



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Sede Amministrativa: Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Filosofia, Sociologia, Pedagogia e Psicologia Applicata

CORSO DI DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN: Filosofia
CICLO XXXVIII

**Immanence and Unity of Reason in Kant's Opus Postumum through a
Comparison with Maimon and Fichte**

Coordinatore: Ch.mo Prof. Luca Basso

Supervisore: Ch.mo Prof. Gaetano Rametta

Co-Supervisore: Ch.mo Prof. Simone Aurora

Dottorando: Davide Puzzolo

Wie man ehemals sagte: es ist Spinozismus,
und nun der Sache den Prozeß gemacht hatte,
so fängt [man] an zu sagen:
das ist Fichtisch – und glaubt nun fertig zu sey.

(J.G. Fichte, *Die Insekten. Ein Lustspiel, nach Aristophanes*, in *GA*, II,6 44).

Abstract:

The aim of this project is to provide a systematic investigation of the transformations undergone by transcendental philosophy through the works of Maimon and Fichte, and to examine whether, and to what extent, similar developments can also be identified in Kant's *Opus postumum*. Kant's manuscripts are thus examined, for the first time in an extended manner, in the historical-philosophical context in which they were developed.

The dissertation is structured in three parts.

The first part offers a comprehensive reconstruction of Kant's unfinished project, with particular emphasis on the significance of the so-called "Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics" and on the new conceptual tools that Kant develops in order to fill the gap between the two disciplines. In particular, I will focus on the meaning and on the function of the *Mittelbegriffe* and on the a priori proof of the existence of the ether.

In the second part I identify a conceptual affinity between the problems Kant confronts in the first fascicles of the manuscripts and those Maimon attempts to address in his *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*. In particular, I will show that in both cases one can discern three important reformulations: (1) a new transcendental schematism; (2) a revaluation of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself; and (3) a new concept of experience. At the same time, I will point out that Kant's project maintains its own specificity and distinguishes itself from Maimon's philosophy insofar as it succeeds in avoiding both the dogmatic rationalism and the empirical skepticism of the latter.

In the third part, I will investigate the relation between the final fascicles of the *Opus postumum* and Fichte's philosophy during the Jena period. This section will begin with a general analysis of Fichte's *Grundlage*, understood as an attempt to respond both to Schulze's and Maimon's skepticism. The primary objective will be to show that the radicalization of the structures of critical philosophy advanced by Fichte does not lead, as many interpreters claim, to a simplistic subjectivist metaphysics in which all reality is dissolved into the infinite activity of the I. At the same time, I will draw attention to the practical implications of Fichte's operation, showing how it leads to a significant revaluation of the relation between subject, world, and God, and thus of Kant's doctrine of the highest good. I will then proceed to examine the final two fascicles of Kant's manuscripts. First, I will focus on the so-called *Selbstsetzungslehre*, showing both its coherence with the overall project of the *Opus postumum* and its connection with the earlier fascicles. At the same time, I will demonstrate that it exhibits not only a terminological but also a conceptual affinity with Fichte's *Grundlage*. Finally, I will show that, in Kant as well, this reformulation of the doctrine of subjectivity leads, in the very last fascicle, to a significant rethinking of his moral doctrine, which no longer assigns to God the task of synthesizing subject and world, but rather to the subject the task of unifying God and the world.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER I. KANT'S TRANSITION PROJECT	11
1.1 The meaning of the "transition" between the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics	13
1.2 The "Transition" before and after 1798	22
1.3 The intermediary concepts as the new principles of the Transition	30
1.4 How many principles? The relation between the dynamical forces of matter and the ether	42
1.5 Ether's <i>Befremdlichkeit</i>	48
CHAPTER II. MAIMON AND KANT. FROM POSSIBLE TO CONCRETE EXPERIENCE.....	62
2.1 Maimon on the "gap" between transcendental principles and concrete experience	71
2.1.1 Maimon's skepticism. An overview	71
2.1.2 <i>Quid juris?</i> and <i>Quid facti?</i>	84
2.1.3 The antinomy of thought and the divine understanding	95
2.1.4 Generating the empirical	106
2.1.5 Schematism, experience, thing-in-itself	121
2.2 The evolution of transcendental philosophy in the central drafts of the <i>Opus postumum</i>	141
2.2.1 An assessment of the problem	141
2.2.2 The schematism of the <i>Mittelbegriffe</i>	151
2.2.3 Thing-in-itself, indirect appearance	167
2.2.4 Experience: empirical knowledge or idea?.....	186
2.2.5 Kant and Maimon on rational dogmatism and empirical skepticism	202
CHAPTER III. FICHTE AND KANT. THE UNITY OF THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL REASON	215
3.1 Fichte's' project of a <i>Wissenschaftslehre</i>	218
3.1.1 Answering to the skeptical doubt(s)	218
3.1.2 The "I" as a principle	227
3.1.3 Solving the systematicity problem.....	244
3.1.4 Solving the applicability problem	258
3.1.5 Fichte and Spinoza. Immanence and unity of the system.....	283
3.1.6 The concept of the "highest good" in Fichte's early thought	301
3.2 Subject and world in the last fascicles of Kant's <i>Opus postumum</i>	317
3.2.1 The <i>Selbstsetzungslehre</i> in fascicle VII	317
3.2.2 Fichte and Kant on self-positing.....	334
3.2.3 Subject, world and highest good in Kant' last fascicles.....	351
3.2.4 Kant on wisdom	363
3.2.5 Kant and Spinoza in the I <i>Konvolut</i> : a Fichtean trace?	373
CONCLUSIONS	392
BIBLIOGRAPHY	400

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade of his life, Kant undertook an ambitious and wide project that, unfortunately, remained unfinished. He intended to title this final work *Transition from the Metaphysical Foundations of the Science of Nature to Physics*. At first glance, this title might suggest that the manuscripts deal exclusively with issues in the philosophy of nature. And indeed, the earliest fascicles of the *Opus postumum* do concentrate on such questions. The later ones, however, written between 1799 and 1803, expand their scope considerably, addressing topics such as the status of subjectivity, the role of transcendental philosophy, and its relation to practical and moral philosophy. Even more striking is that these reflections, though fragmentary and often obscure, appear to mark a significant development beyond the “canonical” critical doctrine – one that, in many respects, brings Kant’s thought closer to that of the so-called post-Kantian philosophers. The object of this work will be thus to examine to what extent it is possible to establish a theoretical proximity between these manuscripts and the growing idealistic tendencies of the end of 18th century.

Though many scholars noticed such an evolution, no in-depth and systematic analysis of the relation between Kant’s latest reflections and the post-Kantian debate has ever been made¹. My aim is thus to address a gap in the secondary literature and to revitalize a discussion that has yet to gain significant momentum. At the same time, my purpose will be delimited. Given the complexity of the debate that characterizes the years at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, it will not be possible to consider all the leading authors of this period. My analysis will therefore focus on those philosophers whose thought embodies, in my view, the most radical and original developments of the critical philosophy, namely, Maimon and Fichte. This may sound surprising or even far-fetched, given Kant’s almost complete lack of references to these authors in the manuscripts. It could be argued that it would make more sense to dwell on those thinkers whose names appear more than a few times in Kant’s notes, such as Enesidemo-Schulze, Tiedemann, Lichtenberg, and Beck. However, I will try to show that none of these thinkers systematically intercept the evolution of the Kantian system within the manuscripts.

¹ As we will see in more detail, most of the scholars tend even to underestimate the development of Kant’s reflections in the *Opus postumum* when compared to his “critical” works, trying to make the two consistent with each other. However, as Tuschling notes, “in the end, the concept of transcendental idealism changes fundamentally, if not definitively, and in a way that puts Kant in a position close to that kind of philosophical idealism which has become famous, notorious, or even abhorred under the name of German Idealism. Dogmatic Kantianism, as well as the dogmatic interpretation of Kantian transcendental idealism, tends to assess putting Kant in that position as too awful and frightening to be true, and so these dogmatic approaches deny that it took place or simply ignore the issue altogether” (Tuschling 1993, p. 162).

Over the past century, numerous contributions have at least mentioned the possibility of a relationship between certain sections of the *Opus postumum* and the early Fichte's thought². In contrast, much less attention has been devoted to exploring the proximity between the manuscripts and Maimon's reflections³. Regarding the latter, a preliminary comparison with the secondary literature will therefore not prove necessary. As for Fichte, my first aim will be to show that most of the studies does not properly grasp the actual meaning of this relation because they ultimately misinterpret the project itself of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In other words, the dominant tendency is to trace an unbridgeable abyss between Kant's reflections and Fichte's philosophy because the latter is considered as a sort of idealistic metaphysic that reduces all the reality to the creative act of an absolute I⁴. A different assessment of the results of the *Grundlage* might instead lead to a possible reinterpretation of the theoretical link between this text and the *Opus postumum*. Naturally, the aim is not to show that Kant's intention had ultimately been to dissolve his own system into that of Fichte. Rather, I will try to detect the possibility of a conceptual dialogue between the two positions, one that should not take the form of an insoluble contrast⁵.

These brief considerations help me to introduce a fundamental methodological premise. I believe that one of the main objectives of this work will be to keep a balance between a "historical-reconstructive" interpretation and a "theoretical-speculative" one. In other words, my aim will not be to demonstrate the *extent* to which both Maimon and Fichte directly influenced Kant's final philosophical development, nor to advance a purely speculative comparison between their proposals. The problems with both these directions are the following: as I have already pointed out, in the first case the lack of systematic references by Kant to these authors would make any such reconstruction overly arbitrary. In the second case, the problem would lie in the risk of underestimating the historical proximity between them. In other words, even if it is not possible to precisely determine the measure of a possible influence of Maimon and Fichte on their master's thought, it is nonetheless undeniable *that* the latter was well aware of the debate that was unfolding in those years.

² See for example Adickes 1920, pp. 668-669, Vaihinger 1884 p. 169, Lachiéze-Rey 1931, de Vleeschauwer 1937, Zahn 1964, Mathieu 1991 p. 191, Hall 2023, p. 143, Sala 2023.

³ The only exception is represented by Lord 2011, where the author proposes a very insightful comparison between Maimon's ideas of the understanding and Kant's concept of the ether. I will take this suggestion as the starting point of my analysis.

⁴ This if, of course, a strong generalization, that cannot be further explained now. In the section dedicated to the analysis of Fichte's reception in the literature regarding the *Opus postumum* I will try spell out in more detail this critique.

⁵ As I will more exhaustively show, most scholars have also focused exclusively on the section of the manuscripts that shows the strongest lexical connection to Fichte's system, i.e., the so-called *Selbstsetzungslehre*, which Kant developed in the penultimate fascicle, written between April and December 1800. While this proximity is undeniable, I argue that the most interesting elements for our purpose are found in the last fascicle (December 1800 – February 1803), where Kant explores the relationship between theoretical and practical reason and redefines the status of transcendental philosophy. Only these later developments, moreover, can shed a proper light into the meaning of the *Selbstsetzungslehre* itself.

In general, I believe it can be argued that the *Opus postumum* project, at least in the early fascicles, originates from an internal movement, that is, from Kant's autonomous and independent effort to complete his own system. However, in some sections, particularly in the second half of the fascicles, the attempt to take a stance within this philosophical debate is also evident. In other words, Kant's project to build a transition from the metaphysics of nature to physics was initially intended as a mere *completion* of the critical system. As I will show, however, the central drafts prove that this was not possible without a substantial and thoughtful reformulation of the core structures of transcendental philosophy. The recognition of this fact led Kant to be more inclined to engage with those authors who, in the same years, were undertaking a similar operation. My aim is therefore to showcase the admirable openness of a thinker, already at the height of his success, to these new speculative perspectives. This will underscore, once again, the remarkable permeability of critical philosophy to both contemporary scientific and philosophical debates. At the same time, the goal is to preserve the internal coherence of a system like that of Kant – a thinker undoubtedly willing to question his own assumptions but resisting a complete abandonment of them.

In other words, the *Opus postumum* can be seen as the precipitate of a dynamical and evolving thought, yet deeply committed to preserving its own essence. I believe that doing justice to this work requires taking its antinomic character seriously and restoring its full significance. We thus must consider the latter not as a definitive checkmate, but rather as a source of productive and fruitful potential. Therefore, recognizing Kant's sincere interest in the unfolding philosophical debate does not necessarily lead to the hasty conclusion of a full absorption of the critical apparatus into the post-Kantians ones.

On the other hand, this approach should allow us to recognize the undeniable development of the conceptual solutions proposed by Kant, without requiring that they always be made fully consistent with the results of his critical works. My aim is also to show that, even where Kant's reflections appear to unfold in a relatively autonomous manner, it remains fruitful to compare them with the solutions advanced by the two authors under consideration, in order to evaluate their respective argumentative structures and to test their validity and internal coherence. Such an interplay between the two approaches can, in turn, highlight both the historical and speculative grounding of Kant's considerations within the framework of the emerging idealist movements of the late eighteenth century, while still preserving their distinctive autonomy.

Before addressing this objective, it will nonetheless be first necessary to examine the structure of the *Opus postumum* itself. This is, after all, a work spanning over a thousand pages across two volumes of the *Akademie-Ausgabe*, organized into thirteen fascicles (*Konvolute*). As I have said at the outset of this Introduction, the themes covered are also extremely varied. This led the first

commentators, such as Krause and Vaihinger, to suggest that the manuscripts are to be taken as the preparatory work for *two* different texts. The recent scholarly widely rejected this hypothesis, proving that the *Opus postumum* was intended by Kant to be a single project. However, still no agreement has been reached on the particular relations that the fascicles entertain with each other. In other words, there is no doubt that Kant conceived the *Opus postumum* as a unique project; however, doubts are casted on whether the various fascicles represent a linear and coherent evolution of Kant's reflections. For instance, scholars strongly disagree on the systematic function of the section named *Übergang I-14*, where Kant develops the most disputed theory of the manuscripts, the so-called ether-proof. This part was written between May and August 1799, placing it roughly at the midpoint of the entire project. Mathieu believes that it represents a genuine turning point in Kant's project, which will guide his reflections until the end of the manuscripts⁶. Lehmann, on the contrary, argues that in later fascicles Kant will abandon the systematic function of the ether, attributing to it the status of a mere transition point (*Durchgangspunkt*) that will be later substituted by other philosophical concerns⁷. A correct appreciation of the speculative relation between Kant's solutions in the manuscripts and the evolution of critical philosophy proposed by Maimon and Fichte should therefore preliminarily presuppose a brief but exhaustive reconstruction of the main problems that emerge in this work.

The dissertation is structured as follows. In the first chapter, I will focus on analyzing the first fascicles of the *Opus postumum*, composed between 1796 and 1799. The aim will be to show that they emerge from an intrinsic necessity of the Kantian system, namely, the need to provide a foundation for the objectivity and systematicity of *physica specialis*. At the same time, I will demonstrate how the solutions proposed by Kant, culminating in the a priori deduction of the existence of the ether, begin to strain the framework of critical philosophy, compelling him to rethink significantly the relation between form and matter, understanding and sensibility.

In the second chapter, I will turn to Maimon's thought in his early writings. My intention will be to identify a conceptual affinity between the problems Kant confronts in the first fascicles of the manuscripts and those Maimon attempts to address in his *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*. In particular, I will show that in both cases one can discern three important reformulations: (1) a new transcendental schematism; (2) a revaluation of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself; and (3) a new concept of experience. At the same time, I will point out that Kant's project maintains its own specificity and distinguishes itself from Maimon's philosophy insofar as it succeeds in avoiding both the dogmatic rationalism and the empirical skepticism of the latter. On the one hand, Kant makes no use of the idea of a divine understanding to secure the possibility of a

⁶ See Mathieu 1991, pp. 117-142.

⁷ Lehmann 1969, p. 399.

reconciliation between the form and matter of objects, as instead occurs in Maimon's *Versuch*. At the same time, Kant appears far from accepting Maimon's view that an adequate knowledge of objects would require the progressive elimination of their sensible component for the sake of their asymptotic rationalization. Kant is careful to preserve the epistemic role of sensibility, even though he proposes a significant reformulation of its relation to the understanding with respect to the first *Critique*.

In the third chapter, I will investigate the relation between the final fascicles of the *Opus postumum* and Fichte's philosophy. This section will begin with a general analysis of Fichte's *Grundlage*, understood as an attempt to respond both to Schulze's and Maimon's skepticism. The primary objective will be to show that the radicalization of the structures of critical philosophy advanced by Fichte does not lead, as many interpreters claim, to a simplistic subjectivist metaphysics in which all reality is dissolved into the infinite activity of the I. Fichte's aim, rather, seems to be to assign a logical-transcendental priority to the spontaneity of the subject, without, however, neglecting or devaluing its passive and finite dimension. At the same time, I will draw attention to the practical implications of Fichte's operation, showing how it leads to a significant revaluation of the relation between subject, world, and God, and thus of Kant's doctrine of the highest good.

I will then proceed to examine the final two fascicles of Kant's manuscripts. First, I will focus on the so-called *Selbstsetzungslehre*, showing both its coherence with the overall project of the *Opus postumum* and its connection with the earlier fascicles. At the same time, I will demonstrate that it exhibits not only a terminological but also a conceptual affinity with Fichte's *Grundlage*. I will argue that Kant's attempt to derive the synthetic unity of the I from its analytic unity should be compared not so much with the section on the Principles of the *Grundlage*, but with its practical part, and in particular with the problem of the "reiteration of positing" (*Wiederholung des Setzens*). Such an analysis will reveal that, paradoxically, Kant's reformulation of his own doctrine of subjectivity contains elements that are, in some respects, even more radical and "idealistic" than Fichte's proposal. This does not, in fact, contradict what I have said earlier, namely, Kant's *intention* to preserve the finitude of the subject and the epistemic role of sensibility. What I wish to show, however, is that in the *Selbstsetzungslehre* he does not seem to provide a fully convincing argument that explains the transition from the subject's activity to its passivity.

Finally, I will show that, in Kant as well, this reformulation of the doctrine of subjectivity leads, in the very last fascicle, to a significant rethinking of his moral doctrine, which no longer assigns to God the task of synthesizing subject and world, but rather to the subject the task of unifying God and the world.

CHAPTER I

KANT'S TRANSITION PROJECT

1.1 The meaning of the “transition” between the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics

Before addressing the problem of the structure of the *Opus postumum*, it is necessary to focus on the reasons why Kant decided to embark in such a new and complex project. In other words, we must ask which was the task he wanted to accomplish by attempting to establish a transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics. In the opening remarks of the first drafts, collected under the title of *Oktaventwurf*, Kant writes that this transition should lead us “from the moving forces, by which matter in general is possible, to those which give it a determinate connection [...], that is: 1) density, 2) cohesion, 3) movability or comparative immovability of the parts which cohere”⁸. In other words, Kant seemed not satisfied of his previous attempt, developed in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and in particular in the Chapter on Dynamics, to account for the two metaphysical forces that make the concept of “matter” in general possible, i.e., attracting and repulsive forces. The philosopher’s aim is to deduce not only the moving forces that enable matter’s general property to fill space⁹, but also the specific moving forces that determine the various attributes of matter, such as density, cohesion, movability etc¹⁰. In this sense, the *Übergang* appears to signify the transition between two disciplines with distinct objects: (1) “matter” in general, as addressed in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and (2) the specific determinations of matter, investigated by physics.

But then, *why* is such a transition required? Does not the question regarding the enumeration and classification of the various properties of matter pertain to mere *empirical* observation? Why do we need to a priori *deduce* the forces that ground these same properties? Kant writes on this topic:

All empirical principles are of such a nature that they can only be collected fragmentarily and always constitute an imperfect aggregate, never a system. This shortcoming is particularly evident in physics among all empirical sciences. Now, such a deficiency – namely, the inability of a science to become a system (which can never occur through empirical research) – is a drawback that even jeopardizes what has already been understood, as it cannot be compared with the rest of the whole. Moreover, what has been discovered is at risk of being something that has already been found before, and, in general, one never knows how or what to search for. Thus, a *schema* that aids in this regard must be devised, akin to the construction of a bridge that leads from the metaphysical first principles to physics¹¹.

⁸ *OP*, XXI 373.

⁹ See *MAN*, 496.

¹⁰ As Emundts writes, “the task of a system to be established a priori for empirical physics consists in systematically analyzing the specific types of matter so that a plan of all possible moving forces can be set up” (Emundts 2004, p. 2019).

¹¹ *OP*, XXI 168.

Kant seems here to suggest that the mere empirical procedure of empirical physics, namely, to investigate natural phenomena through observations and experiments, cannot by itself raise the latter to the status of a science. The investigation of nature which is not supported by a metaphysical apparatus would indeed lead physics to be a mere “aggregate without a form, but not a system”¹². As we have seen from the passage just mentioned, the absence of systematicity in physics would undermine our empirical investigation, as it would prevent us from discerning the true connections governing the interactions between observable phenomena. In other words, to attain genuine *knowledge* of an empirical set of appearances, we must always seek their systematic place within a comprehensive whole. Without being aware of the latter, we would effectively be walking blindly, either risking the rediscovery of something already known or lacking any clear understanding of the goal we are striving to achieve. Physics thus need to presuppose a *philosophical* investigation of the conditions that makes it an organic science. The system must indeed be grounded on a priori and necessary rules, that no empirical inquiry can ever establish by itself.

Now, one could argue that one of the central aims of the *Metaphysical Foundations* was precisely to establish the philosophical grounds for empirical sciences like physics, building upon the results gained in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, as many scholars correctly noted¹³, the “physics” Kant is speaking about in the *Opus postumum* seems to be quite different from the discipline Kant is trying to ground in his two previous works. This explanation requires a brief excursus.

In the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, Kant famously distinguishes the “entire system of metaphysics” into four main parts: (1) ontology; (2) rational physiology; (3) rational cosmology and (4) rational theology¹⁴. While ontology, i.e., transcendental philosophy, only analyzes the system of concepts and principles of pure understanding “without assuming objects that *would be given*”, the other three also consider “*nature*, i.e, the sum total of *given* objects”¹⁵. For my purposes, I need only dwell on the second discipline, namely rational physiology, which is in turn divided into rational physics (*physica rationalis*) and rational psychology (*psychologia rationalis*). The latter deals with the objects of outer sense, i.e., corporeal nature, while the first considers the object of the inner sense, i.e., thinking nature. In other words, rational physics and rational psychology are the two disciplines which should exhibit our rational and a priori knowledge of both sensible nature and the soul.

In a decisive footnote Kant is clear in further distinguishing between *physica rationalis* (rational physics) from what at that time was called *physica generalis*. Let us read the passage:

¹² *OP*, XXI 367.

¹³ See van den Berg 2014, Mathieu 1991, Howard 2023b.

¹⁴ *KrV*, A 846-B 874.

¹⁵ *KrV*, A 845-B 873.

One should not think, indeed, that I understand by this what is commonly called *physica generalis*, which is more mathematics than philosophy of nature. For the metaphysics of nature abstracts entirely from mathematics, and has nowhere near as many ampliative insights to offer as the latter, yet it is still very important with regard to the critique of the pure cognition of understanding that is to be applied to nature in general; in its absence even mathematicians, depending on certain common but in fact metaphysical concepts, have without noticing it burdened the doctrine of nature with hypotheses that disappear in a critique of these principles without doing the least damage to the use of mathematics in this field (which is entirely indispensable)¹⁶.

Although very concise, this note is indispensable in order to understand the relation Kant seeks to establish between metaphysics, mathematics and empirical sciences like physics. The philosopher here clearly distinguishes between two approaches to the science of nature: the mathematical, called *physica generalis*, and the metaphysical, referred to as *physica rationalis*. He suggests that these two approaches could work together to establish the objectivity of the natural sciences. However, such a connection is far from clear in this passage. Kant simply argues that metaphysic cannot *expand* our cognition of nature as mathematics do. That is, it cannot by itself discover any empirical law or trace connections between already known laws. Still, its role is “very important” for our empirical inquiry. What this “importance” amounts to is still quite obscure, but it seems clear that Kant wants to grant some sort of *grounding* role to metaphysics, without which mathematicians would be forced to assume unjustified physical *hypothesis* to secure the application of their theories to the empirical world.

The intricate interplay between these two disciplines is further analyzed in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and particularly in the Preface, where Kant appears to deepen the reflections introduced in the note of the Architectonic. Here it is stated that every proper science of nature (*eigentliche Naturwissenschaft*), that is, every science whose certainty is *apodictic*, needs to be grounded on a priori and rational principles¹⁷. We know that for Kant pure rational knowledge is divided into philosophy, or metaphysics, and mathematics, as the philosopher himself recalls in the Preface¹⁸. Therefore, both of them are required in order to grant the possibility of an apodictic and objective science. As for mathematics, Kant argues that

to cognize something a priori means to cognize it from its mere possibility. But the possibility of determinate natural things cannot be cognized from their mere concepts; for from these the possibility of the thought (that it does not contradict itself) can certainly be cognized, but not the

¹⁶ *KrV*, A 847-B 875.

¹⁷ See *MAN*, 468.

¹⁸ See *MAN*, 469.

possibility of the object, as a natural thing that can be given outside the thought (as existing). Hence, in order to cognize the possibility of determinate natural things, and thus to cognize them a priori, it is still required that the *intuition* corresponding to the concept be given a priori, that is, that the concept be constructed. Now rational cognition through construction of concepts is mathematical. Hence, although a pure philosophy of nature in general, that is, that which investigates only what constitutes the concept of a nature in general, may indeed be possible even without mathematics, a pure doctrine of nature concerning *determinate* natural things (doctrine of body or doctrine of soul) is only possible by means of mathematics¹⁹.

Kant's argument appears to be as follows: he asserts that cognizing something a priori is identical to understanding it through its mere possibility. This amounts to arguing that to cognize an object a priori means consider its mere concept. However, the pure concept of an object, although not logically self-contradictory, cannot grant us that the object actually *exists* outside our thought. In other words, philosophical or metaphysical concepts are necessary and universal, but cannot refer to particular objects unless the latter is given to us through our senses. On the contrary, mathematical concepts can provide by themselves their objects by *constructing* them in the pure intuition. As Kant wrote in the first *Critique*, it is a "requisite for one to make an abstract concept sensible, i.e., display the object that corresponds to it in intuition [...]. Mathematics fulfills this requirement by means of the construction of the figure, which is an appearance present to the senses (even though brought about a priori)"²⁰. In other words, mathematical objects are constructed according to rules given by their concept, and thus do not need to refer to an empirically given appearance to attain validity, as is required for philosophical concepts. To put it in a more contemporary way, mathematics can indeed provide proper cognition of *determinate* objects by a priori constructing measurable and quantitative models to describe the relations between them²¹.

At the same time, if mathematics should not remain a purely abstract science that tells us nothing about *our* empirical world, mathematicians need to assume the *existence* of some sort of physical concepts, such as, for example, the gravitational force, to ground their models and to *apply* them to sensible phenomena. As Kant says in this regard, "in order to make possible the application of mathematics to the doctrine of body, which only through this can become natural science, principles for the *construction* of the concepts that belong to the possibility of matter in general must be introduced first"²². The philosopher argues that, for mathematical models to be applicable to our understanding of natural phenomena, it is necessary to introduce *principles* that should guide the

¹⁹ *MAN*, 470.

²⁰ *KrV*, A 240-B 299.

²¹ On the role of mathematics in Kant's treatment of natural sciences, see also van den Berg 2014, pp. 37-45.

²² *MAN*, 472.

construction of mathematical concepts. In other words, mathematics can surely describe the quantitative and measurable relations between phenomena but can in no way “specify the objective grounds or causes”²³ of the latter. The task of specifying these principles is demanded by Kant to the metaphysics of nature itself, thus justifying its grounding role with respect to mathematics.

Now, the metaphysics of nature is divided in the Preface between a *transcendental* part, which “treat the laws that make possible the concept of a nature in general, even without relation to any determinate object of experience”, and a *special* one, which on the contrary deals “with a particular nature of this or that kind of thing, for which an empirical concept is given, but still in such a manner that, outside of what lies in this concept, no other empirical principle is used for its cognition”²⁴. The special part of the metaphysics of nature is concerned with either corporeal or thinking nature. Therefore, while the transcendental part of metaphysics addresses the concepts that make possible a “nature in general”, whether immanent or transcendent, external or internal, the special part examines the nature of specific kinds of objects. However, as Kant clarifies, the “objects” studied by the special metaphysics possess no particular empirical attributes beyond those already contained in their concepts. Thus, they are respectively “the empirical concept of matter [and] of a thinking being”²⁵.

In the *Metaphysical Foundations* Kant is only interested in the first one. The role of metaphysics of corporeal nature is therefore to exhibit the principles of the properties that permits to mathematical constructions to be applied to the concept of “matter in general”, regardless of its various empirical properties. These properties are, for example, “the concept of motion, the filling of space, inertia and so on”²⁶, which mathematicians cannot help but use to build their theories. However, if no metaphysical analysis that establishes their status and function is presupposed, then mathematicians must “postulate [them], without investigating them with regard to their a priori sources”²⁷. Kant’s attempt in the *Metaphysical Foundations* will be thus to analyze the empirical

²³ Van den Berg 2014, p. 41.

²⁴ *MAN*, 470. As Hoppe correctly notes (see Hoppe 1969, p. 32), this division does not correspond to the division between ontology, i.e. transcendental philosophy, and physiology established in the Architectonic chapter. The transcendental part of the metaphysics of nature that is presented in the first *Critique* deals with concepts that can refer to objects *in general*, regardless of whether they can be given to the senses or not. In this sense, it could also deal with concepts of objects that are transcendent to our cognitive capacity. This ontology could thus also be ontology of the old metaphysics, disavowed by the results of criticism. In contrast, the metaphysics of nature of the *Metaphysical Foundations* has to do with the concept of “nature,” understood as a whole (*Inbegriff*) of objects that can be given to us only through experience. The transcendental part of the metaphysics of nature therefore deals with the laws that make possible the concept of a nature in general, without distinguishing between objects of the internal sense and objects of the external sense. The metaphysics of particular nature, on the other hand, is distinguished into metaphysics of corporeal nature, which studies external sense objects, and metaphysics of thinking nature, which deals with internal sense objects. The former is what will be set forth in *Metaphysical Foundations*, and consists, essentially, of an analysis of that empirical concept that underlies the possibility of any object, namely the concept of “matter.” The metaphysics of corporeal nature can therefore be identified with the immanent physiology of pure reason, rather than with the transcendental part of the metaphysics of nature of the first *Critique*.

²⁵ *MAN*, 470.

²⁶ *MAN*, 472.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

concept of “matter in general” according to the table of categories, in order to a priori establish its properties. Just to give an example, in the Dynamic chapter Kant demonstrates that the metaphysical concept of the space-filling of matter is grounded in the interaction between two dynamic forces of attraction and repulsion. This interplay ensures the possibility of a mechanical account of physics, which relies on the external interaction between material bodies²⁸.

I do not intend to further analyze Kant’s argument in the main part of the work. My aim was merely to highlight the account the philosopher provides in the Preface about the relationship between metaphysics and physics, and what he meant by the latter. From these brief considerations, it should be clear that the physics he seeks to ground through his metaphysical analysis of the concept of matter is a *mathematical* physics. Using the terms of the Note to the Architectonic chapter we analyzed above, Kant’s intention in the *Metaphysical Foundations* was to demonstrate how *physica rationalis*, containing the metaphysical principles of corporeal nature, can ground *physica generalis*, containing its mathematical constructions. As he explicitly argues in the Preface itself, the exposition of the metaphysical concepts that he will pursue in the main body of the text is conceived as the condition of possibility “of a *mathematical* doctrine of nature itself [*einer mathematischen Naturlehre selbst*]”²⁹. Both disciplines, metaphysics and mathematics, belong moreover to the *pure* part of the science of nature³⁰, and so they do not take into account the *particular* and specific properties of empirical matter, such as density, cohesion, fluidity, electricity etc.

What both *physica rationalis* and *physica generalis* consider are the *universal* attributes of matter, like motion and space-filling. As Kant himself writes:

one should guard against going beyond that which makes possible the general concept of a matter as such, and wishing to explain a priori its particular, or even specific, determination and variety. The concept of matter is reduced to nothing but moving forces, and one could not expect anything else, since no activity or change can be thought in space except mere motion³¹.

²⁸ Okhrulik is therefore right in claiming that Kant’s attempt to ground Newtonian mechanical science is based in the exhibition of an ontology of forces that should explain the possibility of the existence of physical bodies and of their mechanical connection. As she argues, “[c]hapter two of that work is entitled ‘Dynamics’, and Kant describes there an ontology of forces similar in most major respects to the force ontology of the *Physical Monodology*. The forces described there are the forces responsible for the very existence of matter; they are neither derived from other bodies nor impressed from outside. Chapter three is called ‘Mechanics’, and presupposes the dynamical properties of matter as described in the previous chapter. It is only here that Kant deals with impressed forces; i.e., with forces which govern the interactions of bodies in physical space. He maintains that the original forces which constitute matter make possible these interactions” (Okhrulik 1983, p. 259).

²⁹ *MAN*, 473. Italics mine.

³⁰ *MAN*, 473.

³¹ *MAN*, 524.

Let us now come back to the *Opus postumum*. This brief digression on the first *Critique* and the *Metaphysical Foundations* was meant to capture Kant's epistemological intentions regarding the foundation of physics in the framework of his Copernican revolution. However, in his last project, Kant seems to show some sort of dissatisfaction with the attempt to ground only the pure part of the science of nature. Let us read this long but fundamental passage from the *Oktaventwurf*:

[...] [P]hysics is, in turn, divided into *general physics* (*physica generalis*), which expresses only the properties of *matter* in outer objects of experience, and that (*physica specialis*) which attends to bodies formed in a particular way, and which draws up a system of them [...]. If it is introduced by no affinity [*Verwandtschaft*], the progress from one system to the other is not a transition [transitus] but a *leap* (saltus), which entirely destroys what is systematic, and, hence, what is scientific in a doctrine; it cannot be tolerated in a philosophy such as physics ought to be, for the fragmentary treatment of its objects carries with it no connection of concepts and does not amount to a whole even for memory. *Physica generalis* thus contains the necessity of the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural sciences to physics, in virtue of the affinity which is to be found between a priori rules and the knowledge of their application to empirically given objects; this [transition] restrains itself from continuing upon the ground onto which it has passed (which would yield a special physics) but only determines and completely displays the foundations for progress in this science. My *Metaphysical Foundations* already undertook several steps in this field, but simply as examples of their possible application to cases from experience, in order to make comprehensible by examples what had been stated abstractly³².

In this quotation we can find several important claims that must be carefully analyzed. I number them in the following way: (1) The assertion that physics is divided into a general and a special physics. The one considers the concept of matter in general, while the other the particular configurations of the latter; (2) The statement that special physics must draw up a *system* of these properties; (3) The claim that, in order for the preceding statement to be justified, we must trace a transition from general physics to special physics, which seems to be allowed thanks to the affinity (*Verwandtschaft*) between the two disciplines; (4) The assertion that it is the *physica generalis* itself the one that contains the necessity of the transition toward *physica specialis*; (5) The affirmation that the *Metaphysical Foundations* had already hinted at some steps toward *physica specialis*.

Regarding (1) and (2), we have already seen that Kant's main purpose in the *Opus postumum* seems to ground not just the systematicity of the pure part of natural sciences, i.e. of its metaphysical principles and mathematical constructions, but also of its *empirical* part, i.e. of the assertions regarding the various attributes of matter³³. In this passage he seems to further clarify the fact that

³² *OP*, XXI 407-408.

³³ Van den Berg notes that the distinction between *physica generalis* (or *rationalis*) and *physica specialis* was probably taken by Kant from Eberhard, who "associated *physica rationalis* with the universal part of the doctrine of nature (*physica*

this systematization is possible only through a transition between the metaphysical principles to empirical physics (3). What this transition amounts to in these preparatory drafts (1796-1798) is still quite obscure, and, as I will argue in the next chapter, Kant will change its meaning in the sheets dating 1798. Now, van den Berg argues for example that this transition consists in an *application* of the already discovered metaphysical principles of the science of nature to its empirical part, following Eberhard's method. As the scholar writes, "[t]his amounted to *applying* principles of *physica generalis* to *physica specialis*, in order to explain particular properties pertaining to specific types of bodies (e.g. fluidity, solidity, etc.). For example, Eberhard applied the notion of an attractive, cohesive force (developed in *physica generalis*) in order to explain fluidity, the brittleness of solid bodies, elasticity, etc."³⁴. Translating this method to the Kantian system, this seems tantamount to arguing that, in his manuscripts, the philosopher's intention was to apply the two forces of attraction and repulsion to justify not only matter's capacity to fill space, but also its empirical properties, such as cohesion, fluidity, rigidity, and so forth.

I would instead propose something slightly different: the application Kant is talking about is not between the metaphysical forces of matter and the empirical determinations of the latter, but rather between the *a priori rules of the understanding* (the categories) and *physica specialis*. I will soon clarify what I mean with his assertion, but I want to preliminarily highlight that this is what Kant himself seems to suggest in the quotation above. The philosopher states that the transition is possible thanks to an "affinity" between *physica generalis*³⁵ and *physica specialis*. He then specifies what this "affinity" amounts to: the latter must be found between *a priori rules* and the knowledge of their application to empirically given objects. In other words, his reasoning seems to be as follows: in the *Metaphysical Foundations* he had shown the possibility of applying the categories to the concept of "matter in general", classifying its properties *a priori*. Now his attempt is to employ the rules of understanding in order to systematize the *particular* kinds of matter. This step should be justified by the affinity of the philosophical *procedures* involved, grounded in the application of the categories "to empirically given objects".

I would thus suggest that the transition between the metaphysical foundations of the science of nature and physics is not a transition between the *principles* of the first to the object of the latter,

generalis), whereas empirical physics was associated with the special part of the doctrine of nature (*physica specialis*)" (van den Berg 2014, p. 176).

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Here I take Kant to use the term *physica generalis* not so much to denote the mathematical aspect of physics, as he defined it in the Note to the Architectonic, but rather its metaphysical principles. Moreover, in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant appears to treat this term as synonymous with *physica rationalis* (see *MAN*, 473). In other words, *physica generalis* seems to be here identified with the *Metaphysical Foundations* themselves.

but rather between the *method* of the first to the object of the latter³⁶. The philosopher writes for example that “the transition (*progressus*) from one form of knowledge to another must be a step [*Schritt*] (*saltus*) only, not a leap (*saltus*); that is, the *doctrine of method* requires one to pass from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics”³⁷, apparently confirming this hypothesis. Moreover, the quotation we are analyzing is located within a paragraph that Kant himself designates as “Preface” (*Vorrede*), and which is followed by the first attempt to classify the properties of matter according to quantity³⁸, quality³⁹, relation⁴⁰ and modality⁴¹.

This suggests that when Kant affirms that (4) *physica generalis* contains the necessity of the transition, he is speaking about the possibility of applying its methodological classification to the object of *physica specialis*, thus ensuring the systematicity of the latter. As we saw, he also states at the end of the quotation that (5) the *Metaphysical Foundations* had already undertook several steps toward the field of general physics. In all likelihood, the reference is to the General Remark to Dynamics, where the attempt had been to show how a dynamical account of matter could explain certain attributes of bodies, such as density, cohesion, elasticity, and chemical solution, albeit not in their complete variety⁴². His intention seems now to take up that project again, and finally give it a systematic form, which was absent in the General Remark⁴³. The following passage lucidly showcases why such a broadening of the project of the *Metaphysical Foundations* is required:

It is, indeed, a common illusion that one may hope, using nothing but mathematics, to produce a philosophical system oh physics, without prior metaphysical foundations; results show, however, that, in this fashion, everything is treated fragmentarily and that a satisfactory whole, or even the plan of one, cannot emerge. It is no less erroneous to suppose that one could undertake to construct physics as a system out of preliminary metaphysical notions and mathematics [...] unless metaphysics has outlined the plan for the whole. Thus it is, if not a particular part, at least a particular obligation of the

³⁶ Even van den Berg himself writes that “[i]n the earlier parts of the *Opus postumum*, Kant attempts to ground physics as a systematic science by discussing the concept of matter in accordance with the table of categories. This methodology mirrors that of the *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe*” (van den Berg 2014, p. 180).

³⁷ *OP*, XXI 387 (emphasis mine).

³⁸ *OP*, XXI 408.

³⁹ *OP*, XXI 410.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *OP*, XXI 411.

⁴² “Instead of a sufficient explanation for the possibility of matter and its specific variety from these fundamental forces, which I cannot provide, I will present completely, so I hope, the moments to which its specific variety must collectively be reducible (albeit not conceivable in regard to its possibility). The remarks inserted between the definitions will explain their application” (*MAN*, 525).

⁴³ It was Emundt’s great merit to point out the systematic connection between the project of the *Opus postumum* and the General Remark to Dynamics (see Emundts 2004). Even if I cannot expand here on this point, I totally agree with her that the first is an attempt to reformulate only that particular section of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and not the main body of the text (see Ivi, pp. 106-117), as Tuschling on the contrary suggests (see Tuschling 1971). However, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, I disagree with her with regard the *reasons* that led Kant to undertake this new project. On the relation between the Transition project and the General Remark to Dynamics see also Thorndike 2018, pp. 92-95.

science of nature (*philosophia naturalis*) to hold itself in preparation for the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics; otherwise the guiding thread would be lacking by which to emerge from the multitude of given objects and to present satisfactorily both its divisions and their content⁴⁴.

These considerations should have helped us in understanding the difference between, on the one hand, the project of the first *Critique* and of the *Metaphysical Foundations* and, on the other, that of the *Opus postumum*. In the first case, the aim was to ground the *pure* part of physics, i.e., its mathematical component through the a priori classification of the metaphysical concepts that mathematicians cannot help but employ in their models. These concepts are those who capture the universal and most general properties of matter, like motion, space-filling, inertia etc. This approach, however, could not provide a foundation for the systematicity of the *empirical* part of the science of nature, for particular properties of matter, such as the different states of aggregation, would have remained indeterminate and fragmentary. Kant's last philosophical attempt was thus meant to give also to the empirical part of physics a systematic form by applying the *method* adopted in the *Metaphysical Foundations* to the concept of "matter" in its complete variety.

1.2 The "Transition" before and after 1798

In the preceding chapter we have briefly seen what the core of Kant's transition project is and what its relationship with previous works consists of. The result of this reconstruction lied in the acknowledgement that Kant's overall aim was to grant the systematicity of the empirical part of physics by applying the method of the *Metaphysical Foundations* to it, that is, by classifying all the properties of matter according to the table of categories. However, as many scholars noted, 1798 seems to represent a turning point in Kant's reflections. In this year, Kant begins to talk about a "gap" (*Lücke*) or a "gulf" (*Kluft*) in his system, both in private letters and in the manuscripts themselves. The most famous passages are the following:

The completion of my account, in terms of the whole of philosophy (regarding both the end and the means), is still pending and I still have not seen it completed, although I am aware of the feasibility of this task: a pain like that of Tantalus, which is, however, not hopeless. The task I am now

⁴⁴ *OP*, XXI 527.

dealing with concerns the “transition from the metaphysical principles of natural science to physics”. It must be resolved; otherwise there would be a gap [*Lücke*] in the system of critical philosophy⁴⁵.

Between metaphysics and physics there still exists a broad gulf [*Kluft*] (*hiatus in systemato*) across which the transition cannot be a step but requires a bridge of intermediary concepts which form a distinctive construction. A system can never be constructed out of merely empirical concepts⁴⁶.

The first one is taken from a letter that Kant sent to Christian Garve on the 21st September 1798, while the second belongs to *Loses Blatt* n.6 dated 1798⁴⁷, and is presumably the first place within the manuscripts where Kant speaks about a *Kluft* or a hiatus in his system. Kant’s letter, in particular, reveals a deep concern of the philosopher about this problem. He highlights the urgency and importance of his task, by arguing that the fact that he has not yet completed it causes him a *Tantalischer Schmerz*. The filling of this gap can therefore legitimacy be seen as the main issue Kant is trying to solve in its last project in order to finally complete his system. However, the problem is the following: what does this *Lücke* consist of?

Earlier scholarship has generally assumed that the “gap” refers to the empty space separating the metaphysical foundations of natural science from physics – one that needed to be bridged through a “transition” from one to the other. However, recent literature had highlighted that the terms *Lücke* and *Kluft* do not appear in *any* drafts before 1798, while the term “transition” appears since the beginning of the project (prior to 1796), thus questioning the legitimacy of a complete identification between the “transition” and the “gap” problems.

Förster was the first scholar to deal in a systematic way with this issue. He explicitly argues that “[i]n view of this time lag, it is utterly implausible that the Transition should be Kant’s attempt to fill the ‘gap in the critical philosophy’ that so worried him in 1798”⁴⁸. Förster thus believes that we must treat them as two completely different problems. The transition deals with the original question of the connection between the two territories of metaphysics of nature, on the one side, and empirical physics on the other. However, while he was working on this project, Kant realized that a “gap” was opening within his system, one that was not directly connected with the “transition”, but rather with even more radical questions. In particular, Förster argues that the “gap” has to do with a lack concerning the Schematism doctrine of the first *Critique*, which Kant unsuccessfully tried to supplement first with the *Metaphysical Foundations* and then with the earlier drafts of the

⁴⁵ *BW*, XII 256.

⁴⁶ *OP*, XXI 476.

⁴⁷ Originally, Adickes dated this draft 1796, but Tuschling and Förster convincingly argued that it is very implausible that it was written before 1798 (see Tuschling 1991, p. 91 and Förster 1993, pp. 262-263).

⁴⁸ Förster 2000, p. 53.

manuscripts⁴⁹. However, as Friedman and Pecere correctly noted, this interpretation rests on a misunderstanding of the relation between the schematism doctrine and the *Metaphysical Foundations*, which were never meant to *supplement* the first by a priori constructing the concept of matter⁵⁰.

Other scholars accepted Förster's proposal to distinguish the two problems. Hall argues for example that the "gap" in the critical system regards a difficulty with the First Analogy of Experience, where Kant was not sufficiently clear in distinguishing between the category of "substance", which should be applied to every single empirical object, and the category of "Substance", which should refer the one substratum that provides the background for the changing and persistence of individual substances. The concept of the ether developed within the manuscripts should have been a solution to this ambiguity, by clearly distinguishing between the all-encompassing and sempiternal substance (the ether itself) and the individual empirical substances. Friedman believes that the "gap" in the critical philosophy should be identified with the distance between the "top-down" procedure of the determinative judgement outlined in the first *Critique* and in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and the reflective judgement's "bottom-up" method developed in the third *Critique*⁵¹. Emundts argues instead that the "gap" must be found in the General Remark to Dynamics of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, where Kant unsuccessfully tried to ground *empirical* physics by demonstrating how the two fundamental forces could explain the different properties of matter. The discovery of a circularity problem with its account of density made Kant recognize the impossibility of justifying the different properties of matter by the two metaphysical forces alone, thus opening a gap in his system⁵². Both Friedman's and Emundt's positions seems to be more moderate than those of Förster and Hall: they do not believe that the "gap" and the "transition" problems must be thought of as completely separate issues. According to both the scholars, bridging the gap should be understood as the *very solution* to the transition from the metaphysical foundations to physics⁵³.

⁴⁹ According to the scholar, the Schematism doctrine had not sufficiently specified the conditions for the applicability of the categories to experience, and the aim of the *Metaphysical Foundations* was therefore to fill this gap by attempting to construct a priori the concept of the object of external sense (to which the categories must apply), namely the concept of "matter." However, the solution of the 1786 text turned out to be unsatisfactory, due to the circularity of the argument regarding the relation between density and the attractive force, which Kant himself recognizes in a note to Beck's letter from 1792 (see *BW*, XI 361). Also unsuccessful turned out to be the attempt put in place in the first drafts of the manuscripts to overcome the difficulties of the *Metaphysical Foundations* by introducing the concept of the ether. It was at this point that Kant noticed a gap in his system, due to the difficulty of constructing the concept of matter and thus demonstrating the applicability of the categories to objects of experience. For a comprehensive view of his reconstruction see Förster 2000, pp. 48-74.

⁵⁰ See Friedman 2003, p. 223 and Pecere 2009, pp. 674-684.

⁵¹ See Friedman 1992a, pp. 242-264.

⁵² See Emundts 2004, p. 15.

⁵³ See Friedman 1992a, p. 262; Emundts 2004, p. 58n.

Other scholars, like Beiser, Busche and Howard, rejected on the contrary Förster's separation of the problems, arguing that there is no sufficient textual basis to support his claim⁵⁴. There are indeed several passages within the manuscripts where Kant explicitly identifies the two issues. The philosopher writes for example that "there is a gap [*Lücke*] to be filled between the metaphysical foundations of natural science and physics; its filling is called a transition [*Übergang*] from the one to the other"⁵⁵. Moreover, even in the *Loses Blatt* n.6, which we have earlier analyzed, Kant stated that "[b]etween metaphysics and physics there still exists a broad gulf [*Kluft*] (*hiatus in systemato*) across which the transition cannot be a step but requires a bridge of intermediary concepts which form a distinctive construction"⁵⁶. Both these passages clearly suggest that the transition is meant to bridge the gap, or gulf, between the metaphysical foundations of the science of nature and physics, and consequently that there is no need to look for alleged single "gaps" or "failures" in previous works. As Howard correctly argues, we shall advocate "setting aside the gap problem to allow a closer focus on the problem of the transition and the conceptual resources with which Kant attempts to solve it"⁵⁷.

However, while I do not accept Förster's proposal to distinguish between the two questions, I believe that he is right in claiming that 1798 represents a turning point for Kant's project. Even though I think that the "transition" and the "gap" problem must be identified, I wouldn't dismiss the significance of the latter's appearance, as Beiser and Busche seem to do. In other words, they argue that Kant was always aware of the presence of a "gap" within his system, and that the emergence of the term in 1798 drafts is merely an accidental fact of little philosophical relevance. On the contrary, I will argue that its importance is signaled not just by its sudden appearance within the manuscripts, but also by the conceptual evolution of Kant's thought in these sheets.

But then, how can I maintain both claims, namely, that the "gap" and the "transition" problems must be identified, and at the same time that the emergence of the first represents a major shift in

⁵⁴ See Beiser 2002, p. 634n; Busche 2010, pp. 56-60;

⁵⁵ *OP*, XXI 482.

⁵⁶ *OP*, XXI 476.

⁵⁷ Howard 2023b, p. 12. The scholar argues that we must conceive the gap in a "neutral" sense, and not as a "mistake" within Kant's system. Rather, the gap represents the empty space between the metaphysics of nature and empirical physics that the philosopher aims to bridge (see *Ivi*, p. 20). However, I don't agree with his distinction between the "neutral" gap mentioned in Kant's manuscripts and the "evaluative" gap seemingly present in the letters to Kiesewetter and Garve, where Kant refers to "a pain like that of Tantalus" (see *BW*, XXII, 257). Howard suggests that Förster might be correct in arguing that this letter reflects a specific problem in Kant's system that requires amendment, but he also warns against viewing this issue as "decisive" for interpreting the *Opus postumum* (see *Ivi*, p. 22). I find this suggestion problematic for two reasons: (1) I see no compelling ground to distinguish between the gap mentioned in the letter and that of the manuscripts. Kant's reference to a *Tantalischer Schmerz* does not necessarily imply that the gap reflects a failure in his earlier doctrine. This pain could instead stem from temporary difficulties in executing the transition project itself; (2) Howard does not provide sufficient justification for setting aside the letter and dismissing its relevance to the interpretation of the *Opus postumum*. If one assumes that the letter refers to a specific problem Kant sought to address in the manuscripts, I believe it should be considered diriment for interpreting his project.

Kant's reflections? I believe there is sufficient textual evidence to argue that, after 1798, the "transition" problem itself sensibly changes, so that a "gap" is discovered between the metaphysical foundations and physics. What I intend to argue is that in *Oktaventwurf*, the "transition" is not assumed as a bridge that must be lowered between two territories that are completely dissimilar to each other and thus separated by a *Lücke* or by a *Kluft*. Rather, it is conceived as a simple "step" (*Schritt*) from one dimension to another. Let us read the following passages, which were written *before* the discovery of the "gap":

The transition (*transitus*) from one form of knowledge to another must be a step [*Schritt*] (*passus*) only, not a leap [*Sprung*] (*saltus*); that is, the doctrine of method requires one to *pass* [*überzuschreiten*] from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics – from concepts of nature given a priori to empirical ones which yield empirical knowledge. The rule herein will be [...] to proceed like elephants, which do not put one of their four feet a step further until they feel that the other three stand firm⁵⁸.

Nevertheless, there can be a relationship of the one form of knowledge to the other which rests neither entirely on principles a priori, nor on empirical principles, but simply on the transition from one to the other; [it shows] how it is possible for us to collect and order the elements of a doctrine of nature to be based on experience, and to arrange them with the completeness required for systematic classification. Thus one attains a *physics* which is a comparatively complete whole, and which, being neither metaphysics of nature nor physics alone, contains simply the transition from the former to the latter and the step [*Schritt*] which connects both banks⁵⁹.

If it introduced by no affinity, the progress from one system to other is not a transition [*Überschritt*] (*transitus*) but a *leap* (*saltus*), which entirely destroys what is systematic, and, hence, what is scientific in a doctrine; it cannot be tolerated in a philosophy such as physics ought to be, for the fragmentary treatment of its objects carries with it no connection of concepts and does not amount to a whole even for memory⁶⁰.

As can be seen, no mention is here made about a "gap" or a "gulf" that the transition should bridge. Rather, Kant talks about a "step" (*Schritt*) from one dimension to the other, as if the two territories were divided, but still contiguous. This seems to be confirmed by the last quotation, where Kant states that we must assume an "affinity" between metaphysics of nature and physics, for without it a leap would exist between them, making their connection impossible. As we have seen in the

⁵⁸ *OP*, XXI 387.

⁵⁹ *OP*, XXI 403.

⁶⁰ *OP*, XXI 407.

preceding chapter, it is possible to assume that this “affinity” consists in the contiguity of the philosophical procedures involved in order to make both the metaphysics of nature and empirical physics systematic. In other words: having demonstrated in the *Metaphysical Foundations* that a thoroughgoing analysis of the concept of “matter in general” through the table of categories was possible, Kant believed he could make a “step” toward empirical physics by applying the same method to the object of *physica specialis*, namely, to the concept of “matter in its various determinations”. The attempts Kant made in the following drafts to a priori classify the specific properties of matter seems to confirm this hypothesis. However, it is clear from the sheets dated 1798 that he was not satisfied with this method, recognizing the need to reformulate the problem of the transition itself. Let us now read the passages where he talks about the transition after this acknowledgment:

It is a primary requirement of philosophical architectonics not to let the boundaries of the sciences run into each other, but to determine each of their territories punctually [...]. If one now, in order to arrive at a scientific (system-constituting) physics, starts from the metaphysical foundations of natural science as a separate doctrine, then the wisdom demands that before one lifts one’s foot to arrive at the latter, one should first consider whether it should be a step [*Schritt*] or a leap [*Sprung*] and whether, rather, a footpath [*Fußsteig*] or a bridge [*Brücke*] between the two, by means of which one can, on the one hand, look back at principles a priori (metaphysics) and, on the other hand, look forward at empirically given ones (physics). A safe transition from one ground to the other is, of course, only possible by means of a structure that in itself constitutes a whole (of the discipline) and a special system⁶¹.

The question is whether one may pass directly from the former to the latter (from a priori principles to empirical ones), or whether the transition (*transitus*) still requires a particular preliminary philosophical groundwork, established a priori, to mediate a connection between the two. This groundwork would not consist merely of empirical principles (as those belong to physics) but would contain reasons for the cognition of nature that partake of both. The question, then, is whether there is a specific part of natural science that necessarily belongs to the system under the title of this transition⁶².

I believe these passages clearly demonstrate Kant’s dissatisfaction with his previous conception of the transition. In the first two quotations, the philosopher explicitly raises the question of whether the *Übergang* should be conceived as a “step” – or also a “footpath” – or rather a “bridge”,

⁶¹ *OP*, XXI 179.

⁶² *OP*, XXI 163.

suggesting that these two options represent completely different methods to deal with the transition problem. In the first case, Kant suggests, we would *directly* pass from the a priori dimension of the metaphysical foundations to empirical physics. As I have already suggested, in my interpretation this amounts to claiming that we would directly apply the *method* of the *Metaphysical Foundations* to the *object* of *physica specialis*. In the second case, the “leap” between the two territories would make this approach impossible, instead requiring the preliminary establishment of a “philosophical groundwork” to mediate this connection. As Kant argues in the first quote, this groundwork should be conceived as an independent and “special” system that constitutes by itself a “whole”. In other words, it should be regarded as a distinct discipline serving as a mediating schema for the transition between metaphysical principles and empirical physics. As we will see, from here on Kant will be particularly consistent in adopting this second conception of the transition, leaving definitely aside its characterization as a simple “step” between two bordering territories.

The following quotation seems to confirm the impression that in these drafts Kant was reformulating his previous method:

One might think that the transition from the metaphysical foundation of natural science to physics requires no bridge, for the former, as a system constituted by concepts a priori, exactly adjoins the ground [*Boden*] of experience onto which it could alone be applied. But this very application creates doubts and contains difficulties which should be embarrassing for physics, as a particular system, separate from the former. For the admixture or insertion of the one into the other, as commonly occurs, is dangerous; not just to its elegance, but even to its thoroughness, because a priori and empirical principles might communicate with or make claims upon one another⁶³.

Although the philosopher does not explicitly address this point, it is highly plausible that the first sentence refers precisely to Kant’s own conception of the transition before 1798. As we saw, at that time, he argued that we must presuppose some form of “affinity” between metaphysical foundations and physics to avoid a dangerous leap between them. This affinity is grounded in the object of the two disciplines: the concept of “matter” in general for the first, the concept of “matter” in its empirical variety, for the second. Such a connection grants the possibility of the method of the *Metaphysical Foundations* to be applied to the object of empirical physics, allowing the transition from the one to the other. As Kant argues in the above quotation, this understanding of the transition rested on the conviction that metaphysical principles, as a system of a priori concepts, directly border on the ground of experience where the latter should be applied. Thus, they can be extended to both the concept of matter in general and the concept of matter in its empirical variety.

⁶³ *OP*, XXI 526.

However, in this passage, Kant also admits that such a method is “dangerous” and even “embarrassing” for physics, as it is hard to understand how the complete heterogeneity of empirical properties of matter can be legitimately subsumed under the table of categories. This difficulty is clearly signaled by the drafts that follows the *Oktaventwurf* (July 1797 – July 1798), named “A-C” and “ α - ε ”, where Kant tried to implement the classification of the properties of matter sketched in the last sheets of the *Oktaventurf* itself. Even a cursory reading of these passages reveals the problematic nature of the method adopted⁶⁴. It suffices to note that in “A-C” Kant does not deal with the category of modality, and in “ α - ε ” neither with the category of relation. It is no coincidence that, in his subsequent sheets, Kant begins to speak of a “gap” between metaphysics and physics, likely because he had come to realize the impossibility of directly applying the method of the former to the object of the latter.

Summing up what has been stated so far, I take the “transition” and the “gap” problem not as distinct and independent issues. The fact that Kant began to talk of a gap between metaphysics and physics only in 1798 does not mean that he had discovered a *new* problem, as Förster argues. Rather, it signals a development in the “transition” question itself, conceived originally as a simply *step* between two bordering territories, and then as a *bridge* to be built between two shores separated by a gulf⁶⁵.

I believe Emundts argues for something similar when she states that “at the time of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant had a relatively unproblematic notion of a ‘transition to empirical physics’. The fact that this becomes problematic endangers the possibility of experience, which gives rise to the talk of a ‘gulf’ or ‘gap’”⁶⁶. The reference to the *Metaphysical Foundations* is clearly directed to the General Remark to Dynamics, where it is evident that Kant already attempted to make a step in the direction of *physica specialis*, however without ever speaking about a “gap” between the territory of the latter and that of metaphysics of nature. This suggests that Kant conceived, both in the *Metaphysical Foundations* and in the early drafts of the *Opus postumum*, the transition as a “coherent” extension of the method of the metaphysics of nature to empirical physics. Only the

⁶⁴ See Tuschling 1971, p. 69: “Judging by its content, however, the draft is by and large not particularly remarkable. The largest section is taken up by natural philosophical and physical topics, and the broad line of the presentation here is the same as in the Loose Sheets and in the *Oktaventwurf*, only the conception and formulation of the approaches developed so far have become more decisive”; and Mathieu 1958, p. 203: “If, in the ’96-’97 drafts, we look for how Kant implements the program of establishing a priori a ‘topic’ or system of ‘commonplaces’ in which to place the forces of matter and their manifestations, we find an unstable and confusing situation”.

⁶⁵ As an example of this development, see also *OP*, XXI 474: “These two territories (metaphysics of nature and physics) do not immediately come into contact; and, hence, one cannot cross from one to the other simply by putting one foot in front of the other. Rather, there exists a gulf between the two, over which philosophy must build a bridge in order to reach the opposite bank. For, in order for metaphysical foundations to be combined with physical [foundations] (...) mediating concepts are required, which participate in both”.

⁶⁶ Emundts 2004, p. 58n.

acknowledgement of the problems inherent in this conception eventually led to the notion of a “gap”⁶⁷ between the two disciplines.

1.3 The intermediary concepts as the new principles of the Transition

After having established the relation between the “transition” and the “gap” problems, it is necessary to focus on the *solutions* Kant proposed after 1798 in order to accomplish his task of grounding the systematicity of *physica specialis*. As we have seen, the problematic character of the first conception of the transition lied in the impossibility of comprehensively classifying all the specific properties of matter according to the table of categories. In the following drafts Kant soon realized that he needed a specific “principle” from which he could derive “a set of phenomena”⁶⁸. In other words, in order to grant the possibility of a priori systematizing the various determinations of matter it was no more sufficient to subsume them under the table of categories; rather, a single principle was needed in order to organically classifying them a priori.

As it is known, the problem of finding a principle for the explanation of the systematicity of nature was also one of the main problems of the third *Critique*. In the first Preface Kant argued that the reflective power of judgement “could not undertake to *classify* the whole of nature according to its empirical differences if it did not presuppose that nature itself *specifies* its transcendental laws in accordance with some sort of principle”⁶⁹. And the principle of the reflective judgement lies in the assertion that nature “*specifies its general laws into empirical ones, in accordance with the form of a logical system, in behalf of the power of judgment.*”⁷⁰. Therefore, it allows us to consider nature – even in its particular empirical determinations – as organically structured into genera and species, according to the form of a logical system. Elsewhere, Kant also specifies that this principle can be called “technique of nature,” since it makes it possible to treat nature as technically – or artistically –

⁶⁷ However, even if we both think that the “gap” problem arised due to the recognition of the problematic nature of the transition, we disagree of the *reason* why it became problematic. Emundts asserts that the gap was opened by Kant’s acknowledgment of the circularity of his theory of density, which led the philosopher to assign to the ether an essential function in order to avoid this problem (see *Ibidem*, p. 15). Kant, however, first addressed the circularity problem as early as 1792 in a note accompanying a letter from Beck, whereas the first mentions of the gap problem emerge only in 1798, with no references to it in the drafts from the preceding two years. This chronological distance leads me to conclude that the two problems cannot be identified. As I have tried to show, in my reading the gap between metaphysics and physics emerged because of the difficulty of applying the method of one discipline to the object of the other.

⁶⁸ *OP*, XXI 319. See also *OP*, XXI 447: “[The task is] to classify the real objects of nature according to a principle, and to bring the empirical study of nature ever closer to a system”.

⁶⁹ *EE*, XX, 215.

⁷⁰ *EE*, XX 216.

organized, as if it were the *intentional* product “of a cause whose causality could only be determined through a *representation* of the object”⁷¹.

However, though the philosopher highlights that the origin of the principle of reflective judgement is *transcendental*, for it is grounded a priori on the structures of our cognitive faculties⁷², he also specifies that it does not allow us to *determine* nature, i.e., to argue that the latter actually *is* systematically and organically organized. As Kant himself writes, the “technique of nature” cannot be applied for the sake of the determination of a specific object, but only “*for the sake of reflection [zum Behuf der Reflexion]* on the object”⁷³. In other words, by deploying this principle, we are not making any objective claims about natural objects as such. Rather, we are establishing the conditions under which we are entitled to reflect on them in order to account for their systematic organization.

These are all questions that are well known in Kant scholarship. Therefore, my aim here is not to propose an in-depth analysis of the functioning of the reflective power of judgement. More modestly, I intend to emphasize that, while this principle enables us to consider the possibility of establishing a system of *empirical* laws of nature and accounting for the *heterogeneity* of natural objects, it remains a purely formal and subjective principle that guides our reflection without *determining* the content of nature itself. When we judge nature according to a purpose, we are in no way entitled to assume the actuality of a *real* cause that should be responsible for the explanation of its purposiveness. What we are permitted to do is to reflect on “given appearances, in order to bring them under empirical concepts of determinate natural things, not schematically, but *technically*, not as it were merely mechanically, like an instrument, but *artistically*”⁷⁴. Contrary to the procedure involved in the employment of the determinative power of judgement, we do not subsume empirical phenomena under given concepts through schemas, but we artistically *create* the concepts that can explain and organize in the best way possible the heterogeneity of given appearances.

As we have briefly seen, the problem of the systematicity of nature is also one of the main concerns in Kant’s reflections in the *Opus postumum*. The general aim of the Transition is to metaphysically ground *physica specialis* as a “system of empirical natural knowledge”⁷⁵. However, Kant’s final project is much more ambitious in both its intentions and results. The problem is no more that of establishing the transcendental conditions for reflecting on given phenomena in order to look for their systematic character. Rather, the question concerns the possibility of a priori constructing the system itself *before* the experience of given phenomena. In Kant’s own words, the aim of the Transition project is to “establish a priori a system of empirical representations (which otherwise

⁷¹ *EE*, XX 232.

⁷² See *EE*, XX 214.

⁷³ *EE*, XX 236.

⁷⁴ *EE*, XX 214.

⁷⁵ *OP*, XXI 635.

appeared impossible) and of *anticipating* experience *quoad materiale*”⁷⁶. Therefore, the systematization of nature does not follow, from a logical standpoint, our experience of given objects; rather, the grounding of an a priori system is the very condition of possibility *for our own experience* of nature. I will try to substantiate more this claim referring to two textual clues within the manuscripts.

(1) In several passages Kant speaks about the necessity of the systematicity “for the sake of experience [zum Behuf der Erfahrung]”⁷⁷ and no more, as it was in the third *Critique*, merely “for the sake of reflection”⁷⁸ or “for the sake of reason”⁷⁹. It thus seems that, in the *Opus postumum*, the impossibility in finding a principle that would guide our experience of nature would threaten not just our ability to reflect on the latter in order to give it an organic coherence; rather, its absence would undermine the *very existence* of an empirical experience.

(2) This impression is confirmed by the fact that the “principles” Kant is seeking in the Transition in order to ground the systematicity – and thus the *possibility* – of experience are both regulative *and* constitutive, as the philosopher himself writes:

This propaedeutic is itself a system which contains a priori the form of the system of physics. What contains the possibility of physics as a whole cannot be a fragmentary aggregate; for, as a whole given a priori, it must necessarily be a system which is capable neither of increase nor of diminution. Regulative principles which are also constitutive⁸⁰.

The propaedeutic Kant is speaking about is, of course, the science of the Transition itself. The principles that should guarantee its mediating role between metaphysics and physics are, on the one hand, regulative, as they must ensure the possibility of a complete classification of the specific properties of matter. On the other hand, they are also constitutive, since, as we will investigate more clearly in a moment, they are conceived as the very conditions of possibility of matter itself, and therefore of our empirical experience of objects. As Kant writes, without these principles “one cannot understand any [object], even not in empirical representation, like the concept of a stone”⁸¹.

I thus believe that both (1) and (2) are sufficient to highlight the evolution of the problem of systematicity, when compared with the *Critique of Judgement*. It is not my intention here to dwell at

⁷⁶ *OP*, XXI 502.

⁷⁷ See e.g. *OP*, XXI 102; XXI 544; XXII 357; XXII 368.

⁷⁸ See e.g. *EE*, XX 236. As Mathieu correctly notes, in the first Introduction to the third *Critique* Kant actually uses the expression “for the sake of experience”, when referring to the role of the principle of the reflective judgement. However, the recognition of the problematic status of this claim in the context of the epistemological framework of the third *Critique* can be seen as one of the grounds that led the philosopher to substitute this Introduction (see Mathieu 1958, p. 157).

⁷⁹ See e.g. *KU*, V 193.

⁸⁰ *OP*, XXII 241.

⁸¹ *OP*, XXI 162.

length on the problem regarding whether this evolution must be taken as a *revision* of Kant's position in the third *Critique*, or as a coherent *supplement* of the latter. However, I find it very difficult to take the Transition project as an attempt to substitute Kant's previous work, as for example Mathieu claims⁸². Even if this problem would require a more in-depth analysis, I believe it is possible to argue that the principles Kant is seeking in the *Opus postumum* are not meant to make the reflective power of judgement and the principle of purposiveness superfluous. Rather, their discovery could be understood as an attempt to provide a more substantial *grounding* for the activity of the latter.

In the first fascicles of the *Opus postumum* Kant constantly refers to the distinction between an *aggregate* of objects and a *system* of them. He writes for example:

Natural investigation cannot produce physics as a system without any principles of classification, because this would result only in an aggregate (*farrago*) of particular observations that, no matter how far they go, would not allow for any predictions. Such natural science is fragmentary, not systematic⁸³.

Kant is thus arguing that, if we understand physics – and particularly *physica specialis* – as a systematic classification of all properties of matter, it is not possible to base its results purely on empirical observations. However, this appears to be precisely the method Kant had in mind in the third *Critique* when describing the activity of reflective judgment. When we look for a universal concept that should encompass a set of particular objects, we must identify regularities or similarities among them that justify their belonging to that concept. This identification can only take place through *empirical* observation of the given objects and through the assumption of nature's purposiveness⁸⁴. As Emundts correctly argues, this could at best ground a “weak” concept of the system, namely one whose “internal arrangement could be legitimized by relationships that fulfill the formal conditions of laws, but in which these laws do not have to be formulable [*nicht formulierbar sein müssen*]”⁸⁵. In other words, the procedure of reflective judgment can legitimize the construction of a system whose concepts rest on similarities that do not need to be grounded in, or explained by, objective laws or principles (besides the *subjective* principle of nature's purposiveness). For example, we can group sets of substances as “acids” or “bases” bodies based solely on their sharing of common characteristics. In the *Opus postumum* Kant explicitly states that this method is not sufficient to ground the systematic – and thus scientific – status of empirical physics. The system of principles, as we have seen, must now be constructed *before* any empirical experience, because otherwise the

⁸² See Mathieu 1958, pp. 133-166.

⁸³ *OP*, XXI 484.

⁸⁴ See also Emundts 2004, p. 59: “This system can be understood as something in which relationships of similarity are to be used as a criterion for the place of the concepts in it, with similarity being something that can be determined empirically”.

⁸⁵ Emundts 2004, p. 60

collection of given phenomena under universal principles would result in a mere aggregate. The philosopher is now seeking to establish a “strong” conception of the system – one in which the objects it contains are organically interconnected through objective principles and laws⁸⁶. To use the same example, it is now necessary to discover those a priori principles that explain and grounds the difference between solidity and fluidity as specific properties of bodies. A procedure guided by reflective judgment would begin by observing that certain substances exhibit similar empirical behaviors: they change the color of indicators, have a particular taste, react in comparable ways with metals, and so forth. Based on these recurring traits, they may be grouped together under the same concept. However, such a classification remains grounded in merely empirical similarities and therefore lacks any claim to necessity; it remains open to constant revision or refinement. By contrast, within the framework of the Transition project, Kant seeks to demonstrate that such empirical regularities are not simply contingent patterns, but are instead the manifestation of a priori moving forces – namely, the moving forces of the ether. On this view, a scientific classification of acids and bases cannot rely solely on observed affinities; it must instead be grounded in objective, constitutive principles that explain the chemical behavior of substances.

At the same time, it seems that the reflective judgement cannot be dismissed as merely superfluous, even in the context of the Transition project. Although the systematicity of natural laws and objects must now be *grounded* on new objective and constitutive principles, the reflective power of judgement, guided by the principle of purposiveness, must determine the position each single object of experience should occupy within a systematic knowledge of nature. To use Emundt’s words, “[e]ven if such a system of explanatory principles is established, it must still be the task of empirical natural science itself to strive for a system of empirical laws – i.e., to explain various phenomena through the same principle”⁸⁷. In other words, the task of constructing a system of objects of experience always remain within the purview of observations, experiments, and generalizations carried out by reflective judgment on the basis of affinities discovered among given objects. However, Kant’s objective is to demonstrate that these affinities are not merely contingent or accidental, but grounded in a priori objective principles (the moving forces of matter), thereby securing a “strong” conception of system. I believe that passages such as the following confirm this reading:

The primitive substances are therefore merely thought-entities [*Gedankendinge*] (*entia rationis*) and mere principles for the combination of moving forces, aimed at enabling the unity of

⁸⁶ See also *OP*, XXI 488: “In order to achieve physics I must know in advance how to investigate nature. Natural science is either metaphysics of the doctrine of nature or physics. The latter does not constitute a system with the former because physics is a mere aggregate of experiences, unless there is a transition from the one to the other”.

⁸⁷ Emundts 2004, pp. 63-64.

experience for the purposes of physics. They constitute the ground of the possibility of a form under which an aggregate of perceptions is subjectively organized into a system, for the sake of experience, in order to carry out the investigation of nature through observation and experiment⁸⁸.

As we will see better later, even though Kant refers to primitive substances in the plural here, he ultimately assigns to the ether the role of systematically combining the moving forces of matter. These ether-forces must be understood as the principles that ensure the possibility of an organic organization of objects into a coherent system. However, as Kant affirms in this passage, it is only “through observation and experiment” that we “carry out the investigation of nature”. Put differently, it is the *empirical* investigation of nature that allows us to *construct* a system of the objects contained within it. This empirical investigation must presuppose the principle of the purposiveness of nature, so that a regularity in the various empirical objects is ensured, allowing for their classification.

The moving forces, at the same time, serve as the rational principles that guarantee the *possibility* of these regularities not being entirely contingent and of the investigation not being open to endless revisions and refutations. In this way, the system we build is no more based on *mere* empirical similarities between objects because these same similarities are in turn grounded on *objective* and *lawful* principles – namely, the principles of Transition⁸⁹.

I thus agree with Emundts when she argues that the *Übergang* “neither replaces nor makes redundant the project of the *Critique of Judgment*”⁹⁰, contrary to Mathieu’s interpretation, which seems to view the former as a kind of *supersession* of the latter⁹¹. However, I also think it’s possible to find a sort of middle path between the two scholars, moderating both their positions. On the one side, I take Emundt’s claim that Kant “understands his new project as connected to the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and not to the third *Critique*”⁹² to be too strong. As we have seen, it is at least possible to conceive the *Opus postumum* as an attempt to give a more solid ground to the activity of reflective judgement and to its ambitions of systematicity, thus establishing a firm connection between the two works⁹³. This brings me closer to Mathieu’s view, according to which “the third *Critique* played a decisive role in the emergence of the *Übergang* project”⁹⁴. However, this does not necessarily lead to the assertion of a complete replacement of the third *Critique*, as the Italian scholar seems to suggest.

⁸⁸ *OP*, XXII 352.

⁸⁹ I believe Thorndike argues for something similar when he writes that “the Transition Project is meant to guide natural sciences to a coherent rational explanation of natural phenomena by connecting the constitutive a priori principles of material nature with the regulative procedure of reflective judgment” (Thorndike 2018, p. 89).

⁹⁰ Emundts 2004, p. 66.

⁹¹ See Mathieu 1958, pp. 133-166.

⁹² Emundts 2004, p. 64.

⁹³ As we have seen, Emundts conceives the Transition as an attempt to correct the General Remark to Dynamics of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and so as a project mainly connected with the 1786 work. However, I believe this does not undermine the possibility that also the *Critique of Judgment* could have played a role in its formulation.

⁹⁴ Mathieu 1958, p. 145.

Rather, one can speak of an attempt at its *integration* through the grounding of a stronger conception of systematicity.

After these preliminary remarks, we must now turn to the question regarding *which* principles underlie the Transition that should guarantee the systematicity of our natural inquiry. We have seen that these principles must be both regulative and constitutive: they must grant the possibility not just of the organicity of our empirical investigation, but also of its very *possibility*. Moreover, we saw in the preceding section that in 1798 Kant discovered a “gap” within his system – one which threatened the prospect of a lawful transition from the method of the metaphysical foundations of natural science to the object of empirical physics. Consequently, earlier attempts to classify the empirical properties of matter according to the table of categories proved unsuccessful. As Förster correctly notes, “[w]hat these first drafts clearly illustrate [...] is the total absence of any well-defined idea or principle for the systematic function of the Transition. Most important, the table of categories [...] cannot substitute for the lacking principle, and cannot indicate which forces must be assembled a priori”⁹⁵. In other words: the categories cannot be the – only – instruments through which we a priori classify all the specific properties of matter, since their function is to account for the universal and formal properties of objects, and not for their particular and contingent content. Using Kant’s own words in the first *Critique*, “[t]he pure faculty of understanding does not suffice [...] to prescribe to the appearances through mere categories a priori laws beyond those on which rests *a nature in general* [...]. Particular laws, because they concern empirical determined appearances, *cannot be completely derived* from categories”⁹⁶.

The acknowledgement of the problematic role played by the categories in systematizing the particular properties of matter could only lead to skepticism regarding the theoretical procedure he had adopted until 1798, consisting in directly applying the method of the *Metaphysical Foundations* to the object of *physica specialis*. For this reason, in conjunction with the discovery of a gulf between metaphysics and physics, Kant begins to emphasize the need to identify “intermediary concepts” capable of bridging the two dimensions:

But the transition from the former to the latter cannot occur directly. Between the concepts of the former, which are grasped a priori, and the empirical ones, by means of which the former must be linked to the latter, intermediary concepts lie, which make the transition of the former to the latter scientifically possible. – Conditions for the possibility of a system of experience of physical nature and of its moving forces⁹⁷.

⁹⁵ Förster 2000, p. 14.

⁹⁶ *KrV*, B 163.

⁹⁷ *OP*, XXI 528-529.

The transition from one science to the other must have certain intermediary concepts, which are given in the one and are applied to the other, and which thus belong to both territories alike. Otherwise this advance is not a lawlike transition but a leap in which one neither knows where one is going, nor, in looking back, understands whence one has come⁹⁸.

If my previous reconstruction is correct, the introduction of these concepts is intended to address the difficulty the philosopher faced before 1798, namely, the challenge of establishing a coherent and comprehensive systematization of the properties of matter according to the table of categories. These intermediary concepts are designed to resolve this issue, thereby fulfilling the role of the new principles of the Transition that Kant was seeking. I pointed out that they must be both constitutive and regulative, making possible the existence of an organic and systematic experience of nature. We also saw that neither the categories nor the principle of purposiveness of the reflective judgment could claim this role. On the one hand, although the rules of the understanding are constitutive, they cannot account for all the specific attributes of empirical objects⁹⁹. They can only ground the possibility of an experience *formaliter spectata*¹⁰⁰. On the other hand, the regulative function of the principle of purposiveness can indeed achieve what the categories cannot – namely, the construction of an organic system of empirical objects. Nevertheless, it would only result in a “weak” system: a conceptual organization grounded on mere empirical and contingent affinities.

It is thus clear that the principles of the Transition must have a “particular content and a peculiar occupation”¹⁰¹, which is not reducible to neither the rules of the understanding nor the function of reflective judgment. To be more precise, the intermediary concepts must incorporate *both* the constitutive function of the first and the regulative role of the latter. They must be objectively valid, in order for *physica specialis* to acquire the possibility of a scientific status, but they also must account for the systematization of all the specific properties of matter, and not only for the pure formal relations between appearances.

If that’s true, then the only way Kant envisages to solve this problem is to question, or to reformulate, its classical distinction between form and matter of knowledge, or between a priori and a posteriori. In the first *Critique* Kant claimed that we can have knowledge of the objects of experience because we can determine, through the categories, their mere *formal* relations. “I call that

⁹⁸ *OP*, XXI 525-526.

⁹⁹ See *KU*, V 183.

¹⁰⁰ See also Carpi 1997: “From what has been argued, Kant states that only the rules of the pure understanding [...], are the condition of possibility of experience itself. These allow us to have a nature in general (*formaliter spectata*); but they do not make us know nature divided into genera and species (*materialiter spectata*), the knowledge of which is delegated to a further principle, not of the understanding, but of Judgment (principle of finality of nature)”.

¹⁰¹ *OP*, XXI 167.

in the appearance which corresponds to sensation its *matter*”, Kant wrote, “but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations I call the *form* of appearance”¹⁰², since “the matter of all appearance is only given to us a posteriori, but its form must lie ready for it in the mind a priori”¹⁰³. In other words, even though we need an empirical matter which is *given* to our senses in order for the categories to be applied to an object, the understanding does not determine anything beyond the mere form of the latter¹⁰⁴.

This is, after all, the meaning of the Schematism doctrine itself: the understanding, through the mediating function of the schemas, does not *directly* determine the objects given by the senses, but only the *forms* through which the objects are given to us: space, and, more importantly, time¹⁰⁵. The understanding thus has the capacity to establish formal and lawful relations between appearances, in order for them to be synthetized and to constitute true objects of knowledge. However, the specific and empirical content, thought necessary for an object to be cognizable, is not a priori determined by the categories. Therefore, the matter of our knowledge is not, as it were, completely *transparent* to the operations of the understanding, for it is always *given* to us by the senses (a posteriori) and not created by the latter (a priori).

In the *Opus postumum*, as we have seen, Kant goes a step further, claiming that it is possible to a priori *anticipate* the experience *quoad materiale*. The principles of the Transition must then mediate not only between the a priori forms of understanding and the a priori forms of sensibility, as the schemas of the productive imagination do, being homogenous to both our faculties¹⁰⁶. Rather, their function consists in mediating between understanding and the *particular content* offered through the senses. They must thus be homogenous to the a priori forms of understanding and the a posteriori content of our sensible perceptions, making then possible to account for the specific empirical variety of our objects of experience and, therefore, to fill the gap between the metaphysical foundations of natural science and physics¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰² *KrV*, A 20-B 34.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴ See Schulze 1994, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ See Mathieu 1958, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶ *KrV*, A 139-140 – B 178-179: “[We have seen] that the modification of our sensibility is the only way in which objects are given to us; and, finally, that pure concepts a priori, in addition to the function of the understanding in the category, must also contain a priori formal conditions of sensibility (namely of the inner sense) that contain the general condition under which alone the category can be applied to any object. We will call this formal and pure condition of the sensibility, to which the use of the concept of the understanding is restricted, the *schema* of this concept of the understanding, and we will call the procedure of the understanding with these schemata the *schematism* of the pure understanding”. See Also Guzmán-Grez 2021, p. 376: “Since we must construct a connection between metaphysics and physics, it is no more a matter of articulating a synthesis between understanding and sensibility in general, but between the transcendental (a priori) and the empirical (a posteriori)”.

¹⁰⁷ See also Lorini 2023, p. 97: “The main function of the *Mittelbegriffe* consists therefore in the mediation between an understanding of nature in terms of natural science (that is, as a matter to be translated into mathematical terms and consequently expressed by a system of logical-formal laws), and an understanding of nature in its dynamic variety (which allows appreciating nature as a qualitatively multifaceted and irreducible whole). Thus, the mediation-function of the

Let us read the following passage:

The most carefully collected empirical concepts never ensure that the natural scientist has a complete and comprehensive system; instead, they can only be achieved by trial and error (*compilando*), and one must always expect that the system that has been assumed will have to be revised, that certain parts will have to be discarded, or that space will have to be left for others that may announce themselves as previously unknown species.

Thus, in a system of natural science, it is unavoidable that a leap (*saltus*) takes place in it if not for an intermediary concept (not the logical one in the syllogism, which concerns only the form of the conclusion but the real one, which offers an object to reason) which, on the one hand, is linked to a concept of the object a priori and, on the other hand, to the condition of the possibility of experience in which this concept can be realized; for only then does such a concept serve as a transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics, which is then no leap¹⁰⁸.

In the first part of the quotation, Kant confirms what we have previously argued: the reflective power of judgment alone is insufficient to account for the possibility of a systematic investigation of nature. The procedure of discovering general concepts (species) based solely on recognizing empirical affinities between natural objects risks leading to a mere problematic aggregation, since this approach leaves open the possibility of endless revisions and corrections based on new discoveries and observations. This risk can be avoided only if these affinities are themselves based on objective valid principles, namely, the *Mittelbegriffe*. In this way the ultimate ground that grants the scientific validity of the system is not the recognition of some sort of empirical affinity between objects, but the a priori structures that regulate the latter. This does not mean that empirical observation is now infallible and unamendable, but it seems that it is at least possible to establish a firm *criterion* for its correctness, which would otherwise be absent if systematization were based only on the subjective principle of nature's purposiveness.

Moreover, as Kant specifies in the above passage, the main feature of the intermediary concepts is that they are not merely logical ones, since they "offer an object to reason". If the *Mittelbegriffe* should be conceived as the *constitutive* ground for the existence and for the reciprocal relations between particular empirical properties, they must claim some sort of *reality* which distinguishes them from the mere formal status of both the categories and the principle of purposiveness. The principles of the transition must therefore be thought of as *both* a priori and

Mittelbegriffe requires them to be at the same time a priori – as both transcendentally deduced and metaphysically determining – and empirical, as they are epistemologically suitable to embed the principles they postulate into the structure of matter"

¹⁰⁸ *OP*, XXI 285.

empirical: on the one side, they must be rationally and systematically deducible, and on the other they must be the very “grounds of the appearances [*Ursache der Erscheinungen*]”¹⁰⁹. In other words: we can give an a priori classification of the various empirical appearances and properties of matter only if we think a principle which is not merely formal, but still transcendently necessary, and which constitutes the ground for the existence and of the determinations of the former¹¹⁰.

But which are the concepts that can fulfil both these conditions – namely, to be a priori classifiable, and to account for the empirical properties of objects? Kant assigns this crucial role to the dynamical forces of matter, that is, to those forces that does not act mechanically between physical bodies, but that on the contrary are conceived as the very conditions of possibility of the latter:

[T]he transition from metaphysics to physics, from the a priori concept of the movable in space (i.e. the concept of a matter in general) to the system of moving forces, can [proceed] only by means of that which is common to both – by means of the moving forces insofar as they act not on matter but rather united or opposed among one another, and thus form a system of the universal doctrine of forces (*physiologia generalis*) which stand between metaphysics and physics¹¹¹.

Even if Kant does not explicitly address the dynamical forces of matter in this passage, he explicitly hints at them when talks about forces that do not act *on* physical matter, but rather among one another, making possible the existence of the latter. In the drafts following the *Oktaventwurf*, written between July 1797 and May 1799 (*A-C*, α - ϵ , *Elem. Syst.* 1-7, *Farrago* 1-4, *A Übergang*, *B Übergang* e *A. Elem. Syst.* 1-6) we find a set of attempts to distinguish between the dynamical, or primitive, forces of matter, and the mechanical, or derivative ones¹¹². Mechanical forces are those exerted by bodies on one another when in motion, requiring the action of one material body on another. In contrast, dynamical forces do not rely on any material substance but instead enable the very existence of the latter through their mutual interaction. They thus belong to a dimension that is not strictly empirical, because, due to their imponderability, their action cannot be directly perceived by the subject. However, their existence is conceived as *necessary* in order for the ponderable matter to exist. “Even ponderability [...]”, Kant writes, “will require the assumption of a matter which is not ponderable (*imponderabilis*); for, otherwise, the condition for ponderability would be extended to

¹⁰⁹ *OP*, XXI 505.

¹¹⁰ On the generative role of the moving forces with regard to the empirical content of our perceptions see also *OP*, XXI 202: “The moving forces of matter contain the material of the perception that, through the consciousness of composing the manifold in intuition, creates their concept of experience and furnishes the real of the sensible representation through which the object becomes perceptible”.

¹¹¹ *OP*, XXI 478.

¹¹² See e.g. *OP*, XXI 239.

infinity, and thus lack a foundation”¹¹³. And also: “[e]very mechanic effect of forces presupposes a dynamical one which precedes the former a priori”¹¹⁴.

The dynamic and imponderable forces of matter are understood primarily as the foundation of the most fundamental property of all physical bodies: their ponderability. They are thus an a priori and necessary presupposition of our empirical knowledge as such, because the latter would not be possible without the existence of a ponderable and perceivable matter. But Kant does not stop here. As we have seen, the Transition project does not deal merely with the general properties of matter, like movement, inertia and ponderability itself. On the contrary, Kant’s aim is to classify also the *particular* properties of specific kinds of matter, like states of aggregations, chemical solutions, etc. The philosopher thus conceives the action of the dynamical forces of matter to be responsible also for these latter. Consequently, a comprehensive classification of the moving forces should also provide a complete account of the particular attributes of bodies, which are grounded on the first:

[h]owever diverse the objects of physics may be (whose properties and classifications must be learned by experience – empirically – in order to make them as far as possible into a so-called system), they are, nevertheless, merely phenomena. A priori concepts of moving forces must always lie at their foundation, and phenomena must be arranged according to them¹¹⁵.

The dynamical forces of matter seem thus to fit into the role Kant was trying to give to the *Mittelbegriffe*: they are necessary and a priori presuppositions of our empirical knowledge as such, and they are therefore also rationally classifiable according to the table of categories. At the same time, their mutual interaction is conceived as the very ground for the specific properties of matter, thereby creating a bridge between the transcendental and the empirical. As the philosopher states, “[w]e can classify a priori the moving forces according to concepts, and so completely enumerate the properties of matter prior to experience; for the synthetic unity of appearances must lie in the understanding priori to experience”¹¹⁶. In light of passages like this, it seems that Kant is now considering the possibility that matter is not merely *given* to the subject a posteriori. Using Mathieu’s words, “[d]ynamism removes the irredicibility of material datum, as it allows us to bring it back to a formal structure that we can construct”¹¹⁷. The empirical properties of objects are thus conceived as the product of the interaction between forces whose existence we can determine a priori, since it represents a necessary presupposition for our very experience of matter. Their reciprocal action can

¹¹³ *OP*, XXII 138.

¹¹⁴ *OP*, XXII 236.

¹¹⁵ *OP*, XXI 477.

¹¹⁶ *OP*, XXI 477.

¹¹⁷ Mathieu 1958, p. 172.

be taken as that ground Kant was seeking in order to grant the possibility of a *strong* systematical experience of nature. Our collection of objects into general concepts is no longer based on the mere observation of similarities between them – a process, that, as we have seen is constantly threatened by the possibility of endless corrections and rectifications. The properties of the objects on whose basis we identify the similarities are in fact the effect of a lawful interaction between the different moving forces of matter. The latter make it possible to a priori explain, for example what grounds the difference between acid and basic substances. In this way, our identification of a set of objects as “acids” or as “bases” will not be ultimately based on the mere identification of empirical similarities, but on the principles that make the latter possible.

1.4 How many principles? The relation between the dynamical forces of matter and the ether

In the preceding section we have seen that the dynamical forces of matter are conceived as those *Mittelbegriffe* that should grant not just the possibility of a lawful *formal* experience, but also of a systematic and organic *concrete* experience. However, our analysis on the role of the intermediate concepts departed from the consideration of Kant’s explicit request to find a *single* “supreme principle of the transition”¹¹⁸, from which the particular properties of matter had to be systematically derived. We should now ask how to conciliate these two apparently contrasting requests – namely, to find a set of intermediate concepts whose mutual interaction explains the generation of the various empirical properties of matter, and to look for a single principle that should guarantee the *unity* of our experience of nature? In other words, is the principle singular, or are there a manifold of them? Kant seems to suggest that both the options are true. Let us read for example the following passage:

The intermediary concept, however, which had to lead from that purely a priori founded science to physics as an empirical science, had to underlie a concept of matter, which in one respect would be empirical but in another would be an a priori concept, and this lies in the concept of matter in so far as it has moving forces.¹¹⁹

Here the philosopher is clear in stating that the intermediary concept is actually singular: it is represented by the concept of “matter in so far as it has moving forces”. The latter are thus conceived as mere parts, or determinations, of a single matter that encompasses them all. When Kant speaks

¹¹⁸ *OP*, AA XXI:594.

¹¹⁹ *OP*, AA XXI:289.

about the intermediary concepts in the plural, he is thus referring to the moving forces that are inherent to a matter which unify them, but *the* intermediary concept *par excellence* seems to be this matter itself¹²⁰. As Kant himself writes, the purpose of the Transition project is thus twofold: what it must account for is “that all of these moving forces of matter stand under the system of the categories, and that one universal [matter] primitively underlies them all”¹²¹.

I believe that the ground of this tension is to be found in the function itself of the principle(s) of the Transition. On the one hand, the existence of an extreme variety in the properties of matter requires that their differences are genetically explained through specific interactions between the moving forces of matter. In other words: each differences require *particular* explanations, based on the interplay of the forces involved. On the other hand, the systematic *unity* of our investigation of nature demands that a *single* principle regulate the establishment of organic relations between the objects it encompasses. This is because such a principle represents the “*absolute* totality in the synthesis of conditions”¹²², which ensures coherence and consistency in our understanding of nature. A multiplicity of principles would lead to a fragmentation of this whole, resulting in a manifold of disparate systems rather than a unified totality. To avoid this risk, we must understand the variety of *Mittelbegriffe* as ultimately grounded in a *single* matter that enables their organic interplay, ensuring systematic coherence within their diversity. This foundational unity does not negate variety but rather serves as the basis upon which diverse interactions can be meaningfully structured, ensuring that the multiplicity of forces and properties remains intelligible within a unified framework.

But what does this matter represent? As we have seen, the function of the intermediary concepts is to connect the empirical and the transcendental territories. They thus belong specifically to neither of them, but they stand *in between* these dimensions. The matter Kant is here speaking about cannot therefore be the *empirical* and *ponderable* matter, for in this case the intermediary concept would belong to the territory of physics alone. Moreover, we saw that Kant clearly distinguishes between the dynamical and primitive forces of matter as belonging to the territory of the Transition, and the mechanical forces which represent interactions between empirical objects. The matter that encompasses all the dynamical forces must be thus distinguished from the ponderable matter which physical bodies are constituted of. As Kant writes,

“Ponderability presupposes the coercibility of the matter in the lever, which resists its bending or breaking, as well as the breaking of the cord by which the weight is suspended. The mechanics of moving forces is thinkable only under the presupposition of dynamics [...]. A living force of matter

¹²⁰ See Howard 2023b, p. 27.

¹²¹ *OP*, XXI 183.

¹²² *KrV*, A 326-B 382 (emphasis mine).

which penetrates the body must be the cause of the dead force of pressure and traction [...]. Thus, the moving force of caloric is required for a lever as an instrument of ponderability”¹²³.

The argument Kant is here employing is very similar to the one we have analyzed before regarding the distinction between dynamical and mechanical forces. In order for a mechanical instrument such as the lever to work, the arms of the latter must be constituted by a ponderable matter, i.e., by a matter which can sustain the weight of a body placed upon it. This can be possible only if the arms of the lever are also coercible, making possible for the latter the resistance to “its bending or breaking”. The coercibility of the lever must in turn be explained by the action of a *living* force – namely, a force that binds the part of the body together, ensuring both resistance to deformation and the capacity to transmit forces through its structure without disintegration. This living force however cannot belong to another ponderable matter, for otherwise we should look for another force which makes possible the latter’s ponderability, and so on *ad infinitum*. The action exercised on the parts of the lever must thus be that of an imponderable and incohesible matter, which Kant here calls “caloric” (*Wärmestoff*), but that in other passages is also named “ether” (*Äther*).

It thus seems that the caloric, or the ether, can be taken as that principle Kant was seeking in order to grant the systematicity of empirical physics. This impression is confirmed by the fact that in these drafts he constantly refers to this specific kind of matter in order to account for diverse properties of bodies. As Mathieu rightly states, “[i]n these explanations, in which the ether is brought up each time to make it responsible for all sorts of phenomena, the fundamental reason given is that such phenomena can only arise as a result of a *living force* which only the ether can exert”¹²⁴. In other words, every empirical property of bodies, like cohesion, fluidity, electricity, magnetism etc. are ultimately explained through the action of a universal and all-penetrating matter, conceived as the “collective unity”¹²⁵ of all dynamical moving forces.

Now, as it is known, Kant had always been particularly interested in the question regarding the existence of the ether and of the caloric. However, there are two fundamental differences between these drafts of the *Opus postumum* and the “critical” works: (1) In the latter, and particularly in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant clearly distinguished between the role of the caloric and that of the ether in the explanation of physical phenomena; (2) In the critical works, they are presented as mere possible physical hypotheses, whereas in the *Opus postumum*, Kant begins to argue for the necessity of their existence.

¹²³ *OP*, XXII 138.

¹²⁴ Mathieu 1991, p. 97. See also Thorndike 2018, p. 102: “In his drafts from 1796–8, Kant attempts to solve the problem of the systematicity of diverse empirical laws through the ether as the principle of all moving forces of matter”

¹²⁵ See e.g. *OP*, XXI 573.

Just to give an example, regarding question (1), in the General Remark to Phenomenology of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant describes the ether as a substance endowed with very low density, distributed among physical bodies, which *mechanically* acts on their surfaces causing the cohesion of their parts¹²⁶. On the contrary, in the General Remark to Dynamics he refers to the caloric as an example of matter that can be completely dissolved (*aufgelöset*) into an empirical body, suggesting that the relation between the two materials is not mechanical, but rather *chemical*¹²⁷. This distinction becomes noticeably blurred in the *Oktaventwurf*. Although Kant sometimes continues to refer to the caloric as an imponderable matter that penetrates bodies and causes their expansion¹²⁸, and to the ether as a matter that, on the contrary, acts as the cause of their cohesion¹²⁹, in other passages he seems to merge their functions, even describing the ether as an imponderable matter capable of penetrating bodies¹³⁰.

As for question (2), Kant has always been very clear, in his critical works, to assign to these matters the status of mere *hypothesis*. In the *Critique of Judgement*, he famously distinguishes between “things of opinion” (*Sachen der Meinung*), “things of fact” (*Tatsachen*) and “things of faith” (*Glaubenssachen*)¹³¹. The last two refer respectively to things which are given in our empirical experience, and to things that, although they cannot be theoretically cognizable, are to be taken as necessary practical postulates (God and the soul). The “things of opinion” are instead “objects of an empirical cognition at least possible in itself (objects of the world of sense); but, which, on account merely of the [low] degree of this faculty that we possess, is *for us* impossible”¹³². The example Kant gives in order to understand the status of these objects is exactly that of “the ether of the new physicists”¹³³. The latter is conceived as a *possible* empirical matter, since, even if it were to exist, it would remain imperceptible for us due to the inherent limits of our cognitive faculties. As Kant showed in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, the ether (and the caloric) can therefore be used in scientific explanations in order to account for the generation of specific empirical properties – which otherwise would remain unexplained – but no claim can be made about their actual existence as physical entities.

In the *Oktaventwurf* – and so, let us remember, before the discovery of the “gap” and of the necessity of the assumption of the intermediary concepts – Kant still talks about the ether and the caloric in terms of mere hypotheses. However, the epistemic status of these hypotheses themselves

¹²⁶ *MAN*, 563-564.

¹²⁷ *MAN*, 532.

¹²⁸ See *OP*, XXI 380, 392.

¹²⁹ See *OP*, XXI 378.

¹³⁰ See *OP*, XXI 383. As Pecere states, “[t]his attempt at mechanical interpretation of chemical concepts is not without uncertainties, and it is not always possible to distinguish between mechanical ether ‘diffused between the parts of bodies’ and chemically dissolved caloric” (Pecere 2009, p. 705).

¹³¹ *KU*, 467.

¹³² *KU*, 404.

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

significantly shifts from that of the critical works. Kant writes for example that “[t]o assume such a matter filling space is an inevitably necessary hypothesis [*eine unvermeidlich nothwendige Hypothese*], for, without it, no cohesion, which is necessary for the formation of a physical *body*, can be thought”¹³⁴. In other words, even if the ether remains a material that cannot be perceived through senses, the hypothesis of its actuality is now deemed necessary, as its external compression on bodies is considered the only explanation for their cohesion and, by extension, of their very existence¹³⁵. It is no coincidence, then, that the ether (or caloric) is now assumed to be responsible for a much broader range of empirical phenomena: if the action of a cosmic matter is considered to be necessary (albeit still only as a hypothesis) to understand the very existence of empirical entities, then nothing prevents us to refer to the action of such a matter also to explain their particular and specific properties, in an attempt to systematically explain their physical emergence from a single principle.

However, even if in the *Oktaventwurf* Kant expressed a stronger confidence in the explanatory power of the ether, he nonetheless lacked any means to overcome its merely hypothetical. This led to a significant problem with respect to the general aim of the Transition project. If the latter should be a philosophical attempt to a priori ground the *systematic* and *rational* dimension of *physica specialis*, then it is difficult to see how a physical *hypothesis* (whose existence can only be attested a posteriori) such as the ether can serve as that principle Kant was seeking in order to “classify the real objects of nature”¹³⁶.

I believe it is exactly to overcome this problem that that the philosopher eventually saw the necessity of introducing the function of the intermediary concept(s), which should avoid the characterization of the ether in terms of a mere *hypothetical* matter. As we have seen, the *Mittelbegriffe* “form the a priori basis of natural research”¹³⁷, and their function is thus assumed as *necessary* in order to grant the possibility of a systematic empirical physics. On the other hand, however, the price to be paid for this theoretical move lies in the difficulty of attributing to the ether any physical property that would allow it to interact mechanically – but also chemically – with other empirical bodies.

¹³⁴ OP, XXI 378.

¹³⁵ See *Ibidem*: “The secondary matter distributed in the ether is thereby necessitated to unify itself into bodies at certain points and so to form cosmic bodies”.

¹³⁶ OP, XXI 447. In the *Metaphysical Foundations* Kant made clear that a hypothesis cannot claim the role of a principle, when he states that “all spaces can be thought of as full, and yet as filled in different measures, whereby empty space at least loses its *necessity*, and is demoted to the value of an hypothesis. For it could otherwise usurp the title of a principle, under the pretense of being a necessary condition for explaining the different degrees of the filling of space” (*MAN*, 524).

¹³⁷ OP, XXI 358.

We have seen that in the drafts following the *Oktaventwurf* Kant frequently stresses its imponderable and incoercible status¹³⁸, in an attempt to mark a clear ontological distinction between the latter and the empirical, i.e., ponderable and coercible matter¹³⁹. As Pecere writes, “[o]ne gets the impression that Kant strives to free himself from the risk of simply returning to the postulates of mechanicism and therefore attempts to ‘dematerialize’ the ether”¹⁴⁰. In other terms, the necessity to assume the ether as an a priori element – one that guarantees the transition between the metaphysics of nature and physics – led to questioning its *physical*, and therefore *hypothetical*, status. However, these drafts clearly testify to Kant’s difficulty in addressing this problem. For if on the one side he is tempted by the solution of a complete “dematerialization” of the ether in favor of its identification with an a priori genuine transcendental principle, on the other side he continues to refer to its physical action for the explanation of particular phenomena. For example, the philosopher constantly talks about supposed “vibrations” (*Erschütterungen*) or “impacts” (*Stöße*) of the ether¹⁴¹, which obviously underlie mechanical properties such as mass, velocity etc. However, he never explicitly addresses the problem concerning *how* such an imponderable matter can interact with empirical bodies through these movements¹⁴².

Now, my intention here is not to reconcile these apparently divergent claims. Rather, my aim is to highlight the productive theoretical *tension* within Kant’s reflections, caught between the attempt to justify the *physical* conflicts underlying the different properties of matter and the *transcendental* need to avoid a merely hypothetical characterization of them. Notably, this second concern becomes increasingly pressing as Kant’s reflections develop, likely due to the inherent difficulty of consistently addressing the first set of problems. In other terms, Kant appears progressively less concerned with explaining *how* the action of the ether could generate the empirical properties of bodies. Instead, his primary focus shifts to demonstrating *that* such a matter must be conceived as a necessary condition for the possibility of all physical objects, and consequently, for the coherence of systematic experience itself. In Kant’s own words, the ether is now understood as a “general principle of the possibility of every experience”¹⁴³.

¹³⁸ See e.g. *OP*, XXII 142: “Caloric is, hence, incoercible, as well as imponderable, and can be coerced [...], in whole or in part (dynamically, not mechanically), by no other material – except that which is of its own type (the universally distributed caloric)”.

¹³⁹ As Lyssy argues, “[t]he ether is to be conceived as ontologically different from moving forces, yet it is constitutive of them. As forces also constitute the essential properties of matter, the ether is indirectly constitutive of matter as well, but also needs to be conceived as ontologically different from all matter that can be experienced” (Lyssy 2023, p. 29). I would only add a clarification: the ether is ontologically distinct from the *mechanical* moving forces of matter, but not from the dynamical, which are inherent to it.

¹⁴⁰ Pecere 2009, p. 717.

¹⁴¹ See e.g. *OP*, XXI 288.

¹⁴² This ambiguity is also signaled by Mathieu 1958, pp. 195-196 and Pecere 2009, pp. 717-746.

¹⁴³ *OP*, XXII 197.

Moreover, this same development can be seen as the main reason for the apparent progressive blurring of the distinction between the functions of the ether and the caloric. If the main problem is no longer that of clarifying the physical processes that should explain how properties like density, cohesion, fluidity etc., are constructed, then it is also no more necessary to refer to these matters as physical entities endowed with particular attributes which are capable of explaining the first trough their mechanical or chemical action¹⁴⁴. Kant explicitly underlies this shift when he states that

be it called ether, or caloric, or whatever, it is no hypothetical matter (for the purpose of explaining certain phenomena, and more or less obviously conjuring up causes for given effects); rather, it can be recognized, and postulated a priori, as an element necessary belonging to the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics¹⁴⁵.

In other terms, the gradual “dematerialization” of the ether and the caloric, through their identification with transcendental principles, resulted in the loss of their physical properties – properties that had previously underpinned their same distinction in earlier fascicles. It is precisely this epistemological shift that allows the philosopher to *definitely* abandon the mere hypothetical status of both materials in the section *Übergang 1-14* (May – August 1799), which has rightly been described as the “most staggering part of the *Opus postumum*”¹⁴⁶.

1.5 Ether’s *Befremdlichkeit*

We have seen that the need to ground a strong concept of systematicity on the principles of the Transition (the ether with its moving forces) eventually led Kant to reflect more consistently on their transcendental function. This needs gradually prompted Kant to set aside predominantly physical problems, allowing him to focus on topics with which he likely felt more at ease. In other words, a physical explanation of the origin of the properties of matter through the action of the ether had to be preceded by a transcendental analysis that would first demonstrate the *necessity* of its function for the sake of experience itself. We also briefly saw that the status of this principle is completely original in the framework of Kant’s system: it is both constitutive and regulative, a priori and empirical, formal

¹⁴⁴ “[T]his indifference toward distinguishing between the ether and the caloric can initially be attributed simply to the fact that Kant no longer regards attempts at an a priori proof of the existence of such a ‘primordial matter’ as a contribution to a problem of physics” (Schulze 1994, p. 135).

¹⁴⁵ *OP*, XXI 168.

¹⁴⁶ Mathieu 1991, p. 117.

and material. Its peculiarity thus required a thoroughgoing and separate analysis of its foundational role within the context of the Transition project.

This investigation was conducted by Kant in the central sections of the manuscripts, specifically in *Übergang I-14*, where we find what scholars refer to as the “a priori ether proof.” This section is undoubtedly the most studied and discussed of the entire manuscript, due to both its remarkable significance and its inherent peculiarity. My aim, therefore, is not to provide a detailed analysis of Kant’s layered attempts to demonstrate the existence of the ether, which have already been extensively examined in the literature¹⁴⁷. I will neither attempt to completely resolve the conceptual tensions embedded in the notion of ether. Instead, my goal is to *bring them to light*, demonstrating that they cannot – and should not – be resolved within the conceptual framework of the *Critiques*, thus requiring additional tools for proper examination.

Now, Kant himself explicitly recognizes the peculiarity of this proof. He writes for example:

This indirect way of proving the existence [*Existenz*] of a thing [*eines Dinges*] is *unique* [*einzig*] and therefore also strange [*befremdlich*]; but it will be less strange if one considers that the object itself is also *unique* [...]. For just as there is only one space and only one time (as objects of pure intuition), so there is also only one object of possible external experience in the field of the causality of the perception of external things, for all so-called *experiences* are always only parts of one *experience* by virtue of the universally distributed, unlimited caloric that connects all world bodies [*Weltkörper*] in a system and gives them a sense of community [*Gemeinschaft*] through interaction [*Wechselwirkung*]¹⁴⁸.

It is not difficult to detect where the peculiarity of this proof lies, since it signaled in the first line of the quotation, where Kant manifests his intention to *prove* (beweisen) the *existence* (Existenz) of a thing. The “proof” the philosopher is referring to is an *a priori proof*. That means that the existence of this particular kind of matter cannot be carried out “from experience (empirical), but from the principle of the possibility of experience in general (a priori)”¹⁴⁹. This is consistent with what I have argued in the preceding section, where I have tried to highlight the difference Kant tried to trace between an empirical and perceivable matter (domain of the interaction between mechanical forces) and a dynamical and imponderable one, which can be no means be the object of a direct perception. The only way to prove its existence is thus by furnishing an a priori demonstration, i.e., by showing that the ether is an indispensable condition for the possibility of our knowledge.

¹⁴⁷ See Adickes 1920, pp. 363-474; Mathieu 1958, pp. 237-302; Id. 1991, pp. 117-133; Pecere 2009, pp. 730-774, Hall 2015, pp. 93-117; Emundts 2004, pp. 156-201, Förster 2000, pp. 75-116; Rollmann 2015, pp. 41-228; Edwards 2000a, pp. 152-166.

¹⁴⁸ *OP*, XXI 579.

¹⁴⁹ *OP*, XXI 226.

The peculiarity of this proof is further emphasized by its “indirect” nature. This feature marks a clear distinction from the demonstrations offered by the philosopher in the first *Critique* to prove the necessity of the constitutive forms of our knowledge. In the Discipline of Pure Reason, Kant explicitly distinguished between “direct” (or *ostensive*) and “indirect” (or *apagogic*) proofs (*Beweise*). The first are the demonstrations on which the propositions of transcendental philosophy must be grounded, since they are “combined with the conviction of truth and simultaneously with insight into its sources”¹⁵⁰. We can state that the truth of the synthetic a priori propositions immediately (or directly) *exhibit* (ostensively) the validity of the constitutive forms of our knowledge, on which the first rests¹⁵¹. On the contrary, the apagogic proofs can demonstrate the validity of a proposition only indirectly, namely, by showing that the consequences of the opposite propositions are false or contradictory. They are thus grounded on the *modus tollens*, since “one need only find a single false one among the consequences flowing from its contrary, and then the contrary is also false, thus the cognition that one had to prove is true”¹⁵².

Even if Kant recognizes the supporting role of the apagogic proofs for our knowledge – particularly for empirical physics and, above all, mathematics¹⁵³ – he simultaneously holds them responsible for the errors of dogmatic metaphysics. Using his own words, “apagogic proof is also the real deception with which the admirers of the thoroughness of our dogmatic sophists have always been held off”¹⁵⁴. The latter’s aim is indeed to attribute predicates (including that of “existence”) to a thing by negating the possibility of their opposite, however forgetting the rule: *non entis nulla sunt praedicata*. In other words, according to Kant it is impossible to attribute any predicate to something if the latter is not primarily cognized as an appearance, i.e., as something which is *given* to our senses and subsumed by the faculty of the understanding. As the philosopher showed in the Transcendental Dialectic, the antinomies raise exactly because we claim something A to be true simply by negating the possibility of its opposite, namely -A. However, as long as both A and -A are not given in the form of an appearance, even the supporter of the truth of -A can formulate a demonstration that shows the impossibility of A, thus making it impossible to break the logical impasse¹⁵⁵. Using *only* the apagogic method to prove the *truth* of a proposition thus inevitably leads to error. As Kant argues in

¹⁵⁰ *KrV*, A 789-B 817.

¹⁵¹ “In general logic, (relevant for all forms of science) direct proof always deserve preference because it allows what is to proven to emerge from its factual reasons, the ‘sources’ of truth. In this way, the connection between the premised reasons and the resulting consequences is made clear, so that the truth of what is asserted is not only (subjectively) certain but also comprehensible [*begreiflich*]” (Heimsoeth 1971, pp. 736-737).

¹⁵² *KrV*, A 791-B 819.

¹⁵³ See *Ibidem*. On the relevance of ostensive proofs for physics and mathematics, see Visentin 2020, pp. 85-92.

¹⁵⁴ *KrV*, A 793-B 821.

¹⁵⁵ See also *Logik Dohna-Wundlacken*, XXIV 749: “One can refute someone apagogic and be refuted by the latter himself with the same force”.

the *Logik Philippi*, the most we can attribute to a proposition established through the apagogical proof is a merely *hypothetical* status:

[t]he indirect proof only shows that something is true or false without indicating the sources that explain why this is the case. It is easier to prove something negatively than affirmatively. For when I show a proposition and only one false consequence, then I have proved that the proposition is false. However, I would have to know all the consequences if I wanted to infer its grounds and prove the truth of the proposition. But since I don't know all the consequences, then I only conjecture the truth of the proposition, and the latter is only a hypothesis¹⁵⁶.

In order to demonstrate the truth of the proposition A, it is not sufficient to prove that even one consequence of its opposite -A is false (*modus tollens*). We should also demonstrate that *all* the consequences of A are true, for showing the truth of *some* consequences is not sufficient to prove the truth of the proposition (*modus ponens*). However, since it is impossible for us to know every possible consequence of a single proposition, then the latter's epistemic status remains merely hypothetical.

Given these considerations, one cannot help but be surprised by Kant's characterization of the ether proofs in terms of *indirect* demonstrations. To dispel any doubt that this is merely an unfortunate formulation, the philosopher himself emphasizes such a feature by claiming that these proofs work *per negationem oppositi*¹⁵⁷, and that "[w]hoever finds the direct (demonstrative) mode of proof insufficiently illuminating, can here use the indirect (apagogic) mode"¹⁵⁸.

The reason for these assumptions lies in the particular nature of the object whose existence must be proved. The ether cannot be *directly* perceived, nor can its necessity be directly and demonstrably *exhibited* through synthetic a priori judgments, as is the case with the pure concepts of the understanding. As we will see more clearly later, even though the ether constitutes the basis of all the dynamical moving forces of matter on which the existence of the particular objects of experience ultimately rests, the *synthesis* of these objects themselves in the empirical intuition is still a result of the understanding's operations. Only the latter can thus be exhibited in the sensible intuition itself¹⁵⁹. As Kant writes, "conducting a direct proof of a material that penetrates every natural body (also the entire world-space) would pertain to physics, because it would contain observations taken from experience"¹⁶⁰, and also, "[t]he existence of the object cannot be directly stated without making it an

¹⁵⁶ *Logik Philippi*, XXIV, 444.

¹⁵⁷ *OP*, XXI 592.

¹⁵⁸ *OP*, XXI 603.

¹⁵⁹ As Gerhardt argues, ostensive proofs "only become possible when reason has ascertained its limits, when it has realized [...] that it remains related to understanding in all promising achievements, but that understanding itself only has meaning insofar as it is directed towards intuitions, which in turn are bound to sensibility. Thus, reason can only show something with conclusiveness as long as it remains in its relationship to the mediating sensibility" (Gerhardt 1998, p. 594).

¹⁶⁰ *OP*, XXI 546.

hypothesis”¹⁶¹. In other words, a direct demonstration of the ether’s existence would require its possible ostensive exhibition in empirical intuition. This leads to two problems. On the one hand, the concept of caloric would belong to physics rather than to the science of Transition, since its existence would need to be proven through empirical observations and experiments. On the other hand, as the second quotation suggests, it could never go beyond the status of a mere hypothesis, because no experiment to date has demonstrated the actuality of this matter. Therefore, even if it is conceived as a constitutive principle of our experience, the ether’s existence can only be demonstrated through an *indirect* proof.

After having clarified the method Kant intends to adopt in order to demonstrate the existence of the caloric, we are now in a position to briefly examine the *content* of the proofs. Section *Übergang I-14* is filled with various attempts to prove the actuality of this matter, which sometimes are quite different from one another¹⁶². However, the *fil rouge* that connects them all lies in the assumption of the systematic (collective) unity of experience and the resulting impossibility of empty spaces. Let us read some passage in order to clarify this assertion:

(1) There can be no experience of empty space, nor can it be inferred as an object of experience. In order to be apprised of the existence of a matter, I require the influence of a matter on my senses. Thus the proposition: “There are empty spaces” can be neither a mediate nor an immediate proposition of experience; it is, rather, merely ratiocinative [*vernünfftelt*]. The proposition: “There are physical bodies” presupposes the proposition: “There is a matter whose moving forces and motion precedes the generation of a body in time”. [...] This material, therefore, which underlies this generally possible experience a priori, cannot be regarded as a merely *hypothetical*, but as a given, originally moving, world-material; it cannot be assumed merely problematically, for it first signifies [*bezeichnet*] intuition (which would otherwise be empty and without perception)¹⁶³.

(2) Unity of space and time and of the possibility of experience (that is, of thoroughgoing determination in space and time) for *omnimoda determinatio est existentia*. On this, and on the principle of the possibility of experience, is founded the idea of the existence of a universally distributed, all-penetrating etc. material which forms the basis of the possibility of there being one single experience, and whose existence can thus be comprehended a priori¹⁶⁴.

(3) The indirect proof is *unique* of its kind – a fact that should not appear strange, since what it concerns is an *individual* object, which carries with it real (not logical) universality. There is to be

¹⁶¹ *OP*, XXI 237.

¹⁶² For a comprehensive examination of the differences between the proofs, see Pecere 2009, pp. 746-760.

¹⁶³ *OP*, XXI 217.

¹⁶⁴ *OP*, XXII 89.

found here a collective unity (*omnitude collectiva*) of the objects of a single experience instead of distributive unity (*omnitude distributiva*) [...]. Whatever agrees with collective unity is actual (*existentia est omnimoda determinatio*, as ontology has it), but to achieve this thoroughgoing determination *empirically* is utterly impossible. [...] The deduction of caloric [...] has an a priori principle at its foundation, namely, that of necessary unity in the comprehensive concept of the possibility of one experience. This unity likewise carries with it identically (that is, not synthetically, but analytically, following a priori from a principle) the actuality of its object¹⁶⁵.

Let's start with a general consideration. As can be seen, (1), (2), and (3) do not take into consideration the specific physical problems – such as the origin of density, cohesion, and ponderability – that were at the heart of the reflections contained in the *Oktaventwurf* and the immediately following fascicles. Rather, as I have already mentioned, *transcendental* questions now become the main concern, and particularly the unity of perceptions and experience in general.

What is striking is Kant's constant insistence on the *type* of unity he is trying to establish, which is defined as a *collective*, and not a merely *distributive* one. According to the first *Critique*, the latter is generated by the use of the understanding, whose task is to subsume an empirical manifold under a general concept, in order to produce an object of cognition. For example, we can attribute the category of substance to an object in virtue of its permanence in time, according to the First Analogy of Experience, thus allowing us to formulate judgments such as the following: “[I]n all appearances that which persists is the object itself, i.e. the substance (*phaenomenon*)”¹⁶⁶. The resulting unity is given by the common sharing, on the part of this empirical manifold, of a certain conceptual determination; in this case, that of substantiality. The understanding's task is thus to “distribute” a predicate to an indefinitely extended series of objects, without, however, determining anything beyond this formal predication. For example, when we apply the category of substance to a set of objects, we are not interested in their particular empirical and contingent features, such as the form, shape, color etc.

This means that the resulting unity does not take into account the individual particularities of these objects, which are left entirely undetermined. The collective unity generated by reason, on the other hand, cannot ignore them, since it must “a priori determin[e] the place of each part and its relation to the others”¹⁶⁷. The goal, in this case, is to establish a complete system in which each object, considered in its individual properties, is organically connected to the others. In other words, only reason is capable of establishing the place that each individual object of knowledge must occupy within a complete system of experience. This is why the unity it produces is collective, whereas the

¹⁶⁵ *OP*, XXI 586.

¹⁶⁶ *KrV*, A 184-B 227.

¹⁶⁷ *KrV*, A 645-B 673.

one generated by the understanding is distributive, meaning it is indifferent to the systematic nature of knowledge.

The distinction Kant introduces in the Architectonic of Pure Reason between the whole as *articulatio* and the whole as *coacervatio* could be useful in clarifying this problem. In both cases, we are dealing with *sets* of objects. However, in the first case “the absence of any part to be noticed in our knowledge of the rest”¹⁶⁸, whereas in the second case, it is in no way possible to establish this kind of relationship between one part of the system and the others. The human body, for example, is clearly an *articulatio* since we know the precise place that each organic component must occupy within the body-system. In this sense, the absence of a limb would immediately catch our attention precisely because we would perceive something missing where we would have expected it to be. A pile of stones, on the other hand, is a *coacervatio* because the position of each individual stone within the whole to which it belongs is entirely irrelevant to us.

We can therefore consider collective unity as a kind of *articulatio*, while distributive unity can be understood in terms of a *coacervatio*. As Hoffer notes, distributive unity can be conceived as an “open series”¹⁶⁹, in which the determination that unites the different members can be indefinitely extended to other possible objects without ever reaching a complete closure. Metaphorically, we could continue adding or removing stones from our pile without affecting its unity in any way. In contrast, the human body, as an *articulatio* – or as a collective unity – can be seen as a completed and closed series, where adding or removing elements would necessarily compromise its integrity.

As Kant explicitly argues in (3), the only way to establish the unity of experience is to conceive it as collective rather than merely distributive. “There is only one experience” he writes “and when we speak about *experiences*, this means only the *distributive* [unity]”¹⁷⁰. The only possible experience is thus a *systematic* and *organic* one, in which every object is “thoroughly determined” (*durchgängig bestimmt*), as both quotations (2) and (3) show. Now, a thing is thoroughly determined when we can establish, for every possible predicate, whether it belongs to it or not. For example, if we consider an object, we must be able to determine whether it is red or not red, heavy or not heavy, alive or not alive, etc. In order for this to be possible, we must confront the object with the *idea* of the *totality* of its possible predicates. As it is known, in the first *Critique* this role was represented by the transcendental ideal, i.e., by the idea of God¹⁷¹. However, I agree with Förster when he claims that in

¹⁶⁸ *KrV*, A 832-B 860.

¹⁶⁹ Hoffer 2020, p. 348.

¹⁷⁰ *OP*, XXII 549.

¹⁷¹ See *KrV*, A 571-B 599.

the manuscripts the latter's function seems to be substituted by the ether itself¹⁷². This means that the *omnitude realitatis* – the idea of every possible predicate of an object – no longer has any theological connotation¹⁷³. Instead, it is replaced by a matter whose *dynamical* moving forces are responsible for the systematic connection of the empirical and *mechanical* moving forces, which in turn generates our empirical perceptions. As Kant writes in (1), experience is always grounded in the existence of matter that acts on our senses. If, in turn, experience must be understood as an organic whole, then the matter that makes it possible should also be conceived as a totality, in which every part (i.e., every moving force) is systematically connected to every other¹⁷⁴. This results in the impossibility of empty spaces within matter itself, since the existence of such spaces would undermine its unity. “No *transition*” Kant writes “can be expected from the full, *via the void*, to the full, as an experience”¹⁷⁵.

Now, one could argue that in order to demonstrate the impossibility of empty spaces it should not be necessary to assume the existence of a cosmic, dynamical, imperceivable and imponderable matter such as the ether. We could simply claim that *empirical* matter does not allow the existence of empty spaces within it. Nevertheless, as Kant explicitly claims in quotation (3), to achieve the thoroughgoing determination of our experience *empirically* “is utterly impossible”. The reason is straightforward, given what has been argued so far. We have seen that, in order to establish “strong” concept of systematicity, Kant had to assume the necessity of the a priori principles of the Transition. These principles are required to objectively ground the possibility of relating objects to one another without relying solely on the observation of empirical affinities. This implies that the systematic organization of empirical matter cannot simply be inferred from the requirement that experience itself must be systematic. In other words, if one were to claim that empirical matter is intrinsically ordered without presupposing the principles of the Transition, such a claim would remain contingent upon empirical observations, which are always subject to revision and refutation. Empirical data alone can never provide the *necessary* justification for the systematicity of empirical matter. Instead, this

¹⁷² See Förster 2000, p. 91. However, I don't agree with the scholar when he argues that the ether has to be conceived as “a transcendental ideal *in the critical sense*” (italics mine), i.e., as a mere regulative principle. As we have seen, the ether now *exists*, even if in a particular manner.

¹⁷³ I also agree with Emundts when she claims that the transcendental ideal of the first *Critique* and the ether cannot be completely identified, since the first represents the “sum total of every reality”, that is, also of transcendent objects, while the second “‘only’ the sum-total of the principles of the phenomenal world” (Emundts 2004, p. 172). However, I believe that, in the context of an attempt to systematically ground empirical physics, the ether renders the function of the transcendental ideal redundant. In other words, if our aim is to thoroughly determine only the *objects of perception*, then we know *in advance* that every possible transcendent attribute is excluded from their determination. Consequently, this determination can only be carried out through a comparison with the sum total of the principles of the *physical* predicates – namely, with the ether.

¹⁷⁴ See Förster 2000, p. 88: “Perceptions of outer objects are the effects of moving forces upon us; experience, by contrast, is knowledge by means of connected perceptions. If experience is also to be systematic, there must be a basis for combining all moving forces of matter into a single, all-embracing whole”.

¹⁷⁵ *OP*, XXI 219.

justification must rest on an a priori principle – namely, the ether – without which a unified and coherent experience of reality would not be possible.

According to Kant, the non-existence of the ether is therefore not *logically*, but *transcendentally* impossible, for its negation would result in the negation of the experience itself. As the philosopher writes, “[n]ot only would this be a deficiency for the establishment of a system, but the unity of experience itself would be self-contradictory and impossible. What is empirically manifold, but whose coordination does not qualify for the unity of possible experience is not an existing object: it is nothing”¹⁷⁶. If the experience can be conceived only as a *systematic* totality, then its very *possibility* depends on this condition, which, in turn, is grounded in the concept of a cosmic world-matter such as the caloric.

In other passages the philosopher also emphasizes the analytic link between ether and experience itself. He writes for example that “[the proof] is not synthetic, trough an ampliative judgement, but analytical, trough an explicative one – that is, according to the principle of identity”¹⁷⁷, and that “the caloric is actual [*wirklich*] and not invented merely for the sake of explanation certain phenomena, but [is] a material that can be proved (analytically) from a universal principle of experience (not from experience) according to the principle of identity [...]”¹⁷⁸. Once again, by insisting on the analytic status of the proof of the ether, Kant’s intention is to prevent any interpretation of the ether in terms of an empirical substance. We do not *discover* the ether through physical experiments or observations. If that were the case, the proposition asserting the ether’s existence would be synthetic, as it would *extend* our empirical knowledge, allowing us to *know* something that we could previously only assume hypothetically. Rather, the concept of the ether is already contained in the concept of a possible experience, as Kant writes in the following passage:

Caloric is actual, because the concept of it [...] makes possible the whole of experience; it is given by reason, not as a hypothesis for perceived objects, for the purpose of explaining their phenomena, but rather, immediately, in order to ground the possibility of experience itself¹⁷⁹.

This quotation highlights another significant point: the analytic link between the concept of the ether and the existence of experience gives rise to a further analytic connection *within* the ether itself – specifically, between its concept and its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) or existence (*Existenz*).¹⁸⁰. We have seen that the ether, in order for it to claim the role of the principle of the Transition, must be

¹⁷⁶ *OP*, XXI 604.

¹⁷⁷ *OP*, XXI 549.

¹⁷⁸ *OP*, XXI 573.

¹⁷⁹ *OP*, XXII 554.

¹⁸⁰ I believe that, in most cases, these terms are used by Kant as synonyms (see also *Kant-Lexikon*, p. 2056). Sometimes he speaks of the actuality of the ether (see *ibidem*), sometimes of its existence (see *OP*, XXI 581).

assumed as a condition for the possibility of experience. However, its status cannot be the same as that of the pure forms of intuition and understanding, since its role is to ground the possibility of *systematic* and *collective* empirical knowledge. The ether must, therefore, exist as a substance whose dynamical moving forces enable the unity of our empirical perceptions. This, after all, aligns with Kant's definition of the role of the *Mittelbegriffe*, whose mediating function places them in an ambiguous position, caught between their transcendental origin and their empirical manifestation. Assuming the necessity of the concept of the ether as a transcendental condition thus analytically leads to the acknowledgment of its actuality. As Kant writes in another striking passage: "here, but also only in this case, it is possible to say: *a posse ad esse valet consequentia*." What he had always considered impossible – namely, analytically inferring the existence of a thing from its mere concept – is now declared valid with respect to caloric.

However, one must ask what Kant means by the terms "existence" and "actuality." In the *Second Postulate of Empirical Thought*, he writes: "that which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is actual"¹⁸¹. According to the doctrine of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the actuality of a thing is determined solely by its connection with an empirical perception, since only the latter "yields the material for the concept"¹⁸². The "existence" Kant seeks to attribute to the ether, therefore, cannot be the same as that considered in the *Critique*, as the former is not an empirical entity and thus cannot be an object of direct perception. This impression is reinforced by numerous passages in which Kant, in a way, defends both the *ideal* and *real* status of caloric, increasingly stretching the characteristic distinctions of critical philosophy.

Forma dat esse rei. The caloric is a fictitious entity [*ein erdichtetes Wesen*], yet, in relation to the self-constructed concept of it [*auf den selbstgemachten Begriff von ihm*], it still provides principles concerning the conditions for the possibility of experiencing such a system. What begins to exist *by itself* also exists in the same way – unchangeably and eternally¹⁸³.

Although this primary material [...] is merely present in thought [*blos in Gedanke da ist*], it is not a hypothetical thing. Nor is it an object of experience; for then it would belong to physics. It has reality [*Realität*], however, and its existence [*Existenz*] can be postulated, because, without the assumption of such a world-material and its moving forces, space would be no sense-object, and experience of it [...] would not take place¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸¹ *KrV*, A 218-B 266.

¹⁸² *KrV*, A 225-B 273.

¹⁸³ *OP*, XXI 544.

¹⁸⁴ *OP*, XXI 219.

It is thus clear that, contrary to what some scholars argue¹⁸⁵, the ether's existence in *Übergang I-14* cannot be reduced to that of an empirical matter, however thin and imperceptible, since it is only a fictitious entity or, as he the philosopher argues more in other passages, a thought-entity (*Gedankending* or *ens rationis*)¹⁸⁶. Again, one can't help feeling surprised, especially we bear in mind what Kant stated about the *ens rationis* in the first *Critique*'s Table of Nothing. A thought-entity, Kant wrote is a "concept without an object, like *noumena*, which cannot be counted among the possibilities although not on that ground be asserted to be impossible (*ens rationis*)"¹⁸⁷. Noumena – like the objects of special metaphysics such as God, the world and the soul – are *logically* possible, for their concept is not self-contradictory, but *transcendentally* impossible, since no real object can correspond to their concept. Throughout the first *Critique*, Kant thus repeatedly stresses that thought-entities have *no* epistemic value. For example, he considers as such the ideas of reason that do not admit any kind of deduction¹⁸⁸, transcendental ideas whose object is conceived in a *transcendent* sense¹⁸⁹, the idea of the complete series of the *future* alterations in the world¹⁹⁰. All these ideas not only do not have a corresponding object, but they also do not have any regulative function for our cognition¹⁹¹, being mere inventions (*Erdichtungen*)¹⁹².

On the contrary, ether is now *ein erdichtetes Wesen* that nevertheless possesses actuality, its existence being conceived as a transcendental condition for the possibility of a systematic and unified experience. Leaving aside for a moment the problematic nature of this solution—to which we will return in the next chapter—it is noteworthy that Kant appears to have identified the ether with thought-entities precisely to avoid accusations of reverting to a form of dogmatic metaphysics. Moreover, this clarification might also help moderate the apparent extravagance of the *indirect* demonstration of the caloric. To put it differently: it would be difficult to defend the philosopher from the charge of re-proposing an ontological argument if his intention had been to infer this matter, so to speak, as a mind-independent entity. As we have seen, the ether exists only *in* thought, as a *transcendental* condition of our knowledge. Kant does not intend to demonstrate that the caloric actually exists as a specific, empirical matter or metaphysical matter (in the dogmatic sense of the

¹⁸⁵ See Emundts 2004, p. 173 and Edwards 2000a, p. 174.

¹⁸⁶ See *OP*, XXI 231, XXI 548, XXI 604, XXII 606.

¹⁸⁷ *KrV*, A 290-B 347.

¹⁸⁸ *KrV*, A 669-B 697.

¹⁸⁹ *KrV*, A 566-B 594.

¹⁹⁰ *KrV*, A 337-B 594.

¹⁹¹ Naturally, no idea has a corresponding object in empirical intuition. However, Kant explicitly distinguishes between transcendental ideas, which at least have a deduction and a regulative role in our cognition, and ideas that are mere inventions. The former fall under the name of *ens rationis ratiocinatae* (*KrV*, A 681–B 709), while the latter are referred to as *ens rationis ratiocinantis* (*KrV*, A 670–B 698). This distinction is made explicit in *KrV*, A 311–B 368 and *KU*, 468.

¹⁹² See *KrV*, A 292-B 348.

term), but rather that we cannot help but *think* the necessity of its existence in order for us to have a systematic and organic cognition of nature.

However, this solution came at a price, consisting in the sensible blurring of typical Kantian distinctions such as those between form and matter, a priori and a posteriori, etc. This impression is repeatedly confirmed in the fascicles following the *Oktaventwurf*, where Kant argued that the principle of the Transition – the *Mittelbegriffe* – must be at the same time constitutive *and* regulative, transcendental *and* empirical, formal *and* material. In *Übergang I-14* he continues along these lines, by claiming that the existence of the ether is *analytically* contained in its concept, or that the ether *exists* but not as an object of possible perception. I believe this represents an undeniable evolution of the critical conceptual tools that does not necessarily need to be made fully consistent with previous structures. Rather, one should assume the evidence of the development and reflect on its actual meaning.

A hermeneutic problem, however, arises. On the one hand, the disorganized and often rhapsodic structure of the manuscripts makes it difficult to thoroughly deepen Kant's reflections based solely on his own words. He never explicitly clarifies, for example, what it means for a matter to exist only in thought or for a concept to be both formal and material. On the other hand, for the reasons I have just explained, even the conceptual tools of the "critical" works cannot consistently help us to understand these late developments. In addition, I believe that the developments we have discussed have systematic repercussions for other fundamental structures of transcendental philosophy as well – such as the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, the function of schematism, and, consequently, the relation between sensibility and understanding. While Kant does not explicitly address these themes in the drafts between the *Oktaventwurf* and *Übergang I-14*, they will emerge in later fascicles, such as *Konvolute X/XI* and *VII*. As can be easily recognized, these are all problems that will dominate the post-Kantian debate¹⁹³. Reading the *Opus postumum* within the broader context of these developments – rather than merely as an attempt to correct specific local issues or "gaps" within Kant's system – can thus be a fruitful approach to understanding the extent to which Kant was pushing the limits of the core structures of his own philosophy.

The aim of this section was not to provide a thorough reconstruction of Kant's ether proofs. My goal was to show that the concept of ether can be understood as the precipitate of the conceptual tensions emerging in the early fascicles. Its *Befremdlichkeit* thus prevents it from fitting within the classical Kantian distinctions, requiring additional conceptual frameworks to clarify both its status

¹⁹³ "The whole development of the metaphysical systems of the post-Kantian period is centered in the problem of deduction. All these systems attempt to overcome the dualism of sensibility and understanding and to make the logical deduction complete, thus embracing the whole object" (Atlas 1964, p. 73).

and function. On these grounds, I believe it could be useful to refer to an author who, within the post-Kantian voices, has most strived to strike a balance between remaining faithful to critical premises and pushing them to their extreme consequences. This author is Salomon Maimon, whom Kant greatly appreciated despite never mentioning him in his manuscripts.

As Beiser correctly notes, “[t]he predicament of Fichte, and indeed the whole post-Kantian generation, was perfectly summarized by Maimon himself: ‘Philosophy has not been able to build a bridge that makes possible the transition from the transcendental to the particular’”¹⁹⁴. We have seen that this seems to be the same problem Kant intends to address in his manuscripts. In the next chapter, I will substantiate these claims by first analyzing Maimon’s proposal and then exploring the possibility of a conceptual dialogue between it and the manuscripts following *Übergang 1-14*. As I noted in the Introduction, my aim is not to argue that Kant’s late reflections were directly influenced by Maimon’s philosophy, as there is no clear textual evidence to support such a claim – neither in Kant’s manuscripts nor his private letters. However, from a systematic and conceptual standpoint, I believe that the problems they identify and the solutions they propose share certain fundamental features. Therefore, the goal of the next chapter will be to demonstrate that some of the conceptual tools Maimon developed – particularly in his early philosophy – to overcome certain critical issues in Kant’s transcendental philosophy, can help illuminate the often-obscure pages of the *Opus postumum*.

¹⁹⁴ Beiser 2003, p. 239.

CHAPTER II

Maimon and Kant

FROM POSSIBLE TO CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

Before delving into the problem of the relation between Kant's late philosophy and Maimon's philosophical project, I find it necessary to provide a brief overview of the literature that has addressed the place of the *Opus postumum* in the broader context of the post-Kantian debate. As mentioned in the introduction, despite the close chronological and conceptual proximity between Kant's manuscripts and the early publications of authors such as Reinhold, Schulze, Maimon, Schelling, and Fichte, research on this topic remains surprisingly scarce.

I believe this is due to two factors: one more radical, the other contingent. The first relates to a reluctance among Kant scholars to recognize in the *Opus postumum* an attempt to develop critical conceptual tools. As Tuschling notes, they view this prospect as "too awful and frightening to be true"¹, and therefore attempt to render the manuscripts as consistent as possible with Kant's "critical" period or simply ignore them². In this context, as we will see shortly, many contributions address this issue merely to highlight Kant's *distance* from the solutions proposed by his "successors".

The second reason primarily concerns contemporary secondary literature and stems from a more incidental factor. Förster's influential book *Kant's Final Synthesis* decisively shaped the debate, making it center to the supposed difference between the *Übergang* and the *Lücke* in early manuscripts. Following Förster's distinction, scholars have sought to identify the real internal "gap" within Kant's system, often overlooking the broader context *beyond* the *Opus postumum*. As I have tried to show in section 1.2, even though Förster was right in highlighting the fact that the term *Lücke* appears only in the 1798 drafts and letters, this does not necessarily imply a separation from the Transition problem. On these presuppositions, I therefore believe there is no *local* "gap" within critical system Kant wanted to fill in the manuscripts, whether in relation to the Transcendental Deduction, the Analogies of Experience or his account of density³. Rather, I will show that the "gap" is much broader than that, as it concerns Kant's fundamental distinctions between form and matter, a priori and a posteriori, understanding and sensibility. Even if the initial project of the *Opus postumum* was probably meant to deepen a specific local question, such as the systematic development of the General Remark to Dynamics, the problems Kant faced in early manuscripts led him to a radical revision of the tenets of his own system. We have seen that *Übergang 1-14* is clear evidence of this development, which will consistently continue throughout all the following fascicles. If this is true – namely, if the gap Kant identifies is between the two fundamental components of his

¹ Tuschling 1993, p. 162.

² See also Thomson 2022: "[The] *Opus postumum* shows us Kant's insistence on revising, rewriting and reformulating aspects of his work. Moreover, if we start from the perspective that Kant is a static thinker who never changed his mind and who was unwilling to shift his position then we would find ourselves in difficulty trying to explain his many 'turns' and 'awakenings'".

³ As we have seen, these are the places where Förster, Hall and Emundts respectively identified the gap.

theory of knowledge – then one cannot help but recognize a similarity with the problems that the aforementioned authors have discovered in their master’s thought. A systematic analysis of this relationship would thus be fruitful in order to comprehend the theoretical potential of the *Opus postumum* itself.

Some early contributions have highlighted the proximity between Kant’s manuscripts and certain representatives of the post-Kantian debate, particularly Fichte. However, their systematic and theoretical ambition is sometimes exaggerated, leading to an overstretching of Kant’s text. This is without doubt the case with Lachiéze-Rey, which sees in the project of the *Opus postumum* an attempt to ground a form of subjectivistic metaphysics in which both the form and the matter of our knowledge are the product of a spontaneous act of our I. Appearances thus become “*appearances of the spirit* [phénomène de l’esprit], product of a spiritual act”, leading to “an extension of the ideality of the content of the Universe, which initially seemed reserved only to its form”⁴. As can be easily intuited, such a conclusion cannot but totally misrepresent Kant’s final project, in which the passive and finite dimension of the subject is never abandoned.

Adickes adopts a more cautious approach in his analysis, even though he acknowledges the idealistic tendencies of the last fascicles of the *Opus postumum*, particularly in the so-called *Selbstsetzungslehre*. He argues that the terminology Kant uses there is nothing more than a concession to Fichte’s growing influence on the philosophical landscape. Accordingly, he writes: “The fact that [Kant] strongly preferred the word ‘setzen’ among the various synonymous expressions he used surely has its reason in his consideration of Fichte and, more generally, of extreme idealism”⁵. Beyond the recognition of this formal concession, however, Adickes does not propose a systematic analysis of its philosophical significance. This fact was noted by de Vleeschauwer, who considers Adickes’ position to be too moderate, as it fails to acknowledge that Kant’s seemingly external gesture toward Fichte’s idealism was, in fact, an attempt to “dissimulate a conversion and, in essence, to mask a defeat”⁶. As I will demonstrate more clearly in the next chapter, even if the new terminology may be seen as an attempt to develop not only the language but also the underlying philosophical content, nothing in the manuscripts can legitimize the conclusion of Kant’s “defeat” in favor of the new idealism expressed by the *Grundlage*.

In more recent years, the relationship between this text and post-Kantian thought received significantly less attention, with the notable exception of Tuschling and, to a lesser extent, Förster himself. Lehmann and Hoppe largely overlooked this issue, focusing instead on the *Opus postumum*’s

⁴ Lachiéze-Rey 1931, pp. 462-463.

⁵ Adickes 1920, p. 668.

⁶ de Vleeschauwer 1937, p. 629.

connection to earlier Kantian writings particularly the *Critique of Judgment* (Lehmann⁷) and the *Metaphysical Foundations* (Hoppe⁸). Mathieu continues along Lehmann's path, deepening the problem of the relation with the third *Critique*. The Italian scholar however also recognizes that the *Selbstsetzungslehre* represents a terminological novelty in the context of Kant's system; yet, he believes that no conceptual connection can be drawn with Fichte's theory of the Self-Positing of the I. In Kant's late thought, the subject remains finite and does not properly create itself through an act of intellectual intuition but merely posits the forms of space and time to construct its sensible perception⁹. However, I believe Mathieu's interpretation largely misunderstands Fichte's project, portraying it as a form of subjective idealism in which the subject creates itself and its representational content, as it were, *ex nihilo*.

Förster also downplays Fichte's role in Kant's development of the *Selbstsetzungslehre*, noting that "Kant speaks of self-positing at a time when he was still working on the critical texts – a time before Fichte had ever turned to philosophy"¹⁰. Even if it is true that the *Opus postumum* is not the first place where Kant uses the term *setzen*, Förster fails to acknowledge that it is undoubtedly the first in which the philosopher employs it systematically with reference to the subject's activity in relation to itself. However, the scholar had also the merit to broaden the discussion about the philosophical context in which the *Opus postumum* raised, taking into considerations also Beck and Schelling's possible influences on Kant. While the scholar again stresses that "there is no noticeable influence of Fichte on Kant's late philosophy"¹¹, he believes that "the case is quite different with Jacob Sigismund Beck"¹², with whom Kant had engaged in a dense exchange of letters. In Förster's opinion it is quite possible that Kant had Beck's theory of *ursprünglich Vorstellen* in mind, and not Fichte's *Grundlage*, when he was writing the *Selbstsetzungslehre*. Moreover, Kant's various references to the young Schelling in the last fascicle suggests, according to the scholar, that he was also very much in the philosopher's mind, "perhaps even more than Beck"¹³. Although Förster deserves full credit for having expanded the range of authors considered, he does not offer a systematic analysis of these conceptual relationships, limiting himself to suggesting Kant's *possible* interest in such developments of his thought.

The case is different with Tuschling, who undertakes a brief yet thorough analysis of Kant's references to Schelling in the I *Konvolut*. In his reading, Kant's *Selbstsetzungslehre* is not derived

⁷ See Lehmann 1969.

⁸ See Hoppe 1969.

⁹ See Mathieu 1958, p. 394.

¹⁰ Förster 2000, p. 76.

¹¹ Förster 1990, p. 162.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Förster 1990, p. 168.

from a confrontation with Fichte's *Grundlage* or Beck's *Standpunkt*; rather, it represents an attempt to unify Schelling's system of transcendental philosophy with the thought of Spinoza and Lichtenberg, both of whom are cited alongside Schelling's name in the final drafts¹⁴. According to Tuschling, it is irrelevant whether Kant actually read early Schelling's writings, for "[e]ven if all the considerations presented here, which aim to make this possibility plausible, were to prove untenable, the indisputable fact would still remain that Kant himself, among the living, recognizes and acknowledges only Schelling – and not Fichte or Beck – as a representative of transcendental idealism"¹⁵. Onnasch contrasts this hypothesis by claiming that Kant's references to Schelling in the latest fascicles are not evidence of an approximation of Kantian theses to his doctrines, but rather a testimony to their rejection. In this sense, when Kant includes Schelling among the representatives of transcendental *idealism*, he does so to mark a distance from his transcendental *philosophy*¹⁶.

Among the most influential contemporary scholars, Friedman, Edwards, and Emundts¹⁷, none of them showed a systematic interest in the problem we are considering¹⁸, for the reason specified at the beginning of this chapter. Hall also does not address this issue in his book. However, in a recent contribution, he argues that Kant's *Selbstsetzungslehre* can be understood as a response to Schulze's skepticism. Specifically, Hall maintains that Kant's theory of the self-positing of the I seeks to explain "how the mind, as the real ground of what is necessary in our cognition, is not a self-in-itself, a noumenon, or a transcendental idea"¹⁹, as Schulze claimed, thereby highlighting the ambiguity of the function and status of the *Ich Denke* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

So far, I have mainly focused on the most relevant books and authors. However, there are also some recent articles which examine the relationship between the *Opus postumum* and the post-Kantian debate. Zahn argued that Kant's theory of Self-Positing can be understood as an evolution of the Transcendental Deduction, in which the philosopher did not properly clarify how the *pure* I Think and *empirical* and *synthetical* apperception relate to one another. Nonetheless, despite his apparent convergence with Fichte, Kant would have always rejected the idea of intellectual intuition and consistently sought to maintain synthesis as irreducible and independent from identity²⁰. Duque makes an interesting argument in this regard, claiming that "when [Kant] uses terms that recall Fichte, it is to immediately emphasize a rupture and introduce a negation in *actu exercito*"²¹. In short, it is

¹⁴ See Tuschling 1991

¹⁵ Tuschling 1991, p. 132.

¹⁶ See Onnasch 2009.

¹⁷ Although Emundts does not address the philosophical context of the *Opus postumum* in her book, she acknowledges in a recent article that Kant's *Selbstsetzungslehre* can be seen a development of his theory of subjectivity, bringing him closer to both Fichte and Schelling (see Emundts 2023, p.124, p. 129)

¹⁸ See Friedman 1992a, Edwards 2000a, Emundts 2004.

¹⁹ Hall 2022, p. 148.

²⁰ See Zahn 1964.

²¹ Duque 2001, p. 209.

true that Fichte may have influenced Kant, but in an essentially “reactive [*réactive*]”, or even “repulsive [*révulsive*]” manner²². A similar position is shared by Pecere. He argues that the last fascicles of the *Opus postumum* are an attempt to critically respond to Fichte’s supposed formalism and to his statements regarding the mere propaedeutic status of Kant’s philosophy²³. Sala’s intention is also to downplay Fichte’s possible influence on his master’s thought by arguing that the concept of positing was “deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition of his time”²⁴, both in logic and metaphysics. He thus notes that Kant had already used this term in his pre-critical writings to challenge Baumgarten’s proof of God’s existence and that it did not undergo substantial changes in either the critical period or the *Opus postumum*.

In the next chapter I will show why I believe all of these positions underestimate the conceptual relations between Kant’s late thought and Fichte’s *Grundlage*, which moreover are not only limited to the *Selbstsetzungslehre*, but they extend to the broader question of the relationship between theoretical reason and practical. As can be noted, however, none of the contributions mentioned so far has ever dealt with the problem we are going to discuss in the present chapter, namely Kant’s relation with Maimon’s philosophy. To my knowledge, the only scholars who discussed (albeit briefly) this issue are S. Schulze, Basile, Lord and Lorini. In his dissertation, Schulze traces a similarity Kant’s project in the *Opus postumum* and Maimon’s remark in *Baco und Kant*, according to which critical philosophy was not able to build a transition between a priori concepts and a posteriori objects²⁵. According to the scholar, the similarities would nonetheless be limited to the identification of a shared *problem*, insofar as Maimonian skepticism would deny the very possibility of a transition between a priori concepts and a posteriori objects. However, I aim to demonstrate that Maimon’s entire *Essay* may be understood as a systematic attempt to bridge precisely this gap. The affinities, therefore, are not confined to the *problem* itself, but extend to the conceptual tools employed in its *resolution*.

Basile takes up Schulze’s interpretation and goes a step further, arguing that the idea to write the Transition project may have arisen in Kant’s mind after reading Maimon’s *Baco und Kant* (1790)²⁶. In particular, the scholar claims that Kant may have realized that the solution he had just given in the third *Critique* to bridge the gap between the sensible and the supersensible was not sufficient to deal with Maimon’s problem. The issue of the *application* of transcendental laws to particular experiences was something pertaining to the “top-down” procedure of determining judgement, and not to the “bottom-up” method of reflective judgment. According to Basile, it is thus

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ See Pecere 2015.

²⁴ Sala 2023, p. 171.

²⁵ See Schulze 1994, pp. 94-95.

²⁶ See Basile 2013, pp. 376-378.

possible to conceive the project of the *Opus postumum* as rooted in Maimon's remarks. Although I find this hypothesis intriguing – given the similarity between Maimon's early thought and his master's latest reflections – I believe that it is rather implausible that the Transition project was *directly* prompted by Kant's reading of *Baco und Kant*. We saw that in the *Oktaventwurf* Kant did not refer at all to any supposed "gap" in his critical philosophy, thereby conceiving the transition from the metaphysical foundations to physics as essentially unproblematic. I argued that it was an *internal* difficulty in addressing this issue that led Kant, in 1798, to discover a "gap" between transcendental principles and empirical objects that had to be filled through the *Mittelbegriffe*. At most, one can state that Kant's reflections *after* 1798 may have been influenced and fueled by his confrontation with Maimon texts, but not that the Transition project itself is *rooted* in them. In this sense, Lorini's view is more convincing. According to him, Maimon's influence would be more directly observable in the later fascicles of the *Opus postumum*, that is, those in which the themes of the indirect appearance and the doctrine of self-positing are addressed²⁷. However, Lorini explicitly limits himself to merely suggesting the *possibility* of such a reading, without exploring its implications, since "a systematic test of his supposed influence in the pages of the *Opus postumum* under discussion would require a careful assessment of these issues to avoid the risk of superficially branding them as Kant's slippage into the subjectivist instances of the emerging German idealism"²⁸.

Lord takes a rather different path, refraining from identifying any possible direct influence of Maimon's philosophy on Kant. Instead, she argues that a theoretical and conceptual connection can be traced between the *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy* and Kant's manuscripts, particularly concerning the concept of the ether. Lord thus contends that caloric is not merely a transcendental condition for *possible* experience but also a genetic condition for *real* experience, akin to Maimon's "ideas of understanding"²⁹. In this chapter, I will take a similar approach, avoiding risky historical-philosophical assumptions about a direct effect of Maimon's reflections on Kant. In doing so, however, I will also highlight where my reading differs from Lord's.

One final note before proceeding. I fully recognize that this procedure also has its challenges. As Howard correctly notes, the risk would be that of "imposing external concerns onto Kant's final

²⁷ See Lorini 2023, pp. 102-103.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 103. It is possible to find a similar suggestion in Franz 2020. Although this article is entirely dedicated to Maimon, the author speaks of "parallel courses" (Ivi, p. 180) between the former's critiques of the Kantian foundation of physics and the *Opus postumum*, without necessarily seeking to trace direct influences.

²⁹ Lord 2011, p. 165. See also Lord 2008, p. 156: "Kant's ether accounts for bodies and intensities, sensations, forces, and material density. But is ether merely another way of describing matter, or does it alter Kant's conception of the nature of reality? Is the ether merely a material condition for the matter of appearance, or is it a genuinely transcendental and genetic condition for experience as such? The existence of ether enables certain real experiences – those of intensity – to become objects of possible experience: it is a transcendental condition. At the same time, it constitutes the reality of experience: it is a genetic condition. Kant frequently repeats in the *Opus Postumum* that the actuality of ether can be postulated "prior to experience, for the sake of possible experience" (OP XXI, 219). It is an a priori transcendental condition, but also a genetic condition.

project”³⁰, as happened with the systematic reconstructions of early interpreters. The scholar’s suggestion would be that of concentrating on specific parts of the text, in order to more carefully analyze Kant’s arguments and to grasp the “repetitions, variations and transformations”³¹ of his claims. In other words, we should avoid viewing the *Opus postumum* as a closed, coherent work where each section systematically refers back to the others. In line with recent literature, the best approach would therefore be to focus on the historical development of the text or on individual sections, rather than providing a systematic reading, and, in turn, a conceptual comparison with other philosophers’ reflections.

However, I believe that although this approach can certainly help in terms of precision and accuracy, it may risk excessively dismembering Kant’s manuscripts. It is certainly true that the *Opus postumum* cannot be conceived as a finished and organic work; yet, I argue it is possible to revive the possibility of a systematic reading which, on the one side, takes into account contemporary acquisitions regarding specific sections, and on the other highlights the theoretical value of this text as a whole. I believe that the analysis conducted in the preceding chapter, even though limited to the first half of the manuscripts, serves as evidence of the feasibility of such an approach. I will thus follow the same path in the second part of this chapter, demonstrating that the fascicles following *Übergang 1-14* are a coherent evolution of Kant’s earlier reflections and an attempt to further develop the problems and issues that implicitly emerged therein. As I have already briefly suggested, *Übergang 1-14* represents the point of highest speculative tension in the work, where the difficulty of maintaining a strict distinction between form and matter, between a priori and a posteriori, clearly emerges for the first time. I believe this *is* a systematic issue which questions the whole of Kant’s critical project. Moreover, once we have established that the *Opus postumum* does not concern merely local problems within Kant’s foundation of physics, I believe we are justified in examining its place within the post-Kantian debate, where these same themes lay at the core of philosophical discourse.

³⁰ Howard 2023b, p. 10.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

2.1 Maimon on the “gap” between transcendental principles and concrete experience

2.1.1 Maimon’s skepticism. An overview

Giving an overview of Maimon’s philosophy is not an easy task, due both to the vastness of his production and the lack of systematic connections between his texts. For this reason, I will limit my analysis to the early phase of his reflections on Kant’s system, as represented by his most famous text, the *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie* (1789)³², and other minor works such as *Baco und Kant*, the *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* (1791), *Über die Progressen der Philosophie* (1792) and the *Streifereien im Gebiete der Philosophie* (1793). However, passages from later writings will also be considered – such as the *Versuch über die neuen Logik* (1794) and the *Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Geist* (1797) – when I find them consistent with his previous reflections³³. Even though I believe that the final phase of his thought represents an evolution in relation to the philosophical *solutions* he proposed, I also maintain that Maimon’s main philosophical *problems* remain consistent throughout his work. These questions concern, for example, the possibility of establishing an objective empirical knowledge and the legitimacy of applying the universal forms of thought to given sensible objects. The purpose of this section is to further articulate these problems, in order to better comprehend Maimon’s stance with regard to Kant’s theory of knowledge. To accomplish this task, I will start from the text I have mentioned discussing Basile’s account of the relationship between Maimon and Kant’s *Opus postumum*, namely *Baco und Kant*. I believe that this work can be conceived as a kind of introduction to the themes that are developed more extensively in other writings.

In this text, published in 1790 in the *Berlinischen Journal für Aufklärung*, Maimon attempts to demonstrate that Bacon’s and Kant’s epistemologies represent two opposing approaches to grounding the possibility of scientific and objective empirical knowledge:

Bacon, as I have already noted, follows the path of induction; he seeks the forms or the relationships and connections of things within the things themselves; he never ascends to transcendental forms but

³² The text was published by Maimon in December 1789, although the first page of the text is dated 1790. It was common practice to postdate books released at the end of the year to the following year (see Engstler 1990, p. 27n).

³³ Furthermore, I consider Kroner’s judgment to be correct, according to which Maimon’s early works had a decisive influence on Fichte, and through Fichte, on later idealism as well, while “the later writings did indeed have some influence on the development of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as well as on post-Fichtean speculation, they no longer played a decisive role in shaping the overall movement” (Kroner 1921, p. 328).

rather presupposes them without concerning himself with their origin. Kant, on the other hand, seeks these forms in the faculty of thought a priori and determines their legitimate use³⁴.

Bacon maintains that scientific knowledge must be founded on an inductive method, which relies on the systematic and empirical observation of data, followed by a process of comparison and elimination to derive general laws. According to Bacon, we can thus distinguish between an ordinary induction and a scientific one. The former is merely a collection of instances based on contingent similarities, “in which blind groping can find no end”³⁵. Scientific induction, on the contrary, follows a systematic method, as the general laws it produces are capable of explaining both everything included under them and their possible exceptions³⁶. Moreover, these laws must always be verified through a rigorous process of experimentation. Apart from the specifics of the Baconian method, which Maimon does not dwell on, his approach presupposes the inherence of laws in things themselves. In this sense, our task is limited to *extracting* them through observation and experimentation.

As is well known, the problem with the inductive method lies in the impossibility of assigning necessity to the laws it uncovers, as they are always open to the possibility of new discoveries or relations that could overturn them. In other words, what once seemed to be a universal law might be challenged by new data or observations. The main aim of Kant’s transcendental philosophy was to address this problem by demonstrating that the regularity of the laws of nature is not grounded in mere empirical relations between objects, but in the necessity of the forms of our *thought*. In the first *Critique* he demonstrated the transcendental and a priori *origins* of these forms and the right of their *application* to sensible objects. These led to two consequences, with respect to the Baconian method: on the one hand, Kant could claim the *necessity* and *universality* of the transcendental forms and of the laws of nature grounded on them. On the other, however, what he gained in terms of objectivity, he had lost in terms of fruitfulness. Bacon’s method, according to Maimon, has the advantage of *expanding* our knowledge through the discovery of new lawful connections between objects, even if these cannot claim absolute necessity.

Maimon therefore emphasizes that the best scientific approach would be to *integrate* both methods, combining Kant’s transcendental analysis with Bacon’s inductive approach. However, here the problem arises. Maimon writes that what is missing in Kant’s philosophy is a “transition [*Uebergang*] from the general transcendental concepts and propositions, which refers to an experience in general, to those which refer to particular experiences”³⁷. To explain what he means,

³⁴ *MGW*, II 518.

³⁵ *MGW*, II 510.

³⁶ See *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *MGW*, II 519.

he refers to Newton's attempt to universalize the law of gravity. Once Newton discovered it and demonstrated that it is a general law governing the relationship between terrestrial bodies, he successfully applied it to the moon in relation to the Earth, to every satellite in relation to its planet, to every planet in relation to the Sun, and so on. When Maimon asks himself whether Kant's categories and ideas could achieve the same success in expanding our empirical knowledge, he laconically answers: "One can believe whatever one wants, [but] I cannot believe it", since in the critical system there is "a gap [*Lücke*] between the transcendental concepts and propositions and the particular concepts and propositions of experience"³⁸. In other words, in Maimon's view it was possible to broaden the application of the law of gravity, since it is already an *empirical* law that governs the interaction between objects endowed with specific empirical properties. Through experiments, Newton demonstrated that this law applies not only to Earth-bound objects but also to celestial bodies, like the Moon and the Sun. Furthermore, this allowed him to provide a physical and mathematical explanation for the motion of the planets, something that was not accounted for in Kepler's theory. On the contrary, for Maimon it remains unclear how Kant's transcendental concepts, i.e., the categories, can help us in expanding our empirical knowledge as Newton's theory did.

Now, in this text, Maimon does not further articulate this problem, making it difficult to fully grasp. One could argue, for example, that Kant's theory of knowledge was never intended to *extend* our empirical cognition, but only to philosophically *ground* the explanatory claims of science. In other words, Kant clearly knows that we cannot discover new laws by deducing them from the transcendental principle of causality alone. Instead, we can use the principle of causality to ground the validity of scientific observations and experiments aimed at discovering new empirical laws.

However, even if Maimon is not clear on this point in this text, I believe his critiques actually touch a raw nerve in Kant's philosophy. Casting doubt on the possibility of applying the categories to experience means not only questioning the potential *expansion* of objective, empirical knowledge, but also its very *existence* in the first place. If transcendental laws cannot be applied to particular objects, then no lawful experience is possible at all. I believe this is why, a few lines later, Maimon speaks of another "gap" in the critical system – one that should reveal the true depth of the problem. This gap lies between form and matter in general, or between understanding and sensibility³⁹. In other words, the gulf Maimon detects between the general transcendental laws and the particular laws of

³⁸ *MGW*, II 520-521.

³⁹ See *MGW*, II, 521: "Is the filling of this gap possible, and can we therefore count it among the desiderata? Or is this merely a hope that can never be fulfilled? According to Kant, we must admit the latter, since, for him, sensibility and understanding are two main requisites for the thought of an object. No matter how much we expand our knowledge, we can never rid ourselves of sensibility. So there always remain two gaps that can never be filled: first, the aforementioned one between the general transcendental and the particular forms of things, and then again a gap between the forms and matter in general"

experience resonates at the level of the cognitive faculties themselves. In Maimon's view, Kant was not able to demonstrate how sensibility and understanding interact with one another in order to make it possible for the form of our knowledge to be applied to sensible data. As the philosopher argues at the end of this brief text, the only way to overcome this difficulty would be through an "improved Leibnizianism [*verbesserte Leibnizismus*]" and the rehabilitation of the systematic function of an infinite understanding⁴⁰.

The solution is only hinted at in this text, but for a more extensive exposition, Maimon refers to his most significant work – published some months before *Baco and Kant* – namely the *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*. This text was written between 1787 and 1789, after Maimon's encounter with the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Despite his non-academic background, Maimon's philosophical knowledge was quite extensive. He studied Maimonides, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Wolff, and Mendelssohn, with whom he directly collaborated during his visits to Berlin. Reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* must thus have been a profoundly impactful experience for a man deeply embedded in the German Enlightenment debate. Maimon himself notes this fact in his autobiography, emphasizing the diligence with which he engaged with Kant's work:

I had now resolved to study Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, of which I had often heard but which I had never seen yet. The method, in which I studied this work, was quite peculiar. On the first perusal I obtained a vague idea of each section. This I endeavored afterwards to make distinct by my own reflection, and thus to penetrate into the author's meaning. Such is properly the process which is called *thinking oneself into a system* [*sich in ein System hineindenken*]. But as I had already mastered in this way the systems of Spinoza, Hume and Leibnitz, I was naturally led to consider a coalition-system. This in fact I found, and I put it gradually in writing in the form of explanatory observations on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, just as this system unfolded itself to my mind. Such was the origin of my *Transcendental Philosophy*⁴¹.

This passage is particularly interesting as it highlights the genetic origins of the *Essay*'s project. It seems, above all, that this work originated as Maimon's attempt to clarify for himself the ideas presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, it also becomes clear that his aim was not merely to *understand* Kant's reflections but to *critically* engage with them, assessing their coherence using the conceptual tools he had acquired from studying the authors mentioned above. That is why he refers to his attempt to comment on the *Critique* as a "coalition-system" (*Koalitionssystem*), which should not be understood as a mere compilation of different philosophical approaches without a

⁴⁰ See *MGW*, II 522.

⁴¹ Maimon 1792-1793, p. 253.

guiding principle. As we will see better in this chapter, I take Maimon's formulation to indicate his intent to systematically align these authors with Kant's transcendental philosophy, seeking to resolve its internal tensions through concepts and methods that, in some cases, originate *outside* of it. Given these considerations, one should not be misled by Maimon's rather cautious remark at the end of the quotation, where he describes his *Essay* as consisting of "explanatory observations" on the first *Critique*. The *Essay* is *not* merely a commentary on Kant's work, but an autonomous and independent text⁴²: while it is undoubtedly indebted to the critical philosophy, it evolves it in a distinctly original manner – so much so that it managed to capture the attentions of Kant himself.

Maimon concluded the work on this book at the beginning of 1789 and immediately sent a manuscript to the author of the *Critique*, with the mediation of Marcus Herz. Herz, in turn, wrote a letter to Kant, praising Maimon's "genius, sharp intellect and diligence", which, in his view, made him "one of the very, very few among the present inhabitants of the earth who have fully understood and grasped"⁴³ the critical philosophy. Kant's response to Herz is particularly noteworthy, as it acknowledges the subtlety of Maimon's reflections – a recognition that was far from obvious, considering that he viewed the *Essay* as a challenge to his own system. Kant admitted that his recent commitments – such as the publication of the third *Critique* and his increasingly frequent correspondence with other thinkers – combined with his advancing age, had kept him from completing the manuscript, restricting his reading to the first two chapters. Yet even this was enough for him to recognize the value of Maimon's attempt, to the extent that he explicitly declared:

but just a glance at it was enough to make me recognize its excellence, and not only that none of my opponents has understood me and the principle question as well as Mr. Maimon, but also that only a few people possess such an acute mind for such profound investigations [as he does]; and this persuaded me to reserve his manuscript for a few moments of leisure; only now have I obtained these, and only enough to go through the first two chapters, which I can only discuss briefly⁴⁴.

Despite Maimon's inclusion among the "opponents" of criticism Kant nonetheless praises his understanding of the principles of transcendental philosophy and the sharpness of his reasoning. Toward the end of the brief Kant further clarifies this stance, by claiming that Maimon "is of one mind with me as to the necessity of a reform in establishing the principles of metaphysics, and few are interested in being convinced of this necessity"⁴⁵. I consider this clarification to be decisive, as it

⁴² As Valpione writes, "the *Versuch* conceals behind its façade as a simple commentary on the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* a new problematization of the concept of the transcendental" (Valpione 2012, pp. 11-12).

⁴³ *BW*, XI 15.

⁴⁴ *BW*, XI 49.

⁴⁵ *BW*, XI 54.

highlights Kant's recognition that Maimon's objections remain entirely internal to transcendental philosophy: rather than aiming to prove it unsustainable, Maimon seeks to refine its core concepts.

I will return to this issue more extensively later, when I will discuss the content of Maimon's objections. For now, it suffices to say that Kant's cursory reading was evidently enough for him to grasp the speculative core of the *Essay*, as most of the letter is devoted to a critical analysis of Maimon's main arguments. The philosopher recognizes that the central problem addressed in the *Essay* concerns the application of the forms of the understanding to the sensible data given in intuition. Kant also mentions, and criticizes, Maimon's attempt to resolve this problem through a new doctrine of the schematism, grounded in the revised role assigned to infinite understanding and in the introduction of a completely new concept that Maimon calls "idea of understanding".

The content of this brief thus shows both Kant's appreciation of Maimon's talent and a strong rejection of his speculative proposals to strengthen the structures of transcendental philosophy. We also know for certain that Kant had knowledge of Maimon's main arguments and critics already a few months before the publication of *Baco und Kant*, where, despite the introduction of the comparison with the English philosopher, no substantial advance was made with regard to the interpretation of critical philosophy. This is another reason to doubt that reading this article prompted Kant to write the Transition project, as Basile suggests, since there is no indication in the letter to Herz that Maimon's arguments had any real impact on his master.

Given this historical background, it is now time to take a closer look at Maimon's philosophical proposal in the *Essay*. In the first lines of the Introduction the author takes up Kant's position that the only two disciplines based on entirely rational and a priori principles are mathematics and philosophy. Therefore, every other science that claims objectivity and necessity must, in some way, be grounded on both these disciplines. As Maimon writes, "[s]cience is to be met with in all the remaining objects of human cognition only in as much as they contain these two within them"⁴⁶. Once again, this is nothing new, since this formulation explicitly mirrors Kant's claim in the *Metaphysical Foundations* that "in any special doctrine of nature there can be only as much *proper* science as there is *mathematics* therein"⁴⁷. Even though no explicit reference to philosophy was made here, its foundational role for science was implicit, since the entire project of the *Anfangsgründe*, as we saw in 1.1, aimed to demonstrate that every *mathematical* science must presuppose an a priori *metaphysical* – and thus *philosophical* – foundation⁴⁸.

However, while Kant believes that philosophy has the right to claim this foundational role, things take a very different turn in Maimon's thought. He argues that the objectivity of all forms of

⁴⁶ *MGW*, II 2.

⁴⁷ *MAN*, 470.

⁴⁸

cognitions should be grounded in the a priori principles and rules of thought. Within the perspective of criticism, this is tantamount to arguing that in every scientific knowledge, objects must consist of a material component which is a priori determined by a priori formal concepts, in order for the object to claim universality and necessity⁴⁹. In the case of mathematics, the relation between form and matter turns out to be not problematic, since the latter “determines its objects completely a priori through construction; as a result, the faculty of thought produces both the *form* and the *matter* of its thinking out of itself”⁵⁰. In other words, mathematical concepts are constructed with respect to both their form and matter. When we draw a triangle, we generate an object in pure intuition according to the rule governing its construction. As Maimon writes in the final Remarks of the *Essay*, “the objects of mathematics are time and space determined a priori according to rules or conditions”⁵¹. Even though time and space can be considered a priori forms of a posteriori objects, they are also the very a priori matter of mathematical objects, since the latter are nothing other than specific rule-governed determinations of these forms. When we construct a triangle, we are shaping – or, in other words, determining – the a priori form of space⁵². This means that the matter of the object-triangle is, so to speak, entirely “transparent” to the concept that determines it, since there is no material component in the triangle that is not determined by its genetic rule. Maimon writes, for example, that in mathematical objects form and matter “determine each other reciprocally, and are thus in the faculty of cognition *inseparable* [unzertrennbar]”⁵³, in the sense that no matter can be abstracted from form without annulling itself.

However, this is not the way philosophy works, since “in philosophy the understanding produces only the *form* of thinking I out of itself; but the *objects* it is *applied* to must be given to it from elsewhere”⁵⁴. Philosophy remains an a priori form of knowledge, like mathematics, since its rules are not derived from experience but grounded in the structures of our cognitive faculties. However, the objects determined by these a priori rules are also constituted by matter which is given to us a posteriori through sensibility. The question thus becomes: “how is philosophy possible as pure a priori cognition”⁵⁵, since the understanding can conceive only rules or conditions and cannot

⁴⁹ See *MGW*, II 12: “A limited cognitive faculty requires two parts: 1. *matter*, that is to say something given, or what [*das was*] is to be cognized in the object of cognition; 2. *form*; or that *for which* [*das wofür*] the object is to be cognized; Matter is the particular in the object, – through which it is cognized and distinguished from all other objects Form, on the other hand, (in so far as it is grounded in the cognitive faculty in relation to this kind [*Art*] of object) is the universal that can belong to a class of objects.”

⁵⁰ *MGW*, II 2.

⁵¹ *MGW*, II 335.

⁵² See also *MGW*, V 182-183: “Time and space are the *general materials of the objects of mathematics*, given a priori to the faculty of cognition. Through thought, they can assume all possible *forms* and thus become *real objects of pure mathematics*”.

⁵³ *MGW*, V 173.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *MGW*, II 336.

generate anything on its own that conforms to them? While on the one hand the objectivity of mathematics was granted by understanding's a priori generation of both the form and the matter of its objects, the objectivity of philosophy is *questioned* by the heterogeneity of the form and the matter of its objects⁵⁶.

It is thus clear that, according to Maimon, mathematical knowledge should be regarded as the epistemic paradigm for any cognition claiming objectivity. However, in the *Essay* Maimon does not dwell at length on the attempt to justify this assumption. Fortunately, we can find a more detailed explanation of the difference between mathematical and philosophical knowledge in the *Logic*. Here Maimon distinguishes between three forms of thought, namely *formal*, *arbitrary* and *real*⁵⁷. I will briefly expose their characteristics as follows:

1) In *formal* thought, the elements of a manifold we bring into the unity of our consciousness are mutually dependent, in a way that “[n]either can occur in consciousness without the other (apart from the connection)”⁵⁸. Such is the case, for example, with the concepts of “cause” and “effect”, which cannot be thought separately from one another;

2) In *arbitrary* thought, the elements can both be thought separately from one another. Such is the case of empirical concepts like “red”, “sweat”, “table” etc.

3) In *real* thought, one element can be an object of consciousness in itself, even without the other (apart from the connection), while the other cannot be an object of consciousness without the first. As we will see, this is the case of mathematical and geometrical concepts.

Now, in Maimon's view only the latter can claim both objectivity and necessity. In formal thought we think the connection about general concepts, such as that between “cause” and “effect”, however without referring them to any specific real object⁵⁹. In arbitrary thought, as we have seen, the connection of the elements brought into unity is merely arbitrary, such that neither objectivity nor necessity can be claimed. As Maimon writes, “arbitrary thought has no ground whatsoever, and so it is not a thought at all”⁶⁰. This synthesis is thus only a product of our imagination, and not a rule-governed connection. For example, even if we actually perceive a red table, and we formulate the

⁵⁶ See Engstler 1990, p. 35.

⁵⁷ *MGW*, V 82.

⁵⁸ *MGW*, V 80.

⁵⁹ *MGW*, V 83: “Formal thought does indeed have a *ground of knowledge* [Erkenntnisgrund], that is, a basis in the faculty of cognition in relation to an object in general, but it lacks a *real ground* [Realgrund] in the specific objects of knowledge”.

⁶⁰ *MGW*, V 82.

judgement “the table is red”, there is no *necessary logical* connection between the “table” and its “being red”, since both the elements can be conceived as separated from one another. In other words: we can think about a table that is not red, and the red color without referring it to a table.

We must therefore consider now what legitimizes the objectivity and necessity of real thought. Maimon argues that here the elements brought into unity must be in some way dependent (*abhängig*) on one another. However, unlike the mutual dependence found in formal thought, this *Abhängigkeit* must be unilateral (*einseitig*)⁶¹. This means that one of the elements within the relation must remain conceivable even when abstracted from the relation itself, while the other cannot. The first element is the subject, or the determinable (*das Bestimmbare*), while the second is the predicate, or the determination (*die Bestimmung*).

Before analyzing Maimons’ example, we can summarize the peculiarity of real thought compared to the other two as follows: in its connection, the determination synthetically adds something to the determinable that was not already presupposed by the latter. This marks a fundamental difference from formal thought, where both elements are mutually dependent on each other, and thus neither adds a specific determination to the other that is not already contained within it. On the other side, contrary to mere arbitrary thought, the determination that is added to the determinable “cannot be an object of *the consciousness determined by thought* outside this connection, [and so] this connection also has an objective ground with respect to it”⁶². In other words: the relation which connects the determination to the determinable is logically *necessary*, since the first would not be thinkable without the latter.

The law that specifies these conditions of real thought is called by Maimon “law of determinability” (*Grundsatz der Bestimmbarkeit*)⁶³. The philosopher believes that only mathematical concepts and judgements can fulfill the requirements established by this rule:

The concept of a triangle, for example, has an objective basis and determines a real object. The manifold to be connected within it (space, three lines) stand in a conceptual relationship. Space, as an intuition, is also in itself – apart from the connection – an object of consciousness, whereas lines, without space, are not objects of consciousness at all⁶⁴.

⁶¹ *MGW*, V 83.

⁶² *MGW*, V 82.

⁶³ The *Satz der Bestimmbarkeit* is formally established in the *Logic*, yet even in the *Essay* we find an early, albeit sketchy, formulation of it, specifically in section four. Here the philosopher writes: “If one of the constituent parts of a synthesis can be thought without reference to the other, i.e. either in itself or in another synthesis, but the other cannot be thought without reference to the first, then the first is termed the subject of the synthesis and the latter the predicate. For example, a triangle or a space enclosed by three lines can be thought just as well in itself, without reference to its being right- or oblique-angled, as it can be thought disjunctively in these different kinds of synthesis” (*MGW*, II 84).

⁶⁴ *MGW*, V 82.

In other words, the triangle is a specific real determination of space, as it cannot be conceived independently of it. It does not possess a proper existence of its own; rather, its reality consists in being a determination of something determinable. Between space and the triangle there is thus a logical connection which determines the reality of their relation. Moreover, any other more specific determination of the triangle would be a real one, for, according to the law of determinability, every possible determination of the determination is also a determination of the determinable⁶⁵. For instance, also the “thought of a *right-angled triangle* is [...] a real thought”⁶⁶, since right-angled triangle is a further specification of triangle, which, in turn, is a determination of space (the determinable). Through the conditions established by the *Grundsatz der Bestimmbarkeit* we are thus in a position to *construct*, according to specific rules, new determinations or new objects⁶⁷ that were not already contained in the determinable subject⁶⁸. These objects are *real* ones, since they are always determinations of the a priori intuition of space and cannot be thought if abstracted from the latter.

Having established this, we are now in a position to better comprehend the status of philosophical knowledge when compared to mathematical one. Maimon’s main problem does not concern the a priori status of the concepts of our understanding, nor the question of their systematization or completeness. Rather, he doubts the possibility of their being applied to sensible objects. In the *Logic* he claims that Kant’s deduction can at best demonstrate that “[t]he *pure* a priori concepts that refer to *real objects in general* are possible *determinations* of the possible determinations of time”⁶⁹. In this text Maimon does not doubt that a priori concepts *can* refer to

⁶⁵ See *MGW*, V 89.

⁶⁶ *MGW*, V 216.

⁶⁷ Maimon distinguishes between producing new determinations of an object and producing a completely new object. For example, in the judgement “a triangular figure has three angles” the predicate “three angles” is a specific determination of a triangular figure which was not analytically contained in its concept, since we must *construct* a triangle in order to know that it has three angles. However, through this judgement we are not constructing new objects, but we are simply discovering new *determinations* of a given object. The judgement “a triangle can be right-angled”, on the contrary, contains the foundation of a new object, since a right-angled triangle is an *object* distinct from other possible triangles. Although both judgments are objective, since they fulfill the conditions of the law of determinability, the second is more “fruitful” (*fruchtbar*) for the expansion of our knowledge than the first (*MGW*, V 110).

⁶⁸ On this point, see Schechter 2003 p. 47, which brings the Maimonian method in the *Logic* closer to the speculative logic of the raising German Idealism: “But mathematics, with the aid of ‘construction’, provides us with the model for an intellect that not only obeys the conditions of the LOD, but also with the sense of how this intellect can create new concepts. One cannot deduce the concept of ‘right-angled triangle’ from the concept of ‘triangle’, but one can construct this new concept on the basis of the former concept. This demonstration, I believe, affords us a new model of knowledge which neither Maimon nor Kant could offer. It is a logic of generating concepts without relying on deductions and identities. Synthesis for Maimon is a productive activity of the intellect which culminates in creating new objects. It gives us the basis for thinking of developmental logic, that is to say, a process of production which grants the mind the possibility of presentation instead of representation, while considering it a synthetic, not an analytic, activity. Thus Maimon posited the ground – in his concept of synthesis in accordance with the LOD – for the speculative philosophy and logic of German Idealism”.

⁶⁹ *MGW*, V 239.

objects⁷⁰, but he denies that this relation is *necessary*. The reason is that, according to him, the *logical* and *necessary* connection between possible objects grounds also the objective connection between real objects, but the contrary does not hold. Let us consider, for example, a judgement such as “fire causes heat”. Kant would argue that this judgement expresses a *necessary* connection between the elements involved, since we apply the category of causality thanks to the particular and objective time-determination of succession between the fire and the heat. However, Maimon objects:

If we find in our perception (as is actually the case) that heat always follows fire [...], we cannot conclude from this that fire contains the *logical* (necessary) *ground of heat*. However, we can at least conclude that it is *possible* for fire to contain the (logical) *ground of heat*. For if everything that is thinkable *in a certain way* must *exist* in that way, then *something* that *exists* in a certain way must also be *thinkable* in that way⁷¹.

In other words, while the logical and necessary connection between concepts also serves as the basis for their possible real exhibition in intuition, as in the case of geometrical concepts, the perception of a particular empirical relation between objects is not, in itself, sufficient to establish their logical and necessary connection. This is why an empirical judgment such as “fire causes heat” does not meet the requirements of the law of determinability. The absence of a logical connection between fire and heat makes it possible to conceive both elements independently of their relation⁷².

The legitimacy of using formal laws in mathematics is therefore determined by the *homogeneity* between these laws themselves, the determinable to which they must be applied, and the determination which is the result of their application. This is why, properly speaking, in mathematics, we are not *applying* a rule to an object but rather *generating* an object according to a rule. For example, if we draw in pure intuition of space two perpendicular segments starting from a common point A, and then connect their endpoints B and C with a third segment, then we *know* that resulting object ABC is *necessarily* a right-angled triangle which was generated in *intuition* by a lawful act of the *understanding*. I believe this homogeneity is what grounds the impossibility for the determination to be thought apart from the determinable, since removing the determinable would result in the elimination of the determinable *along with its determinations*. A triangle (or any other geometrical

⁷⁰ See *Ibidem*: “If we can therefore show that the categories are possible determinations of these determinations of time, it will also simultaneously be shown that the categories are indirectly possible determinations of the objects that are possible in time”.

⁷¹ *MGW*, V 241.

⁷² Therefore, as Senderowicz correctly writes, “the commitment to this principle invites skepticism” (Senderowicz, 2003, p. 196), since it seems that all empirical knowledge, whether it is based on simple, immediate perceptions (such as the perception of a red table) or on supposedly objective judgments (such as the judgment that “fire causes heat”) inevitably remains outside the realm of real thought.

object) is an object generated according to a rule of the understanding that cannot be thought separately from the intuition of space, because the latter provides the context and structure within which the determination can be meaningful. On the contrary, the *heterogeneity* between formal categories and empirical objects makes their logical and necessary connection impossible to prove, since we can conceive of heat even without its reference to fire. This means that we can never ascertain whether fire actually *is* the *real* cause of heat, and that philosophy, unlike mathematics, can never attain the status of *real* knowledge.

Now, one could argue that it is not the task of critical philosophy to directly apply our a priori concepts to empirical objects. As Kant notes in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason*, transcendental philosophy considers only the system of a priori principles of reason, without assuming any particular object that would be given⁷³. The actual application of this system is carried out by particular sciences, which rely on our a priori concepts to construct models and theories that claim a certain degree of objectivity with regard to our empirical world. However, it is the responsibility of philosophy to *justify* this application. I think Maimon has exactly this problem in mind when he writes:

The question here however is not about the possibility of a *pure*, but of an *applied* [angewandten] philosophy. The Kantian system may appear to be so in terms of theory, but a doubt always remains in terms of its use, and as long as the necessity of this use cannot be proven, the state of our scientific and scholarly [gelehrten] culture cannot be determined [...] ⁷⁴.

Maimon's intention is not to doubt about the truth or the completeness of the system of our a priori concepts and forms, but about the necessity of their being *applied* to particular objects of experience. If philosophy cannot properly justify this relation, then no scientific cognition can claim an objective and necessary status, regardless of how much systematic order its concepts may have.

In this sense, Maimon's challenges to transcendental philosophy rest on entirely different assumptions than those underlying the critiques of Reinhold and, later, Fichte, as he himself recognizes in the *Streifereien*. Here Maimon argues that "Kant's critical philosophy is already completed, and the improvement that one can make in it is not to rise from it to higher principles, but rather to descend to lower principles"⁷⁵. The philosopher thus has little interest in the research of a higher philosophical principle that would ensure the systematicity and completeness of our forms of knowledge. On the contrary, he is concerned with the possibility of *descending* from the pure and a priori dimension of our understanding into the empirical and contingent realm of experience, in order

⁷³ See *KrV* A 845-B 873.

⁷⁴ *MGW*, III 22.

⁷⁵ *MGW*, IV 209.

to grant the validity of the first. As Maimon writes in a letter to Reinhold himself, “[f]or me truth is the most important even if it is demonstrated in a way that is less systematic, absolutely necessary and universally valid”⁷⁶. In other words, his problem does not concern the *foundation* of the structures of our knowledge, but rather their *extension* in the direction of the empirical reality⁷⁷. This is why, in the same letter, he goes on by praising Newton’s *Principia*, which contribute to the expansion of our knowledge much more than “every theory of the faculty of a priori cognition, which can only be used to deduce what is already known”⁷⁸, clearly referring to Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie*. Maimon’s goal is thus not to provide a philosophical foundation for already known facts but to enable philosophy to justify our search for *new* facts through scientific research. This stance is fully in line with his argument in *Baco und Kant*, where he highlighted the epistemic advantages of the Newtonian method over that of transcendental philosophy, whose principles can claim completeness but still lack a proper justification for their application.

Based on these considerations, it is thus possible to argue that Maimon’s problem, particularly in the *Essay* and in the writings before the *Logic*⁷⁹, does not concern Kant’s *metaphysical* deduction of the categories, but rather their *transcendental* deduction – namely, not the question of their *origin*,

⁷⁶ *MGW*, IV 263.

⁷⁷ “From his study of transcendental philosophy Maimon came to the conclusion that critical philosophy is systematic and consistent within itself to the highest degree but is unconnected with anything real; its transcendental concepts and principles, categories and ideas, have no reality” (Bergman 1976, p. 83). Maimon reaffirms this position in a letter to Fichte, written in 1794 in response to receiving a copy of *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* from the latter. Here Maimon writes: “We will meet on the same path, even if we appear to take it in opposite directions. You seek to describe it from above downward, [...] whereas I aim to describe it from below upward” (*MGW*, VI 452)

⁷⁸ *MGW*, IV 264.

⁷⁹ In the *Logic*, Maimon actually conceives the principle of determinability itself as the supreme principle of real thought, from which the categories should also be derived. In this work, the philosopher thus seems to express dissatisfaction also with Kant’s metaphysical deduction, which was grounded in the attempt to derive our transcendental concepts from the judgments of formal logic. According to him, this method is not valid, since formal principles such as the principle of non-contradiction can only be assumed as a negative, not a positive, criterion for the complete exhibition of the categories (see *MGW*, V 215). However, I argue that contrary to both Reinhold and Fichte, Maimon does not conceive this problem as the main issue to be resolved in order to grant the validity of philosophical knowledge. In the *Letters of Philaetes to Aenesidemus*, published as an Appendix to the *Logic*, he writes that, contrary to Reinhold, he is “far from accusing *Kantian Critique* of lacking a *supreme principle*, since such a *supreme principle*, as will later be demonstrated, is not only *superfluous* but also *inherently impossible*” (*MGW*, V 447). Moreover, his metaphysical deduction seems to take an inverse approach compared to both Kant and the other two authors: rather than starting from logical forms or a supreme principle from which to derive the categories, it starts instead from the thought of a *real* object and traces back to the conditions that make it possible. “My method”, Maimon writes, “is this: I take as a basis the possibility of thinking a real object (of cognizing a thought object), seek to determine a priori the conditions of this possibility from the concept of a real object in general, and present them as categories or elementary concepts of all real objects” (*Ibidem*). One could thus argue that, in Maimon’s method, transcendental deduction must *precede* metaphysical deduction, since it is first necessary to demonstrate *that* it is possible to think real objects, and then analyze the formal conditions that make them possible. I believe Rametta argues for something similar, when he writes: “The principle of determinability, which allows us to establish which predicates can be meaningfully attributed or denied to certain classes of objects, must therefore be placed at the foundation of the deduction of the categories. This is because the latter are not merely forms to think an object *in general*, but rather the actual modes through which thought apprehends a *real* object. The concept of a real object must precede the concept of an object in general, and just as the principle of determinability must be placed at the foundation of the deduction of the categories, so too must the categories be placed at the foundation of the deduction of the forms of thought” (Rametta 2019b, pp. 193-194). On the systematic role of the principle of determinability and on its influence on Fichte, see Nisenbaum 2016.

but the question of their rightful application to sensible objects. This remark leads to the two problems I will address in more detail in the next section, namely the questions *Quid juris?* and *Quid facti?*.

2.1.2 *Quid juris? and Quid facti?*

In the preceding section, I outlined the core tenets of Maimon's skepticism. I began with a brief analysis of *Baco und Kant* to highlight the problems Maimon identified in Kant's critical philosophy, especially in comparison with other epistemological approaches. I then examined Maimon's attempt to substantiate these claims in the opening pages of the *Essay*, where he argues that critical philosophy, as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cannot claim a foundational role for our objective knowledge of the world. We saw that the problem lies in the heterogeneity between the forms of our thought and the objects to which they must be applied. Additionally, we referred to passages from the *Logic* to better understand why this very heterogeneity poses a challenge to the grounding of objective and real thought. I have argued that the requirements established by the *Satz der Bestimmbarkeit* can be met only if there is *homogeneity* between the rules of understanding, the determinable, and its determinations. In the case of mathematical objects, this homogeneity is ensured by the fact that all three elements are *a priori*. Only in this way can a determination be conceived as inseparable from both its determinable and the rules that set the conditions for its possibility. By contrast, in the case of empirical judgments, the elements that are brought into unity are heterogeneous with respect to the rules governing their connection, since their material aspect is always given *a posteriori* to our sensibility. If this is the case, then both elements can be conceived independently of this connection, and therefore also independently of one another. He explicitly hints at this fact in a letter to Reinhold, when he argues that "if the members of a manifold connected in an object can be thought also in themselves, without this reciprocal relation between them, then their connection in a single object has no ground"⁸⁰.

It is evident that the *Lücke* Maimon identified, in his *Baco und Kant*, within critical philosophy lies precisely here. The strict distinction Kant introduced in the first *Critique* between the formal and material components of knowledge made it impossible to bridge the heterogeneity between *a priori* forms and *a posteriori* objects, thus also rendering their synthesis untenable.

As Maimon reiterates in *Über die Progressen der Philosophie* (1792),

⁸⁰ *MGW*, IV 216.

Philosophy [...] has not yet been able to build a *bridge* that would make possible the transition [Uebergang] from the *transcendental* to the *particular*. If one remains at the level of the *transcendental*, one certainly holds a *firm position*; however, one can only act in a *defensive manner* here, by refusing to concede that the a priori forms should be employed beyond their general conditions of use in relation to an *object* of experience *in general*, for the determination of *particular objects*⁸¹.

Contrary to mathematics, in which the transition between the universal and the particular is ensured by the possibility of *constructing* the particular according to the rules of the universal⁸², Kant's critical philosophy failed to demonstrate how particular given objects of experience can be legitimately subsumed under the universal forms of thought. As I have already mentioned, Maimon does not question the *existence* of a transcendental dimension which is separated by the empirical one, but only the possibility of their connection. He explicitly states in the above quotation that one can certainly hold firm to the level of a priori concepts and forms, however only "in a defensive manner". I believe here Maimon is hinting at what he already said in *Baco und Kant*, namely, that the transcendental method established by Kant cannot help us in *expanding* our empirical knowledge. On the other hand, if we leave this "high position" we would be able to "only engage in minor *incursions* in the realm of truth [*Streiferein im Gebiete der Wahrheit*] with light troops – *induction, analogy, probability, and the like* – but cannot achieve any secure *conquests*"⁸³. One is thus caught between these two unsatisfactory alternatives: to defend the position in the territory of transcendental philosophy or to abandon its trenches and engage in the fight for objective truth, however stripped of any tools that could guarantee the definitive success of the enterprise.

Maimon's attempt in the *Essay* is aimed at uncovering the reasons why philosophy has struggled to go beyond this merely defensive stance and at providing it with the tools that should guarantee its possibility to engage with reality. This, however, comes at the cost of a sensitive reformulation of the core structures of Kant's *Critique*. At the end of the Introduction of the *Essay*, Maimon explicitly outlines the points he aims to address in order to accomplish this task:

I present the following remarks to the thoughtful reader for examination. (1) First, the distinction between mere a priori cognition and pure a priori cognition, and the difficulty that still remains with respect to the latter. (2) Second, my derivation of the origin of synthetic propositions from the incompleteness of our cognition. (3) Third, doubts with respect to the question *quid facti?*, to which *Hume's* objection appears to be irrefutable. (4) Fourth, the clue I give to the answer to the question

⁸¹ *MGW*, IV 38.

⁸² See *MGW*, IV 37: "Mathematics, whether it ascends *from the particular to the general* or descends *from the general to the particular*, always secures the reality of its procedure – and consequently also of what it produces – through *construction*".

⁸³ *MGW*, IV 38.

quid juris? and the explanation of the possibility of a metaphysics in general, through the reduction of intuitions to their elements, elements that I call ideas of the understanding [*Verstandsideen*]. The reader will find the remaining remarks in their appropriate places. To what extent I am a Kantian, an anti-Kantian, both at the same time, or neither I of the two, I leave to the judgement of the thoughtful reader. I have endeavoured, as much as I could, to avoid the difficulties of these opposed systems (something that I also wanted to show in my motto). How far I have succeeded in this, others may decide⁸⁴.

These remarks, which Maimon also mentions in a letter to Kant before submitting his manuscript, aim to summarize his programmatic intent. A detailed analysis of Maimon's proposal should thus address all four points. As for (1), the distinction the philosopher traces between a priori cognition and pure a priori cognition mirrors the distinction we analyzed in the preceding section between mathematical and philosophical knowledge. Maimon defines a priori cognition as "a universal cognition, which is the form or condition of all particular cognitions"⁸⁵. Both the intuitions of space and time and the concepts of understanding are a priori, since they are the necessary conditions for thinking a particular given object. So far, nothing different from Kant's doctrine. However, Maimon adds a new distinction. "Something is *pure*", he writes, "when it is a product of the understanding alone (and not of sensibility). Everything that is pure is at the same time a priori, but not the reverse"⁸⁶. According to Maimon, we must distinguish between an a priori cognition, which relies on both understanding and sensibility, and pure a priori knowledge, which does not depend on the latter. This second kind of knowledge is *both a priori and pure* since it relies solely on concepts of the understanding, such as identity, substance, and cause, as well as the propositions grounded upon them, such as "every effect has a cause." All these concepts can be used to think of given objects, but they do not presuppose any particular object in order to be thought. By contrast, the concepts and propositions of mathematics cannot be pure, since they must always be grounded in an intuition, albeit an a priori one. If we think of a circle, we must necessarily conceive of its construction within the a priori intuition of space.

As Maimon argued in the quotation mentioned above, the "difficulty" he seeks to address pertains solely to pure a priori cognition, since it arises from the heterogeneity between pure concepts of the understanding and the objects to which they must be applied. Mathematical knowledge, on the other hand, does not face this problem, since its objects are *constructed* in intuition at the very moment they are *thought*.

⁸⁴ *MGW*, II 9.

⁸⁵ *MGW*, II 55.

⁸⁶ *MGW*, II 56.

The other three points outlined in the quotation are thus meant to directly address this difficulty within pure a priori knowledge. To summarize them briefly: (2) concerns the relationship between synthetic *a priori* propositions and the limits of our knowledge; (3) refers to the doubts surrounding the question *Quid facti?*; and (4) pertains to the attempt to solve the problem of *Quid juris?*. I will set (2) aside for the moment, as I believe its meaning can be properly grasped only after analyzing (3) and, above all, (4).

Starting from the *Quid facti?* problem, Maimon aims to show that critical philosophy ultimately failed to overcome Humean skepticism. Kant's attempt to establish the objectivity and necessity of our empirical knowledge, according to Maimon, ultimately rests on a circular argument, as it implicitly assumes what it is supposed to be explained. The transcendental deduction of the categories does not truly explain why our understanding must necessarily determine experience according to certain principles; rather, it starts from the premise that this determination occurs and then seeks to legitimize it⁸⁷. As a result, Kant's attempt to counter Humean skepticism remains unsatisfactory and circular, as it merely *presupposes that* we possess objective knowledge of the empirical world⁸⁸. However, if we, like Hume, doubt the truth of this very fact, then the entire critical system seems to be undermined:

Yes, it will be said, the fact is indubitable. We say, for example: the fire warms (makes warm) the stone and this signifies not merely perception of the succession of the two appearances in time, but the necessity of this succession. But to this *David Hume* would reply: it is not true in this case that I perceive a necessary succession; I certainly use the same expression that others use on this occasion, but I understand by it only I the often perceived succession of the warming of the stone upon the presence of the fire and not the necessity of this succession. It is merely an association of perceptions, not a judgement of the understanding. It is just what in animals we call the expectation of similar cases⁸⁹.

As can be seen, Maimon's argument explicitly mirrors Hume's remarks against the supposed objective validity of the scientific method. When we perceive the warming of a stone caused by fire, we are led to think that their succession in time is a sufficient reason to assert their necessary and

⁸⁷ In the aforementioned letter to Reinhold, Maimon argues that critical philosophy actually succeeded in overcoming dogmatism, but not skepticism (see *MGW*, IV 213). Also in the *Wörterbuch* he claims: "The *Critique of Pure Reason* has proven that metaphysics is impossible, while mathematics and natural science are possible. I readily subscribe to the former for the aforementioned reasons, but I cannot so easily accept the latter" (*MGW*, III 47).

⁸⁸ "Nevertheless, Kant's response to skepticism is defective, in [Maimon's] view. It presupposes *as a fact* what has to be proved: namely, *the fact of scientific experience*. Since, as Maimon engages to show, there are no compelling reasons obliging us to accept this as a fact, the truth of skepticism is inevitable, and Kant's reply to Hume begs the question" (Senderowicz 2003, p. 176).

⁸⁹ *MGW*, II 73.

rule-governed relation. However, nothing prevents the skeptic from doubting this fact, arguing that this supposed objective connection is nothing more than a mere subjective association of perceptions that we illegitimately elevate to a universal rule, simply because of habit. He writes in the *Logic* that “[w]hen we find in our perceptions [...] that *heat* always follows *fire*, we cannot conclude from this that *fire* contains the *logical* (necessary) *ground for heat*”⁹⁰. Even though Kant’s main goal in his first *Critique* was to counter this argument, he ultimately failed, according to Maimon, as he merely *pre-supposed* that our experience of the fire heating the stone is both objective and necessary. This assumption would have compromised the entire transcendental deduction, since even the objectivity of the forms of understanding would rest on the unjustified presupposition of the objectivity of experience⁹¹.

However, while Maimon explicitly employs Humean arguments to expose the fallibility of Kant’s proposal, it would be unwarranted to reduce his thinking merely to that of Hume. I believe Maimon shares Hume’s *grounds* for skeptical doubt but not its *consequences*. Two key distinctions can be identified: first, Maimon does not believe that empirical objective knowledge is utterly *impossible*. More cautiously, he only argues that no doctrine so far has been able to ground it or to reject the psychological argument⁹².

The second difference lies in Maimon’s view of mathematical knowledge as an indication of our ability to attain some form of objective knowledge. In the aforementioned letter to Reinhold, he writes that his skepticism, contrary to Hume, “admits the concept of objective necessity and only doubts its real use with respect to the objects of perception”⁹³. Maimon contends that our concept of objective necessity must originate from somewhere, and specifically from “the objects of

⁹⁰ *MGW*, V 241.

⁹¹ “The difference between Kant’s deduction of these concepts and mine amounts to this: Kant assumes there is no doubt that we possess experiential propositions (that express necessity), and he proves their objective validity by showing that experience would be impossible without them; but on Kant’s assumption, experience is possible because it is actual, and this is why these concepts have objective reality. But I doubt the fact itself, that is to say, I doubt whether we possess experiential propositions and so I cannot prove their objective validity the way Kant does”. (V 185)

⁹² Engstler observes that Maimon appears to favor the term “*Bezweifeln*” over “*Leugnen*” when referring to doubts about the objectivity of our empirical experience. See Engstler 1990, p. 205n: “‘To reject’ [*Leugnen*] therefore clearly means to deny, while ‘to doubt’ [*bezweifeln*] expresses more of an uncertainty about the actual state of affairs. If we apply this conceptual distinction to Maimon’s presentation of Hume’s ‘objection’, it seems to me that one could say that Hume *denies* the empirical use of the category of causality, while Maimon himself merely *doubts* it”. On this point, see also Bransen 1991, p. 78: “This is, clearly, Hume all over again, but as Maimon stresses more than once, the purport of his skepticism is to reformulate Hume in terms of Kant’s critical philosophy in order to show that Kant did not succeed in refuting Hume’s skepticism. Kant’s Transcendental Deduction is informing about the preconditions of knowledge and it provides a convincing answer to the ‘*Quid juris*’, Maimon is willing to accept, but in order for it to provide a convincing answer to the ‘*Quid facti*’ too, Kant had to take refuge in an unwarranted premise. This is the premise that we have experience (that we do sometimes make true judgements about empirical objects), where ‘experience’ is understood as the *universal and necessary* connection of certain determinations and certain ‘determinables’; not merely a contingent, though constant connection. This premise must be doubted, according to Maimon, which does not, however, imply that we do *not* have experience. No, we just don’t know whether we have or not, and this we will never know, which reminds us again of our finite understanding”.

⁹³ *MGW*, IV 214.

mathematics and their relations”⁹⁴. Again, it is clear that mathematical knowledge constitutes Maimon’s epistemic paradigm for every human cognition that claims objectivity. Even if the philosopher does not directly refer to Hume, in the Concluding Note of the *Essay* he directly criticizes the empiricists, who “do not want to accept any a priori principle, either material or formal”⁹⁵. If every principle must be conceived as the result of an inductive abstraction from given objects, then there is no universal concept that can claim universality, neither in empirical nor in mathematical knowledge. Maimon is very harsh in his comments, arguing that such a position does not deserve a proper refutation: it asserts nothing and undermines reason itself, since the objectivity of mathematical propositions is incompatible with a mere inductive demonstration.

I thus believe that Maimon’s intent was to employ Hume’s doubt to counteract Kant’s transcendental argument, without, however, following the Scottish philosopher in all the consequences of his skepticism⁹⁶. On the one hand, he certainly doubts the fact *that* we actually employ pure concepts of the understanding when making empirical judgments. However, this does not lead him to reject the *existence* of any transcendental dimension or deny the *right* to apply such concepts to objects. Mathematical sciences, for instance, provide an example of how this application is possible and actual at the same time⁹⁷.

These remarks lead me to point (4), namely the question *Quid juris?*, which does not concern the *actuality* of the application of transcendental concepts to empirical objects, but rather its mere *legitimacy*. Maimon argues that Kant’s solution to this problem is unsatisfactory; yet, unlike the question of *Quid facti?*, he believes that it can be addressed through a refinement of the structures of transcendental philosophy. I therefore concur with Engstler in considering the attempt to resolve the *Quid juris?* as the principal objective of the *Essay*⁹⁸. It is precisely at this juncture that, according to Maimon, the conceptual tensions of the first *Critique* become most evident. The resolution of this problem, which initially concerns only the relationship between a priori forms and a posteriori matter, will thus give rise to a series of consequences that will also affect other key Kantian distinctions, including those between sensibility and understanding, appearances and things-in-themselves, analytic and synthetic judgments.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *MGW*, II 429. Engstler doubts that Maimon is referring to Hume in this note (see Engstler 1990, pp. 206-207). However, the remarks he makes in his letter to Reinhold – where he explicitly distinguishes his own skepticism from Hume’s – are very similar, if not identical, to the critiques he puts forward in the Concluding Note against the empiricists, who fail to justify the objectivity of mathematics. This critique is explicitly addressed to Hume in the *Letters of Philaletes to Aenesidemus*, where Maimon argues that, according to Hume “the concepts of cause, effect, force etc. do not have any *objective reality*” (*MGW*, V 397).

⁹⁶ On the differences between Maimon and Hume (and Schulze), see also Elon 2019, Asmuth 2019, Marinelli 2021.

⁹⁷ See *MGW*, II 363-364: “As for me, I also take a fact as ground, but not a fact relating to a posteriori objects (because I doubt the latter) but a fact relating to a priori objects (of pure mathematics) where we I connect forms (relations) with intuitions; and because this undoubted fact refers to a priori objects, it is certainly possible, and at the same time actual”.

⁹⁸ See Engstler 1990, pp. 27-25.

We have seen that Maimon's skepticism fundamentally arises from his acknowledgment of a "gap" (*Lücke*) between the transcendental and the empirical. This gap is not merely a theoretical distinction but represents a deeper disjunction in the way knowledge is structured and experienced. As Maimon writes in his *Progresses*, this separation underpins the limitations of human cognition and the challenge of reconciling the transcendental, a priori conditions of knowledge with the concrete, sensible data of experience. Similarly, in *Baco und Kant*, he describes this distinction in terms of the opposition between form and matter of our knowledge, casting doubts about the possibility of synthesizing these two aspects into a coherent objective experience. Addressing the *quaestio juris* thus directly engages with this same problem, since it concerns the legitimacy of the application of categories to the sensible manifold given in intuition. In other words: an appropriate solution of the *Quid juris?* would directly contribute to bridging the gap within transcendental philosophy.

Kant himself recognized that the distinction between the sensible and intellectual faculties required a specific analysis to justify the possibility of their interaction. The doctrine of schematism was intended to address this very problem by introducing a third faculty – the transcendental imagination – as a mediator between sensibility and understanding. The transcendental schemas, as products of the imagination, are specific determinations of time and, as Kant himself writes, are homogeneous with both the rules of the understanding and the appearances to which these rules must be applied. On the one hand, schemas are homogeneous with the categories, as both constitute universal and a priori determinations of appearances. On the other hand, they are homogeneous with the given appearances themselves, since "time is contained in every empirical representation of the manifold"⁹⁹. Every category has thus its own respective schema that allows its application to the sensible manifold. For example, the schema of the category of substance is the *permanence* of the real in time: we can apply the category of substance to that which, in our empirical representation, remains identical to itself in time, while its accidents change.

It is now important to highlight a peculiarity of Kant's schematism, which Maimon will use as a basis for his critiques. Although Kant sometimes describes the schema as a means of mediating between the rule of the understanding and the *appearances*, his doctrine ultimately seeks to mediate not between an a priori faculty and an a posteriori given matter, but between *two a priori faculties*, namely understanding and sensibility¹⁰⁰. This distinction is crucial since it shifts the focus from a straightforward application of concepts to empirical data toward a more complex interaction between different levels of cognition. As we already pointed out in section 1.3, Kant's intention is to show

⁹⁹ *KrV*, A 139-B 178.

¹⁰⁰ See *KrV*, A 139-140 – B 178-179.

that the categories do not directly apply to the material aspects of the objects given to sensibility, but only to the form through which objects are given to us: in this case the a priori intuition of time¹⁰¹. The schema, then, is not a bridge that should connect the a priori dimension of the understanding to the a posteriori matter. Rather, it is a rule-governed way of structuring time so that it can serve as an intermediary between the two faculties that are both a priori, albeit one spontaneous and the other receptive.

This account of schematism is where Maimon's critique becomes particularly relevant. If Kant's solution relies on the schematization of categories through time, then the question arises: does this mediation truly resolve the heterogeneity between concepts and objects, or does it merely push the problem one step further? As Maimon writes,

Kant certainly tries to get around this difficulty by assuming that space and time and their possible determinations are a priori representations in us, and therefore that we can legitimately ascribe the concept of necessity, which is a priori, to determined succession in time, which is also a priori. But we have already shown that even if they are a priori, intuitions are still heterogeneous with concepts of the understanding, and so this assumption does not get us much further¹⁰².

Maimon's critique of Kant's doctrine can be summarized as follows: Kant aimed to demonstrate how the understanding synthesizes an empirical manifold given in intuition to ensure its objective validity. However, the solution presented in the schematism chapter fails to adequately justify how this sensible can be subsumed under the rules prescribed by the categories. This is because the categories determine only the form of appearances (their specific time-determination) and not their material content¹⁰³. Kant's attempt to bridge the gap between the transcendental and the empirical domains merely *shifted* the problem rather than *resolving* it¹⁰⁴, as it relied on the interaction between two a priori faculties – sensibility and understanding – rather than explaining how a priori forms could relate to a posteriori matter. For this reason, Maimon writes that the objective use of the

¹⁰¹ See Engstler 1990, p. 74.

¹⁰² *MGW*, II 64.

¹⁰³ "Kant introduces the schemata of categories as formal elements of his system, which, though products of the imagination, nevertheless enjoy a transcendental status. The schemata, that is, do not make any reference to the content of intuitions, but only to the temporal form that intuitions must take. The ground of synthetic judgments is then not found in the content these judgments contain, but rather in the fact that synthetic judgments must bear some relation to the form of intuition. Yet Maimon's challenge is directed at the way in which the categories can discriminate between the contents, and not the forms, of thought. All empirical intuitions are identical with regard to their form (they are all informed by space and time), yet the Schematism shows how the categories apply only to these formal features of intuition" (Thielke 2001a, p. 456). On this topic, see also Thielke 2001b, p. 111.

¹⁰⁴ As Rametta writes, "even if the schema succeeded in mediating the application of categories to intuition through the pure form of time, the problem would be shifted rather than solved. The heterogeneity between the understanding and sensibility, in fact, would reemerge just as radically in relation to the empirical material, which appears to the understanding as given a posteriori and is, in principle, external to the formal unity of the concept as an a priori function" (Rametta 2019b, p. 178).

understanding is “certainly illegitimate with respect to the matter of intuition, which is given a posteriori”¹⁰⁵.

In order to fully grasp this problem, it would be useful to consider Maimon’s critique of the Second Analogy of Experience, which is the principle of understanding that regulates the application of the category of causality. We have now seen that the employment of every category is mediated by a schema, which represents a particular determination of time. In the case of the category of causality, this time-determination consists in the necessary succession of states. In other words, we can state that a state A is the cause of a state B if B necessarily follows A in time and if this time-relation is irreversible, i.e., if it is not possible to conceive B as preceding A in time. To use an empirical example, we can state that the fire is the cause of the warming of a stone if the stone’s exposure to fire precedes its increase in temperature. This relation is unidirectional, since it is not possible to conceive the warming of the stone as the cause of the action of the fire on it.

Maimon’s objection is directed against the possibility of identifying rule-governed succession between events with the mere function exercised by the schema. In other words, the schematism cannot help us in distinguishing between necessary and merely arbitrary or habitual succession of empirical events.

According to Maimon it is not comprehensible how schema, which are to be conceived as pure time-determinations, can properly consent the application of a category to *empirical* objects such as the sun and the stone. As Maimon notes in the *Logic*, “[t]his latter question is not so easily answerable, because we do not see how the pure concept of cause, a priori, can stand in a relation of determinability to an empirical object at all”¹⁰⁶. As we have seen, the heterogeneity between rules of the understanding and empirical objects undermines the possibility of the establishment a relation which satisfies the requests of the law of determinability.

In particular, the problem with Kant’s schematism doctrine is that it allows us to determine nothing more than an *object in general*, rather than particular and concrete objects of experience. As Beiser points out, “[t]he concepts of the understanding are so abstract and general that they do not necessarily ensure order among the specific intuitions of our actual experience”¹⁰⁷. Maimon’s point is that, in the case of fire warming a stone, the causal relation between them is established purely in terms of their temporal succession, without any reference to their material determination. That is, the empirical attributes of fire and stone play no role in instituting the connection. As a result, we lack any transcendental proof that it is *fire*, as a concrete empirical object with specific attributes, that warms the *stone*, as another specific object of experience. What the understanding determines through

¹⁰⁵ *MGW*, II 51.

¹⁰⁶ *MGW*, V 235.

¹⁰⁷ Beiser 2003, p. 236.

the mediation of the schema is always merely the *formal* structure of appearances – the pure time-relation of succession – while their material aspect remain entirely indifferent to its operations:

We do not apply this concept directly to the matter of intuition, but merely to its a priori form (time) and by this means to the intuition itself. So, if I say *a* is the cause of *b*, or if *a* is posited, *b* must also necessarily be posited, then *a* and *b* are not determined with respect to their matter or content, but only with respect to particular determinations of their form (the preceding and the succeeding in time): i.e. the reason that *a* is *a* and not *b* is not that *a* has a material determination that *b* lacks (for this cannot be subsumed under the *a priori* rule in so far as it is something a posteriori), but rather because *a* has a formal determination (the preceding), that *b* does not have¹⁰⁸.

The solution Kant provided to the *quaestio juris* through the doctrine of schematism was thus able to justify only the possibility of applying categories to mere objects in general – objects A and B, for instance, where the only thing required for the employment of the category is their a priori temporal succession. However, it does not allow for the determination of specific, concrete objects, like fire and the stone¹⁰⁹. As we have seen, the problem concerns the impossibility to fill the gap between the transcendental and the empirical. This means that it would be impossible for us to distinguish between objective and merely arbitrary succession of objects or events. In other words, if we cannot legitimately apply the category of causality to the relation between the fire and the heating of the stone, then we cannot distinguish their temporal relation from a contingent and arbitrary succession. Let's take an example: consider two different events such as the heating of a stone caused by fire and the turning on of streetlights which happens every evening after the sunset. In both cases, we observe a regular succession of events. However, we believe that only the first case involves a *necessary causal connection*, while the second is merely a coincidental pattern, since the sunset *is not* the cause of the streetlights turning on. Even if, hypothetically, the sun didn't set tomorrow, the streetlights would still activate, as a timer controls their operation. The problem is that Kant's schema of causality – understood as the rule that causes precede effects – does not provide any clear criterion for why the first case should count as *necessary* while the second should not. The mere time-relation of succession between objects is thus not sufficient to discriminate between necessary and contingent causal events.

¹⁰⁸ *MGW*, II 52.

¹⁰⁹ “Kant has shown only that we need to assume that every event has some indeterminate cause. He has not shown that we need to *assign* any determinate cause to any event. Nor has he shown *how* we *could* assign any determinate cause. Maimon is prepared to endorse some version of Kant's argument, and is even prepared to argue that the mere perception of *subjective* succession presupposes a version of the principle of causality. But he does not think that Kant's argument shows either the necessity or the possibility of determinate applications of the principle in causal judgments” (Franks 2003, p. 227).

Moreover, even if we accept that the categories genuinely determine concrete objects of experience, it remains obscure how this process would unfold. In Maimon's reconstruction of Kant's argument, we saw that the category of causality can be applied to objects if these objects *exhibit a necessary and irreversible temporal succession*. However, as Valpione notes, "it is not clear where this necessity comes from"¹¹⁰. It seems that Kant is aware of the need to distinguish between merely arbitrary succession and the necessary succession of perceptions even at the level of intuition itself, but this would have led him into a vicious circle. He should have argued, on the one hand, that the category itself guarantees the objective and necessary connection between perceptions; on the other hand, he should have claimed that the objective temporal relation between perceptions grounds the possibility of applying the category to them.

The problem can also be formulated in the following way: does the category establish necessity, or does the necessity we observe allow for the category's application? Kant cannot uphold both positions. The solution thus lies in choosing one of the two alternatives. As we have seen, according to Maimon, the first must be excluded, as a category cannot be legitimately applied to a matter that is inherently disorganized. Following the second path, which is the solution Maimon accepts, requires however a radical rethinking of the fundamental structures of critical philosophy. If we must be able to distinguish between merely arbitrary successions and genuine causal connections, then the *objects themselves* – even in their material aspect – must exhibit a rule-governed relation. Embracing this view requires going beyond Kant by demonstrating that objects are already rationally connected, even prior to the intervention of our understanding. Maimon's argument therefore underscores the necessity of an inherent order within objects themselves, rather than one dictated from above by the understanding. As we shall see, Maimon's approach suggests that the understanding does not impose its rules on a passive, unordered reality but rather *uncovers* and *brings to light* a world already governed by lawful structures¹¹¹.

In the next section, I will outline how this reformulation of the core structures of critical philosophy unfolds and explain its connection to the relation between our finite understanding and the formulation of *synthetic* judgments, which is the last problem we need to examine.

¹¹⁰ Valpione 2012, p. 16.

¹¹¹ "[B]ecause on Maimon's view a real object is nothing more than the chain of concepts that compose it, there is no longer a question about our entitlement to apply the categories to sensuously given objects, since now even matter has been fully conceptualized" (Nisenbaum 2016, p. 474).

2.1.3 The antinomy of thought and the divine understanding

I will start this section dedicated to Maimon's attempts to resolve the *quaestio iuris* by quoting a key passage we find in his *Wörterbuch*. Here, the philosopher frames the problematic relationship between a priori and a posteriori in the terms of an "antinomy of thought" whose solution is curiously found by Maimon in the concept of the "thing-in-itself":

The *thing-in-itself* [das Ding an sich] is therefore an idea of reason, which is given by reason itself to solve a *universal antinomy of thought in general*. For thought in general consists in relating a form (a rule of the understanding) to a matter (the given subsumed under it). Without matter, one cannot attain consciousness of the form; consequently, matter is a necessary condition of thought [...]. On the other hand, however, the completeness of thinking an object requires that nothing in it be merely given, but that everything must be thought. We cannot dismiss either of these demands as illegitimate; therefore, we must satisfy both by making our thinking increasingly complete [*immer vollständiger*]. In doing so, the matter continuously approaches the form, infinitely, and this is the resolution of this antinomy¹¹².

Maimon's antinomy of thought does not refer to an impossible choice between two equally indemonstrable – and therefore metaphysical – propositions. On the contrary, Maimon's aim is to demonstrate that our empirical knowledge itself is antinomical, since, for the reasons specified in the preceding section, the heterogeneity of its elements undermines its claim to objective validity¹¹³. Two key points must now be emphasized. First, unlike the antinomies presented by Kant in the Transcendental Dialectic, the universal antinomy of thought in general is solvable, even if only through an asymptotic process. This is not surprising if we consider that this antinomy is nothing more than a reformulation of the *quaestio iuris*, with respect to which Maimon had already suggested the possibility of a conciliation. Second, what is needed in order to solve it is the *Vernunftidee* of the thing-in-itself. We must now ask what this last request precisely means. In order to do so, I will come back to the pages of the *Essay* where Maimon proposes his solution to the problem *Quid iuris?*.

We saw that Maimon's concern regarding this issue was Kant's failed attempt to bridge the gap between the transcendental and the empirical dimensions through the schematism doctrine. The problem lay in the schema's inability to properly enable the application of the categories of

¹¹² *MGW*, III 186. The text where we find this passage was originally published by Maimon in the *Berlinisches Journal für Aufklärung* in 1790 as a response to a short writing (probably written by Reinhold) on the *Essay*.

¹¹³ See also Beiser 2002, p. 256 and Franks 1969-1970, p. 375. Already in the *Essay* Maimon discussed the existence of antinomies outside the field of metaphysics, even in physical and mathematical knowledge (see *MGW*, II 227). However, here the philosopher focuses on *specific* examples of antinomies in physics and mathematics, rather than on the antinomic nature of thought in general.

understanding to sensible data in order to formulate a judgment such as “fire heats the stone”. The schema is only capable of determining the *form* through which our intuitions are given (namely, time), but not the intuitions themselves, making it impossible to determine whether two intuitions stand in an actual causal connection or merely in a contingent succession. The only way to prove that two intuitions, even in their material determination, actually exhibit a rule-governed interaction is by demonstrating that they *are* rationally connected even before the intervention of our understanding. In other words, rather than viewing cognition as an imposition of order onto an inherently disordered manifold, we must instead recognize that the very existence of empirical objects presupposes an intrinsic rational connection.

This insight leads to a fundamental revision of Kant’s framework. If we want to explain how cognition successfully applies to experience, we cannot assume that form is merely imposed upon matter through an act of our discursive understanding. Instead, we must demonstrate that matter itself is *generated* by form according to necessary rules, much like in mathematics. This would eliminate the heterogeneity that threatens the objectivity of empirical knowledge. As Maimon argues in the *Essay*, according to Kantian system and its qualitative distinction between form and matter, understanding and sensibility, it is impossible to demonstrate how “can the understanding subject something (the given object) to its power (to its rules) that is not in its power”¹¹⁴. In other words, if matter is truly independent of form, it remains unclear how cognition can impose order upon a given that is, by definition, external to it. This issue highlights a deeper tension within Kant’s system: our understanding inevitably perceives form and matter as distinct, yet their separation undermines the very possibility of objective knowledge.

To solve this problem, Maimon posits the necessity of conceiving an infinite understanding in which form and matter, understanding and sensibility, are wholly identical¹¹⁵. Only in this way can we view the content of our empirical perceptions not as a chaotic manifold that requires ordering through an act of our spontaneity, but as something *already* structured according to rational laws by a supreme intelligence. In Maimon’s own words:

We assume an infinite understanding (at least as idea), for which the forms are at the same time objects of thought, or that produces out of itself all possible kinds of connections and relations of things (the ideas). Our understanding is just the same, only in a limited way. This idea is sublime and will, I believe (if it is carried through), overcome the greatest difficulties of this kind¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁴ *MGW*, II 63.

¹¹⁵ As Cassirer wrote, “[t]he gap between the universal and the particular in knowledge seems, from the standpoint of the ‘finite’ use of empirical understanding, to be insurmountable. However, it closes as soon as we at least problematically admit and introduce the idea of an *infinite and divine understanding*” (Cassirer 1920, p. 94).

¹¹⁶ *MGW*, II 64-65.

A few observations on this quotation are in order. First, the use of the verb “assume” (*annehmen*) is not incidental. Maimon is not interested in offering a revised version of an ontological proof for the existence of God. In other words, his concern is not with proving God’s actuality as a metaphysical entity in the traditional sense. Instead, he believes that we must “assume” God as an epistemic tool that enables us to think the possibility of an identity between form and matter, and so of a rational structure inherent to the reality itself¹¹⁷. It is not a coincidence that Maimon immediately adds the specification that the existence of the infinite understanding must be thought “at least as idea” (*zum wenigsten als Idee*), in an attempt to avoid the falling back into a pre-critical form of metaphysics. The *idea* of the infinite understanding makes it conceivable, for us, that the difference between form and matter is, in reality, neither definitive nor ineliminable¹¹⁸. God’s cognition is not constituted by a form that must be applied to a matter external to it; rather, God creates – or generates – matter itself according to the rules (forms) of its thought. More precisely, one could argue that the term “matter” is not truly legitimate when referring to the kind of knowledge possessed by an infinite understanding. From its perspective, matter is entirely reduced to the rational rules governing its production, since nothing remains impenetrable to its thought. For God, matter is nothing but form itself. Consequently, the distinction between sensibility and understanding also dissolves completely, for an infinite understanding does not encounter any matter that could be properly *perceived*.

Now, even if the assumption of the idea of an infinite understanding allows Maimon to remove the rigidity of the Kantian distinction between form and matter, this simple introduction alone would not be enough to explain how, for us human beings endowed with a finite understanding, the *quaestio juris* can be resolved. If the distinction between understanding and sensibility remains insurmountable due to the limitations of our cognitive faculties, what practical relevance does the hypothesis of an infinite understanding hold for us? In other words, if only an infinite understanding has complete and immediate access to the laws governing the connection between events in the phenomenal world, how can assuming its existence be useful to us, given that these same laws remain inaccessible to our understanding?

Maimon’s response lies in a concise, yet fundamental clarification found in the quotation above. He underlies that our understanding “is just the same [*ist eben derselbe*]” as God’s, albeit “in a limited way”. This remark is crucial, since it underlies that Maimon conceives the distinction between finite and infinite understanding in a *quantitative*, rather than *qualitative* manner¹¹⁹. A distinction of this kind keeps open the possibility of a *dynamic* interaction between the divine and

¹¹⁷ See also Atlas 1964, p. 95.

¹¹⁸ As we will see, however, despite Maimon’s stated intention to avoid reverting to a form of pre-critical metaphysics, the structure of his arguments often appears unable to fully escape this difficulty

¹¹⁹ On this point, see Beiser 2002, p. 256-257; Franks 2003, pp. 206-207.

human understanding, allowing the latter to strive toward ever greater conformity with the former. By contrast, a qualitative distinction would make this impossible, as our understanding would be, in principle, not only incapable of *attaining* the knowledge of an infinite one but even of *attempting* to do so. Maimon's view fosters the idea of an ongoing, dynamic engagement with knowledge, in which human understanding is not cut off from the divine but rather on a continuum with it. In other words, in order to sidestep the radical consequences of Humean doubt, Maimon argues that we must rehabilitate the rationalistic assumption of a divine understanding, which serves as a guiding model for our own knowledge.

I thus agree with Beiser when he argues that “the resolution of skeptical doubt now lies in the field of action rather than contemplation”¹²⁰. Only in this way can we challenge the idea that our knowledge is inevitably finite and static, and with it, the notion that our relationship with the object of knowledge is purely reflective. According to Maimon, the object is not simply something that stands *before us*, whose formal properties we may define while its material and contingent aspects remain untouched and impenetrable¹²¹. As we have seen, the inability to determine the material aspect of objects would lead to the inability to determine *objects altogether*. As long as we remain trapped in a dualistic conception of knowledge, which assumes that form must be extrinsically applied to matter, overcoming skepticism remains impossible¹²². Instead, objective knowledge requires *action*: it involves an active, asymptotic *transformation* of the object, even in its material aspect, into a series of rational relations in the attempt to fully comprehend it. This is what Maimon meant in the *Wörterbuch* regarding the solution to the antinomy of thought when he wrote that “the completeness of thinking an object requires that nothing in it be merely given, but that everything must be thought”¹²³. Naturally, the complete comprehension of the object is unattainable for us, as the knowledge of infinite understanding remains a *regulative* idea of reason. We can approach it but can never fully achieve the complete transparency between form and matter, a priori and a posteriori, which remains God's exclusive prerogative¹²⁴.

Moreover, the quantitative characterization of the distinction between divine and human understanding leads directly to the reformulation of another distinction, which is internal to the very

¹²⁰ Beiser 2002, p. 256.

¹²¹ Of course, it would be entirely incorrect to reduce Kant's theory of knowledge to mere contemplativism. After all, according to Kant, the *objects* of knowledge are actively constructed by the spontaneous operation of the understanding. However, Maimon sees a problem in the rigid distinction between *given* matter and *produced* form, as it reintroduces a contemplative element into Kantian epistemology and makes it difficult to justify their connection.

¹²² “For if we simply contemplate or reflect upon an object, we do not change it, and so the dualism between subject and object persists; but as long as that dualism remains, we have made no progress toward acquiring knowledge. The only means of overcoming the despair of skepticism, then, is through acting, for only in acting upon the world do I change it, and so diminish the subject-object dualism” (Beiser 2003, p. 248).

¹²³ *MGW*, III 186.

¹²⁴ On this topic, see also Atlas 1969-1970, p. 376.

structure of human cognition. I will explore this issue in more detail in the following section. For now, it is enough to note that, if in divine knowledge sensibility is entirely absorbed into the understanding, then in human beings, sensibility is simply a mark of the understanding's limitation rather than an independent faculty. As Maimon explicitly states, restoring once again the Wolffian-Leibnizian tradition against Kant, "both flow from one and the same cognitive source [*Erkenntnisquelle*] (the difference lies only in the degree of completeness of this cognition)"¹²⁵. Sensibility is not qualitatively distinct from understanding, but just an incomplete and obscure version of it. Our perception of "matter", then, is nothing more than a sign of the understanding's limitation: when I perceive a something that is "given", it is because my understanding fails to grasp the rational laws which governs its production. Otherwise, the object would dissolve entirely into its rules, leaving no "matter" to resist our conceptualization. The human understanding's asymptotic approach to the divine can thus be understood as the progressive elimination of sensibility from our knowledge, aiming to make the latter increasingly aligned with its object.

Now, before proceeding, I should point out that these considerations will ultimately help us understand the second problem Maimon raises in the Introduction to the *Essay*, which I have set aside until now: the connection between synthetic judgments and our finite understanding. Maimon's rehabilitation of a quantitative difference between infinite and finite understanding has profound implications for Kant's own distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. According to Maimon, their difference is not determined by their belonging to qualitatively distinct branches of knowledge (logic on one side, physics and mathematics on the other), but by the *degree* of their necessity. In God's cognition, there is no room for synthetic judgments, as every property of an object is already contained within the concept of the object itself. For an infinite understanding, all knowledge is immediate and complete; there is no gap between the concept and the reality it represents. In contrast to human cognition, which requires the synthesis of concepts and intuitions to form judgments, divine cognition encompasses the totality of each object within its concept, without any need for an act of synthesis or empirical investigation. As Maimon writes, synthetic judgements "derive their existence from the incompleteness of our concepts"¹²⁶. This is why, contrary to the latter, for analytic judgements the *quaestio juris* does not even arise¹²⁷, since there is no form that has to be applied on a matter, but everything is already contained in the former.

This does not mean that Maimon does not recognize the belonging of different judgments to different kinds of knowledge. However, this same distinction is determined by the extent to which these forms of knowledge are necessary for our understanding. Logical propositions are analytic for

¹²⁵ *MGW*, II 63.

¹²⁶ *MGW*, II 65.

¹²⁷ See *MGW*, II 60.

us because, within the framework of human cognition, they involve no synthesis of matter and form; rather, they are entirely self-contained within the structure of formal reasoning. In other words, logical truths are derived purely from the principles of identity and non-contradiction, without any reference to empirical or intuitive content. The statement $A=A$ is just as necessary for our understanding as it is for the infinite understanding. By contrast, the propositions of physics are synthetic for us but analytic for the divine understanding, as only the latter fully comprehends the real rational relations that govern the interaction between physical objects, thus reducing the latter to their formal rules. In the case of synthetic propositions, we can “at best ascribe the highest degree of probability to [them], but there is no way that we can ascribe apodictic certainty to them. To be able to do so we must assume that the (for us) synthetic connection between the subject and the predicate must have an inner ground [*einen innern Grund*]”¹²⁸. In other words, our finite understanding can, at best, assign a high degree of probability to the propositions of physics but can never establish their necessity. The latter can only be determined through complete cognition of the “inner ground” of the connection between subject and predicate – something only an infinite understanding can achieve. If we do not know what this foundation consists of, we cannot even assert *that* it actually exists, and therefore we cannot establish a necessary connection between subject and predicate.

Moreover, it is also important to emphasize the fact that this distinction is not static and definitive. As Gasperoni argues, “[t]he difference between analytic and synthetic judgements is a dynamical difference”¹²⁹. If our goal is to make our knowledge increasingly conform to the cognition of an infinite understanding, then this is tantamount to arguing that our goal is to strive to make our synthetic judgements conform to analytic judgements through an asymptotic process.

Now, one might ask what justifies Maimon in claiming that our understanding is merely a less refined version of the infinite one. In other words, what proves that the distinction between these two types of knowledge is only quantitative, and therefore *dynamic*, rather than qualitative, and thus *static*? The philosopher argues that the similarity between these two ways of knowing is determined by a specific discipline, namely mathematics. He writes in the *Progresses*:

God, as an infinite representative force [*als eine unendliche Vorstellungskraft*], conceives from all eternity all possible beings, that is, he conceives himself as limited *in every possible way*. He does not think discursively as we do, but his thoughts are at the same time *presentations* [*Darstellungen*]. If one objects that we have no concept of such a way of thinking, I reply: in fact, we do have a concept of it, as we possess it in part ourselves. All concepts of mathematics are *thought* by

¹²⁸ *MGW*, II 61.

¹²⁹ Gasperoni 2012, p. 123.

us and at the same time *presented as real objects* through a priori construction. In this, therefore, we are *similar to God* [*Wir sind also hierin Gott ähnlich*]¹³⁰.

In mathematics, therefore, lies a trace of the similarity between our understanding and the divine understanding. As we have seen, the material component of mathematical objects is not passively given to us through sensibility but is genuinely *produced* through a rational rule of construction. As Maimon writes a few lines below, mathematics thus “teaches us the difference between mere discursive and *real thought*”¹³¹. In discursive thought, we can think of any concept without knowing whether or not a real object corresponds to it before having an actual experience of that object. Discursive thought should attain its reality only through the application of a concept to an object – an application that, however, as we have seen, is always problematic in the case of empirical cognition. In mathematical thought, on the other hand, the reality of the concept is immediately determined by the possibility of its construction. If we think a right-angled triangle, we *construct* it in our a priori intuition of space, and therefore we *know* that the right-angled triangle is a real object, since it satisfies the requirements established by the law of determinability¹³². On the contrary, we can think the concept of a “regular decahedron”, but we can never construct it in intuition. Therefore, this concept is “objectively false, or it has no object”¹³³.

The possibility of a priori constructing real objects according to rational rules thus establishes the analogy between our understanding and that of God. However, it is also important to emphasize that Maimon speaks of a *similarity*, not an *identity*, between the two. The impossibility of fully equating these forms of understanding is not only due to the fact that we can construct *only* mathematical objects, whereas in the divine mind *every* object is constructed.

I also believe that the very process by which we construct mathematical objects carries within it a mark of distinction from the creative process of the divine understanding. In other terms, the impossibility of fully equating these forms of understanding does not rest solely on the distinction between the *objects* being constructed but extends to the very nature of the *constructive act* itself. First of all, we saw that the knowledge of the divine understanding is an analytic one. Unlike human cognition, which relies on empirical investigation to uncover new properties of objects – as in physics – or on the constructive process of pure intuition, as in mathematics, such an understanding grasps

¹³⁰ *MGW*, IV 42.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*.

¹³² The distinction between thought and cognition is clearly brought out here. Thought is governed by the formal laws of logic. For cognition of mathematical objects, however, formal thought is insufficient, but the possibility of construction of the objects is indispensable. In the construction of the objects by intuition a material element is added to the formal. The concept of a decahedron is a logically possible concept. The material of intuition, namely, space, resists the construction of the decahedron; the concept therefore has no objective reality” (Atlas 1964, p. 227).

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

the totality of an object instantaneously and completely. This suggests that God's creative act is not sequential or dependent on a *process* of synthesis; rather, it is atemporal and *immediate*. As Maimon writes, "the infinite thinking being thinks all possible concepts all at once with the greatest completeness"¹³⁴. The productive act of human understanding in mathematics is thus different from the productive act of God, as it involves a temporal, i.e., progressive construction according to rules in the a priori intuition of space. As a consequence of this, mathematical propositions are not, for our finite understanding, analytic propositions. Let us read for example the following passage:

Suppose I do not possess a representation of a straight line, and someone asks me, "can a straight line be non-straight at the same time?". I will certainly not put my judgement off until I have a representation of it (assuming that I don't know what a straight line is), rather I will have my answer on hand at once: that this is impossible. By contrast if he asks me, "is a straight line the shortest?" I will answer, "I don't know, perhaps yes, perhaps no", until I have acquired I a representation of a straight line. The reason for this is that the principle of identity is the most universal *form* of our cognition, and hence it must apply to all objects in general, no matter how they are otherwise constituted. By contrast, "a straight line is the shortest" is merely the form by means of which we think this determined object, so that as long as we do not possess any representation of the object, we cannot know if this form pertains to it or not¹³⁵.

In the case of the proposition "a straight line cannot be non-straight", we know its truth without the need to *represent* a straight line in intuition, as it is guaranteed by the logical principle of identity, which holds for every possible object. On the contrary, the judgement "a straight line is the shortest (between two points)" cannot be confirmed without *drawing* a straight line in intuition and then comparing it to other possible lines. As Atlas writes, "[c]onstruction of mathematical objects is thus a sort of 'verification' of mathematical propositions"¹³⁶. This process of construction serves as a demonstration of the proposition's validity, grounding mathematical reasoning in intuition rather than relying exclusively on formal thought. This means that, for our understanding, mathematical concepts or propositions always involve a synthesis of a concept and a particular (constructed) intuition, unlike formal logic, whose principles do not refer to any particular object, whether empirical or a priori, given or constructed. This need for a reference to intuition, even if a priori, is completely negated in the case of divine knowledge, where intuition itself is fully identified with the understanding.

¹³⁴ *MGW*, II 183.

¹³⁵ *MGW*, II 169-170.

¹³⁶ Atlas 1964, p. 223. See also *MGW*, III 198: "Mathematics consists entirely of synthetic a priori propositions, that is, rules of the understanding that are given along with the construction of the objects themselves, or more precisely: the faculty of knowledge generates objects in accordance with these rules. Thus, the rules derive their reality from the very presence of the objects".

Although the creation of mathematical objects by a finite understanding brings it closer to divine knowledge, the generative processes of the human and divine minds remain thus fundamentally different. In the case of the human understanding, a mathematical concept can only be constructed by processual transposition of a rational rule into the pure intuition of space. By contrast, in the infinite understanding, there is neither a *process* nor an *extension* of thought into the domain of intuition, since God does not need to verify the reality of its objects by representing or instantiating them in space and time. Rather, all things exist *immediately* and *analytically* within the realm of divine thought.

However, a problem may now emerge. We have seen in section 2.1 that, according to Maimon, mathematical knowledge is the paradigm of every knowledge claiming objectivity. On the other hand, we have now seen that the goal of our understanding is to make synthetic judgments increasingly conform to analytic judgments. The latter thus appear to represent the *ultimate* standard of all objective and necessary cognition, as they embody the *complete* self-transparency of thought with itself. But what, then, is the status of mathematics, if for us it always remains synthetic knowledge? It seems that preserving an intuitive dimension within it distances mathematics from the status of an objective science. In the *Wörterbuch* Maimon indeed distinguishes between the objective necessity of formal logic, which is the only analytical knowledge for a finite understanding, the subjective necessity of mathematics and the arbitrariness of empirical physics¹³⁷. Logic and mathematics are both necessary due to their a priori status: both disciplines do not refer to any object that is given a posteriori. In the first case we do not find any determinate object at all, while in the second the objects are entirely produced. However, mathematics is only subjectively necessary, for its objects are constructed in pure intuitions, which exist only for finite rational beings like us¹³⁸. As Maimon writes, “perhaps some thinking being, or even I myself, could, under certain circumstances, construct a triangle with more or fewer angles, since this [thought] in itself contains no contradiction”¹³⁹. Contrary to the rules of formal logic, which hold for every thinking being, Maimon argues that mathematical concepts are not per se universal and objectively necessary, for it is always possible to think some other being whose thought is not conditioned by pure intuitions like ours. Mathematical

¹³⁷ *MGW*, III 198.

¹³⁸ On the synthetic character of mathematics, see also Kroner 1921, pp. 344-353. However, Freudenthal underscores Maimon’s ambiguity on this issue. In certain passages from the first part of the *Essay*, Maimon maintains that mathematical knowledge is not genuinely synthetic, asserting that the truth of a proposition such as “only a straight line can be the shortest path between two points” can be demonstrated analytically (see *MGW*, II 66). Nevertheless, in the course of composing the *Essay* – possibly influenced by his correspondence with Kant – Maimon appears to have recognized the impossibility of such an approach, at least for a finite understanding, thereby acknowledging the synthetic nature of mathematics. For a thoroughgoing analysis, see Freudenthal 2006.

¹³⁹ *MGW*, III 199.

laws are thus not necessary in themselves but only in relation to the particular constitution of our cognitive faculties¹⁴⁰.

And yet, what are we to make now of those statements in which Maimon explicitly asserted, against the empiricists, the objectivity of mathematics? As we saw, the philosopher placed special emphasis on this point to demonstrate that mathematics proves the possibility of an objective application of the transcendental forms of thought. Fortunately, Maimon explicitly addresses this point in the Concluding Note, when he discusses the philosophical proposal of the “rational dogmatists and empirical skeptics”, among which he includes (only) himself. After having clarified that they (namely, he) have extended the use of reason further than skeptics like Hume, he also affirms:

On the other hand, however, they doubt the fact itself, i.e. that reason possesses or uses these forms; they will only hear of a single form, namely that of identity and contradiction, to which they attribute objective reality. By contrast, they are certain that a merely subjective reality should be attributed to the other forms, but because of their universality in relation to us, these forms serve in exactly the same way I as if they had objective reality, so that the interest of reason is not narrowed in any way. If I am asked: who are these rational dogmatists? then for the moment I can name no one but myself¹⁴¹.

This passage suggests that, even if only formal logic possesses objective necessity in itself, we can nevertheless treat mathematical knowledge *as if* it did, insofar as it holds universal validity for us. In other words, Maimon appears to regard the existence of beings capable of constructing a triangle with more than three angles as irrelevant; what matters is securing the objective validity of mathematics within the bounds of our transcendental structures. No human being, under normal conditions, can conceive of a triangle without constructing it in pure intuition as a geometric figure with three angles and three sides. This feature of mathematical knowledge shows that, even if it lacks the absolute necessity characteristic of formal logic, it nonetheless provides an objective and internally consistent standard within the limits of human cognition.

It is thus possible to argue that, although the ultimate paradigm of necessary and objective knowledge is the analytical knowledge of an infinite understanding, the constitution of our finite mind prevents us from ever achieving this kind of cognition. As we saw, the latter remains an *idea of reason*, i.e., something we can indefinitely approach but can never fully grasp. Our cognition, therefore, can only be processual and synthetic, both in empirical and mathematical knowledge. For

¹⁴⁰ Atlas suggests that here lies Maimon’s anticipation of non-Euclidean geometry. See Atlas 1964, pp. 238.

¹⁴¹ *MGW*, II 432-433.

example, Maimon argues that when the understanding prescribes to the imagination to construct in intuition a space closed by three lines, it does not know in advance that this enclosed space will also have three angles. Thus, the three angles are not analytically contained in the concept of a space enclosed by three lines. The understanding *discovers* the properties of the triangle only *after* constructing it¹⁴². However, contrary to empirical knowledge, the properties we identify in the triangle are real and not merely arbitrary, for the reasons we have specified in the preceding sections: we cannot think a close space with three angles without thinking a triangle.

On these grounds, it is clear that, for a finite understanding like ours, real thought always entails synthetic knowledge. Even though only logic is universal and necessary in the strict sense of the term, it cannot be productive model for our cognition, as it refers only to objects in general rather than to real and determinate ones. Contrary to what happens with an infinite understanding, analytic knowledge is for us empty and merely formal. Consequently, although the analytic model (as it exists in the mind of God) remains the ultimate standard of objective knowledge, mathematics is the only form of cognition that enables us to approximate this standard through an asymptotical process. Mathematics offers us a model of thought that enables us to construct objects, and to have a real knowledge of them, as it is not affected by the problems concerning the *quaestio juris*.

Let us now summarize what we have argued so far in this section. We started with a quotation from Maimon's *Wörterbuch*, where the philosopher frames the problem of the relation between a priori and a posteriori in the terms of a universal antinomy of thought. He also hinted at the possibility of a solution to this antinomy through the concept of the "thing-in-itself". From what we have discussed, it is clear that the "thing-in-itself" to which Maimon refers is the idea of reason of a divine understanding. Rather than serving as a transcendent foundation that guarantees the objectivity of our perceptions, the *Ding an sich* functions as an epistemic principle inherent to our transcendental structures, making possible the synthesis of the two components of knowledge¹⁴³. This, in turn, allows us to view the distinction between matter and form not as fixed and rigid but as fluid and dynamic. Since our understanding differs from the infinite one only in degree, it must be capable of progressively reducing matter to form through an asymptotic process. Mathematics is the discipline whose epistemic status guarantees the viability of this procedure. It occupies a position between the synthetic, yet arbitrary, thought of physical science and the analytical, yet unproductive, thought of analytical knowledge, aiming to render even this distinction a flexible one. In the *Essay* Maimon suggests the following: if our thought is not, in its essence, qualitatively different from the divine one, then all branches of knowledge can be made to align as closely as possible with the analytical

¹⁴² See *MGW*, III 198-199.

¹⁴³ I will focus in more detail on the status of the "thing-in-itself" in Maimon's philosophy in the following sections.

knowledge of God. In other words, the same fluid relationship between form and matter must apply to the different modes of cognition of a finite understanding. Achieving this requires addressing the *Quid Juris?* in empirical knowledge – a challenge Maimon takes up through his theory of differentials.

2.1.4 Generating the empirical

In the preceding section we analyzed Maimon's attempt to solve the *quaestio juris* through the introduction of the idea of an infinite understanding and the fluidification of the distinction between form and matter. At the same time, we saw that mathematics is the discipline that exemplifies the actuality of this dynamism for a finite understanding, for its objects are materially constructed according to a formal rule. However, this means that for our understanding, mathematics does represent a problem with respect to the *questio juris*, since it does not involve the application of a form to a given matter. Mathematical propositions *are* real ones, since they fulfill the requirements established by the law of determinability.

Thus, when Maimon highlights the intention to resolve this issue, he is not referring to mathematical knowledge but to empirical one. In this sense, mathematics should be regarded only as a tool or a model for legitimizing a form of objectivity also in empirical physics. In other words, the goal is to develop a conceptual framework in which the objects of physics are not seen as composed of matter shaped by an applied form, but rather as *genetically emerging* from the form itself. As Maimon himself writes: “the understanding does not subject something given a posteriori to its a priori rules; rather it lets it arise [*läßt entstehen*] in accordance with these rules (which I believe is the only way to answer the question *Quid juris?* in a wholly satisfactory way)”¹⁴⁴. In the aforementioned letter to Kant, where Maimon lays out what he sees as the problematic aspects of transcendental philosophy, he identifies the “ideas of the understanding” as the answer to the *quaestio juris* in relation to empirical knowledge¹⁴⁵. While the introduction of the divine understanding has shown that a solution is *possible*, the ideas of understanding should explain *how* this problem can be properly addressed. Or, to put it another way: if the infinite understanding represents the *possibility* of fully uniting matter and form, its ideas of understanding act as the conceptual tools that should *realize* this synthesis. Let's now examine what Maimon means by this term.

¹⁴⁴ *MGW*, II 82.

¹⁴⁵ “3.) A newly noted kind of ideas, which I call *ideas of the understanding*, and which point to material totality just as the *ideas of reason* you mentioned point to formal totality. I believe that in this way, I have opened up a new perspective for answering the aforementioned question *Quid Juris?*” (*BW*, XI 16-17).

The third section of the *Essay* is explicitly dedicated to an analysis of the distinction between the “ideas of understanding” and the “ideas of reason”. The first are described as “the material completeness [*Vollständigkeit*] of a concept, in so far as this completeness cannot be given in intuition”¹⁴⁶, while the second represent “the formal completeness of a concept”¹⁴⁷. In an attempt to clarify this distinction, Maimon provides an example. Imagine we are constructing a circle. The rule of its production tells us that, from a given point, we must draw an infinite number of identical lines, and connecting their endpoints should generate the circle’s circumference. The possibility of this rule can be shown in intuition by keeping one endpoint fixed (P) and rotating the opposite endpoint around P until the circle is complete. Through this process we should obtain the *formal* completeness of the circle, that is, its ostensive exhibition in the pure intuition of space. However, as Maimon writes, “its material completeness (completeness of the manifold) cannot be given in intuition, because only a finite number of equal lines can be drawn”¹⁴⁸. In other words, even if we actually can draw a circle in pure intuition, we cannot exhibit the totality of its genetic conditions, namely, an infinite number of equal lines starting from the point P. The material completeness of a concept (that is, not its simple instantiation in intuition, but the exhibition of the totality of its genetic conditions) is thus “something that we can come infinitely close to in intuition by means of the successive addition of such lines, and consequently a limit concept [*Gränzbegriff*]”¹⁴⁹. So, while the circumference of the circle is an idea of *reason*, as it formally (symbolically) represents the totality of the conditions necessary for the construction of the circle, this very totality is an idea of the *understanding*¹⁵⁰.

Another useful example is the root of an irrational number, like $\sqrt{2}$. The symbol “ $\sqrt{2}$ ” is conceived by Maimon as an idea of reason, as it formally represents in intuition the totality of the numbers that compose the root of two. However, the actual sequence of these numbers, namely “1.4142135...”, cannot be ostensively exhibited in its entirety, as it is infinite, and is therefore an idea of the understanding. Our definition of the root of two can therefore never be complete but can only be expressed as an asymptotic approximation in the display of the series of numbers which compose it. As Maimon writes, “[a] root of 2 has a meaning [...] and is thus possible *formaliter*. But it is not possible *materialiter* because in this case no object (determinate number) can be given”¹⁵¹. Unlike the root of a negative number, such as $\sqrt{-a}$, which is impossible both *formaliter* and *materialiter*, the

¹⁴⁶ *MGW*, II 75.

¹⁴⁷ *MGW*, II 80.

¹⁴⁸ *MGW*, II 75.

¹⁴⁹ *MGW*, II 76.

¹⁵⁰ For a thoroughgoing analysis of the distinction between ideas of reason and ideas of the understanding, see also Moiso 1972, pp. 144-151.

¹⁵¹ *MGW*, II 58.

root of two yields a determinate result – namely, a number that, when multiplied by itself, equals two. However, due to its irrational nature, this number cannot be fully exhibited in intuition.

Now, it's important to highlight that this distinction between two kinds of ideas is not just formal or extrinsic; rather, it represents the very conditions that make our understanding's operation possible. If, as we have seen, thought is always a process, then the ideas of reason function as the regulative ideal of its full realization, a horizon of completeness that our cognition strives toward but never fully attains. In contrast, the ideas of the understanding designate the individual steps within this process, marking both the necessary stages of thought and the inherent impossibility of bringing it to a final, closed conclusion. Naturally, this impossibility must be conceived as a fruitful one, in so far as it constantly keeps the dynamism of our thought open and active, thus avoiding the exhaustion of the process itself. Using Rametta's words, "the mismatch between totality in the material sense (idea of the understanding) and totality in the formal sense (idea of reason) does not signify a failure; on the contrary, it is the condition for the *productivity* of the understanding"¹⁵².

The role of the ideas of the understanding is to establish the rational principle governing the production of objects. In the case of the circle, the material totality of the lines composing this geometric figure must be regarded as the fundamental condition for its construction and, consequently, for its very existence. However, due to the limitations of our understanding, we are unable to represent this totality in a figurative way. Instead, we must settle for an approximation – namely, the symbolic representation of the circle's circumference, understood as the outcome of the rules given by our understanding. God, on the contrary, can think the totality of the ideas of the understanding, for in its cognition there is no distinction between these latter and the ideas of reason, and so no asymptotical process of approximation.

However, if, as we have seen, no qualitative distinction exists between different levels of knowledge – specifically, between empirical and mathematical knowledge – then there is likewise no fundamental difference between the *objects* of these disciplines. In other words, empirical objects, like mathematical ones, must also be understood as composed of ideas of the understanding. The only difference is that empirical objects appear to our understanding with a greater degree of opacity. In their case, not only can we not exhibit the rules of their production in their totality, but we cannot even *know* these rules themselves.

¹⁵² Rametta 2019b, p. 181. On this topic, see also Furlani 2019: "[According to Maimon], precisely because there is a gap and an irreducibility between the real and perception, the understanding is activated and its intervention is fully justified from a transcendental point of view. The gap between reality and perception does not stop knowledge. This gap does not reduce the scope of knowledge to the irreducible relation between the real and perception; on the contrary, as has been said, the opposite is true: knowledge would come to a halt if it were able to perceive contents and data in an immediate, positive, and certain way.

The rational rules that constitute the ground of empirical objects are called by Maimon *differentials*, taking this term from Leibniz's infinitesimal calculus:

These differentials of objects are the so-called *noumena*; but the objects themselves arising from them are the *phenomena*. With respect to intuition = 0, the differential of any such object in itself is $dx = 0$, $dy = 0$ etc.; however, their relations are not = 0, but can rather be given determinately [*bestimmt angegeben werden können*] in the intuitions arising from them. These *noumena* are ideas of reason serving as principles to explain how objects arise according to certain rules of the understanding¹⁵³.

Now, before analyzing the function of the differentials within Maimon's attempt to bridge the gap between the transcendental and the empirical, it is important to briefly consider their status, which is explicitly addressed in this passage. Maimon refers to differentials as "*noumena*", considering them the true (rational) cause responsible of the production of empirical appearances (*phenomena*). We will explore this issue in more detail later, for it is crucial to correctly understand the position of Maimon's epistemology in the context of the post-Kantian debate. For now, it is sufficient to note the following: Maimon clearly aims to distance himself from any realist interpretation of Kant's thing-in-itself. As we will see better in the next section, the ground of the appearances is not a *thing* that exists, so to speak, on a transcendent level and beyond the appearances themselves; rather, it is the *immanent* rational rule governing their genetic production¹⁵⁴. This is why, in later writings, Maimon will harshly criticize both Reinhold's and Schulze's dogmatic conception of the thing-in-itself. As he writes in the *Streifereien*, according to Reinhold "the thing-in-itself is the object, insofar as it is conceived as that to which the mere content of representations belongs"¹⁵⁵. On the contrary, Maimon believes that the thing-in-itself cannot be neither an *object* nor a *thing* – for neither of them can exist outside consciousness – but only "the limits (ideas) of appearances themselves, or of the final members of their series"¹⁵⁶. Thus, the real grounding of appearances is not an external object but rather an immanent *process*, namely, the rational structure that governs how empirical appearances emerge.

There is no discontinuity, then, between the thing-in-itself and its appearance. The appearance is not something separate or distinct from the underlying ideas; rather, it is the sum total of the genetic rules that govern its production. In other words, appearances are nothing more than the outward

¹⁵³ *MGW*, II 32.

¹⁵⁴ "The differentials perform the task of Kant's thing-in-itself which, as interpreted by Maimon, express the ultimate goal of the epistemological process, the object corresponding to the infinite mind as its cognized object" (Bergman 1976, p. 62). See also Atlas 1969-1970; Beiser 1987, p. 298; Lord 2011, pp. 118-119. For a different and realist interpretation of the concept of the thing-in-itself in Maimon's thought, see Karampatsou 2023.

¹⁵⁵ *MGW*, IV 228. For a (similar) critique on Schulze's conception of the thing-in-itself, see *MGW*, V 368-369.

¹⁵⁶ *MGW*, III 201.

manifestation of these same rules. However, they are also the trace of our inability to fully grasp the noumena that compose them. Something appears to us as an appearance precisely because we *cannot* fully grasp its differentials. The appearance thus signifies an opacity, a resistance that manifests itself in the form of an empirical object and defies complete rationalization. In contrast, the divine understanding does not think in terms of *phenomena* but only in terms of *noumena*, as it can entirely resolve the former into the laws that determine their genetic constitution.

As we will see in more detail, this has also great implications for the very meaning of the relation between subject and object. As Duffy writes, “what is immediately striking about Maimon’s account of the concept of the sensible object is the fact that for Maimon there are no objects outside consciousness. Maimon gives new meaning to the Kantian idea of the ‘thing in itself’ by conceiving ‘the thing itself’ and phenomena solely as functions of knowledge”¹⁵⁷. In other terms, sensible objects, even in their material aspect, do not refer to something that exists outside our consciousness. Rather, they are merely the correlate of the latter’s limitation. We represent objects *as if* they were outside of us only because we are unaware of their rational cause, namely, of their *noumena*¹⁵⁸.

One last remark on this issue before proceeding. In the final sentence of the quotation above, Maimon refers to differentials as “ideas of reason”. However, we have seen that the ideas meant to constitute the material totality of the genetic rules of objects are actually the ideas of the understanding. In other parts of the text, Maimon indeed defines differentials in terms of the latter¹⁵⁹. In a comment to the English translation of the *Essay*, Welchman argues that “[i]t seems that at times, as here, he uses ‘ideas of reason’ in a loose sense to cover both these kinds of idea”¹⁶⁰. In other words, Maimon would use the term “idea of reason” in two ways: a narrower sense, distinguishing it from the ideas of the understanding, and a broader one, encompassing both. Given Maimon’s well-known lack of terminological precision, this hypothesis cannot be entirely ruled out. However, it could also be possible, as Rametta argues, that this fluctuation does not stem from a mere lack of conceptual rigor but, on the contrary, from the theoretical stratification of the concept of the differential¹⁶¹. In this sense, the differential would integrate the notion of the material totality of the rules governing

¹⁵⁷ See Duffy 2014, p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ See Ivi, p. 6; Marinelli 2024, pp. 35-44. On this basis, in a letter to Reinhold Maimon contrasts the latter’s conception of the distinction between subject and object. Maimon argues that “[a]ccording to Mr. Reinhold, an object is that which is distinguished in consciousness by the subject from the subject and the representation, and to which the representation, differentiated by the subject, is related”. On the contrary, according to Maimon there is no distinction between the object and its subjective representation, for the object is “a necessary synthesis of the understanding, i.e., the connection of several representations through a synthetic unity of the understanding” (*MGW*, IV 218).

¹⁵⁹ “According to this explanation, mathematics contains both ideas of the understanding and ideas of reason. Differential magnitudes are ideas of the understanding since they are real objects determined by means of a priori conditions; but they cannot be constructed, i.e. presented in intuition, because they must be viewed in abstraction from all magnitude (because they are expressed merely by means of a function-relation that, as a numerical relation, is continuously variable). So they are ideas of the understanding” (*MGW*, II 373).

¹⁶⁰ Maimon 2010, p. 21.

¹⁶¹ See Rametta 2019b, p. 179.

the production of phenomena (idea of the understanding) and the idea of the full realization of the reduction of objects into these very rules (idea of reason)¹⁶², which is attainable only by God. This reading preserves the terminological ambiguity of the concept of the differential, emphasizing its antinomic yet productive nature.

I thus believe that the term “*noumenon*” refers to the differential conceived in both senses: as an idea of reason and as an idea of the understanding, it always denotes something that is not directly ostensible in the domain of appearances. We can perceive neither the complete formal reduction of empirical objects to the rules of their production (idea of reason) nor the material totality of *these rules themselves* (idea of the understanding). Focusing on this latter meaning, the differentials lack any extensive properties – they do not occupy space, nor do they exhibit measurable magnitude in the way empirical appearances do. However, according to Maimon, the fact that differentials cannot be apprehended through direct empirical intuition does not negate their existence. As Maimon asserts, “the metaphysically infinitely small is real because quality can certainly be considered in itself abstracted from all quantity”¹⁶³. This statement underscores the idea that the differential is not reducible to mere quantitative relations; rather, it expresses purely qualitative properties. It is precisely this qualitative nature that ensures the differential’s role as the foundational principle underlying the various attributes of empirical objects. As Maimon stated in the above quotation, with respect to sensible intuition, each individual differential, such as $d(x)$ and $d(y)$, is equal to 0, indicating the impossibility of their ostensive exhibition¹⁶⁴. Let us read also the following passage:

if an extensive magnitude is reduced to its differential, it can nevertheless be thought as a ratio of extensive magnitudes because of its intensive magnitude. To explain this, consider a triangle; now move one side in relation to the opposite angle so that it always remains parallel to itself; do this until the triangle becomes an infinitely small [triangle] (a differential). The extensive magnitude of the sides then completely disappears and is reduced to their differentials; but the relation of the sides always

¹⁶² “However, if we consider the process of reduction as complete, we then transform the differential into a noumenon. Or rather: the noumenon expresses the differential as an idea of *reason*, insofar as it presents the reduction process of the extensive magnitude to zero as *completed*” (Ivi, p. 180).

¹⁶³ *MGW*, II 355.

¹⁶⁴ This Maimonian conception of the theory of differentials does not fully align with mathematical theory. As demonstrated by Cauchy, Weierstrass, and, later, Russell, differentials have no meaning or value when considered as abstract entities independent of the derivative $d(x)/d(y)$. Maimon appears to suggest something similar when he asserts that the values of $d(x)$ and $d(y)$, taken in isolation, are equal to zero. However, he seems to imply that this lack of value applies only at the level of empirical extension. In other words, while $d(x)$ may be zero in intuition, it still retains an intensional (qualitative) value on a non-empirical level. However, I believe Bergman is right in arguing that this discrepancy between the mathematical and philosophical approaches should not necessarily diminish the value of the latter. As he writes, “[t]he objection [...] is justified only from the standpoint of the mathematician. It does not deny the meaningful positing of the philosophical problem, for this problem exists in its own right and not for the sake of mathematics. It is unfortunate that Maimon and Cohen appropriated the term ‘differential’ and the symbol dx , thus provoking the mathematicians to a criticism that is based upon a mutual misunderstanding. It would have been possible for both sides to dispense with the term and symbol although the *root* of positing the problem is the same for both” (Bergman 1976, p. 264).

remains the same because it is not the relation of number to number with respect to one and the same unit, but the relation of unit to unit. Consequently, the intensive magnitude (the quality of the quantum) is in this case the differential of the extensive quantities, and the extensive quantities are the integral of the intensive magnitude¹⁶⁵.

This extract, which Maimon added in the Notes and Clarifications at the end of the essay, attempts to elucidate the qualitative nature of differentials and the possibility of their existence apart from any ostensive intuitive exhibition. If we consider a right-angled triangle and progressively slide its base perpendicularly to the other leg, in the direction of the opposite angle, we progressively reduce the figure while keeping the ratios between the sides unchanged. As we carry out this process, the triangle's extensive magnitude approaches zero, yet the relationship between its sides remains unchanged. In other words, when a triangle is reduced to its differential, it can no longer be exhibited in intuition, but its qualitative dimension persists, expressed by the ratio of its sides¹⁶⁶. This suggests that differentials are not merely vanishing quantities but retain a qualitative structure, independent of their extensive magnitude.

The differential, then, is a real yet non-empirical condition of the very possibility of empirical difference and variation, an entity whose reality is attested not by ostensible representation but by its function as the ground of change and differentiation in the empirical world¹⁶⁷. As Cassirer noted, “[the understanding] derives, through its peculiar and characteristic function, the diversity of things from the diversity of their principles of generation [*Erzeugungsprinzipien*]”¹⁶⁸, i.e., the differentials.

However, Maimon also precises that, even though each individual differential, taken in isolation, is equal to 0, their *relation* is not = 0, and can therefore “be given determinately in the intuitions arising from them”¹⁶⁹. In other words, it is not the individual differentials themselves that reveal a determinate extensive magnitude, but rather their interplay. “The extensive magnitude”, Maimon writes, “is, so to speak, the schema of the intensive magnitude because intensive magnitude, along with its relations, cannot be perceived directly and in itself but only by means of extensive magnitude”¹⁷⁰. Here, Maimon underscores that the extensive magnitude functions as a perceptible, figurative representation of the intensive magnitude. The intensive magnitude cannot be directly perceived by a finite mind like ours, but it is made intelligible through its manifestation in the

¹⁶⁵ *MGW*, II 394-395.

¹⁶⁶ See also Bergman 1976, p. 60; Valpione 2012, pp. 25-26; Rametta 2019b, p. 179-180.

¹⁶⁷ As we will see in the next section, Maimon refers to the differentials as “fictions”. However, I will argue that there is no contradiction between the “real” and “fictional” nature of the differentials. On the contrary, this tension reflects the very function of the differential, caught between the realm of pure concepts of the understanding and empirical matter in order to bring them to synthesis. On this issue, see also Engstler 1990, pp. 139-143.

¹⁶⁸ Cassirer 1920, p. 98.

¹⁶⁹ *MGW*, II 32.

¹⁷⁰ *MGW*, II 121.

extensive magnitude, even if only the infinite understanding can properly grasp the totality of the differentials which constitute the structure of empirical reality¹⁷¹.

Given these considerations, we can now better understand the systematic role of the differentials within the framework of Maimon's epistemology. Their primary function is to address the problems within Kant's schematism doctrine. We saw that Maimon criticized Kant's idea that we *apply* a category to a given manifold in order to bring the latter to a synthetic unity. The heterogeneity between form and matter makes this process untenable. As we saw, according to Maimon, the principle of causality would apply to two *objects in general* A and B that stand in a particular relation of succession, but not to two *concrete* objects of experience that stand in the same relation. In this latter case, the simple time-determination of succession would not be able to distinguish between genuine causal relations and arbitrary ones. Kant's attempt to demonstrate how the categories can be applied to an unorganized material thus proved ineffective

To resolve this issue, Kant would have needed to demonstrate that the intuitions themselves reveal an objective and necessary order, thereby justifying the application of the categories. However, this would have led him into a vicious circle, since, from his perspective, the categories themselves must guarantee the necessity and objectivity of the succession of our perceptions. In other words, Kant would have had to claim that the categories make the perceptions necessary and objective because the perceptions themselves are necessary and objective.

To resolve this impasse, Maimon had two options: he could either stay closer to a Kantian framework by demonstrating how categories actually apply to content lacking necessity and objectivity, or depart from the path of the *Critique* by arguing that the latter are inherent in intuitions themselves. As known, he opted for the second approach. In particular, Maimon believes that objectivity and necessity are already present at the level of intuitions (at least for an infinite understanding), while categories merely *express* in the form of judgements what is contained in the structure of intuitions themselves. In this sense, he would not have fallen into a vicious circle because he would not have assigned the categories the task of organizing a matter that was already organized, but only the task of bringing to expression the rational relations embedded in intuitions themselves. Within this framework, the differentials are precisely the rational elements that ground the objectivity of the relation between sensible objects. After having clarified the real status of differentials, Maimon writes:

This way of considering it is also useful for resolving the question *quid juris?* because the pure concepts of the understanding or categories are never directly related to intuitions, but only to

¹⁷¹ See also Bergman 1976, p. 63.

their elements, and these are ideas of reason concerning the way these intuitions arise; it is through the mediation of these ideas that the categories are related to the intuitions themselves. Just as in higher mathematics we produce the relations of different magnitudes themselves from their differentials, so the understanding (admittedly in an obscure way) produces the real relations of qualities themselves from the real relations of their differentials. So, if we judge that fire melts wax, then this judgement does not relate to fire and wax as objects of intuition, but to their elements, which the understanding thinks in the relation of cause and effect to one another. Namely, I hold that the understanding not only has a capacity to *think* universal relations between determined objects of intuition, but also to *determine* objects by means of relations. As a result, it can legitimately relate different relations to one another a priori¹⁷².

Kant failed to prove that the judgment “fire melts wax” holds objective validity. The mere temporal succession of the two objects is not sufficient to establish with absolute certainty a genuine causal connection between them. Maimon, in response, seeks to demonstrate that objectivity must be grounded in rational and intensive relations, which determine the necessity of this event and, from a transcendental standpoint, *precede* the manifestation of these objects in empirical intuition. As Valpione lucidly notes, “[t]he knowing subject therefore no longer must impose order on a chaotic multiplicity, since the latter is already present at the level of perceptions, which do not capture isolated objects devoid of any relationship. On the contrary, knowledge deals with laws, dependencies, and relationships from the very beginning”¹⁷³.

If the problem was the inability to apply a form to a given matter, due to their heterogeneity, then the matter itself must be reduced to the form, that is, to rational rules, intensive relations, differentials. As Maimon argues in the above quotation, the possibility of justifying the objectivity of the judgement “fire melts wax” does not rely on their merely extrinsic time-determination of succession. Instead, the grounding of this causal relation must be sought in the underlying “elements” – that is, the differentials – which define the lawfulness governing this empirical event. In other words, the possibility of attributing a causal action to fire in relation to the melting of wax is not determined by their sequential occurrence alone. Rather, it is determined by the specific rational relations that these two particular objects, even in their material aspect, maintain with each other.

In other passages the philosopher writes that “the understanding cannot think an object as having already arisen [*entstanden*] but only as arising [*entstehend*], i.e. as flowing [*fliessend*]”¹⁷⁴, or that “the understanding does not subject something given a posteriori to its a priori rules; rather it lets

¹⁷² *MGW*, II 355-356.

¹⁷³ Valpione 2012, p. 23. See also Gasperoni 2012, p. 208: “The ideas of the understanding have the function of making perception possible. Only through the ideas of the understanding it is possible to represent objects”.

¹⁷⁴ *MGW*, II 32.

it arise [*läßt entstehen*] in accordance with these rules”¹⁷⁵. As I have already mentioned, Maimon takes mathematical knowledge to be the paradigm for every *real* knowledge which strives to progressively reach the form of necessity expressed by analytic judgments. If empirical knowledge must aspire to some form of objectivity, then its *objects* must also be thought of according to the model of mathematical objects, namely, as *produced* rather than *given*, as *flowing* rather than *static*. In this sense, the concept of the “given” can no longer be simply assumed as a presupposition but must be rationally grounded¹⁷⁶. As Maimon argued at the end of the quotation, the understanding does not think universal relations between given objects, but *determine* objects by means of relations. In other terms, we must think of objects as the sensible representation of a chain of rational rules which grounds their interplay and their mutual connection. “It is an error”, Maimon also argues, “to believe that things (real objects) must be prior to their relations”¹⁷⁷. Relations are not something applied to pre-existing objects; rather, they are the rules that *generate* objects, not only in their formal aspect but also in their material and empirical differences.

Let’s consider an example to clarify the connection between empirical knowledge and the mathematical model. When I construct a triangle, the rule governing its formation necessarily leads to the intuitive representation of a figure with three angles whose sum is always 180 degrees. This demonstrates an objective and necessary link between the way a triangle is generated and this fundamental property. In other words, we cannot construct a triangle except as a geometric figure bounded by three sides, whose interior angles sum to 180 degrees. The truth of mathematical propositions, therefore, is not something we properly create but rather something we *uncover* through the ostensive exhibition in intuition of pre-existing rational rules which govern the generation of the object. As Maimon explicitly writes, “[a]ll mathematical truths have their reality prior to our consciousness of them”¹⁷⁸.

Now, let’s apply this reasoning to empirical objects. If we want our judgments about empirical objects to have epistemic validity, then the same principle must hold. The rational rules that determine the existence and properties of empirical objects (the differentials) must necessarily account for their relationships and connections. For example, the rational rules that govern the existence of fire must explain why fire has the capacity to melt wax. By reducing empirical objects to their generative rules, we should therefore be able to show that the objectivity of such events cannot rest solely on empirical observation and the application of categories regulated by a mere temporal relation between two objects. Instead, objectivity must rest on a deeper, rational structure that precedes both our

¹⁷⁵ *MGW*, II 82.

¹⁷⁶ See Gasperoni 2012, p. 117.

¹⁷⁷ *MGW*, II 190.

¹⁷⁸ *MGW*, II 190.

observation and our judgments. Our task is to *present* in the form of judgment what already exists in the object itself. The relation between fire and wax, for instance, is not just a contingent temporal succession but is governed by rational principles that ensure the necessity of the event. These rational principles form the foundation upon which our knowledge of such events should be built, just as mathematical rules form the basis for our understanding of geometric truths.

It is thus evident that the differentials are meant to substitute the role of the transcendental schemas in the first *Critique*. The limitation of the former lay in their ability to mediate between the pure forms of the understanding and the pure forms of sensibility, but not between the former and empirical objects in their specific reality. As a result, the latter remained excluded from the operations of the understanding. The differentials, as rules governing the production of the empirical itself, allow for the elimination of the gap between form and matter, making it possible for the categories to be applied to objects through them¹⁷⁹. For this reason, Maimon makes a clear distinction between what he calls the “subjective” order of the operations of the human mind, and the “objective” one. The former more or less aligns with the architectonical sequential structure of Kantian faculties:

1. Sensibility (which certainly does not provide consciousness itself, but rather the matter for consciousness).
2. Intuition. The ordering of homogeneous sensible representations under their a priori forms (time and space); from this consciousness arises, although certainly no thought.
3. Concepts of the understanding (categories); from this a thought arises, i.e. the representation of a unity in the manifold.
4. Ideas of reason. Totality of the concepts of the understanding.

The “objective” one is instead:

1. Ideas of the understanding, that is to say the infinitely small of every sensible intuition and of its forms, which provides the matter to explain the way that objects arise.
2. Concepts of the understanding, and
3. Ideas of reason, whose use has already been explained.

I believe Maimon calls the first series “subjective” because it examines the process of knowledge solely from the perspective of the finite understanding. The “objective” series, by contrast, emerges from questioning the exclusivity of this finite standpoint. As we have seen, sensibility and intuition are merely expressions of the limitations of our mind. Since we cannot fully grasp the

¹⁷⁹ It is a topic that has been extensively examined in the literature. Among others, see e.g. Cassirer 1920, pp. 100-101; Kroner 1921, pp. 353-356; Engstler 1990, p. 48; Rametta 2012; Gasperoni 2012; Schmid 2021, Duffy 2014.

underlying rules that govern the production of objects, we perceive them as *given* and as *external* to us. However, when we challenge the fixed nature of this perspective by introducing the notion of an infinite understanding, we realize that, from an objective standpoint, sensibility and intuition dissolve entirely into the ideas of the understanding. The objective series shows that the concepts of the understanding are not applied on sensible intuitions, but on these very ideas, thus resolving the problem of the heterogeneity between a posteriori intuitions and a priori concepts.

This reformulation of the doctrine of schematism leads to another highly significant consequence. As I have mentioned, rational rules (the differentials) are not meant to be *applied* to *given* objects, but instead to *ground* the very *generation* of objects and their relations. This means that, in a sense, these objects are already rationally organized in the divine mind before any intervention of our understanding¹⁸⁰. In this regard, our role is not to structure and organize a given matter, but merely to bring to consciousness or to make explicit what is already structured and ordered. I believe this is what Maimon himself means when, immediately after having presented the two series, he writes that “for the understanding and for reason there is neither sensibility nor intuition [...] but only ideas and concepts that always accompany the former and that come to light (to consciousness) [*zum Vorschein (Bewusstseyn) kommen*] at their instigation [*Veranlassung*]”¹⁸¹. In other words, ideas (of the understanding) and concepts are not functions of the ‘I think’ designed to structure reality, but rather something that *preexists* consciousness and is only *brought to light* by its expression in the form of judgements¹⁸².

Our examination of Maimon’s approach to the *quaestio juris* has shown how the mathematical model serves to bridge the gap between form and matter, as well as between understanding and sensibility. However, it is also crucial to emphasize that mathematics remains, ultimately, only a *regulative* paradigm for our empirical knowledge. The two disciplines can therefore never be fully identified. I believe the key difference lies in the epistemic relation we have with the rules governing the production of objects. In mathematics, we *know* these laws and can generate objects in accordance with them. In contrast, the differentials which constitute the genetic structure of empirical objects can

¹⁸⁰ “In contrast to Kant, for whom the highest point is the synthetic unity of apperception [...] Maimon regards the synthetic unity of consciousness as a derived standpoint. Objective, that is, absolute unity, is not to be found in consciousness. Such a unity does not arise through the activity of synthetic connection but rather emerges “all at once”. The original activity cannot be understood as mere connection [*Verbinden*], but only as pure production [*Hervorbringen*]. While connecting is a process that unfolds in time and presupposes given material, the production of real unity within pure relations is a process that occurs outside of time. The purity of this activity thus implies the absence of both sensory matter and sensory form (that is, inner intuition). According to Maimon, the objective unity underlying consciousness can only be conceived as such a pure activity or spontaneity. This objective unity cannot gradually emerge, nor can it consist in the mere connection of given sensory elements. For Maimon, a true (objective) unity cannot arise step by step” (Ehrensperger 2006, p. 113).

¹⁸¹ *MGW*, II 83 (transl. modified).

¹⁸² For further discussion on the absence of a systematic role of the ‘I think’ in Maimon’s thought, see Valpione 2012, pp. 19-20.

only be fully comprehended by a divine mind. Here lies the essence of Maimon's definition of his system as a blend of "dogmatic rationalism" and "empirical skepticism"¹⁸³. Maimon does not believe that reality is a chaotic array of events devoid of laws. However, he argues that the regularity and legality of the relationships between objects can only be fully comprehended by a divine mind. From this perspective, no object is simply given or remains beyond its comprehension. As we have seen, divine understanding operates exclusively through differentials, thereby attaining complete knowledge of objects and their rational principles. I thus agree with Franks when he writes that "Maimon's rational dogmatism is in the driving seat", since "[i]t is only *because* he is a rational dogmatist that he can be – or, perhaps, can only be – an empirical skeptic"¹⁸⁴. In other words, Maimon's commitment in the idea of an absolute intelligibility of reality – only achievable by a divine understanding – inevitably leads to question *our* capacity to truly *know* reality itself.

For this reason, although Maimon demonstrates that it is possible for us to apply the categories to sensible objects by reducing them to their rules of production, he does not claim that this actually occurs in a straightforward or definitive manner. In this sense, his position diverges from Kant's in an important way: while Kant argues that the possibility of objective knowledge (i.e., the capacity of the categories to structure experience) necessarily leads to its actuality (i.e., that we do, in fact, successfully apply them in experience), Maimon denies this logical leap. In other words, the solution to the *quaestio juris* is not necessarily a solution to the *quaestio facti*. As Maimon writes both in his *Essay* and in the *Streifereien*, the latter remains an insoluble or unanswerable question¹⁸⁵. Therefore, Maimon does not claim that we can fully settle the problem concerning the application of categories to objects of experience. Instead, he maintains a stance of skepticism, suggesting that while we may formulate a coherent theory on the possibility of overcoming the heterogeneity between form and matter, we cannot ultimately prove that our understanding has the means to fully *implement* it.

I believe Engstler correctly highlights a fundamental tension in Maimon's position, one that risks turning his philosophy into a kind of abstract and futile exercise, akin to Don Quixote's relentless yet futile pursuit of impossible ideals:

[I]t seems that one can only sensibly formulate a theory if one is convinced of the existence of the problem it is meant to solve. Since Maimon, as an empirical skeptic, considers it uncertain

¹⁸³ See *MGW*, II 436.

¹⁸⁴ Franks 2003, p. 201. The author draws an intriguing comparison between Maimon's self-definition as a rational dogmatist and empirical skeptic, and Kant's description of himself as both a transcendental idealist and an empirical realist. In Kant's case too, the first element should take precedence: he is an empirical realist precisely *because* he is a transcendental idealist

¹⁸⁵ See *MGW*, II 9; *MGW*, IV 79.

whether we can apply a priori concepts to a posteriori objects, how can he, as a rational dogmatist, devote effort to developing a theory of this application?¹⁸⁶

Engstler observes that this tension can be, if not resolved, at least alleviated by considering that Maimon does not necessarily give an objective negative answer to the *Quid facti?* question but rather highlights our *subjective* inability to reach a definitive conclusion. Even if Maimon is never clear on this point¹⁸⁷, in the *Kritische Untersuchungen* he writes that “the answer to the question *Quid juris?* depends on the answer to the question *Quid facti?* [...] Through the question *Quid facti?*, the given case must first be determined before it can be subsumed under a specific rule, that is, before the question *Quid juris?* can be answered”¹⁸⁸. There is thus a dependent relationship between the *quaestio juris* and the *quaestio facti*, so that if the latter were found to be fundamentally irresolvable, the former would also become meaningless and philosophically irrelevant. Considered that, as we have seen, the solution to the *quaestio juris* lies at the very core of the *Essay*, it is difficult to believe that this is the perspective Maimon intends to embrace.

I believe that Maimon’s seemingly paradoxical solution, which involves developing a theory that ultimately appears unable to resolve the central problem it started with, stems from the *dynamic* nature of his own proposal. What I aim to argue is that the same ongoing tension the philosopher attributes to the finite understanding, in its attempt to align with the infinite one, mirrors the tension between the desire for a solution and the impossibility of fully attaining it. This means that the distinction between the *Quid juris?* and *Quid facti?* is not, in a way, qualitative. They are not two entirely separate issues, as if the *quaestio juris* could never provide an answer to the *quaestio facti*¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁶ Engstler 1990, p. 236.

¹⁸⁷ On the contrary, some passages could suggest that this impossibility is inherent to the very essence of the question. For example, in the *Letters to Reinhold*, he writes that the “doubts regarding the question of *quid facti* [...] are ineliminable by their nature” (*MGW*, IV 221n.). However, I do not think this implies a contradiction in Maimon’s thought: he does not claim that the question itself is undecidable, but rather that our (subjective) doubts concerning it are ineliminable. Again, if Maimon conceived the question of *quid facti* as absolutely insoluble, it would be unclear what grounds the objectivity of divine and mathematical knowledge, and his skepticism would become indistinguishable from that of Hume.

¹⁸⁸ *MGW*, VII 115.

¹⁸⁹ In this regard, it is curious that Lask, in his *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte* (1902), writes that “[Maimon] is not troubled by the question of *quid iuris* in Kant’s sense, i.e., how the validity of the categories for experience in general can be justified (Kant’s deduction). Rather, he fears that the legislation of the a priori, whose legitimacy he does not doubt, is practically doomed to ineffectiveness, since the individual, factual cannot be subsumed under general laws; what troubles him is the question of *quid facti*” (Lask 1902, p. 45). I disagree with this statement for two main reasons: (1) it seems to downplay the importance of the *quaestio juris* for the development of Maimon’s philosophy; (2) it treats the two questions as if they were independent of each other. It is not true that Maimon is not concerned with the *Quid juris?*; on the contrary, his entire theory of the infinite understanding and differentials is developed as an alternative to Kant’s proposal. It is true that the solution Maimon offers does not allow him to resolve the *quaestio facti*. However, by reformulating the *quaestio juris*, Maimon is able to view the *quaestio facti* as not *fundamentally* irresolvable, but rather only within the constraints of our subjective structures. In other words, Kant was unable to demonstrate both the possibility and the reality of the application of categories to empirical objects. Maimon, however, believes he has justified the former, while the reality of this application remains the ultimate goal of an asymptotic process that would theoretically conclude with the full reduction of matter to the rule of its productions – something that, *for us*, remains impossible to

Rather, the solution to the first grants the possibility of the *process* in the direction of the solution of the second, but not the possibility of fully achieving that objective. As Engstler himself writes, in some passages “Maimon gives the impression that what matters is the *journey*, not so much the achievement of the *goal*”¹⁹⁰.

The *quaestio facti* could be resolved if we were able to fully dissolve the antinomy of our thought, thus reducing matter completely to form. However, considered that this process occurs for us only in terms of an asymptotic approach, we can never be certain *that* we have an objective knowledge of reality. This is guaranteed only by complete transparency between the object and its concept, which is possible either through the analytical knowledge of the divine mind or through the mathematical knowledge of our understanding¹⁹¹. I therefore believe that the following passage should be interpreted within this framework:

The difference between Kant’s deduction of these concepts and mine amounts to this: Kant assumes there is no doubt that we possess experiential propositions (that express necessity), and he proves their objective validity by showing that experience would be impossible without them; but on Kant’s assumption, experience is possible because it is actual, and this is why these concepts have objective reality. But I doubt the fact itself, that is to say, I doubt whether we possess experiential propositions and so I cannot prove their objective validity the way Kant does; instead I prove only the possibility that they are objectively valid of the limits of objects of experience (which are determined as objects by reason in relation to their corresponding intuitions), not [that they are valid of] of objects of experience themselves (which are determined in intuition). As a result, the question, *quid juris?* must fall aside (in as much as pure concepts are applied to ideas). So things *can* stand in this relation to one another; but whether they do so in fact is still in question¹⁹².

In this passage, Maimon explicitly acknowledges the gap between the possibility of objective validity and the certainty of its actualization. The question *Quid juris?* can be resolved in principle, but the question *Quid facti?* remains an open and unresolved issue. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that striving toward its solution is *meaningless*. As we saw in section 2.2, at least two key features distinguish Maimon’s skepticism from Hume’s one: (1) the acknowledgment of a criterion of truth represented by the analytical knowledge of a divine understanding and (2) the idea that mathematics serves as evidence of the finite understanding’s ability to achieve a form of objective

achieve. On Lask’s reconstruction of Maimon’s argument, see Gambaro 2023, pp. 88-93. On the problem of the distance between thought and reality in Lask’s philosophy, see Rametta 2002, Furlani 2012, 2023.

¹⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 241.

¹⁹¹ As we have seen, even though mathematical knowledge does not achieve the same level of transparency as divine knowledge – since it still involves a distinction between concept and its exhibition in (pure) intuition – we can nonetheless regard the former *as if* it were an objective knowledge.

¹⁹² *MGW*, II 186-187.

knowledge. These two points clearly show that is at least conceivable a (divine) form of knowledge in which the *quaestio facti* does not arise, and that a form of human knowledge (mathematics) exists where the same holds¹⁹³. This would support the idea that its irresolvability stems solely from an intrinsic (quantitative) limitation of our subjective epistemological capacities, rather than from a lack of meaning of the question itself.

Maimon's doctrine of the differential, then, aims to show that it is *possible* to apply categories to the limits of the objects of experience or to the ideas of the understanding, and from there, to extend those categories to the objects themselves. Nevertheless, this application can never be fully completed by our finite understanding, since for us there will always remain a residue of "givenness" that cannot be further reduced and, therefore, cannot be fully rationalized. Thus, the skeptical doubt regarding our effective use of the categories is never entirely dispelled. As Maimon writes in the *Letters of Philaletes to Aenesidemus* "I do not admit this *use* as a *fact*, without thereby denying its *possibility*"¹⁹⁴.

The tension between the possibility of resolving *quaestio juris* and the (subjective) impossibility of answering the *quaestio facti* should not be seen as a failure of Maimon's philosophy. On the contrary, it represents the main feature that defines his "dynamic" skepticism and allows Maimon to position himself both as a dogmatic rationalist and an empirical skeptic. In the next section, I will outline some of the results from the analysis conducted so far, focusing in greater detail on key aspects of Maimon's proposal that distinctly depart from Kant's critical philosophy. This will then allow me to revisit the pages of the *Opus postumum*, where, as I will demonstrate, similar conceptual tensions can be identified.

2.1.5 Schematism, experience, thing-in-itself

The aim of this section is to provide a systematic reassessment of Maimon's philosophy by centering the analysis on what I identify as three pivotal aspects of his speculative framework: the reformulation of the doctrine of schematism, the reconsideration of the doctrine of things in themselves, and the redefinition of the very concept of experience. This discussion serves as an

¹⁹³ See also MGW, II 363-364: "As for me, I also take a fact as ground, but not a fact relating to a posteriori objects (because I doubt the latter) but a fact relating to a priori objects (of pure mathematics) where we I connect forms (relations) with intuitions; and because this undoubted fact refers to a priori objects, it is certainly possible, and at the same time actual. But my question is: how is it comprehensible? (*Quid juris?* for me means the same as *quid rationis?* because what is justified [*rechtmäßig*] is what is legitimate [*gesetzmäßig*], and with respect to thought, something is justified if it conforms to the laws of thought or reason)".

¹⁹⁴ MGW, V 388.

introduction for the subsequent sections. In these, I will engage with the relation between Maimon's proposal and Kant's manuscripts, where, as I will argue, analogous developments can be discerned.

As I have already highlighted, Maimon's entire project consists in an attempt to demonstrate that it is at least *possible* to bridge the gap between the transcendental and the empirical – a gap that Kant was unable to properly fill through his schematism doctrine. We saw that the problem lied in Kant's assumed heterogeneity between form and matter, a priori and a posteriori. In Maimon's reconstruction, the *Critique of Pure Reason* showed how concepts can apply to "objects in general", i.e., to merely thought-objects, but not to concrete objects of experience.

This impossibility seems to be implied by the structure of Kant's schematism itself. The schema, as an a priori determination of the pure form of time, does not actually mediate between the a priori dimension of the categories and the a posteriori sensory matter. Rather, it mediates between two faculties that are both a priori: sensibility and understanding. The categories, in this sense, do not directly determine objects but only the form in which they are given to us – in this case, that of time. As we saw when I considered Maimon's critique of Kant's Second Analogy of Experience, this leads to the impossibility of considering a judgment such as "fire melts wax" as holding objective validity, since the concepts of cause and effect cannot be applied to these particular objects of experience. Their mere succession in time is not a sufficient criterion to distinguish between a merely arbitrary relationship and a genuine causal one.

Maimon's attempt is thus to radicalize Kant's doctrine of schematism in order to give a valid solution to the question *Quid juris?*. The theory of differentials is meant to solve this problem. Its core function is to demonstrate that matter can be conceived not merely as "given" and existing independently from the spontaneity of the understanding, but as something authentically produced by rational, rule-governed laws. These laws are instantiated by the differentials themselves, conceived as "the infinitely small of every sensible intuition"¹⁹⁵, which ground the object's existence and its possession of determinate attributes. In this way, it is possible for us to conceive as legitimate the application of categories to the objects of experience through the mediating function of the differentials. The latter does not mediate between two a priori distinct faculties, but between the a priori faculty of the understanding and the a posteriori given matter which empirical objects are constituted of. Maimon explicitly suggests that the differentials are meant to substitute Kant's schemas when he writes:

I freely admit that the distinguishing marks of these objects must be given in experience in order for them to be subsumed under these concepts. So I agree with Kant that these concepts, as well

¹⁹⁵ *MGW*, II 82.

as the judgements grounded in these concepts, are valid only of objects of experience; I only claim that they are not, as K. assumes, directly valid of objects of experience as they appear to us, but rather that they are valid only of the limits of objects of experience (ideas), and that they are valid of the objects of experience themselves by means of these ideas¹⁹⁶.

In the preceding section, I briefly pointed out that his reformulation has significant consequences for Kantian epistemology. The sensible matter is no longer considered something immediately given to the senses and requiring a process of synthesis that should result in an objective determination. On the contrary, the “given” is already organized by a chain of intensive and rational rules that preexist the process of subjective synthesis, and whose legality is guaranteed by the divine understanding. Our role is therefore merely to express in the form of judgement what is already contained in sensible perceptions themselves, and not to *organize* something that is originally unorganized. Let’s consider an example I previously mentioned in section 2.2: the heating of a stone by the sun and the turning off of streetlights at night. According to Maimon, distinguishing the causal necessity between these two events is impossible. In other words, it seems that there are no sufficient criteria, based on the Kantian model, to determine that one of the two temporal successions is objective and necessary, while the other is merely contingent. Maimon’s solution is to propose that such distinctions can only be made if we fully decompose objects into their genetic rules of production – rules that specify the precise manner in which objects and events arise from their underlying differentials. Only through this genetic analysis could one determine whether a given event follows a necessary causal structure or merely exhibits a contingent association. In other words, the certainty of causal relations depends on whether we can fully reconstruct the internal genesis of an event according to rational principles.

However, this rationalistic ambition gives rise to a profound epistemological challenge. In the *Essay*, Maimon acknowledges that human understanding is inherently incapable of achieving a complete reduction of empirical reality to rational principles. While we can formulate causal judgments – such as “the sun is the cause of the stone’s heating” – these statements ultimately express only a certain degree of probability rather than absolute necessity. Our grasp of causality, therefore, remains approximate and provisional, never attaining the kind of certainty that would be accessible only to an infinite understanding.

In this section, I aim to briefly illustrate how these epistemological consequences also entail profound implications for Maimon’s ontology. As previously mentioned, the theoretical foundation of Maimon’s entire epistemological framework lies in his redefinition of the distinction between

¹⁹⁶ *MGW*, II 186.

divine and finite understanding in strictly quantitative terms. This conceptual shift has far-reaching implications, including a reconfiguration of the very distinction between understanding and sensibility, as well as between form and matter. In each of these cases, the two terms of the relation should not be conceived as qualitatively distinct entities. Rather, the second term should always be understood as a quantitatively diminished, less clear, and less transparent manifestation of the first.

This reinterpretation ultimately leads Maimon to develop a theory of representation and consciousness that radicalizes Kant's position by explicitly rejecting any reference to an "external" matter beyond consciousness or to a "thing-in-itself" as the unknowable ground of appearances. Instead, Maimon's framework seeks to dissolve these dualistic oppositions, proposing a more fluid model of cognition in which the traditional boundaries between faculties and kind of objects are rethought in terms of degrees of clarity and determinacy. Let us read the following example:

The empirical [component] (material [*Materiale*]) of intuitions is actually (like the light rays) from something outside us, i.e. something given (different from us). But we must not let ourselves be misled by the expression "outside us", as if this something were in a spatial relation to us; the reason is that space itself is only a form within us, whereas this 'outside us' signifies something in whose representations we are not conscious of any spontaneity, i.e. something that (with respect to our consciousness) is purely passive and not active in us¹⁹⁷.

Maimon acknowledges that our intuitions contain an empirical component – something seemingly given from outside us. However, he immediately qualifies this claim, warning against the assumption that this "outside" refers to an external reality in a spatial sense. Since space itself is merely a form of our intuition rather than an independently existing framework, the "outside" must be understood differently. What we experience as the given is not the causal imprint of an external object but rather the manifestation of a passivity *within* consciousness itself. Maimon therefore suggests that what we call "given" is nothing more than a *limit* of our cognitive process. The given is not an effect produced by an unknown material cause beyond experience; rather, it denotes the very point at which cognition encounters its own opacity. It signals a lack rather than a presence, a shadowy region in knowledge rather than the influence of a distinct object. When we perceive an object, we are not actually perceiving *something* but rather registering the *absence* of something. Perception, in this sense, is not the reception of determinate external content but the encounter with the limits of our own cognitive activity. The given, then, can be understood as the "blind spot" of differentials within finite understanding – an element that resists full dissolution into its own genetic rules.

¹⁹⁷ *MGW*, II 202-203.

As Maimon also writes in the Notes and Remarks, “the given can only be something within representation whose cause is as unknown to us as the way it arises (*essentia realis*) in us, i.e. something we have merely an incomplete consciousness of”¹⁹⁸. In other words, the given is not an independent, self-subsistent reality existing outside the realm of thought, but rather the *constraint* of thought itself, which our imagination presents to us in the form of an object. If we were capable of comprehending the process through which the given is generated – if we could grasp its formation in accordance with rational and intensive laws – then it would no longer be “given” in any meaningful sense. Instead, it would be entirely integrated within the domain of conceptual determination, making the distinction between the given and the spontaneous activity of the understanding collapse. Through this reformulation, Maimon effectively dissolves the Kantian dichotomy between receptivity and spontaneity, replacing it with a continuum of cognitive clarity that depends on the degree to which representations can be rendered intelligible¹⁹⁹.

What interests me now is to note that this way of framing the problem has important implications for our understanding of the concept of “reality”. If, as we have seen, the “given” no longer designates the perception of something but rather the recognition of the *absence* of something, this means that the very category of “reality” must be shifted from the level of empirical intuition to that of its rational foundation. In other words, what is real is not the given in its pure immediacy, as it appears to our senses, but rather its underlying genetic rule. Empirical matter, so to speak, is merely the *shadow* of the latter. This is explicitly confirmed by Maimon in a passage I have already analyzed in the preceding section. “The metaphysically infinitely small” he writes “is real because quality can certainly be considered in itself abstracted from all quantity”²⁰⁰. In another excerpt he argues:

[T]he object of applied thought is neither an intuition (which is not an object of the understanding) nor any mere *ens logicum*, but rather the *ens reale* or what I call an idea of the understanding, the element of a particular intuition. It is a limit concept between pure thought and

¹⁹⁸ *MGW*, II 419/415.

¹⁹⁹ For this reason, some scholars have pointed out that Maimon anticipates the immanent model of idealism that Fichte would soon develop in its most radical form (see e.g. Beiser 2003). Even if I cannot dwell here at length on this topic, I believe this is only partially true. While it is clear that Maimon aims to replace a dualistic model of knowledge with a monistic and immanent one, the persistence of the concept of an infinite understanding within his system might undermine the coherence of this project. To put it differently, rather than *eliminating* the epistemological dualism between matter and form, Maimon appears to shift it onto a different level, recasting it as a distinction between human and divine knowledge, or between real and ideal cognition (see Gasperoni 2010, p. 21). Although Maimon insists that the difference between these two forms of cognition is purely quantitative and that God is merely an “idea,” it is hard to ignore the impression that the role attributed to divine understanding leaves his system open to charges of dogmatism. In fact, God seems to act as the ultimate guarantor of the existence of differentials and of the laws governing their connections. From this standpoint, the “given material” would not signify an *inherent limit* to the self-transparency of our knowledge but rather a *boundary* distinguishing human consciousness from divine consciousness, thus repositing a dualistic model of knowledge. On the unbridgeable differences between Maimon’s infinite understanding and Fichte’s absolute I, see Rametta 2019b, p. 183.

²⁰⁰ *MGW*, II 355.

intuition by means of which the two are legitimately bound together. Suppose it is true that we possess experiential propositions (in Kant's sense) and that we apply the pure concepts of the understanding to appearances for their sake; then the possibility of all this or the *quid juris?* is easily explained according to my theory because the elements of appearances, what the pure concepts of the understanding are subsequently applied to, are not themselves appearances²⁰¹.

The reality of differentials, or the ideas of the understanding, is therefore determined by their function as a transcendental condition of the perceptions themselves. The "reality" being discussed is, of course, not the same as that which pertains to the level of phenomenal objects, as Maimon himself affirms at the end of the last quote. The mediating function of the differentials, which for a finite understanding should allow for the possible application of categories to sensible objects, thus enabled Maimon to think in a completely original way about the status of these entities. On the one hand, they cannot be directly verified by our senses, yet on the other hand, they are not simply formal and universal determinations of objects. In Kant's framework, the mediating role of the schema did not eliminate its purely formal nature, as it mediated not between a priori faculties and empirical a posteriori objects, but between two equally a priori faculties. As an a priori determination of time, the schema of the imagination thus only grasped formal relationships between objects (such as succession, permanence, etc.). In contrast, Maimon considers the differentials as principles of *differentiation* of the empirical itself. The differentials do not solely capture the universal properties and relations of various objects of experience, but constitute the genetic condition of their empirical and contingent singularities. This shift has clear ontological repercussions: the differentials must occupy a specific and original place in the structure of experience, for they cannot be reduced to either the immediate material of sensory perception (which is the raw "given" in Kant's terms) nor can they be reduced to universal forms of thought.

In this sense, it seems to me that it is already possible to assert that there is a clear similarity – both in terms of ontological status and epistemic function – between Maimon's differential and the *Mittelbegriffe* of the *Opus postumum*, which I will more carefully analyze in the next part. This impression is confirmed by the structural tension that both Maimon and Kant attribute to these concepts. On the one hand, as we have just seen, they must be real as genetic conditions for empirical differentiation. On the other hand, to avoid a clear relapse into a dogmatic form of metaphysics, both authors emphasize their merely ideal or even fictional nature. Even if Maimon never refers to the differentials in terms of "fictions" within the *Essay*, he indirectly hints at this idea in later works. He writes for example:

²⁰¹ *MGW*, II 192-193.

[S]ome believe they find a contradiction in Leibniz's system of monads, according to which a body (which is infinitely divisible) is supposed to be composed of monads. But what if I claim that Leibniz's Monadology, just like the method of indivisibles, is nothing but a mere fiction? And that it should not be said that a body consists of monads, but rather that, in order to gain a correct concept of the relationship between bodies and to precisely determine the magnitude of this relationship, we must resolve bodies into their infinitely small parts and derive the relationship of the whole from the relationship of these parts. This resolution into infinity, of course, can never be fully completed by us. However, it serves us as an idea to which we can continuously approximate in our investigation of the nature of bodies and their relations to one another. Leibniz, therefore, does not speak of things in themselves as simple substances, but merely of fictions²⁰².

The method of indivisibles, the *infinite series*, *differential calculus*, and similar approaches inevitably lead to contradictions if they are regarded as more than mere *methods*. The *imagination* plays its game with them, presenting *its fictions as real objects*. *Reason*, however, does not concern itself with this and instead recognizes them for what they truly are: mere *fictions*²⁰³.

Although Maimon does not directly refer to his doctrine of differentials, but rather to the Leibnizian doctrine of monads, the reference to the “infinitely small parts” of bodies and to the idea of an “approximation to infinity” is an implicit reference the ideas of the understanding. I thus think it is possible to argue that the reference to Leibniz can be extended to his own theory, which Maimon himself has defined as form of “*verbesserte Leibnizianismus*”²⁰⁴. Beiser interprets this shift as an evolution in Maimon's thought, suggesting that his early commitment to the reality of differentials gradually gave way to a more idealist or fictionalist position²⁰⁵. Engstler, on the other hand, affirms that “Maimon clearly does not succeed in formulating his concept of the differential consistently”²⁰⁶. The scholar points out an unresolved ambiguity between a physical interpretation of the differential, as an infinitely small *element* of the phenomenal world, and a rational interpretation, as an *idea* of the understanding. Both Beiser and Engstler, in different ways, see Maimon as caught in an unresolved tension between two incompatible perspectives, thereby forcing a choice: one must either regard differentials as real entities or as conceptual fictions. Contrary to this view, I contend that Maimon's reformulation of the schematism doctrine – the central objective of the *Essay* – necessarily calls for

²⁰² *MGW*, IV 51-52.

²⁰³ *MGW*, V 263-264.

²⁰⁴ *MGW*, II 522.

²⁰⁵ “Yet if Maimon commits himself to the existence of differentials in the earlier *Versuch*, he avoids all such ontological commitments in his later writings. According to the *Logik* and *Wörterbuch*, for example, a rigorous transcendental philosophy shuns all transcendent entities, especially infinitesimal ones” (Beiser 1987, p. 300).

²⁰⁶ Engstler 1990, p. 169.

a reconsideration of the distinction between real and fictional (ideal) dimensions. In other words, I see Maimon's oscillations not as a symptom of theoretical ambiguity, but as the very mark of his epistemic and ontological shift²⁰⁷. Against Beiser, I also believe that, although in the *Essay* he never explicitly refers to differentials as "fictions", their status as ideas of the understanding clearly indicates Maimon's intent not to reduce them to mere metaphysical entities. While he may not explicitly label them as fictions, their role within his system suggests that he does not conceive of them as independently existing objects but rather as necessary thought-entities that mediate between sensible intuition and conceptual thought. In this sense, the tension between the real and the fictional is not a later development but is already embedded – if somewhat less explicitly – in the *Essay* itself²⁰⁸.

These considerations lead me to the second topic I wish to address in this section, namely Maimon's reinterpretation of Kant's doctrine of the thing-in-itself. My aim is to demonstrate that the reconceptualization of the relationship between the ideal and the real has direct implications for the very notion of the *Ding an sich*. As is well known, this concept is perhaps the most problematic within Kant's entire project. It is no coincidence that the most significant criticisms directed at Kant in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* pertained precisely to its controversial nature. Both opponents of critical philosophy, such as Schulze and Jacobi, and its proponents, including Fichte and Maimon himself, highlighted the untenability of the thing-in-itself or, at the very least, a fundamental ambiguity that required clarification. All of them, albeit in different ways, maintained that the thing-in-itself could not be conceived as a "thing" that actually *exists* beyond our representations and, consequently, as the "cause" of the latter's manifestation to our consciousness. Indeed, such a view would require an unwarranted application of the categories beyond the phenomenal world. The outcomes of this critique vary significantly: Schulze, for instance, held that the impossibility of demonstrating the existence of things-in-themselves, and thus the correspondence between our representations and their "objects", should ultimately lead to the untenability of critical philosophy and, consequently, to an inescapable skepticism. Maimon, on the

²⁰⁷ See also Atlas 1969-1970, p. 364 and Zac 1986. However, similar to Beiser, Atlas also contends that Maimon's thought undergoes a development, as he never explicitly refers to differentials as "fictions" in the *Essay*. At the same time, Atlas maintains that this evolution does not constitute a fundamental shift in Maimon's doctrine but rather a change in emphasis. He argues that Maimon consistently described differentials in terms of "ideas", a term that, in his later writings, becomes synonymous with "fictions" (see Ivi, p. 370).

²⁰⁸ As Atlas correctly notes, the concept of fiction is actually conceived by Maimon in two different ways. On the one hand, it is "[a] concept that arises in our mind as a consequence of a psychological illusion is a fiction. Such are the concept of a thing-in-itself as a metaphysical entity and the concept of empty space". On the other, "[t]he same term is also used in the Kantian sense of an idea, that is to say, an idea toward which we strive, an ideal goal that can be endlessly approached but never fully attained. In this case, fiction is not equivalent to nonreality, for fiction has the reality of a goal determining our actions and giving direction to our thinking and striving. It has the reality of a limiting concept rather than that of an empirical object. Such a concept is not an illusion resulting from a psychological deception; it is a creative idea fulfilling a positive function in our thought which strives for greater unity in our mastery and comprehension of reality" (Ivi, pp. 366-367).

contrary, argued that there was no need to assume the reality of a supersensible cause of our representations in order to uphold the coherence of critical philosophy. The problems of the latter lie elsewhere. In this sense, Maimon's skepticism is far more refined than that of Schulze, as it is grounded in an *internal* critique of Kant's theory of knowledge and his account of the structure of our cognitive faculties. In the *Wörterbuch* Maimon argues:

I differ from Mr. Kant regarding the distinction between the *thing-in-itself* and the *concept or representation of a thing*. According to Mr. Kant, the thing-in-itself is that which lies outside our faculty of cognition and to which the concept or representation within it refers. On the other hand, I maintain that the thing-in-itself, taken in this sense, is an empty word without any meaning, since one cannot only fail to prove the existence of this thing, but also cannot form any concept of it. According to me, things-in-themselves and the concept or representation of a thing are objectively one and the same, and only subjectively, that is, in relation to the completeness of our cognition, are they distinguished from one another²⁰⁹.

It is obviously a subject of ongoing and still unresolved debate whether Kant truly intended the thing-in-itself as an entity existing outside the phenomenal domain. However, it is true that some passages in the *Critique* do indeed suggest this direction, and that Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie* – the most influential attempt, before Fichte, to systematize Kant's transcendental philosophy – had emphasized the role of the thing-in-itself as the objective correlate of representations²¹⁰. According to Maimon, understood in this way, the thing-in-itself is entirely superfluous and is only a meaningless word²¹¹, for it is an “illusion of the imagination, which, through the habit of relating its reproduction to the objects or the original perceptions of the same, eventually refers even original perceptions to something outside of consciousness”²¹².

In other words, it is the deceptive power of the imagination that leads us to believe that the ground of the existence of objects lies in something outside our representation of them. As discussed in the previous section, Maimon rejects the notion of objects as “distinct” from us or external to our field of consciousness, since the “given” of our sensation is nothing but the limit of our own

²⁰⁹ *MGW*, III 54-55.

²¹⁰ For both Maimon and Fichte, the criticisms directed at Kant's transcendental philosophy were often aimed at it only indirectly, through a polemical confrontation with Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie*. In other words, for both authors, Reinhold's system appears to represent a dogmatic radicalization of criticism, which must be challenged in order to bring to light the true meaning of Kant's teaching. For Maimon's explicit criticism against Reinhold, see in particular their epistolary exchange in *MGW*, IV 199-266, which published by Maimon in the *Streifereien*, without Reinhold's approval.

²¹¹ “A strict critical philosopher, such as Mr. Reinhold, should, of course, refrain from such metaphysical statements. He should develop only what is contained in representation or what must be presupposed as a condition of its possibility, without concerning himself in the least with the cause, force, etc. [...]. Such investigations belong to metaphysics, the possibility and scope of which are to be determined only through a critique of the faculty of knowledge” (*MGW*, V 391-392).

²¹² *MGW*, V 377-378.

consciousness – the mark of our inability to grasp the differentials of objects in their entirety. Any attempt to posit something beyond consciousness would result in an infinite regress, as we would be compelled to ask what grounds that which grounds the objectivity of our perception, and so on²¹³. In the Letters to Reinhold Maimon makes it clear again that “simple matter [*blosse Stoff*], before it is connected through form, belongs to nothing outside itself; it is a mere perception, which, as such, refers to nothing beyond itself”²¹⁴. The thing-in-itself is thus not what grounds the matter of an object, but only the result of an abstraction “from any particular determination with which [a real object] may appear in consciousness”²¹⁵, which the imagination subtly transforms into an independent thing. In other words, the *Ding an sich* is only the concept of an “object in general” or of “an undetermined synthesis in general”²¹⁶, which our understanding has not *yet* brought to consciousness, but which does not lie *outside* its synthetic power.

Now, these considerations can be conceived as representing Maimon’s negative attitude toward Kant’s (and Reinhold’s) doctrine of the thing-in-itself. However, it is equally important to highlight that Maimon does not intend to completely eliminate this concept from his system. His epistemological turn, in fact, would have allowed the philosopher to reintroduce a “positive” conception of the thing-in-itself, detached from the problems previously mentioned. As we have observed, in the *Wörterbuch* Maimon conceives the thing-in-itself to be the very solution to the universal antinomy of thought in general. The analysis conducted in the preceding chapters has clarified that this notion should be understood in two distinct and complementary senses. On the one hand, the thing-in-itself, as an idea of reason (divine understanding), allows us to justify *that* the distinction between finite and infinite can be understood in a purely quantitative and not qualitative sense. On the other hand, the thing-in-itself, as an idea of the understanding (differentials), makes it possible to show *how* the rational structure of empirical objects should be understood in order to remove the rigid distinction between form and matter.

The analysis conducted regarding the connection between the ideal and the real in relation to the differentials allows for a deeper understanding of the status that should be attributed to the things-in-themselves. When properly understood, the thing-in-itself does not constitute a mere abstraction devoid of meaning, but rather represent the rational structure that governs the existence and interaction of empirical objects. The “reality” that Maimon attributes to the differentials as things-in-themselves is that of a mathematical and rational set of rules that structures the empirical world.

²¹³ “It is somewhat analogous to the question posed by the Indian who, when told that the world rests on a pair of elephants and that the elephants stand on a great turtle, innocently asked: ‘And what, then, does the turtle stand on?’” (*MGW*, V 379).

²¹⁴ *MGW*, IV 229.

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁶ *GMW*, IV 228.

Maimon thus argues that the differentials are not something separate from the phenomena they generate, but rather the underlying *immanent* principles or conditions that make the existence and interaction of those phenomena possible. As Lord writes, “the differential remains ‘in’ the phenomenon it generates as the mathematical formula of its construction”²¹⁷.

The distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves is therefore not an objective division between two separate entities, but rather a subjective one, concerning the epistemic relation we hold with these very objects²¹⁸. A straight line is not distinct from the rational rule that governs its construction; rather, it is the concrete manifestation of this rule, which we, as finite rational beings, must represent in intuition to render it intelligible. Similarly, empirical objects are not independent from the rules that generate them; rather, they constitute the bounded expression of the differentials within human cognition.

At the same time, the status of this epistemic relation also changes significantly compared to the one described by Kant. Rather than upholding an absolute epistemic division between phenomena and things-in-themselves, Maimon reinterprets this distinction in quantitative terms. That is, he does not regard knowledge of things-in-themselves as *absolutely* impossible but rather as *progressively* attainable, albeit in a limited manner. This reconceptualization should imply that cognition is not strictly confined to appearances but can, through a process of refinement and approximation, extend toward the principles underlying them. Although Maimon never explicitly articulates this point, I argue that the following passage suggests such an interpretation:

As for the last question, namely: *How is metaphysics possible?* One must first determine what metaphysics means. I believe I agree with Mr. Kant in the definition of metaphysics, namely, that metaphysics is the science of things-in-themselves. I differ from Mr. Kant only in this: according to him, things in themselves are the substrata outside us of the appearances within us, and entirely heterogeneous from them. Consequently, this question must remain unsolved, since we have no means at our disposal to know things-in-themselves apart from the way we are affected by them. According to me, however, the knowledge of things in themselves is nothing other than *the complete knowledge of appearances*. Metaphysics, therefore, is not a science of something beyond appearances, but rather a science of the limits (ideas) of appearances themselves, or of the final elements in their series²¹⁹.

While this passage constitutes a clear oversimplification of Kant’s conception of metaphysics, reducing it to the *dogmatic* form of metaphysics, it nonetheless elucidates Maimon’s objective of

²¹⁷ Lord 2011, p. 119.

²¹⁸ “According to me [...], the thing in itself, the concept, and the representation of a thing are objectively one and the same, and only subjectively, that is, in relation to the completeness of our knowledge, distinguished from one another” (MGW, III 185).

²¹⁹ MGW, III 200-201.

resolving the dualism between phenomena and things-in-themselves. Specifically, Maimon suggests that the process of asymptotically approaching the divine understanding is, in effect, a means of progressively uncovering the underlying rational structure of appearances. In this view, phenomena are not rigidly opposed to things-in-themselves; rather, they can be traced back to the principles that constitute them, their differentials²²⁰. If such an approximation is indeed possible, as Maimon appears to assume, then the knowledge of things-in-themselves should likewise be attainable, though only in a limited and gradual manner. This interpretation finds further support in Maimon's discussion of *Quid juris?*, in which he argues that resolving the legitimacy of synthetic a priori judgments requires demonstrating the applicability of the categories to the elements of intuition. The application of categories to differentials necessarily entails their determination and, consequently, the possibility of their cognition. Therefore, contrary to Kant's doctrine, it seems that for Maimon the knowledge of things-in-themselves is not inherently precluded by the limits of human cognition. Rather, it is *required* precisely to overcome the partiality of a doctrine founded on the rigid dualism between finite and infinite, a priori and a posteriori, form and matter.

These considerations lead me to the third point I intend to analyze in this section, namely Maimon's reformulation of the concept of "objective experience". I will begin my analysis by addressing this passage from the *Kritische Untersuchungen*:

since what is *constant* in our *perception* is not eternal (it is still possible that we will perceive the opposite of it at some point), every *ground* is not *sufficient* to assume this perception with *certainty* for the future, but only as *probable*. For me, therefore, *experience* in the strict sense is not a *concept* that can be represented in *intuition*, but an *idea* to which one can always approach in imagination, one that can never be fully attained²²¹.

The stringent demand for the intelligibility of objects leads Maimon to assert that no specific determination of an object, carried out through the categories, can be regarded as an (objective) experience of that object. Such an experience would only be possible if the perceived object could be thoroughly determined – that is, if the object could be completely reduced to its genetic rules. For us, as finite rational beings, the experience of objects, and so their complete cognition, can thus be conceived solely in the form of an idea. The judgement "fire melts wax" will always remain for us a judgement which expresses probability, but not objectivity, for the latter would be attainable only through the complete dissolution of both "fire" and "wax" into their genetic rules. "Here I would like

²²⁰ On the metaphysical implications of Maimon's doctrine, see Pringe 2024.

²²¹ *MGW*, VII 156

to state once and for all” Maimon writes in the *Essay* “that I hold what Kant calls objective necessity (condition of an objective perception or experience) to be a merely subjective necessity”²²².

In Kant’s philosophy, the objectivity of a judgment (and, consequently, the possibility of an objective experience of the event expressed by the judgment) is determined by the synthesis performed by an intellectual operation on the material received from sensibility. In this sense, it is not necessary to refer the objects of judgment to the totality of their conditions in order to justify the validity of the judgment itself. Such a totality can, of course, be conceived as a regulative idea, whose function lies in the systematic organization of our particular experiences. Their role is to orient and guide empirical inquiry, to promote the systematic organization and unity of experience, rather than to serve as conditions for the possibility of knowledge *per se*. The idea of the unconditioned totality for every given condition may thus structure the horizon of inquiry, but it does not determine the truth or objectivity of any given empirical judgment. These remain dependent on the proper coordination between sensibility and understanding, whose synthesis grounds the possibility of empirical knowledge.

By contrast, Maimon introduces a far more radical standard for objectivity, one that ultimately displaces the sufficiency of Kant’s transcendental synthesis. For Maimon, synthetic a priori judgments do not, in themselves, express any genuine objective necessity. Rather, he contends that true necessity can only be found in the *analytic* a priori judgments contained in the mind of an infinite understanding. Such a mind would possess the capacity to intuitively grasp the totality of the differentials from which all appearances arise, thereby grounding knowledge in a way that transcends the limitations of our discursive faculties. Synthetic judgments, in Maimon’s account, are therefore of a fundamentally *derivative* nature. They do not carry their validity intrinsically, through the synthesis of intuition and concept, but instead must be measured against a higher standard – namely, that established by analytic judgements. This external criterion of validity places synthetic judgments in a subordinate position: they are provisional approximations whose validity remains merely subjective. This underlying dialectic between the analytic and synthetic is mirrored in Maimon’s distinction between *representation* (*Vorstellung*) and *presentation* (*Darstellung*).

Maimon writes in this regard:

Properly understood, a representation is the reproduction of a part of a synthesis in relation to this synthesis. Prior to the consciousness of this synthesis, the consciousness of each one of its parts is not a representation, but a presentation, since it does not refer to anything outside of itself. Thus, the complete consciousness of all parts of the synthesis, and consequently of the synthesis itself, is not a representation but rather a presentation of the (intellectual) thing itself. But we should note that both

²²² *MGW*, II 419/415.

the primitive consciousness of a constituent part of a synthesis (without relating this part to the synthesis) as well as the consciousness of the complete synthesis are mere ideas, i.e. they are the two limit concepts of a synthesis, in that without synthesis no consciousness is possible, but the consciousness of the completed synthesis grasps the infinite in itself, and is consequently impossible for a limited cognitive faculty²²³.

This intricate passage suggests that representation should not be understood as an autonomous and discrete phenomenon but rather as the expression of a partial aspect of a higher synthesis. In other words, each individual representation – such as that of fire melting wax – must be conceived as an integral component of a higher totality, which alone could ground its objective validity (if only such totality were accessible to our cognition).

Presentation, instead, entails two distinct yet opposing aspects. On the one hand, it designates the primitive consciousness of an isolated component of a representation, which precedes any awareness of its integration within the synthesis. On the other hand, it refers to the consciousness of the totality of representations as constitutive elements of the synthesis. In both cases, what identifies these as *Darstellungen* rather than *Vorstellungen* is their self-referential nature: they do not refer to anything beyond themselves. The “primitive consciousness”²²⁴ of a representation qualifies as a presentation because, in its immediacy, it does not recognize itself as part of a broader totality. Conversely, the consciousness of totality is also a presentation, for a totality, by definition, does not admit anything external to itself. Both, therefore, remain mere “ideas,” conceived as the lower and upper limits of representation. Although Maimon is not explicit on this point, I believe that both the idea of the understanding and the idea of reason may be conceived as “presentations.” The infinitely small part of each object (the differential) is a *Darstellung*, as it constitutes a self-subsistent element that becomes manifest in intuition only when is related with other differentials²²⁵. Likewise, the knowledge exhibited by divine understanding is also a *Darstellung*, as it represents the self-subsistent and all-encompassing totality of all differentials that structure reality.

What I am now interested in focusing on is the second meaning of *Darstellung*, understood as the complete consciousness of all parts of the synthesis. Indeed, this is the meaning to which Maimon most frequently refers. *Darstellung* can be conceived as the type of knowledge that can only be attained by a divine understanding and toward which we must asymptotically approach in our attempt

²²³ *MGW*, II 349 (transl. modified).

²²⁴ *MGW*, II 29.

²²⁵ “[Ideas of the understanding] exist only in a primitive consciousness that does not represent [*vorstellt*] but rather presents [*darstellt*]. Presentation differs from representation in that it does not make something present that was previously absent but instead posits something as existing that did not exist before. Primitive consciousness is not yet actual consciousness but rather the beginning of all consciousness. Primitive consciousness and the ideas of the understanding given within it are a limit concept, reached through an infinite reduction of representation” (Bonsiepen 2002, p. 386). On the differentials as *Darstellungen*, see also Valpione 2012, pp. 29-37.

to resolve the antinomy of thought in general. *Darstellung* is therefore the realm of *truth*, while *Vorstellung* that of mere *probability*. As Maimon writes in the *Logic*, “[a] *representation* is nothing other than a *partial presentation* (Theildarstellung), or the *presentation of certain features of an object*, accompanied by the awareness that these features are *connected* to other features within the object itself”²²⁶. If *Darstellung* is understood as the comprehensive knowledge of an object’s characteristics and the site where the truth of the object itself is revealed, then *Vorstellung* can only constitute a partial and limited representation of our understanding of the object.

As Atlas observes, the dialectical relationship between *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* thus leads to the development of a functional or coherentist rather than a correspondentist theory of truth²²⁷. Now, it is not my intention here to engage in the debate concerning which of these two conceptions of truth should be attributed to Kant. This remains an ongoing discussion, as strong arguments can be made in support of both positions²²⁸. However, the very existence of such a debate renders Kant’s stance considerably more ambiguous than Maimon’s. In the latter case, it is clear that he categorically rejects any theory of truth that seeks to ground it in a direct correspondence between a concept and its object. The truth of a concept is not determined by its single instantiation in an object, but rather by its systematic coherence with the whole that encompasses it. This truth, however, will always remain beyond our reach, as its attainment would necessitate knowledge of *the totality itself* – something that belongs exclusively to a divine understanding.

Moreover, if the truth of synthetic propositions can be (asymptotically) determined only by referring to the systematic framework in which they are embedded, then the ideas of reason which formally represent this same framework cannot be mere fictions. It is the *truth* of the *Darstellung* expressed by the ideas of reason that guarantees the possibility of the truth of our *Vorstellungen*, conceived as *Teildarstellungen*. Therefore, as in the case of the ideas of the understanding, the ideas of reason are also defined as *real* by Maimon:

²²⁶ *MGW*, V 299.

²²⁷ See Atlas 1969-1970, pp. 383-389.

²²⁸ For arguments in support of a correspondentist theory of truth in Kant’s thought, see Nenon 1986, Schulz 1993, Hanna 2000. For a coherentist reading, see on the contrary Kemp Smith 1923, Prauss 1980 and Putnam 1981. I restrict myself here to claiming that I agree with Vanzo when he argues that it is at least possible to reconcile those passages in which Kant appears to lean toward a coherentist theory of truth with a correspondentist account (see Vanzo 2008). More broadly, I concur with his claim that “[t]he true Copernican revolution, in this domain, concerns the status of objects, not the notion of truth, which Kant continues to define in a rather traditional way, using expressions typical of correspondentist theories” (Ivi, p. 95). In other words, attributing a correspondentist theory of truth to Kant does not necessarily entail the problematic demand for a correspondence between judgments and things-in-themselves, as many scholars tend to argue. Rather, the Copernican revolution would not so much alter the classical notion of truth as correspondence between judgment and thing but would instead transform the very notion of the “thing”, now conceived as an appearance and not as a thing-in-itself.

[A]n idea is in no way a dream; it would be better to call it a divine inspiration, and my opinion is that no two things are as much opposed as an idea (if it merits this name) and a dream. Dreams have no order, no plan, and are complete chance; but ideas are nothing but order and an all-encompassing plan. An idea of something is, as *Kant* says: the totality of its conditions; and hence it is the highest of these conditions: its domain is the infinite and this is why it cannot be presented in an intuition while nevertheless being real, being, indeed, the ground of the reality of all our cognition²²⁹.

Maimon's distinction between ideas and mere "dreams" suggests that he considers fictions to possess varying degrees of epistemological and ontological significance. On one hand, fictions can refer to arbitrary entities we may conceive of but that play no role in the organization of our experience. Due to their lack of any systematic function, they cannot be attributed any reality, and whether we think of them or not has no bearing on our ability to approach the truth. On the other hand, although ideas cannot be directly exhibited in intuition, they represent the totality of conditions for any given object, thereby constituting the horizon of truth within which they can be understood. In this sense, what Maimon writes in the final sentence of the quotation is particularly significant. It seems that ideas not only have a role in *organizing* our experience but also in *making it possible* in the first place, for they are "the ground of the reality of all our cognition" (*der Grund der Realität aller unserer Erkenntniß*). Passages like these suggest that Maimon ascribed to the divine understanding both a regulative *and* constitutive status. Even though the philosopher never explicitly takes an explicit stance on this issue, the role he attributes to the divine understanding in the *Essay* does not seem to be reducible solely to a regulative function²³⁰.

Maimon's explicit endorsement of a coherentist conception of truth implies that individual judgments, when considered in isolation and without reference to the encompassing totality, lack any objective validity. Consequently, it is solely the *Darstellung* – understood as the form of knowledge embodied by the divine understanding – that serves as the criterion of truth, thereby allowing even individual *Vorstellungen* to be ascribed a truth value. In this framework, the epistemic correlation between category and representation seems to be replaced by the correlation between presentation and representation. The idea of a divine understanding is not merely a means to organically connect individual representations that could also be formed independently of their reference to totality. Rather, its role is to ground the very possibility for granting these representations an epistemic value. As we saw, this shift signals a fundamental reconceptualization of objectivity: rather than being

²²⁹ *MGW*, II 327-328.

²³⁰ The only scholar to have explicitly identified a constitutive function in the idea of the understanding is Bonsiepen (see Bonsiepen 2002, p. 406). Ehrensperger also mentions some passages in the *Essay* where Maimon appears to attribute a constitutive role to this idea; however, he maintains that these are not always compatible with other parts of the text, where the regulative function is more strongly emphasized (see Ehrensperger 2006, p. 127n). I believe that the constitutive and regulative status of the idea of an infinite understanding are not mutually exclusive.

derived from the correspondence between categories and objects, truth emerges from the internal coherence of cognition itself, ultimately anchored in the unity of divine thought.

This holds true for both mathematical and empirical cognition. As previously discussed, according to Maimon, the objectivity of mathematical knowledge is grounded in the homogeneity between the rules governing the construction of an object and the object itself, as both are *a priori*. Mathematical objects are not given *a posteriori* to our sensibility; rather, they are constructed within the *a priori* intuition of space, in accordance with rules dictated by the understanding. Nevertheless, the objectivity of this – limited – human production relies on a higher presupposition, namely, the possibility of a complete identity between intuition and concept – or more precisely, the complete *reduction* of intuition to concept – as exemplified by divine cognition. The objective correspondence between the object constructed in pure intuition and its rules of production is thus based on the assumption of the identity of their *origin* within the mind of a divine understanding, with respect to which our understanding is only a less refined version.

As for empirical knowledge, the situation is quite different. Unlike what happens in mathematics, even the idea of a divine understanding cannot ground the objectivity of our empirical representations, for the distance between empirical objects and their rules of production can never be fully reduced. However, this idea at least justifies the possibility of an asymptotic process of approximation toward the complete identity between matter and form, and thus toward the resolution of the antinomy of thought. Without the notion of a divine understanding, our knowledge of the empirical world would lack any grounding beyond mere contingency. Not only would we be unable to assert the objectivity of our empirical judgments, but we would also lack any criterion for distinguishing between degrees of approximation to truth. Even probability, as a form of epistemic justification, presupposes an ideal of systematic unity. Without such an ideal, our representations would collapse into pure arbitrariness. It therefore seems that, even in the case of empirical knowledge, the divine understanding must have a constitutive function.

It is nevertheless crucial to emphasize that this reconceptualization of the divine understanding does not entail the complete dissolution of the regulative into the constitutive. On the contrary, the regulative now assumes a constitutive role while *retaining* its regulative function. Were the idea of an infinite understanding to be exclusively constitutive, it would necessarily establish a perfect correspondence between our representations – including empirical ones – and the truth embodied in the divine mode of cognition. In other words, it would also secure the objectivity of empirical knowledge. The fact that Maimon deliberately situates empirical knowledge beyond the horizon of complete conformity with truth suggests his intention to preserve the distinction between the

constitutive and regulative dimensions, preventing their collapse into one another. This interweaving seems to be implicitly conveyed in the following passage:

So I differ from Kant merely in this: instead of the three ideas that he assumes, I assume a single idea (of an infinite understanding), and I ascribe objective reality to this idea (not, it is true, viewed in itself – for this is contrary to the nature of an idea – but only in so far as it acquires objective reality for us in so many ways by means of objects of intuition). And also the other way around, that is, intuitions acquire objective reality only because they must eventually resolve into this idea: as Kant has himself proved, intuitions possess objective reality only when they are connected by pure a priori concepts. Now the understanding (or, according to Kant, reason) insists on absolute totality in these concepts so that this totality belongs as much to the essence of the understanding as to these concepts in general even if we cannot attain it²³¹.

I believe this quote summarizes well what we have just argued. First, it explicitly states that the idea must have a reality that manifests itself in its function of systematically unifying the intuited objects, once again confirming that, in the *Versuch*, reality and ideality are not mutually exclusive. A few lines above the passage I quoted, Maimon even claims that ideas can actually be known “if not in themselves (directly), [...] through the mediation of their schemas (what is given of them in intuition)”²³². As we have seen, in fact, the idea is not something distinct from the appearance, but rather represents its complete intelligibility. Conversely, the appearance is nothing other than the schema, that is, the sensible and imperfect manifestation of the idea itself.

Secondly, the constitutive dimension of the idea is highlighted in its role of ensuring the possibility of an objective reality of intuitions through their complete reduction into the totality – represented by the idea itself – of their genetic rules. In other words, if we accept that reality originally resides not in isolated appearances but in the systematic whole to which they belong, then the reality of these particular appearances depends on their ability to be integrated into this totality, or, in other words, to be “resolved into this idea” – that is, to be understood as part of a unified, law-governed structure of knowledge.

Finally, Maimon highlights once more that, even though this systematic totality is the necessary condition for attributing reality to empirical intuitions, its complete attainment by a finite understanding remains impossible. In other words, while the idea plays a constitutive role in structuring experience, it retains a regulative dimension insofar as it points toward a unity that we can approach but never fully realize. The idea, then, continues to function as a guiding principle for an

²³¹ *MGW*, II 366-367.

²³² *MGW*, II 366.

infinite task, emphasizing the dual nature of its role: both grounding the conditions of cognition and exceeding our capacity to fully grasp it.

This section has thus allowed me to intercept the major systematic developments of transcendental philosophy in Maimon's *Essay*. I have identified what I believe to be the three main changes with respect to Kantian criticism, namely the reformulation of the schematism doctrine, the reassessment of the relationship between appearances and the thing-in-itself, and a new meaning of the concept of "objective experience". At the same time, I have tried to demonstrate that these changes, far from constituting a compartmentalized reconsideration of specific elements of transcendental philosophy, entail a profound disruption of its fundamental structures, such as the distinctions between real and ideal objects, and between constitutive and the regulative principles.

As numerous scholars have noted, the solutions proposed by Maimon raise substantial philosophical problems, which, however, I will not examine in detail here. These will be analyzed in greater detail in the following chapter, through a comparison with Kant. For now, it suffices to say that, for example, Maimon does not explicitly clarify how appearances arise from their underlying differentials, how finite rational beings can engage in the process of dissolving phenomena into their noumena, or, ultimately, how categories can be applied to these rational principles. Nevertheless, I would argue that the value of Maimon's work lies less in the completeness or persuasiveness of his proposed solutions than in the sharpness and originality with which he formulates the problems themselves. His critical engagement exposes some of the latent tensions and aporias within Kantian philosophy, while at the same time anticipating central themes that would come to define the trajectory of German Idealism. In this regard, Maimon's thought can be seen not merely as a response to Kant, but as a genuine catalyst for the philosophical developments of figures such as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Therefore, I believe one could easily agree with Hoyos' words, according to which "Maimon's contribute follows from the clear representation he had of the problem, but less from his proposed solution"²³³.

In the following chapter, I will argue that the philosophical problems articulated by Maimon are not fundamentally different from those which Kant himself begins to confront in the *Opus*

²³³ Hoyos 2008, p. 280. On the problematic nature of Maimon's solutions, see also Rametta 2019b, pp. 184-185: "Maimon uncovers a new line of questioning, centered on the *genesis of the material of knowledge*, and in this sense genuinely opens a new path for the inquiry of thought. However, having opened this path, he does not appear willing to follow it through to its full implications". According to Rametta, the major weakness of Maimon's proposal lies in his attempt to amend Kant through a reappropriation of Leibnizian philosophy, whose metaphysical dimension, however, he ultimately failed to expunge. On the problematic aspect of the concept of "differential", see Elon 2021, p. 114: "The fundamental conceptual weakness of Maimon's epistemological theory of differentials is, however, relatively evident: while Kant may be criticized for the theory of schematism having the character of a ultimately unconvincing '*ad hoc* solution' – an attempted bridge between sensibility and understanding – Maimon's theory can be seen as equally problematic. The radical intellectualization of the content of intuition through the mathematical concept of the differential may likewise appear as an unpersuasive *ad hoc* solution or as a constructed device".

postumum. Chief among these is the persistent issue of the gap (*Lücke*) between the transcendental and the empirical, a structural disjunction that undermines the unity of Kant's critical system and calls for a new articulation of their connection. In broad terms, both Maimon and Kant, in their respective ways, attempt to reconstruct a mediating pathway between these two dimensions that deviates from the account presented in the first *Critique*. In this section, I have outlined what I take to be the principal implications of Maimon's reformulation for the conceptual apparatus of critical philosophy. In the next part, I intend to show how all three issues I have analyzed here – the reformulation of schematism, of the concept of the thing-in-itself, and of "objective experience" – are also explicitly present in the *Opus Postumum*. The aim will be to assess the possibility of using Maimonian tools to interpret some of the conceptual shifts occurring in Kant's late thought, while still preserving its specific character.

2.2 The evolution of transcendental philosophy in the central drafts of the *Opus postumum*

2.2.1 An assessment of the problem

In this section, my intention is to introduce the problem of the relationship between Maimon's thought and Kant's *Opus Postumum* through a preliminary assessment of what has been argued in the preceding parts. The aim is first and foremost to understand whether a comparison can be established between the problems that, according to Maimon, still afflict transcendental philosophy and the issues that Kant himself seeks to address within the manuscripts. As previously noted, Maimon articulates with considerable clarity what, in his view, constitutes the fundamental weakness of Kant's system. This issue, first formulated in the *Essay*, persists with minimal variation throughout his entire production. It concerns what Maimon, in *Baco und Kant*, refers to as "a gap [*Lücke*] between the transcendental concepts and propositions and the particular concepts and propositions of experience"²³⁴. In the same work he also states that "what is evidently missing here is the transition [*Uebergang*] from the general transcendental concepts and propositions, which relate to experience in general, to those that relate to particular experiences"²³⁵. The same point is formulated in almost identical terms two years later, in the *Progresses*, where Maimon argues that "*Philosophy* [...] has not yet been able to build a *bridge* [*Brücke*] that would make possible the transition [*Uebergang*] from the *transcendental* to the *particular*"²³⁶. As we saw, Maimon's attempt in the *Essay* was to resolve this gap between the transcendental and the empirical, at least on the level of *legitimacy*. In other words, the solution to the *Quid juris?* through the doctrine of differentials and the infinite understanding showed Maimon the *possibility* of building a bridge between the two dimensions. As we have seen, however, the impossibility, for our understanding, of fully reducing objects to their rules of production prevented the resolution of the *Quid facti?*, since only a *complete* transparency between intuition and concept would be capable of grounding objective knowledge. This gap between the transcendental and the particular involves all the key structures of critical philosophy, as it directly manifests in the distance between form and matter, between understanding and sensibility, but also – perhaps more indirectly – between appearances and things-in-themselves, between constitutive and regulative principles.

As we have mentioned, Kant uses a very similar terminology in the *Opus Postumum*. Just to remind one example, the philosopher writes that "there is a gap [*Lücke*] to be filled between the

²³⁴ *MGW*, II 520-521.

²³⁵ *MGW*, II 519.

²³⁶ *MGW*, IV 38.

metaphysical foundations of natural science and physics; its filling is called a transition [*Übergang*] from the one to the other”²³⁷. Now, one might point out that the similarity stops at the terminological affinity between the terms *Lücke* and *Übergang*, without actually involving the *elements* related by these two concepts. In other words: is the gap between the transcendental and the empirical that Maimon speaks of truly comparable to that between the metaphysics of nature and empirical physics, or are these two entirely different issues? At first glance, it would seem that the problem identified by Kant is narrower than Maimon’s, as it does not involve the entirety of the critical structure, but only a specific application of it, related to philosophy of nature. In this sense, even the potential failure to carry out this transition would not have undermined the solidity of transcendental philosophy as such.

Regarding this latter point, it can first preliminarily be noted that the urgency and importance of the project for the coherence of the critical system are explicitly emphasized by Kant in his letter to Garve dated September 21, 1798, in which the philosopher speaks of a “pain like that of Tantalus” and of the necessity to complete the Transition project, since otherwise there would be “a gap in the system of critical philosophy”²³⁸. In a letter to Kiesewetter dated October 19, 1798, shortly after the previous one, Kant speaks of the need to “fill a remaining gap [...]; namely, the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics, as a specific part of *philosophia naturalis*, which must not be missing from the system”²³⁹. It is true that in this latter passage Kant appears to relegate his project to a part of philosophy of nature reinforcing the impression that the problem is more limited in scope compared to the issues raised by Maimon. However, as I have already suggested in the first part of this work, and as I will attempt to explore in the following sections, Kant must have soon realized that the problems initially thought to be confined to a specific part of his system in fact involved the key structures of critical philosophy as a whole. Moreover, in their biographies, Hasse and Borowski emphasize not only the relevance but also the absolute centrality that Kant seemed to assign to his final project within the context of the critical system. In Hasse’s biography, it is reported that Kant referred to the *Opus Postumum* in private discussions as his “main work [Hauptwerk], a Chef d’œuvre”²⁴⁰. Borowski, on the other hand, describes the Transition project as the true “keystone [*Schlußstein*] of his philosophical work”²⁴¹. As Basile correctly suggests, it is possible that the term “keystone” should not be given excessive importance²⁴². One can assume, in a neutral sense, that it simply indicates the fact that Kant viewed this text as his final work. At the same time, however, the

²³⁷ *OP*, XXI 482.

²³⁸ *BW*, XII 256.

²³⁹ *BW*, XII 258.

²⁴⁰ In Buchenau-Lehmann 1925.

²⁴¹ In Groß 1993.

²⁴² See Basile 2013, p. 453.

expression also suggests a more substantial evaluative implication. The *Schlußstein* is indeed the key structural element that ensures and upholds the integrity of the entire building. While it may be excessive to claim that the *Opus Postumum* was intended to secure the coherence of the entire critical system, the available sources nonetheless support the view that the problems developed therein are not confined to merely regional issues, such as the classification of the moving forces of matter according to the principles of transcendental philosophy. Rather, it represents an attempt to critically engage with these very principles, in order to assess their function and status. In what follows, I will substantiate this claim by focusing on the reconfiguration of the structure of transcendental philosophy that occurs in the fascicles following *Übergang I-14*.

Moreover, I believe that certain insights into the non-localized nature of the Kantian project stem from what I argued in section 1.1 regarding the meaning of the *transition* from the metaphysical principles of the science of nature to physics. As I have argued there, it is not about an attempt to employ the two forces of attraction and repulsion in order to justify all the empirical properties of matter, such as cohesion, fluidity, rigidity and so on. The question is much broader, as it concerns Kant's effort to apply the *method* of the *Metaphysical Foundations* to the object of *physica specialis*. In other words, what is at stake is the possibility of applying the *categories* not only to the concept of "matter in general" but also to matter as considered in its specific and particular determinations. The difficulties that Kant encounters in the *Oktaventwurf* and in the immediately subsequent manuscripts, in his attempt to classify the properties of matter in accordance with the table of categories, lead him to acknowledge the existence of a gap between the metaphysical principles of natural science and physics. If my reading is correct, then this gap lies between the *categories* themselves and *empirically given objects*. This should prove that the issue is not confined to specific questions within the philosophy of nature, but involves the very fundamental structures of transcendental philosophy itself.

I therefore consider S. Schulze's observation to be correct, namely that the "transition" Maimon refers to in *Baco und Kant* and in the *Progresses* between transcendental concepts and particular experiences, is "broader than the one referred to in the working title of the *Opus Postumum*, since it is not limited to a specific science". However, as the same scholar notes, "the underlying problematic that gives rise to the idea of such a transition – namely, the asserted necessity of a mediation between a priori concepts and empirical experience – is [...] the same"²⁴³.

At the same time, I cannot agree with Schulze's claim that, unlike Kant, Maimon denied "the possibility, but at the same time also the necessity of such a transition"²⁴⁴. I believe this statement is too strong, for it would render the very project of the *Essay* unintelligible. As we have seen, the main

²⁴³ Schulze 1994, p. 94.

²⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 95.

objective of that text is to provide a solution to the *Quid juris?* through a new doctrine of schematism. Since the function of schematism is precisely to connect the a priori dimension of the categories with the a posteriori dimension of the objects synthesized by them, this problem necessarily intersects with the issue of the transition from the transcendental to the empirical. It would be rather odd if Maimon had devoted so much effort to a project he himself regarded as neither necessary nor possible. One could argue that, for Maimon, proving the *possibility* of this transition is not sufficient to establish its *actuality*, which, on the contrary, remains indemonstrable due to the finite understanding's inability to fully reduce objects to their genetic rules of production. Nevertheless, this limitation does not, in my view, undermine Maimon's theoretical ambition to articulate a different relationship between matter and form, nor his aim to demonstrate the possibility of an intrinsic, rational organization of reality – one that we may never *fully* comprehend, but which nonetheless grounds the intelligibility of experience.

For both Maimon and Kant, the central problem thus lies in developing a conceptual framework that should enable the possibility of a systematization of the *particulars* objects of experience. Such systematization cannot be achieved through the laws prescribed by the categories of the understanding, as these determine only objects in general and fail to account for the specific relations between individual objects. Nor can it be realized through the reflective power of judgment as articulated in the third *Critique*, which organizes particular appearances solely on the basis of observations and experiments. In such a case, the resulting system would remain perpetually open to endless revision and modification. Instead, it becomes necessary to assume principles that are immanent to particular appearances themselves – namely, genetic laws that govern their specific interactions and ground the systematic character of experience in a stronger sense, as we saw in section 1.3.

In the case of the late Kant, these principles consist in the dynamical moving forces of matter unified through the idea of the ether, whereas in Maimon's case, they are represented by the differentials, whose interaction is governed by the idea of a divine understanding. It is interesting to note how these principles respond to both criteria of differentiation and unification. On the one hand, the moving forces and differentials constitute the genetic rules for the production of the individual and distinct empirical properties of appearances. On the other hand, the ether and the divine understanding function as guarantors of the systematic interaction among these genetic principles, which would otherwise operate without any order and could not function as conditions for the possibility of a *systematic* experience. For both Kant and Maimon, it is therefore not sufficient to demonstrate how the individual empirical properties of bodies are grounded in the interaction of

specific genetic rules of production; it is also necessary to show that these rules operate in a unified and organic manner, so as to render the order of reality intelligible.

In this regard, another clarification is in order. In both the case of the moving forces of matter and that of differentials, there is no qualitative distinction between these principles – conceived as the foundations of particular empirical differences among phenomena – and that which ensures their unity and the lawful character of their relations. We already hinted at the fact that the ether is not distinct from its moving forces. In the same manner, the infinite understanding is not distinct from the differentials. If God is pure thought, pure rationality, then the differentials constitute its expression as principles of differentiation. Differentials are understood as rules through which reality is articulated into differences – that is, into multiple appearances. They are not objects or things, but fundamental rules or processes contained in the divine mind that allow reality to differentiate itself, to become what it is in its manifold variety. If this is true, then it follows that the very unity encompassing the moving forces of matter on the one hand, and the differentials on the other, is simultaneously both regulative and constitutive. In other words: both the ether and the infinite understanding do not merely have the function of systematically organizing a given material; they also contribute, in a constitutive sense, to the *production* of this material through their own internal processes of differentiation.

Moreover, the parallel between the epistemic function of the divine understanding – as the comprehensive unity of differentials – and that of the ether – as the totality of the moving forces – is further manifests as an *ontological* affinity. In Maimon’s case, we saw in section 2.1.5 that the rearticulation of the relation between form and matter had profound implication for the for our way of understanding the very concept of “reality” (*Wirklichkeit*). “Real” is not something which “is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation)”²⁴⁵, as Kant argued in the first *Critique*. In Maimon’s rationalistic framework, the passivity inherent in human sensation serves on the contrary as a clear indication of our inability to access the rational process that constitute the object itself. It is the process itself that is *real*, whereas the object we perceive is nothing more than its opaque image grasped by our sensibility. The reality of differentials is therefore not grounded in their empirical manifestation, but in their status as genetic conditions of what we mistakenly assume to be the reality of sensation. At the same time, Maimon emphasizes the *ideal* nature of these processes. This means that differentials and the divine understanding are not conceived as self-subsisting realities, but rather as concepts capable of providing systematic coherence to our knowledge. In other words, their reality is determined by the degree of systematization they are able to confer upon our experience. As Atlas puts in, “[i]deas that represent ‘modes of the generation of

²⁴⁵ *KrV*, A 218-B 266.

objects' present reality of a higher order than the reality of objects given through the forms of sensibility, for true knowledge consists in knowing the origin of a thing and the cognition of the principle of its generation"²⁴⁶. The ideas of the understanding and of reason are thus real insofar as they guide us in the endless task of constructing a coherent and systematic account of knowledge. Without these ideas, we would be left with a disjointed array of singular experiences. Individual perceptual experiences, then, are not properly real until they are traced back to the system of rules that encompasses and grounds them. Reality, for Maimon, lies not in what appears, but in the rational process through which appearance is generated and rendered intelligible.

The analysis I conducted in section 1.5 has shown us that the ether appears to possess both an epistemic function and an ontological status that are analogous to those of Maimon's principles. In fact, Kant is even more explicit than Maimon in affirming that "[t]here is a not merely regulative, but also constitutive formal principle, existing a priori, of the science of nature, for the purpose of a system"²⁴⁷. As we have seen, this principle is the ether with its moving forces. On the one hand, it is regulative, as it ensures the systematic order of our experience; on the other hand, it is also constitutive, as it represents the lawful condition of possibility for the specific and different determinations of appearances. Unlike the ideas of the first *Critique*, or the reflective judgment of the third, the ether does not function as a principle that organizes an already given material; rather, it is responsible for the very *production* of this material in the first place.

As for its status, I have pointed out Kant's oscillations on the matter. In the *Oktaventwurf* and the immediately subsequent notes, Kant treats the ether (and caloric) as a physical hypothesis, in continuity with his earlier writings. In the later manuscripts, however, one observes a gradual increase in Kant's confidence in the explanatory power of the ether within empirical physics. Nonetheless, so long as its nature remained that of a physical entity, Kant was unable to ascribe to it more than the provisional status of a useful hypothesis. It is only in section *Übergang 1-14* that a significant shift occurs. Here, Kant explicitly sets out to deduce the existence of the ether a priori. This move entails a radical transformation of its status, which can no longer be understood merely as that of an empirical substance. Accordingly, formulations of the following kind begin to appear:

Although this primary material [...] is merely present in thought [*blos in Gedanke da ist*], it is not a hypothetical thing. Nor is it an object of experience; for then it would belong to physics. It has reality [*Realität*], however, and its existence [*Existenz*] can be postulated, because, without the

²⁴⁶ Atlas 1969-1970, p. 370.

²⁴⁷ *OP*, XXII 240.

assumption of such a world-material and its moving forces, space would be no sense-object, and experience of it [...] would not take place²⁴⁸.

However, one cannot posit this substance as a *hypothetical* one – namely, one borrowed empirically from physics and raised to the principle of the moving forces of matter (e.g., caloric); for it is merely a thought-entity [*Gedankending*], not an object of possible experience, but a concept of the only possible means to make experience²⁴⁹.

These passages clearly shows that Kant's main objective in *Übergang 1-14* is to assign the ether an original status within the framework of critical philosophy. On the one side, the ether is not an empirical matter, for otherwise we could not assign to it the role of a *transcendental* principle. On the other side, it is neither a merely *formal* principle that guarantees the possibility of experience in general, for it must be conceived as the explanatory ground of the specific attributes of matter. I therefore believe that the reality of the ether should be understood in a similar vein as that of Maimon's ideas: it is a *genetic* principle that ensures the reality of concrete experience. Its moving forces constitute the rational rules of the production of empirical objects. The ether is not a substance or a thing-in-itself (in the dogmatic sense of the term) that stands beyond the domain of experience, but rather the *idea* of the totality of rules that enable us to construct an organic and systematic experience.

This idea of the genetic function of the ether and its moving forces is suggested by Kant the following passage:

But the transition from the one to the other cannot occur directly; rather, between the a priori concepts of the former and the empirical ones, through which the former must be connected to the latter, there must lie intermediate concepts [*Zwischenbegriffe*], which make the transition from the former to the latter scientifically possible. These are the conditions of possibility for a system of experience of corporeal nature and of its moving forces, and thereby can ground a physics. For the idea of this science contains the representation of a whole that is internally connected and complete; without this, it would not be a true system, but merely a patchwork, the direction and extent of which, in the investigation of nature, could not be foreseen. The principles of the latter, however, are not to be logical and formal – that is, prescribing the order of thought in general – but genetic, concerning the objects (the material of knowledge), through which natural science is expanded by experiential knowledge²⁵⁰.

²⁴⁸ *OP*, XXI 219.

²⁴⁹ *OP*, XXII 606.

²⁵⁰ *OP*, XXI 528-529.

I regard this passage as highly significant, as it constitutes the only instance within the *Opus postumum* in which Kant explicitly attributes a genetic function to the principles of the Transition, in a manner reminiscent of Maimon's ideas. For this reason, a precise analysis of the passage is warranted. At the outset, Kant reiterates the claim that establishing a connection between the metaphysical principles of natural science and empirical physics necessitates the introduction of a specific category of concepts, designated as "intermediate concepts". These forces hold a rather peculiar status within the framework of the critical system, since, on the one hand, they can be classified a priori, and on the other, they are regarded as the cause and ground of the particular empirical determinations of sensible objects. Simultaneously, as this passage underscores, their function is to guarantee that physics – that is, the scientific cognition of nature – is rendered "internally connected and complete". Without the principles of the Transition, our inquiry into nature would devolve into a mere "patchwork" of data, lacking systematic order and coherence, and thus perpetually subject to revision, modification, and correction.

Finally, Kant clarifies that these very principles are not merely logical or formal, but *genetic* in nature, as they concern the *material* content of knowledge. In other words, the principles of the science of the Transition do not simply determine the formal relations among objects in general, but instead constitute the genetic conditions for *concrete* objects in their material determinations – in a way that evokes Maimon's differentials. The intermediate concepts thus represent the condition of possibility for a systematic concept of experience in the strong sense, as previously discussed in section 1.3. Nonetheless, they do not supplant the role of empirical research and investigation, a point that Kant seems intent on emphasizing in the closing sentence. It is always experiential knowledge (*Erfahrungserkenntnis*) that expands our scientific understanding of nature. Yet, the intermediate concepts serve to secure the internal coherence of the procedures through which experiential knowledge is acquired.

I therefore believe that Kant's attribution of a genetic character to the principles meant to ground empirical physics is of utmost importance. In previous works Kant had in fact assigned this characteristic only to the principles of mathematics. In the *Logik Jäsche* we find for example such description: "A definition is genetic if it provides a concept through which the object can be presented [*dargestellt*] a priori *in concreto*; all mathematical definitions are of this kind"²⁵¹. Mathematical definitions are genetic because they do not merely describe, for example, what a triangle is: they shows us how to *construct* one. It is therefore a *productive* definition, which allows the object to be represented "concretely" in the pure intuitions. All other definitions, including that of empirical sciences, on the contrary, "are dianoetic, serving merely for comparison with what is already

²⁵¹ *Logik Jäsche*, IX 144.

known”²⁵². Contrary to mathematics, in empirical cognition we cannot construct our own object (in its material determinations), but we must *apply* concepts to what is already known, namely, to *given* objects of experience. For example, in the definition of force as “that which causes a change in the state of motion of a body” we are not generating the concept of “force” in pure intuition. Rather, we presuppose a given empirical framework in which force, bodies, motion, and change are already known and we *connect* them through our a priori concepts.

It thus seems that, in the *Opus postumum*, Kant attempted to blur this distinction, attributing even to the principles of empirical science – that is, the principles of the Transition – a genetic status. A few lines below the passage we previously quoted from the manuscripts, Kant writes:

It is a purely mathematical concept to imagine a lever that does not break or bend under the influence of weights. Here, too, a connection is conceived [*Zusammenhang*] and a certain thickness at which the lever would tear in a parallel direction due to its own weight. The opposition lies in the moving forces of matter, like +a and –a – that is, an opposition not merely logical but real²⁵³.

Like many passages in the manuscripts, this one too displays a certain degree of obscurity. Yet, a coherent line of interpretation can be discerned. Kant seems to be suggesting that the science of physics cannot be fully accounted through mere dianoetic operations. Instead, it involves a more fundamental layer of conceptual construction grounded in the dynamics of forces. The example of the lever is particularly telling. The lever’s capacity to resist, up to a certain threshold, the mechanical forces exerted upon it by other bodies, is to be understood as a property arising from the action of original forces whose real opposition, expressed symbolically as +a and -a, gives rise to the very thickness of the lever itself. This property is therefore not merely something empirically observed in nature, but something that can be *constructed* through reference to the action of dynamic forces, which, as we have seen, occupy a position between the purely a priori level of transcendental forms and the a posteriori domain of empirical objects. As Kant reiterates shortly afterward,

for physics to come into being, principles of natural science must first be in place – not logical ones concerning the subject and its method, but elementary concepts [*Elementarbegriffe*] concerning the object itself. For this transition, the anticipation of certain empirical representations is required, as they are necessary for the possibility of physics as a system²⁵⁴.

²⁵² *Logik Refl.* 3001, XVI 609.

²⁵³ *OP*, XXI 529-530.

²⁵⁴ *OP*, XXI 530.

This appears to substantiate once again the interpretation proposed here. The principles of natural science are not merely logical and formal – that is, they are not simply functional for establishing a connection between materials which are simply *given* to the subject. Rather, they are “elementary” concepts that determine and construct the object itself even in its material components, allowing us to “anticipate” its empirical properties and to establish physics as a systematic science in a strong sense. Further support for this view can be found in these same notes, where we encounter additional suggestions pointing toward the same conclusion: namely, that the “elementary concepts” Kant speaks of correspond precisely to the dynamic forces of matter, unified under the concept of the ether, or caloric. Just prior to the passage cited above, Kant writes: “The caloric is incompressible and inexhaustible. – It is the force that connects all moving forces; it is the universal means of connection and dissolution [*Verbindung und Auflösungsmittel*]”²⁵⁵. As the totality of the moving forces inherent in matter, caloric thus emerges as the ultimate ground for both the cohesion and the partition of material bodies. It is, in a sense, the “place” where real oppositions between moving forces occur, producing transformations in the states and determinations of matter.

In light of these considerations, it seems entirely legitimate to conceive of the ether as a *genetic condition* of concrete experience. This notion reveals a function which is difficult to situate within the classical boundaries of Kantian criticism, wherein a genetic role is traditionally ascribed solely to mathematical concepts. These preliminary reflections, therefore, provide a justified basis for invoking Maimon’s conceptual framework in order to clarify the reconfiguration that Kant seems intent on introducing into the architecture of his own system. As previously noted, the affinity between Maimon’s ideas (of reason and of the understanding) and Kant’s principles of the Transition is grounded in a shared epistemic function – both regulative and constitutive – as well as in a shared ontological status. In both frameworks, these elements are understood as simultaneously *real* and *ideal*: real insofar as they constitute the genetic condition without which the particular determinations of objects could not be given; ideal insofar as they elude direct and ostensive presentation within empirical experience. In other words, they are thought-entities which are *posited* by the subject, yet their *reality* is determined by their capacity to explain and connect phenomena within a coherent system. However, as I will try to demonstrate in the following paragraphs, a fundamental difference can be discerned. In Maimon, the reality of differentials seems to “overshadow” the reality of empirical objects, in the sense that the latter are regarded merely as the imperfect manifestation of the former. The “true” reality is thus represented exclusively by the rational dimension of the genetic rules governing the production of objects, which are contained in the mind of a divine understanding. In the manuscripts, however, one observes a “splitting” of the

²⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

concept of reality, such that the existence of empirical objects retains its independence, and, with it, the subject's sensibility preserves its epistemic function, without requiring a complete reduction to the dimension of the understanding.

The aim of the following sections will be to substantiate this interpretation by referring also to the manuscripts that follow *Übergang I–14*, namely *Konvolute X* and *XI*, as well as parts of *Konvolute VII*. The objective is to show that the affinities between Maimon's proposal and that of the late Kant are not limited to a mere terminological proximity between Maimon's ideas and the principles of the Transition. Rather, the intention is to highlight how this proximity is accompanied by a significant rearticulation of the structures of transcendental philosophy – one that precisely concerns the three issues identified in section 2.1.5 as the most significant consequences of Maimon's arguments, namely, the proposal of a new schematism, a reformulation (or clarification) of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself and a new concept of "experience". Simultaneously, I will aim to elucidate the points at which the two proposals diverge and maintain their conceptual distance.

2.2.2 The schematism of the *Mittelbegriffe*

As discussed in the first part of this study, in 1798 Kant identifies a "gap" between the metaphysical foundations of natural science and empirical physics – a gap resulting from the disparity between the universal a priori forms structuring the metaphysics of nature and the particular a posteriori determinations characteristic of empirical inquiry. According to the philosopher, the introduction of the *Mittelbegriffe* was needed to bridge precisely this gap through an a priori classification of the moving forces of matter upon which these particular determinations of phenomena are grounded. As such, the *Mittelbegriffe* must be homogeneous with both the categories and the empirical data they relate to, effectively uniting the two domains. The *Mittelbegriffe* should thus be conceived as a particular kind of "schema". Kant himself emphasizes, especially in post-1798 drafts, that these intermediate concepts function as a specific kind of *schema*²⁵⁶. I include here some passages that I consider to be significant:

- (1) The concept that shall serve the transition must be a priori, yet they must nonetheless contain the schematism of the concepts of composition that is required for the empirical. Concerning

²⁵⁶ The absence of any reference to intermediary concepts or their schematic role in the notes preceding Kant's 1798 shift supports my central thesis: that, in those earlier texts, Kant regarded the domains of the metaphysics of nature and empirical physics as adjacent to one another. Although the *Oktaventwurf* and the early *Lose Blätter* do contain efforts to classify moving forces a priori, they offer no indication of a perceived need to introduce an intermediate domain capable of mediating the transition from the a priori to the empirical dimension (see e.g. *OP*, XXI 477).

forces that move not mechanically but dynamically (*vires innatae motrices non impressae*). Concerning *phenomenology*. Concerning the force that permeates all matter – itself thus not *material*, yet appearing as such [*als solche erscheinende*]. Analogous to inherence in relation to subsistence, and vice versa²⁵⁷.

(2) The transition is the schematism of the composition [*Zusammensetzung*] of moving forces, insofar as these constitute a system for physics in general that conforms a priori to the form of classification. In other words, the architectonic of the investigation of nature. This transition is the architectonic classification of the moving forces of matter a priori, as a propaedeutic to a system of physics. It contains the complete classification of the necessary materials and their form²⁵⁸.

(3) The *schematism* of the concepts of the understanding presents here, as indeed throughout transcendental philosophy, the difficulty of the transition to physics in the thorough determination [*durchgängige Bestimmung*] of the system of moving forces. The schematism of the concepts of the understanding is the vestibule [*Vorhof*] (*atrium*) of the transition from the metaphysical foundations to physics – a moment in which metaphysics and physics touch both shores at once²⁵⁹.

These passages clearly show how the intent to bridge the gap between the metaphysics of nature and physics had to be based on the establishment of a new schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding. Quotation (1) emphasizes that these concepts must, on the one hand, be a priori, but that on the other hand they must also contain what is required for the composition of the empirical²⁶⁰. In other words, they must constitute the rational principle of differentiation of empirical appearances and their attributes. As we already mentioned in section 1.3, this function cannot be fulfilled by the schema of the first *Critique*, since these, being merely determinations of the a priori form of time, are not capable of determining the individual empirical properties of phenomena. For example, the schema of the category of substance – i.e., permanence in time – cannot account for the particular characteristics of *that which persists* through time.

The same quotation clearly indicates that the *schema* required to enable the transition from the metaphysics of nature to physics consists in the very moving forces of matter, considered not mechanically, but dynamically. Mechanical forces act between objects possessing mass, velocity, and acceleration, and thus belong entirely to the empirical realm; they cannot serve as *Mittelbegriffe*. Dynamical forces, by contrast, being innate, operate on a more original level, *generating* the empirical itself. As Kant writes in the same passage, they “permeate” all matter – thanks to their imponderability

²⁵⁷ *OP*, XXI 174.

²⁵⁸ *OP*, XXII 263.

²⁵⁹ *OP*, XXII 487.

²⁶⁰ For an accurate analysis of the notion of “composition” (*Zusammensetzung*) in the *Opus postumum*, see Lorini 2023.

incoercibility – and are not themselves material. Dynamical forces *appear* (erscheinen) as material only insofar as the effects of their interaction manifest at the level of empirical appearances and their associated mechanical forces.

Quotations (2) and (3) further underscore the expanded role of schematism in Kant's manuscripts, extending well beyond its function in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the final sentence of quotation (2), Kant asserts that the classification of moving forces results in a comprehensive classification "of materials and their forms." Here again, the schematic function of the *Mittelbegriffe* is not limited to enabling the application of pure a priori forms to objects in general; rather, it plays a crucial role in determining *matter in its concrete configurations*. As quotation (3) makes clear, this determination must be both exhaustive and systematic. This means that, *quantitatively*, it should encompass the full range of matter's properties; and that, *qualitatively*, it must follow a rational and ordered structure, grounded in the table of categories, rather than remaining fragmentary or disordered.

There is little doubt that Kant understood the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to empirical physics as involving a genuinely new schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding. The key question, however, is how this "new" schematism should be interpreted. Does it signify a replacement of the schematism developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or merely its expansion? As we have seen, Maimon's solution to the question *Quid juris?* can be seen as an attempt to substitute Kant's doctrine of schematism by replacing the mediating function of the transcendental schemata of the imagination with the differentials. In this sense, Maimon believed that the schematism of the first *Critique* was unable to solve the very problem it was designed to address – namely, to show how the understanding and sensibility can communicate in order to ground the possibility of objective experience. If we want to evaluate the theoretical proximity between the *Opus postumum* and Maimon's project, we must first assess whether this is ultimately Kant's objective in the manuscripts as well – namely, to revise or correct his earlier doctrine. In light of what I argued in the first part, and as I will attempt to show here in more detail, the answer seems to me to be *no*. The new schematism should be understood not as a revision, but as an *extension* of the original.

More precisely, my claim is that while Kant's *Opus postumum* does indeed aim to establish a metaphysical foundation for the possibility of a *physica specialis*, this does not entail a revision of the foundation of *physica generalis*, which was the principal concern of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. This interpretation also allows us to view the *Opus postumum* as, in part, a response to the criticisms Maimon directed at Kant's project of grounding physics. Specifically, I argue that Maimon's objections – particularly his claim that

transcendental philosophy fails to secure the objectivity of physical knowledge – stem from a conflation or neglect of the distinction between *physica generalis*, which is mathematical in nature, and *physica specialis*, which is not susceptible to complete mathematization. In this light, it appears that Kant already possessed, in the *Critique* and the *Metaphysical Foundations*, the conceptual resources necessary to answer Maimon’s skepticism with respect to *physica generalis*. What remained unaddressed, however, was the task of grounding *physica specialis*, which thus remained exposed to the kind of skeptical challenge Maimon advanced.

In other words, I believe that, at least in certain passages of the *Essay*, Maimon holds an extremely simplified view of Kant’s conception of empirical physics, as if the demonstration of its validity were based exclusively on the Analytic of Principles and, in particular, on the Analogies of Experience. As we have seen, Maimon’s critique is based on the impossibility of demonstrating the existence of a genuine and necessary causal relationship between two objects, A and B, given the heterogeneity between the universal forms of thought and the contingent, empirical dimension to which these forms are supposed to be applied. In this sense, Maimon’s skepticism is rooted in a perceived epistemic weakness of the concept of causality and of the principle that is meant to govern its application – namely, the Second Analogy of Experience.

However, as Franks correctly notes, “Kant’s *full* story about how we arrive at determinate causal judgments requires, not only the Analytic of Principles, but also the account of the mathematization of appearances in Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*”²⁶¹. Therefore, in order to justify the validity of the propositions and laws of physics – such as the law of universal gravitation – it is not sufficient to refer solely to that specific section of the Analytic of Principles in which Kant examines the conditions under which the category of causality can be applied. Rather, one must turn to the mathematical formulation of this law and of the phenomena it seeks to explain (in this case, Newton’s mathematical expression), as well as to the principles that, according to Kant, metaphysically ground the validity of such a law – that is, those articulated in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, and in particular, in the chapter on Mechanics. My aim here is not to offer a comprehensive analysis of how the Analytic of Principles, Kant’s metaphysical principles, and mathematics together underpin the objectivity of physical science. This complex issue deserves a dedicated inquiry and has already been the subject of substantial scholarly discussion²⁶². Rather, what I intended to emphasize is merely the fact *that* Kant conceives of these three components to be all indispensable for grounding *physica generalis*, that is, “a *mathematical* doctrine of nature itself [*einer mathematischen Naturlehre selbst*]”²⁶³. To use Friedman’s words,

²⁶¹ Franks 2003, p. 228.

²⁶² For a comprehensive examination of the problem, see Friedman 1992b.

²⁶³ *MAN*, 473. Italics mine.

[I]t is only the *Metaphysical Foundations*, I suggest, that first makes it clear what the nature of this crucially important relationship between transcendental laws and empirical laws actually is. For the *Metaphysical Foundations* further specifies the transcendental laws of the understanding by means of the empirical concept of matter to obtain the metaphysical doctrine of body, and then makes it clear how the latter, in turn, serves as an a priori ground or foundation for the empirical law of universal gravitation. By the same token, it is only the *Metaphysical Foundations* that first makes it clear how the dynamical principles of pure understanding are constitutive with respect to (generate schemata for) empirical concept – in this case, the empirical concept of matter. Without the *Metaphysical Foundations*, therefore, we would have no conception whatsoever of *how* the principles of pure understanding are actually constitutive with respect to experience²⁶⁴.

The aim of the *Metaphysical Foundations* is thus to “concretize” the general principles of the *Critique of Pure Reason* by instantiating them in the empirical concept of “matter”. In doing so, Kant seeks to provide a metaphysical grounding for the doctrine of bodies and their motion in space. This procedure is particularly evident in the section on Mechanics, where Kant’s aim is to a priori ground the three laws of mechanics a priori, deriving them from the three Analogies of Experience – namely, the principles governing the application of the categories of substance, causality, and reciprocal interaction²⁶⁵. The result is a specific instantiation of the principles of the understanding with respect to corporeal nature and empirical bodies. In other words, by applying the *transcendental* principles to the object of the outer sense – the concept of “matter” in general” – we obtain the *metaphysical* principles of natural science, namely, the law of mechanics²⁶⁶.

However, Maimon might still object that such a procedure is insufficient to guarantee the necessity of the empirical laws that the principles of mechanics are supposed to ground. In other words, Kant’s (re)formulation of the laws of mechanics, even though it represents an attempt to instantiate the Analogies of Experience by applying them to the object of outer world would still be too

²⁶⁴ Friedman 1992a, p. 259.

²⁶⁵ See van den Berg 2014, pp. 46-48; Friedman 1992b, p. 185. It is well known that Kant’s principles of mechanics do not precisely correspond to Newton’s laws of motion. It is enough to note here that Newton’s second law, according to which “the change of motion is proportional to the moving force impressed; and is made in the direction of the right line in which that force is impressed” is not even mentioned. Kant’s second law of mechanics therefore appears to be a reformulation of Newton’s first law, while Kant’s first law (“In all changes of corporeal nature the total quantity of matter remains the same, neither increased nor diminished”, *MAN* 541) does not correspond to any of Newton’s laws. However, I believe it is not relevant here to examine the reasons for these differences.

²⁶⁶ See Friedman 1992b, pp. 181-192. This procedure is intended to ensure that every physical body is necessarily subject to the principles of mechanics, and that the regularities we observe in phenomena do not stem merely from inductive generalization. For example, according to Kant, Kepler had merely *described* the motions of the planets and their regularities through a purely inductive procedure, and had not provided the a priori *laws* governing these phenomena, which would instead later be discovered by Newton himself. As Kant writes in the manuscripts, “[i]nstead of Kepler’s *aggregation* of motions, which contained empirically gathered rules [*Regeln*], Newton made a principle of the system of moving forces from active causes [*wirkende Ursache*]” (*OP*, XXII 521).

general to determine the lawfulness and necessity of particular concrete cases that are supposed to fall under this law.

It is precisely at this juncture that mathematics assumes a fundamental role, insofar as “Kant takes mathematical constructions to provide a priori cognition of *determinate* natural things”²⁶⁷. Mathematical constructions in fact allow us to build models whose reality is apodictic, and which can be considered as quantitative representations of *individual* objects and their movements in space. Mathematical laws make it possible to confirm whether or not a given object adheres to a universal law, since it is possible to calculate and measure its movement and verify its conformity to the formula expressed by the law. For example, Newton demonstrates mathematically that if two bodies attract each other with a force inversely proportional to the square of their distance, then the resulting motions follow elliptical trajectories (according to Kepler’s laws), and that such a force can be represented by the formula: $F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$. Subsequently, Newton observes that the planets of the solar system and the satellites of Jupiter follow precisely the trajectories predicted by the law. These observations are not the basis of the law, which is rationally deduced according to the a priori laws of motion, but serve to verify that certain empirical objects fall under the formulated law²⁶⁸. Finally, Newton concludes that these bodies are necessarily subject to the law of gravitational attraction, and thus proves the *objective* validity of the latter.

The regularity of the planets’ motion along an elliptical orbit, therefore, does not stem from a mere perceptual habit that we elevate to a physical law through induction. On the contrary, it is a kind of motion governed by precise mathematical laws which, according to Kant, are grounded in the *metaphysical* principles of mechanics, in turn derived from the *transcendental* principles of the Analogies of Experience²⁶⁹. These mathematical procedures allow us to prove, through observations and experiments, that general laws are actually applied to *individual* phenomena.

In other words, the doctrine of schematism and the principles of pure understanding (such as the Analogies of Experience) serve to demonstrate the possibility of applying the categories to *experience in general*, but the fact that *individual* objects or events are actually governed by the

²⁶⁷ Van den Berg 2014, p. 38. Italics mine.

²⁶⁸ “The significance of this last point is now that Kant, in the context of his fundamental reinterpretation of the Newtonian argument for the law of gravitation, has eliminated all of its explicitly inductive steps. We begin, to be sure, with Kepler’s three laws as empirical descriptions of the observable ‘phenomena’: the empirically given relative motions in the solar system. From this point on, however, we do not proceed inductively. For Kant, the laws of motion we subsequently apply are fixed a priori, and so are the crucial properties of immediacy and universality (as well as the Euclidean geometry of space, of course). It follows that the law of gravitation is determined (or perhaps better, ‘constructed’) from Kepler’s laws by means of a procedure that admits no room for inductive uncertainty: there can be no question, in particular, of alternative possible explanations of the same given data. In this sense, the law of gravitation does not count as a mere *hypothesis* for Kant, and he is therefore in a position to give a very strong interpretation to Newton’s notion of ‘deduction from the phenomena’” (Friedman 1992a, pp. 174-175).

²⁶⁹ On the relation between the principles of the understanding and the metaphysical principles, see Friedman 1992b, pp. 181-192.

universal laws of thought must be proven through mathematics and empirical observation. Most scholars, adopting an argument that in some respects recalls Maimon's claims, agree on the fact that the Second Analogy proves only the necessity of the transcendental principle of causality – namely, that every event B must have a cause A – but not the validity of particular instantiations of this principle, that is, of particular empirical laws²⁷⁰. In other words the Transcendental Analytic establishes the validity of the categories for a nature in general, their correct application in the context of *particular empirical laws* must always be assessed through a proper mathematical analysis of their concrete instantiation. There may indeed be cases in which we *believe* we have applied the principle of causality between two events, A and B, but a proper scientific analysis of these events shows us that this was not actually the case.

Moreover, this relationship between the universal validity of the transcendental principles and the demonstration of their concrete instantiation appears to be acknowledged – albeit somewhat hastily – in a passage from the Second Analogy itself, where Kant affirms:

Now how in general anything can be altered, how it is possible that upon a state in one point of time an opposite one could follow in the next – of these we have a priori not the least concept. For this acquaintance [*Kenntnis*] with actual forces is required, which can only be given empirically, e.g., acquaintance with moving forces, or, what comes to the same thing, with certain successive appearances (as motions) which indicate such forces²⁷¹.

Although Kant does not explicitly refer to mathematical knowledge, I believe that he is here asserting that the proper and effective use of the principle of causality – grounded in the succession of perceptions in time – must be supported by an “acquaintance” of the forces governing the interactions among phenomena. In other words, we must analyze the individual cases in which we think we have applied the principle of causality, and, through empirical observations and mathematical procedures, demonstrate that these cases are governed by specific metaphysical and mathematizable laws of motion.

Let us for example consider the case of an elastic collision between two empirical bodies, A and B, moving on a frictionless plane. Body A, with mass m_1 and initial velocity v_1 , collides with body B, which has mass m_2 and initial velocity v_2 . After the collision, both bodies change their velocities, moving respectively at v'_1 and v'_2 . The observable effect – the change in motion of body B – can be conceived, according to Kant, only as necessarily *caused* by the collision with body A, for the change in motion of body B necessarily *follows in time* the collision with body A (Second Analogy

²⁷⁰ See Beck 1967, Van Cleve 1973, Guyer 1987, Friedman 1992b.

²⁷¹ *KrV*, A 207-B 252.

of Experience). This causal connection between two empirical objects, however, is not exhausted in mere temporal succession, but is determined by universal laws of motion. In this case, the laws of conservation of momentum and kinetic energy. These laws constitute the mathematical formulation of the causal link, allowing the consequences of the collision to be precisely determined. Moreover, the law of conservation of momentum can be seen as a direct consequence of Newton's third law of motion – whose validity Kant demonstrated a priori –, which states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. During the collision, body A exerts a force on body B, and simultaneously, body B exerts an equal and opposite force on body A. This principle ensures the symmetry of the interaction and the conservation of momentum within an isolated system

In this way, the reality of the causal connection is quantitatively verified, and the category of causality finds a *concrete* application in an empirical event. This example demonstrates how, from the Kantian perspective, the objectivity of scientific knowledge does not stem from empirical induction, but from the ability to subject experience to necessary rules, grounded in the transcendental structure of the understanding and demonstrated through the mathematical construction of natural phenomena.

If what I have argued so far is correct, then Maimon's objection to the validity of the propositions of physics should not concern only the Analogies of Experience, but also their instantiation in the *Metaphysical Foundations* and the possibility of a mathematization of empirical phenomena. This means that Maimon's critique appears insufficient to refute Kant's foundation of *physica generalis*. As we have seen, Maimon argues that Kant's argument is not sufficient to demonstrate how the Analogies of Experience can allow us to distinguish between merely subjective successions of phenomena and objective successions, in which the principle of causality holds. However, as I have attempted to show in this section, this is not the aim of the Analogies of Experience, which merely exhibit the rule to which every objective event must conform, but it does not allow us to determine *whether this rule has been applied to each individual event under examination*. This task is left to empirical observation and mathematical demonstration, which must assess whether particular phenomena conform to the metaphysical laws of mechanics and, in turn, to the principles of understanding²⁷². But even if we were to demonstrate that, in a particular case, we

²⁷² "Kant's allusions to the *Metaphysical Foundations* help us better to appreciate what is distinctive in Kantian pure natural science – namely, that it involves a mathematically exact realization of the pure categories and principles of the understanding. For the Analogies of Experience, in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, are realized by the quantitative conservation of the total quantity of matter, the quantitative conservation of momentum in all actions (exertions) of causality, and the quantitative equality of action and reaction in all causal mutual interactions. And it is in precisely this way that we obtain mathematically exact realizations of the categories of substance, causality, and community. So what Kant requires for full insight into causal necessity, on my reading, is that both the given causally acting (interacting) substances and the given causal actions (interactions) of these substances be thus mathematically representable in accordance with the Analogies of Experience" (Friedman 2014, pp. 549-550).

were wrong to apply the principle of causality, this would not undermine the *transcendental* validity of this principle. I believe Thielke summarizes this problem very clearly when he writes:

Given this ambiguity, the Kantian can accuse Maimon of confusing transcendental and empirical levels of explanation. According to this view, in the Second Analogy Kant provides only the transcendental conditions that govern the possibility of events; the application of the category of causality is a necessary condition on the possibility of making causal judgments. This does not mean, however, that we may not be empirically wrong about whether some perceptual order is in fact an event. The category of causality provides what we can view as the correct form for causal judgments, but the truth-values of these judgments are a matter of empirical investigation – mistaken causal judgments do not impugn the notion of causality in general. Kant aims to establish only that if something is to count as an event, then it must be rule-governed; whether a particular sequence is in fact an event is a matter of empirical concern. Maimon's objection that the category of causality cannot distinguish between events and non-events then seems to be an easily accommodated empirical concern²⁷³.

I agree with Thielke's observation that Maimon appears to conflate the transcendental and empirical levels of explanation. However, I also believe that the scholar fails to sufficiently address the issue, as he does not clarify how the verification of the objectivity of events is supposed to function. As I have argued, this verification relies not merely on general empirical observations, as Thielke seems to suggest, but also on strict *mathematical* demonstrations. In this respect, the possibility of mathematizing phenomena emerges as a crucial factor in justifying the objective and real application of the categories. Only mathematics can provide apodictic certainty that certain phenomena obey specific laws. Consequently, this also implies that in cases where such a demonstration is not feasible, the real application of the categories remains doubtful, thereby reinstating Maimon's skepticism. Franks argues for example that, for this very reason, the objectivity of scientific judgments can be established with certainty, in contrast to ordinary judgments, which lack such demonstrability due to their resistance to mathematization²⁷⁴.

Although I agree with this observation, I also believe that Maimon's skepticism may affect not only propositions related to ordinary experience, but also those concerning the "sciences" which, at the end of the 18th century, had not yet undergone a profound process of mathematization, such as chemistry and biology. As we saw in section 1.1, in the *Opus postumum* Kant's intention is not so much to provide a foundation for *physica generalis*, but rather for what he refers to as *physica*

²⁷³ Thielke 2001a, p. 448.

²⁷⁴ As the scholar correctly asks, "[i]f judgments of experience are shown to be possible only through a proof of the possibility of mathematization [...] then how are ordinary – non-mathematical – judgments of experience possible?" (Franks 2003, p. 229).

specialis. As Kant himself writes in the *Oktaventwurf*, “physics is, in turn, divided into general physics (*physica generalis*), which expresses only the properties of matter in outer objects of experience, and that (*physica specialis*) which attends to bodies formed in a particular way, and which draws up a system of them – for example, by considering the difference between inorganic and organic bodies”²⁷⁵.

If the last sentence of this passage alludes to the incorporation of biology within physics, in other passages Kant seems to directly include chemistry as well – which, as we have seen, had instead been explicitly excluded from the domain of proper natural sciences in the preface to the *Metaphysical Foundations*²⁷⁶. The philosopher writes, for example, that “[c]hemistry is a part of physics but not a simple transition from metaphysic to physics. The latter contains only the conditions of possibility for instituting experiences”²⁷⁷. In another interesting passage he argues:

The transition into another species of concepts (*μεταβασις εις αλλο γενος*) is either indirect, through intermediate concepts [*Zwischenbegriffe*] and thus permissible, or direct and impermissible; the former through a step (*passus*), the latter through a leap (*saltus*). The latter occurs when one moves immediately from metaphysics to physics, and thus fragmentarily to a system (as physics is); for example, from the metaphysics of nature to chemistry, without first subjecting the moving forces of matter – which must be specified in advance – to the formal conditions of its composition [*Zusammensetzung*] through a priori concepts²⁷⁸.

In the first part of the quotation, nothing substantially new emerges in comparison with what has already been argued in the first section of this work: Kant’s emphasis lies on the necessity of a transition from the metaphysics of nature to physics that must be mediated by intermediate concepts. Only such mediation can ensure that the transition is not a leap, but rather a continuous and methodologically coherent passage between contiguous domains²⁷⁹. What proves more interesting to note, however, is the example Kant offers in the second part of the quotation, where he states that it

²⁷⁵ *OP*, XXI 407.

²⁷⁶ See *MAN*, 471.

²⁷⁷ *OP*, XXI 316.

²⁷⁸ *OP*, XXI 623.

²⁷⁹ This passage seems, in fact, to challenge the interpretation presented in section 1.2 concerning the meaning of the “transition” problem. According to my reading, prior to 1798 Kant appeared to conceive the “transition” as a straightforward step (*Schritt*) from the metaphysics of nature to physics, considering these two domains as contiguous without the need for a mediation. However, in 1798, Kant begins to assert that the transition can no longer be accomplished through a mere step, as he recognizes the gap (*Lücke* or *Kluft*) that exists between these two areas of knowledge. The passage we have just quoted, written between December 1798 and January 1799, seems to contradict this interpretation, insofar as it appears to once again identify the transition with a step, despite acknowledging the gap between the metaphysics of nature and physics. Nevertheless, I argue that this rearticulation is due precisely to the discovery of intermediate concepts, which are meant to serve as a connecting bridge: if the step *prior* to 1798 was *illegitimate*, as it was conceived as a direct leap from the metaphysics of nature to physics, the step *after* 1798 is *legitimate*, as it is made possible by the bridging function of the intermediate concepts.

would be illegitimate to move directly from the metaphysics of nature to *chemistry* without first specifying, a priori, all the moving forces of matter. This example seems to suggest that a proper classification of these forces would, in fact, make such a connection *possible*, thereby rendering chemistry a *systematic and organic science* as well²⁸⁰.

In other words, the classification of moving forces would appear to serve the purpose of determining a priori the legality of certain properties that are not empirically observable, and thus cannot be the object of purely quantitative and experimental analysis. In this sense, the objectivity and legality of certain phenomena (chemical and biological) would be verified not through purely mathematical demonstrations, but through their qualitative reduction to rational and genetic principles, such as the specific dynamic moving forces of the ether. In this way, even in the absence of full mathematization, chemical and biological processes can be shown to conform to an a priori rational order, thereby securing their objective validity within the framework of *physica specialis*.

If this reading is correct, then the new doctrine of schematism should not be understood, as Förster suggests²⁸¹, as an attempt to replace the schematism of the first *Critique* and the *Metaphysical Foundations*, which was grounded upon the results of the first. Rather, it should be seen as an attempt – never fully brought to completion – to develop a *further* form of schematism, capable of determining a priori not only the mathematically quantifiable aspects of phenomena, but also their specific qualitative features. As Kant writes in the early fascicles:

The transition from the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* to physics must not consist entirely in a priori concepts of matter in general – for then it would remain mere metaphysics (for example, where only attraction and repulsion in general are discussed); nor must it consist entirely in empirical representations, for in that case, it would simply belong to physics (for example, the observation of chemistry). Rather, it must pertain to the a priori principles of the possibility of experience, and thus to natural science understood as the investigation of nature [*Naturforschung*] – that is, to the subjective principle of the schematism of the power of judgment, which classify empirically given moving forces according to a priori principles in general, and thus to pass from a mere aggregate of such forces to a system [...] ²⁸².

²⁸⁰ Now, although in this passage Kant explicitly speaks of chemistry, I believe there is not sufficient textual evidence to support Friedman's claim according to which the *Opus postumum* was written *precisely* to provide a philosophical foundation for chemistry in light of the results it was achieving thanks to Lavoisier's work (see Friedman 1992a). I believe that the problem is more general and consists in the attempt to provide a rigorous philosophical foundation for a certain kind of knowledge – which he calls *physica specialis* – that is not entirely subject to mathematization, and that includes disciplines such as chemistry, certainly, but also, for example, biology and even geology. For an interpretation of the *Opus Postumum* as an attempt to establish a broader range of disciplines beyond chemistry, see Van den Berg 2014, pp. 149–258.

²⁸¹ See Förster 2000, pp. 48–74.

²⁸² *OP*, XXI 363.

I argue that this passage supports the interpretation presented in the current analysis. Kant does not dismiss the findings of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, but rather suggests that they are inadequate to classify a priori the moving forces of matter, a necessary step for establishing an empirical physics conceived as a systematic body of knowledge. The “schematism of the power of judgment” mentioned at the end of the passage is specifically intended to fulfill this new role. It provides an a priori framework for determining phenomena that cannot be fully explained by the laws of motion or the law of universal attraction, such as the states of aggregation of matter, heat, crystallization, and magnetism. These phenomena, unlike the example we mentioned earlier of the elastic collision between two bodies, cannot be explained through the principles of the *Metaphysical Foundations* and, perhaps even more importantly, cannot be mathematically verifiable, making it difficult to establish the laws that should govern their existence²⁸³. Furthermore, as we have observed, the regulative procedure of reflective judgment cannot serve as the ultimate foundation for the scientific legitimacy of chemistry or biology. While it enables the classification of empirical data through the pursuit of increasingly general concepts aimed at the formation of an empirical system, it remains incapable of determining the laws that govern the system itself. This is because it prescribes laws solely to itself, and not to nature²⁸⁴. Without the principles of Transition and the new doctrine of schematism, the operation of reflective judgment would amount to a mere disorganized and fragmentary collection of empirical data, constantly subject to the possibility of revisions and corrections.

The aim of the Transition project is, therefore, to determine a priori the laws that govern the specific empirical qualities of objects, thereby enabling the construction of a system of particular natural objects that does not rely solely on empirical procedures of observation and classification. In this way, Kant attempts to overcome the rigid distinction between the form and matter of experience, seeking to show that even the material dimension of phenomena can be anticipated a priori through a new schematic function of the understanding. Using Kant’s words, the new schematism should

²⁸³ “Yet there was a fundamental problem here. In the case of the universal attraction of gravity, our theory of force and the phenomena it is intended to explain fit together perfectly: we observe the planetary (relative) motions, subject them to a mathematical analysis of centripetal acceleration, use the laws of motion to infer therefrom the existence of and mathematical law governing a dynamical force, and use these same laws of motion to arrive at the reciprocity and finally the universality of this force. In the case of chemical phenomena, however, it appeared that we must forever despair of even the possibility of this kind of tight fit between theory and experiment. For how are we to infer from our experiments concerning chemical reactions – careful observations of solutions, precipitations, crystallizations, and so on – to a characterization of the attractions and/or repulsions that are presumed to underlie such reactions? The problem, of course, is that the forces presumed to be operative here are exclusively microscopic, and thus the motions that are their immediate effects are entirely inaccessible to us. Here, unlike the case of gravitational attraction, there appeared to be no way to make theory and observation fruitfully meet one another, and chemistry appeared to be therefore in danger of remaining always a merely experimental science” (Friedman 1992a, p. 241).

²⁸⁴ See *KU*, 180.

demonstrate the possibility of “establishing a priori a system of empirical representations (which otherwise appeared impossible) and of *anticipating* experience *quoad materiale*”²⁸⁵.

Given this aim, then the schema that represent the possibility of the instantiation of the categories can no longer be a simple determination of the a priori form of time, since that would not be able to mediate between the universality of the concept and the particularity of the empirical given²⁸⁶. As we have seen, in order to apply the category of causality to two events, A and B, it is in fact sufficient, according to Kant, that they exhibit a certain temporal relation of succession, and the empirical properties that these objects exhibit (such as their density or their state of aggregation) play no role in this process of subsumption. In other words: the schematism of the first *Critique* is entirely indifferent to the specific differences between objects, whereas the schematism of the *Opus postumum* has as its primary goal precisely the rational justification and systematization of the latter. Kant writes for example that “[t]he supreme principle of transcendental philosophy: ‘how are synthetic judgements possible’ indeed extends knowledge with regard to the object of *pure* intuition, but not with respect to the empirical aggregate of perceptions”²⁸⁷.

The moving forces of matter, unified by the idea of the ether, should therefore have, as *Zwischenbegriffe*, precisely the function of enabling an a priori classification of the particular attributes of phenomena. If this is true, then the possibility of tracing a certain affinity with the genetic function of Maimon’s differentials becomes evident. As we saw in the previous section, this affinity also seems to be confirmed by Kant himself, when he stated that the principles of the transition are “not to be logical and formal – that is, prescribing the order of thought in general – but genetic, concerning the objects (the material of knowledge), through which natural science is expanded by experiential knowledge”²⁸⁸. In this sense, I believe that the reference to Maimonian conceptual tools helps to clarify the particular function of these intermediate concepts, which, as I have attempted to show in the first part of this work, are difficult to situate within the more rigid framework of Kantian criticism.

First, both Kant’s moving forces of matter and Maimon’s differentials are conceived as schemas that allow for a determination of the specific qualitative differences among empirical objects. In both cases, they function as rational and genetic rules for the production of objects, and not merely as determinations of the pure formal intuition of time. As I have tried to show in this section, the main

²⁸⁵ *OP*, XXI 502.

²⁸⁶ “[T]his schematism is situated at a different level of inquiry of the transcendental schematism: it regards a more specific application, which works not as a transcendental time determination of the first *Critique*, but through the reference to the ether. Besides, it concerns the forces of matter (not the pure forms of the understanding) and the objects of experience as given in space and time (not as objects in general)” (Scaglia 2023, p. 83).

²⁸⁷ *OP*, XXII 482. Emphasis mine.

²⁸⁸ *OP*, XXI 528-529.

difference between Maimon and Kant, with regard to this issue, lies in the fact that the former conceives his new schematism as a *correction* of the schematism of the first *Critique*, whereas Kant seems to understand the schematism of the *Opus postumum* as an *expansion* of the latter. Maimon's error, from a Kantian perspective, would lie in having directed his critique of Kant's foundation of physics solely at the *Analytic of Principles*. He would have failed to take into account that these represent only the most general level of the foundational structure of scientific experience, which requires further determinations and instantiation through the metaphysical principles of mechanics and their mathematical demonstration. I therefore believe that Maimon's critique does not grasp the core of Kant's foundation of *physica generalis*, understood as the mathematical science of nature, but may instead challenge those forms of knowledge that are not subject to mathematical formalization, which Kant includes under the name of *physica specialis*. The new schematism of the manuscripts thus appears to be designed precisely to address this problem.

Secondly, both Maimon's and Kant's new schematism appear to serve not only a "vertical" function in mediating between two distinct components of knowledge, namely matter and form, but also a "horizontal" function in *systematizing* knowledge itself. As I attempted to show in the previous chapter, in Maimon's thought we find a strong connection – if not an outright identification – between truth and systematicity, or between truth and *Darstellung*. The divine understanding truly *knows* objects because it is able to thoroughly determine (*durchgängig bestimmen*) them: it knows all their predicates and can place them appropriately within the logical space represented by a complete system of knowledge. Differentials – that is, the rules underlying the production of the predicates of objects – must therefore be conceived not only as principles of *differentiation*, but also as principles of the *systematization* of these predicates. Knowing the differentials is tantamount to knowing how the object fits within a network of internal and external relations that define its rational position within a complete conceptual system. A similar task appears to be assigned by Kant also to the moving forces of matter. These latter, like Maimon's differentials, define the possibility of empirical differentiation and systematization within nature itself. In this respect, they fulfill the same "horizontal" role: they are not just formal conditions that must be *applied* on given objects for the sake the unity of experience. Rather, they are the rational rules that explain how appearances are *generated* and how they systematically interact with one another.

It can be argued that Kant implicitly thematizes the function of differentiation and systematization of moving forces through the distinction between an "elementary system" (*Elementarsystem*) and a "world system" (*Weltsystem*), which, in the philosopher's intentions, were to constitute two distinct parts of the Transition project. This distinction, however, was never fully carried out. In the drafts "No. 1–No. 3 η", Kant defines the two systems as follows: "The system of

the moving forces of matter, insofar as it pertains to the various kinds thereof (*singulis*), I call the elementary system of matter in general; insofar as it pertains to all matter taken as a whole (*universis*), I refer to it as the world system”²⁸⁹. As Emundts rightly notes, both systems offer different representations of the same content – namely, the totality of the moving forces of matter²⁹⁰. They differ only according to their methods. The elementary system follows an analytic method²⁹¹: it proceeds through a classification of these forces in accordance with the table of categories. The world system, by contrast, adopts a synthetic method, aiming to demonstrate the systematic unity of these forces through the idea of the ether, conceived as their unifying ground²⁹².

From this perspective, the elementary system makes it possible to account for the fact that empirical substances “differ according to their specifically different forces”²⁹³. In other words, its aim is to demonstrate that different moving forces of matter produce different properties in the empirical objects, and that a classification of the first would result also in a classification of the latter. As Kant writes in an early note, “[w]e can classify a priori the moving forces according to concepts, and so completely enumerate the properties of matter prior to experience”²⁹⁴. However, such an enumeration would remain fundamentally fragmentary in the absence of a principle capable of ensuring the systematic organization of the moving forces. The world system’s aim is thus to show that these forces do not operate in a chaotic or fragmented manner, but rather organically – namely, as components of a universal matter (the ether), which encompasses and orders them within a single dynamic whole. “Without such a substance as the basis of all moving forces, which together would constitute the real principle of a possible experience”, Kant notes, “we would have nothing but perceptions, and not a whole of experience thoroughly determined by moving forces”²⁹⁵.

The synthesis between the elementary system and the world system would thus allow us not only to trace the specific properties of certain objects back to the action of various moving forces in an attempt to explain their genesis. It would also provide the basis for considering these objects as part of a broader systematic totality, one that makes it possible to define their “logical place”²⁹⁶, that is, the position they occupy within the context of an organic system of experience. In this way, the

²⁸⁹ *OP*, XXI 510-511.

²⁹⁰ See Emundts 2004, p. 146.

²⁹¹ See *OP*, XXI 359.

²⁹² As Kant writes, “[t]he proof of the present proposition concerning the existence of a universally pervasive caloric [...] pertains not only to an elementary system but also to the world system of matter, and [...] presumes to be established here not merely as problematic but even as apodictic” (*OP*, XXI 237).

²⁹³ *OP*, XXII 450. See also *OP*, XXII 192: “To constitute a system in which I consider, on the one hand, only the parts in their diversity *sparsim*, but subsequently also regard the same matter *coniunctim* as an absolute whole, not belonging to something greater. From this, the division of the system of the moving forces of matter into the elementary system and the world system will follow”.

²⁹⁴ *OP*, XXI 477.

²⁹⁵ *OP*, XXI 600.

²⁹⁶ *OP*, XXI 485.

classification of the moving forces of matter can be conceived as “a schema that outlines in advance the physical places a priori, which already presents the possible places for the empirical in a table, because otherwise physics could not be a complete system, but merely an aggregate, where one does not know what is still missing in order to guide the investigation of nature”²⁹⁷.

To conclude on this issue, I therefore believe it can be argued that the similarity between the central problem raised by Maimon in the *Essay* and the problem identified by Kant in the *Opus Postumum* – namely, the “gap” to be bridged between the transcendental and the empirical – leads to a significant reformulation of the doctrine of schematism. Despite the differences that I have tried to highlight, in both cases we witness a marked expansion of the systematic function of the schemata. If their task is to demonstrate the possibility of a rational organization of the empirical dimension, such that no distance remains between the universality of the concept and the particular given, then they must no longer be confined to the “vertical” mediating function between the two faculties of understanding and sensibility. It is no more sufficient to demonstrate how given objects can be subsumed under the categories through the mediation of pure time-determinations such as the transcendental schemas. Rather, it is necessary to show how objects themselves are *generated*, even in their material dimension, thus allowing the empirical itself to be traced back to their rational principles. In this sense, the *Mittelbegriffe* must also constitute the condition of possibility for a “horizontal” synthesis²⁹⁸.

Just like differentials, the moving forces of matter – unified by the idea of the ether – must explain how various phenomena are generated and how they interact with each other in an organic, rational and systematic manner. These forces, as Kant suggests, are not to be empirically *discovered*, but must instead be a priori *posited* as schema that outline the conceptual structure within which empirical particularities can be situated and explained. Using Lorini’s words, “[t]hese forces express *in concreto* and systematically the regularity of the concept, and thus explain the step from the *cogitabile* to the *dabile*”²⁹⁹.

Yet, this broadening of schematism’s scope does not entail the abandonment of its vertical function. The intermediate concepts that govern the production of phenomena remain grounded in the spontaneous activity of the understanding. They do not indicate the presence of a metaphysical

²⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁹⁸ “Thus in the passages of the *Opus postumum*, Kant aims for the *continuum formarum* (mentioned a few lines later), but does so in accordance with the epistemological paradigm of the third *Critique* – namely, according to both a vertical and horizontal continuity. The former refers to the relationship between the forms of conceptual thought and appearance (*Erscheinung*); yet this is no longer to be understood as an external legalization of appearance, but rather as the so-called ‘appearance of appearance’ (*Erscheinung der Erscheinung*), that is, the representation of the emergence of the appearance as deriving from a principle [...]. The horizontal continuity looks at the plurality of the appearances, but it is linked with vertical continuity insofar as the conceptual ground of the appearances can be detected within each of them and their mutual relationship can be formalized on the basis of this common conceptual root” (Lorini 2023, pp. 95-96).

²⁹⁹ Ivi, p. 102.

substratum or pre-existing reality independent of the subject's synthesis. As Kant writes in *Konvolut X*, "perceptions are nothing other than moving forces connected with consciousness, through which the understanding extracts [*aushebt*] [...] only as much as it has itself introduced [*hineingelegt*] for the sake of possible experience [*zum Behuf möglicher Erfahrung*]"³⁰⁰, conforming that the productive power of the subject remains central. One can therefore maintain that the vertical dimension of schematism is *integrated* through a horizontal synthetic function that allows the understanding not only to subsume given objects under purely formal rules, but also to generate the properties of the objects themselves and the regularities of their systematic interactions. The schema is not to be understood as merely a condition for the possibility of the instantiation of the categories in discrete objective events; rather, it constitutes the totality of the dynamic forces inherent in the matter of the ether, which underlie the possibility of a *collective* unity of experience³⁰¹.

I believe that, in order to better understand this new function of schematism and its relation with the subject's activity, it is helpful to refer to what Kant calls the "indirect appearance". At the same time, it will be shown that this problem also has significant implications for the very concept of the thing-in-itself.

2.2.3 Thing-in-itself, indirect appearance

In the preceding chapter I have shown that Maimon's reformulation of the schematism is intimately bound up with a reformulation of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself. As I have tried to demonstrate, this concept is not simply removed from the Kantian system, but rather reconfigured in a way that addresses the very difficulties Maimon identified within it. Maimon himself even conceives the thing-in-itself as the very solution to what the philosopher calls the "universal antinomy of thought in general". In particular, we have seen that differentials were assigned the role of mediating between the purely formal dimension of the categories and the empirical dimension of objects of experience, showing that the latter is not simply given to the subject, but produced in accordance with rational rules – that is, the differentials themselves. The introduction of differentials as schemas and as genetic rules governing the production of the empirical dimension necessitated however a careful examination of their ontological status. On the one hand, unlike the transcendental

³⁰⁰ *OP*, XXII 334.

³⁰¹ As I will examine more closely in section 2.2.4, much like in Maimon's *Essay*, also in the *Opus Postumum* this new doctrine of schematism should be understood as aimed at the *thoroughgoing determination* of the objects of experience (see *OP*, XXII 497).

schemata of the first *Critique*, differentials cannot be reduced to mere determinations of the pure form of time. Such a reduction would deprive them of the explanatory power needed to ground the empirical features of objects. On the other hand, they cannot be located within the empirical realm itself, insofar as this realm is precisely where the rational form of the rule is concealed by the immediacy of sensory data.

Differentials are, rather, the rational structure that underlies the objects and their empirical determinations. It is on this basis that Maimon reinterprets them through the lens of the Kantian thing-in-itself, but with a decisive clarification: the thing-in-itself is not to be regarded as a separate and transcendent entity existing beyond phenomena, but as the *immanent* rule that generates them. In this sense, it is not an object *external* to experience, but the intelligible condition of its genesis – just as, for instance, the equation of a parabola in Cartesian space is not something apart from the parabola, but the very principle that determines its configuration. The parabola is nothing other than the spatial expression of its generative rule; it is not *a separate object*, but the manifestation of an immanent rational structure.

What I believe is particularly worth noting is that Kant himself, in the *Opus Postumum*, appears to assign a similar status to the dynamic forces of matter and to the ether, particularly in *Konvolute* X and XI. These fascicles were written between August 1799 and April 1800, thus immediately after the conclusion of *Übergang* 1-14. While the demonstration of the existence of the ether no longer occupies a central position in these later drafts, I will argue in this section that they must nonetheless be interpreted in essential continuity with the preceding section. Contrary to what Lehmann and Hoppe claim, the demonstration of the existence of the ether therefore does not represent merely a “transitional point” (*Durchgangspunkt*)³⁰² in Kant’s project, which would be abandoned in later notes. More specifically, my aim is to show that Kant introduces the concept of the “indirect appearance” at this stage *precisely* in order to better articulate both the function and the ontological status of the ether and its dynamic forces³⁰³.

These notes constitute a particularly intricate section of the manuscripts, in which the results of the preceding fascicles begin to be integrated with thematic developments that will be elaborated more systematically in *Konvolut* VII, such as the doctrine of the self-positing of the subject and of the thing-in-itself³⁰⁴. Given the density and complexity of the material, it will not be possible to

³⁰² Lehmann 1969, p. 399. See also Hoppe 1969, p. 111.

³⁰³ Moreover, even though references to the ether and to caloric decrease significantly in these manuscripts, there are still numerous references to them as conditions for the possibility of a systematic physics; see e.g., *OP*, XXII, 331, 384, 478.

³⁰⁴ *Konvolute* X and XI occupy an intermediary position between what have been identified in the scholarly literature as the two most significant sections of the manuscripts, namely, *Übergang* 1-14 and *Konvolut* VII. As a result, these fascicles have frequently been overlooked or accorded insufficient attention. For an insightful reconsideration of their systematic and architectonic function in connecting this two parts of the work, see Howard 2019.

address all the content presented in these pages. Instead, I will concentrate on those themes that appear most pertinent to the central aim of this study: the analysis of the reconfiguration of the fundamental structures of transcendental philosophy.

A salient feature that emerges from a reading of *Konvolute* X and XI is Kant's persistent engagement with the question: "What is physics?" (*Was ist Physik?*). The philosopher insists on the necessary systematic character of empirical investigation. In a recent study, Howard, while acknowledging the underlying coherence between these fascicles and *Übergang* 1-14, nevertheless argues that they mark a departure from the notes *preceding* the ether's proof. In particular, the scholar maintains that in these pages Kant came to recognize the impossibility of providing a satisfactory and complete elementary system of the moving forces of matter. For this reason, Kant is said to have introduced a distinction between an elementary system (*Elementarsystem*) and a doctrinal system (*Lehrsystem*). The former would no longer represent a necessary first step in establishing the transition from metaphysics to physics, but rather a merely regulative idea toward which the doctrinal system of physics ought to aspire³⁰⁵. Howard thus suggests that in fascicles X and XI Kant would have reflected on the possibility that *physics itself* is *already* systematic, and that it does not need a preliminary grounding through the science of the transition and the elementary system of the moving forces. On the contrary, the latter would be only "the *task* of the properly systematic doctrinal system of physics at which the transition should *arrive*"³⁰⁶. This, however, leads Howard to reflect on the status of physics itself. If physics is to be in itself systematic, then it cannot be a science composed solely of empirical observations and experiments, as argued by, among others, Hoppe, Adickes, and Tuschling.

Briefly summarizing Howard's argument, the scholar believes that the physics Kant discusses in these fascicles is not merely an investigation of external objects. Kant would be considering the possibility of conceiving physics as a doctrine founded on the interaction between the subject's moving forces and the moving forces of the object. We would therefore not be entirely passive in the reception of the objects' moving forces, but genuinely active, *exercising* our own forces upon objects and producing a *reaction* in them. Since these forces are thus originally produced through our spontaneous activity, it would be possible for us to systematically order the perceptions that result

³⁰⁵ "According to this line of Kant's thinking, the classificatory elementary system envisaged in the earlier drafts appears to be rejected entirely. Elsewhere, as noted, Kant suggests that the elementary system still belongs to the transition, but as the *object* of physics. On this more moderate view, the transition would reach physics, which then has the separate task of endlessly compiling infinitely varied empirical findings toward a systematic whole that it cannot reach, namely, the elementary or Linnean natural system. The elementary system, on this view, functions as a horizon or a regulative idea" (Howard 2023b, p. 38-39).

³⁰⁶ Howard

from them³⁰⁷. Physics would therefore no longer be a complete system of objects of experience, but rather a system of *perceptions* which, as a doctrinal system, must strive toward the completeness expressed by the elementary system.

Howard's study constitutes a valuable contribution in drawing attention to the distinctive features of these fascicles and their significance within the framework of the science of the transition. Nonetheless, I would argue that fascicles X and XI do not exhibit the radical reassessment of the role of the elementary system that Howard claims to identify. To my knowledge, there is only one passage, within these drafts, where Kant explicitly expresses skepticism about the possibility of establishing a complete elementary system of the moving forces³⁰⁸. In other places Kant continues to set as his programmatic goal that of explaining how "the material element [can] be completely enumerated in an elementary system"³⁰⁹. Furthermore, the philosopher appears to maintain the view that the elementary system constitutes a foundational structure intended to prepare the ground for the systematic articulation of physics as a scientific discipline³¹⁰. Kant writes for example:

Here, then, is the key to opening the gate to the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics, within the elementary system of the moving forces of matter: namely, not to derive them *from experience* empirically, but rather *for* experience, a priori, to comprehend the manifold of appearances through the understanding – not in a fragmentary way, but according to concepts, as a whole which the understanding itself *makes*, namely, to *constitute* a principle of experience. The moving forces of matter, in general, are to be classified a priori for the purposes of physics³¹¹.

³⁰⁷ "The influence of the subject on the outer object and the reaction of the latter to the subject make it possible to cognize the moving forces of matter and so matter itself in substance, and to set them out for physics" (*OP*, XXI 494).

³⁰⁸ "Thus we cannot, as it seems, even with all our means of having experience, discern a priori – with universal validity – which (and how many) objects of perception (which, taken together, constitute matter) and moving forces (in kind and number) there are which could be taken by us as underlying our possible experience. Rather, [it seems,] that we could, at best, by random groping among outer sense-objects, merely compile an enumeration of certain forces, e.g. hardness, softness, heaviness, lightness, and so on – which together do not amount to a complete system of forces (and thus also to the materials which they contain). The reason is that we cannot come to knowledge of them by the investigation of nature, according to an a priori principle – that is to say, we cannot specify the primary materials of the moving forces and develop an elementary system of them" (*OP*, XXII 354). I believe this statement should be understood as an acknowledgment of the difficulty and the oddity of the task undertaken, rather than as a recognition of its definitive impossibility. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by other passages, where the philosopher writes, for example, that "It is strange; it seems almost impossible to specify a priori the empirical, in the representation of the moving forces of the objects which affect the senses, and which constitute the matter (the basis) itself, and yet this is rightly demanded in a physics if it is to be a science" (*OP*, XXII 348).

³⁰⁹ *OP*, XXII 461.

³¹⁰ See also Beiser 2002, p. 203: "Before the transition, physics is essentially an empirical discipline, whose main business is observation and experiment, and whose central goal is to collect an aggregate of observations or mass of data. After the transition, however, physics acquires an a priori form, becoming a single system organized according to a priori principles".

³¹¹ *OP*, XXII 393-394.

I therefore believe that, as in the previous sections, Kant conceives of physics as systematic, but only *insofar as a preliminary transition* has been established. As numerous passages confirm³¹², even in these manuscripts physics remains a science made up of observations and experiments, whose systematic unity is nevertheless ensured by the preliminary establishment of a science of transition and a topic of moving forces, contrary to what Howard claims. The scholar acknowledges that in many instances Kant recognizes the experimental dimension of physics, yet he chooses to consider as relevant only those in which Kant speaks of its intrinsic systematic nature. This, however, leads to two interconnected problems: 1) it seems to imply that Kant proposed, within the same pages, two opposing conceptions of physics – one as a systematic science and the other as a science proceeding merely through the aggregation of observations and experiments, and 2) it results in the need to choose which of these two conceptions should be relied upon to interpret the Kantian project. I believe it is possible to consistently maintain both the features of physics – namely, its systematicity and its experimental nature – by arguing that the *Übergang* project is meant to account for their connection.

In this sense, I believe that the separation Kant introduces in these fascicles between an elementary system and a doctrinal system does not imply a rejection of the theory he presented in the previous drafts. On the contrary, I argue that this distinction is fully compatible with what we stated in section 1.3 regarding the kind of systematicity physics must aim for. As we have seen, a “strong” system must rest not merely on observed affinities between objects, but on the grounding of these affinities in an a priori system of moving forces that can account for them. This foundational framework is what Kant refers to as the *Elementarsystem*, which, along with the *Weltsystem*, marks the transition from metaphysics to physics. Even though Kant does not frequently mention the world system in fascicles X and XI, it is clear that he continues to regard the function of the ether as indispensable for ensuring the organic unity of the action of moving forces. When the philosopher discusses in a programmatic way, in the early notes of these fascicles, what their objective ought to be, he writes that one of its aims is to show “how an elementary system of the moving forces is constituted a priori by the understanding [...] by means of a universally distributed, all penetrating, etc. matter, which forms a self-subsistent whole”³¹³.

The elementary system and the world system seem to be both necessary presupposition of the empirical investigation of nature, for they provide the principles of differentiation and systematization of the objects of experience. They are thus both indispensable parts of the *transition* from the metaphysics of nature to physics.

³¹² See e.g. *OP*, XXII 298, 321, 352, 355, 523.

³¹³ *OP*, XXII 325.

The doctrinal system, by contrast, belongs properly to empirical investigation. As Kant writes, physics is “[t]he doctrinal system of the totality of knowledge of objects of the senses as contained in experience”³¹⁴. If the objects of this knowledge belong to experience, then the practices necessary to organize them must also be empirical practices of observation and experiments³¹⁵. The latter aim to identify similarities and affinities between objects in order to construct a system – similarities that are, however, ultimately grounded in the a priori structure provided by the elementary system and the world system. I believe that this relationship between these two systems and the doctrinal system is addressed in the following passage:

The moving forces of matter, however, in virtue of the unity of space and its thoroughgoing fullness (since empty space would be no object of experience), form an *elementary system*, which is, indeed, the object of physics. The latter is a *doctrinal system* of the moving forces, and, by means of the investigation of nature, is always progressing as regards logical specification³¹⁶.

In this passage, Kant defines the elementary system as the totality of the (dynamic) moving forces of matter, synthesized through the idea of the ether. He subsequently characterizes the elementary system as the “object” of physics. This formulation is admittedly difficult to interpret. However, I contend that it should not be read as a departure from the conception of the elementary system as a condition for the possibility of physics. Rather, it underscores its constitutive role: physics takes the elementary system as its object precisely because it is through this system that the empirical manifold of appearances becomes systematically intelligible. The elementary system of moving forces, which provides the internal dynamic and structural organization of matter in space, functions as the necessary conceptual framework for the ordering of empirical content. Physics, in this sense, does not originate from raw empirical data alone, since such data are already conditioned by and grounded in the transcendental structure articulated by the elementary system.

The task of empirical investigation – the doctrinal system – is thus to progressively specify and classify the objects of experience, insofar as it is accepted that the objectivity of its procedure is secured by the principles established through the science of the Transition. As we have already seen, this would allow us, for example, to classify objects as “fluid” or “rigid” on the basis of external similarities which are, however, themselves grounded in objective laws and principles. This procedure should ensure that the similarities between objects are not merely contingent but a priori

³¹⁴ *OP*, XXII 475.

³¹⁵ “It contains an absolute whole of empirical knowledge of external objects of the senses as a science, the attainment of which is called the task of natural investigation. Its material (empirical) principle is based on observation and experiment” (*OP*, XXI 319).

³¹⁶ *OP*, XXII 342.

justified by the elementary system of the moving forces. Moreover, at the end of the passage, Kant makes it clear that this empirical investigation is “always progressing”, suggesting the classification of the *entire* variety of objects of experience is merely an idea to which we can only indefinitely approximate.

This brief digression on the distinction between the elementary system and the doctrinal system was necessary in order to highlight the continuity with previous notes. What I intended to show was Kant’s still present conviction that empirical physics can be conceived as a proper science only if there exists an intermediate dimension – composed of the *Mittelbegriffe* organized within the elementary system and synthesized by the idea of the ether – that can guarantee its systematic nature.

My current objective is to examine another significant innovation introduced in these drafts, namely, the concept of the “indirect appearance”, in order to demonstrate how it may be coherently interpreted as an attempt to elucidate the ontological status of mediating concepts and their genetic role with respect to concrete experience. The designation is, in fact, quite varied: Kant also refers to it as the “appearance of the appearance,” the “second-order appearance,” or the “subjective appearance,” among other expressions. What is striking, however, is the fact that Kant never provides a fully precise definition of its function, despite the central role it occupies within the science of the *Übergang*. As Lehmann observes, “it would have been good if Kant addressed the gradation of appearance, if he had established a ‘doctrine’ of the gradation of appearance and dealt with it in a separate section. Unfortunately, that is not the case”³¹⁷. This lack of conceptual clarity has consequently given rise to a degree of interpretive arbitrariness concerning the status and function of the indirect appearance.

Krause, for instance, maintains that the indirect appearance is simply the empirical object perceived through our own body, which is itself an appearance. In other words, what the subject touches or senses is an appearance, but since this is perceived through another appearance (e.g., one’s arm), it may be designated a “appearance of an appearance”³¹⁸. By contrast, Vaihinger and Adickes argue that the doctrine of the indirect phenomenon can only be properly understood by reference to the theory of double affection, and through a distinction between the empirical and the transcendental subject³¹⁹. Lehmann offers yet another interpretation, suggesting that the indirect appearance is the subject affecting itself within the sensible world – that is, “the subject manifesting itself in the phenomenal realm as an object, the psychophysical subject, the subject as organism”³²⁰.

³¹⁷ Lehmann 1969, p. 375.

³¹⁸ See Krause 1888, p. 74.

³¹⁹ See Vaihinger 1884 and Adickes 1920, pp. 300 ff. For a summary of the position of the two scholars regarding the problem of affection and the concept of the indirect appearance, see Basile 2008.

³²⁰ Lehmann 1969, p. 95.

Nevertheless, none of these interpretations appears entirely satisfactory, insofar as they fail to acknowledge the close connection Kant seems to establish between the indirect appearance and the ether itself. In my reading, the indirect appearance should be interpreted as an attempt to thematize the role and function of the intermediate concepts. From this perspective, my proposal is to conceive the introduction of the *indirekte Erscheinungen* precisely as an effort to articulate the function of the latter. It is thus not coincidental that the introduction of the indirect appearance immediately follows *Übergang* 1-14, the section in which Kant presents the a priori deduction of the ether. My attempt will be now to justify such claims and to investigate the relation between the problem of the indirect appearance with that of the thing-in-itself.

As we briefly saw in the previous section, Kant still assigns a central role to the understanding in the context of the new schematism doctrine. The moving forces of matter, which function as intermediary concepts, are in fact “inserted” (*hinheingelegt*) by the understanding into experience in order to make that latter possible³²¹. This is determined by their very nature and by the function they are intended to fulfill. On the one hand, they must be conceived as the cause and explanatory ground of the empirical determinations of matter; on the other hand, however, the necessity of their a priori systematization demands that their origin be not merely empirical, but rational. In sheet G of the *X Konvolut*, Kant describes the difference between direct and indirect appearance in these terms:

The appearance of things in space (and time), however, is twofold: (1) that of the objects which we ourselves insert in space (a priori), and which is metaphysical; (2) that which is empirically given to us (a posteriori), and which is physical. The latter is direct appearance, the former indirect—that is, appearance of an appearance³²².

The difference between direct and indirect appearance is thus conceived as the difference between a metaphysical and a priori “appearance”, which is *posited* by the subject for the sake of possibility of experience, and an empirical and a posteriori appearance, which is instead *given* to the subject as a physical object. If my interpretation is correct, this difference can also be understood in terms of the distance that separates the *Elementarsystem*, as an a priori constructed system of moving forces belonging to the *transition* from metaphysics to physics, from the *Lehrsystem*, as the system of empirical objects – or direct appearances – that is grounded on the former. I believe this reading is confirmed by the following passage:

³²¹ See e.g. *OP*, XXII 379.

³²² *OP*, XXII 340.

To take hold of the moving forces of matter empirically, and to collect them fragmentarily, cannot ground a physics as a system. Rather, it must be capable of being erected as a whole – not as an aggregate (*sparsim*) but as a system (*coniunctim*) – according to an a priori principle which determines the number and order of the moving forces. This cannot occur otherwise than [by taking as its principle] what we insert for the sake of a possible experience [...], not what we extract from the aggregate of perceptions. In this way, a science is brought about in which the investigation of nature (by observation and experiment) proceeds [*ausgeht*] from the appearance of appearances (and so accordingly to an a priori principle)³²³.

Kant once again confirms at the beginning of the quotation that physics cannot be grounded on *mere* empirical investigation, as this would inevitably lead to the establishment of a fragmented and disorganized classification. An empirical inquiry must be preceded by a *principle* of the connection of objects of experience, one that determines the number and order of the moving forces upon whose action the very existence of these objects is grounded. This principle must be introduced into scientific experience *before* this experience itself occurs. This “before”, of course, is not to be understood in a chronological sense, but in a transcendental one: the positing of the principle of transition is a transcendental condition for the very possibility of natural inquiry. In this way, as the final sentence confirms, the investigation of nature through observation and experiment will no longer be a mere disorganized collection of data, but a true systematic science, insofar as it is anchored in the transcendental structure posited a priori by the subject in the form of an appearance of an appearance – or indirect appearance. In other words, the function of the indirect appearance is to make “possible, and indeed necessary, to expose a priori for experience in a system objects of perception through the moving forces of matter”³²⁴.

For this reason, I believe it can be argued that the indirect appearance is merely another name to designate schematic function of the ether along with its dynamic moving forces. As Mathieu points out, whereas the material of the schema in the first *Critique* was the pure form of time, “the material of the indirect appearance consists of the primitive moving forces”³²⁵. The characterization of the ether in terms of an *indirect* appearance is therefore instrumental in clarifying the difference between this kind of matter and the matter of which empirical objects are composed of³²⁶. The main objective

³²³ *OP*, XXII 322.

³²⁴ *OP*, XXII 371

³²⁵ Mathieu 1991, p. 158.

³²⁶ For a similar reading, see Beiser 2002, pp. 201-214. On the contrary, for a different interpretation, see Hall 2015, pp. 154-197. The scholar claims that it is the ether that must be conceived as a direct appearance, for it directly affects the I think, whereas the sensible objects are indirect appearances, for they “depend upon the activity of the subject organizing direct appearances” (Ivi, p. 113). As I have tried to demonstrate in Puzzolo 2024a, pp. 90-103 and 2024b, Hall’s reading finds little textual basis, for Kant explicitly states that the indirect appearance is the *metaphysical* appearance that we insert into experience, whereas the direct appearance is the *physical* appearance that affects our senses (see *OP*, XXII 340).

of this section is in fact to show how fascicles X and XI can be understood as an attempt to clarify the non-phenomenal status of the ether. Here as well, one can discern an affinity with the status of Maimonian differentials, insofar as Kant, in various passages, seems to suggest that the indirect appearance – or the ether – may be conceived as a specific form of the thing-in-itself. Kant himself explicitly and programmatically specifies that he intends to address the question regarding “direct and indirect appearances in comparison with things-in-themselves”³²⁷. It comes to no surprise, therefore, that in these drafts it is possible to find numerous passages such as the following:

First, the matter [*die Materie*] – the movable; second, the materials [*die Stoffe*] (*bases*) that is, the moving force of matter, insofar as they are a manifold, [...] both in the appearance or as a thing-in-itself – in a certain respect, as indirect appearance of the same³²⁸.

Subjective appearance that precedes the objective; the indirect precedes the direct and makes space into an object of experience. [...] Moving forces as appearance (mechanically), on in themselves [*an sich selbst*] (dynamically). [...] The object of an indirect appearance is the thing-in-itself [*Sache an sich selbst*], that is, one which can only extract from intuition insofar as we have ourselves inserted [*hineingelegt*], that is, insofar as it is a product of our cognition³²⁹.

As previously observed in section 1.3, it is particularly important to underscore Kant’s distinction between mechanical forces – which act among empirical objects – and dynamic forces, which he regards as conditions for the very possibility of the existence of both empirical objects and their mechanical interactions. This distinction is further elucidated in the quotations above, where Kant appears to characterize moving forces as constituting the material of indirect appearance, which must therefore be distinguished from the directly given appearances in space and time. What is particularly striking, however, is Kant’s assertion that, *in a certain respect* (in gewisser Beziehung), the indirect appearance can be equated with the thing-in-itself. This led the scholarship to question the meaning of this comparison.

Förster and Mathieu, for example, insist on the fact that, in most passages, when speaking about the status of the indirect appearance or the dynamical forces of matter, Kant uses the term “*Sache an sich*” rather than “*Ding an sich*”. In the notes to his English translation of the manuscripts, Förster writes that, whereas the words “*Objekt*” and “*Gegenstand*” are used interchangeably in the manuscripts, the words “*Ding*” and “*Sache*” are not, for “Kant frequently speaks of a *Sache an sich* in a way that does not appear to be synonymous with the *Ding an sich* – the ‘thing in itself’ familiar

³²⁷ OP, XXII 320.

³²⁸ OP, XXII 346.

³²⁹ OP, XXII 340-341.

from his earlier writings”³³⁰. In this sense, the term “*Sache an sich*” should be understood, so to speak, in an broader or extended sense, just as Kant uses it in a passage of the Transcendental Aesthetic, when the philosopher writes:

If one stands by it (as commonly happens) and does not regard that empirical intuition as in turn mere appearance (as ought to happen) so that there is nothing to be encountered in it that pertains to anything in itself, then our transcendental distinction is lost, and we believe ourselves to cognize things-in-themselves, though we have nothing to do with anything except appearances anywhere (in the world of sense), even in the deepest research into its objects. Thus, we would certainly call a rainbow a mere appearance in a sun-shower, but would call this rain the thing-in-itself [*Sache an sich selbst*], and this is correct, as long as we understand the latter concept in a merely physical sense, as that which in universal experience and all different positions relative to the senses is always determined thus and not otherwise in intuition³³¹.

Kant is here hinting at the possibility of using the term “thing-in-itself” in a broad sense. What he means is that it is possible, while remaining within the realm of sensible objects, to think of the *physical* cause of a given appearance as its thing-in-itself. In this way, it becomes legitimate to refer the term *Sache an sich selbst* to the raindrops that concur to cause the phenomenon of the rainbow. According to the scholars, when Kant refers to the dynamic forces of matter as forces in themselves, or as *Sachen an sich selbst*, he appears to be employing this term in such broader and physical sense³³². In other words, the dynamic forces of matter should still be conceived as empirical and phenomenal forces. These, however, insofar as they constitute the foundations of mechanical forces, are regarded by the physicist as self-subsistent realities, endowed with an ontological status distinct from that which characterizes phenomena *directly* accessible to our senses.

However, it must first be emphasized that, from an exegetical point of view, it is not true that there is such a clear distinction in Kant’s works between the concepts of *Sache an sich* and *Ding an sich*, either in the manuscripts or in the published texts. On the contrary, it is possible to find passages where Kant uses the first concept as he normally uses the first, that is, as the noumenical – and not physical – unknown ground of the appearances³³³. This leads us to question the idea – implicitly assumed in these interpretations – that when Kant speaks of the *Sache an sich* in the *Opus postumum*, he is referring precisely to that passage taken from the Transcendental Aesthetic.

³³⁰ Förster 1993, XLVII. See also Mathieu 1958, pp. 337-339.

³³¹ *KrV*, A 45-B 62.

³³² See also Mathieu 1958, p. 338. It must be admitted that in the revised edition of his book, Mathieu appears to reconsider this stance, asserting that the analogy between the case of the ether in the manuscripts and that of the raindrops in the *Critique* would be “misleading” (Mathieu 1991, p. 154), for the ether, as an indirect appearance, can never be exhibited in sensible intuition (see *ivi*, pp. 160-161).

³³³ See e.g. *OP*, XXII 413; XXII 416; *KrV*, B xx, B xxvii, B 67, A 479-B 507; *Fortschritte*, XX 292.

However, one could object to my interpretation by pointing out that, in some passages of these manuscripts, Kant does indeed explicitly distinguish between a “metaphysical” and a “physical” perspective on appearances, suggesting that, in the latter case, they can be treated as things-in-themselves. Let us read, for example, the following quotation:

What, when considered metaphysically, is counted merely as appearances must, in physical consideration, be regarded as the thing-in-itself [*Sache an sich selbst*] (appearance of the appearance), and can be known a priori as the mere form of connection. The concept of appearances that belongs to physics (that again must be distinguished from illusion [*Schein*]) refers to the *data* of sensible representation [...].³³⁴

At first glance, it seems that Kant is allowing for the possibility of adopting a “broader” sense of the term “thing in itself,” one that could also be applied to physical objects conceived as the causes of determinate phenomena. However, I would argue that the underlying argument is, in fact, of a different nature than the one presented in the Transcendental Aesthetic. To begin with, it is worth examining the modal verbs employed here. Whereas the argument presented in the passage from the first *Critique* leads to the admission of the *possibility* of conceiving certain appearances as things-in-themselves in a broad sense, in the quotation just mentioned Kant states that what, from a metaphysical standpoint, is conceived as an appearance *must*, from the physical standpoint, be conceived as a thing-in-itself. This means that, for the physicist, the only possible way to conceive of this object *is* as a thing-in-itself, and not merely that he is *legitimized* to consider it in this way through a broadening of the meaning of the thing-in-itself.

The corollary of this claim is that the object in question cannot, in any way, be conceived as a sensible object, unlike the raindrops in the example drawn from the first *Critique*. In other words, for the physicist who investigates nature through observation and experiments, the dynamic forces of matter can never be sensibly experienced, and for this reason they must be regarded as things-in-themselves. As Kant writes in the same quotation, the concept of appearance that belongs to physics refers only to what is *given* through sensible representations.

At this point, it is natural to ask why Kant nonetheless maintains that, for the metaphysician, what is for the physicist a thing-in-itself must instead be considered an appearance. A possible answer to this question, I believe, lies precisely in the specific function attributed to the moving forces of matter: even though they cannot be directly experienced by the empirical subject, they can nonetheless be a priori determined – and thus, in a certain sense, *known* – by the transcendental

³³⁴ *OP*, XXII 329.

philosopher, who posits them as conditions for the possibility of a collective unity of experience. As Kant himself writes, “[o]ne can determine a priori those forces which effect perception, as anticipations of sensible representation in empirical intuition”³³⁵. According to this reading, the designation of the moving forces as “appearances” in a metaphysical sense finds its justification not in the possibility of their direct perception – which remains precluded – but rather in the possibility of their rational classification within an elementary system.

Moreover, besides the exegetical standpoint, I argue that the interpretation I proposed in the previous sections cannot support the idea that Kant is referring to the indirect appearance, or to the dynamical forces, in a physical sense. In my view, when Kant writes that the concept of the thing-in-itself and that of the indirect phenomenon can be identified “in a certain sense”, he is not actually referring to the possibility of using the concept of the thing in itself in an broader sense with respect to the traditional one, but rather to the possibility of attributing a *specific* meaning to the very concept of the thing-in-itself, without the need to distinguish between a “broad” and a “traditional” use. My claim is that, in the *Opus postumum*, Kant is engaged in clarifying the notion of the thing-in-itself, by stripping it of any realist and metaphysical connotation, which were still present in some passages of the first *Critique*³³⁶. More precisely, Kant aims to demonstrate that the thing-in-itself should not be understood as an entity ontologically distinct from appearances, but rather as a thought-entity (*Gedankending*)³³⁷ which is posited by the subject in order to ground the very possibility of experience in the first place. This concern is especially evident in fascicle VII, which immediately follows fascicles X and XI, where Kant repeatedly asserts, for example, that the thing-in-themselves “are not existing things [*existierende Dinge*] but acts through which the subject posits itself for the sake of possible experience a priori”³³⁸, or that they are “the mere representation of one’s own activity [*die bloße Vorstellung seiner eigenen Thätigkeit*]”³³⁹.

I will not propose an analysis of these notes here, for such an attempt would require a careful examination of the doctrine of the self-positing of the subject, which is developed in these drafts alongside the reworking of the notion of the thing-in-itself. Nonetheless, it appears reasonable to

³³⁵ *OP*, XXII 505.

³³⁶ See e.g. KrV, B XX, A 277-B 333, A 614-B 642, A 540-B 568, A 379. I am fully aware of the long-standing and still unresolved debate concerning the ontological status of the thing-in-itself (see e.g., Adickes 1924, Rousset 1967, Prauss 1974, Hogan 2009, de Boer 2014, 2020, Chiba 2012, Onof 2019), as well as of the fact that already in the *Critique of Pure Reason* there are passages in which Kant appears to conceive of the thing-in-itself in terms that anticipate its later articulation in the *Opus postumum* (see Beiser 2002, p. 212). My aim, however, is not to determine which interpretation of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself within the first *Critique* should be considered definitive. Rather, my intention is to highlight that the very persistence of such a debate is indicative of a fundamental ambiguity in Kant’s treatment of the issue in the 1781 work – an ambiguity that is, by contrast, explicitly resolved in the manuscripts in favor of a non-realist account of the thing-in-itself.

³³⁷ See e.g. *OP*, XXII 415, 417, 420, 25, 36.

³³⁸ *OP*, XXII 71.

³³⁹ *OP*, XXII 37.

maintain – at least in this instance – that Kant’s attention to this theme had been shaped by the debates among his contemporaries, who had not hesitated to point out the ambiguities and problems that this concept exhibited within the context of the first *Critique*. Authors like Schulze, Beck, Jacobi, Fichte and Maimon himself, through often widely differing argumentations, highlighted the incompatibility between Kant’s transcendental idealism and the assumption of a transcendent reality – i.e., external to the sphere of the subject’s consciousness – that could function as the material cause of sensible representations. Put briefly, this would in fact have exposed Kant to the very same errors as those of dogmatic metaphysics, due to the unwarranted application of categories to a thing not given in sensible intuition. I believe Kant’s insistence on the ideal nature of the things-in-themselves in *Konvolut* VII should be seen as a response to this kind of allegations. As we will see more clearly in the next section, the thing-in-itself is a mere “x” posited by the subject in order to make the phenomenal dimension of reality intelligible. As Kant writes, “[t]he thing-in-itself is merely a thought-entity (*ens rationis*) and serves as an object = x in order to represent the object of intuition in contrast to appearance. The thing-in-itself is not something given (*dabile*) but what is thought merely as corresponding [...], belonging to the division. It stands only like a cipher [*Ziffer*]”³⁴⁰. In other words, the thing-in-itself is posited by the subject to ground the possibility of conceiving *something* – completely indeterminate – as corresponding to the object in the phenomenal realm. This “something” does not properly *exist* as a material substratum outside the subject’s consciousness but is merely *thought* as a transcendental condition for the possibility of an experience of sensible objects. Accordingly, Kant refers to a “principle of autonomy to make itself an object in the appearance (*objectum Phaenomenon*), where the thing-in-itself [*Sache an sich selbst*] = x (*objectum Noumenon*), is only a thought to represent the object as appearance”³⁴¹.

Now, I believe that, if one adopts this interpretation of the thing in itself, it becomes possible to justify Kant’s claims regarding the status of indirect appearance, or the ether, without: 1) making it a physical matter, thus using the passage from the Transcendental Aesthetic to interpret its status as a thing-in-itself in a “broad” sense; 2) conceive the ether as a thing-in-itself in the dogmatic sense of the term, i.e., as a self-subsistent and mind-independent entity we would claim to *exist* outside our field of knowledge. As I will try to show here and in the next section, it should be possible to conceive the indirect appearance as something merely *posited* by the subject in order to make the *collective* unity of experience intelligible. I believe this interpretation is substantiated by the numerous similarities we can trace between the status of the thing-in-itself and that of the ether along with its dynamic forces. In both cases, Kant speaks of them in terms of “thought-entities” (*Gedankendinge*)

³⁴⁰ *OP*, XXII 31.

³⁴¹ *OP*, XXII 416.

and underscores the productive role of the subject's activity for their generation. As we already saw, Kant states that "[t]he object of an indirect appearance is the thing-in-itself, that is, one which can only extract from intuition insofar as we have ourselves inserted, that is, insofar as it is a product of our cognition"³⁴². In other passages the philosopher also frames the notion of the indirect appearance in terms of a "subjective appearance that [...] precedes the objective and makes space an object of experience"³⁴³.

As something *created* by the spontaneous faculty of the understanding, the indirect appearance can thus share no similarities with the sensible objects. In other words: it is not possible to consider its status analogously to that of raindrops as the cause of the phenomenon of rainbow. It is not a question of an empirical object that the physicist might, in a broad sense, designate as a thing-in-itself insofar as it would serve as the underlying cause of a given phenomema. In other words, it does not concern two perspectives on the same empirical reality, but *two fundamentally distinct orders of reality*: one belonging to the domain of sensibility (the direct appearance), the other to the domain of the understanding (the indirect appearance)³⁴⁴.

It seems that Kant is addressing precisely this issue when, in these very notes, he invokes the Amphiboly of the concepts of reflection. As is well known, with this expression Kant referred in the first *Critique* to the (philosophical) tendency to logically compare concepts with one another, without taking into consideration "where their objects belong, whether as noumena to the understanding, or as appearance to sensibility"³⁴⁵. This would have led philosophy to formulate judgments purporting to be synthetic a priori on spurious grounds – that is, for instance, on concepts merely thought by the understanding, without any corresponding object being given in intuition. It is on this fundamental error that, according to Kant, Leibniz's Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles would rest. According to Leibniz, it would be impossible to numerically distinguish two objects possessing exactly the same properties, thereby compelling us to assert that they are in fact one and the same object. The problem, from Kant's perspective, lies in the fact that Leibniz conceives objects merely as things-in-themselves. However, if we regard objects as *given* within space and time, then

³⁴² *OP*, XXII 340.

³⁴³ *OP*, XXII 339.

³⁴⁴ To my knowledge, the only scholar who conceives the relationship between the ether, as an indirect appearance and the thing-in-itself in a similar way is Guzmán Grez: "Raindrops represent 'empirical objects', that is, empirical things in themselves. If this is correct, raindrops point to objects of natural science as *substantiae phaenomenon*. However, we have seen that the *substantia phaenomenon* of matter corresponds to the body as object, and not to the systematic substratum of our perceptions. For this reason, *the thing-in-itself in the Critique of Pure Reason (Transcendental Aesthetic) differs essentially from what Kant understands by thing-in-itself in the Opus Postumum*. The former, as material body, exists as the object of investigation in mechanics. If, for example, we now focus on the examination of the coercibility of raindrops, we introduce moving forces to explain the reality of the empirical object, and thus presuppose the dynamic *thing-in-itself* of the *Opus Postumum*. This latter, as the *appearance of appearance*, should not be confused with the *thing-in-itself* of the *Critique of Pure Reason*" (Guzmán Grez 2021, pp. 413-414).

³⁴⁵ *KrV*, A 269-B 325.

their mere difference in spatial or temporal position – despite complete identity in determinations and properties – would suffice to distinguish them numerically from one another. What Kant calls “transcendental reflection”³⁴⁶ was therefore meant to serve as an instrument to disambiguate the status of the objects in question, thereby enabling the assignment of each to its proper domain – whether that be the noumenal sphere of pure understanding or the phenomenal sphere of sensibility.

In the *Opus postumum* the philosopher writes:

The amphiboly of the concepts of reflection consists in confusing the composite [*Zusammengesetzte*] in appearance with composition [*Zusammensetzung*] as a concept of the understanding (of the thing, the object in itself); in confusing the empirical of intuition (perception) with the principle of the connection of phenomena for the possibility of experience, with experience itself as a principle of aggregation into a system (such as experience in general is); and thereby casting into shadow transcendental philosophy, whose task is the question: how are synthetic a priori judgments possible? – that is, the schematism of the concepts of the understanding³⁴⁷.

Evidently, Kant is here warning us against the temptation to regard the indirect appearance – in its transcendental function of composition and genesis of empirical material – as belonging to the same order of reality *as that which it itself composites*, namely, the direct appearance given in intuition. As Beiser argues, the Amphiboly “draws a distinction between different logical orders, so that we do not confuse the transcendental (appearances of appearances) with the empirical (appearances)”³⁴⁸. The compositing role of the indirect appearance is to provide a systematic account of the moving forces of matter, on which the very existence of sensible objects relies. Given this foundational role in relation to the systematic character of experience, the indirect appearance can certainly not be simply given to the subject, but must be *produced* for the sake of the organic structure of physics itself:

The understanding *makes* the *cogitabile* into the *dabile*. We cannot synthetically and universally determine anything from concepts with regard to the moving forces as efficient causes of our perceptions in their connection as empirical knowledge, except what we ourselves have made – that is, *what we have inserted into this intuition* and extracted from the system of the same, which lies a priori in the understanding³⁴⁹.

³⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁷ *OP*, XXII 331.

³⁴⁸ Beiser 2002, pp. 205-206.

³⁴⁹ *OP*, XXII 385.

In my reading, the indirect appearance must therefore be thought as that *cogitabile* that the understanding creates in order to make the *dabile* an object of a systematic and organic experience³⁵⁰. It would not be possible to construct a system of knowledge based on *mere* observations of contingent affinities and similarities between objects, for that would result in a mere aggregate. Rather, a system of the moving forces – the indirect appearance as *cogitabile* – must be a priori inserted by the understanding into experience in order to objectively ground the properties of objects, and thus, in turn, also their affinities and similarities. If this is true, as I have attempted to articulate, then the ether and its moving forces can be conceived neither as a physical entity – and thus as a *Ding an sich* in the broad, physical sense – nor as a metaphysical substance, and thus as a *Ding an sich* in the dogmatic sense. Rather, the ether represents a transcendental structure that the understanding itself posits for the sake of a systematic experience³⁵¹. It does so, however, without claiming that such a structure *exists* as a self-subsistent material substratum of reality³⁵². Much like Maimon’s conception of differentials, the reality of these dynamical moving forces is grounded solely in their explanatory and connective function with respect to phenomena, which I will more carefully analyze in the following section. This is why Kant attributes to the ether both an ideal and a real status: it is ideal insofar as it is invented (*erdichtet*) by the subject, yet real insofar as its construction enables and underwrites the systematicity of our phenomenal experience. As Mathieu puts in, “the construction is something invented – not, however, to unleash imagination, but rather to connect data. Insofar as it possesses this capacity the construction, it ‘exists’, even though it remains a mere invention”³⁵³.

As I have tried to show, this reconstruction would allow us to justify those passages in which Kant appears to assign a noumenal status to the ether by referring to the particular conception of the thing-in-itself that will be developed in more detail by Kant himself in fascicle VII. I believe that this reading justifies the possibility to consistently conceive the ether as a thing-in-itself without falling back into a dogmatic form of metaphysics. The thing-in-itself should not be understood as a material substratum underlying phenomena, but rather solely as an “x” – a conceptual placeholder posited by

³⁵⁰ This reconstruction necessarily entails a re-evaluation of the architectonic order between sensibility and understanding, such that the activity of the understanding must, from a transcendental standpoint, *precede* the function of sensibility. In other words, sensibility can only grasp what the understanding has *already* inserted into experience to make the latter possible. This is explicitly stated by Kant himself, when he writes that “the understanding anticipates the influences of the senses” (*OP*, XXII 509). Naturally, this is a topic that would require more space to be treated satisfactorily. For a more detailed analysis, see Thomson 2019 and Puzzolo 2024a.

³⁵¹ It is quite interesting to note that Kant was already sketching a new Amphiboly of the concepts of reflection in the section *Übergang 1-14* in order to distinguish the status of the ether from that of empirical objects (see *OP*, XXI 545-546). This supports my interpretation, according to which the indirect appearance should be understood as an attempt to thematize the function of the caloric.

³⁵² According to Kant, this would have been Leibniz’s mistake, namely, to have *hypostatized* something created by the spontaneous activity of the understanding. As we saw in Section 2.1.5, according to Maimon as well, the only way to rescue Leibniz’s philosophy from accusations of dogmatism is to interpret the monads as fictions rather than as self-subsistent entities (see *MGW*, IV 51-52).

³⁵³ Mathieu 1958, p. 336.

the subject in order to account for the very possibility of phenomenal *experience in general*. In a similar way, the ether, as the principle of composition of appearances, is the result of an act of “position” or “insertion”. However, unlike the generic function of “thing-in-itself”, the ether does not simply ground the possibility of *experience in general* but rather enables the articulation of *an organic and systematic experience of nature*³⁵⁴. One could thus argue that the ether constitutes a specific instantiation of the *Ding an sich*, which grants the resolution of the problem concerning the systematicity of our empirical experience. According to Kant, the ether “contains the principle of the combination of the moving forces in space, in order to realize space through empirical representation, according to its form – not through experience, but for the sake of the possibility of experience as a system of the subject’s empirical representations”³⁵⁵. Moreover, a few lines below he further specifies that

[t]his composition [*Zusammensetzung*] [...] is not itself a phenomenon [*Phänomen*], but a connection of the moving forces by a concept of the understanding. By its means we systematically establish, according to a principle, the manifold (which has been fragmentarily composed by us, through observation and experiment) into a whole of empirical knowledge for the sake of the investigation of nature³⁵⁶.

To *compose* a system of experience thus means to identify the objective and necessary principles, instantiated in the moving forces of matter, that a priori specify the particular determinations of objects and their properties, so that a true *Lehrsystem* can be built through empirical observations and experiments. As I have tried to demonstrate, this a priori system of the moving forces can be conceived as a thing-in-itself insofar as it is not immediately given in intuition but *posited* for the sake of it. The transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics is thus possible only if we reconstruct the genetic emergence of appearances through the identification of their dynamic moving forces, conceived as things-in-themselves³⁵⁷. Let us also read the following quotation:

³⁵⁴ For a similar account see also Guzmán Grez 2025, p. 114: “If we compare the central core of both texts, for example, it could be said that while the Transcendental Deduction proceeds from an abstract affection (that is, from an indeterminate thing-in-itself) toward the internal structure of the transcendental subject, the *Ätherdeduktion* unfolds in the opposite direction – that is, from sensible affection toward the ultimate ground of exteriority. Thus, what in the *Critique of Pure Reason* remained under the guise of the transcendental object = X now takes the form of a deduction of the ether”.

³⁵⁵ *OP*, XXII 326.

³⁵⁶ *OP*, XXII 326.

³⁵⁷ De Boer maintains that already in the *Metaphysical Foundations* the two original forces were understood by Kant as noumenal foundations of empirical objects, even though their non-empirical status was not explicitly specified at that stage. In this sense, Kant would not have completely abandoned Leibniz’s monadological account of matter, substituting monads with dynamic forces. According to De Boer, the role of the transcendental object in the *Critique* is precisely to justify the possibility of opening up a noumenal dimension that grounds the realm of appearances – a dimension that takes shape, on the practical side, through the idea of freedom, and on the theoretical side, through a dynamic theory of matter

Because the concept of sense-objects as mere appearances, nevertheless, always, through reason, refers back to the thing-in-itself (of which, however, no intuition can be expected), physics – which has to do with outer representations of the senses, their system for the sake of experience, and the principle of the possibility of experience – will have to occupy itself with nothing more than the systematic inner connection of these representations of the moving forces of matter. Progression toward physics³⁵⁸.

What I believe Kant is asserting here is that physics must *presuppose* the possibility of “tracing back” objects of experience to things-in-themselves – that is, to the system of the moving forces of matter – in order to attain a systematic form. In this way, the matter of which the empirical objects is composed would no longer be conceived as simply given, but instead as derived from rational genetic rules. This move would effectively bridge the gap between form and matter, and more broadly, between the a priori and a posteriori dimensions of our knowledge. Moreover, the conclusion of the passage clarifies that the necessity of establishing this system of forces is not a task that belongs to physics as such – which remains, in any case, an *empirical* physics – but rather to the *progression* toward physics, that is, to the science of Transition itself. Similarly, in another passage Kant writes: “The determinable is the thing-in-itself [*Ding an sich*] – that which is given through the understanding and posited synthetically a priori according to form (the *dabile*) [...]. This is the principle of the possibility of experience (a transition to physics)³⁵⁹”.

If my interpretation is correct, it may be possible to claim that, for Kant as well, the thing-in-itself can be conceived as the solution to the problem of the transition from the a priori dimension of universal and necessary forms to empirical particular objects. Although the philosopher – unlike Maimon – never states this explicitly, there are passages in which he asserts, for example, that “the key [*der Schlüssel*] [of the Transition] is the distinction between the moving forces in appearance and the moving forces in themselves”³⁶⁰. The pivotal significance of this distinction lies in the possibility

(see de Boer 2014, pp. 248-256). Although De Boer does not consider the *Opus postumum*, I argue that Kant’s conception of the ether aligns closely with this interpretive framework. In fact, when it comes to this particular kind of matter, Kant is especially careful to underscore both its foundational role in relation to phenomenal experience and its non-empirical, hence immaterial, status. Moreover, in my view, Kant’s manuscripts would clarify the derivation of the ether and its forces from the spontaneous activity of the understanding, thereby avoiding Leibniz’s metaphysical dogmatism.

³⁵⁸ *OP*, XXII 319.

³⁵⁹ *OP*, XXII 418.

³⁶⁰ *OP*, XXII 327. See also *OP*, XXII 393: “Here, then, is the key to the gate to the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics, given in the elementary system of the moving forces of matter: namely, not empirically *from experience*, but *for* experience, a priori, the manifold of appearances is to be apprehended by the understanding for physics as a doctrinal system of those forces, not fragmentarily, but according to concepts, into a whole that the understanding itself *constitutes*, namely, as a principle of experience”. In this passage, Kant does not explicitly refer to the distinction between forces in appearances and forces in themselves; however, I believe it is clear that he regards the latter – as indirect appearances – as the principle of experience that is meant to open the gate to the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics.

of positing a level of transcendental reality that, while distinct from the reality of empirical objects, nonetheless enables a rational justification of the latter's genesis. Unlike the reality of empirical objects, the transcendental reality of the indirect appearance would not derive its legitimacy from its relation to the material conditions of experience – namely, sensation³⁶¹ – but rather from its explanatory power in accounting for the systematic organization of empirical phenomena within a coherent and unified scientific framework. According to my reading, the dynamic forces of matter unified by the idea of the ether should fulfill precisely this role. In other words, the distinction between (mechanical) moving forces, which empirical objects exert upon one another, and (dynamic) moving forces, which we insert into experience in order to explain *how empirical objects are generated*, is essential for understanding how particular properties of matter can be genetically explained and thereby systematically classified. Much like in Maimon's case, moreover, in Kant too this separation between two levels of reality does not lead to a metaphysical and transcendent split between phenomena and noumena. Although the latter cannot be reduced to their empirical manifestation, they do not designate a different *object* from the objects of the senses. The moving forces of matter, as we have already seen, are not self-subsistent and entirely independent forces, but only immanent rules for the production of the empirical, created by understanding itself for the sake of a systematic unity of experience. As Kant will write in the I *Konvolut*, the principles of transcendental philosophy “must [...] remain immanent and ought never to become transcendent, for otherwise they would amount to false fictions”³⁶².

2.2.4 Experience: empirical knowledge or idea?

After having the new schematic *function* of the ether along with its moving forces, and their *status* as things-in-themselves, it is now time to investigate the consequences that these reformulations have for the very concept of experience. In other words, Kant is well aware that the justification of the epistemic function of mediating concepts must be grounded in the assumption of a certain notion of experience – one that cannot be reduced to the distributive unity of experience. As I have already suggested in section 1.5, the ether, along with its moving forces, must in fact be conceived as a principle of the *thorough determinations* of sensible objects, which we must posit for the sake of a *collective* unity of experience:

³⁶¹ See *KrV*, A 266-B 219.

³⁶² *OP*, XXI 65.

One cannot compose [*zusammensetzen*] experience by mere accumulation (*compilando*), that is, through an aggregation of perceptions without an a priori principle; rather, the very possibility of experience – that is, of having any experience at all – requires a schema of the composition [*Zusammensetzung*] of empirical intuitions, which *predetermines* [*praedeterminirt*] appearances in a thoroughgoing determination of the object [*durchgängige Bestimmung des Objekts*]³⁶³.

First and foremost, it is important to highlight the emphasis with which Kant maintains that the very possibility of experience presupposes a schema governing the composition of the objects of experience. This schema, as I have tried to demonstrate in the preceding sections, is not to be identified with the transcendental schema of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Rather, it corresponds to the schema constituted by the ether itself, conceived as an indirect appearance, which enables the composition – and hence the predetermination – of the material dimension of appearances.

This does not mean that the function of categorical synthesis from of the first *Critique* is entirely set aside. As I attempted to show in section 2.2.2, I believe that Kant still considers the results of the *Critique* and of the *Metaphysical Foundations* valid for justifying the possibility of a *physica generalis*, but not of a *physica specialis*. However, this would seem to contrast with what Kant himself states in the passage just quoted, where he writes that “the very possibility of experience”, requires the new schematism of the Transition project. In fact, it would appear that Kant is here attempting to *replace* the schematism of the *Critique* with the new schematism, similarly to what Maimon had done, and not merely to expand it. Nonetheless, I argue that this is not the case. In order to properly grasp the issue, it is necessary to examine the specific concept of “experience” at stake in this context. What I aim to show is that Kant regards the new schematism as a condition for the possibility of experience only insofar as the latter is understood in a markedly narrow sense – namely, as a collective unity.

In many passages of the *Opus postumum* Kant thematizes the difference between distributive and collective unity in the following way: “There is therefore only one experience, and when we speak about *experiences*, this means only the *distributive* unity of a manifold of perceptions, not the *collective* [unity] of their object itself in its thoroughgoing determination”³⁶⁴. And also: “[the] elementary material, as a given whole, is the basis for the unification of all the forces of matter into the unity of [experience]. Now, whatever belongs to the absolute unity of possible experience is actual [*wirklich*]. Hence, such a material is actual as a not merely distributively universal, but also collectively universal world-material”³⁶⁵.

³⁶³ *OP*, XXII 510.

³⁶⁴ *OP*, XXII 549.

³⁶⁵ *OP*, XXI 603.

Kant is therefore not denying the possibility of experiences grounded in the unity provided by the categorial synthesis elaborated in the first *Critique*. Rather, he seems to be articulating a more nuanced view: that while individual experiences (in the plural) are indeed possible and even necessary for cognition, they remain fundamentally partial, singular, and dispersed. That is, they are fragments of a broader epistemic process, and in their isolated form they do not amount to “experience” in the full sense of the term. The notion of *experience* in this higher sense refers not to any one empirical encounter or sequence thereof, but to a unified, coherent, and systematically integrated whole.

In this respect, Salomon Maimon’s remarks in the *Kritische Untersuchungen* prove particularly illuminating. We saw that the philosopher clarifies that *experience* in the strict sense is not a determinate concept that can be instantiated in any specific intuition. Instead, it functions as an *idea* that can be approximated and thought but never fully achieved in concrete empirical cognition. Maimon writes: “*experience* in the strict sense is not a *concept* that can be represented in *intuition*, but an *idea* to which one can always approach in imagination, one that can never be fully attained”³⁶⁶. It is somewhat striking to find formulations such as the following in the first *Konvolut* of the *Opus postumum*:

Experience is not empirical knowledge, but rather itself only an idea for the construction of a concept. This construction is always merely *asymptotic* – an approach toward experience (as in the case of the hyperbola). It is not *experiences* in the plural, but *experience* in the singular³⁶⁷.

Experience, as a principle of the determination of knowledge, is itself only an idea and a structuring [*Formgebung*] of a sensible object as such. It does not arise from an aggregate of perceptions, but rather from their totality (*complexus*) within a system, of which it contains only the general form. Thus, one cannot speak of experiences (*objectively*), but only of experience (*subjectively*); yet to rely on it as a ground of proof remains always unreliable and permits nothing more than approximation³⁶⁸.

What emerges from these passages is a particularly narrow characterization of the concept of “experience”. In the first quotation, Kant specifies that experience is *not* empirical knowledge. What Kant seems to be arguing – similarly to what Maimon himself maintains in the *Kritische Untersuchungen* – is that experience does not simply consist in the synthesis of particular and discrete intuitions and categories. Rather, experience in the proper sense is the *idea* of the construction of the object, that is, of its thorough determination, which for our understanding is always asymptotic. As

³⁶⁶ *MGW*, VII 156.

³⁶⁷ *OP*, XXI 90.

³⁶⁸ *OP*, XXI 76.

we saw in the previous chapter, this construction of the object should be carried out by the compositing function of the indirect appearance. In my reading, the fact that Kant maintains that only this constitutes experience in the proper sense marks a significant development when compared to the first *Critique*. In that work, it is possible to identify at least two other different concepts of experience, which I shall refer to as E₁ and E₂, both of which differ from – and are broader than – the concept presented in the manuscripts, which I shall designate as E₃. Now, both E₁ and E₂ are already discernible in the well-known additions to the Introduction of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant writes:

There is no doubt whatever that all our knowledge begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a knowledge of objects that is called experience?

At the beginning of the quotation Kant distinguishes knowledge from experience, and argues that the former *begins* with the latter. In this regard, the concept of experience that the philosopher has in mind is as broad as possible. If knowledge begins with experience, this implies that experience is not, in itself, *already* knowledge. In this preliminary sense (E₁), *experience* signifies the raw, unordered material of cognition. It is not yet *knowledge*, since knowledge requires the active contribution of the understanding, which organizes and synthesizes the manifold in accordance with the categories. Thus, if knowledge *begins with* experience, this implies that experience, in E₁, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for knowledge³⁶⁹. However, at the end of the passage, Kant appears to shift to a more restrictive and technical use of the term *experience* (E₂). Here, experience is no longer merely the passive reception of sensory data, but rather the result of the synthesis of this data by the understanding according to the categories. In this stronger sense, *experience* (E₂) is itself a form of knowledge – specifically, empirical knowledge of objects as they appear to us, under the conditions of space, time, and the categories. The same term, *experience*, thus slides from referring to the initial data of sensibility (E₁) to designating the fully constituted, objective cognition of empirical reality (E₂), which must be grounded on the first. According to the first *Critique*, every possible knowledge for a finite rational being is thus always an *empirical* knowledge. While knowledge contains a priori elements, its application is always constrained by the empirical

³⁶⁹ This conception of experience is explicitly taken up again a few lines later, when Kant writes: “But although all our cognition commences *with* experience, yet it does not on that account all arise *from* experience” (*KrV*, B 1).

conditions under which objects are given. At the beginning of §27 of the second Transcendental Deduction, Kant in fact writes:

We cannot *think* any object except through categories; we cannot *cognize* any object that is thought except through intuitions that correspond to those concepts. Now all our intuitions are sensible, and this knowledge, so far as its object is given, is empirical. Empirical knowledge, however, is experience. Consequently *no a priori knowledge is possible for us except solely of objects of possible experience*³⁷⁰.

I believe that the distance between this passage from the *Critique* and the quotations drawn from the I *Konvolut* of the *Opus postumum* can be readily measured by observing that in the former, experience is *denied* to be empirical knowledge, whereas in the latter, it is explicitly *affirmed* as such. According to this quotation, to properly *know* an object (E₂) means to synthesize an empirical manifold given in intuition (E₁) through the spontaneous activity of the categories. Moreover, in addition to clarifying the necessary reference to empirical content in order to justify the possession of knowledge of a determinate object, the passage just quoted also makes clear that, in the first *Critique*, experience *in the proper sense* is identifiable with E₂ – that is, with the synthesis of given matter through intuition and a concept produced by the understanding. In this sense, one could argue that the concept of “experience” understood as a mere empirical manifold (E₁) constitutes only an improper or extensive use.

As we have seen, however, the concept of experience presented in the *Opus postumum* corresponds neither to E₁ nor to E₂, but rather designates the *idea of the totality of all possible experience* (E₃). Although, to my knowledge, Kant never directly employs the term “experience” in this sense within the *Critique*, it is true that the *collective unity* of experience already presented in the Transcendental Dialectic corresponds to this meaning. However, I would argue that the fundamental difference lies in the fact that, in the *Critique*, even E₃ is there considered as “experience” only in an *improper* sense. It merely designates an unattainable “goal” projected by reason in support of the systematic connection of the cognitions generated by the understanding³⁷¹. That the collective unity does not qualify as genuine experience is explicitly acknowledged by Kant in the *Prolegomena*, where he states that “the absolute totality of all possible experience is itself not an experience, and yet it constitutes a necessary problem for reason”³⁷². We have just seen that, quite surprisingly, Kant appears to completely reverse his position in the manuscripts, claiming that

³⁷⁰ *KrV*, B 165-166.

³⁷¹ *KrV*, A 644-B 672.

³⁷² *Prolegomena*, 328.

“experience is not empirical knowledge, but rather itself only an idea for the construction of a concept”³⁷³. In this sense, here it is the collective unity that is conceived as an experience in the *proper* sense.

The question that must now be answered is therefore the following: would this reformulation mean that in the manuscripts the distributive unity of experience is stripped of any objectivity? Or, in other words, if experience in the proper sense is now understood solely as collective unity, does this imply that the synthesis of intuition and concepts is no longer sufficient to guarantee genuine knowledge of the world? As we have seen, this seems to be precisely Maimon’s position. According to him, only the entire systematic unity of experience (the *Darstellung*) can convey the objectivity and necessity of cognition. Anything that is not the *entire systematic unity itself*, but merely a part of it (the *Vorstellung*), cannot be said to be neither objective nor necessary, but at most *probable*. In this sense, according to Maimon, physics is a form of knowledge that will always deal with propositions that are more or less probable, but never with universal and necessary propositions.

It seems to me, however, that in the case of the *Opus Postumum*, the situation is different. Although Kant asserts that only E₃ – the collective unity of experience – constitutes experience in the proper sense, there is no passage in the manuscripts where he explicitly *denies* the objectivity of E₂, or where he asserts that the cognition stemming from E₂ is merely *probable*. In my reading, this once again calls for a distinction between the domains to which Kant’s late proposal applies. As I noted in section 2.2.2, the manuscripts should be interpreted as an attempt to ground *physica specialis*, but not *physica generalis*, whose objectivity remains secured by the achievements of the first *Critique* and the *Metaphysical Foundations*. The mathematization of phenomena effected by general physics enables the verification of the proper application of the categories to sensible data. In this sense, the distributive unity generated by the synthesis of sensible matter and the forms of the understanding can be regarded as objectively valid.

However, the case is different with the objects of *physica specialis*. As Friedman writes, “[t]he extraordinarily complex phenomena studied by chemistry could not be comprehended within the mechanical natural philosophy: that is, solely in terms of motion and its communication through impact and pressure”³⁷⁴. In other words, insofar as mathematics is not the privileged means by which to verify whether particular phenomena studied by disciplines such as chemistry, biology and geology

³⁷³ *OP*, XXI 90.

³⁷⁴ Friedman 1992a, p. 240. See also Lehmann 1969, p. 399: “The final problem comes so clearly to the forefront that one can rightly speak of a categorical apprehension of the world of perception as the fundamental task of the *Opus Postumum*: reality would be only partially determined if cognition were to content itself with the principles of the theory of motion; the clothing of things with the richness of qualities – colors, sounds, and so forth – would remain completely incomprehended” and Guzmán Grez 2025, p. 116: “Kant observes that the mathematical principles cannot ground a philosophy of nature in its full material integrity, since such a claim entails the atomistic consequences that follow from mechanics”.

conform to specific mechanical laws – laws that are, in turn, derived from the metaphysical principles of mechanics and the principles of pure understanding – the criterion for their objectivity must lie elsewhere³⁷⁵.

I argue that this criterion is to be found in the systematicity of the knowledge contained within a particular discipline. In this case, the objectivity of individual propositions is not determined by the possibility of mathematically formalizing their objects and subsequently verifying their correspondence with the transcendental laws of the understanding. Rather, it is determined by the possibility of discovering principles capable of coherently and systematically unifying various natural phenomena that cannot be explained by the laws of mechanical physics³⁷⁶. As McNulty emphasizes, non-physical sciences – such as chemistry – might be grounded in a different source of objectivity, namely, not in the operations of the understanding, but rather in those of reason. As the scholar writes, “reason’s ideas, and not just the understanding’s categories and principles, can also constitute such an a priori ground, making possible genuine empirical laws in non-physical sciences”³⁷⁷. I agree with McNulty’s thesis regarding Kant’s need to assign a criterion of objectivity to the non-physical sciences that differs from that derived solely from the use of the understanding. However, contrary to the scholar’s claims, the central argument of this work is that the merely regulative function of reason or judgment in its reflective use is not sufficient to secure an adequate criterion of objectivity.

Let’s take an example proposed by McNulty himself. He illustrates the process of experimentation by a chemist who, through repeated observations, arrives at the judgment: “Lead can be calcined”. The use of reason leads us to seek the foundation of this phenomenon. The scientist initially hypothesizes that the condition for calcination lies in the color of lead – specifically, its grayness. However, she soon discovers that not every gray object is susceptible to calcination, leading him to discard this hypothesis. She then tests the notion that it is the metallic nature of the substance that accounts for its ability to undergo calcination. This second hypothesis proves to be more effective than the first, yet it still falls short of universality, as there exist non-metallic substances, such as

³⁷⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the reasons why chemistry, for Kant, cannot be a mathematical science, see McNulty 2014.

³⁷⁶ Of course, this does not mean that systematicity is irrelevant in mechanical physics. However, I agree with Friedman in observing that, in that context, systematicity plays primarily a subjective, economic and heuristic role in *organizing* experience, rather than serving as a guarantor of objectivity (see Friedman 1992b, 2014). His interpretation is based on statements such as the following: “In fact the manifold of rules and the unity of principles is a demand of reason, in order to bring the understanding into thoroughgoing connection with itself, just as the understanding brings the manifold of intuition under concepts and through them into connection. Yet such a principle does not prescribe any law to objects and does not contain the ground of the possibility of cognizing and determining them as such in general, but rather is merely a subjective law of economy for the provision of our understanding, so that through comparison of its concepts it may bring their universal use to the smallest number, without justifying us in demanding of objects themselves any such unanimity as might make things easier for our understanding or help it extend itself, and so give objective validity to its maxims as well” (*KrV* A 306-B 362). On the contrary, scholars like Buchdahl and Guyer argue that only the regulative use of reason can ultimately ground the objectivity of *every* science. See Buchdahl 1966, 1971; Guyer 1990a, 1990b.

³⁷⁷ McNulty 2015, p. 4.

limestone, that can also be calcined. This compels reason to seek a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon, ultimately leading to the formulation of the hypothesis of *phlogiston*. In this way, it is no longer an empirical property but an idea (not empirically verifiable) that is conceived as the cause underlying the calcination process. The scientist's work, however, does not stop here. After having hypothetically assumed the idea of phlogiston as the cause of the calcination process, she realizes that it can also be used to account for other similar phenomena, such as the process of combustion³⁷⁸. In this way, a connection governed by laws between these phenomena would be discovered, and a systematic unification of them would be achieved through the idea of phlogiston.

Now, I agree with McNulty's reconstruction concerning Kant's attempt to ground the scientific procedure through the tools provided by the first and third *Critiques*. However, I also contend that this very method is precisely what Kant seeks to call into question in the *Opus postumum*. In this work, the method used to arrive at the hypothesis of phlogiston – through the regulative use of reason (or of the reflective power of judgement) – is explicitly presented as insufficient for establishing a strong form of systematicity³⁷⁹. Significantly, in relation to the specific example under consideration, the phlogiston theory was shown to be untenable by Lavoisier himself. This illustrates that the purely regulative use of reason cannot yield a level of apodictic certainty comparable to that of the mathematical sciences, whose principles – such as the law of universal gravitation – are, in Kant's view, not subject to revision, as they are grounded in the transcendental laws of the understanding³⁸⁰. It is no coincidence that, in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant explicitly distinguishes between an *apodictic* use of reason, in which the universal is certain and “the particular is necessarily determined through it” and a *problematic* or *hypothetical* use, in which “the particular is certain while the universality of the rule for this consequent is still a problem”³⁸¹. This seems to imply that, while the *inquiry* driven by reason toward the progressive systematization of our knowledge is undoubtedly necessary, the *principles* that reason assumes in its attempt to organically connect various phenomena may, over time, be replaced by other principles with greater explanatory power. McNulty, of course, acknowledges this distinction; nevertheless, he maintains that the hypothetical use of reason can be “transformed” into an apodictic use when the principle discovered by reason is employed to syllogistically deduce and connect other particular phenomena. As he writes, “we use reason apodictically when we descend syllogistically from a given principle to particulars,

³⁷⁸ See McNulty 2015, pp. 5-6.

³⁷⁹ See e.g. *OP*, XXI 285.

³⁸⁰ Furthermore, as Blomme rightly observes, “nothing suggests that Kant could not foresee that Lavoisier's model, replacing the theory of Stahl, would at a later stage be replaced by yet another model. If the philosopher Kant wants to contribute to the metaphysics of experimental physics, he cannot rely on the contingent form in which chemistry occurs at this or that time” (Blomme 2023, p. 21).

³⁸¹ *KrV*, A 646-B 674.

so after verifying a principle hypothetically we use it to ground and unify the other judgments of the science”³⁸². In this way, according to McNulty, it would be possible to demonstrate that the laws of chemistry are not based merely on regularities and empirical observations. Once phlogiston is assumed to be an element contained in *every* sample of lead and the cause of its calcination, the judgment “lead is calcinable” becomes an apodictic judgment, for it would be impossible to find a sample of lead that does not contain phlogiston and that, therefore, would not be calcinable³⁸³.

However, it seems to me that the use of principles discovered by reason in its regulative function (such as the phlogiston) to connect particular phenomena is not sufficient to confer upon them apodictic necessity. After all, it remains possible that, in the course of scientific experimentation, the principle we had assumed as the basis for explaining particular phenomena proves to be inadequate for accounting for them in a coherent manner. As Lavoisier noted, the calcination process could not be explained by referring to the release of phlogiston from lead, since the latter increases in weight after being calcined. In this sense, phlogiston cannot be regarded as a principle that connects and explains the phenomena of metal calcination. This does not imply that the use of reason itself is called into question, but rather only that the *principle* initially constructed to connect certain phenomena proves inadequate to its task.

I therefore argue that, according to the late Kant, to ensure that the system is not built on merely hypothetical grounds, it is necessary to anchor the practices of observation and experimentation in a principle different from the subjective principle of the purposiveness of nature, or from the merely heuristic principles of reason, namely manifoldness, affinity, and unity³⁸⁴. As previously observed, these principles suffice only for the construction of a “weak” system – one that remains perpetually open to correction and revision. Evidently, such a system cannot furnish a sufficiently robust criterion of objectivity for the propositions and objects it encompasses. As Kant writes in the first Introduction to the third *Critique*,

³⁸² See McNulty 2015, p. 6.

³⁸³ “The scientist has no guarantee that this regularity will hold in the future. When the judgment is reduced to an elemental explanation, however, it gains the necessity and generality of a genuine law. According to the pre Lavoisierian, phlogistic chemistry, lead is a metal, and all metals are salt-phlogiston dyads. Since phlogiston is the bearer of inflammability phenomena, substances that contain phlogiston are combustible. When being burned, a phlogisticated substance releases its phlogiston; this loss explains the chemical changes substances undergo during burning. Thus in virtue of being a phlogisticated substance, a sample of lead is combustible/calcinable. The judgment “lead is calcinable”, hence, follows from the very nature of lead: any sample of lead must be calcinable. So it is through the reduction of chemical behavior to the elements that we can transition from merely contingent, observational judgments to genuine laws that carry necessity with them. These chemical laws are of a different sort from their physical counterparts insofar as they are empirical and do not involve mathematical construction, but, nevertheless, the elements necessitate and generalize regularities, making them genuine laws” (McNulty 2016, p. 86).

³⁸⁴ *KrV*, A 662-B 690.

The reflective power of judgement thus works with given appearances to bring them under empirical concepts of determinate natural things not schematically, but technically; not merely mechanically, like a tool controlled by the understanding and the senses, but artistically, according to the universal but nonetheless indeterminate principle of a purposive and systematic ordering of nature. Our power of judgement is favoured, as it were, by the conformity of the particular laws of nature (about which the understanding is silent) to the possibility of experience as a system, which is a presupposition without which we have no hope of finding our way in the labyrinth of the multiplicity of possible particular laws. Thus the power of judgement itself makes the technic of nature into the principle of its reflection a priori, without being able to explain or determine it more precisely or to possess an objective determining ground for the universal concepts of nature (through a cognition of things in themselves), but only in order to facilitate its reflection in accordance with its own subjective laws and needs while remaining in harmony with the laws of nature in general³⁸⁵.

The reflective power of judgement and the “indeterminate” principles of purposiveness make the establishment of a natural system possible. However, they do not determine any objective law with respect to this system. Should *physica specialis* aspire to a strong epistemic standing, it must be grounded in principles that are not merely regulative but also constitutive – principles such as the ether and its moving forces, whose interaction can *objectively* explain the various properties of matter. The specificity of these principles lies in the fact that they do not take affinities and similarities between objects as something merely “given”; rather, they explain their origin *genetically*, tracing them back to rational and objective rules. In this way, the connection between similar phenomena would not merely be explained by *problematically* assume principles such as the phlogiston, but would instead be grounded in a transcendental principle of the possibility of experience – namely, the ether as indirect appearance. As Kant writes, “physics is constituted, not out of and from experience, but [by means of] the concept of the unity of moving forces, for the possibility of experience (by means of observations and experiment) according to the principles of the investigation of nature”³⁸⁶.

In McNulty eyes, such expressions do not represent a novelty of the *Opus postumum*, since already during the “critical” period Kant would have conceived the elements of chemistry – understood as ideas of reason – as being posited *before*, rather than after, scientific investigation³⁸⁷. However, it seems to me that this does not align with Kant’s position as presented in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic or in the third *Critique*. While it is true that the transcendental ideas of God, the soul, and the world are, in a certain sense, a priori deduced by pure reason from the logical forms of syllogisms³⁸⁸, the ideas employed in empirical sciences – such as pure air, pure water, or

³⁸⁵ *EE*, 214.

³⁸⁶ *OP*, XXII 325

³⁸⁷ See McNulty 2016, p. 89.

³⁸⁸ See *KrV*, A 321-B 378.

phlogiston – are instead the result of an extension of *empirical* concepts toward the unconditioned. In this respect, the production of these ideas always *presupposes* prior experience of particular objects and phenomena.

For this reason, I believe it is possible to refer to these particular ideas, as Rauscher suggests, in terms of “empirical” or “mundane” ideas³⁸⁹. If such ideas are generated by reason to unify specific empirical phenomena, such as calcination or flammability, then their status must remain provisional. Since they are not strictly deduced a priori they are inherently open to revision and correction. Rauscher thus maintains that empirical ideas can be supplied by reason to the understanding for a “possible constitutive confirmation”³⁹⁰ – a confirmation that remains contingent upon the success of empirical inquiry. Should such confirmation fail to occur, these ideas must be revised. Contrary to what McNulty affirms³⁹¹, empirical ideas are therefore not a priori in the same sense of transcendental ideas, and they may therefore be subject to revision and correction.

As we have seen, Kant’s aim in the *Opus postumum* is precisely to demonstrate that the idea of the ether, as the condition of possibility for the systematic unity of knowledge, must serve as the a priori foundation for the particular determinations of appearances. It is not taken from experience, nor does it arise as a provisional inference from empirical data. Instead, it is introduced as a *transcendental foundation* for the lawful and systematic determination of appearances. The ether, together with its moving forces, functions as a constitutive framework that *precedes* experience, thereby allowing *physica specialis* to become an objective science. In this light, Kant’s late work aims at constructing a *strong system*, one not perpetually susceptible to empirical revisions.

Now, this brief digression has been necessary in order to clarify why, in the context of *physica specialis*, Kant considers distributive unity insufficient to guarantee the objectivity of scientific propositions. Since the objectivity of such propositions cannot be verified mathematically, it becomes necessary to provide a different criterion. This criterion is a strong conception of systematicity, which can only be found within the framework of a collective unity of experience, grounded in the system of the moving forces of matter. In this sense, once again, when in the *Opus postumum* Kant writes that the only experience is the collective unity, he is not, in fact, questioning the objectivity of the distributive unity of experience *per se*. Rather, he is specifying the scientific context within which each can claim objective validity. In the context of *physica generalis*, and thus of mathematical physics, the distributive unity of experience (E₂) is sufficient to establish the necessity of scientific propositions³⁹². If we consider a discrete event composed of two objects, A and B, and wish to assert

³⁸⁹ See Reuscher 2010, pp. 296-297.

³⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 298.

³⁹¹ See McNulty 2014, p. 6.

³⁹² Maimon’s critique of the capacity of transcendental philosophy to ground the objectivity of physics is also addressed by Guzmán Grez in Guzmán Grez 2021, pp. 396 ff.. Contrary to my view, however, the scholar does not distinguish

that the action of A is the cause of the motion of B, the application of the principles of the understanding, and their specific instantiation in the laws of mechanic, is sufficient. The fact that this event is indeed governed by these laws is then proved through a mathematical analysis.

In the context of *physica specialis*, however, the criterion for the objectivity of events is determined by their being parts of a systematic totality, in which each event refers to the others in a coherent and organic manner. In this sense, it is not possible to demonstrate the objectivity of discrete events without referring them to the totality to which they belong. If this is indeed the case, then the merely regulative function of reason and the reflective use of judgment could not serve as a determining means for the foundation of this science. The system they are capable of constructing rests, in fact, upon explanatory *hypothesis* that remain perpetually open to revision and correction. While they may provide the means to construct a system, they are not sufficient to determine the objective laws that govern it. Put differently: they are not capable of providing a robust criterion by which the objectivity of different propositions can be assessed. This position is clearly expressed by Kant in the following passage:

The most carefully collected empirical concepts never ensure that the natural scientist has a complete and comprehensive system; instead, they can only be achieved by trial and error (*compilando*), and one must always expect that the system that has been assumed will have to be revised, that certain parts will have to be discarded, or that space will have to be left for others that may announce themselves as previously unknown species.

Thus, in a system of natural science, it is unavoidable that a leap (*saltus*) takes place in it if not for an intermediary concept (not the logical one in the syllogism, which concerns only the form of the conclusion but the real one, which offers an object to reason) which, on the one hand, is linked to a concept of the object a priori and, on the other hand, to the condition of the possibility of experience in which this concept can be realized; for only then does such a concept serve as a transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics, which is then no leap³⁹³.

As Kant writes in the first part of the quotation, the mere collection of empirical data cannot ground a comprehensive system of physics (understood as *physica specialis*), for it proceeds only through tentative steps that must be continually revised and corrected. In this sense, the principles adopted through the regulative use of reason are not capable of resolving this problem by securing the apodicticity of special physics, insofar as these very principles are themselves constructed by reason through a process of progressive extension of the *empirical concepts* themselves. They lack a proper

between *physica generalis* and *physica specialis*, and therefore considers Maimon's critique to be valid with respect to the grounding of both disciplines.

³⁹³ *OP*, XXI 285.

and independent a priori foundation. In the second part of the passage, Kant clarifies that it is possible to construct a system of natural science only if one assumes an intermediate concept that links the a priori dimension of a given object with the possibility of its realization in concrete experience. This corresponds to the requirement of identifying the moving forces that are meant to explain and determine a priori the specific empirical characteristics of a particular object. In this way, the principles intended to explain certain characteristics of bodies would no longer possess a merely problematic or hypothetical status, but rather an apodictic and constitutive one³⁹⁴:

To take hold of the moving forces of matter empirically, and to collect them fragmentarily, cannot ground a physics as a system. Rather, it must be capable of being erected as a whole – not as an aggregate (*sparsim*) but as a system (*coniunctim*) – according to an a priori principle which determines the number and order of the moving forces. This cannot occur otherwise than [by taking as its principle] what we insert for the sake of a possible experience [...], not what we extract from the aggregate of perceptions. In this way, a science is brought about in which the investigation of nature (by observation and experiment) proceeds [*ausgeht*] from the appearance of appearances (and so accordingly to an a priori principle)³⁹⁵.

As the end of this quotation shows, Kant's insistence, within the manuscripts, on the existence of a single experience conceived as a collective unity must be read in conjunction with the problem of the ether as indirect appearance. If the only form of experience of nature is a systematic one, then it becomes necessary to posit an a priori principle that constitutes the condition of possibility for a coherent and organic investigation of nature. Without such a grounding principle, the epistemic legitimacy of *physica specialis* would remain in question. To have a proper experience of an object would thus no longer merely mean formally connecting perceptual material through the pure a priori forms of the understanding (E₂). Rather, the task is to identify and enumerate a priori the moving forces of matter within a system, to provide an objective explanatory foundation for the various attributes of matter, and, consequently, to render possible their classification within a coherent and organic system.

For this reason, in certain passages, Kant appears to articulate the distinction between direct and indirect phenomena in terms of a difference between mere empirical representation and experience in the proper sense. In other words, if experience is understood solely as the collective unity of experience, then it must be identified with that transcendental structure posited by the subject

³⁹⁴ As Kant wrote in *Übergang 1-14*, “the proof for the present proposition concerning the existence of a universally pervasive *caloric*, which is claimed to pertain not only to an elementary system but also to the world system of matter, [...] presumes to be established not merely problematically but even apodictically” (*OP*, XXI 237).

³⁹⁵ *OP*, XXII 322.

as a condition for the possibility of a thoroughgoing determination of appearances. “The amphiboly of concepts”, Kant writes, “to make a leap from that to which comes to us empirically, and is merely appearance, to experience – since the latter would be an appearance of an appearance, and experience cannot be received as a representation which comes to us, but must be made”³⁹⁶. Here, Kant is suggesting that experience in the *proper* sense (E₃) lies not within the domain of the direct appearance, but in the a priori conditions – such as the ether as indirect appearance – that make systematic knowledge possible³⁹⁷. As I have tried to demonstrate in this paragraph, this is a conceptual operation that cannot be correctly grasped through a reference to the regulative use of reason or the reflective power of judgement; instead, it reveals striking affinities with Maimon’s attempt to shift the proper meaning of the concept of experience from that of *Vorstellung* to that of *Darstellung*. However, it is also possible to identify significant differences between the two projects.

In this regard, it may be argued that the shift in the proper meaning of experience from E₂ to E₃ should be understood as Kant’s attempt to justify the possibility of attributing an apodictic and objective dimension to *physica specialis*. Unlike *physica generalis*, the objectivity of the former’s propositions cannot rely solely on the agreement between intuition and concepts, since what is lacking is the mathematical instrument necessary to verify such a correspondence. In the case of *physica specialis*, systematicity is no longer merely an organizing principle applied to bodies of knowledge whose objective validity has already been established by the understanding; rather, it becomes the very criterion of the objectivity of knowledge itself. Although the distinction between the criterion of objectivity in *physica generalis* and that in *physica specialis* is never explicitly thematized by Kant in the manuscripts, I believe that passages such as the following ought to be interpreted in this direction: “the proposition ‘the experience teaches this’ (when it cannot be justified a priori) is only an approximation to certainty, since in the transition to physics, a *thoroughgoing determination* would be required for that”³⁹⁸.

What Kant appears to assert at first glance is that no particular empirical knowledge can legitimately claim certainty or objectivity, as these are guaranteed solely by the thorough determination of objects – a condition that is never fully attainable for us. In this sense, it would seem

³⁹⁶ *OP*, XXII 322.

³⁹⁷ Even within the *Opus postumum*, Kant actually seems to have all three meanings of experience that we mentioned clearly in mind. In the following passage, he writes: “Experience is: 1) an empirical consciousness, i.e., *perception* (*animadversio*); 2) an *aggregate* of perceptions according to a principle (*observatio et experimentum*); 3) the thoroughgoing determination of this aggregate into a complete system of perceptions” (*OP*, XXII 93). These three meanings of experience correspond almost perfectly to E₁, E₂, and E₃. The first refers to the mere perception of a manifold; the second, to the connection of this manifold according to a principle (of the understanding), which yields propositions that can be tested through observation and experiment; the third, to the complete determination of objects within a system. Although Kant brings together all three under the concept of “experience” in this passage, for the reasons outlined in this paragraph, I maintain that – within the context of *physica specialis* – only the third meaning should be regarded as the proper sense of experience that Kant aims to establish in the Transition project.

³⁹⁸ *OP*, XXII 438.

that even the objectivity of individual propositions within general physics is called into question, thereby bringing Kant closer to Maimonian skepticism. However, I contend that the parenthetical remark serves to preclude this risk. Kant, in fact, maintains that empirical knowledge is excluded from the domain of certainty *only when it cannot be justified a priori*. As I have attempted to show repeatedly, the application of the categories and the mathematical verification of their correctness serve precisely this purpose. It seems to me, then, that the remark is intended to clarify that all merely empirical knowledge *that is not the physico-mathematical knowledge of physica generalis* is excluded from the domain of objectivity, unless it is grounded on the establishment of the science of Transition. Only the latter can ground the possibility of a coherent attempt to thoroughly determine the objects of experience in *physica specialis* without relying on a mere process of trial and error.

At this point, however, a further problem might arise. We have just seen that the mathematization of the procedures of *physica generalis* makes it possible to assign objective validity to its propositions – a validity that does not strictly depend on the establishment of a collective unity of experience. In the case of *physica specialis*, however, the absence of a comparable process of mathematization would seem to lead to the conclusion that the objectivity of the discipline can be secured *only once a collective unity of experience has been definitively established*. In a manner reminiscent of Maimon, it would appear that only *Darstellung* can ensure the objectivity and necessity of experience. However, the thoroughgoing determination of objects – and thus a genuine *experience* of them – still remains an *asymptotic* task. This would seem to suggest that, even here, objective knowledge of phenomena lies beyond our grasp and can function only as a regulative ideal of inquiry, thereby rendering *physica specialis* a merely probabilistic science.

Although Kant does not provide explicit instructions in the *Opus postumum* on how to resolve this tension, I believe that the risk of empirical skepticism can be avoided if one correctly understands the grounds on which Kant bases the objectivity of scientific knowledge³⁹⁹. The contrast with Maimon's position is instructive here. In Maimon's philosophy, the impossibility of adequate knowledge of appearances, and thus his skepticism concerning empirical cognition, is grounded in the strong demands of his dogmatic rationalism. For Maimon, objectivity requires a *complete* reduction of the material manifold to its rational genetic rules. Since such a reduction is, for finite beings, impossible, empirical cognition is never fully justified and thus remains, in his view, fundamentally uncertain.

Kant, by contrast, insists that it is both *possible* and *necessary* to establish a complete system of rational laws that govern the production of objects, namely, the moving forces of matter. These laws which do not exhaustively determine empirical content, but rather regulate the conditions under

³⁹⁹ This is a theme I will explore more fully in the Conclusions to this part, but I will introduce it briefly here.

which such content can be meaningfully experienced and investigated. Once the elementary system of forces is established, it becomes possible to ground empirical investigation in principles that confer objectivity, independently of whether or not the empirical system as a whole is, or ever could be, *complete*. The infinitude of the task, then – unlike in Maimon’s framework – does not consist in an endless reduction of empirical content to rational form. Rather, it lies in the open-ended nature of the construction of the empirical system itself, namely, in the systematic integration of new phenomena into a conceptual framework whose rational foundations are already in place. Objectivity, in this view, is not a function of empirical totality but of systematicity under lawful conditions.

Accordingly, in the *Opus postumum*, the objectivity of the empirical system is not determined by its actual completeness, which remains an unattainable ideal, but by the completeness and internal coherence of the laws that govern its development. To use Kantian terminology, it is determined by the completeness of the *Elementarsystem* (the system of moving forces), rather than that of the *Lehrsystem* (the system of empirical objects grounded upon the former). Consequently, in order to affirm the objectivity of specific empirical events, it is sufficient that they be systematically explained by reference to the elementary system of forces. The possibility of future integration of further events into the system does not retroactively undermine the objective validity of those events *that have already been explained* according to established laws.

In this sense, it can be argued that, unlike Maimon, Kant maintains that the propositions of *physica specialis* can attain objective validity. This is the case even though the complete unification of experience into a single empirical totality remains an asymptotic goal. The key difference lies in how objectivity is grounded: not in the empirical completeness or totality of the system of appearances (*Lehrsystem*), but in the structural completeness and coherence of the laws that govern them (*Elementarsystem*). These laws provide the necessary framework within which empirical data can be meaningfully and objectively situated, even as the empirical content itself remains open-ended and subject to further development.

After having briefly outlined these significant differences between Kant’s position and that of Maimon, the final paragraph will offer a more detailed analysis of this distance, despite the affinities identified in the preceding sections. In particular, I will seek to demonstrate that Kant’s *Opus postumum* remains far removed from Maimon’s radical and dogmatic rationalism, as well as from his complete devaluation of the epistemic role of sensibility.

2.2.5 Kant and Maimon on rational dogmatism and empirical skepticism

In this concluding paragraph, I aim to summarize the course of the analysis conducted thus far, in an attempt to measure as precisely as possible the proximity (and the differences) between Maimon's proposal in the *Versuch* and Kant's later philosophy. This proves necessary in order to avoid the risk of superficially conflating the two perspectives. Lorini argues, in this direction, that "a systematic test of [Maimon's] supposed influence in the pages of the *Opus postumum* under discussion would require a careful assessment of these issues to avoid the risk of superficially branding them as Kant's slippage into the subjectivist instances of the emerging German idealism"⁴⁰⁰. Now, while I agree with the scholar's intention to carefully distinguish between the two proposals, I do not believe that the primary risk involved in comparing Maimon and Kant lies in portraying the latter as drifting toward a form of subjectivist idealism – nor do I believe such a risk would stem from Maimon's influence. The reason for this is relatively straightforward: I take Maimon himself to be quite far removed from any such subjectivist idealism. As we saw in the previous chapter, the philosopher in fact appears to *contract* the role of the finite subject in favor of the activity of the divine understanding. The order of reality is not produced or imposed by the subject; rather, it *preexists* the subject's activity in the mind of an infinite understanding. The goal of the finite subject is merely to bring to light, and to make explicit in the form of judgments, what is already contained in the divine mind – namely, the differentials. As I will try to show now, the problem I take to affect Maimon's proposal lies instead in the establishment of a dogmatic rationalism that conceives sensibility as an obstacle, rather than a means to the attainment of an objective knowledge.

At the same time, it is undeniable that the *Opus postumum* exhibits a significant revaluation of the role of subjectivity in Kant's philosophical system. Certain passages indeed suggest a far-reaching expansion of the subject's activity, particularly in relation to the positing of the moving forces and the idea of the ether as necessary conditions for experience. However, I argue that this shift does not amount to a convergence with Maimon, but rather accentuates their divergence: whereas Maimon appeals to a transcendental rational structure external to the subject, Kant appears to move toward an increasingly immanent foundation of experience in the subject's own activity. If anything, it is Kant, not Maimon, who could be read here as tending toward a form of subjectivism – though certainly not one reducible to the dogmatic kind commonly associated with German idealism.

The twofold aim of this concluding section is therefore as follows. First, to demonstrate that Kant does not subscribe to Maimon's radical rationalism. Second, and more broadly, to argue that Kant's late philosophy, while expanding the role of subjectivity, does so in a way that resists

⁴⁰⁰ Lorini 2023, p. 103.

classification as a form of extreme subjectivist idealism in any straightforward sense. As I will try to show, the answer to the first problem will also provide a solution for the second one. In particular, the maintenance of an epistemic role for the subject's sensibility is what ensures that both extremes are avoided.

With regard to the first point, we have seen that the specificity of Maimon's proposal lies in his attempt to resolve the problem of the heterogeneity between form and matter by assuming a divine understanding in which these two components are fully unified. The merely quantitative difference between our understanding and the divine one would then make it possible – albeit asymptotically – to approach the idea of a complete identification between form and matter, sensibility and understanding, thereby offering a potential resolution to the *quaestio juris*. We have also seen that this rationalistic dimension of Maimon's proposal is directly counterbalanced by its skeptic outcome: if only the divine understanding is capable of fully reducing matter to form, then the human (finite) understanding is necessarily incapable of attaining such a level of epistemic objectivity. The task of the finite subject must therefore consist in reducing the object, as far as possible, to its rational rules of production (the differentials), with the awareness that a complete dissolution of the object will never be achievable. In this sense, for Maimon, sensibility is nothing but an impediment, a “defect” characteristic of finite subjectivity, that prevents the latter from accessing truth and certainty. Maimon's dogmatic rationalism thus demands that the approximation to a form of objectivity in knowledge entails a progressive elimination of our sensible component in favor of our rational dimension.

However, Maimon's devaluation of the status of sensibility does not, in fact, lead to a form of subjective idealism, since our own rationality derives from, and is a part of, the rationality of the divine understanding. In this sense, the rationality of reality is not guaranteed or constituted by the subject itself, but by the infinite mind. While this may avert the danger of dogmatic subjectivism, it risks nonetheless to give rise to a different kind of problem. The introduction of the divine understanding in order to solve the *quaestio juris* appears to lead to a regression into a form of pre-critical metaphysics. It is true that Maimon acknowledges, in certain passages of the *Versuch*, that we must assume God as an *idea* and not as a transcendent entity, thus signaling an awareness of the limits imposed by transcendental philosophy⁴⁰¹. However, it seems that, despite these assertions, the overall structure of Maimon's discourse reveals a more substantive ontological commitment to the status of God. God cannot be conceived as a merely regulative idea that we adopt as a normative reference in order to impose order upon an independent and autonomous empirical reality. In Maimon's view, empirical reality must be fully *reduced* to the rational reality instantiated by the divine understanding.

⁴⁰¹ See *MGW*, II 64-65.

In this light, the ontological and epistemic weight assigned to the divine understanding risks eclipsing the reality of empirical objects, which increasingly come to be seen as partial or deficient expressions of an ultimately inaccessible rational totality. If sensibility functions not as a condition but as a limitation of knowledge, then truth, in a certain sense, must be understood as transcending the sensible and finite domain altogether. As I noted in Section 2.1.5, Maimon clearly intended to overcome the rigid Kantian dualism between form and matter, but his proposal risks reintroducing another dualism at the level of the distinction between human and divine knowledge. As Rametta puts in, the solution to the *quaestio juris* “can present itself as such only if conceived in the light of *the integration of the human understanding into the divine understanding*; only by restoring, in other words, *the metaphysical presupposition of the existence of God as an infinite understanding, of which the human cognitive faculty is merely a finite manifestation*”⁴⁰².

I believe that Kant’s position in the manuscripts diverges significantly from Maimon’s in two important respects. Kant seeks neither to reduce sensibility to a mere imperfect manifestation of the understanding, nor to anchor the activity of the latter in a theologically inspired dogmatism. Regarding the first problem, I will now attempt to show that despite the obvious development of the Kantian proposal, sensibility continues to play a relevant epistemic role⁴⁰³.

As noted briefly in the preceding paragraphs, in the *Opus postumum* Kant demands a strong form of systematicity in order to justify the possibility of a *physica specialis* as a science – one that requires a procedure which cannot rely solely on the merely regulative use of reason or on reflective judgment. These latter approaches construct systems based on mere observation of facts and empirical data, seeking to subsume them under more general concepts. Since these concepts are not deduced a priori but are instead posited problematically as regulative hypotheses, they remain subject to ongoing revision and correction. The only solution Kant envisions to this problem is the establishment of an a priori system of moving forces of matter, which would ground and genetically explain the emergence of various empirical phenomena and their regularities, differences, similarities, and so forth. In this way, the similarities and differences encountered in the analysis of natural phenomena are no longer contingent, but are instead rationally explained by the system of moving forces. At this point, however, the question arises concerning the precise relationship between understanding and sensibility. If the system of moving forces is to be posited a priori, as Kant repeatedly affirms –

⁴⁰² Rametta 2012, p. 183.

⁴⁰³ “Although Kant now says that the self-positing subject posits itself through sensibility as well as understanding, this does not mean for him that understanding dominates sensibility, as if sensibility were now only an inchoate or confused form of understanding. Rather, he holds that the subject posits itself through only the form of sensibility, while its matter is simple given, something that sensibility receives through affection by objects that we know only as appearances” (Beiser 2002, p. 198).

particularly in fascicles X and XI – then it must be a product of the spontaneity of the understanding. That is, such a system cannot emerge from empirical observation alone; it must be constructed *prior* to the actual experience of objects. Kant articulates this necessity in a number of crucial passages. For example, he writes:

That the objects of sense must allow of being specified and divided by genus and species, prior to experience and for the sake of it, does not, thus, take place by fragmentary groping around, but according to an objective principle of combination in a system of empirically given natural forces. The latter have influences on the senses, and yet, at the same time, must be thought as united a priori by the understanding into a whole [...]. This amounts to the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics, in which the manifold [is] unite according to the form of a system (*non sparsim sed conjunctim*) and, [likewise,] the whole of all objects of perception for the sake of the possibility of experience – not through that which the understanding merely extracts from the manifold, but only insofar as it has itself previously inserted [the form of] the system⁴⁰⁴.

Thus, a principle of natural science is given for physics and the transition to it, according to which an elementary system of moving forces of matter is, in its form, a principle of classification a priori – based not on empirical experience, but rather, for the very possibility of experience, on what the understanding has already posited in advance [*zuvor hineingelegt hat*] within the complex of moving forces (*complexus*) for the purpose of a complete system⁴⁰⁵.

In such passages, Kant suggests that the elementary system of moving forces – and the ether as its unifying principle – must be posited by the spontaneous activity of the subject before any actual experience of empirical objects. In this way, they can be regarded not as mere hypothetical entities inductively inferred from experience, but as genuine transcendental conditions of its very possibility. Only under such conditions can the “predetermination”⁴⁰⁶ of appearances be secured – thereby allowing for their material and concrete dimension to be anticipated a priori. In other passages, Kant explicitly states that “the understanding anticipates the influence of the senses”⁴⁰⁷. This underscores, once again, the necessity that the material dimension of the sensible object is not merely given, but *constructed* for the sake of a systematic experience of nature.

As I have indicated in paragraph 2.2.3, the doctrine of the indirect appearance also fits coherently within this framework. The distinction between direct and indirect appearance is established in terms of a difference between the appearance that is immediately perceptible by the

⁴⁰⁴ *OP*, XXII 354.

⁴⁰⁵ *OP*, XXII 289.

⁴⁰⁶ *OP*, XXII 510.

⁴⁰⁷ *OP*, XXII 509

senses and the transcendental structure that the subject spontaneously posits in order to make possible the very perception of objects of experience. “Subjective appearance, which precedes the objective”, Kant writes, “the indirect, which precedes the direct, and which makes space into an object of experience”⁴⁰⁸. In my reading, passages such like this become intelligible if the indirect appearance is understood in terms of the moving forces of matter posited by the subject through the spontaneity of the understanding. What I intend to highlight is that the reformulation of the relation between sensibility and understanding— according to which the understanding itself is conceived as a genetic condition for the empirical determinations of objects of experience – does not lead to Maimon’s radical rationalism.

As I have already suggested, in Maimon’s proposal, the reality of the differentials *overshadows* the reality of objects of experience. Since differentials constitute the genetic rules for the production of empirical objects, whose rationality and regularity are guaranteed by their dependence on the divine understanding, empirical objects are nothing other than their imperfect and “opaque” manifestation. For the finite understanding, properly knowing an object means progressively freeing it from its material and contingent dimension in order to reveal its fundamentally rational structure. As a consequence, sensibility itself is conceived as an obstacle to the proper knowledge of the object – an obstacle from which we must progressively emancipate.

I maintain that Kant’s position is fundamentally different and that, despite the evolution of his doctrine, he remains committed to the epistemic function of sensibility and to its qualitative distinction from the understanding. In other words, the subject’s sensibility and receptivity are not something to be overcome, nor are they merely a limitation of the activity of the understanding; rather, they constitute a necessary condition for any coherent investigation of nature that proceeds through observation and experiments. Let us examine in what sense.

According to Maimon, the thoroughgoing determination of objects of experience consists in a progressive and asymptotic reduction of their material aspect to their formal and genetic dimension – namely, to their differentials. However, given that our sensible condition is unamendable, complete knowledge of an object’s differentials will always remain inaccessible to us. In this sense, the determination of the object and the individuation of its differentials is conceived as a task that can never be fully accomplished.

By contrast, Kant argues in several passages that, despite the difficulty of the task, the *complete* enumeration and a priori classification of the moving forces – as genetic principles for the production of empirical matter – is *possible* according to the table of categories. The philosopher writes for example that the task of the Transition project itself is to show “[h]ow can the material be

⁴⁰⁸ *OP*, XXI 339.

completely enumerated as an elementary system”⁴⁰⁹. While Maimon considers the task of identifying the rational rules governing the production of empirical material to be infinite and never fully attainable, for Kant it is an operation that can be brought to completion by following the order imposed by the table of categories. The impression is that, for Kant, the specific differences between various empirical objects are not grounded on an indeterminate number of infinitesimal elements, such as differentials, but rather by distinct *interactions* among moving forces whose number, however, can be identified and defined within an elementary system.

But why, then, do both Kant and Maimon share the view that the complete determination of appearance is an asymptotic process? If the full identification of the moving forces – as opposed to the identification of differentials – is a goal that can be achieved, where lies the infinitude of the task? I contend that it is precisely at this juncture that the epistemic function of sensibility is reinstated. For Kant, the complete determination of objects of experience is always an *empirical* operation, involving observation and experiments. He writes for example that the “thoroughgoing determination, as merely *thought*, cannot be *given*, for it extends into the infinite field of empirical determinations”⁴¹⁰ and that “[s]ystems can arise from empirical grounds of cognition (observation and experiment), namely from experience; but they require as their basis the complete enumeration of the forms which can arise only from reason (with its absolute necessity)”⁴¹¹. These passages once again confirm Kant’s intention to integrate the new principles of the science of Transition with the reflective use of judgment developed in the third *Critique*. On one side, the systematic ordering of nature requires that empirical differences and similarities among objects be grounded in a priori principles, namely, the moving forces, which function as intermediate concepts bridging metaphysics of nature and empirical physics. On the other side, it is only through *empirical* investigation, through the observation of concrete appearances and the detection of patterns among them, that this ordering can be realized in the practice of scientific inquiry. In this sense, Kant’s attempt to reconcile the metaphysical foundations of nature with empirical physics does not aim at reducing the material dimension of objects to their generative rules in an asymptotic manner – as if empirical reality were merely an imperfect approximation of a purely rational order. Rather, his solution lies in the recognition that matter and its empirical manifestations must be accounted for and systematized by rational principles without thereby being eliminated or reduced to the latter.

In this framework, sensibility is not treated as a mere hindrance to the activity of the understanding. Instead, it retains its fundamental autonomy: it is the indispensable medium through which the empirical world is accessed, and through which the systematic regularities among objects

⁴⁰⁹ *OP*, XXII 461. See also *OP*, XXII 459.

⁴¹⁰ *OP*, XXI 603.

⁴¹¹ *OP*, XXI 82.

can be observed, classified, and explained. I believe that Beiser articulates this point with particular clarity when he writes:

It would seem, then, that Kant develops the concept of an appearance of appearance to maintain his dualism between understanding and sensibility, and not to express the consequences of abolishing it. The whole point of the concept appears to be to reveal the difference in kind between those representations that are a function of understanding and those that are a function of sensibility; or, to speak more in accord with the result of the Deduction, between those that are *entirely* a function of the understanding and those that are *only partly so* and also a function of sensibility ⁴¹².

In contrast to Maimon's proposal, the attribution of a status of reality to the ether and its moving forces as indirect appearances does not eclipse the reality of empirical objects⁴¹³. Both indirect and direct appearances are real, albeit in different ways: the former insofar as they enable the complete determination of objects as a function of the understanding, without which experience itself would not be possible as a unified whole; the latter, because they conform to the principle expressed by the Second postulate of empirical thought in the first *Critique*; namely, because they are objects of perceptions⁴¹⁴. Thus, as we will see better in a moment, when Kant asserts that experience in the proper sense – as a collective unity – belongs to the dimension of the indirect appearance, he is not claiming that the existence of the direct appearance should be nullified or reduced to the former. Rather, he appears to maintain that the indirect appearance constitutes the totality of the laws and

⁴¹² Beiser 2002, p. 206.

⁴¹³ However, in certain passages, Kant even appears to conflate the knowledge and reality of an object in ways that seem to echo Maimon's ontology. For instance, Kant writes: "*Experience* cannot be had (received) without being made; thus, its possibility presupposes an a priori principle of the representation [*Darstellung*] of sensible objects, one that predetermines what kinds of *perceptions* (empirical representations with consciousness) will be required, in the course of conducting experience, for the *thorough determination* of the object of perception – that is, for its existence" (*OP*, XXII 497). Nevertheless, I maintain that such formulations do not indicate Kant's adherence to the radical rationalism of Maimon (and of Wolff), for the reasons I have previously outlined. It is *only* in the case of the ether as an indirect appearance that complete determination properly coincides with its existence, as Kant himself acknowledges in certain passages (see *OP*, XXI 603). By contrast, the existence of direct appearances (empirical objects) can be immediately attested by our senses, and it is only the possibility of their *knowledge* that requires them to be completely determined. In the passage just cited, Kant thus appears to inappropriately transpose the concept of "existence" from the level of the indirect appearance to that of the direct appearance.

⁴¹⁴ *KrV*, A 218-B 266. This distinction between the two notions of existence is noted by Mathieu: "The *Critique* had not made the problem entirely explicit, but its relevance – particularly in relation to the new notion of existence introduced in the *Opus postumum* – is evident: from the transcendental point of view, the immediate relation to the 'material conditions of experience' presupposes the immediate construction of a connection by means of the understanding, since only intellectual activity can bring about a real nexus. [...] And this construction, which establishes the connection as a product of the understanding, can only be the indirect appearance that precedes the direct one" (Mathieu 1991, p. 206). One might object that the notion of the transcendental ideal in the first *Critique* was also meant to secure the systematic unity of experience, without thereby requiring that existence be attributed to it. However, as we have noted on several occasions, the ether differs from the transcendental ideal insofar as its function is both regulative *and* constitutive: it does not merely serve as a *focus imaginarius* toward which the systematic organization of knowledge by the understanding should strive. Rather, the ether and its moving forces are also intended to constitute the objective and necessary laws governing the emergence of the various empirical properties of matter.

principles that grounds the systematicity of our investigation of nature – an investigation that must, nonetheless, always be carried out through empirical procedures.

When Kant speaks of the infinity that characterizes the task of the thoroughgoing determination of objects, he thus conceives of this process differently from Maimon. Once again, it is not a matter of an asymptotic reduction of matter to form, but rather of a process of empirical investigation and classification of nature according to the principles of the Transition that can never be considered fully complete. Even if the laws governing the various empirical properties of objects can be enumerated a priori, it remains the task of empirical research to discover and identify the particular empirical objects that fall under these rules. In other words, the a priori principles of the Transition provide the framework, but the content must always be filled in by empirical inquiry. To reprise an earlier example – one that, while not found explicitly in Kant’s text, helps illuminate the point – we may specify the moving forces that differentiate acidic from basic substances, but the actual determination of which substances exhibit these properties, and how they interact in particular empirical contexts, can only emerge through observation and experiments. This means that the work of empirical science must proceed *indefinitely* in the attempt to identify and classify particular empirical objects within the conceptual framework established by science of Transition. As Kant writes, “[e]xperience is the empirical absolute whole of sensory representations, only a constant *approximation* insofar as the manifold of these is asymptotically connected in one system”⁴¹⁵. The doctrine of the moving forces as a principle for the thoroughgoing determination of phenomena thus serves to specify the laws governing the establishment of a rational order of natural phenomena. However, the actual integration of specific phenomena into this systematic order – and so the attempt to thoroughly determine these phenomena by specifying the logical space to which they belong – is the task of empirical investigation. Therefore, the science of transition does not *replace* empirical physics. Rather, it *grounds* its operations, by preparing, so to speak, a framework of the moving forces of matter constructed a priori according to the table of categories, which must guide our natural inquiry.

Let us now turn to the second point of analysis. We have seen that Kant does not endorse Maimon’s dogmatic rationalism and does not abandon the qualitative distinction between sensibility and understanding, even though he appears to broaden the role of the latter with respect to the a priori determination of the properties of objects. Furthermore, in contrast to Maimon, Kant’s solution to the problem of the gulf between the a priori dimension of the categories and the a posteriori dimension of the specific properties of matter does not involve any reference to a theological dimension. As I have sought to demonstrate, Maimon’s appeal to the divine understanding as the “site” of the

⁴¹⁵ *OP*, XXII 103.

completed unity between form and matter does not *resolve* the underlying dualism; instead, it merely *relocates* the problem to the level of the relationship between finite and infinite understanding. In this sense, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Maimon's solution to the *quaestio juris* ultimately amounts to a return – albeit in a refined form – to a dogmatic form of metaphysics that the critical philosophy had already overcome. More specifically, the problem lies in the surreptitious assumption of a conceptual tool posited *outside* the domain of finite cognition, and yet assumed as constitutively grounding the very possibility of this cognition. Kant's solution, by contrast, does not exhibit such features. The transition from the a priori dimension of the metaphysics of nature to the a posteriori dimension of physics does not require the postulation of a divine intelligence to guarantee the regularity and connectedness of empirical objects. Rather, this regularity is to be secured by the postulation of a universal matter – such as the ether – whose moving forces should organically explain the genesis and formation of the various properties of matter. Now, I believe that the crucial difference between the two positions does not primarily concern the disparity between the *objects* posited as conditions of possibility for our knowledge – God in the one case, ether in the other – but rather the nature of the *relationship* the finite subject maintains with them.

As we have just seen, in Maimon's view, complete knowledge of the rational order governing the interaction among phenomena is something that we can never attain; it exists solely within the divine mind. In this sense, the laws that regulate this order are not actively *applied* by the subject, but merely *uncovered* by it through an asymptotic process of reducing matter to its differentials. Complete knowledge of objects of experience – that is, knowledge of their generative rules – thus remains permanently beyond the reach of our cognitive faculties. On the contrary, Kant argues that we must be able to provide an exhaustive account of the specific determinations of the dynamic matter that give rise to the particular properties of sensible objects. In other words, in order to provide a foundation for a strong conception of the systematic inquiry into nature, it is not sufficient to regard the ether merely as the totality of all the specific attributes that matter can possess. This would allow for the establishment of only a provisional system, which would not be capable of explaining the *emergence* and *genesis* of similarities and differences among appearances according to a priori principles. In order to avoid this problem, it is necessary to explain *how* the fundamental properties of matter emerge from the specific interactions among the dynamic moving forces of the ether. The classification and enumeration of these moving forces within the elementary system is directed precisely toward this aim.

This implies that the ether is not to be conceived as a metaphysical assumption whose complete intelligibility lies beyond the bounds of human cognition. Instead, it should be understood as a necessary conceptual instrument for explaining the formation of the properties of bodies – an

instrument whose generative role can be accounted for through the structure of our understanding, specifically by reference to the table of categories. Thus, while Maimon relegates the condition of possibility of a systematic knowledge beyond our cognitive reach, Kant insists on the immanent spontaneity of the finite subject as the origin of the collective unity of experience. This does not imply that the finite subject materially generates the empirical world before itself through an act of intellectual intuition or creation *ex nihilo*. As we have seen in these concluding reflections, Kant is particularly careful to preserve the independence and autonomy of the subject's passive dimension, which is not entirely subsumed by its spontaneous activity. Rather, the point is to show that the subject possesses the conceptual resources necessary to construct an a priori classificatory framework for the properties of matter; a framework whose concrete content must, however, be filled in through empirical analysis and investigation. This is why I believe that the solution to the first issue – namely, distinguishing Kant's proposal from Maimon's radical rationalism – can also be seen as a solution to the second, that is, to disentangle the *Opus postumum* from any form of subjectivist idealism. In both cases, the goal is to preserve the epistemic roles of sensibility and empirical inquiry, which cannot be replaced by, or reduced to, the rational structures created by the divine mind (as in Maimon's case) or by the absolute spontaneity of the subject itself.

I therefore argue that, from a transcendental point of view, Kant's proposal, at least in its intention, would appear more compelling than Maimon's solution, insofar as it does not require an unwarranted leap beyond finite consciousness – toward the infinity represented by the divine understanding – in order to account for what occurs *within* finite consciousness. As I have tried to demonstrate, the ether is not an entity that lies beyond the bounds of our cognition. Rather, it is a condition of possibility for experience that must necessarily be *thought* with specific characteristics in order to justify a systematic investigation of nature. Moreover, the definition of the particular status of this matter, understood as a mediating concept to be placed between the purely formal dimension of the a priori pure forms and the a posteriori dimension of empirical objects, was meant the bridge rigid dualism found in the *Critique* between form and matter, and more generally, between subject and object. The ultimate goal was to prove the possibility to determine a priori not only the formal properties of objects of experience, but also their material dimension. The material dynamic substratum represented by the ether would thus underlie and structure the empirical features of appearances, giving them a rational and ordered framework. In this light, the reworking of Kant's conceptual apparatus aims to show that the material aspect of appearances – their phenomenally given properties – can be brought within the field of conceptual and subjective determination. That is, they are not simply "given" in a raw, contingent way, but are already mediated through rational and a priori structures, namely, the indirect appearances. This appears to imply a progressive and

irreducible tendency of the subject to “capture” the particular determinations of the object by incorporating them into its own conceptual frameworks.

Nevertheless, despite its intentions, I contend that also Kant’s proposal ultimately proves not completely satisfactory, insofar as the a priori classification of the moving forces of the ether within the elementary system remains incomplete and sketchy. Kant undoubtedly takes a step forward than Maimon, demonstrating that the relationship between form and matter can be rearticulated in different terms than those employed in the first *Critique*, without necessarily adopting a theological framework that dangerously risks falling back into a pre-critical form of metaphysics. However, the development of the manuscripts makes it quite clear that the problem originally posed by Kant – namely, the establishment of an elementary system of the moving forces of matter, which would allow for the transition from the metaphysics of nature to physics – gradually recedes into the background. It continues to be presented as a *programmatic* objective, but Kant appears increasingly less invested in *actually* elaborating such a system. I argue that this is due to the fact that the opening and reformulation of the concepts of transcendental philosophy were so radical that the very problem which initially motivated this transformation, i.e., the transition from the metaphysics of nature to physics, became increasingly less urgent⁴¹⁶. In particular, the last two fascicles of the *Opus postumum*, namely *Konvolute* VII and I, indicate that the reflections on the philosophy of nature had reopened some of the central problems of critical philosophy, which now demanded autonomous treatment, independently of their specific relevance to the transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics.

What these fascicles explicitly thematize, in particular, is the status of the transcendental subject – considered in light of the developments outlined in the preceding fascicles – and the relationship between theoretical and practical philosophy. In my view, the emergence of both these issues signals Kant’s growing awareness that such a profound reconfiguration of the relationship between form and matter, and between subject and object, cannot proceed without a direct engagement with the constitutive role of the subject in relation to experience, as well as of the relationship between theoretical and practical reason. I believe that, in Kant’s view, both issues were of fundamental importance in the attempt to conceptually justify the developments presented in the preceding notes. Accordingly, questions of the following kind begin to assume a prominent role: How should we understand the structure of a transcendental subject that posits not only the forms of possible experience in general but also the (dynamic) matter of concrete experience? What

⁴¹⁶ By this, I do not mean to suggest that the goal of establishing a transition from the metaphysics of nature to physics had been definitively abandoned. On the contrary, certain formulations suggest that Kant still intended to bring this project to completion. In both *Konvolute* VII and I, Kant continues to emphasize the necessity of establishing a transition from the metaphysics of nature to physics, although this is now conceived as a specific moment within the broader attempt to develop a “system of philosophy” as a whole. See e.g. *OP*, XXI 15, 102, 125.

implications does this have for the status and function of the “I think”? Can one argue that theoretical reason must, in some sense, assume a *practical* character in order to overcome due dualism between subject and object? These are all questions that become central in Kant’s later notes and, as is well known, also significantly shape Fichte’s writings during his Jena period. For this reason, I believe that a theoretical analysis of the relationship between these final fascicles of Kant’s manuscripts and the author of the *Grundlage* may prove useful in assessing the extent of the development of Kant’s thought also with regard to these problems.

CHAPTER III

Fichte and Kant

THE UNITY OF THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL REASON

The aim of this third chapter is to assess the theoretical proximity and divergence between the final fascicles of the *Opus postumum* – namely, *Konvolute* VII and I – and Fichte’s writings during his Jena period. In particular, I will focus on the works spanning from the publication of the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794-95) to the so-called Atheism Dispute. As I did in the first part of the previous chapter, I will temporarily set aside the analysis of the *Opus postumum* to concentrate on a preliminary assessment of Fichte’s writings. This assessment will be guided, however, by themes that are especially relevant for interpreting Kant’s late manuscripts.

This preliminary analysis is perhaps even more necessary here than in the case of Maimon. As I briefly noted in the Introduction to this study, scholars who have attempted to address the relationship between Kant and Fichte have often done so on the basis of a markedly tendentious reading of the latter. Within this interpretative framework, Fichte is frequently portrayed as the advocate of a subjectivist form of idealism, in which the I is endowed with the capacity to generate the entirety of experiential reality through a form of intellectual intuition. If this is the interpretation offered of Fichte’s project, then the distance between it and Kant’s manuscripts can only appear as broad as possible. As I tried to demonstrate in the previous chapter, while it is, in my view, undeniable that Kant radicalizes certain conceptual tools of the critical philosophy in his late work, there is no indication that he ultimately embraced a form of subjectivist metaphysics. I therefore maintain that a proper analysis of the relationship between these respective phases in the thought of Kant and Fichte must begin with a careful assessment of the conclusions reached by Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* during the Jena period. This is essential for understanding the true philosophical position defended by Fichte in his early writings. A different interpretation of his thought inevitably leads to a different determination of the relationship between his philosophy and that of the late Kant.

To offer an example, in a recent article Branca writes: “It is now clear that the final Kantian conception of metaphysics and transcendental philosophy cannot be reduced to a form of absolute idealism, but must instead be understood as a radicalization of the same fundamental idea of the *Critique*”¹. I agree with the scholar on this point. However, he employs this definition to emphasize the *distance* between Kant’s manuscripts and post-Kantian philosophy in a broad sense. Branca asks for example, with respect to Kantian reflections contained in the I *Konvolut*: “Is this a form of idealism akin to that which Fichte and Schelling were theorizing during the same years [...]? Or should these definitions rather be read in continuity with the transcendental idealism of the *Critique*, as a radicalization of its very positions?”². It thus appears that Fichte’s philosophy is

¹ Branca 2024, p. 285.

² Ivi, p. 276.

placed, alongside that of Schelling and Hegel, among the forms of idealism that *explicitly* tried to move beyond Kant's critical philosophy. My intention, by contrast, is to show that *neither* Kant's last notes *nor* Fichte's thought during the Jena period represent radical departures into metaphysical or speculative idealism. Rather, they should be understood as divergent yet not opposed attempts to further develop, radicalize, and in some respects complete the project of critical philosophy³.

Moreover, one of the limitations of the secondary literature addressing this topic lies in having restricted the question of the relationship between Kant and Fichte to the doctrine of the self-positing of the subject. While reference to this issue is undoubtedly necessary, I argue that it constitutes only a preliminary step toward the deeper concern that occupies Kant in the final notes of the *Opus postumum* – namely, the redefinition of the unity between theoretical and practical reason, and of transcendental philosophy itself.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, will be to show that Fichte's thought – rather than amounting to an unwarranted drift toward a form of extreme idealism in which the reality of objects is entirely denied and reduced to a purely subjective act of production – should instead be understood as an attempt to radicalize certain aspects of critical philosophy without thereby undermining its overall epistemological framework. In this way, the attempt will be to offer an interpretation of the relationship between Kant's manuscripts that goes beyond the affirmation of a mere irreducible opposition, while nonetheless acknowledging and preserving the specific differences of each proposal.

³ To be clear, it is not my intention here to diminish the value of Branca's article, which I in fact regard as offering an excellent analysis of the status that Kant appears to assign to transcendental philosophy in his final manuscripts. Moreover, the relationship with post-Kantian thought is addressed there only tangentially and does not constitute the central focus of the text. Nevertheless, I take it as a useful example of how a different reading of post-Kantian philosophy can lead to entirely different conclusions concerning its relationship to the *Opus postumum*, even if one agrees with the interpretation offered of the latter.

3.1 Fichte's project of a *Wissenschaftslehre*

3.1.1 Answering to the skeptical doubt(s)

A faithful reconstruction of Fichte's thought must begin with a preliminary account of the philosophical debate from which it emerged. In this regard, the aim of the present section is to offer a brief overview of the key issues that prompted Fichte to develop his system. Naturally, this undertaking will not be limited to a purely historical reconstruction for its own sake; rather, the intention is to draw out from this necessarily selective historical account the *conceptual junctures* that are most relevant to the aims of the present study.

In particular, the aim is to show how the *Wissenschaftslehre* emerged as a response to the skeptical challenges posed – on the one hand by Aenesidemus-Schulze and on the other by Maimon himself – to critical philosophy. This is by no means an original or unexplored hypothesis; on the contrary, it is Fichte himself who frames his project in these terms⁴. The latter thus situates itself in substantial continuity with the project of critical philosophy, aiming to defend the latter – if necessary by radicalizing some of its aspects – against skeptical attacks. Nevertheless, this consideration is often overlooked by scholars of the *Opus postumum*, who – as I have noted on several occasions – tend to emphasize the distance between Fichte's system and that of Kant, portraying the former as a form of subjectivist metaphysics already rendered obsolete by Kant's *Critiques* even before it emerged. A reliable assessment of the intentions and outcomes of the first version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* must therefore take into account its genesis within the context of the post-Kantian debate.

According to what the philosopher himself states in two letters addressed to Dietrich von Miltitz and to Johanna Marie Rahn (her future wife), Fichte began studying Kant's philosophy around the second half of 1790, during a stay in Leipzig, where he was working as a private tutor. He first read the *Critique of Pure Reason* and subsequently the *Critique of Practical Reason*. It is the latter that marks a decisive turning point in his philosophy. As we know from his private correspondence prior to 1790, Fichte – perhaps under the influence of Spinoza⁵ – had developed a deterministic

⁴ See e.g. the *First Introduction* to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797): “On a modest acquaintance with the philosophical literature since the appearance of the Kantian *Critiques* I soon came to the conclusion that the enterprise of this great man, the radical revision of our current conceptions of philosophy, and hence of all science, has been a complete failure; since not a single one of his numerous followers perceives what is really being said. Believing that I did, I decided to dedicate my life to a presentation, quite independent of Kant, of that great discovery, and will not relent in this determination” (*GA*, 1, IV, 419).

⁵ Noack and I.H. Fichte explicitly trace the determinism present in Fichte's early thought back to the influence of Spinoza (see Noack 1862, pp. 30.31; I.H. Fichte 1830, p. 28). However, Léon and Kabitz emphasize that it is uncertain whether Fichte had direct access to Spinoza's works, although it is certainly very likely that he developed an indirect familiarity with them through conversations and debates (see Léon 1922, pp. 55-57; Kabitz 1902, p. 6n.). More recent scholars such as Ivaldo and Lauth agree with the latter interpretation, maintaining that Fichte's determinism was shaped more by the

thought that left no room for human freedom. It is therefore not surprising that the philosopher, in a well-known letter to F.A. Weißhuhn, describes his encounter with the second *Critique* with such enthusiasm:

I have been living in a new world since I read the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Sentences that I believed to be indisputable have been overturned; things that I thought could never be proven to me, such as the concept of absolute freedom, of duty, etc., have been proven to me, and I feel all the more joyful because of it. It is incomprehensible what respect for humanity, what strength this system gives us! [...] What a blessing for an age in which morality had been destroyed from its very foundations, and the concept of duty had been crossed out of all dictionaries⁶.

Kant's treatment of the concept of duty, and his establishment of an indissoluble link between duty and freedom itself, provided Fichte with the intellectual tools to attempt an overcoming of the deterministic fatalism in which his earlier thought had remained trapped. Duty – the pursuit of which ensures the value of the action we are performing – is not the duty of natural necessity, but rather the duty imposed by the autonomy of our own reason. The demonstration of the reality of freedom as the principle of moral action finally succeeds in restoring to the human being the dignity and worth it deserves, liberating it from the chains of blind necessity and rendering it responsible, and thus also accountable, for its own actions.

The superiority of the Kantian system over determinism does not lie so much in greater conceptual precision or coherence. From a purely speculative standpoint, determinism – if developed radically – has nothing to concede to critical philosophy in terms of conceptual consistency. Nevertheless, the superiority of transcendental philosophy manifests itself in the full extent of its conceptual articulation, one that is able to address not only the interests of reason but also those of the heart and sentiment. The abandonment of the deterministic system should not, therefore, coincide with a leap beyond the sphere of philosophical rationality *tout court*, but rather with an integration – within philosophical rationality itself – of demands that are not strictly theoretical in nature.

Fichte's enthusiasm for this discovery led him to travel directly to Königsberg, where he had the opportunity to attend the master's lectures. These, however, did not leave the same impression as his writings – likely due to Kant's advanced age at the time. Nevertheless, the encounter with the great philosopher prompted Fichte to compose his first essay inspired by the principles of critical

influence of the Leibnizean-Wolffian school than by Spinoza (see Lauth 1989, pp. 24-25; Ivaldo 1992). Nevertheless, I agree with Breazeale when he writes that “both Leibniz and Wolff explicitly denied that their systems had such dire implications regarding freedom and morality, and it thus seems unlikely that they could have been the only influences upon the formation of Fichte's early views on this subject” (Breazeale 2019, p. 105).

⁶ *GA*, III,1, 167.

philosophy, namely the *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1792). As is well known, the work was published anonymously – a choice (taken by the editor) that ultimately sealed the young author's fate. The text was initially attributed to Kant himself, and when the latter denied authorship, the praise that had already been bestowed upon the *Versuch* – and could no longer be retracted – was promptly redirected toward Fichte. In this way, the young philosopher was abruptly thrust into the forefront of the German philosophical discourse.

In 1793, this work was followed by two others of a practical-political nature: *Zurückforderung der Denkfreiheit* and *Beitrag zur Berechtigung der Urteile des Publikums über die Französische Revolution*. The former was prompted by the publication, in 1788, of the edict issued by Wollner, Minister of Justice under King Frederick William II. This edict reintroduced censorship in Prussia and curtailed the Enlightenment freedoms of thought and press. In his text, Fichte vehemently opposes any attempt to restrict the fundamental rights of human beings – chief among them the right to freedom of thought, and by extension, to rationality itself.

Similar in tone are the reflections Fichte offers in the *Beitrag* concerning the French Revolution. Fichte justifies the legitimacy of the Revolution on the basis of a perceived discrepancy between the necessarily contingent, historical, and context-bound nature of any given political constitution, and humanity's infinite progress toward the realization of its autonomy. The conclusion Fichte reaches is that, if a constitution proves to be an obstacle to this emancipatory process – for instance, by being overly concerned with preserving and perpetuating its own privileges – then the people are justified in overturning it⁷.

As can thus be observed, the concerns that animate Fichte's early writings are essentially of a practical nature – both religious and political. It is through this lens that his later works, and in particular the project of the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself, must be interpreted. Despite its pronounced emphasis on scientific rigor, coherence, and the systematic organization of knowledge, this project must ultimately be understood as one of a fundamentally practical orientation – or more precisely, as an undertaking aimed at demonstrating the indissoluble unity of theoretical and practical reason within human reason. Although Fichte acknowledged that Kant was the first to point out the path leading toward this goal, he nonetheless maintained that critical philosophy still lacked the necessary tools to fully accomplish it. As Fichte wrote in a letter to Niethammer,

As for the current state of critical philosophy, I said above – and now here is my sincere confession, *which I share with you in private* – that I am not at all satisfied with it. In my deep conviction, Kant has merely hinted at the truth, but neither presented it nor proven it. This remarkable,

⁷ For a detailed introduction on the *Beitrag*'s contents, see Rametta 2012, pp. 35-66.

unparalleled man either possesses a gift of divining the truth without being consciously aware of its foundations, or he did not think highly enough of his age to share it with them, or he shrank from drawing upon himself during his lifetime the superhuman veneration that, sooner or later, was bound to come to him anyway⁸.

In other words the results of critical philosophy were indeed correct, yet they still lacked a solid foundation capable of guaranteeing and securing their certainty. This concern, in Fichte's view, was not a matter of mere academic pedantry – as if the search for the principles upon which transcendental philosophy ought to be grounded amounted to rhetorical speculation devoid of concrete outcomes. On the contrary, the absence of such foundational principles rendered philosophy vulnerable to the attacks of skeptics such as Schulze and Maimon, while also undermining its claim to internal unity. In other words, if, as previously noted, philosophy's task was to reveal the essential unity of theoretical and practical knowledge, then it was necessary to demonstrate the existence of a single foundational principle from which both dimensions could be derived. According to Fichte, Kant had merely established the principles of theoretical knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, those of practical knowledge in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and had then attempted, in a somewhat surreptitious manner, to bring them into unity in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*⁹. According to Fichte, by contrast, the *unity* of theoretical and practical knowledge must be posited and demonstrated as antecedent to their *disjunction*, rather than constructed retrospectively by accepting the disjunction itself as already given. In a letter to Reinhold from 1795 Fichte writes that “Kant does not wish to subordinate those three faculties [*Erkenntnisvermögen, Gefühl, Begehrungsvermögen*] in the human being to any higher principle, but takes them to be merely coordinated”¹⁰. Once again, the assumption of a merely coordinative relationship among the various human faculties reflects the presupposition of their difference as simply given, rather than as systematically derived from an original unity.

⁸ *GA*, III,2, 20-21.

⁹ “Kant, however, succeeded in realizing his project only in an incomplete form. Rather than examining reason in its original unity, he undertook its analysis after its division had already occurred. The three Kantian *Critiques* present reason in its distinct functions – as theoretical, practical, and judging reason – but none of them is able to grasp the original point of disjunction from which reason splits from itself [...]” (Rametta 2013, p. 47). In this article, Rametta effectively highlights Fichte's critique, articulated in the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1804, concerning the unity of the Kantian system. Unlike pre-critical philosophers, Kant was the first to avoid and caution against the unwarranted projection of the determinations of thought onto being itself. However, Kant's limitation, according to Fichte, lies in having implemented this distinction between thought and being merely by presupposing it, rather than deducing it genetically from a higher principle. As Rametta notes, “[d]ifference presupposes a differing, but differing [...] implies reference to a principle that differs within itself, that is, that produces itself in difference from itself, thereby appearing to itself” (Ivi, p. 48). This means that, having failed to identify a principle from which to derive his system, Kant was compelled, so to speak, to unify the first two *Critiques ex post* through the third. However, the unity achieved in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* had to remain, once again, “a unity yet to come, a unity of aspiration rather than of actual realization” (Ivi, p. 49).

¹⁰ *GA*, III,2, 314.

Now, the lack of an adequate principle for the foundation of the systematicity of philosophy had been noticed, even before Fichte, by Reinhold, who in *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* stated that “[e]very philosophy up to now – even *kantian* philosophy, if one considers it as a science, is no exception – lacks nothing less than a *foundation*”¹¹. This is not the context for a detailed examination of Reinhold’s attempt to ground transcendental philosophy. It is sufficient, at this stage, to highlight that, in his view, the *certainty* and *universal validity* of transcendental philosophy can only be secured by a foundational principle that already embodies these qualities and is capable of transmitting them to the system built upon it. This principle is what Reinhold calls the principle of consciousness (*Satz des Bewusstseins*). In the Preface to the *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, he writes:

The basis on which the new theory could and had to be developed consists solely of *consciousness* as it functions in all people according to basic laws, and what follows directly from that and is really conceded by all thinkers. The concepts of representation had to be fully developed without any single assertion being used which could not be subscribed to by a philosopher of whatever sect on the basis of his former principles. [...] In a word, the author had to seek to assure himself of the general validity of his theory by presupposing nothing at all as universally valid which is not really universally accepted¹².

To put it briefly, Reinhold holds that the certain and indubitable principle upon which philosophical knowledge must be grounded should be a fact (*Thatsache*) upon which all human beings must agree – namely, the fact of possessing consciousness. Yet consciousness, according to Reinhold, is always *representational* consciousness: “Consciousness in general consists in the relation of the representation per se to both object and subject, and is inseparable from any representation in general¹³”. Anyone who seeks to deny this principle must therefore deny consciousness itself, which is impossible, since the very act of denial necessarily presupposes some form of representational consciousness. In this sense, the Kantian forms of knowledge, such as intuitions, categories, and ideas, ought to be deduced from this very principle in order to attain certainty and validity. In other words, they should be derived as the conditions of possibility for what the fact of consciousness entails: namely, the relation between a subject, an object, and a representation that connects the two while remaining distinct from both.

This attempt to ground critical philosophy on the fact of consciousness would be sharply criticized by Schulze in his *Aenesidemus*. The text has the form of an epistolary dialogue between

¹¹ Reinhold 1791, p. 3.

¹² Reinhold 1789, p. 66.

¹³ Ivi, p. 321.

Hermias – a supporter and adherent of the Kantian revolution – and Aenesidemus, who seeks to expose the flaws of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as well as the theses advanced by Reinhold in his attempt to ground it. The most substantial, and theoretically significant, part of the work is the third letter, in which Aenesidemus presents a detailed, analytic critique of the individual sections comprising Reinhold’s *Versuch*. The core of Schulze’s critique does not lie in a rejection of the fact of consciousness *per se*, but rather in its elevation to the status of an indubitable first principle of philosophy. Contrary to Reinhold’s position, Schulze argues that the formulation of this principle need not be necessarily accepted by all as self-evident. For instance, when Reinhold asserts that the representation must be distinguished from both subject and object, he fails to clarify what precisely this “distinction” entails, thereby generating interpretive ambiguities that undermine both the certainty and universality of the principle itself. Another argument in support of Aenesidemus’ skeptical conclusions lies in the impossibility of considering the principle of consciousness as a universal principle, that is, one capable of fully accounting for the meaning and nature of every type of representation. Indeed, there exist manifestations of consciousness in which not all the constitutive elements identified by the principle of consciousness are present. Schulze offers the example of a pure mental representation: while it is undeniable that the latter constitutes a form of representation, it lacks *the perception of an object distinct from the self and from the representation contained within it*. Consequently, the proposition articulated by the principle of consciousness cannot be regarded as universally valid, since there are, in fact, representations that do not contain the essential features expressed by that very principle. “The definition of the essential characteristics of representation”, Aenesidemus concludes in this regard, “as established by Elementary Philosophy, is undeniably narrower than the object it seeks to define”.

Moreover, another critique by Schulze that merits attention for the purposes of the present work – and which targets not only Reinhold’s attempt to systematize critical philosophy but also the very core of Kant’s transcendental idealism – concerns the concept of the thing-in-itself. Schulze argues that both Reinhold and Kant, by conceiving empirical objects as mere objects of representation, are compelled to anchor their objectivity in a mind-independent reality that serves as their “substratum”, namely the thing-in-itself. However, if one accepts the basic premises of critical philosophy, then – since no predicate can be attributed to the thing-in-itself – one cannot even assert its existence as an independent substratum of representations. In Schulze’s view, this threatens to collapse transcendental idealism into a form of Berkeleyan idealism¹⁴. Using Petrini’s words, “[t]he

¹⁴ As I have already emphasized, this is undoubtedly a rather simplistic and crude interpretation of transcendental philosophy, even though certain passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason* do appear to accommodate a more “dogmatic” reading of the role and status of things-in-themselves. These two latter aspects are not particularly clear in Reinhold either. In certain passages of the *Versuch*, Reinhold appears to radicalize the ontological status of the thing-in-itself – conceiving it as the true external ground of the matter of our representations (see Reinhold 1789, p. 249). However, in the same

idealist reduction of the world to an imaginary chimera cannot be refuted without an immediate or pre-representational cognitive access to objects, and the risk is not averted by an unproven admission of the existence of things in themselves”¹⁵. Schulze’s critique thus appears to rest on the (unwarranted) assumption that, for Kant, the reality of representations must be secured by their correspondence to an object external to them – an object that serves as both their epistemic and ontological ground. Given that we cannot legitimately affirm either the existence of such an object or its possession of specific attributes, transcendental philosophy, in Schulze’s view, cannot constitute a form of knowledge that is certain and universally valid¹⁶. In other words, Kant cannot justify the objectivity of our knowledge for he cannot justify the possibility of a correspondence between our representations and their underlying things-in-themselves. However, Kant’s transcendental idealism denies in the first place the necessity of positing such a correspondence in order to ground objective cognition. The latter is not secured by the relation between an empirical object and its supersensible ground, but rather by the correspondence between the empirical object and the laws established by the understanding, which constitute the true source of the objectivity of our judgments. Fichte understands this problem very clearly when he writes:

This *transition* from the external to the internal or vice versa is precisely what is in question. It is precisely the task of the critical philosophy to show that no such transition is required, that everything that occurs in our mind can be completely explained and comprehended on the basis of the mind itself. The critical philosophy does not even dream of trying to answer a question that it considers

passage, he also defines the thing-in-itself as “only the *concept* of something which is not representable” (*ibidem*), thus reducing it to a mere conceptual entity. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Rumore 2002 and Petrini 2018. The former regards this ambiguity as merely apparent, interpreting it as an attempt to reconcile Kant’s divergent formulations on the matter, whereas the latter sees it as an inconsistency within Reinhold’s system.

¹⁵ Petrini 2018, p. 127.

¹⁶ As Beiser correctly observes, Schulze “had simply presupposed the standard of truth characteristic of transcendental realism. According to Schulze’s skepticism, Kant cannot justify our knowledge because he cannot satisfy the normal standard of truth, the correspondence of a representation with a thing-in-itself. It was just this standard of truth, however, that Kant had questioned in the Transcendental Deduction” (Beiser 2003, p. 238). See also Breazeale 2014, p. 32: “If Kant and Reinhold could not – appearances to the contrary notwithstanding – really be guilty of clinging to the self-contradictory demand for knowledge of things in themselves, who then is guilty of such hopes? In fact, it is the skeptic himself who is guilty of this. What Aenesidemus really objects to is not the doctrine of things in themselves but the weakness of what he takes to be Kant’s and Reinhold’s attempt to infer the existence of such things from our mental representations. The skeptic simply takes it for granted that genuine knowledge must be knowledge of external things in themselves, and he treats this assumption as if it were rooted in human nature itself, without pausing to ask whether such an assumption can have any meaning whatsoever”. However, Thielke rightly observes (see Thielke 2001b, p. 106) that Breazeale at times appears not to sufficiently distinguish between Schulze’s skepticism and that of Maimon, suggesting that the *general* problem of *all* skepticism lies in the assumption of the necessity of a reference between representation and an object external to it. While this may be an accurate characterization of Schulze’s skepticism, it is certainly not of Maimon’s, who, on the contrary, had forcefully challenged this interpretation of critical philosophy. This erroneous conflation is, however, attributable to Fichte himself, who often fails to draw a clear distinction between Schulze’s skepticism and that of Maimon.

to be contradictory to reason. This philosophy points out to us that circle from which we cannot escape. Within this circle, on the other hand, it furnishes us with the greatest coherence in all our knowledge¹⁷.

Fichte correctly identifies Schulze's error as lying in the assumption that the characteristic of transcendental idealism must rest upon the positing of, and correspondence between, our representations and a reality external to them. In this passage, Fichte instead emphasizes that the very point of transcendental philosophy is to show that everything falling within the domain of our consciousness can be explained and legitimized solely through consciousness itself and its operations. In a letter to Franz Reinhard the philosopher again underscores this point by arguing that "[a]s long as one clings to the thought of a connection between our cognition and a thing-in-itself that is supposed to possess reality entirely independent of it, the skeptic will always be victorious"¹⁸.

This is why, as I noted in the previous chapter, I consider Maimon's skepticism to be considerably more refined – and therefore more dangerous – than that of Schulze, who appears to be targeting a caricatured version of critical philosophy¹⁹. Maimon's critique, by contrast, rests on a challenge to the true criterion of objectivity in transcendental idealism – namely, the relation between a matter given to sensibility and a form generated by the understanding. The issue at stake is not the justification of a correspondence between a representation and an object external to it, but rather the internal relation between the elements we find *within the domain of consciousness* – form and matter – that contribute to the very genesis of representation.

Moreover, we have also seen that Maimon's concern is quite distant from the problem initially raised by Reinhold – namely, that of identifying a supreme principle of philosophy from which all its elements might be systematically derived. As he himself writes in the Appendix to the *Logic*, the philosopher is "far from accusing *Kantian Critique* of lacking a *supreme principle*, since such a *supreme principle*, as will later be demonstrated, is not only *superfluous* but also inherently *impossible*"²⁰. The problem, for Maimon, does not lie in the systematicity of the elements of transcendental philosophy, but rather in the possibility of their effective use through their *application*

¹⁷ *GA*, I,2, 55.

¹⁸ *GA*, III,2, 39. A similar critique is also put forward in the *Personal Meditations on the Elementary Philosophy*: "If the path I have actually taken can be exhibited through concepts, and the path that can be exhibited through concepts has in fact been taken, then it is true *in itself*. It possesses *inner* truth. No *external* truth has any place in it; indeed, such external truth does not take place at all. This, then – to recall against *Aenesidemus* – is Kant's true mode of argumentation" (*GA*, II,3, 24).

¹⁹ "The conclusion of Maimon's philosophy consists in this: that the systematization of Kantian critique leads to a rehabilitation of Humean skepticism, purified of any implicit or unconscious dogmatic presupposition. The return to Hume does not entail, as in Schulze, a revival of dogmatic motives as the *arrière-pensée* of skepticism; rather, the thing-in-itself is entirely abolished, such that both transcendentalism and skepticism are purified of dogmatism and brought back onto a strictly critical framework [...]" (Pareyson 1976, p. 87). For a brief reconstruction of the difference between Maimon's and Schulze's skepticism, see also Furlani 2019, pp. 41-52.

²⁰ *MGW*, V 447.

to objects of experience²¹. Having already examined these criticisms at length, there is no need to rehearse them here. Instead, my aim is now to demonstrate how both Schulze's and Maimon's skepticism played a decisive role in the development of Fichte's thought²². In this regard, it will be shown that, for Fichte, both the problem of the principle and the problem of the application of the forms derived from it constitute crucial issues that philosophy must resolve in order to attain the status of certain knowledge. Moreover, I would argue that, for Fichte, resolving the problem of the systematicity of philosophy through the identification of its supreme principle leads *necessarily leads* to the resolution of the problem of its applicability²³.

Not by coincidence, in the opening lines of the Preface to his programmatic essay *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte writes:

The author of this treatise was fully convinced, through reading the new skeptics, especially *Aenesidemus* and the excellent writings of Maimon, of something that had already seemed highly probable to him: namely, that philosophy, despite the most recent efforts of the most acute thinkers, has not yet been elevated to the rank of an evident science. He believed he had discovered the reason for this and had found an easy way to fully satisfy all the well-founded demands that the skeptics raise against critical philosophy; and furthermore, to reconcile the dogmatic and the critical systems in their conflicting claims, just as critical philosophy had already reconciled the conflicting claims of various dogmatic systems²⁴.

In this passage, Fichte attributes to both Schulze and Maimon the “merit” of having identified the weak points of critical philosophy. In this sense, any adequate attempt to ground – and thereby preserve – the scientific validity of transcendental philosophy must take into account the critiques raised by both authors. As Fichte himself states in the above quotation, his task is to satisfy *all* the

²¹ In a similar vein, Maimon writes in a letter to Fichte dated August 16, 1794: “[I]nstead of treating philosophy as pure but nonetheless in such a way that it constitutes the fully developed form of all other sciences (not merely a *canon* but the complete *organon*), they treated it as an *isolated* science, not merely *existing on its own*, but as an entirely *independent* discipline. Philosophy thus became entangled in its own web, rather than arranging this web so as to receive *nourishment* from without as effectively as possible. It is now time to call philosophy back down *from the heavens to the earth*. What it lacks is not – as Mr. Reinhold claims – a *highest* principle, but rather the *lowest* principle – that is, the boundary or transition from purely *formal* to *real* cognition” (*GA*, III,2, 194-195).

²² As Thielke notes, scholars of Fichte's early thought have often devoted considerably more attention to his engagement with Schulze, while his confrontation with Maimon has been largely relegated to the background (see Thielke 2001b, p. 105n). However, I agree with Thielke in arguing that the critiques of both authors were decisive for the development of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and that Fichte believed skepticism could only be overcome once and for all if *both* Schulze's and Maimon's positions were thoroughly refuted.

²³ As notes, “[o]ver and over again in Fichte's Jena writings one encounters the claim that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not an empty ‘formulaic philosophy’ [*Formular-Philosophie*], but is instead a ‘system of real thinking’ (Breazeale 2013, p. 62), suggesting that this emphasis on the reality of philosophy is the result of Fichte's speculative engagement with Maimon.

²⁴ *GA*, I,2, 109.

demands put forward by the skeptics. In the next paragraph I will show how the philosopher intends to reach this objective.

3.1.2 The “I” as a principle

The aim of the present paragraph is to show how, in my reading, Fichte’s discovery of a new principle of transcendental philosophy can be read as a response to both Schulze’s and Maimon’s charges on Kant’s transcendental idealism. As previously noted, Fichte’s new formulation of the principle of philosophy has traditionally been interpreted as a response solely to the debate between Reinhold and Schulze. However, I will argue that the elevation of the I to the supreme position within philosophical knowledge represents an attempt to resolve both the problem of the systematization and internal coherence of that knowledge – thus addressing the Reinhold-Schulze debate – and the problem of its applicability, thereby offering a response to Maimon’s skeptical challenge.

This analysis will take its point of departure from the issue of the systematic character of philosophy, since it is the problem most explicitly addressed by Kant in the texts leading up to the composition of the *Grundlage*, such as the *Aenesidemus Review* and the programmatic text *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*. For a more in-depth analysis, I will also refer to texts unpublished by Fichte, such as the *Personal Meditations on Elementary Philosophy* and the *Zurich Lectures*.

As briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, two intellectual “shocks” can be identified in the early phase of Fichte’s thought. The first was occasioned by his reading of Kant’s *Critiques* – particularly the second – which convinced him of the possibility of abandoning his earlier fatalistic determinism. The second arose from his reading of Schulze’s *Aenesidemus*, which appeared to call into question the legitimacy of that initial philosophical revolution by attacking the very foundations of both critical philosophy and Reinhold’s elementary philosophy. The seriousness of this second upheaval is confirmed by the length of time Fichte took to compose his review of Schulze’s *Aenesidemus*. Although he decided to undertake the review at the beginning of 1793, he did not complete it until the end of the same year, and was even compelled to apologize directly to the editor of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* for the delay. As Fichte himself acknowledges in a letter to Wloemer from November 1793, the postponement was due precisely to the radical nature of Schulze’s criticisms and to the need to respond to them not merely by reiterating the positions of Kant or Reinhold, but by laying the foundations for an entirely new philosophical system:

Judge for yourself how much urgent work had accumulated; to this was added the fact that I was, shortly thereafter, led, through the reading of a resolute skeptic, to the clear conviction that philosophy was still far from attaining the status of a science, and I was compelled to abandon my own previous system and to conceive of one that would be more stable. How little time remains for me²⁵.

In this sense, given the gravity of the task, the *Aenesidemus Review* must be regarded not merely as an evaluative response to Schulze's book, but as a genuine theoretical laboratory in which Fichte lays the groundwork for his *Wissenschaftslehre*²⁶. The weeks following the dispatch of the aforementioned letter thus represent a period of intense and decisive intellectual development for Fichte. In a subsequent letter to Stephani from mid-December, the philosopher enthusiastically announces that he has succeeded in identifying the new foundation of philosophy, which would serve to refute Schulze's criticisms:

Have you read *Aenesidemus*? It has perplexed me for some time now. It has overthrown Reinhold in my eyes, has made me suspicious of Kant, and has overturned my whole system from the ground up. One cannot live under the open sky. It cannot be helped; the system must be rebuilt. And this is what I have been faithfully doing for the past six weeks or so. Come celebrate the harvest with me! I have discovered a new foundation, on the basis of which it will be easy to develop the whole of philosophy. Kant's philosophy, as such, is correct – but only in its results and not in its reasons. This singular thinker looks more marvelous to me every day. I believe that he possesses a genius which reveals the truth to him without showing him why it is true²⁷.

Fichte thus uses the *Aenesidemus Review* as a pretext to construct the framework of his own new philosophical system. The final part of the quotation also provides some insight into the status of this project and its relation to critical philosophy. Fichte emphasizes that Kant's philosophy is correct in its conclusions, but it lacks the foundations that would lead to them with certainty and incontrovertibility. It is, therefore, as if the truth had been revealed to Kant by a genius, without, however, the great philosopher being able to substantiate and ground it properly – thus leaving it vulnerable to skeptical criticism. For this reason, Fichte expresses particular appreciation for Reinhold's attempt to identify the supreme principle of transcendental philosophy – a principle that was to assume the foundational role still lacking in Kant's thought. As he himself recognizes,

²⁵ *GA*, III,2, 14.

²⁶ As Breazeale correctly notes, underscoring the importance of this text, "Fichte's review of *Aenesidemus* thus not only signals a revolution in his own philosophical development but marks a genuine watershed in the history of German Idealism" (Breazeale 1981, p. 546).

²⁷ *GA*, III,2, 28.

“[w]ithout Reinhold, philosophizing reason might perhaps have occupied itself for a long time with commenting and recommending upon Kant, without ever discovering the distinctive character of his system, for this cannot be discovered by anyone who does not open up his own way to its discover”²⁸. Nevertheless, as is well known, Fichte simultaneously reveals his dissatisfaction with the results achieved by Reinhold, despite fully acknowledging both the legitimacy and, indeed, the necessity of his endeavor.

The urgency of this inquiry is prompted, according to Fichte, by Kant’s failure to thematize the problem – or, at the very least, his failure to do so adequately. From Fichte’s perspective, Kant merely assumed, and thus presupposed, the distinction between the Transcendental Aesthetic, Analytic, and Dialectic, and, at a higher level, between theoretical and practical reason, attempting only at a later stage to reconcile them into a unified whole. For Fichte, by contrast, difference always presupposes an identity capable of accounting for its very genesis. Without such a foundational identity, difference is merely taken as *given* and hence remains *unjustified*, thereby reinstating a dogmatic attitude at the heart of transcendental philosophy. In Fichte’s view, the principle of systematic unity must therefore *precede* the emergence of difference, rather than being appended to it externally and retrospectively in an effort to reconcile it. As Rametta argues, “Kant examined reason after the disjunction had already occurred”²⁹. The principle Fichte is seeking must therefore be capable of grounding the *deduction* of the aforementioned differences, which was a task that also Reinhold took as necessary. However, the *Review* brings to light the limitations of Reinhold’s solution, which are highlighted by Schulze’s own criticisms.

Now, Fichte begins by examining the relation of dependence between the principle of consciousness and the principle of non-contradiction. *Aenesidemus* denied the absolute priority of Reinhold’s principle, based precisely on the evident subordination of that principle to the logical rule established by the principle of non-contradiction. Since the principle must be expressed in propositional form, this can only be done in accordance with the principle of non-contradiction, which governs the formulation of all judgments. Fichte observes that if we conceive the principle of non-contradiction as a purely logical and formal rule, *Aenesidemus*’s critique loses its force, since the principle of representation retains priority in terms of *content*; the latter, indeed, cannot be deduced from a purely logical principle³⁰. However, Schulze’s objection gains significance if one attributes to

²⁸ *GA*, I,2, 62. See also *GA*, I,2, 110-111; “I am just as sincerely convinced that nothing, following Kant’s spirit of genius, could contribute more to philosophy than Reinhold’s systematic spirit, and I believe that I recognize the honorable place which Reinhold’s Elementary Philosophy will always be accorded, despite the further progress which philosophy must necessarily make under the guidance of whomever it may be”.

²⁹ Rametta 2013, p. 48.

³⁰ “Like any possible reflection, reflection on the Principle of Consciousness is, with respect to its *form*, subordinate to the principle of contradiction; but its *content* is not determined by the principle of contradiction” (*GA*, I,2, 43).

the principle of non-contradiction a material meaning as well – something that Schulze fails to explicitly do:

Thus for *Aenesidemus*'s remark to have any real meaning he must, though he nowhere clearly says so, ascribe material as well as formal validity to the principle of contradiction, that is, he has to assume or conjecture a mental fact upon which the principle of contradiction is originally based³¹.

Put differently: if the critique of the principle of representation's non-absolute priority is to be meaningfully developed, one must demonstrate that the logical principle of non-contradiction also possesses a material dimension – a content – that cannot be derived from the principle of representation. This is a step Aenesidemus fails to take, but one that Fichte will pursue in the *Grundlage*, where, as we shall see, his aim is precisely to articulate a principle distinct from Reinhold's – one that not only avoids contradicting the logical rules in its propositional form, but also provides their transcendental grounding.

Moreover, Fichte agrees with Schulze in considering the *fact of representation* as a synthetic principle. More precisely, the proposition that expresses the act of representation and the relation between its constitutive elements – form and matter – is certainly an analytic proposition, for “they [the constitutive elements] are of course all included in the concept of consciousness³². However, as Fichte subsequently emphasizes, “the very action of representing, the act of consciousness itself, is obviously a synthesis, and indeed, the highest synthesis and the foundation of all other possible syntheses”³³. The act of representing is necessarily synthetic because it involves the unification of a *divergence* between terms – in this case, between subject and object, between form and matter – that are *given* in the synthesis as heterogeneous and presupposed elements. To be sure, it constitutes the *supreme* synthesis underlying all particular cognitions, for every specific act of synthetic knowledge presupposes the most general synthesis expressed by the *Satz des Bewusstseins*. However, this does not imply that it can fulfill the function Fichte intends to assign to the supreme principle of philosophy: it is not capable of grounding the synthesis in an original unity³⁴.

³¹ *GA*, I,2, 43-44.

³² *GA*, I,2, 45.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ As Fichte argues in Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, “The kind of reflection which governs the whole *Wissenschaftslehre* (insofar as it is a science) is an *act of representing*. From this it by no means follows that everything which is reflected upon is also nothing but an act of representing. In the *Wissenschaftslehre* the I is *represented*. But it does not follow that the I is represented merely *as* representing. Other features may well be found in this I. Qua philosophizing *subject*, the I is indisputably only a representing I, but it might well be more than this qua *object* of philosophizing. Representing is the highest and absolutely first act of the philosopher as such. But the absolutely first act of the human mind might well be something else” (*GA*, I,2, 149).

This means that, despite its claim to ground and justify the differences merely assumed by Kant, Reinhold's principle in fact reproduces them within itself. It elevates the distinctions to the highest level of generality, yet without dissolving them into an original identity. Thus, in Fichte's eyes, even this supreme synthesis requires something that posits it and explains its internal differentiation, in order to demonstrate that the fact of representation, contrary to Reinhold's claim, is not truly indeducible. The aim of a genuinely scientific form of knowledge will therefore be to uncover the transcendental origin of a synthetic fact such as that of representation:

Principle of Consciousness is a theorem which is based upon another first principle, from which, however, the Principle of Consciousness can be strictly derived, a priori and independently of all experience. The initial incorrect presupposition, and the one which caused the Principle of Consciousness to be proposed as the first principle of all philosophy, was precisely the presupposition that one must begin with a fact. We certainly do require a first principle which is material and not merely formal. But such a principle does not have to express a fact; it can also express a deed-act [*Thathandlung*] – if I may risk asserting something which can be neither explained nor proven here³⁵.

In this famous passage, Fichte lays the groundwork for what will become the structural core of the entire project of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Here, he explicitly addresses what he identifies as Reinhold's fundamental error – namely, the idea that philosophy as a system could be grounded upon a *fact* (Thatsache). Reinhold assumed this was necessary because the principle, insofar as it was to serve as the starting point of philosophy, could not be logically or rationally deduced; otherwise, it would no longer qualify as a *first* principle. It therefore had to present itself with the immediacy of self-evidence, that is, as something indubitable precisely in virtue of its direct and unquestionable character.

Fichte argues, however, that the immediacy of a fact is not, in itself, sufficient to warrant its elevation to the status of an absolute principle. On the contrary, the so-called “fact of consciousness” is invariably empirically conditioned: every representation is the representation of a determinate object by a determinate subject. As such, it remains bound to a dimension of mere “givenness” and ungrounded “factuality” – a dimension that transcendental philosophy must overcome by tracing it back to a higher, original principle³⁶. Thus, if this principle is to function as truly foundational in relation to the fact of consciousness, it must be situated at a level that is not merely empirical. Otherwise, we would never reach the level of reflection demanded by transcendental philosophy. Put

³⁵ *GA*, I,2, 46 (trans. modified).

³⁶ According to Fichte, Kant's transcendental philosophy, through Reinhold's reformulation, would therefore have lapsed into a form of psychologism. On the problem of the relation between transcendental philosophy and psychologism in Fichte and Reinhold, see Fabbianelli 2010.

differently, we would remain caught in the endless search for ever more general “facts” to account for particular ones, without ever freeing ourselves from a form of thought that merely synthesizes already presupposed differences.

It is for this reason that, in the passage cited above, Fichte introduces the term that perhaps most characterizes his Jena period, namely, *Thathandlung*. This compound word, formed from *That* and *Handlung* – literally “deed” and “act” – refers to an act that is both foundational and self-positing³⁷. The principle of philosophy – which, in this text, has not yet been identified – must therefore be a *Thathandlung* insofar as it is an act that *posits* itself as such, and which, in this way, justifies itself and its foundational function. The movement expressed by the *Thathandlung* also entails a convergence of the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the principle itself. This principle is both the activity that posits – and, in the very act of positing, becomes aware of the activity it is performing – and the result, the content, of that activity. In this way, the principle is no longer composed of two irreducible elements that are only subsequently unified through the medium of representation. Rather, it is a single movement in which what is posited is identical with the activity of positing itself, and is thereby justified, from a transcendental point of view, by that very act. In this way, according to Fichte, one should attain that unity between thought and being which ought to ground the very disjunction of these terms in empirical representation³⁸. Using Rametta’s words, “in order to posit itself unconditionally, [the principle] must *know* itself to be at the same both as the *activity* that posits and as the *act* that has been posited (*Thathandlung*)”³⁹.

The distinction between *Thathandlung* and *Thatsache* thus reflects the difference between a principle that is capable of transcendently legitimating itself as the condition of possibility for a systematic philosophy, and a (supposed) principle that is merely assumed and dogmatically posited in such a role. If this is the case, then the status of the principle Fichte seeks must be radically different from any empirical “fact”, no matter how general or abstract the latter may appear. For this reason, and in a move that is not without risk, Fichte characterizes the *Thathandlung* in this text as an instance of “intellectual intuition”. As the philosopher writes, “[t]he subject and the object do indeed have to

³⁷ For a long time, it was believed that the word *Thathandlung* was, in fact, a neologism first coined by Fichte (see e.g. Breazeale 1992, 13n). However, Franks has pointed out that “*Thathandlung* is an old German word whose usage can be traced back several centuries before Fichte and which, although already somewhat archaic, was still being used in the eighteenth century by as exemplary a stylist as Lessing” (Franks 1997, p. 318). In a more recent work, Breazeale himself concedes the validity of Franks’s observations (see Breazeale 2013, p. 36n).

³⁸ “Philosophy must therefore begin, not with a principle of mere consciousness, but with self-consciousness; not with any fact, but with an Act. Here, in the self-positing activity of the I, we encounter that which Kant’s results seemed everywhere to presuppose but nowhere to acknowledge explicitly and unambiguously: the point of unity between thought and being. Once this has been clearly grasped and adopted as the starting-point of philosophy, then skeptical objections like those of Schulze/Aenesidemus – objections that ultimately rest upon the charge that the Critical philosophy depends upon an illicit move from subjective to objective necessity, from thought to being – can be laid to rest once and for all” (Breazeale 2013, p. 38).

³⁹ Rametta 2012, p. 81.

be thought of as preceding representation, but not in consciousness qua an empirical mental state, which is all that Reinhold is speaking of. The absolute subject, the I, is not given by empirical intuition; it is, instead, posited by intellectual intuition”⁴⁰. Now, it must be acknowledged that Fichte does not offer a fully articulated definition of *intellectual intuition* within the confines of the present text. Nevertheless, its function and orientation become increasingly clear when situated in contrast to the Kantian understanding of the term. For Kant, intellectual intuition refers to a form of knowledge accessible only to a non-discursive, divine understanding, one not constrained by the forms of sensible intuition (space and time)⁴¹. It is a mode of cognition that would allow a being to bring objects into being through the mere act of thinking them. Fichte, by contrast, radically reconfigures this notion: intellectual intuition, for him, does not denote a divine mode of object-creation, but rather the structure of the first principle itself – an act in which the I *posits* itself and thereby *knows* itself as positing⁴².

Understood in this way, *intellectual intuition* expresses the logical form of the absolute principle: a pure act of identity, in which the subject is not distinct from the act it performs⁴³. The first principle, insofar as it is the genetic origin of all subsequent differentiation, cannot itself contain any internal distinction. It must be wholly identical with itself, and this identity is given as a *Thathandlung* that posits and simultaneously intuitively itself. Hence, intellectual intuition does not mark a separation between a thinker and a thought object, but rather the unity of being and knowing in the original act of self-positing. Intellectual intuition, therefore, does not signify the creation *ex nihilo* of an object by an act of an infinite understanding, but rather the simple act of self-positing of the principle in its identity with itself.

Moreover, the invocation of intellectual intuition serves to underscore once more the radical distance separating the first principle of philosophy from any form of empirical consciousness.

⁴⁰ GA, I,2, 48.

⁴¹ See e.g. *KrV*, B 72, *KU* 409.

⁴² See also Haag 2012, p. 110: “It was, after all, the whole point of introducing the concept of a *Thathandlung* that subject and object would not be distinguished in this act. This denial of separation accordingly allows for a different, ontologically neutral conception of self-positing as a form of producing; we do *not* by this act produce an object, but a subject-object that is consciousness in virtue of the specific kind of *Thathandlung* characteristic for subjects like us: a *Thathandlung* that *proceeds by intellectual intuition* and produces a self that is nothing but pure consciousness”. On the difference between Kant’s and Fichte’s conception of intellectual intuition, see also Anthony Bruno 2023.

⁴³ “The term ‘intellectual intuition’ here designates the basic structure of the I as immediately present to itself, or ‘self-positing’ [...]. So understood, [intellectual intuition] thus signifies the pure essence of the I as a unified – though always self-differentiating – subject-object” (Breazeale 2013, pp. 204-205). Breazeale notes that this is not the only meaning Fichte assigns to intellectual intuition; he identifies three additional senses: (2) intellectual intuition as the mode through which one becomes conscious of the moral law and of freedom; (3) as the finite I’s means of accessing immediate awareness of the absolute I, through the attempt to shift attention from *objects* to *ourselves* as free subjects; and (4) as the genetic process of deduction of the constitution of every finite I (see Ivi., pp. 197-229). However, as the author himself seems to suggest, I would argue that the meaning Kant attributes to intellectual intuition in the *Review* is the first – namely, the one that identifies it with the very logical structure of the *Thathandlung* which is *implied* in every finite consciousness, but which is not identified with the finite consciousness’ access to the absolute I. On Fichte’s intellectual intuition, see also Olk 2020, Philonenko 1981, Haag 2012.

Empirical consciousness, by definition, involves duality: it presupposes the synthesis of a given subject and a given object, mediated by representation. Intellectual intuition, by contrast, removes this duality entirely. It designates a moment prior to the division between subject and object, where identity is not yet mediated or fractured by representational structures. As such, it marks the epistemic and ontological singularity of the *Thathandlung*: a primordial act in which the principle is immediately and non-discursively present to itself. As Fichte argues, the intellectual intuition can therefore be expressed “through the *I am*, and indeed, through the *I simply am, because I am*”⁴⁴. This original self-positing is not the product of empirical representation, but the ground of all possible representation; not a consequence of thought, but the condition of its possibility. In this way, intellectual intuition reveals itself as the necessary articulation of a principle that ground empirical consciousness, enabling philosophy to begin not with a fact, but with an act:

If, in intellectual intuition, the *I is because* it is and is *what* it is, then it is, to that extent, *self-positing*, absolutely independent and autonomous. The *I* in empirical consciousness, however – the *I* as intellect – *is* only in relation to something intelligible, and is, to that extent, dependent. But the *I* which is thereby opposed to itself is supposed to be not two, but one – which is impossible, since “dependence” contradicts “independence”⁴⁵.

This passage clearly highlights the distinction between intellectual intuition as a mode of articulating the logical structure of the first principle, on the one hand, and empirical representation, on the other⁴⁶. In the first case, intellectual intuition allows the principle to posit itself in absolute independence and, therefore, in complete autonomy, as dependent on nothing other than its own self-positing movement. In the second case, by contrast, empirical representation presupposes a relation of dependence between the representing subject – the intelligent *I* – and that which is represented, namely the intelligible object. The duality inherent in the structure of empirical consciousness

⁴⁴ *GA*, I,2, 57.

⁴⁵ *GA*, I,2, 65.

⁴⁶ Rametta notes that, in certain texts such as the *Second Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, Fichte appears to describe the intellectual intuition not as the act implicitly present in every finite consciousness, but as *the very act of finite (and thus empirical) consciousness* that is necessary in order to access the absoluteness of the *I*. This corresponds to the third meaning that, as I briefly showed above (see *supra*, p. 227n), Breazeale attributes to intellectual intuition. Rametta, however, highlights the problems inherent in this form of intellectual intuition, when he writes: “The relationship between intellectual intuition and the constitution of subjectivity remains problematic. [...]. The question concerns the legitimacy of defining as ‘intellectual intuition’ an activity of consciousness that, within consciousness, operates without consciousness. Indeed, some Fichtean texts attribute intellectual intuition to the philosopher, or to anyone who operates as the philosopher does. Intellectual intuition would no longer be unconsciously present in immediate consciousness, but would instead express the *specifically philosophical act* (as such, within reach of anyone who chooses to reflect *on themselves*) that *intuits that immediate consciousness and becomes aware of it*” (Rametta 2012, p. 124). In brief, this interpretation of intellectual intuition appears to excessively blur the boundaries between intellectual intuition and empirical consciousness itself.

necessarily renders the I dependent on the object it represents, and thereby incapable of serving as the foundational principle of philosophy.

Therefore, as Fichte promptly clarifies, it is not Reinhold's principle of representation *per se* that is being called into question. Rather, the critiques advanced by *Aenesidemus* are considered valid only insofar as they concern the *foundational* role assigned to the principle of representation as the supreme principle of philosophical knowledge:

From what has been said so far it follows that insofar as Aenesidemus's objections are aimed at the Principle of Consciousness in itself they are groundless. They are, however, appropriate objections to the Principle of Consciousness considered as the first principle of all philosophy and as a mere fact, and they make it necessary to establish a new foundation for this principle⁴⁷.

It is for this reason that, as we shall see more clearly in the Second part of the *Grundlage*, Fichte's objective is not to deny the validity of the principle of representation, but rather to deduce it genetically from the *Thathandlung*, thereby securing its validity. We could say that the critique of Reinhold is not aimed at the content of his principle but at its status: it cannot function as a first principle because it does not ground itself. Intellectual intuition, as the mode in which the I posits and intuits itself as identical to its own activity, supplies precisely the kind of foundational act that Reinhold's system lacks.

Now, we have seen that in this text Kant introduces the concept of *Thathandlung* as a response to the problem of the foundation of philosophy – a problem that Reinhold had not adequately resolved. Moreover, as the cited passages indicate, Kant characterizes the *Thathandlung* as a movement of what he calls the “absolute I” or the “absolute subject,” which is clearly to be distinguished from the empirical I. However, this concept is introduced into the text in a rather hasty manner. After criticizing the dualism underlying Reinhold's principle, Fichte simply argues – in a passage I have already quoted – that the subject and the object must be conceived prior to their unification within the domain of representation, that is, not within consciousness as an empirical mental state. For this reason, he continues, we must be able to conceive of the *absolute subject* as posited by intellectual intuition. Nonetheless, it seems that in this text this passage is not completely justified, both in terms of argumentation and terminology.

Why must the search for a principle higher than the principle of representation necessarily lead to the assumption of an absolute subject as the bearer of that role? It is certainly clear that the dualism underlying the principle of representation, according to Fichte, must be corrected by means

⁴⁷ *GA*, I,2, 48.

of a principle that expresses both activity and complete self-identity – namely, a *Thathandlung*. However, what compels us to claim that this *Thathandlung* is instantiated by an *I*? Put simply, if the synthesis between subject and object is to be overcome through the positing of an original thesis, why must this thesis be located on the side of the subject rather than the object? Admittedly, the answer may seem obvious, especially if we consider that Fichte firmly positions himself within the trajectory of the transcendental turn started by Kant⁴⁸. Nonetheless, this response would clearly require a more detailed and rigorous argument than the one offered in this text. And, terminologically speaking, what is meant by “absolute subject”? Surely not a “subject” endowed with a divine understanding, given that we have ruled out the idea that the meaning of intellectual intuition employed here by Fichte corresponds to the one formulated by Kant. This would undoubtedly place Fichte outside the very framework of the transcendental turn itself. As Reid correctly observes, “the theory of intellectual intuition does not represent a break with Kant’s theory of discursive mind; rather, it is one of its presupposition”⁴⁹.

While the *Review* does not offer a fully satisfactory answer to these questions⁵⁰, they are fortunately addressed in the opening sections of the *Grundlage*. I will thus now turn to the arguments Fichte advances in these passages, in an effort to clarify both the function and the status of the absolute *I* as the foundational principle of philosophy. In the following sections, I will then show how, according to Fichte, the adoption of this principle offers a solution to both the problem of systematicity and that of the application of philosophical knowledge.

As we have seen, the *Review* can certainly be interpreted as a genuine conceptual laboratory in which Fichte not only engages systematically with the vibrant debate of post-Kantian philosophy, but also lays the – albeit preliminary – foundations of his own philosophical system. However, the first true elaboration of Fichte’s system takes shape in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. The text was published in two parts, in 1794 and 1795, as a manuscript intended for the auditors of Fichte’s lectures, where the philosopher had succeeded Reinhold himself to the University of Jena. It represents the first systematic exposition of Fichte’s thought and of his attempt to overcome skeptical doubts once and for all by establishing philosophy as a rigorous science.

⁴⁸ “As to the true nature of my system, and the possible modes of classifying it, whether as the truly thorough-going criticism which I believe it to be, or as whatever else one wants to call it, that is nothing to the purpose. I have no doubt that many names will be found for it, and that a variety of mutually contradictory heresies will be imputed to it” (*GA*, I,2, 254).

⁴⁹ Reid 2003, p. 277.

⁵⁰ Despite the decisive role that the *Review* plays in the development of Fichte’s thought, Breazeale is nonetheless right to maintain that “The value of the *Aenesidemus Review* is above all *propaedeutic*: it provides us with a unique and very instructive glimpse into the specific context within which he developed his life long interpretation of the Critical Philosophy and out of which grew his own, highly original and influential philosophical system” (Breazeale 1981, p. 566. Emphasis mine).

In line with what he had already outlined in the *Review*, the aim is thus to determine the principle on which to ground the scientific character of the discipline. As Fichte writes in the opening lines of the first part of the *Grundlage*:

Our task is to discover the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge. This can be neither proved nor defined, if it is to be an absolutely primary principle. It is intended to express that A which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible⁵¹.

Fichte's argument to achieve this goal is fairly well known, but it is nonetheless worth presenting it here. As we have already seen, Fichte maintains that the principle of philosophy cannot belong to the empirical determinations of consciousness, since these always display a dualistic structure that the principle itself must not possess. The aim, then, is to begin from a fact of consciousness – a proposition that is universally accepted as valid and beyond dispute – and to examine whether this proposition is self-sustaining or whether it instead requires a higher principle to ground its universal validity. Fichte emphasizes that the particular proposition chosen as the starting point of philosophical inquiry is, in itself, indifferent; what matters is that it be certain and indubitable. Nonetheless, the philosopher notes, it is undoubtedly advantageous to choose the proposition “which offers us the shortest road to our goal”⁵². This is the proposition expressing the logical principle of identity, namely $A = A$. Fichte now asserts that, at first glance, such a proposition would appear to be “*absolutely certain, that is, without any other ground* and in so saying – undoubtedly with general approval – we would be attributing to ourselves the capacity to *affirm something in an absolute manner*”⁵³.

If this were really the case, then the logical principle would be indubitably certain and without any further condition, requiring no higher principle for its grounding. However, the certainty of the principle of identity is called into question by Fichte, who attributes to it not an apodictic, but rather a *hypothetical* character. To state that A is equal to A is valid only insofar as A is *first posited*. In other words, the proposition $A = A$ expresses a formal relation of equality in which, *if* A is posited, *then* it is posited as identical to itself. Between the “if” and the “then” there thus exists a necessary relation that expresses the logical form of identity in the proposition $A = A$. Fichte designates this formal relation with the term $= X$. To assert that X , as a merely formal relation, is posited, does not

⁵¹ *GA*, I,2, 255.

⁵² *GA*, I,2, 256.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

yet entail that the members (the content) of this relation are likewise posited. In other terms, the logical relation (the form) cannot be posited unless the members it connects (the content) are also posited. The question thus becomes: under what conditions is A posited?

Now, Fichte asserts that what he designates as X refers to a specific logical form through which a law is expressed. However, a law can only be expressed in the form of a judgment – a judgment that must be made by an I that thinks the law itself⁵⁴. For this reason, the logical form of identity exists *only in the I and for the I* – that is, within thought itself as an act of *positing*.

This, however, does not yet tell us that *A is*. Still, if thought posits a logical relation (X), it cannot avoid positing the terms that stand in that relation. As Fichte writes: “Then at least so far as this connection is posited, A is in the I and posited by the I, just as X is. X is possible only in relation to an A; now X is really present in the I: and so A must also be present in the I, insofar as X is related to it”⁵⁵. In other words, thought is the act that allows both the *form* (X) of the logical principle of identity and its *content* (A) to be posited together, since X cannot be thought independently of A. Without the activity of thought, the judgment $A = A$ would remain unfounded: its form and content would remain disconnected.

Fichte thus employs the hypothetical structure of the principle of identity to show that it too – just like the principle of representation—is constituted by a duality of form and matter. This inner duality prevents the logical principle from being self-grounding, because, as we have seen, for Fichte every difference presupposes an identity that underlies it. In this sense, within the logical principle, the relation expressed by X does not necessarily refer to a content A unless a higher principle, namely the I, is there to think both X and A together. In short, for the form and the content of the principle to *exist together*, they must also be *thought together*.

However, as Rametta correctly observes, this I that thinks the unity of A and X – and thus of A with itself – is certainly not to be understood in a psychological sense: “what is relevant is not that it is posited here and now by a particular individual being, but that it must be posited in general; and that, in order to be posited in general, the activity that posits it cannot itself be posited by an activity other than itself”⁵⁶. The I to which Fichte refers – the one that posits the identity relation expressed by the logical form – is therefore not the empirical self, but *thought in general*. Since thought as expressed by a particular subject, is itself a fact of consciousness – a representational and dualistic act – it cannot provide a sufficient foundation for the logical relation of identity.

⁵⁴ As Fichte specifies a few lines below, “The proposition ‘ $A = A$ ’ constitutes a *judgment*. But all judgment, so empirical consciousness tells us, is an activity of the human mind; for in empirical self-consciousness it has all the conditions of activity which must be presupposed as known and established for purposes of reflection” (GA, I,2, 258).

⁵⁵ GA, I,2, 257.

⁵⁶ Rametta 2012, p. 80.

In this regard, it is useful trace Fichte's reasoning more closely, as this helps to clarify a crucial aspect of this point. Fichte thus established that both X and A are posited by the I. However, in order to posit X – that is, to posit the identity relation of A with itself – the I must itself possess the same logical structure exhibited by X. In other words, the I must be identical to itself. For this reason, the *logical* principle $A = A$ must be grounded in the *transcendental* principle $I = I$, or *I am I*. The difference between the two lies in the fact that the former is posited only conditionally, since, as a hypothetical principle, it requires a higher principle to ground its validity. The latter, by contrast, “is unconditionally and absolutely valid, since it is equivalent to the proposition X; it is valid not merely in form but also in content. In it the I is posited, not conditionally, but absolutely, with the predicate of equivalence to itself; hence it really is posited, and the proposition can also be expressed as *I am*”⁵⁷. The logical principle, as we have seen, expresses a fact of consciousness in which its elements – form and matter – are given as presupposed. In this sense, they do not necessarily refer to one another, for even if the logical relation is posited, it does not follow that its content, A, is likewise posited.

The transcendental principle, by contrast, no longer expresses a fact, and thus no longer a dualism, but rather an act (*Thathandlung*), and therefore an absolute identity which posits itself as such. The object of the relation is no longer a particular object that may or may not be posited; it is now the I itself, i.e., thought or knowledge in general, which, in the very act of positing X, cannot but posit *itself* as a term of that relation. As Fichte writes, “[y]ou cannot think at all without thinking your I, as conscious of itself; from your self-consciousness you can never abstract”⁵⁸. In this way, as *Thathandlung*, the I is at once both the process of positing and its object – that is, the agent (*das Handelnde*) and the product of action (*Produkt der Handlung*)⁵⁹, for that which thinks is at the same time that which is thought, and that which is thought is at the same time that which thinks – making it impossible to abstract from one term of the relation without thereby eliminating the other as well. As already mentioned, in the *Thathandlung*, knowing and being are one and the same: it cannot posit itself without *knowing* that it does so, and it cannot know itself without at the same time *positing* itself as such.

Moreover, I believe that this identity between knowing and being entails another identity – one that Fichte considers particularly relevant for giving systematic form to the Kantian system – namely, the identity between the practical and the theoretical dimensions. On the one hand, the I posits, and thus produces, itself through a purely spontaneous – and therefore practical – act; on the other hand, this act is possible only in the form of a reflective act of the I itself on itself, that is,

⁵⁷ GA, I,2, 258. See Rametta 2012: “The activity that grounds logical identity, therefore, cannot itself be posited hypothetically; it must be posited necessarily, that is, categorically. For if it were not posited, not only would none of what we have done have been possible, but identity itself would never even have appeared as a ‘fact of consciousness’”.

⁵⁸ GA, I,2,

⁵⁹ See GA, I,2, 259.

as the knowledge the I has of itself in the very process of its self-production. The I is thus simultaneously the result of its own action and the object of its own cognition. This kind of movement expresses the original unity of theoretical and practical reason, which, as we shall see, Fichte will nevertheless analyze independently in the two subsequent parts of the *Grundlage*⁶⁰. Using Dürr's words, "[i]n this way, Fichte seeks to overcome Kant's dualism of practical and theoretical reason in the concept of self-positing: insofar as he defines self-positing in a practical sense as the positing of being, and this being then, in a theoretical sense, as knowledge"⁶¹.

For this reason, the I's position as identical with itself and as conscious of this very position is, according to Fichte, nothing other than the positing of the very *existence* of the I: "If the account of this Act [*Thathandlung*] is to be viewed as standing at the forefront of a *Wissenschaftslehre*, it will have to be expressed somewhat as follows: The I begins by an absolute positing of its own existence [*Seyn*]"⁶². This means that the position of the first principle can simultaneously deduce the category of reality itself. For the purposes of this work, it is particularly important to underscore this point, since, a few lines later, Fichte dwells on it and employs this theme as a possible (initial) response to Maimon's skepticism. In fact, he writes:

The skepticism of Maimon is ultimately based on the question of our right to apply the category of reality [*Realität*]. This right can be derived from no other—we are absolutely entitled thereto. The fact is, rather, that all other possible rights must be derived from this; and even Maimon's skepticism inadvertently presupposes it, in that he acknowledges the correctness of ordinary logic. But we can point out something from which every category is itself derived: the self, as absolute subject. Of every other possible thing to which it may be applied, it has to be shown that reality [*Realität*] is transferred to it *from the I*: that it would have to exist, provided that the I exists [*daß es seyn müsse, wofern das Ich sey*]"⁶³.

Here, Fichte appears to use the terms "existence" (*Seyn*) and "reality" (*Realität*) interchangeably, in an attempt – still preliminary – to show how his own idealism might be regarded as a response to Maimon's skepticism. I will examine this issue in greater detail in the following

⁶⁰ "Yet although the term 'positing', as used to address the absolute structure of the I, has neither a specifically theoretical nor a specifically practical meaning, it nevertheless prefigures the subsequent differentiation of the I into a theoretical I or intelligence and a practical or striving I. Absolute positing in Fichte contains the protocognitive connotation of self-ascription or 'taking' as well as the protopractical connotation of activity or doing. Indeed, it is the very unity of those two traits that characterizes the I as such. For Fichte, the I is originally theoretical and practical" (Zöller 1998, pp. 46-47)

⁶¹ Dürr 2018, p. 73. See also Ivi, p. 68: "As a self-grounding ground, as self-positing as the unity of activity and the product of activity, the 'I' thus conceived is absolute insofar as it is both theoretical and practical at once. In a practical sense, 'positing' (qua *producing*) means that the I produces itself as activity – wherein the unconditional dimension of moral action is indicated; in a theoretical sense (qua *asserting*), it expresses that the I knows itself to be absolute as being-for-itself, insofar as it has itself as the object of its knowledge".

⁶² *GA*, I,2, 261.

⁶³ *GA*, I,2, 261-262.

sections, but for now it is sufficient to highlight the following point: despite his intentions, according to Fichte, Maimon's skepticism regarding the applicability of the categories of the understanding seems to be nothing other than a residual metaphysical and dogmatic assumption that persists within his position. What Fichte seems to suggest is that, if we consider the self-positing of the I as a genetic deduction of the category of reality, and if we acknowledge that every object can only be *an object for the I*, then there is no reason why the category of reality cannot be legitimately transferred from the I to the object itself. Only a philosophical position that conceives of objects as *external* to the sphere of action of the I, and thus a dogmatic philosophical position, could raise doubts about this. *How* this transfer occurs is not yet addressed at this stage and will therefore be examined in a later moment.

In conclusion, I would like to present three key considerations that emerge from these preliminary reflections. First, this section of the *Grundlage* clearly articulates the relationship that, according to Fichte, ought to exist between logic and transcendental philosophy. In the *Review*, Fichte had claimed that Reinhold merely showed a lack of mutual grounding between the principles of logic and the principle of representation. On the one hand, it's unclear how the former could be derived from the latter; on the other, the latter is not strictly deduced from logical principles, but only shown to be in agreement with them. In this respect, *Aenesidemus* was right to voice dissatisfaction with Reinhold's position, as it seemed to undermine the absolute primacy of the principle of representation. Fichte's aim is not merely to show that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is compatible with the principles of formal logic, but that it is also capable of grounding them. In particular, Fichte argues that while, in the supreme principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, form and content – as we have seen – are identical, logic arises only through a free abstraction of the form of this principle from its content. This does not mean that logic is without content, since every proposition, including logical ones, requires both form and content. However, the matter of logical propositions is nothing other than the form of the principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, *taken as a content*. Logic, therefore, presupposes two free acts: through an act of *abstraction*, it separates form from the entire content of the *Wissenschaftslehre*; through an act of *reflection*, it transforms this form into its own content⁶⁴. This

⁶⁴ “If this is what logic is, then it must be possible to indicate a particular determination of freedom by means of which scientific activity crosses from the realm of the *Wissenschaftslehre* into that of logic—a move which establishes the boundary between the two sciences. It is easy to point out this specific determination of freedom. In the *Wissenschaftslehre*, content and form are necessarily united. Logic is supposed to establish mere form separated from content. Since form and content are not originally separated, this act of separation can only occur through freedom. Consequently, logic would come into being through this free separation of mere form from content. The name for such an act of separation is ‘*abstraction*’, and thus the essence of logic consists in abstraction from the entire content of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. It would follow from this that the propositions of logic would have nothing but form. But this is impossible since, according to the concept of a proposition as such, a proposition must have content as well as form. Thus the content of logic must be that which was merely form in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This content again receives the universal form of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, though this form is here specified to be the form of a logical proposition. This

means that, while the *Wissenschaftslehre* is grounded in the necessary act of the self-positing of the I, logic, by contrast, is “is an artificial [*künstliches*] product of the freedom of the human mind”⁶⁵.

The second consideration concerns what I previously noted regarding the indeterminate – or insufficiently justified – nature of the subjective dimension of the *Thathandlung* in the *Review*. As we have seen, in that text Fichte appeared to simply assume that the *Thathandlung* expressed the subject’s act of self-positing. In the *Grundlage*, by contrast, Fichte provides a *demonstration* of why the I is both the subject and the object of this movement. The crucial point was to show that every particular act of consciousness – whether expressed in the simple logical principle of identity or in any other specific synthetic act – is necessarily performed within the domain of thought, of knowledge, and therefore of the I.

However, this I is not to be understood neither as an empirical subject, nor as a divine form of knowledge. In the first case, as I have already shown, the dualistic structure of the representational act carried out by empirical consciousness makes it impossible to assign it a foundational role in the sense intended by Fichte. It is for this reason that, both in the *Review* and in the *Grundlage*, Fichte speaks of an “absolute subject”: this refers to a specific form of subjectivity that embodies pure thought as an act of positing, independently of its concrete instantiation in individual empirical consciousnesses. As Zöller points out, “[p]ure, preindividual consciousness as self-consciousness is not so much an instance of consciousness but its basic, principal form”⁶⁶. In other words, the “absolute subject” is nothing other than the transcendental horizon within which individual acts of consciousness acquire meaning – and, consequently, existence. In this sense, it is not even to be conceived as an act that might bring us closer to the creative spontaneity of a divine intelligence. What the absolute subject posits, at least at this level, is nothing other than the I itself, insofar as it is identical with itself, and not any particular, determinate object.

The third, and maybe most relevant consideration for the purpose of this work, lies in a preliminary reflection on the relation between Kant’s and Fichte theory of subjectivity. As Dürr correctly notes, the opening paragraph of the *Grundlage* seems to suggest a reversal in the relationship between the analytic unity of apperception – that is, the I’s simple self-reflection – and the synthetic unity, understood as the unification of an empirical manifold under the I think⁶⁷. In the

second free act, the act through which form becomes its own content and turns back upon itself, is called ‘*reflection*’” (*GA*, I,2, 137-138).

⁶⁵ *GA*, I,2, 139. Moreover, as Marinelli observes, it is likely that, with regard to the issue of the derivation of formal logic from transcendental logic, Fichte was influenced by Maimon, particularly through his reading of *The Categories of Aristotle* (1794) (see Marinelli 2024, pp. 145-153).

⁶⁶ Zöller 1998, p. 58.

⁶⁷ “By inverting the relationship between the analytical unity of apperception – that is, the representation of the identity of consciousness – and the synthetic unity of apperception – that is, the connection of the manifold of representations within a single consciousness – Fichte transforms this unity: the absolute I is not the result of the synthesis of the manifold, but, as something immediately certain, it becomes the ground of its deduction” (Dürr 2018, pp. 76-77).

second Transcendental Deduction, Kant had made it clear that the synthetic unity of apperception holds both ontological and epistemic priority, when he wrote that “the *analytical* unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some *synthetic* one”⁶⁸. In other words, it is only through the original synthesis of representations in consciousness that the thought of the I’s identity with itself can arise. Put differently: only the synthesis of difference allows for the thought of identity, understood as that which brings together what is different. What truly *exists*, then, is the synthesis of representations in consciousness; the identity of consciousness is given only *as a function of* the synthesis it enables. This does not imply that the analytical unity is genuinely *produced* by the synthesis of the manifold. Such a claim would risk bringing Kant’s position dangerously close to a doctrine of the subject akin to that of Hume – namely, as if the I was nothing more than a fluctuating bundle of perceptions, constantly changing and lacking any stable or enduring identity. Clearly, the synthesis of the manifold must, in some sense, presuppose an original unity that makes coherent and structured experience possible. However, this original unity – the analytical unity – exists inseparably from the synthetic unity. It is, therefore, an identity that exists as identity *alongside* difference, and not one that precedes it as its genetic origin⁶⁹. To use Zahn’s words, “Kant’s doctrine of the acts of consciousness clearly shows that the relationship between unity and disjunction is still understood as a mere juxtaposition, and in this respect, synthesis is conceived from the outside”⁷⁰.

For Fichte, by contrast, the task is to grant unquestioned priority to the absolute identity of the I with itself – an identity that exists prior to the synthesis it makes possible, and so prior to *difference* itself. In a lecture from 1812 – which thus belongs to a significantly later phase of Fichte’s thought, yet in a way that seems to resonate well even with the Jena period – the philosopher argues, for example:

I have not presented the matter as if the unity were seen through the multiplicity, but rather the multiplicity through the unity; unity is not seen as emerging from multiplicity, but multiplicity from unity. Unity is not a product of multiplicity, but multiplicity is the product of unity. Thus, through an analysis of unity, I have generated multiplicity. The dispersion of absolute *multiplicity* over *unity* is a central point of my entire philosophy. [...] [Synthetic unity] only becomes synthetic under the presupposition that there is an analytic one; synthetic only by means of passing through the manifold. In this sense, Kant’s proposition, the proposition of the synthetic unity, would be correct; only, it is not the first, not the absolute proposition. What precedes as the absolute proposition is the proposition

⁶⁸ *KrV*, B 133.

⁶⁹ “Even the ‘I think’ of transcendental apperception – the keystone of Kant’s Analytic – is no longer assumed as a *given* function, but rather *deduced* from the I that *posits* itself as identical to itself, thereby substituting a new principle of unification for all the activities of consciousness. The Kantian ‘I think’ cannot serve as the first principle, since it arises from a more original activity of thought, constituted by the *Thathandlung* of the absolute I” (Rametta 2012, p. 112).

⁷⁰ Zahn 1963, p. 182.

of a unity that is, that does not become, and the proposition of the analysis of this unity. For this belongs to apperception⁷¹.

What becomes evident from reading this passage is that Fichte, unlike Kant, does not conceive of unity and multiplicity (or difference) as always juxtaposed or mutually interpenetrating. Priority is not given to synthetic unity – that is, the *already accomplished* unity of identity (analytic unity) and difference (empirical multiplicity) – but rather to analytic unity itself as *complete identity* of the I with itself, and as the foundational principle from which difference must be subsequently developed. The identity of the I with itself *exists* in an *absolute* and *unconditional* manner; indeed, as we have seen, it is precisely this identity that makes it possible to deduce the very category of *reality*. The synthetic unity – that is, the unity of the I not in its absolute identity with itself, but insofar as it is determined by the Not-I – must therefore be derived from the analytical unity.

I will examine this in greater detail in a subsequent paragraph, specifically through a comparison with Kant's development of his theory of subjectivity in the VII *Konvolut* of the *Opus Postumum*. For now, it is sufficient to note that Fichte's position raises a further problem: if the *Thathandlung*, as the supreme principle of philosophy, signifies nothing more than the pure act of the I positing itself in absolute identity with itself, then it risks appearing as a completely closed, self-referential circle. The challenge is not simply to identify philosophy's first principle, but also to derive the subsequent determinations of the system from it. But how is this possible, if the principle does nothing beyond positing itself as identical to itself? I will take up this question in the next paragraph, aiming to show how, in the *Grundlage*, Fichte attempts to offer a systematic deduction of the determinations of finite mind, as they had been assumed by Kant⁷². I will also show how this very deduction can serve, at the same time, as a response to Maimon's doubts about the applicability of transcendental philosophy.

3.1.3 Solving the systematicity problem

So far, we have examined the nature of Fichte's critiques of Reinhold's elementary philosophy. As I have pointed out, these critiques are not primarily directed at Reinhold's intentions

⁷¹ *GA*, IV,5, p. 326. In a similar manner, in a manuscript from the same years, Fichte wrote that "the synthetic unity of apperception is only an image [*Nachbild*] of the analytical unity" (*GA*, II,14, p. 245).

⁷² As Reid puts in, "[a]mong the many distinctions developed with great care in the three *Critiques*, the most important for Fichte were those drawn between the various powers or faculties of the human mind. Fichte came to recognize that a well-grounded philosophical science would have to account for the complex structure of human subjectivity without dividing the mind into a mere aggregate of lifeless mental faculties" (Reid 2003, p. 243).

– which Fichte, in fact, fully endorses – but rather at the *method* employed in attempting to realize them. In particular, partially following the criticisms advanced by *Aenesidemus*, the issue lies in having identified the philosophical principle with a mere fact of consciousness. Fichte's aim is thus to overcome this problem by grounding Reinhold's principle of representation in a more fundamental principle, namely, the *Thathandlung*. However, as noted at the end of the previous paragraph, positing the *Thathandlung* as the first principle of philosophy introduces a further difficulty: if it expresses nothing more than the self-positing activity of the I, or of thought, in its pure self-identity, how can the manifold determinations of finite spirit be derived from it? Put differently, if this act of self-positing amounts to a closed, self-referential loop in which the absolute subject relates only to itself, how can it, in any meaningful way, *transcend* itself to account for what is other than itself?

This problem – namely, that of deriving the articulation of the system from its first principle – had already been addressed by Fichte in his programmatic text *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*. I will therefore make a brief detour through this text before returning to the first part of the *Grundlage*. This work examines the specific features that a system such as the *Wissenschaftslehre* must possess – namely, the certainty grounded in its first principle, the systematic articulation of the particular determinations derived from that principle, and the completeness of the system as a whole. The first point has, in fact, already been addressed in our discussion of the problem of the principle in the *Review* and the first part of the *Grundlage*. The certainty of the principle is grounded in its immediacy and in its self-justification: the *Thathandlung* expresses the absolute identity of the I with itself, which requires no further justification to validate its epistemic status. The systematic articulation of the system and its completeness, by contrast, are two aspects that still require further clarification.

With respect to the first point, Fichte writes:

In addition to that proposition which is certain prior to the connection with others, a science may also contain other propositions, which are recognized as certain only because of their connection with the first principle and are recognized to be certain only in the same way and to the same degree that the first principle is recognized to be certain. As was previously indicated, this connection between propositions is established by showing that if proposition A is certain, then proposition B must also be certain, and that if proposition B is certain, then proposition C must also be, etc. Connection of this sort is called the 'systematic form' of the whole (i.e., that whole which originates from the individual parts)⁷³.

⁷³ GA, I,2, 115.

The first proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* – that is, the one expressing the highest principle of knowledge – must therefore be capable of transmitting its certainty to the other propositions through a series of logical deductions⁷⁴. The kind of knowledge that emerges from this process is grounded entirely in itself – it doesn't depend on anything external to justify it. Its certainty comes from the way each step in the system carries forward the certainty of its foundational principle. More specifically, this is a knowledge of knowledge – a *Wissenschaftslehre* – that is, a form of knowing capable of reflecting on itself and on its own conditions of possibility, and that, through this very act of reflection, is able to constitute itself as a systematic body of knowledge⁷⁵.

However, according to Fichte, this movement must not be confined to the mere self-grounding of a sterile and abstract knowledge – one whose only function would be to legitimize itself, yet without the capacity to transmit its certainty beyond itself. On the contrary, the *Wissenschaftslehre* must be understood as the form of knowledge that grounds every other particular form of knowledge, including particular sciences. This does not mean that the *Wissenschaftslehre* must produce the specific principles upon which the particular sciences are founded. Rather, it must demonstrate that every scientific endeavor – even if only implicitly - always presupposes the transcendental structures of thought that are articulated and deduced within the *Wissenschaftslehre*. If this is to be possible, then it becomes evident that the first principle of philosophy cannot remain locked within its own negative autarky, but it must be capable of moving beyond the circle of self-reflection in order to ground that which is other than itself. In other words, it must demonstrate the possibility of a rational and justified transition from identity to difference.

In order for this to be possible – that is, for the *Wissenschaftslehre* to ground that which is other than itself – it must incorporate difference as a constitutive moment within its own internal articulation. In other words: if the *Wissenschaftslehre* is to account both for its foundational role in relation to the sciences and for its difference from the status of individual scientific disciplines, it must contain *difference itself* as a specific moment in the development of its own structure. However, if the first principle can only express a pure self-identity with itself, then there must be other principles in the *Wissenschaftslehre* that can account for the genesis of difference. Before presenting the

⁷⁴ I shall merely point out, as Rametta rightly observes, that this position is not without its difficulties. If the foundation is to transmit certainty to the parts of the system, this implies that “the certainty of the foundation, no longer able to remain confined to itself, dissolves into the certainty of the system” (Rametta 2021b, p. 14). This would lead to the aporetic situation in which the certainty of the foundation, in order to be demonstrated, would itself have to await confirmation from the very system that is erected upon it.

⁷⁵ “It is precisely this meta-reflexive dimension of knowledge that, according to Fichte, was lacking in Kant’s own philosophy. As Rametta argues, “Kant, by making reason the ‘object’ of investigation, forgot that it was also that through which the investigation was carried out; in other words, in exploring reason as a field of objective inquiry, it appeared to him in the multiplicity of its functions and performances, but he ‘overlooked’ that it was at the same time the ‘organon’ of the transcendental investigation, the *Vermögen* actively engaged in the inquiry directed at itself” (Rametta 1995, p. 54).

provisional structure of the *Wissenschaftslehre* at the end of the Third Section of *On the Concept*, Fichte writes:

The absolute first principle must be shared by all the parts of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, since it is supposed to provide the foundation, not merely for a portion of human knowledge, but rather for knowledge in its entirety. Division presupposes an opposition, the terms of which must both be equivalent to some third term⁷⁶.

I will return to this point shortly, when I will consider again the path Fichte outlines in the first part of the *Grundlage*, following the discovery of the supreme first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. What is already clear, however, is the necessity of establishing a moment of differentiation and internal opposition within the very structure of the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself. This is required in order for the first principle not to remain locked in self-referential closure, but to be conceived instead as the generative source of a series of systematically interconnected propositions⁷⁷. As we will see – and as this passage already anticipates – if the supreme principle is the expression of an absolute identity, then the second principle, in order to account for the possibility of difference, must be posited in terms of an opposition to identity – that is, as a counter-position. In light of this, a third principle will also be necessary, one that enables a form of unification between the two preceding principles, thereby avoiding the risk of their mutual and unproductive annihilation.

Before analyzing this final point in detail, it is necessary to consider the third criterion that Fichte introduces in this text to account for the systematic character of philosophy. It is not sufficient for the first principle to be absolutely certain and indubitable, nor is it enough that a system of propositions can be constructed on its basis, with that principle serving as both foundation and condition of possibility. It is also necessary to establish a criterion that determines what constitutes the completeness of the system. This is essential to ensure that, once the system has been fully constructed, no propositions are included that should not have been, and that no further propositions remain that ought to have been included but were not. In other words, the *Wissenschaftslehre* must

⁷⁶ *GA*, I,2, 150.

⁷⁷ As Rametta showcases, “[i]n order to think the real, Fichte must therefore satisfy two conditions. The first consists in conceiving openness [...] as an openness and availability to receive the real. The second lies in conceiving this real not in the pacified form of what is obvious, already familiar and taken for granted, but rather as the exposure of the transcendental subject to a confrontation with a radical alterity, irreducible to identity. To think the real will thus mean to expose the subject to the risk of a confrontation with an alterity that, in principle, destabilizes every acquired certainty, for it drives into the heart of the I the sharp point of difference: contradiction to identity. Translated into transcendental terms, this indicates the necessity of positing a second principle capable of grounding the independence of contradiction, capable of affirming the autonomy of difference with respect to the circular implication of being and becoming that constitutes the absolute I. Fichte thus takes as an indispensable requirement for thought the task of conceiving the autonomy of an opposite, the reception of a radically other than that I which has nonetheless been posited as the first and absolute principle” (Rametta 2019a, pp. 24-25).

present itself as a completed totality, in which nothing can be added and nothing proves superfluous. The only criterion capable of determining whether this goal has truly been achieved is the circularity of the system itself: the point of departure – the principle – must coincide with the system's conclusion. If, at the end of the exposition, we arrive once again at its point of departure, then we will know that everything that was meant to be deduced has indeed been deduced:

Furthermore, the science is a *system* (or is complete) when no additional propositions can be deduced from the first principle. This furnishes the positive proof that the system does not include fewer propositions than it should. The only question then is the following: When and under what conditions can an additional proposition be deduced? For clearly nothing is proven by the merely relative and negative criterion that I cannot see how anything further can be deduced from the first principle. There might well come after me another person able to see something where I can see nothing. We require a positive criterion in order to be able to demonstrate absolutely and unconditionally that nothing more can be deduced. This criterion can only be this: that the very principle from which we began is at the same time our final result⁷⁸.

In this way, it will be possible not only to account for the legitimacy and completeness of the propositions deduced from the principle, but also for the *legitimacy of the principle itself*. Prior to the completion of the system, the principle can fulfill its role only *hypothetically*, namely, as a provisional starting point whose validity must be demonstrated through the internal coherence and necessary unfolding of the system as a whole. It is only at the *conclusion* of the exposition – when the system has attained the status of an organic totality – that the principle can be confirmed in its epistemic function as a certain foundation. These three criteria – certainty, systematicity, and completeness – thus constitute the foundational principles that Fichte programmatically adopts for the development of his *Doctrine of Science*, and they will indeed continue to play a central role throughout the *Grundlage*. The first criterion has been sufficiently analyzed in the preceding sections. The task now is to gain a clearer understanding of how the other two are integrated into Fichte's project within the *Grundlage*. Having established the first principle of philosophy – the *Thathandlung* as the self-positing of the I – it is now necessary to determine how this principle can serve as the foundation for a logical sequence of propositions that unfold from it. In other words, it is necessary to show how *difference* arises from *identity*.

Now, although we have seen that in the first principle of philosophy there is an absolute identity between form (the logical implication of the principle) and matter (the I), our reflection can freely abstract these two components and analyze them independently. Moreover, it is possible to

⁷⁸ GA, I,2, 130-131.

conceive of different modes of relation between form and matter. What does this mean? Fichte has shown, first and foremost, that the first principle is absolutely unconditioned – that is, it is derived from nothing outside itself – both in its formal and material aspects. It does not derive either component from anything other than itself, but posits both – simultaneously and absolutely – out of itself.

Nevertheless, our reflection can conceive of alternative ways of articulating this relation: one in which the content remains absolutely unconditioned while the form is not, and another in which the form remains absolutely unconditioned while the content is not. The aim, then, is to identify a principle that is unconditional – at least with respect either to form or to content. This can be done by following the same method employed earlier – namely, by beginning with a given fact and reconstructing its conditions of possibility.

This time, however, the fact in question is no longer the logical principle of identity, but rather the principle of non-contradiction: not-A is not A. By applying the same reasoning that was followed in the search for the first principle, we must now ask: who posits the content of this relation? Clearly, it can once again only be the I, or transcendental knowledge as such. A and not-A are posited only conditionally—that is, they are posited only insofar as they are posited by the I. In this case, however, the relation between the members of the logical proposition is not one of identity, but of opposition. Consequently, this logical relation must also hold with respect to the I, which leads to the second principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*: the I posits itself as opposed to the Not-I. This principle, however, is, according to Fichte, conditioned with respect to content, because the object to which the form of opposition applies is none other than the I of the first principle. As Fichte writes, “[n]othing is posited to begin with, except the I; and this alone is asserted absolutely. Hence there can be an absolute opposition only to the I. But that which is opposed to the I = the *Not-I*”⁷⁹. However, the principle is instead conditioned with respect to form, since the form of opposition cannot in any way be derived from the form of identity, for it is in fact entirely opposed to it. In this way, we have managed to break out of the circle of pure self-referentiality of the first principle, by positing a second principle that is dependent on the first in terms of content, but independent in terms of form. Moreover, just as the first principle allowed for the deduction of the category of reality, the second principle makes it possible to deduce the second category of quality, namely, negation.

The reflection on the first principle, and the attempt to reconceive the relation between form and content within the principle itself, has thus proven productive in enabling a step beyond the mere positing of the I’s identity with itself, leading instead to the positing of a Not-I as opposite to the I. However, a new problem now arises: the second principle does not merely advance beyond the first,

⁷⁹ *GA*, I,2, 266.

but seems, in fact, to stand in direct opposition to it – raising the risk that the two principles neutralize themselves reciprocally. The mutual elimination of these two principles – conceived as the foundations of all forms of knowledge – would inevitably lead to the impossibility of any knowledge, and thus of any consciousness. Fichte thus argues that “we have to discover some X, by means of which all these conclusions can be granted as correct, without doing away with the identity of consciousness”⁸⁰. The X we posit must therefore be capable of holding together the I and the Not-I without their mutually negating one another. Moreover, since both the I and the Not-I are (distinct) products of acts of the I, the X that is to unify them must likewise be regarded as the result of an act of the human spirit. This act is designated by Fichte as = Y. The only way to resolve the contradiction between the I and the Not-I – that is, to demonstrate the possibility of their coexistence without resulting in mutual cancellation – is to conceive this act = Y in terms of a “reciprocal limitation” (*ein durcheinander Einschränken*), and the product = X as that which expresses the “limits” (*Schranken*) as outcomes of this act. At the same time, in order for limitation to function, the I and the Not-I must be understood not, as it were, as two monolithic blocks, but as *quantitatively* determinable terms. In other words: the reciprocal limitation of the I and the Not-I is possible only if these two terms negate each other “not *wholly*, but only in *part* [*nicht gänzlich, sondern nur zum Theil*]⁸¹.

In this way, one can argue that the I and the Not-I do not cancel each other out, but rather mutually *limit* one another, thereby making possible the deduction of the very category of *limitation*. This category implies that the I and the Not-I determine one another as follows: where there is reality in the I, there is negation of the Not-I; and where there is reality in the Not-I, there is negation of the I. Reality and negation, moreover, can coexist simultaneously and reciprocally in both the I and the Not-I, since both their reality and their negation are only partial and do not encompass the whole of either term.

Yet this solution necessarily introduces a “split” within the I itself: if, as Fichte claims, both terms – the I and the Not-I – are posited within the I, then the absolute I of the first principle cannot truly be limited by the Not-I, since for the absolute I, the Not-I is “absolutely nothing”⁸². The positing of the Not-I thus leads to the emergence, within the absolute I itself, of an I that is divisible or capable of being limited by the Not-I. The formula that expresses the third principle of the Doctrine of Science – which must secure the possibility of a synthesis between the first two – is therefore articulated by Fichte in the following way: “*In the I, I oppose a divisible Not-I to the divisible I*”⁸³.

⁸⁰ GA, I,2, 269.

⁸¹ GA, I,2, 270.

⁸² GA, I,2, 271.

⁸³ GA, I,2, 272.

This “splitting”, however, requires careful clarification: the absolute I and the divisible I should not be regarded as two separate, ontologically independent entities. What exists empirically is only the divisible I – that is, the empirical subject endowed with finite consciousness – while the absolute I exists within the consciousness of the finite I, but solely as an *idea*, or as a *fiction*. In the *Sonnenklarer Bericht*, Fichte write, with regard to the very structures of the *Wissenschaftslehre*:

Actual [*wirkliche*] consciousness exists; it is a whole and is completely finished, just as we ourselves are finished and have self-consciousness. The *Wissenschaftslehre* concludes with self-consciousness as its final step. [...]. According to our philosophy, this [self-consciousness] that is absolutely present can be treated of and judged in real life just as if it has arisen through an original construction of the sort that the *Wissenschaftslehre* carries out. [...]. To take this just as if for a categorical that, to take this fiction for the narrative of a true event that is supposed to have occurred at such and such a time is a crude misunderstanding. Do you actually believe that we want to produce with the construction of fundamental consciousness in the *Wissenschaftslehre* a history of the acts of consciousness that existed prior to consciousness, the life-story of a man before his birth?⁸⁴

As Breazeale rightly observes, I believe that Fichte’s fictionalism must be taken seriously in order to grasp the very project of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and to definitively distance it from any psychological or metaphysical interpretation: the structures of the *Wissenschaftslehre* do not represent either stages in the actual historical development of human consciousness or metaphysical structures endowed with a supersensible reality independent of our finite consciousness⁸⁵. At the same time, embracing a fictionalist reading should by no means lead to conceiving the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a mere collection of propositions – beginning with the one that expresses the self-positing of the absolute I⁸⁶ – devoid of epistemic value and as the arbitrary product of imagination. The fictions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, unlike any other form of arbitrary fiction, are *necessary*, insofar as they constitute a condition of possibility for the so-called “facts of consciousness”. As Fichte argues in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, that which grounds experience is “something that is only produced by pure thought for the purpose of providing a necessary foundation for experience”⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ *GA*, I,7, 249.

⁸⁵ See Breazeale 2002, p. 188.

⁸⁶ As Crowe points out, it is not just the first principle, but the *entire* system of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that could, in fact, be understood as an “idea” - or even as a “fiction”: “The entire *Wissenschaftslehre*, understood as the systematic construction of the conditions of self-consciousness, is not a piece of armchair psychoanalysis that delves into the pre-conscious mind, but is instead a construction, a ‘fiction’ [...], produced for the purposes of philosophical explanation” (Crowe 2008, p 270).

⁸⁷ *GA*, IV,2, 20.

For this reason, is helpful to recall, as Breazeale himself does, that the very method of fictional construction seems to have been suggested to Fichte by his reading of Maimon⁸⁸, who, as we saw in the previous part, places particular emphasis on the epistemic function that must be attributed to philosophical fictions. For both Fichte and Maimon, fictions are thus not opposed to reality, but rather designate a kind of reality that differs from the reality of empirical “facts”. It is not by chance, for example, that in the *First Introduction* to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte writes that the I “actually appears within consciousness as something real”⁸⁹. Similarly, in a response to an essay by J. C. A. Grohmann, he notes that “[t]he *Wissenschaftslehre* establishes the reality of its concepts within intellectual intuition, and it employs these concepts in no wider sense whatsoever than that which they have acquired within intellectual intuition”⁹⁰. As in the case of Maimon, I believe that the passages in which the reality of transcendental structures is affirmed should not be seen as standing in opposition to those in which their fictional character is emphasized. On the contrary, these positions must be held together: on the one hand, to preserve the epistemic function of fictions, and on the other, to avoid the risk of falling back into a form of dogmatism or psychologism⁹¹.

The following sections will explore in greater detail this problem in Fichte’s system. For now, it is worth noting that a similar line of thought emerged earlier in the discussion of the idea of God in Maimon’s philosophy. There, too, Maimon explicitly affirmed the dual status of the idea of God as both ideal and real – along with that of the differentials, which serve as articulations of divine knowledge. However, in that context, the broader epistemological framework posed challenges to sustaining this position. Positing a mode of knowledge fundamentally distinct from our own – one that can only be approached asymptotically – risked reintroducing an epistemological dualism which is difficult to reconcile with the principles of transcendental philosophy. As we will see, Fichte likewise conceives of the absolute I as the endpoint of an asymptotic progression pursued by the finite I. Yet I will argue that, unlike in Maimon’s case, Fichte’s practical articulation of the relationship between the finite and infinite I enables him to avoid the epistemological difficulties that troubled Maimon’s account.

⁸⁸“Fichte, of course, did not share Maimon’s skepticism regarding the applicability of the categories, a skepticism he attributed to Maimon’s own vestigial dogmatism concerning the relationship between ‘objective knowledge’ and ‘things in themselves’, and he thus saw no need to embrace Maimon’s ‘fictionalist’ interpretation of judgments of experience. What *did* attract Fichte’s attention was a more limited feature of Maimon’s discussion of this topic: namely, his account of what he called ‘the *method* of fictions’ and his proposals concerning the *employment* of this method within philosophy” (Breazeale 2002, p. 178). As we have seen, it is precisely in his early writings that Maimon assigns a central epistemic role to fictions – not as mere arbitrary inventions, but as genuine transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience.

⁸⁹ *GA*, I,4, 190.

⁹⁰ *GA*, I,4, 487.

⁹¹ For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between reality and fiction in the *Wissenschaftslehre* of the Jena period, see Crowe 2008.

Before reaching that point, however, it is necessary to conclude the analysis of Fichte's argument in the first part of the *Grundlage*, in order to show how the system of the *Wissenschaftslehre* unfolds from it. As we have seen, Fichte's analysis – aimed at overcoming the circularity inherent in the self-referential character of the first principle – began with an attempt to reformulate the relationship between the form and the content of that very principle. In the case of the second principle, we obtained a proposition that was conditioned in its content but unconditioned in its form. The task now is to determine whether the third principle also contains within itself an unconditional element capable of securing its certainty.

Fichte argues that the third principle, too, is unconditioned – this time with respect to its content, rather than its form. The opposition, within the I, of a divisible Not-I to a divisible I presupposes both the logical relation of identity of the I with itself and the relation of opposition between the I and the Not-I. The first relation is in fact nothing other than a synthesis of these latter two. The form of the third principle therefore depends on the formal relations established by the first two principles – namely, the relation of the I to itself and that of the I to the Not-I. By contrast, the content of this principle does not depend on the others. As we have seen, the third principle posits that the divisible I and the divisible Not-I can come into contact by partially limiting one another's reality, without either being entirely negated. However, it is never possible to deduce precisely the “place” of this encounter. In other words, it is never possible to determine a priori, in a particular circumstance, to what extent the Not-I is limited by the I, or the I by the Not-I.

The path followed by Fichte up to this point has thus enabled him to identify the three principles on which the philosophical system must be grounded, while at the same time providing a justification for the three categories of quality. In this way, these categories are no longer taken as mere “facts”, as Kant appeared to have done, but are instead genuinely deduced from the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*⁹².

Fichte's project, however, cannot stop here, since his aim is to deduce the entire structure of the human spirit. At the conclusion of the first part of the *Grundlage*, the philosopher announces that, in order to achieve this goal, he will need to adopt a synthetic method in the second part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This method consists in identifying, within a given synthetic proposition, two elements that have not yet been unified and that therefore require a further synthesis:

⁹² This argument, however, seems to oversimplify Kant's position with regard to the problem of justifying the categories. As is well known, Kant also attempts to provide his own deduction of the table of categories from the table of judgments. Nevertheless, I would argue that, in general terms, the Kantian solution remains vulnerable to Fichte's critique, insofar as the deduction of the categories from the forms of judgment merely *shifts* the problem rather than *solving* it. If the judgments themselves are taken as mere “facts” of consciousness, they too remain unjustified, thereby undermining the entire metaphysical deduction.

There have to be syntheses, so from now on our whole procedure will be synthetic (at least in the theoretical portion of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, for in the practical part it is the other way round, as will appear in due course); every proposition will contain a synthesis. But no synthesis is possible without a preceding antithesis, from which, however, we abstract, so far as it is an act, and merely seek out the product thereof – the opposite in question. In every proposition, therefore, we must begin by pointing out opposites which are to be reconciled. All syntheses established must be rooted in the highest synthesis which we have just effected, and be derivable therefrom. In the self and not-self thus united, and to the extent that they are united thereby, we have therefore to seek out opposing characteristics that remain, and to unite them through a new ground of conjunction, which again must be contained in the highest conjunctive ground of all. And in the opposites united by this first synthesis, we again have to find new opposites, and to combine them by a new ground of conjunction contained in that already derived. And this we must continue so far as we can, until we arrive at opposites which can no longer be altogether combined, and are thereby transported into the practical part of this work⁹³.

This method therefore consists in beginning from the supreme synthesis articulated by the third fundamental principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and asking whether, within this synthesis, oppositions persist that call for further unification. Once such a higher synthesis has been achieved, the task is to determine whether it contains new oppositions that require synthesis, and so on, until a point is reached at which no further synthesis is possible. At that stage, the method undergoes a reversal and gives way to the practical part of the system.

What I wish to emphasize is that the synthetic method employed in the second part of the *Grundlage* serves as the true driving force of Fichte's systematic construction, driven by the ongoing search for syntheses that demand ever-new unifications. The use of this method will make it possible, in particular, to systematically derive the entirety of the theoretical structures of finite consciousness, as they had been presupposed by Kant. More than that: what will ultimately be deduced at the conclusion of the procedure is the very principle that Reinhold had posited as the first principle of philosophy – namely, the principle of representation. The genetic derivation of this latter will mark the final step of the theoretical part of the *Grundlage*, and will constitute the true solution to the problem of the systematicity of philosophical knowledge – at least on the theoretical side – which, in this way, will have been deduced in its entirety.

I will not offer here a comprehensive analysis of the arguments that Fichte develops in the second part of the *Grundlage* to deduce the remaining categories and, more broadly, the faculties of the human mind. What I wish to indicate here is, first and foremost, the starting point of these reflections. As we have seen, the synthetic method requires that one first identify, within a given

⁹³ *GA*, I,2, 275.

synthesis, the elements that still call for unification⁹⁴. The most general synthesis from which Fichte must begin is that expressed by the third principle, namely, the proposition: *In the I, I oppose a divisible Not-I to the divisible I*. According to Fichte, this proposition in fact contains within itself two mutually opposed propositions, namely: (1) The I posits the Not-I as limited by the I; (2) The I posits itself as limited by the Not-I.

These two propositions express the fact that, in the third principle, the I posits itself both as determining and as determined, both as limiting and as limited. They respectively represent the foundational principles of the practical and the theoretical parts of the *Wissenschaftslehre*: in the former, the I is posited as determining the Not-I; in the latter, the Not-I is posited as determining the I. Fichte maintains that the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* must precede the practical part, even though, as we shall see more clearly, it is precisely the practical faculty of reason that makes the theoretical faculty possible. Nevertheless, as he himself writes, “because the *thinkability* [Denkbarkeit] of the practical principle depends on that of the theoretical. And thinkability is, after all, what we are concerned with in reflection”⁹⁵. In other words, although the reality of the theoretical faculty is grounded in the reality of the practical part, it is nevertheless only through the exercise of our reflection – and thus through the theoretical use of our reason – that we are able to conceive the possibility of a practical faculty⁹⁶. Thus, while the practical grounds the real activity of the I, the theoretical grounds the reflectivity through which this activity becomes comprehensible to us.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting, however – without claiming to exhaust the issue here – that Fichte appears to conceive of a more nuanced relationship between the synthetic and analytic methods. In other words, the synthetic and analytic methods do not operate entirely separately and independently, with the former confined to the theoretical part and the latter to the practical one. Rather, it seems that already within the theoretical part, the synthetic and analytic methods work together. In fact, the task of identifying the oppositions contained within a given synthesis is necessarily an *analytic* act of reflection. As Fichte writes, “This antithetical activity must be set up by reflection, which is to that extent initially analytical. For to attain by reflection a clear consciousness of the opposing features contained in a given concept A as indeed opposed, is to analyze that concept” (*GA*, I,2, 284). In this passage, Fichte is quite clear in stating that, in order to carry out a synthesis of opposites, one must first *analyze* the concept in which the two opposites are initially united. This suggests the need to establish a specific and complex relation of interdependence between the analytic and synthetic methods in the second part of the *Grundlage*. As also Pareyson notes, “[i]f the progression of the self is synthetic, reflection, in order to follow it, must bring to light the contradictions contained in a proposition and gradually seek to reconcile them — that is, it will be at the same time antithetical and synthetic, that is, analytical” (Pareyson 1976, p. 147).

⁹⁵ *GA*, I,2, 285.

⁹⁶ The relationship between the theoretical and practical faculties of reason is a widely discussed topic in the literature, one that has led scholars to reflect on the meaning of the “primacy” that Fichte appears to assign to the practical part in several passages of the *Grundlage*. Beiser, for instance, argues that “[Fichte’s] aim is to abolish transcendental philosophy by showing that all its problems can be resolved only through practical activity. For Fichte, no less than for Marx, all the mysteries of theory are to be dissolved in practice” (Beiser 1992, p. 74) while Mandt maintains that “Fichte’s idealism is not so much a theory of experience as a moral standpoint” (Mandt 1984, p. 128). These authors thus tend to downplay Fichte’s attempt to ground transcendental philosophy in a scientific manner, holding that this project must be entirely subordinated to the philosopher’s practical, moral, and political concerns. Authors such as Cesa, Zöller, and Breazeale, however, have sought to temper such interpretations by reestablishing a relation of non-subordination between the theoretical and the practical parts of Fichte’s philosophy (see Cesa 1990, Zöller 1998, Breazeale 2014). In particular, the latter scholar has advanced the notion of a fundamental “equiprimordiality” between theory and practice, observing that, for Fichte, even the practical part would be unthinkable without the theoretical, and that the scope of the so-called “primacy of the practical” must therefore be significantly re-evaluated. For a more detailed analysis, see Breazeale 2013, pp. 404-439.

The theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* must therefore begin with the proposition “The I posits itself as determined by the Not-I” and examine whether this proposition still contains elements that have not yet been unified. The latent opposition at stake here concerns, on the one hand, the self-positing of the I as absolute activity, and on the other, the determination that the Not-I exercises upon the I, which thus cannot posit itself in its absoluteness. The point, once again, is to conceive this kind of activity through the category of quantity – that is, to show that the positing of the I does not entail the complete dissolution of the Not-I, and that the positing of the Not-I does not imply the total negation of the I. The solution thus lies in conceiving the I as something that is, in part, self-determining and, in part, determined. This permits Fichte to deduce the category of *reciprocal determination*: at the moment the I posits reality in itself, it posits a negation in the Not-I; whereas when it posits reality in the Not-I, it posits a negation in itself:

Hence the I posits negation within itself, insofar as it posits reality in the Not-I, and reality in itself, insofar as it posits negation in the Not-I. It thereby posits itself as *self-determining*, insofar as it is determined, and *as being determined*, insofar as it *determines* itself: and the problem, so far as it was posed above, is thereby solved⁹⁷.

In this case, the category of reciprocal determination is thus deduced as an attempt to resolve the antithesis between the absolute positing of the I and the absolute positing of the Not-I. In a similar fashion, the other relational categories – namely, causality and substantiality – will likewise be deduced. These latter categories will reveal, in particular, that the reciprocal determination between the I and the Not-I is not, in fact, entirely symmetrical, since the I retains a logical precedence over the Not-I, by virtue of its activity as opposed to the passivity of the Not-I. In particular, the category of causality shows that activity must be situated on the side of the I, while passivity belongs to the side of the Not-I. However, this gives rise to a contradiction: if the I is the cause and the Not-I is the effect, it is unclear why the I should be limited by the very effects it produces. It therefore becomes necessary to explain why the I is the cause of the Not-I and yet is simultaneously limited by it. In this context, the category of substantiality is deduced in order to show that passivity should not be conceived in an absolute sense as *opposed* to activity, but rather *as a particular determination of the activity itself*. The I, in its absolute and total activity, is conceived as substance, while accidents are the *particular determinations* of its own activity, which are apprehended as passivity. To use Fichte’s own words, “*passivity is a quantum of activity*”⁹⁸.

⁹⁷ GA, I,2, 289.

⁹⁸ GA, I,2, 297.

At this point, however, Fichte finds himself confronted with another impasse. The category of causality, in fact, implies that passivity can be posited in the I only insofar as activity is posited in the Not-I. Yet the category of substantiality states that all activity is posited within the I, and that passivity is nothing other than a particular determination of the I's own activity.

Now, the attempt to resolve the opposition between causality and substance takes place in what is arguably the most comprehensive section of the entire *Grundlage*, namely Paragraph E of the theoretical part. Here, Fichte examines the various aporias that arise from different forms of idealism and realism (in both their qualitative and quantitative variants) in relation to the very categories of causality and substance. It is not necessary, for the purposes of the present work, to reconstruct the entirety of Fichte's argumentation. What must be noted, however, is that these aporias – together with the inadequacy of their synthesis through what Fichte refers to as *quantitative critical idealism* – stem from the impossibility of assigning the ground of the I's limitation solely to the I or solely to the Not-I. Fichte's solution to this problem lies in the introduction of the concept of “check” (*Anstoß*). This concept makes it possible to understand, first and foremost, that the Not-I does not constitute a being qualitatively distinct from the I, acting, as it were, externally upon the I and thereby bringing about some particular determination within it. As Zöller writes, “[t]he Not-I is not actually determining the I nor is the being being determined in specific ways. Rather, the I is determined in a most general, unspecific way to bring about its own determinations at the instigation of the check. Any specific determination of the I is the work of the I's own activity in response to the generic determinations provided by the check”⁹⁹.

The concept of *Anstoß* thus clarifies that the determination of the I, insofar as it is determinable, arises on the one hand from a provocation originating in the Not-I, understood in its most general form as a “check”; and on the other hand, from the I's own *free* decision regarding *how* to respond to this check by giving itself a particular determination.

At the same time, the very existence of the *Anstoß* presupposes the I's infinite striving beyond the check itself: the I is limited only because it attempts to transcend its own limitation and is continually thrust back upon itself in this endeavor. Both the *Anstoß* and the feeling of pain that accompanies the I's reflection upon itself in the aftermath of the check are simply *assumed* at the conclusion of the theoretical part, as they cannot be further deduced. The theoretical part can only show that they are given as *facts*, thereby deferring their grounding to the practical part. However, the theoretical exposition is not yet complete with the positing of the *Anstoß* as the original limitation of the I. Fichte still needs to demonstrate how the I's infinite striving and its limitation through

⁹⁹ Zöller 1998, p. 51.

the *Anstoß* – expressed by the Not-I – can coexist without canceling one another. It is in this context that the first of the mental faculties *assumed* by Kant – namely, productive imagination – is *derived*.

Imagination is the faculty that, oscillating between opposites – in this case, the finite and the infinite – holds both together as necessary moments in the realization of the *Anstoß* and the I's continual attempt to overcome it. In other words, it both constitutes and grounds finite consciousness itself. The deduction of imagination marks a turning point within the context of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, insofar as the deductions undertaken thus far by the philosopher finally intersect with a fact of reason – a genuinely existing faculty. This entails that all the provisional structures previously constructed by the philosopher through earlier syntheses are now confirmed as necessary moments within the genetic explanation of imagination itself. The deduction of the other faculties – which we will briefly examine at the beginning of the next section – such as intuition, understanding, and reason, will ultimately allow Fichte to deduce Reinhold's very principle of representation, with which the theoretical part of the *Grundlage* concludes.

It is in this way that Fichte believes he has resolved the problem of the systematicity of philosophical knowledge: by showing that, from a single absolutely certain and indubitable principle, one can deduce not only hypothetical structures for the explanation of consciousness, but also the very faculties that exist within our finite consciousness. Unlike in Kant and Reinhold, these faculties are no longer merely assumed, but are instead genuinely justified through transcendental reflection. In doing so, Fichte aims to refute Schulze's doubts regarding both the possibility of a certain and indubitable first principle and the very existence of the *fact of representation*. The focus of the next section will be to demonstrate that the foundation of the systematicity of philosophical knowledge is not, for Fichte, a superfluous embellishment, but rather constitutes the very condition of possibility for the *application* of such knowledge, thereby also responding to the doubts raised by Maimon.

3.1.4 Solving the applicability problem

In the preceding section, we examined how Fichte, after establishing the certainty of philosophy's first principle, proceeds to deduce the other two principles, each of which is partially dependent on the first – one in terms of content, the other in terms of form. Subsequently, it was shown how, starting from the still-unresolved opposition within the first principle and employing the synthetic method, Fichte systematically deduces those faculties of the mind that Kant, in the *Critique*, had merely presupposed, along with Reinhold's very principle of representation.

Now, although it is only in the practical part that Fichte *justifies* the *existence* of the “check” and the ensuing striving (*Streben*) to overcome it, thereby constituting the real ground upon which the theoretical part is built, I maintain that it is above all in the latter that Fichte articulates the conceptual tools that enable him to overcome both Schulze’s and Maimon’s skepticism. This paragraph will thus aim to clarify how this process unfolds within the first two parts of the *Grundlage*, and why it ultimately leads to the necessity of introducing a practical part as well.

As we have already seen in the preceding paragraphs, Fichte aims to refute Schulze by showing that it is indeed possible to ground philosophy on a first principle that is certain and indubitable – one that expresses not a fact, but an act. From this act, all the structures of the philosophical system are to be derived, with their certainty ultimately guaranteed by the certainty of the foundational act at the outset of the deduction. In Fichte’s eyes, this mode of derivation provides a satisfactory solution to the problem first raised by Reinhold: namely, that of securing for philosophy the form of a complete system of knowledge.

Less clear, however, is the relationship with Maimon’s skepticism. As we have seen, Maimon is not particularly concerned with the need to give philosophy a systematic form. On the contrary, in his polemic with Reinhold, he argues that this is, in fact, a largely irrelevant issue¹⁰⁰. What matters for Maimon is solely the possibility of demonstrating the *applicability* of philosophy to objects of experience, regardless of whether the first is presented in systematic form or not. The heterogeneity between the forms produced by the spontaneity of the subject and the content given through receptivity rendered it impossible, according to Maimon, to demonstrate that empirical knowledge (and thus, primarily, physics) could be certain and indubitable. My aim here will be to show how Fichte’s solution to the problem of the systematicity of philosophy, namely, the deduction of the faculties of the mind from a single principle, also constitutes, at the same time, an answer to the problem raised by Maimon.

Moreover, it often seems that Fichte treats the skepticism of Schulze and Maimon as stemming from a common underlying error, namely, the unwarranted dogmatic assumption of something *external* to our representations. In Schulze’s case, this assumption is explicitly asserted: in his (misguided) interpretation of transcendental idealism, appearances are nothing more than subjective productions, which must correspond to a reality in itself in order to secure their objectivity. This reality in itself, however, remains entirely inaccessible, thereby undermining any justification for the claims of our knowledge.

In Maimon’s case, the issue is considerably more complex. He explicitly rejects the dogmatic presupposition of a thing in itself as the cause of appearances – a presupposition he attributes to both

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. *MGW*, IV 263.

Schulze and Reinhold. Indeed, as we have seen, Maimon – it a move that anticipates Fichte – explicitly conceives of the matter of representations not as something given externally to them, but solely as a limit to the activity of our spontaneity¹⁰¹. However, as we shall see more clearly, Maimon’s dogmatism appears to be unintentionally reinstated within his own philosophy precisely as a consequence of his skeptical conclusions¹⁰²: if empirical knowledge cannot attain certainty, it is because Maimon continues to uphold the *surplus* of a content over the forms of thought – a content that resists being subsumed under those very forms¹⁰³. This stance is not only theoretically deducible from the very systematic aim of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, but is also explicitly stated in a text written shortly thereafter, namely, the *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre* (1795): “[Maimon’s] error, which is admittedly confirmed by the letter of Kant but stands in complete contradiction to his *spirit*, consists merely in the claim that the object is supposed to be something other than a product of the imagination. If one asserts this, one becomes a transcendent dogmatist and entirely departs from the spirit of critical philosophy”¹⁰⁴. In this sense, Maimon’s error – and, to some extent, that of Kant’s own exposition of the problem in the *Critique* – would lie in preserving residual dimension in the object with respect to the legislation of the imagination and, by extension, of the understanding itself. According to Fichte, however, this can only amount to a betrayal of the true

¹⁰¹ “The empirical [component] (material [*Materiale*]) of intuitions is actually (like the light rays) from something outside us, i.e. something given (different from us). But we must not let ourselves be misled by the expression “outside us”, as if this something were in a spatial relation to us; the reason is that space itself is only a form within us, whereas this ‘outside us’ signifies something in whose representations we are not conscious of any spontaneity, i.e. something that (with respect to our consciousness) is purely passive and not active in us” (*MGW*, II 202-203).

¹⁰² “The thrust of his reply is that Maimon too is guilty of his own form of dogmatism. Like Schulze, Maimon assumes that the categories must apply to some object independent of them, though in his case the object is something given in experience rather than a thing-in-itself beyond it. According to Fichte, Maimon ascribes our belief that the categories apply to experience to a mere illusion of the imagination. We have no evidence from reason or experience that the categories do apply to our sense impressions; but because we are so accustomed to associating these impressions, we imagine something corresponding to them in the world outside us. The proper response to this argument, Fichte contends, is to question the premise that the object is given independent of the activity of the imagination” (Beiser 2003, p. 239).

¹⁰³ Some scholars, such as Krämer, Breazeale and Thielke (see Krämer 1997, Thielke 2001a; Breazeale 2014, p. 60n) have argued that on certain occasions Fichte even appears to conflate Maimon’s dogmatism with that of Schulze. According to these authors, Fichte would thus appear to attribute to Maimon as well the explicit thesis that representations must refer to things in themselves in order to secure their objectivity. As evidence of this claim, the following passage from the *Personal Meditations* is often quoted: “These reflections also expose the false appearance of Maimon’s accusations against Reinhold – ‘From the fact that he can think something, he concludes that something must exist’. But this ‘something’ in question is merely a fact of our mind. This is what Reinhold thinks. Now, how do his thoughts correspond to the activity of the mind? How can such a correspondence be demonstrated? That is the real question: for the object of his philosophy is not the thing-in-itself, but the representation of the thing. - There is no talk of a thing outside this representation” (*GA*, II,3, 24n). Kabitz even suggests to read “Aenesidemus” in place of “Maimon” (see Kabitz 1902 p. 62n). However, although this reading is plausible, there is insufficient evidence in Fichte’s texts to support the claim that the philosopher *systematically* misinterpreted Maimon’s objections to critical philosophy and elementary philosophy by reducing them to those raised by Schulze. On the contrary, I will attempt to show that other passages indicate that Fichte in fact had a thoroughly accurate understanding of Maimonian skepticism, recognizing its distinctiveness in relation to that of *Aenesidemus*.

¹⁰⁴ *GA*, I,3, 190.

spirit of transcendental idealism, which “posits both concept and object at once, and treats neither in isolation from the other”¹⁰⁵.

Put differently: if, for Fichte, the goal is to show that the only coherent form of transcendental idealism is one that demonstrates that all of reality is posited solely *in* and *for* the I, then it is unclear why there should remain an unbridgeable gap between the dimension of form and that of matter. This is not to say that, for Fichte, the material content of our experience must be created by form through a subjective act of creation *ex nihilo*, as Jacobi had accused him of claiming. As I briefly noted, the figure of the *Anstoß* – further developed and justified in the third part of the *Grundlage* – is precisely what prevents this risk¹⁰⁶. At the same time, the transcendental imagination, as the faculty that allows for the oscillation between I and Not-I, should be understood as what enables a coherent and law-governed transition from the I to the Not-I, without there being anything in the latter that escapes the I’s determination. Let us read for example the following passage, placed at the end of the theoretical part:

Our doctrine here is therefore that all reality – *for us* being understood, as it cannot be otherwise understood in a system of transcendental philosophy – is brought forth solely by the imagination. One of the greatest thinkers of our age, whose teaching, as I understand it, is the same, calls this a deception on the part of the imagination. But to every *deception* [Täuschung] a truth must be opposed, and there must be a means of escaping it. Yet if it is now proved, as the present system claims to prove it, that this act of imagination forms the basis for the possibility of our consciousness, our life, our existence for ourselves, that is, our existence as selves, then it cannot be eliminated, unless we are to abstract from the self; which is a contradiction, since it is impossible that what does the abstracting should abstract from itself. Hence the act is not a deception, but gives us truth, and the only possible truth. To suppose that it deceived us would be to institute a skepticism that told us to doubt our own existence¹⁰⁷.

In this passage, Maimon is not mentioned by name, but the reference is clear and confirmed by the excerpt from the *Grundriß* cited just above. Fichte’s point is to show that the imagination, contrary to what Maimon believed, is not a faculty that produces deceptions, but is rather a genuine source of truth. This is fairly comprehensible in light of what we have argued thus far: if, for Fichte, the imagination is the faculty that enables the I’s oscillation between the finite and the infinite, then

¹⁰⁵ *GA*, I,3, 317.

¹⁰⁶ “What the imagination does create for Fichte is the *object of experience*, that is, the object as it is perceived according to the forms of sensibility and understanding. While all the determinations of the object of experience are created by the imagination, the matter of experience, the raw unsynthesized sensations or feelings that do not come to consciousness, remain simply given. [...] To defeat Maimon, Fichte needs to assume only that *the object of experience* is entirely created by the imagination. If this is the case, then the skeptical problem disappears, because there is nothing to the object of experience which is given prior to synthesis” (Beiser 2003, p. 242).

¹⁰⁷ *GA*, I,2, 368-369.

it is also the very condition of possibility for the *Anstoß* itself, and thus for finite consciousness as such. It would therefore be impossible to abstract from the imagination without at the same time abstracting from ourselves as finite consciousnesses. Without the imagination, none of the oppositions developed within the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* could be synthesized, thereby nullifying all the transcendental structures of our mind. As Beiser claims, “[w]e can no more doubt the reality of the productive imagination [...] than we can doubt the reality of our existence, because the activity of the imagination is a necessary condition of our own self-consciousness”¹⁰⁸.

Yet the fact that imagination is a necessary faculty of the mind does not, in itself, imply that it is a source of truth. It could very well be, as Maimon argues, that imagination is indeed a real faculty within us, but one that merely leads us astray. What Fichte needs, then, is an argument that shows not only that imagination is essential for holding together various oppositions, but also that, through this very activity, it can provide us with objective knowledge of reality. I contend that such an argument is sketched – at least in preliminary form – in the opening section of the *Grundlage*, where Maimon is mentioned once again. Here Fichte writes, after having deduced the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*:

The skepticism of Maimon is ultimately based on the question of our right to apply the category of reality. This right can be derived from no other – we are absolutely entitled thereto. The fact is, rather, that all other possible rights must be derived from this; and even Maimon’s skepticism inadvertently presupposes it, in that he acknowledges the correctness of ordinary logic. – But we can point out something from which every category is itself derived: the I, as absolute subject. Of every other possible thing to which it may be applied, it has to be shown that reality is transferred to it *from the I*: – that it would have to exist, provided that the I exists¹⁰⁹.

In this passage, Fichte once again takes up the problem raised by Maimon concerning the legitimacy of applying the categories to sensible objects. This time, the focus is on the category of reality, whose right to application, according to Fichte, conditions the legitimacy of the application of all the other categories. Indeed, if we are unable to demonstrate, at least preliminarily, that an object exists – or is real – then any possibility of ascribing further categorial determinations to it collapses. Now, Fichte maintains first of all that Maimon falls into contradiction in his attempt to uphold, on the one hand, the validity of formal logic, and on the other, a skepticism regarding empirical knowledge. As I have already shown, Fichte holds that even formal logic presupposes transcendental reflection. To demonstrate that $A = A$, one must first demonstrate that both the content

¹⁰⁸ Beiser 2002, p. 240.

¹⁰⁹ *GA*, I,2, 262.

A and the logical form of identity are posited within and by the I. Given that, for Fichte, every object is posited by and within the I, there is no reason why the category of reality should be valid for formal logic but not for empirical knowledge.

How this process takes place – even in the case of empirical knowledge – is not described in the first part of the *Grundlage*, but rather in the second, precisely through the function of imagination. Imagination, by holding together the I and the Not-I in order to prevent their dissolution, also enables the transfer of the categories deduced through transcendental reflection – above all, the category of reality – from the I to the Not-I. If this transfer were not possible, imagination itself would lose its function, thereby rendering finite consciousness impossible¹¹⁰.

Nevertheless, this response – grounded in the role of imagination – may not be entirely satisfactory. As we have briefly seen, according to Fichte, imagination not only produces the transcendental schemata that allow for the application of the categories to objects of experience, but also constitutes *those very objects of experience in the first place*. At the same time, the extreme idealist tendency is limited by the “check” encountered by the intelligent I, which prevents it from engaging in an unlimited and arbitrary activity. However, this resistance cannot be justified within the theoretical part of the system; it is simply *presupposed* as given. The step that remains to be taken, then, lies in the justification of that presupposition from which Fichte develops the function of imagination, namely, the *Anstoß* itself, which occurs only within the practical part of the system¹¹¹. In this paragraph, I will attempt to pursue both directions of inquiry, by analyzing: (1) the functioning of imagination and (2) its practical justification, in the attempt to show how both, in Fichte’s view, concur to counteract Maimon’s skepticism.

As for (1), we have already seen that imagination is introduced – or better: *deduced* – by Fichte in order to unify the I’s opposite directions toward infinity and toward self-limitation:

Both are to be one and the same; this signifies, in brief: *no infinity, no limitation; no limitation, no infinity; infinity and limitation are united in one and the same synthetic component*. – If the I’s activity did not extend into the infinite, it could not itself set limits to this activity; it could posit no

¹¹⁰ “Imagination conditions the application of every category to objects, and it is precisely for this reason that knowledge has objective validity. In fact, imagination has the function of uniting the sensible and the intelligible, precisely because every category is deduced from the absolute I, and it is from the absolute I that reality is transferred to every other thing. The realism of ordinary consciousness is founded on the fact that every object is the product of that imagination, which is the mediating element between the intelligible and the sensible” (Pareyson 1976, p. 88).

¹¹¹ “The check is indispensable for understanding the operation of imagination, but it cannot be conceived outside of the latter’s synthetic activity. On the other hand, while this attests to its status as a ‘fact’, it does not mean that an adequate explanation of it has been provided. On the contrary, according to Fichte, the theoretical part is not capable of offering any explanation of this fact: it has deduced it as a condition of possibility for the functioning of intelligence, but precisely for this reason, intelligence itself cannot in turn be posited as a condition of possibility for that fact. The fundamental question that the practical part must therefore answer is the following: what are the conditions of possibility of the fact in question?” (Rametta 2012, p. 115).

limit thereto, though this it is obliged to do. [...] This interplay of the I, in and with itself, whereby it posits itself at once as finite and infinite – an interplay that consists, as it were, in self-conflict, and is self-reproducing, in that the I endeavors to unite the irreconcilable, now attempting to receive the infinite in the form of the finite, now, babbled, positing it again outside the latter, and in that very moment seeking once more to entertain it under the form of finitude – this is the power of *imagination*¹¹².

Now, we saw in the previous paragraph that toward the end of the theoretical part, Fichte introduces the “check” in order to explain the determination of the I without presupposing the action of some object external to the I itself – a thing-in-itself – as the cause of this determination. The existence of a check – the cause of which we are not permitted to inquire – ensures that the I is, first of all, capable of being determined (*Bestimmbar*), but that the determination itself is produced by the I through its own activity, and not by something external to it. In this way, Fichte’s idealism could be conceived as a form of realism, but as “a much more abstract form of realism than any of the other”¹¹³ since the particular determination that the I might assume is taken only as a “task” (*Aufgabe*). For this reason, it remains distinct from both qualitative realism, which explains the limitation of the I by referring to a thing-in-itself, and from quantitative realism, which merely presupposes the determination of the I without dogmatically tracing it back to the action of an object external to it, but is unable to *explain* this determination. Fichte’s idealism, by contrast, like quantitative realism, aims to take the limitation as something merely given to the I, rather than caused by something external to it. At the same time, it turns to the practical part in order to show that the limitation, and thus the determination, of the I is produced by a *real activity* of the I itself. However, even though the theoretical part cannot properly explain the existence of a check, its task is nonetheless to show that there are *ideal* conditions of possibility, *within* the I itself, without which the check could not occur. As the philosopher writes,

The check (unposited by the positing I) occurs to the I insofar as it is active, and is thus only a check insofar as there is activity in the I; its possibility is conditional upon the I’s activity: no activity of the I, no check. Conversely, the activity of the I’s own self-determining would be conditioned by the check: no check, no self-determination¹¹⁴.

In the theoretical part, Fichte confines himself to showing that the check cannot occur without some form of active self-determination on the part of the I – otherwise, one would fall back into

¹¹² *GA*, I,2, 358-359.

¹¹³ *GA*, I,2, 355.

¹¹⁴ *GA*, I,2, 356.

quantitative realism, which simply takes limitation as a given without grounding it in the I itself. That said, the theoretical part does not yet clarify neither what this activity consists in, neither what the “check” actually is. This will emerge in the practical part through the doctrine of the “striving” (*Streben*)¹¹⁵. What matters to Fichte at this point, however, regardless of the particular determination that the I’s activity and the check may assume, is to show how activity and passivity, infinity and limitation, are necessarily bound together, such that neither can cancel the other.

The point is in fact to show that, on the one hand, there can be no check without a positing activity on the part of the I – since otherwise, the check would have nothing to oppose itself to – but, on the other hand, there can likewise be no positing activity without a check, since without it there would be no possibility of determining the I, and thus no finite consciousness. This movement embodies what Fichte also calls the law of the “mediacy of positing” (*Mittelbarkeit des Setzens*), which sounds as follows: “no subject, no object; no object, no subject”, and which “is thus the ground of the essential opposition of I and Not-I, and thereby of all reality, either of the Not-I or the I”¹¹⁶.

The law of the mediacy of positing thus tells us that the positing of one of the opposites – the I or the Not-I – always entails the positing of the other as well. However, once it has been established that the existence of finite consciousness is determined by its struggle between these two opposites – between the I’s positing of its own absoluteness and the positing of a check as opposed to it – what remains to be shown is how these opposites can coexist simultaneously *within* finite consciousness, that is, within the I as intelligence. The task of holding both opposites together is assigned by Fichte, as we have already seen, to the faculty of imagination. The latter is conceived as a faculty “that wavers in the middle between determination and non-determination, between finite and infinite; and hence it does indeed determine $A + B$ *simultaneously* through the determinate A, and also through the indeterminate B, which is that very synthesis of imagination of which we were speaking just now”¹¹⁷.

As in Kant, imagination is in Fichte likewise intimately connected with a temporal dimension. “For mere pure reason, everything is simultaneous”, the philosopher claims, “only for imagination is there such a thing as time”¹¹⁸. Indeed, the only way to hold opposites together without allowing them to cancel each other out is to *unfold* them in time – that is, to retain one until the other emerges. It is precisely the dimension of temporality that enables Fichte to conceive the synthesis of opposites in a coherent and effective manner. In other words, imagination allows us to conceive not that an object

¹¹⁵ “Even if Fichte has succeeded in demonstrating the necessity of the *Anstoß* for the possibility of any consciousness, whether of “external objects” or of oneself, more remains to be said concerning precisely how such a determinate ‘check’ or ‘impulse’ presents itself to the I and concerning the sort of evidence that can be cited in support of the claim that such an *Anstoß* actually does occur. These questions are directly answered in the third, ‘practical’ part of the *Grundlage*” (Breazeale 1995, p. 93).

¹¹⁶ *GA*, I,2, 332-333.

¹¹⁷ *GA*, I,2, 360 (transl. Modified).

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

A can be both B and C *at the same time*, but that A can wave between B and C – taking on determination A at one moment and determination B at another – while still preserving the non-actualized determination from disappearing entirely.

Now, the deduction of the imagination constitutes a pivotal point of the entire *Grundlage*, as it is through its function that all the oppositions developed over the course of the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* finally reconciled. This faculty enables the I to be conceived both as infinite – that is, as absolute and unlimited self-positing – and as finite, that is, as an activity thrust back upon itself by the resistance of the Not-I. Imagination makes it possible to conceive the I as constituted by both of these movements, without one negating the other.

In this way, according to Fichte, the proposition with which the entire theoretical part began—namely, “The I posits itself as determined by the Not-I” – would be entirely exhausted, along with all the contradictions it contains. The philosopher would have shown, on the one hand, that the I can posit itself only insofar as it is determined by the Not-I, since, according to the law of the “mediating of positing” there can be no subject without an object. At the same time, he would have demonstrated that which limits the I is nothing other than “its own product”, since, according to the same law, there can be no object without a subject¹¹⁹. This means that the check is not something merely imposed on the I by a particular action of an external object – which the I could not itself posit – but rather consists in the *mere limitation of the I in its activity*, or, as Breazeale puts it, “the original presence to consciousness of *etwas überhaupt*”¹²⁰. In this way, the I posits itself as *determinable*, but the *specific determination* it receives is not imposed upon it from without; rather, it is the result of a free act of the I itself, thus showing that activity and passivity, the infinite and the finite, can only arise reciprocally. As Fichte writes, what we deduce is “neither a Not-I present apart from the I, nor even a determination present within the I, but merely the requirement for a determination to be undertaken within it by the I as such, or the *mere determinability* of the I”¹²¹.

Now, however, if Fichte’s aim in this section is to deduce the entirety of the structures of theoretical knowledge, the argument cannot be reduced to the deduction of the faculty of imagination alone. With this deduction, the first series of the theoretical part comes to an end – that is, the part in

¹¹⁹ “The principle set at the head of the entire theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre*: the self posits itself as determined by the not-self is completely exhausted, and all the contradictions it harbored have been overcome. The I cannot posit itself otherwise than as determined by the Not-I (no object, no subject). To that extent it posits itself as determined. At the same time it posits itself also as determinant; for the limiting factor in the not-self is its own product (no subject, no object)” (GA, I,2, 362).

¹²⁰ Breazeale 1995, p. 89. See also Haag 2019b, p. 119: “The check is, consequently, not contributing in any way to the content of the boundary or either the I or the Not-I that are opposed at this very boundary. (Hence, it would be a mistake to equate the check with an abstracted version of a Kantian thing-in-itself.) The check only serves as an incentive for the I to determine itself and thus to establish a boundary between the I and the Not-I within itself, in that way conferring reality both to the I and the Not-I”.

¹²¹ GA, I,2, 355.

which, starting from a principle, we gradually uncovered latent oppositions and attempted to synthesize them. Yet all operations carried out prior to the deduction of imagination were merely *hypothetical*, as they had not been confirmed by any actual fact. In those cases, we produced both the rules of reflection and the very objects of reflection, which remained purely ideal. It was only the deduction of imagination itself that showed how the preceding reflections, and thus the objects they produced, were validated through their intersection with a real fact of the mind. The objects of the second series, inaugurated by the deduction of the imagination, “will not first be *brought forth* [hervorgebracht] by that same reflection, but simply *elevated into consciousness* [zum Bewußtseyn erhoben]”¹²². For this reason, these will no longer be mere hypotheses awaiting confirmation; rather, to each object henceforth deduced, a *reality* will necessarily be attributed, insofar as they are deduced directly from the activity of the imagination itself, understood as a real fact. Moreover, in this way, it would be demonstrated not only that the imagination exists as a real fact, but also that it functions as the guarantor of the epistemic validity of the structures of our mind – contrary to what Maimon claimed. In particular, what can be deduced from the function of the imagination are the other faculties, such as intuition, the understanding, and reason. Let us examine briefly how.

Fichte invites us to imagine the activity of the I as a straight line beginning at point A and extending infinitely, passing through points B, C, and so on. However, the impact suffered by this activity halts it – let us say – at point C, redirecting it back toward A. The segment AC thus entails both the activity and passivity of the I: the I can be repelled at C (passivity) only if there was an initial activity directed toward C (activity), thereby illustrating the synthesis of the oppositions mentioned above. Moreover, the activity arrested at C gives rise within the I to a particular *intuition*. This intuition, therefore, is not, as Kant would have it, the mere form of a purely passive faculty, but rather the result of a synthesis between the spontaneous activity of the I and its “blockage” caused by the check. As Fichte puts in, “In virtue of the determination through reciprocity, the intuited, too, is such only under a certain condition. Failing the condition, it would not be an intuited item, but an absolutely posited one, a thing-in-itself: an absolute passivity, as the counterpart of an absolute activity”¹²³.

However, the activity redirected at C – that is, the intuition – must somehow be fixed, so that it does not continue to reproduce itself endlessly, from C to A and then again from A to C, thereby nullifying the possibility of determining anything at C as something intuited. The faculty that fixes the activity at C, according to Fichte, is *reason*. At the same time, it is also necessary that this activity not only be fixed at C, but *preserved* over time, such that it does not vanish instantaneously after

¹²² GA, I,2, 364.

¹²³ GA, I,2, 378.

being fixed. The faculty that maintains intuition at C over time is the *understanding*¹²⁴. For this reason, although the understanding – unlike imagination – is an “inactive” faculty, insofar as it merely serves as a receptacle for what the imagination produces, Fichte nonetheless writes that “[i]n understanding alone (albeit first through the power of imagination) there *is* reality; it is the faculty of the *actual*; the ideal first becomes real therein”¹²⁵.

By preversing the products of imagination, the understanding assigns them reality. This reality thus emerges as a product of our own cognitive faculties, rather than as something merely “found” outside of us. Reality, in this context, is not something we simply and passively “encounter”, rather, it is something we ourselves contribute to producing – through the activity of imagination, its stabilization via reason, and its preservation by the understanding. It is only ordinary consciousness – that is, consciousness which has not yet ascended to the level of philosophical reflection – that “hypostatizes” the reality of objects, failing to recognize their subjective and genetic origin. Furthermore, common consciousness is also that which, as Fichte observes, even when acknowledging the role of imagination in the construction of objects, would still reduce such construction to mere illusion, as Maimon had done. Philosophical reflection, by contrast, allows us: (1) to recognize the function of imagination as an indispensable moment in the process of object constitution; (2) to acknowledge this act of constitution as a legitimate source of objectivity, not of mere illusion.

As Haag emphasizes in a recent article, Fichte’s solution to Maimon’s skepticism can be regarded as valid only if, beyond demonstrating the necessary dependence of the object on the subject, it also provides the conditions of possibility for thinking *objectivity as such*, without reducing it entirely to an arbitrary and absolute creation of the subject¹²⁶. Put differently: the demonstration of the necessity of applying a priori forms to objects must, at the same time, preserve the distinction between subject and object, without allowing the latter to collapse entirely into the former. Without claiming to exhaust the complexity of the issue here, I would like to outline the contours of Fichte’s argument.

As we have seen, for Fichte, imagination is a necessary function of the mind, insofar as it enables finite consciousness to sustain its own limitation while simultaneously revealing that every object is, in fact, an object *for* the I. In this respect, Maimon’s skepticism would appear to amount to a form of dogmatism, since in doubting the applicability of the categories to objects, it continues to

¹²⁴ “The argument Fichte employs to demonstrate that this is the proper activity of the understanding is primarily etymological in nature. He explains that the faculty he is seeking must ensure that the activity at point C is, as he puts it, “arrested, settled, as it were, or brought to a stand”. The faculty that should bring to a stand (*verständigen*) the activity is the understanding (*Verstand*)” (see *GA*, I,2, 374).

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁶ See Haag 2019b.

posit objects as external to the domain of consciousness. Fichte, by contrast, insists that the object cannot be thought independently of the relation that binds it to the subject, and that it can therefore only exist *in* and *for* the subject, by way of the mediating function of imagination. In other words, there would be no checked activity in C, and thus no *intuition*, without a self-positing activity of the I toward C. As Breazeale writes, “the *Wissenschaftslehre* [does not] accept the sharp, Kantian dichotomy between intuiting and thinking. Instead, Fichte purports to be able to explain objective experience [...] entirely in terms of the *activity* of the I”¹²⁷. This means that intuition does not have a different origin from the understanding, nor is it a faculty entirely heterogeneous to it. As we have seen, both are in fact generated by the activity of the imagination. The intuiting I is therefore not purely passive: “*the I is to posit itself as intuiting*; for nothing belongs to the I, save insofar as it attributes the same to itself”¹²⁸. This implies that the I is *legitimized* to transfer its own categories – above all, that of reality – to the intuited object itself. The object which is thought by the understanding is, in fact, nothing other than the intuition preserved at point C and generated through the oscillatory movement of the imagination. As Fichte claims, “[t]he intuited, as such, is produced”¹²⁹.

At the same time, for Fichte, the production of an intuited content as such is not a conscious activity of the I, nor is it an act that we can freely perform or withhold through deliberative choice. Consciousness, in fact, always entails some form of the I’s reflection upon itself – a folding back of activity onto itself. However, the original activity that proceeds from point A to point C, and is checked at C in such a way as to generate the intuited object, is not yet a reflected activity. The production of the intuited is therefore a process of which the I is not originally conscious, and which it can reconstruct in its genesis only through philosophical reflection.

In a revealing passage from his *Lectures on Logic and Metaphysics* of 1797, Fichte writes:

Maimon objects that the Kantian philosophy possesses no reality, for he asks, how do we come to apply concepts to objects a priori? He claims that in mathematics we can grasp the reality of our concepts, because we construct them ourselves. It is easy to see how this accords with the laws of the mind. But just as it is in mathematics, so is it with our entire *Weltanschauung*; the only difference is that one is not conscious of one’s constructive activity in constructing the world, since this is something that occurs necessarily and not with freedom. Subsequently, however, once one has obtained a much firmer footing, one can indeed summon this I to consciousness. This is the business of philosophy and of every transcendental philosopher: i.e., to pay attention to how objects come into

¹²⁷ Breazeale 2013, p. 60.

¹²⁸ *GA*, I,2, 371.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

being. This is possible only during the course of speculation, outside of which the philosopher, like every other human being, loses himself in objects¹³⁰.

In this passage, Fichte argues that Maimon was mistaken in positing a fundamental difference between mathematical objects and empirical objects with regard to the possibility of their cognition. According to Fichte, empirical objects too are constructed by the I; the only difference lies in the mode of construction: while mathematical objects are produced through a free act of the I, the construction of empirical objects occurs unconsciously and by necessity. Because we are not aware of this unconscious, necessary synthesis, we mistakenly regard empirical objects as external, as independent things-in-themselves. This explains why, in ordinary experience, we are compelled to believe in the mind-independent existence of the empirical world, since we remain unaware of the generative role played by the I in structuring that very world.

Now, according to Fichte, this dynamic not only *legitimizes* the application of the categories to objects given in intuition, but also *compels* it. Fichte's commitment to the necessarily systematic character of our cognitive structures implies that no single faculty can operate in isolation from the others. In this sense, imagination exists and can carry out its functions only insofar as intuition, the understanding, and reason likewise fulfill their respective roles. Accordingly, the understanding must preserve intuition through time; otherwise, even the oscillatory movement of imagination would fail to produce reality – and finite consciousness itself would not exist¹³¹. Thus, Fichte's account suggests that the *systematicity* of our cognitive faculties is not merely a formal structural feature of the mind, but is in fact *a condition of the very possibility of experience*. The applicability of the categories to intuition is not an extrinsic imposition, but follows necessarily from the internal dynamics of consciousness itself. As I have tried to show, this is a clear indication that, for Fichte, the problem of systematicity – how different cognitive faculties form a coherent whole – is intimately connected with the problem of applicability – how concepts are legitimately applied to objects of experience.

¹³⁰ *GA*, IV,1, 212-213. See also *GA*, I,6, 44-45: "All our thinking is schematization, i.e. constructing, limiting and shaping a foundation that has to be presupposed by our mind in thinking. (Schema.) In geometry, e.g., by tracing a triangle, a circle, and the like, empty space is limited in a certain way; and this is universally recognized and conceded. But this construction of the object a priori holds true not only for geometry; it holds true for all of our thinking, including what we call 'experience'. The difference is merely this: that in the first case we can immediately become conscious of this act of construction; in the second case, however, we can infer it only by means of transcendental philosophy".

¹³¹ "The Principle of Reciprocal Determination, as we have noted, applies to *all* of the original actions of the I, and hence to all of the products of the same. Our intuitions of 'external' objects, as well as our thinking about and forming judgments concerning such objects are described in the *Wissenschaftslehre* as actions, which, at every step of the way, are determined a priori by the Principle of Reciprocal Determination or Law of Reflective Opposition. Since all the original (necessary) acts of the mind are related to one another according to this principle, we are unable to think *any* of them as determinate without also thinking of all of the others as what is determinable in this case. Intuiting is therefore *always* determined by thinking just as thinking is always determined by intuition" (Breazeale 2014, p. 61).

The very act of cognition presupposes both, and their unity is grounded in the spontaneous and necessary activity of the I.

Now, even once Fichte's argument against Maimon's doubt regarding the applicability of the categories to objects has been laid out, one must still ask whether the philosopher possesses the resources to avoid falling into a form of solipsistic idealism. I would argue that the answer is yes, although the argument developed in the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* remains only partial and will need to be reinforced in the practical part.

As for the theoretical part, the solution once again lies in showing how there is a relation of mutual determination between the intuiting subject and the intuited object – such that neither can be given independently of the other. In this regard, Fichte writes that “[t]hey are mutually related as activity and passivity (reality and negation), and hence are united through interdetermination. No intuited, no intuiting, and vice versa. Moreover, if and insofar as an intuited is posited, there is also a positing of an intuiting, and vice versa”¹³².

The specific relation of interdependence between the intuiting and the intuited – and therefore between subject and object – is examined in Section V and following of the “Deduction of Representation”. According to Fichte, the possibility for the intuiting subject to intuit something determinate arises from the reciprocal relation of two activities inherent within the subject itself. The first is an *objective activity*, that is, a determinate activity. The second is a *pure* or *absolute activity*, that is, an activity that is not limited. This latter constitutes the real ground of the former, since without pure activity there could be no objective activity. Conversely, the first constitutes the ideal ground of the second, insofar as activity can become conscious of itself only as *determinate* activity, and therefore as objective¹³³.

Fichte clarifies that, pure activity can become objective activity only by means of a limitation – that is, only insofar as it encounters a *passivity*. Passivity becomes what we properly call the object of intuition, and it is determined by the understanding as something *necessary*. At the same time, passivity can be intuited only as the impossibility of the opposite action, which, insofar as it is not necessary, must be a *free* action. The latter is conceived as “intuited by imagination as a wavering of imagination itself between performance and nonperformance of one and the same act; between apprehension and non apprehension of one and the same object in understanding; which is apprehended in the understanding as *possibility*”¹³⁴. The synthesis of these two aspects is achieved by showing how both self-affection (freedom) and affection from without (necessity) are mutually

¹³² *GA*, I,2, 377.

¹³³ “The interdetermination is thus generating the condition under which the intuiting becomes as such objective, representational activity (but not object or represented!)” (Haag 2019b, p. 123).

¹³⁴ *GA*, I,2, 378.

determined: the intuition of an object is conditioned by the free activity of the I and by its necessary encounter with a passivity. This also establishes a reciprocal relation *within* the intuited object itself: “[t]he thing in and for itself is an object of intuition under a condition of reciprocal action. Insofar as the intuiting is active, the intuited is passive; and insofar as the intuited, which to that extent is a thing-in-itself, is active, the intuiting is passive. Moreover, insofar as the intuiting is active, it is not passive, and vice versa; and so with the intuited”¹³⁵.

In other words, intuition itself can be determined as either active or passive depending on the determination of the intuiting subject. If the intuiting subject is active, then the intuited is conceived as passive; if the intuiting subject is passive, the intuited is conceived as active. These demonstrations allow Fichte, once again, to show that the subject’s free activity is not expressed in a wholly arbitrary manner, since both the intuiting subject and the intuited object are, at once, active and passive. However, Fichte must also show that a criterion exists by which to distinguish, within intuition itself, between these two terms. Put differently: if this relation were entirely symmetrical, it would be wholly indifferent which of the two, in a given relation, is the intuiting subject and which the intuited object, thereby preventing a clear distinction between subject and object¹³⁶.

Fichte’s proposed solution to this problem is presented in the final sections of the “Deduction of the Representation”, where he deduces our capacity of “judging”. Here, Fichte first shows that, in order for an object of intuition to be determined, it must become an object of thought. Intuition, as such, always refers to objects in general, never to determinate objects. In this sense, intuition is directed indifferently toward A or toward -A, and the imagination allows it to oscillate between the two terms without determining either one. However, in order to know – and thus to determine – an object, it is necessary that either A or -A be determined. The faculty that enables us to determine A or -A is judgment, which is “the capacity, free till now, of reflecting upon objects already posited in understanding, or of abstracting from them, and, on the strength of this reflection or abstraction, of positing these objects more determinately in understanding”¹³⁷. In other words, the judgement allows us to reflect upon something that has already been posited (for example, A), or to abstract from it – thereby enabling a more precise determination of what had been fixed in the understanding.

¹³⁵ GA, I,2, 379.

¹³⁶ “A→C must contain the intuiting subject, which itself is to be intuited and determined. C→A contains the intuited object, which likewise is to be intuited and determined. Since both acts of intuition – the intuition of the intuiting subject and of the intuited object – occur only through one another in reciprocal alternation, it follows that the intuiting subject cannot be determined ‘through itself’. The I is unable to distinguish itself, as the intuiting subject, from the Not-I as the intuited object. It can determine the intuiting A→C *as such* only if it limits this activity – otherwise proceeding to infinity – through an act of absolute spontaneity at point C. Likewise, it can determine the intuited object only by distinguishing the activity C→A from that which is reflected from infinity back into C. In a literal sense, it can thus be said that the entire line – from the intuiting to the intuited – is equally occupied, such that an explicit separation of the one from the other is not possible” (Metz, 1991, p. 337).

¹³⁷ GA, I,2, 381.

In this way, Fichte arrives at a demonstration of the very faculty he himself had employed in carrying out his deductions in the theoretical part, thus also marking the conclusion of the latter. As Rametta writes, “at this point, we are approaching the end of our deduction: by pushing our capacity for abstraction to its outermost limits, we arrive at a point beyond which abstraction is no longer possible”¹³⁸. This point is none other than ourselves as thinking subjects. Judgment is the faculty that, throughout the course of the deduction, has enabled the progressive reflection upon and abstraction from given objects, thereby determining them ever more accurately. Through this very process, the deduction has now encountered the faculty that made it possible in the first place – namely, judgment – thus rendering any further abstraction from it impossible. Indeed, to attempt to abstract from judgment would be to re-enact the very activity from which one seeks to abstract.

I argue that this moment not only marks the conclusion of the theoretical part, but also allows Fichte to more precisely determine the relationship between subject and object by breaking its symmetry. Subject and object do indeed stand in a relation of mutual determination; yet within this relation, the subject retains a position of primacy, by virtue of its capacity to abstract from the object, but not from itself:

If everything objective is eliminated, we are left at least with what *determines itself*, and is *determined by itself*, the I or subject. Subject and object are so far determined by each other, that the one is absolutely excluded by the other. If the I determines itself merely, it determines nothing beyond itself, and if it determines something beyond itself, it does not determine merely itself. But the I is now determined as that which remains over, after all objects have been eliminated by the absolute power of abstraction; and the Not-I as that from which abstraction can be made by this same abstractive power: and thus we now have a firm point of distinction between object and subject¹³⁹.

Let it be clear: the subject that remains when we abstract from all objects is not the empirical subject, which is always determined by its relation to the object, but rather the *absolute subject* of the first principle, or reason as such¹⁴⁰. Reason, in fact, encompasses within itself both subject and object as two moments that mutually determine one another, and which can exist only by virtue of this reciprocal relation. However, our capacity to grasp the absolute I through an act of reflection always presupposes the original connection between empirical subject and empirical object. As we have seen,

¹³⁸ Rametta 2012, p. 113

¹³⁹ *GA*, I,2, 382-383.

¹⁴⁰ This is explicitly clarified by Fichte in a letter to Jacobi, in which the philosopher seeks to defend himself against the accusations of nihilism that had been directed at him: “My *absolute I* is obviously not the *individual*, though this is how of fended courtiers and irate philosophers have interpreted me, in order that they may falsely attribute to me the disgraceful theory of practical egoism. Instead, *the individual must be deduced from the absolute I*, and the *Wissenschaftslehre* will immediately proceed to such a deduction in conjunction with its treatment of natural rights” (*GA*, III,2 392).

it is only by virtue of the check that the subject's activity (from A to C) can reflect upon itself and become properly self-conscious, thereby exercising its transcendental reflection. Even the possibility of abstraction – from the object, at the philosophical level – is made possible in the first place by the existence of the object itself, as *that from which* one may abstract. If the object were completely identical with the subject – that is, if it were completely *dissolved* in the subject – then it would not be possible to abstract from the object without simultaneously abstracting from the subject. The very possibility of such abstraction thus marks the distinction between the two terms. At the same time, if it is possible to abstract from the object, this implies that the object itself must fall within the sphere of the I's activity, and is not something external to it; otherwise, we could not abstract from something over which we have no grasp¹⁴¹.

The “Deduction of the Representation” thus enabled Fichte to: (1) deduce the very fact that Reinhold had taken as the foundational principle of his own philosophy, thereby resolving the problem of the systematicity of the mind's theoretical faculties; and (2) show how the imagination, in its oscillating movement between subject and object, allows for the necessary determination of the object through a subjective activity, while nevertheless preserving the object as something existing as distinguished from the subject. In this way, the synthesis of the two contradictory propositions that were still present in the statement from which the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* had originated would have been achieved – namely, “The Not-I determines (actively) the I” and “The I determines itself (with absolute activity)”. The synthesis would consist in the I's *self-determination* to be *both determining and determined* in relation to the Not-I, with the imagination serving the role of holding together these opposites.

However, this does not exhaust the task of the *Grundlage* as a whole, nor, consequently, can one claim to have fully accomplished the task of demonstrating both the applicability of the categories to objects and the irreducibility of these objects to a merely subjective project of production. For even if it has been shown that the subject cannot be posited independently of its relation to the object, one must still recall that, in the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the arguments supporting this demonstration ultimately rest upon the assumption of a fact that has not itself been deduced – namely, the *Anstoß*. A fully adequate argument capable of effectively responding to Maimon's doubt must therefore also address the explanation of this fact, which has thus far only been presupposed.

The third part of the *Grundlage*, that is, the practical part, is devoted precisely to the justification of that *Anstoß*, which the theoretical part had merely posited as a given. Only in this way

¹⁴¹ I believe Metz summarizes this problem very clearly, when he writes: “We distinguish ourselves from the object and are aware of this distinction; but in order to be aware of it, the object must also be present in consciousness and synthesized with it – otherwise, the difference between the two could not be known. That is to say, the I must posit the object absolutely for itself – and must always already have posited it (productivity, first part of §4) – in order to be able, likewise absolutely, to separate itself from it and oppose itself to it (second part of §4)” (Metz 1991, p. 349).

can the original limitation of the I be demonstrated, thus avoiding accusations of dogmatic idealism. As we have seen, this *Anstoß* was introduced to account for the limitation of the I, and consequently, for the theoretical structures that constitute finite intelligence. However, the very fact that the *Anstoß* had to ground the theoretical part made it impossible to demonstrate how, conversely, the theoretical part could ground the *Anstoß*.

Now, just as the aim of the theoretical part was to unify the oppositions not yet synthesized in the proposition “The I posits itself as determined by the Not-I”, the goal of the practical part is to unify the oppositions still present in the proposition “The I posits itself as determining the Not-I”. Fichte immediately specifies, however, that he will adopt a shorter – though by no means less rigorous – method than that used in the theoretical part: rather than progressively identifying all the remaining antitheses within the proposition, the proposition will be taken as the formulation of a “fundamental antithesis” (*Haupt-Antithese*) constituted by the opposition between the I conceived as intelligence (or finite I) and the absolute and infinite I.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify the origin of this opposition, and thus to explain why, ultimately, two “distinct” I are operative in the proposition of the practical part. Put concisely: if the I is to posit itself as determining the Not-I, it must also posit itself in such a way that it can determine the Not-I without entirely nullifying it. For if the Not-I were to be completely absorbed into the I, there would be no check upon the I, and hence no finite consciousness. On the one hand, then, the I must posit itself as absolute and unlimited, as expressed in the first principle; on the other hand, it must posit itself in such a way as to preserve the finitude of consciousness deduced in the theoretical part. Hence, Fichte writes that “the absolute self and the intelligent I (if we may put it as though they consisted of two selves, though they can only constitute one) are not one and the same, but are opposed to each other; which contradicts the absolute identity of the self”¹⁴². This contradiction, as Fichte himself clarifies, does not involve two ontologically distinct I, but rather two different movements of self-positing of one and the same I: on the one hand, as absolute and unlimited; on the other, as finite and limited. The task, then, is to show how these two movements can coexist within the I without disintegrating the structure of the I itself – and thereby undermining its very existence. This is equivalent to showing how the I can simultaneously exercise causality over the Not-I – that is, *determine* it – and *not* exercise causality over the Not-I – that is, *be determined* by it. For without this latter moment, the Not-I would cease to exist altogether and be entirely absorbed into the I, thereby preventing the finite I from being an I at all. Now, the solution Fichte proposes to resolve this contradiction lies in *dynamizing* the very relation between the finite and the infinite I. As the philosopher puts in, since the absolute and the limited self-positing of the I “are not equal [*gleich*],

¹⁴² GA, I,2, 387.

we can only say that their equality is absolutely demanded: they *ought to be* [sollen] absolutely equal”¹⁴³.

In other words, the task is not to demonstrate that the activity of the I that posits itself absolutely is actually equal to the activity of the I that posits itself as limited – something which, as we have seen, is not possible. Rather, the aim is to show that they *ought to be* equal; that is, one of the two activities must be regarded as the ideal toward which the other strives in an effort to achieve equality with it.

Fichte thus introduces the concept of “striving” (*Streben*) precisely to illustrate how the I can simultaneously be the cause of the Not-I and yet not be its cause. *Streben* translates the absolute causality of the I posited in the first principle into the dynamic framework of the I as it appears in the third principle: in this latter case, the I’s causal activity is obstructed, or checked – it cannot posit itself absolutely, but is constantly pushed back, even though it never ceases to act. The possibility for the finite I to continue exercising its activity upon the Not-I, despite never being able to bring it to full and complete realization, is grounded precisely in the existence of the absolute I as something toward which the finite I must strive. The first thus constitutes the condition of possibility for the inexhaustibility of the striving of the finite I. It is at this level that the ideal nature of the absolute I is finally recovered: it necessarily exists, yet exists only *within finite consciousness* as the idea of the I’s complete identity with itself. In this way, any metaphysical interpretation of the first principle is decisively undermined¹⁴⁴.

Moreover, in this way Fichte would have succeeded in satisfying the third requirement that, in *Concerning the Concept*, he had established as a criterion for the scientific character of philosophy – namely, its completeness. As we have seen, the completeness of philosophy rests on its circularity, that is, on the identity between the beginning and the end of the system. The first principle of philosophy – the absolute identity of the I with itself – is recovered in the *Grundlage* at the conclusion of the system in the form of an idea that the finite I must strive to realize, through its attempt to render the Not-I increasingly conformable to itself. This would confirm that the I posited at the beginning of

¹⁴³ *GA*, I,2, 396.

¹⁴⁴ As we have seen, Maimon too conceived of the divine understanding in terms of a mere idea. However, in that context, I noted that Maimon was not entirely immune to charges of dogmatism. Why, then, can the same not be said of Fichte? I shall return to this question in section 3.1.4, but for it is sufficient to highlight this: I believe the crucial difference lies in the distinct epistemic functions attributed to the idea of God and the idea of the absolute I. In Maimon’s case, the idea of the divine understanding served to guarantee the existence of a system of rational rules for the generation of objects – namely, differentials – whose complete knowledge remained inaccessible to us. This involved the positing of a determinate rational “world,” conceived as the foundation of the sensible world, whose existence had to be secured by an infinite understanding and which remained beyond the full grasp of our finite cognitive faculties. By contrast, in Fichte’s philosophy, the rational “world” represented by the absolute I is not a world whose existence is presupposed and guaranteed by a divine intelligence, but rather a world that *we ourselves* must create through the inexhaustible exercise of our freedom. See e.g. Pareyson 1976, p. 88.

the system is not merely a hypothetical construct devised by the philosopher, but a real principle operative within our consciousness.

Through the *Streben*, the I therefore *exerts* causality upon the Not-I insofar as it endeavors to reclaim it within its own activity; and *it does not exert* causality upon the Not-I, insofar as this activity is perpetually hindered by the opposition of the Not-I itself. In this way, the *Streben* resolves the fundamental antithesis between the finite I and the infinite I contained in the proposition of the practical part. What matters the most to Fichte, however, is to show: (1) that for the finite I, this movement is a necessary one – it is, in fact, “fully binding in force [*rechtskräftig*], for it is posited by the absolute positing of the I”¹⁴⁵; and (2) that the I’s striving could not arise at all without an object that stands in opposition to it. As he writes:

The result of our inquiry so far is therefore as follows: *in relation to a possible object*, the pure self-reverting activity of the self is a *striving*, and as shown earlier, *an infinite striving* at that. This boundless striving, carried to infinity, is the *condition of the possibility of any object whatsoever*: no striving, no object¹⁴⁶.

Streben, in this real movement of the I’s self-positing, thus also becomes the condition of possibility for the object – and, by extension, for the representational activity of the intelligent I. Indeed, if there were no object, there would be no possibility of limiting the absolute activity of the I, and hence no *Streben*. It is for this reason that, as I previously suggested, the I’s practical faculty constitutes the *real* condition of possibility for its theoretical faculty: it is only the I’s self-positing movement, continually “obstructed”, that makes it aware of the presence of an object standing against it, thereby enabling the theoretical faculties to represent and determine the object itself.

Fichte further notes that for the I not only to posit itself (ontological dimension), but also to *know* itself in the very act of self-positing (epistemic dimension), it must presuppose an internal “division” between the absolute I and the finite I, and the corresponding striving of the latter to reach the former. The absolute I, precisely insofar as it posits itself in its absoluteness, cannot *reflect* upon itself, and therefore cannot attain self-consciousness in any proper sense. To illustrate this, Fichte invokes the example of divine self-consciousness. The latter he argues, cannot be explained, since in God there is no distinction between the act of *reflection* and *what is being reflected upon*. God’s creative act manifests and unfolds without any external constraint, and for this very reason, it cannot turn back upon itself to produce genuine reflection. In the case of the I, however, the reflective

¹⁴⁵ *GA*, I,2, 397.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

dimension of consciousness is necessarily integrated into its very essence; otherwise, an I could not be an I – that is to say, it could not be a consciousness at all.

The self-positing of the I thus entails the complementary interaction of two movements: a centrifugal one, through which the I projects itself infinitely outward, positing itself beyond itself without ever returning; and a centripetal one, in which this initial movement is redirected back, drawing the I toward itself. It is within this dynamic that what Fichte calls the “reiteration of positing” (*Wiederholung des Setzens*) takes place:

The I posits itself absolutely, and is thereby complete in itself and closed to any impression from without. But if it is to be an I, it must also posit itself as self-positing; and by this new positing, relative to an original positing, it opens itself, if I may so put it, to external influences; simply by this reiteration of positing, it concedes the possibility that there might also be something within it that is not actually posited by itself. Both types of positing are conditions for an operation of the Not-I; without the first, there would be no activity of the self to undergo limitation; without the second, this activity would not be limited for the I, and the latter would be unable to posit itself as limited. Thus the I, as such, is initially in a state of reciprocity with itself, and only so does an external influence upon it become possible. By this, too, we have at last discovered the point of union we were seeking between the absolute, the practical and the intellectual characters of the I¹⁴⁷.

I believe this passage is crucial for the coherence of the entire *Grundlage*, as Fichte himself points out at the end of the quotation. Fichte emphasizes that for the I to truly be an I, it must posit itself *as* an I – that is, it must engage in an act of self-reflection. This implies that the initial act of positing the I must be followed by a second positing that takes the first as its object, thereby bringing the first to consciousness. Yet, it is precisely this second act of positing that makes the I “open” to external influence¹⁴⁸. For the second positing to take the first as its object, there must be a point (the point C we discussed earlier) where the initial positing reverses course and reflects upon itself. However, this reversal can only occur if at point C the “collision” occurs that underpins the entire theoretical framework. In doing so, the unity of the absolute, practical, and intelligent features of the I is achieved – demonstrating that the very structure of the I depends on an influence from outside itself in order for it to become the object of its own reflection.

¹⁴⁷ GA, I,2, 409.

¹⁴⁸ As Ivaldo claims, “‘Reiteration of positing’ by no means signifies a duplication of the fundamental principle; nor does it introduce ambiguity or change into reason. Rather, it means that pure reason, as a ‘spiritual being,’ is at once complete *and* open; as a living act of initiating, it enables that relation which constitutes knowledge itself – without being relativized in its fundamental law or giving up its ‘essential being’. Thus, self-positing and self-opening are by no means separate in the spiritual act, in consciousness” (Ivaldo 2019, p. 176).

However, at this point a clarification is required. The reiteration of positing does not allow us to deduce, strictly speaking, the *reality* of the *Anstoß*. Fichte himself in fact states that, through it, we do not demonstrate *that* the *Anstoß* actually occurs, but only that it *must* occur¹⁴⁹. In other words, the reiteration of positing is merely the *ideal* ground of the occurrence of the *Anstoß*, which is rooted in the reflective nature of the I itself. At the same time, the *Anstoß* constitutes the *real* ground of the I's reflection, since only through its actual occurrence can the I effectively reflect upon itself.

In this way, Fichte would have also thereby demonstrated that “[t]he *Wissenschaftslehre* is [...] *realistic*”, insofar as it “shows that the consciousness of finite creatures is utterly inexplicable, save on the presumption of a force existing independently of them, and wholly opposed to them, on which they are dependent in respect of their empirical existence”¹⁵⁰. As I have already suggested, it thus becomes entirely clear that Fichte's response to skepticism – and in particular to Maimon's form of skepticism – requires the collaboration of both the theoretical and the practical parts of the *Wissenschaftslehre*¹⁵¹. On the one hand, the theoretical part addresses the problem of the applicability of the forms to objects of experience, demonstrating that the objects of experience are themselves *created* by the oscillating movement of the imagination and stabilized by reason within the understanding. In this way, Kant's original separation between forms and objects is eliminated, and it is no longer necessary to explain how the two terms might be brought into unity. On the other hand, it was equally necessary to show that the imagination produces these objects of experience only *insofar as they are represented objects*. Fichte writes in this regard that “according to the necessary law of representation, the specific determinations of the represented, *as* represented, are caused by the intelligent I”¹⁵². Fichte is thus clear in stating that the causality of the intelligent I, that is, of the finite I as representing subject, is exercised solely over the determinations of the objects *qua* representations but it cannot *deduce* the reality the *Anstoß*, which remains entirely indeterminate from a theoretical standpoint.

The reiteration of positing explains that the reflexive structure of the I is the condition of *possibility* for its encounter with the non-I. The reality of this encounter, however, is explained by the *practical* faculty of the *Streben*: insofar as the activity of the I is a *limited* activity, it is conditioned by an actual “check” of the not-I that restricts it. Yet this non-I, at the same time, exists solely by virtue of the I's *Streben* to posit itself. As Fichte writes in the *Sittenlehre*:

¹⁴⁹ See *GA*, I,2, 408.

¹⁵⁰ *GA*, I,2, 411.

¹⁵¹ For this reason, I believe that Haag's interpretation in Haag 2019b, while correct with regard to Fichte's justification of the distinction between subject and object in the section on the “Deduction of Representation,” remains necessarily incomplete if not supplemented by an analysis of the practical part.

¹⁵² *GA*, I,2, 389.

Only through such a conception of the matter as has just been given is the absoluteness of the I preserved as its essential character. Our consciousness originates in the immediate awareness of our activity, and only by means of this do we subsequently find ourselves to be affected. It is not the non-I that acts upon the I, as the matter has usually been regarded, but rather the reverse.

It is not the non-I that penetrates into the I, but the I that goes out into the non-I, as we are compelled to apprehend this relation through sensible intuition. From a transcendental point of view, however, it must be expressed in this way: we find ourselves as originally limited, not because our limitation contracted us [...] but rather because we expand our boundaries, and precisely in the act of expanding them. Furthermore, in order even to be able to go forth from itself, the I must be posited as overcoming resistance. In this way, once again, though in a higher sense, the primacy of reason, insofar as it is practical, is affirmed. Everything proceeds from action, and from the action of the I¹⁵³.

This passage shows much Fichte is careful in upholding the transcendental priority of the spontaneity of the I over its passivity, and of identity over difference. Fichte makes it clear, in fact, that the passivity of the I is nothing other than a limitation of its own activity. At the same time, however, this limitation necessarily entails a “check” that prevents the activity of the I from expanding without limit. The doctrines of *Streben* and of the reiteration of positing jointly demonstrate that the reflexive character of the I, and its tendency to posit itself, cannot exist without this check. At the same time, they clarify that the not-I is not to be understood as something absolutely independent of the I, as a *thing-in-itself* in the dogmatic sense. As the citation above makes clear, the latter would not exist at all without the infinite striving of the I to posit itself and to “expand its own boundaries”.

For these reasons, I do not agree with Beiser when he claims that Fichte’s strategy in responding to Maimon ultimately relies on what he calls an “extravagant transcendental idealism”, for, as Beiser puts it, “it seems that Fichte intends to defeat Maimon by a more radical idealism which makes the productive imagination responsible for not only the form but also the content of experience”¹⁵⁴. Beiser refers to this strategy as Fichte’s “first line of defense” against Maimon, which, in his view, ultimately proves ineffective. The “second line,” by contrast, would consist in the argument developed within the practical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which the scholar considers more compelling. However, it seems to me that in framing the issue this way, Beiser overlooks the fact that these two strategies are not in fact mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. It is precisely the argument developed in the practical part that grounds the demonstration in the theoretical part and prevents Fichte’s idealism from collapsing into an “extravagant transcendental

¹⁵³ *GA*, I,5, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Beiser 2003, p. 241.

idealism”¹⁵⁵. At the same time, however, the very existence of something external depends on the original striving of the I to posit itself absolutely. In this way, Fichte ultimately succeeds in unifying the practical and theoretical dimensions by showing their derivation from a single principle, unlike Kant, who had attempted only an external reconciliation after originally positing them as separate.

Fichte’s originality lies in having demonstrated the strict mutual interdependence of these two dimensions. Practical reason constitutes the real ground of theoretical reason, insofar as it is only through the I’s actual striving toward its own realization that it encounters the check upon which theoretical cognition is exercised. Yet, at the same time, theoretical reason constitutes the ideal ground of practical reason, insofar as the I’s real activity can be actualized only if actualized through the theoretical structures of consciousness – such as imagination – that allow for the oscillation of the I between finitude and infinity¹⁵⁶.

Now, the argument in the practical part does not conclude with the introduction of *Streben* and the reiteration of positing. However, for the purposes of this work, it will not be necessary to follow Fichte through the entirety of his argument. What needed to be shown was simply that, for Fichte, the emergence of a world as opposed to the subject – and thus the very origin of finite consciousness – cannot be demonstrated by theoretical means alone. It is only the original *practical* structure of the I, conceived as an unceasing striving toward the realization of its absolute autonomy, that reveals its own limit, and thereby gives rise to the encounter with a Not-I that stands in opposition to it. For this reason, the *Wissenschaftslehre* “asserts nothing more than that such an opposing force, is merely felt [*geföhlt*] by the finite being but not known [*erkannt*]”¹⁵⁷.

In Fichte’s eyes, this is sufficient to ensure that the representation of the world encountered through the “check”, once synthesized by theoretical reason, is not merely a figment of the imagination,

¹⁵⁵ At the same time, Beiser is right to suggest that Maimon likely had a positive influence on Fichte, particularly regarding the concept of *Streben* (see Ivi, p. 247). Just as, for Maimon, the antinomy of thought could only be resolved by positing an asymptotic movement of matter toward form, so too, for Fichte, skepticism can be addressed only by conceiving an unending striving toward the absolute I as something intrinsic to all finite consciousness. What fundamentally distinguishes the two thinkers, however, is that while Maimon conceives this process in primarily theoretical and epistemological terms, Fichte articulates it in practical and moral terms. This does not mean, however, as Beiser seems to suggest, that in Fichte’s thought the theoretical dimension is excluded from this dynamic; rather, it is *grounded* in the practical dimension, which alone can account for our encounter with a world that stands in opposition to us. Breazeale himself argues that “Beiser fails to recognize the degree to which even this, theoretical, strategy invokes a *practically* grounded starting-point” (Breazeale 2014, p. 258n).

¹⁵⁶ See Rametta 2012, p. 117. This is a topic that cannot be addressed in detail here, but it will be examined more carefully in the following sections, particularly through a comparison with Kant’s reworking of the relationship between theoretical and practical reason in the *Opus Postumum*. One point, however, is worth emphasizing – as Breazeale rightly observes: the thesis of Fichte’s so-called “primacy of the practical” needs to be reconsidered. Without such a reassessment, there is a risk of reducing Fichte’s philosophy to a form of ethical idealism, “for whom the objective world is nothing but an arena for practical striving, a sort of ‘moral gymnasium’ posited by the I so that it will have an arena to ‘work out’ its practical projects” (Breazeale 2013, p. 103). In this sense, Breazeale speaks of a certain “equiprimordiality” between practical and theoretical reason, whereby theoretical interests retain their own intrinsic value, even independently of the practical dimension – despite their mutual grounding. On the need to avoid reducing the *Wissenschaftslehre* to a form of ethical idealism, see also Gambaro 2020, p. 17.

¹⁵⁷ *GA*, I,2, 411.

but a true objective representation. Thus, it is through the interaction between practical and theoretical reason - each grounded in the original self-positing of the I – that the overcoming of Maimonian skepticism and dogmatism is to be achieved. As Pareyson correctly observes:

Maimon's error lay in having abolished the thing-in-itself while forgetting that reason is, in and of itself, practical. As such, there exists an intelligible realm that constitutes the true and profound object of consciousness, namely, the noumenal world as freedom, which is not merely a limit marking the imperfection of consciousness. As a result, [for Maimon], the problem of the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible is addressed without any concern for grounding the realism of ordinary consciousness, so that empirical consciousness is reduced to a mere illusion, lacking both universality and necessity¹⁵⁸.

Unlike Maimon, Fichte does not believe that the existence of a noumenal reality – conceived as an asymptotic limit toward which finite consciousness must strive – renders consciousness imperfect or merely a source of illusions. It is here that the contrast between Maimon's still fundamentally metaphysical framework and Fichte's project becomes most apparent.

For Maimon, the intelligible world – understood as the sole domain in which matter and form are fully unified – is the only realm to which true reality and objectivity can be ascribed. Yet only a divine understanding has complete access to this world. Despite the merely qualitative difference between the human and divine understanding, our knowledge of things as they are “in themselves” – that is, of their differentials – is necessarily limited and ultimately inaccessible in its entirety. As a result, the only kind of knowledge available to us is incomplete, imperfect, and therefore illusory, since “true” reality exists solely in God's mind.

By contrast, for Fichte there is no “in-itself” aspect on things whose lawfulness must be secured by a divine understanding. The only genuine “reality in itself” is that expressed by the *Thathandlung* – that is, by the absolute autonomy of the I, or by freedom itself. In this sense, the noumenal world is not something to be discovered, as though it already existed in the mind of a more perfect understanding, but rather something that must be *created* through the actualization of our own freedom – through the asymptotic effort to bring the Not-I under the domain of the I.

Accordingly, even the objects that appear to empirical consciousness are not imperfect manifestations of an inaccessible reality, but the product of the subject's own dynamic of self-positing. As we have seen, in order to posit itself as an I, the subject must also posit a world that reflects its original activity. However, this world does not possess a self-subsisting, independent, and therefore unknowable “reality in itself”. At the same time, this conception eliminates the basis for

¹⁵⁸ Pareyson 1976, p. 88.

skeptical doubt, since there is no hidden realm “beyond” the object that lies outside the reach of our theoretical faculties. The only “beyond” is the one *we ourselves* create through the exercise of our freedom. This leads me to introduce the next topic, namely the relationship between Fichte’s thought and Spinoza’s system.

3.1.5 Fichte and Spinoza. Immanence and unity of the system

In the preceding paragraphs, we saw that Fichte’s project can be understood as a response not only to Aenesidemus’ skepticism but also to that of Maimon. At the same time, I tried to highlight how, especially in the case of the latter, Fichte did not regard him merely as a polemical target, but rather as a genuine source of conceptual resources. Unlike Schulze – who had completely misinterpreted the aims of transcendental idealism – Maimon’s philosophy situated itself coherently within the trajectory inaugurated by the Copernican revolution, at least in intentions. Nevertheless, Maimon’s insistence on preserving a dimension that transcends the bounds of consciousness, and on grounding it within a theological–metaphysical framework, made it difficult for him to pursue his line of thought to its ultimate conclusions.

Fichte’s strategy, then, consisted in retaining certain instruments from Maimon’s philosophical apparatus, such as the striving of finite consciousness toward an ever greater degree of clarity and transparency. However, whereas in Maimon this striving was directed toward the infinite understanding, in Fichte its ultimate object is nothing other than the I in its pure identity with itself.

Another point of convergence – at least partial – between Fichte and Maimon lies in their treatment of the problem of the thing-in-itself. Schulze, and to some extent Reinhold, held that the objectivity of representations had to be secured by their correspondence to a reality “in itself”, for otherwise transcendental idealism would collapse into a form of Berkeleyan idealism. According to both Maimon and Fichte, by contrast, no such “reality” exists apart from the domain of representations. As Fichte writes in the *Aenesidemus Review*, conceived in this sense, the thing-in-itself is “a phantasy, a dream, a non-thought”¹⁵⁹. However, as we have seen, Maimon does not completely eliminate the thing-in-itself from his system; rather, he reconfigures it through the doctrines of differentials and the infinite understanding. Contrary to the common representation, Fichte likewise does not abandon the

¹⁵⁹ *OP*, I,2, 57. As we have seen, the error of taking the cause of representation to lie outside representation itself leads to what Fichte calls qualitative – or dogmatic – realism (see *GA*, I,2, 324).

concept of the thing-in-itself altogether. Instead, he fundamentally reconfigures it in such a way that it becomes integrated into the architecture of the *Wissenschaftslehre*¹⁶⁰.

Fichte holds that the responsibility for the misunderstandings surrounding the concept of the thing-in-itself lies primarily with Reinhold and with Kant himself, who, in his words, “have not yet spoken clearly and forcefully enough”¹⁶¹ on this issue. Fichte’s aim, in this regard, is not so much to correct Kant’s doctrine of the thing-in-itself, but rather to uncover its true meaning by eliminating the lingering metaphysical residues that still persist in the exposition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The relevance that the concept of the thing-in-itself still holds even within a system such as the *Wissenschaftslehre* is acknowledged by Fichte himself in the following passage, taken from the practical part of the *Grundlage*:

Now where do we locate our opponent’s independent Not-I, or thing-in itself, which the foregoing argument is supposed to have demonstrated? Obviously, nowhere and everywhere at once. It is there only so long as we do not have it, and as soon as we seek to apprehend it, it flies away. The thing-in-itself is something for the I, and consequently in the I, though it ought not to be in the I: it is thus a contradiction, though as the object of a necessary idea it must be set at the foundation of all our philosophizing, and has always lain at the root of all philosophy and all acts of the finite mind, save only that no one has been clearly aware of it, or of the contradiction contained therein. This relation of the thing in-itself to the I forms the basis for the entire mechanism of the human and all other finite minds. Any attempt to change this would entail the elimination of all consciousness, and with it of all existence¹⁶².

I regard this passage as crucial for grasping Fichte’s position on the thing-in-itself. It simultaneously asserts both the indispensability of this concept for the *Wissenschaftslehre* and its inherent contradiction. However, this contradiction must be understood in light of the broader role that contradiction plays within the *Grundlage*. It does not signal a *failure* of reason, but rather the very condition of its operation, the ground of its productivity. Just as the contradiction between the intelligent I and the absolute I is resolved in the practical part of the *Grundlage* through the doctrine

¹⁶⁰ My aim here is not to offer a comprehensive analysis of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself in the early phase of Fichte’s thought. This is a problem that would require a much more extensive investigation, especially given the complexity and nuance with which Fichte treats this concept. As Rockmore notes, in certain passages Fichte appears to “reject this concept as a perversion of the intellect” (Rockmore 2010, p. 17), while in others he emphasizes its indispensability. Beiser points out that this leads to a “serious question of consistency” within Fichte’s system (Beiser 2002, p. 272). Without claiming to resolve this issue definitively, my aim is nevertheless to show that it is possible to identify within Fichte’s system a concept of the thing-in-itself that is consistent with the foundational principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and with its commitment to the immanence of thought. This will serve as an introduction to Fichte’s relation with Spinoza’s thought, which will be the central focus of the following section.

¹⁶¹ *GA*, I,2, 61.

¹⁶² *GA*, I,2, 414.

of *Streben*, a similar resolution applies to the internal contradiction of the concept of the thing-in-itself.

The contradiction arises from the fact that the thing-in-itself is meant to signify a supposed nature of things independent of any perceiving subject. Yet this very nature is posited and affirmed by the subject itself, which, in the very act of asserting the thing's absolute independence, in fact brings it back into relation with itself. In this sense, one can certainly *think* the thing-in-itself as a way of indicating the alterity of objects in general in relation to the subject; yet this notion does not claim to establish the *existence* of some independent reality beyond the subject. Put differently: in order to account for the existence of real consciousness – that is, of a finite understanding – one must posit something that *limits* this very consciousness.

From the standpoint of ordinary experience, objects appear to us as external, insofar as they determine and constrain our spontaneity. However, if we elevate ourselves to the philosophical standpoint, it becomes clear that this “something” posited as the subject's opposite is in fact posited *within* the sphere of transcendental knowledge. This means that philosophical reflection allows us to see that even the subject's passive dimension can be explained not by appealing to the action of something external to the I, but by tracing it back to an original activity of the I itself¹⁶³. The I can feel itself to be limited only if there is within it an original *activity* that is being limited. As we saw, there can be a check at point C only if there is an activity going from A to C. What distinguishes ordinary consciousness from philosophical consciousness is that the former is unaware of the genetic process that gives rise to its own passivity. This dialectic between ordinary consciousness and philosophical consciousness in relation to the problem of the thing-in-itself is explicitly addressed by Fichte himself, when he writes: “This fact that the finite spirit must necessarily posit something absolute outside itself (a thing-in-itself), and yet must recognize, from the other side, that the latter exists only for it (as a necessary *noumenon*), is that circle which it is able to extend into infinity, but can never escape”¹⁶⁴.

In this case, it is particularly interesting to observe that, when referring to ordinary consciousness, Fichte characterizes the *cause* of its passivity using precisely the term “thing-in-itself,” whereas in the context of philosophical reflection, the thing-in-itself is described as a *noumenon*. I will not, of course, delve here into the complex issue of the distinction between the thing-in-itself and the noumenon in Kant's thought. However, with reference to this particular

¹⁶³ On this point, see e.g. the *Second Introduction*, where Fichte argues: “To think of something as a thing-in-itself, that is, as existing independently of myself, the empirical, I must think of myself from the point of view of life, where I am merely the empirical; and for that very reason know nothing of my activity in this thinking, *because it is not free*. Only from the philosophical viewpoint can I infer in my thinking to this activity” (GA, I,4, 236n).

¹⁶⁴ GA, I,2, 412.

passage, it is clear that the use of the term “noumenon” serves to frame the thing-in-itself – within philosophical reflection – as the product of the I’s spontaneity, of its *Nous*. In this sense, the noumenon is not an existing object posited or created by the absolute I, but rather the *thought* of an object in general – something we must assume in order to make sense of the finitude of ordinary consciousness. As Fichte argues in the *Second Introduction*: “What, then, is the object? *That which is added to appearances by the understanding, a mere thought* [ein bloßer Gedanke]. – The object affects us; *something that is merely thought affects us*. What does this mean? If I have even the slightest trace of logic in me, the meaning is simply: it affects us insofar as it exists, that is, *it is merely thought of as affecting us*”¹⁶⁵. Once again, the thing-in-itself is not conceived as an object existing independently of the sphere of knowledge. It cannot, in fact, be posited unless it is first *thought as posited*, precisely in order to ground the receptivity of sensibility. It is in this sense that, according to Fichte, the thing-in-itself constitutes a contradictory concept that must nevertheless be posited at the foundation of his system. It represents the thought of something independent of thought, which must nonetheless be posited by thought itself in order to account for the existence of finite consciousness. This contradiction, like that between the intelligent I and the absolute I, is ultimately resolved through the separation of the theoretical and practical dimensions¹⁶⁶. For how can something that exists only as a thought produce an affection in us? Only if, from a practical standpoint, it is *felt* (gefühl) by the subject as affecting it.

This kind of distinction can already be found in a still embryonic phase of Fichte’s project – namely, in a note appearing in the opening pages of his *Concerning the Concept*:

The real controversy between criticism and dogmatism *concerns the connection between our knowledge and a thing in itself*[...]. Some future *Wissenschaftslehre* might well be able to settle this controversy by showing the following: that our knowledge is by no means connected directly through representation with things in themselves, but is connected with them only indirectly, through *feeling* [Gefühl]; that in any case things are *represented* merely as *appearances*, whereas they are *felt as things in themselves*; that no representations at all would be possible without feeling; but that things in themselves can be recognized only *subjectively*, i.e., insofar as they affect our feeling¹⁶⁷.

Things-in-themselves can therefore be posited (and thus *thought*) by the I as the cause of the passivity of receptivity only if, from a practical standpoint, they exert a *real* influence on finite

¹⁶⁵ *GA*, I,4, 241.

¹⁶⁶ See *GA*, I,2, 311: “Even the thing-in-itself only exists to the extent that at least the possibility of a passivity is posited in the self: a canon which obtains its complete determination, and becomes applicable, only in the practical part of our work”.

¹⁶⁷ *GA*, I,2, 109n.

consciousness, which is *felt* by the letter. This concrete influence constitutes a constant counterforce to the subject's striving, effectively delimiting and restraining its otherwise boundless expansion. This means that the action of things-in-themselves is something that finite consciousness "merely feels but does not know"¹⁶⁸. This feeling is the feeling of a check from an object that the empirical subject conceives as independent from itself. This implies that – contrary to what Kant believed – it is not sensation (*Empfindung*) that constitutes the first and immediate component of empirical knowledge, but rather *feeling* itself. The latter, as Fichte writes, "only becomes sensation through relation to an object, by means of thought"¹⁶⁹. In other words, feeling is nothing but the immediate and indeterminate encounter of actual consciousness with a limit that prevents its absolute positing. Feeling becomes sensation only when it is synthesized and determined by the theoretical faculties.

This brief digression on the status of the thing-in-itself in Fichte's thought provides an opportunity to introduce the central concern of the present section: the relationship between Fichte and Spinoza. This is a matter of particular significance, since, as Breazeale notes, "no philosopher's name [beside Kant] appears more often in Fichte's published writings and unpublished lectures than that of Spinoza"¹⁷⁰.

Gaining a clearer understanding of the complex and multifaceted relationship between the *Wissenschaftslehre* and Spinoza's philosophy is therefore essential for elucidating the theoretical foundations of the former. This topic becomes even more compelling in light of the broader aims of the present study, when one considers that in the final notebooks of Kant's *Opus Postumum*, Spinoza's name likewise appears with striking frequency – this time no longer merely in a polemical context, as was largely the case in his earlier critical writings. I therefore contend that clarifying the relationship both Fichte and the late Kant maintain with Spinoza's thought is instrumental in determining the theoretical proximity between their respective philosophical projects. In particular,

¹⁶⁸ *GA*, I,2, 411.

¹⁶⁹ *GA*, I,2, 243. I do not consider it useful here to dwell on the technical distinction between feeling and sensation. What Fichte seems intent on emphasizing by choosing the former term, however, is the radically subjective nature of the process of affection, whose cause appears to lie not so much in the action of an external object, but rather in the self-limitation of the I's own activity. I believe that the purely subjective dimension of feeling is effectively emphasized by Fichte in this passage from *The Vocation of Man*: "– *Spirit*. And I would not tire of repeating it in every way in which it can be said if I had reason to fear that you have not yet understood it, that you have not yet indelibly impressed it upon your mind. Can you say: I am aware of external objects? – *I*. Definitely not, strictly speaking. For the seeing and feeling, etc., with which I take hold of things is not consciousness itself but only that of which I am first and most directly aware. Strictly speaking, I could only say: I am conscious of my seeing or feeling things" (*GA*, I,6, 217). On this issue, see Piché 1998. The author, for instance, addresses the difference between sensation and feeling in the following way: "What Fichte says about the Kantian concept of sensation is that this term can only be employed to refer to a property of a constructed object. But before the construction of this object, the colour green cannot be said to come from the object 'meadows', for the simple reason that the latter is not yet an object that can have properties. At the beginning of the process of knowledge, the colour 'green' is instead an immediate feeling, that is, an inner accident of the knowing subject. In other words, as long as green expresses a certain limitation of the I, it is a feeling, but when it is later transposed onto an object constituted by the knowing subject, the colour green becomes a sensation, i.e., a property of the object 'meadows'" (Ivi, pp. 74-75).

¹⁷⁰ Breazeale 2019, p. 103.

the analysis of both Kant and Fichte in relation to Spinoza will focus on the questions of immanence and the unity of the system.

It is well known that Fichte's early thought was profoundly shaped by Spinoza. Before the shift caused by his engagement with Kant's second *Critique*, Fichte seemed to adopt a form of strict determinism that left no room for moral action and human freedom. From a theoretical standpoint, Spinozism seemed to offer the only philosophically tenable system: a system in which the necessity of events is guaranteed by God, and in which no space is granted to any form of free human intervention, for the latter would constitute a violation of already established and necessary laws¹⁷¹.

As we have seen, the *Grundlage* marks Fichte's decisive break with any deterministic system, in order to develop a philosophical system that emphasizes the role of freedom not only in the practical domain – as Kant had already done – but also in the theoretical realm. In this context, Spinoza comes to represent the clearest and most influential example of the kind of philosophy the *Wissenschaftslehre* aims to overcome.

Moreover, this turn in Fichte's thought marks a further rupture with Spinoza's system. What is at stake is no longer merely the possibility of freedom, but the very epistemic status of *philosophical knowledge as such*, its capacity to justify the existence (or nonexistence) of freedom. In this sense, Fichte regards the *Grundlage* as the fullest and most consistent development of a truly critical and transcendental philosophy, while Spinoza's thought becomes, in contrast, "the most logical outcome of dogmatism".¹⁷² However, as Lauth correctly observes, "Fichte tried to interpret Spinoza as positively as possible from his own standpoint"¹⁷³.

In other words, Fichte's characterization of Spinozism as the most radical form of dogmatism did not prevent him from expressing appreciation for this system and incorporating certain aspects of it. In his *Personal Meditations*, Fichte himself describes his own system as a form of "moral Spinozism"¹⁷⁴. And in the *Grundlage* itself, at the end of §4 of the theoretical part, he writes that "[t]he theoretical portion of our *Wissenschaftslehre*, which will actually be evolved only from the two latter principles, since here the first has a merely regulative validity, is in fact, as will appear hereafter, systematic Spinozism"¹⁷⁵. Fichte's appreciation of Spinoza, therefore, cannot be dismissed as a mere

¹⁷¹ See e.g. the fragment *Einige Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus* (1790): "There is a necessary being, whose existence, and whose manner of existing, is itself necessary. According to and through the eternal and necessary thought of this being, the world came into being. Every change in this world is necessarily determined by a sufficient cause exactly as it is. The first cause of every change is the primordial thought of God" (*GA*, II,1, 290).

¹⁷² *GA*, I,2, 280.

¹⁷³ Lauth 1989, p. 28. Also Wood claims that "Fichte always treats Spinoza's name with respect, even reverence. If he is Fichte's most direct philosophical opponent, he is always an honored opponent" (Wood 2012, p. 125). F

¹⁷⁴ *GA*, II,3, 132. On this topic, see Fabbianelli 2000, pp. 101-106.

¹⁷⁵ *GA*, I,2, 282.

incidental or extrinsic detail, but rather points to a significant systematic and theoretical consonance that deserves careful consideration.

The key issue, then, is to determine and to investigate the spinozistic component inherent in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, while also seeking to avoid the clichéd depiction of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as an “inverted Spinozism”, as polemically characterized by Jacobi¹⁷⁶. In other words, the identification of characteristic elements of Spinoza’s thought within Fichte’s system must be understood and situated within the context of the transcendental turn initiated by Kant and further radicalized by Fichte himself. As Haag notes, “the pivot to the subject may not be interpreted as a turning to simply another substance that now fulfills the function of an absolute *ens*”¹⁷⁷. Fichte’s intention should not be read merely as an attempt to replace one principle with another – namely, the ‘I’ in place of substance – while remaining within the same conceptual paradigm. Rather, his aim is to demonstrate how this substitution inaugurates a fundamentally different framework for the articulation of philosophical thought. As Fichte himself will write in the 1811 *Wissenschaftslehre*, he intends to “unite both Spinoza and Kant, and amend the system of the former, which is correct on only one point and wrong on all the rest, while realizing and completing the system of the latter”¹⁷⁸.

Even though this consideration clearly belongs to a later phase of Fichte’s thought, I believe it is still possible to show that it is also valid in relation to the Jena project. The aim, therefore, will be to understand where, according to Fichte, Spinoza was mistaken, and, conversely, which elements of his system might contribute to completing the Kantian project.

As for the first point, the problem that Fichte identifies in Spinoza’s philosophy is, unsurprisingly, its dogmatism. The central error of dogmatism lies in the separation it introduces between being and thought, and in the assumption that being can be posited independently of thought itself, that is, as a thing-in-itself. In this respect, Spinoza would represent the most radical, and most consistent, form of dogmatism. Spinoza posited the substance as the supreme principle of his philosophy without recognizing that it was, in fact, the *very act of thought through which substance is posited* that must ground the existence of substance itself in the first place. In Fichtean terms, Spinoza posited substance as an independent Not-I, even elevating it to the status of the highest principle, without acknowledging that the positing of the Not-I can occur only through the I and within the I, as established by the third principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*¹⁷⁹.

¹⁷⁶ See the famous Letter to Fichte (*GA*, III,2, 226 ff.), published by Jacobi himself in 1799.

¹⁷⁷ Haag 2019a, p. 145.

¹⁷⁸ *GA*, II,12, 173.

¹⁷⁹ “I and Not-I, as equated and opposed through the concept of their capacity for mutual limitation, are themselves both something (namely accidents) in the self as divisible substance; posited by the I, as absolute, illimitable subject, to which nothing is either equated or opposed” (*GA*, I,2, 279).

Spinoza was thus the principal representative of qualitative realism – that is, a form of realism which posits the Not-I as a reality independent of the I, acting upon it from the outside. In this way, Spinoza would have reintroduced a metaphysical and transcendent dualism, incapable of accounting for the origin of difference from within an original identity:

Any philosophy is [...] *dogmatic* when it equates or opposes anything to the I as such; and this it does in appealing to the supposedly higher concept of the thing (*ens*), which is thus quite arbitrarily set up as the absolutely highest conception. In the critical system, a thing is what is posited in the I; in the dogmatic, it is that wherein the I is itself posited critical philosophy is thus *immanent*, since it posits everything in the I; dogmatism is *transcendent*, since it goes on beyond the I. So far as dogmatism can be consistent, Spinozism is its most logical outcome¹⁸⁰.

Despite the supposed *immanence* of Spinoza's system, its flaw lies in restricting this immanence to the sphere of the Not-I, or of substance, without seeking to reconcile it with the I, thereby necessarily resulting in a *transcendent* relation between the I and the Not-I. This unjustified move leads Spinoza into two major difficulties: one concerning the grounding of finite consciousness, and the other concerning the possibility of freedom. As for the first problem, according to Fichte, Spinoza's positing of substance as the supreme principle of the system was meant to constitute the very foundation of finite consciousness itself. Yet this foundation is posited as *external* to consciousness through a movement that, paradoxically, unfolds entirely *within* thought – and therefore *within consciousness*, thereby undermining the validity of the demonstration at its core. As Fichte writes,

Spinoza grounds the unity of consciousness in a substance wherein its unity is necessarily determined alike as to matter (the determinate series of presentations) and as to form. But I ask him what it is, once more, that contains the ground for the necessity of this substance, both as to content (the various series of presentations it contains), and again as to form (whereby all possible series of presentations are alleged to be exhausted in it, and to form a completed whole). But for this necessity he offers me no further ground, telling me merely that it is absolutely so; and this he says because he is compelled to assume some absolutely primary, ultimate unity. But if this is what he wants, he ought to have stopped forthwith at the unity given him in consciousness, and should not have felt the need to excogitate a higher one still, which nothing obliged him to do¹⁸¹.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸¹

Spinoza, then, had no right to step outside the sphere of consciousness in order to explain, through a movement that unfolds within consciousness itself, the unity of the latter. Were someone to ask Spinoza on what grounds he took this step, he would be unable to provide a justification – since its legitimacy rests solely on the request of a highest principle, without any transcendental reflection on the very conditions that make such a request both possible and realizable. Moreover, if his goal was to account for the unity of the fact of consciousness then he ought to have been satisfied *with that fact itself* – as Reinhold was – rather than looking for a “higher” fact. This higher fact, in the absence of proper transcendental foundation, turns out to be both redundant and unnecessary to the explanation.

Through a remarkably concise and effective formulation, Fichte characterizes Spinoza’s system as one in which “the I (what he calls *his* I, or what I call *mine*) does not exist absolutely *because* it exists; but because *something else* exists”¹⁸². Insofar as Spinoza is unable to explain, from a transcendental point of view, why this “something else” exists, he is likewise incapable of accounting for the very existence of consciousness itself. In the absence of such a transcendental foundation, the entire system risks becoming circular or dogmatic: it presupposes the existence of an absolute principle in order to explain consciousness, without inquiring into how consciousness could arrive at or legitimately justify such a principle¹⁸³. Consequently, since he cannot account for the origin of alterity with respect to consciousness, Spinoza ultimately leaves consciousness itself without a genuine foundation. By contrast, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is capable of grounding the fact of empirical consciousness because it begins from a principle that can account for both its own identity and its self-differentiation *within* knowledge itself, without positing anything outside of it.

The second problem deals with the question of freedom, which I believe is strictly linked to the first problem. If the ground of consciousness is posited outside of consciousness itself, then the very possibility of practical freedom is called into question. According to Fichte, the I’s freedom is inextricably bound to the possibility of its autonomous self-positing. If this possibility is undermined, then freedom itself is jeopardized, as it no longer depends on the I alone but on a ground external to it, thus ceasing to be freedom in the proper sense. As Fichte argues in the First Introduction “the presentation of the independence of the I, and that of the thing, can assuredly coexist, but not the independence of both. Only one of them can be the first, the initiatory, the independent one: the second, by virtue of being second, necessarily becomes dependent on the first, with which it is to be

¹⁸² *GA*, I,2, 263.

¹⁸³ “Once *thought* is brought back to awareness by consciousness, then the One in question can no longer be determined as *being*, but rather as that which *posits* that being: namely, as I. Thus, by adopting the Spinozist presupposition that it is a matter of positing a *being* and determining it absolutely as *One*, Spinozism itself is revealed to be logically untenable: that One turns out *not* to be being, but I” (Rametta 1995, p. 107).

conjoined”¹⁸⁴. Put differently, the independence – and thus the freedom – of the I cannot coexist with the independence of a principle external to it that would serve as its foundation. Either the I is the ground of itself and therefore autonomous, or something else is its ground, in which case the I is dependent and its freedom forfeited.

Now, with regard to this question, Fichte explicitly acknowledges in the first introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* that Spinoza’s fatalism cannot be refuted solely by theoretical means. The dogmatist (and thus Spinoza) denies the freedom of the I, while the idealist affirms it, appealing to the *individual’s* experience of freedom – an experience in which one *feels* oneself to be free and not bound by the causal chains that govern the phenomenal world, when one acts according to reason and not by merely following sensible impulses. However, the dogmatist can always respond that this is merely an *illusion* of freedom, itself determined by a higher cause upon which freedom would ultimately depend. As Fichte therefore writes “[the dogmatist] could be refuted only on the basis of the postulate of the freedom and independence of the self; but it is precisely this that he denies”¹⁸⁵.

The reality of freedom, then, cannot be established speculatively; it must instead result from a *choice* motivated by a practical interest¹⁸⁶. At the same time, this very choice can, according to Fichte, be *justified* by the idealist through transcendental reflection, which is capable of accounting for the grounds of the decision to choose freedom over determinism. By contrast, the dogmatist is unable to provide such a legitimate justification, for the reasons we have already analyzed. Still, the idealist’s argument cannot take hold for the dogmatist, since the latter refuses from the outset the starting point of the idealist’s position – namely, the reality of freedom. In other words, while this fact can be justified once it has been assumed (contrary to the dogmatist’s determinism), there is no means of compelling *others* to adopt it as a starting point.

Now, as we have seen, despite these limits, Fichte appears to hold Spinoza’s philosophy in high regard. As previously noted, Fichte does not merely invoke Spinoza as a polemical target, but instead establishes a complex and multifaceted engagement with his thought, characterizing his own philosophy as a “moral Spinozism” and suggesting that the theoretical part of the *Grundlage* should be understood as a form of “systematic Spinozism”. In a letter to Reinhold dated 2 July 1795, Fichte also states that Spinoza is the thinker “on the basis of whose system my own can be most conveniently expounded”¹⁸⁷, thereby suggesting a propaedeutic role for Spinoza’s system in approaching the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This may appear rather surprising, given that Spinoza’s philosophy is conceived

¹⁸⁴ *GA*, I,4, 193.

¹⁸⁵ *GA*, I,4, 192.

¹⁸⁶ It is on the basis of these considerations that Fichte formulates his famous expression: “What sort of philosophy one chooses depends, therefore, on what sort of man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture that we can reject or accept as we wish; it is rather a thing animated by the soul of the person who holds it” (*GA*, I,4, 195).

¹⁸⁷ *GA*, III,2, 348.

as the most radical form of that dogmatism that Fichte's project aims to overcome. Having outlined the main points of divergence between the two systems, we must now ask how the connection that Fichte himself seemed to identify between the *Wissenschaftslehre* and Spinoza's philosophy ought to be understood.

First and foremost, what Fichte acknowledges in Spinoza's thought is its systematic ambition and its pursuit of the highest possible unity. As he himself notes, the two systems are linked by "the necessary endeavor to bring about the highest unity in human cognition"¹⁸⁸. The main difference lies in the fact that, whereas in Spinoza this ambition remains an unfulfilled aim, Fichte claims to have actually brought it to completion.

Now, I am not here asserting that Fichte derived the demand for a first principle of philosophy directly from Spinoza himself. As Lauth notes, "Fichte owes to Reinhold and not to Spinoza the idea that philosophy as science must be a system derived from a single principle"¹⁸⁹. However, acknowledging this historical lineage does not preclude the claim that Spinoza's philosophy constitutes the most radical – albeit dogmatic – form of systematic thought grounded in a single, self-sufficient principle. Nor does it diminish the decisive role Reinhold played in shaping the early stages of Fichte's intellectual development. It is clear and indisputable that Fichte adopted directly from Reinhold the goal of providing a systematic foundation for Kantian philosophy. Nonetheless, I maintain that Reinhold was not, in Fichte's view, as radical as Spinoza, and thus could not be taken as the model of the most consistent form of systematic philosophy (before the *Wissenschaftslehre*). In this respect, Reinhold remained caught, so to speak, *between* transcendental philosophy and dogmatic metaphysics: he simply assumes the fact of consciousness as the first principle of philosophy, without deducing it from something higher – whether the *Thathandlung* or substance. And yet, the problem with this solution lies in its inability to reduce the dualism or difference between subject and object to an original identity. Both Spinoza's substance and Fichte's *Thathandlung* express this original identity – the former in a metaphysical sense, the latter in a transcendental one – whereas Reinhold is content to take the *difference* implied by the fact of representation as his starting point. In this respect, he was less radical than Spinoza, even if this allowed him to avoid falling into an overtly dogmatic position. Spinoza's merit, then, lies in having at least posed the problem of the first principle in the most radical way possible, even if he was mistaken in identifying that principle with substance.

¹⁸⁸ *GA*, I,2, 263. As Breazeale notes, "From their shared commitment to the highest possible unity, it follows that Spinoza and Fichte also share a commitment to rigorous systematicity as an essential feature of any adequate philosophy; for it is precisely by virtue of its internal coherence that philosophy preserves the unity of its starting point and communicates the same to its manifold theorems and conclusions" (Breazeale 2019, p. 125).

¹⁸⁹ Lauth 1971, p. 60.

Moreover, I would argue that a further point of convergence between Fichte's system and that of Spinoza lies in their shared commitment to an immanent relation between the first principle and its determinations. The immanent nature of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is explicitly affirmed by Fichte when he writes that "critical philosophy is [...] immanent, since it posits everything in the I"¹⁹⁰. As we have seen on several occasions, the defining feature of a truly transcendental mode of thought lies in the recognition that everything that is posited is posited by the I, and therefore within the I. Even the check or resistance of the Not-I would not exist were it not for an activity of the I that encounters an opposition from them: they exist only for the I and in the I. The immanence of the *Wissenschaftslehre* thus consists in the impossibility, for consciousness, of stepping outside itself, of breaking the circle of consciousness, when it seeks to affirm or determine anything whatsoever, even its own limitations¹⁹¹.

Now, this immanence of the relation between principle and determinations is, as is well known, also a cornerstone of Spinoza's ontology. The attributes and modes of substance are not ontologically separate entities; they are, rather, expressions of the one eternal substance, and nothing exists except in and through it. Just as, in Fichte, everything is posited in the I, so in Spinoza, everything is posited in substance.

And yet, precisely while Fichte describes the *Wissenschaftslehre* as an immanent system, he simultaneously draws a sharp contrast between his own position and that of Spinoza. He writes: "[d]ogmatism is transcendent, since it goes on beyond the I. So far as dogmatism can be consistent, Spinozism is its most logical outcome"¹⁹². For Fichte, the dogmatism inherent in Spinoza's system does not primarily stem from the internal relation that Spinoza posits between the principle (substance) and its determinations (attributes and modes). That relation is, after all, strictly immanent. Rather, the dogmatism lies in the *way* the principle itself is established – as something external to, and independent of, the I. The decisive error, from Fichte's point of view, is that Spinoza situates both the principle and its determinations both *outside* of consciousness. In doing so, he reintroduces the very dualism that the *Wissenschaftslehre* seeks to overcome: a split between the knowledge and the absolute ground of reality.

¹⁹⁰ *GA*, I,2, 279.

¹⁹¹ As Furlani notes, this drive toward the immanence of Fichte's philosophy is certainly a heritage of Maimon: "One might be tempted to say that, despite the recognition of Maimon's greatness, it is Reinhold's contribution that proves decisive for Fichte. In reality, we believe this is not the case. Note, in fact, the movement of illusion and return to reality that Fichte sets in motion by tightening the relation of imagination to the I. It is the movement that frees itself from the immediate oppositions of the real, in order then to grasp, within reality itself, its conditions of possibility. This is Maimon's legacy: an impulse to break free from Kantian oppositions, inseparable from a drive toward immanence in reality. In the articulation of the reflective structures of the I, Fichte owes much to Reinhold and to his engagement with him. Yet this borrowing of Reinhold's analyses of consciousness takes place within a framework that that of Maimon" (Furlani 2019, p. 58).

¹⁹² *Ibidem*.

Thus, Spinoza's system may be internally coherent and immanent in its own ontological terms, but it remains *transcendent* in relation to consciousness. It posits a totality that does not emerge from, nor is mediated by, the self-positing activity of the I. In this sense, it is a system of immanence that is itself *transcendent with respect to knowledge*. And it is precisely for this reason that Spinoza's dogmatism is also the most consistent: because it places *everything* – the principle and its determinations, along with their immanent relation – outside the I, i.e., in the Not-I. To put it very bluntly, one could thus argue that in Spinoza's thought, the principle and its determinations share an immanent relation, but both terms remain transcendent with respect to the I. In Fichte, by contrast, there is no transcendence at all, insofar as the principle itself is identified with the I, and thus even its determinations exist only in the I. As Fichte claims in the *Vorlesungen über Logik und Metaphysik* from 1797/98, “[t]he same determinations of the mind are, from one perspective, my action and, from another perspective, the object of my action. [...] This arises from the twofold perspective on the operation of intelligence as such. [...] Spinoza may not have thought this deeply, for otherwise he would have become a critic”¹⁹³.

The essence of critical philosophy lies in not separating the activity that posits an object from the object itself, demonstrating that the object can be given *only through the activity that posits it*. Spinoza, by contrast, fell precisely into the error of separating these two terms, “because he was not conscious of his own insight [*weil er eben seines eigenen Einsehens sich nicht bewußt wurde*]”¹⁹⁴. Had Spinoza been conscious of this operation of consciousness, he would have realized that the principle cannot be posited in terms of a substance (of a *being*), but must instead be conceived in terms of an I (of a *thought*), thus reaching the critical standpoint. As Rametta argues, “[i]f being is nothing other than what is *thought* by consciousness, then it is *this latter* the One the Spinozist has in mind, and not that being, which is nothing but a thought that forgets the act of thinking from which it arises”¹⁹⁵.

It is in this way, I believe, that Fichte seeks to achieve the unification of Spinoza and Kant that he refers to in the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1811. As we have seen, in that passage Kant claimed that Spinoza was right about only one thing, while being wrong about everything else. I take it that what Fichte believes Spinoza was right about is precisely the demand for the unity of the philosophical system – its grounding in a principle that expresses an absolute identity – and the necessary immanence between that principle and its determinations. By grafting these demands onto the framework of Kant's critical philosophy, and thereby correcting the dogmatic elements that still

¹⁹³ GA, IV,1, 367-368.

¹⁹⁴ GA, II,8, 116.

¹⁹⁵ Rametta 1995, p. 108.

persist in Spinoza's thought, Fichte would not only have preserved what was valid in Spinoza's system but also carried the critical project to completion.

What remains now is to explore what this retrieval of Spinoza actually entails, and how it is reworked through critical lens. We've already seen which aspects of Spinoza's philosophy Fichte still finds compelling, but we haven't yet examined how he puts them to use in developing his own project. Nor have we reflected on what it really means to call the *Wissenschaftslehre* a "systematic Spinozism" or a "moral Spinozism." The goal here is to show that Fichte's engagement with Spinoza is not simply a matter of inverting his system – replacing a principle of substance with a principle of the I, which would still be conceived as a kind of being or substance. Instead, the shift from substance to the I leads to a completely new way of understanding *what it means to be a principle*, one that marks the fundamental and irreducible break between transcendental and dogmatic thought. This distinction is made explicit by Fichte when he writes:

It is easy enough to see what impelled him to his system, namely the necessary endeavor to bring about the highest unity in human cognition. This unity is present in his system, and the error of it is merely that he thought to deduce on grounds of theoretical reason what he was driven to merely by a practical need; that he claimed to have established something as truly given, when he was merely setting up an appointed, but never attainable, idea. We shall encounter his highest unity again in the *Wissenschaftslehre*; though not as something that *exists*, but as something that we *ought to*, and yet *cannot*, achieve¹⁹⁶.

In this passage, Fichte appears to recapitulate what I argued earlier regarding Spinoza's indifference to the practical motive that ought to sustain the search for the highest unity in philosophy. Spinoza seems to have conceived this undertaking as exhausted within the purely theoretical domain, thereby neglecting the practical interests of reason. It is precisely because of this neglect that he failed in his attempt to discover the true *supreme* principle, capable of holding together *both* theoretical *and* practical reason. Had Spinoza recognized this error, he would not have conceived the principle as something that *is*, but rather as something that *ought to be*. But what, in fact, does this mean?

Answering this question requires clarifying in what sense the *Wissenschaftslehre* ought to be regarded as a "moral Spinozism." Before doing so, however, it is necessary to pause and consider why Fichte describes the theoretical part of the *Grundlage* in terms of a "systematic Spinozism." Let us return to the passage in which Fichte makes this claim:

¹⁹⁶ *GA*, I,2, 263.

The theoretical portion of our *Wissenschaftslehre*, which will actually be evolved only from the two latter principles, since here the first has a merely regulative validity, is in fact, as will appear hereafter, systematic Spinozism; save only that any given I is itself the one ultimate substance. But our system adds to this a practical part, whereby the first is grounded and determined, the whole of knowledge is completed, everything encountered in the human mind is exhausted¹⁹⁷.

I believe this passage already helps us to understand why, on the one hand, the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* can be conceived in terms of a “systematic Spinozism” and, on the other, why this system must be completed through a “moral Spinozism,” that is, by extending it into a practical part.

As for the first point, we have already seen in §3.1.3 that the function of the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is to deduce systematically – thus resolving the problem initially raised by Reinhold – the entirety of the real faculties of the finite I. This deduction is carried out through the synthetic procedure applied to one of the two propositions contained in the third principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which in turn depends on the interaction between the first and second principles. In this sense, the deduction of the faculties – and thus the whole theoretical part – is systematic not because Spinoza’s philosophy was not also systematic, but because, unlike the latter, Fichte’s deduction rests on a *foundation*, the third principle, that can be justified from a transcendental standpoint.

Now, when Fichte writes in this section that “any given I is itself the one ultimate substance,” the term “I” refers to every *finite* I. This means that the faculties of the mind can be deduced only from the activity of the transcendental imagination, which in turn can operate solely insofar as the activity of the I is *checked* by the *Anstoß*. In other words, the faculties are deduced from the I insofar as it is an *intelligence*, a *finite* I, a *limited* activity. They could not be directly deduced from the absolute I, which in this context has only a regulative validity. “Any given I is the ultimate substance” means that it is only from the *finitude* of the I, and from the consequent activation of the imagination, that the faculties of the mind find both their reality and their transcendental justification¹⁹⁸. At the same time, the derivation of all faculties – including intuition, understanding, and reason – from the productive faculty of imagination demonstrates that every *intuited object* can be such only *as an*

¹⁹⁷ *GA*, I,2, 282.

¹⁹⁸ “The imagination in its “wavering” or “oscillating” [...] is the necessary starting point for the mechanism of mind that brings us back to the conscious thinking self that now likewise has the reality of a fact, thus bringing to totality the (first) full circle of the analytic and synthetic chains of reflection that are the theme of the theoretical part of the WL. Only the power of imagination, oscillating between opposites and thus mitigating and mediating between them, can give reality (not merely possibility or ideality in thought) to the opposites themselves in an intuition (and not merely in thinking)” (Haag 2019a, p. 155).

object created by the imagination, and thus as an *object for the I*, since even the *Anstoß* itself could not occur without an activity that is checked.

However, as we have already seen, the actuality of the *Anstoß* itself cannot be deduced from a theoretical standpoint. The ideal series of the first section of the theoretical part can be deduced by resolving the contradictions still contained in the third principle. Yet the argument eventually reaches a point where the deduction of the ideal series comes to a halt and encounters a real fact – namely, the imagination, which confers reality upon the ideal series itself. This imagination, however, is set into motion only in the presence of an *Anstoß*, the occurrence of which cannot itself be theoretically deduced. It is precisely because of this impossibility of deducing the limitation of the I that the “systematic Spinozism” of the theoretical part of the *Grundlage* cannot be understood as a mere “subjectivist inversion” of Spinozism¹⁹⁹. Were that the case, the *Anstoß* itself would have to be speculatively deduced from the absolute activity of the I. As Haag rightly observes, “[m]aking Spinozism systematic, consequently, means turning it into something that is decidedly not Spinozism in the dogmatic sense”²⁰⁰.

This brings us to the second issue raised in the above quotation: the necessity of adding a practical component capable of grounding the theoretical part. We have already seen that this is achieved through the doctrine of *Streben*, which explains the genesis of the *Anstoß*. For the purposes of this discussion, this dynamic inherent to the finite I accounts for the transformation of the first principle – the absolute I – from something that simply *is* to something that *ought to be*, thereby generating the “moral Spinozism” that constitutes the *Wissenschaftslehre* in its entirety.

The absolute identity of the I with itself is not simply negated through the doctrine of the *Anstoß* (obstacle). Rather, it is shifted from the dimension of a rigid and static reality to that of an *idea*, which, however, does not thereby possess mere fictional character. The absolute I *exists* in finite consciousness as an idea to be actualized through an asymptotic approach, and it is in this way that the gap between dogmatic metaphysics and transcendental philosophy is definitively consummated. The absolute I should not be conceived as an independent reality that generates its own determinations in the manner of Spinoza’s substance. In Fichte, the immanence of the relation between principle and determinations must be understood in an entirely different sense. The principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* comprises the finite I and the Not-I not within a unity that simply *is*, but within a unity that *ought to be*: only through an asymptotic process of approximation can the finite I and the

¹⁹⁹ I believe it is possible to maintain that this attempt to “reabsorb” transcendental philosophy into Spinoza’s dogmatism is precisely what Fichte himself imputes to Schelling. As Rametta argues, “[Schelling] seeks to incorporate the real into philosophy, thereby *eliminating the original experience of limitation*, which constitutes the only immediate proof of the real. What does the elimination of limitation entail? For Fichte, it entails that becoming [...] must appear as the result of an inner impulse of absolute being” (Rametta 2021b, p. 37).

²⁰⁰ *Ivi*, p. 157.

Not-I be brought into unity with the absolute I. Such a unity is never definitively given, nor is it ever hypostatized into a metaphysical entity; rather, it is something that we ourselves must produce through our practical activity. As Rametta writes, this kind of rupture with dogmatic metaphysics, however, “does not at all entail the reduction of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to a merely logical or methodological discipline. On the contrary, for Fichte it represents the foundation of a new ontology, a new doctrine of being; but one transcendently founded, and thus epistemologically justified”²⁰¹.

In this sense, the being of the absolute does not designate a self-subsisting reality, but rather a *goal* that finite consciousness must constantly strive to realize through the exercise of its irreducible freedom, in an attempt to achieve complete identity with itself. This is a goal that *consciousness itself* posits *for* itself, recognizing, through transcendental reflection, that the absolute I towards which it strives is nothing other than the inner principle of its own activity: “We are speaking, rather, of an idea of the self which must necessarily underlie its infinite practical demand, though it is inaccessible to our consciousness, and so can never appear immediately therein (though it may, of course, mediate, in philosophical reflection)”²⁰².

To conclude, I thus believe it is possible to detect two distinct levels of immanence in Fichte’s philosophy. On the first, theoretical level, immanence is articulated through the relation between the finite I and the *represented* object²⁰³. Since it is the imagination itself – as a faculty of the intelligent I – that generates the represented object through its oscillatory activity, there can be no transcendent dimension of the object that remains unknowable to the I. The exteriority that the finite I experiences in relation to the Not-I is therefore not theoretical but practical in nature: the I *feels* the exteriority of the Not-I through the *Anstoß*²⁰⁴.

This brings us to the second, practical level of immanence, which concerns the relation between the absolute I, on the one hand, and the finite I together with the Not-I, on the other. At this level, the Not-I that gives rise to the *Anstoß* is opposed to the finite I only *within* the infinite I of the first principle, conceived as an idea. As Fichte himself writes in the Practical part, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is realistic, yet not transcendent. This means that the *Wissenschaftslehre* “does not forget that, even in the course of this explanation, it governs itself by its own laws, and that, in course of reflecting on this, the independent factor again becomes a product of its own power of thought, and thus something dependent on the I, insofar as it is to exist for the I (in the concept

²⁰¹ Rametta 1995, p. 116.

²⁰² *GA*, I,2, 409.

²⁰³ As Furlani writes, “[t]he Cartesian vein of Fichte’s idealism will, quite consciously, remain inscribed within a perspective that is far more Spinozian, one much more oriented toward plunging into reality” (Furlani 2019, p. 59).

²⁰⁴ “The activity of productive imagination is grafted upon the *Anstoß*, which is immediately ‘felt’ as its own limitation, and which constructs the universe of the I as intelligence, that is, as the theoretical principle of representations. The activity of the intelligent I is thus grounded in the activity of the practical I” (Rametta 2012, p. 119).

thereof)²⁰⁵. The fact that philosophical reflection allows us to conceive the Not-I as existing solely *for* the I has significant consequences on the practical level. From a practical standpoint, the alterity of the Not-I experienced by the finite I thus does not constitute a definitive or static opposition, but rather the very condition of possibility for the infinite practical striving of the finite I to posit itself as identical with the infinite I. As Fichte writes,

[In the theoretical part], the question was, *how* is a thing posited, intuited, thought, etc; [in the practical part] it is, *what* is posited? Thus if the *Wissenschaftslehre* were after all to possess a metaphysic, as a supposed science of things-in-themselves, and such a metaphysic were demanded of it, it would have to refer to the practical part of the system. As will become increasingly apparent, it is this alone which treats of an original reality; and if the *Wissenschaftslehre* should be asked, how then, indeed, are things-in-themselves constituted, it could offer no answer, save, *as we are to make them*. Now this in no way renders our science transcendent; for everything that we shall also point out in this connection we find in ourselves, and bring forth from ourselves, because there is something *in us* that can be fully accounted for only by something *outside us*²⁰⁶.

As this quotation shows, in the theoretical part, the central concern lies solely in the mode of cognition of represented objects, which – inasmuch as they are *known* – are entirely grounded in the sphere of activity of the finite I. The practical part, by contrast, aims to show that the *Anstoß* giving rise to these representations is not determined by some supposed reality external to the I, but rather by a limit posited *within* the absolute I itself.

Returning to the problem with which this paragraph began, within this framework, the thing-in-itself is that element which empirical consciousness experiences as external to itself, yet which at the same time provides the impulse for its striving to posit itself absolutely, to exercise its freedom to reach unity with the absolute I. In other words, while the thing-in-itself appears, on the one hand, as the wholly indeterminate element that empirical consciousness encounters through feeling, on the other hand it is precisely in virtue of this indeterminacy that *it ought to be determined* through our practical activity. The thing-in-itself thus designates both what we encounter as finite consciousnesses and what we ourselves “make” in the act of progressively determining the Not-I through our practical freedom, as the above quotation states. It is not a static entity that we passively observe, but rather the very condition of possibility of our activity: the horizon of freedom that emerges when consciousness confronts an obstacle to its absolute self-positing²⁰⁷. Thus, the immanence of the

²⁰⁵ *GA*, I,2, 412.

²⁰⁶ *GA*, I,2, 416 (emphasis mine).

²⁰⁷ I also argue that this transition from the theoretical to the practical dimension of the relation between the I and the thing-in-itself also marks the decisive departure from Maimon’s dogmatism to Fichte’s transcendental philosophy. For Maimon, complete knowledge of things-in-themselves is identical to divine knowledge. The latter, although differing

absolute I unfolds as the idea that regulates this practical process – an idea that encompasses both I and Not-I within a unity that *is* not, but that *ought to be*. This unity functions not as a metaphysical substrate but as a normative horizon, orienting the activity of finite consciousness toward an infinite task of self-determination.

In the following paragraph, I shall inquire into how this practical process is, for Fichte, articulated within a specific sphere of human experience, namely that of morality. This provides the groundwork for what will be attempted in the subsequent chapter, namely, to seek to demonstrate that the most significant points of convergence between Kant's *Opus postumum* and Fichte's philosophy are to be found precisely in their respective engagements with Spinozism and in their reformulation of the moral question as articulated by Kant in his "critical" works.

3.1.6 The concept of the "highest good" in Fichte's early thought

After having examined the question of Spinozism in the *Grundlage*, in this concluding paragraph I wish to focus on the particular moral inflection that the practical activity of the I in the third part of the *Grundlage* assumes in the writings preceding the Disputation on Atheism. Specifically, the aim is to determine how the doctrine of *Streben* and the immanent relation between the Absolute I, the finite I, and the Not-I reconfigure, in an original manner, Kant's moral doctrine. As I have already suggested, in Fichte the practical activity of the I does not assume an exclusively moral character, but is also articulated in social and, above all, political terms. For the purposes of the present study, however, I consider it sufficient to concentrate solely on the first aspect. Indeed, I believe that it is the most useful for analyzing the relationship between this phase of Fichte's thought and the final fascicles of the *Opus postumum*, in which Kant appears to set aside the political considerations that had dominated his writings of the 1790s.

More specifically, my concern will be to examine Fichte's reformulation of the doctrine of the highest good, hinted at in the *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (1794), and the corresponding reinterpretation of the relationship between morality and religion, as this is articulated most clearly in the essay *Über den Grund unseres Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung* (1798). This study will thus neither attempt to propose an exhaustive analysis of

only quantitatively from human knowledge, nonetheless seems to preexist it and to constitute the ideal of its perfection: to know the differentials is to grasp the operation of the divine understanding. As I have already emphasized, in Maimon the activity of the subject appears to consist in articulating, in the form of judgment, something that already preexists the judgment itself in the divine mind. Fichte, by contrast, conceives the idea of the absolute I not as something determinate that preexists finite consciousness, but as that which we progressively realize through our practical freedom. Through this freedom we genuinely create something new, rather than merely discovering something presumed to preexist our activity.

Fichte's moral doctrine in this phase of his thought²⁰⁸. Such an undertaking would require a systematic consideration of the principal work that Fichte devoted to this subject, namely the *System of Ethics* (1798). Although it is in this work that Fichte presents, in the most systematic way, his moral proposal, it does not contain a specific treatment of the question of the highest good or of the relationship between morality and religion²⁰⁹. For these reasons, I consider it sufficient to focus on the two texts already mentioned.

The *Scholar's Vocation* was published in 1794 and consists of five lessons that Fichte had announced as public lectures for the summer semester of that same year at the University of Jena. Unlike the *Grundlage*, it is a non-technical work aimed at a broader audience. The principal aim of the work is to investigate the vocation of the scholar (*Gelehrter*) within society. According to Fichte, the scholar is not merely an educated individual, but rather “a person who dedicates his life to the acquisition of knowledge”²¹⁰ and who, at the same time, devotes his very life to the transmission of such knowledge to others, in the interest of their moral and political formation according to the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

The scholar's task, in this regard, is to contribute to the moral and intellectual education of society, thus underscoring the impossibility of reducing philosophical knowledge to a merely sterile or narrowly specialized erudition. The *Wissenschaftslehre*, in addition to constituting a science concerned with the ultimate foundations of knowledge, must therefore also assume a pedagogical and political function – one that the scholar must articulate and exemplify within the social sphere. As mentioned, however, what concerns me in this paragraph is not directly the political and educational articulation of the scholar's function. For this reason, my analysis will focus in particular on the first of these lectures, entitled “The vocation of man in itself”. As Fichte himself writes at the conclusion of this lecture, the latter investigates “the vocation of man, insofar as he is considered in isolation, that is, apart from any relation to rational beings of his own kind”²¹¹.

What Fichte therefore explores in this first lecture is that particular kind of relationship which the scholar must cultivate not with respect to others, but with respect to himself:

The answer to the [question regarding the vocation of man within society] presupposes, in turn, an answer to yet another, higher one: What is the vocation of man as such? That is to say, what

²⁰⁸ For a precise reconstruction of Fichte's practical philosophy during the Jena period, and, above all, for a reconstruction of the philosophical debate within which these reflections emerge, see Fabbianelli 2000.

²⁰⁹ Just as the *Grundlage* may be regarded as an attempt to the genetic deduction of the faculties of the human mind, the *System of Ethics* can be conceived as an attempt at the genetic deduction of the categorical imperative and a justification of its concrete application through the theory of drives (*Triebe*). This work, however, does not take as its primary object the complex relationship between the moral and the religious dimensions that underlies the Kantian doctrine of the highest good. For a comprehensive analysis of the *System of Ethics*, see Rametta 2012, pp. 159-195.

²¹⁰ *GA*, I,3, 53.

²¹¹ *GA*, I,3, 32.

is the vocation of man considered simply qua man, merely according to the concept of man as such – man isolated and considered apart from all the associations which are not necessarily included in the concept of man?²¹².

Before examining the manner in which the human being must articulate his vocation of educating *others*, it is necessary to investigate how he must educate *himself* as a rational being. Fichte's argument is clearly grounded on the practical part of the *Grundlage*, where the relationship between the finite I and the absolute I was finally determined in terms of the former's *Streben* to attain the latter. As we have seen, here lay perhaps the most original component of Fichte's thought: the transformation of the absolute into something not statically existent and presupposed, like Spinoza's substance, but rather into an idea that we ourselves must attain through the progressive exercise of our freedom and through the constant attempt at the rational determination of the Not-I. This also led to a radical reformulation of the concept of the thing-in-itself: the latter is no longer the theoretically unknowable foundation of appearance, but the result of the practical activity involved in our effort to determine the Not-I.

In this sense, the Not-I, must not be conceived as a self-subsistent reality wholly external to the I. As Fichte writes in *On the Ground of Our Faith*: "In the first case, reason is compelled to halt before the being of the world as before an absolute; the world simply is because it is, and it is thus simply because it is thus"²¹³. In such a case, we are confronted with a reality that we assume to be immutable precisely because it is external to, and irreducible to, the sphere of the I's activity. This is the standpoint of common consciousness, in which the Not-I simply stands before us, and whose genetic origin we are unable to trace. By contrast, the transcendental standpoint enables us to understand that "there is, then, no world existing for itself: in everything we behold [*erblicken*], we behold merely the reflection of our own inner activity"²¹⁴. In the *Staatslehre* Fichte also argues:

Is [the sensible world] in every regard capable of receiving the imprint of the free and spiritual will? Or, if it is not already, how would [the sensible world] have to be [constituted] and, in that case, how would it first have to be made [so that it is capable of receiving the imprint]? – Thus, we have to direct our consideration towards the surrounding world, as the sphere of free action [...] with respect to its fittingness for free moral effects²¹⁵.

²¹² *GA*, I,3, 27.

²¹³ *GA*, I,5, 349.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁵ *GA*, II,16, 31.

Trough transcendental reflection, we recognize the world not as something that merely stands before us, but as the true “sphere of free action”. If this is true, it also means that our own activity can alter and change the world, and not merely contemplate and observe it. Such a transformation of the world must, however, coincide first and foremost with a *transformation of oneself*. The asymptotic determination of the Not-I by the I in fact coincides with the asymptotic approach of the finite I toward the infinite I – that is, toward complete unity with itself. This kind of unity is required by the very structure of our reason and finds expression in the form of the law of the categorical imperative, as Fichte already hinted – without pursuing the matter further – in the concluding lines of the practical part of the *Grundlage*²¹⁶, and as he demonstrates more extensively in the *System of Ethics*²¹⁷. The categorical imperative is the one which commands the I *to take itself as its own end*. This does not mean, of course, that the categorical imperative is the expression of an egoistic law demanding that the ends of others be subordinated to one’s own. Rather, it expresses the necessity that the I “ought to determine itself, and never allow itself to be determined by anything else; it ought to be what it is because it wills to be so, and because it ought to will so”²¹⁸.

To take oneself as one’s own end means, for the finite I, to strive toward the realization of the self as pure rationality, that is, as the infinite I. This is possible only insofar as the I allows itself to be determined not by anything other than itself, namely, not by the sensible component, which exists solely by virtue of the simultaneous presence of a not-I opposed to the I, but rather *by itself*, by its purely rational dimension. Morality thus consists in the *agreement of oneself with itself*:

The ultimate characteristic feature of all rational beings is, accordingly, absolute unity, constant self-identity, complete agreement with oneself. This absolute identity is the form of the pure I and is its only true form; or rather, in the conceivability of identity we recognize the expression of the pure form of the I. Any determination which can be conceived to endure forever is in accordance with the pure form of the I²¹⁹.

Now, this unity and concordance with oneself do not, clearly, signify a fixed and completed state of the I, but rather the unattainable terms of a process through which the I must constantly strive

²¹⁶ See *GA*, I,2, 450.

²¹⁷ In this sense, the moral doctrine of the early Fichte remains closely bound to a Kantian framework, in which the moral law and the categorical imperative are regarded as the true pillars on which the structure of our ethical action rests. This orientation, however, would change significantly after the Atheism Dispute, particularly from the *Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800) onward. In this later phase of Fichte’s work, the legalistic and formalistic morality of Kantian inspiration is replaced by the so-called “higher morality” (*höhere Moralität*). Within this latter framework, the subject’s moral action no longer consists in conforming subjective maxims to an empty formal duty, but rather in the manifestation of that primordial “life” of which the subject is nothing more than a mean for its expression. For a detailed analysis of the “higher morality” in Fichte’s later thought, see Gambaro 2020.

²¹⁸ *GA*, I,3, 30.

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

to attain its absolute rationality. It is, therefore, a process by which the finite I transforms and determines itself in the attempt to reach such a condition. Yet why, then, should self-determination and the determination of the world be mutually implicated? If the moral activity of the subject consists in a progressive self-determination at the expense of the determination of the not-I, would this not amount, for Fichte, to grounding morality in a constant process of solipsistic self-referentiality on the part of the subject, to the detriment of external reality? Clearly, this is not the solution Fichte proposes. The self-determination of the I according to its pure rationality does not coincide with a progressive elimination of its sensible component and, therefore, of the not-I upon which that component is grounded. Such an elimination would in any case be impossible, for – as we have seen in our analysis of the *Grundlage* – the very existence of the I depends upon the existence of the not-I; consequently, the elimination of the latter would amount to the annihilation of the I itself. As the philosopher himself writes, sensibility and reason “are supposed to exist alongside each other”²²⁰.

Sensibility must therefore be *shaped* by reason, namely, *subordinated* to it without being annihilated. Likewise, the moral activity of the I should not consist in a progressive withdrawal from the world but, on the contrary, in an *engagement* with the world that allows for its gradual determination and subordination to the rational ends of human beings. It is in this sense that these two processes are mutually implicated: in order to determine myself in accordance with the laws of my rationality, I must likewise determine the world – the not-I – in the same way. The world, therefore, is not to be annihilated, but *transformed* in accordance with the laws of our rationality, so that, progressively, it no longer constitutes an obstacle to our self-determination as rational beings. This interdependence between the self-determination of the I and the determination of the not-I is well expressed in the following passage:

If the I nevertheless ought always to be at one with itself in this respect too, then it must strive to act directly upon those very things upon which human feeling and representation depend. Man must try to modify these things. He must attempt to bring them into harmony with the pure form of the I, in order that the representation of these things, to the extent that this depends upon the properties of the things, may harmonize the form of the pure I. But it is not possible purely by means of the will alone to modify things in accordance with our necessary concepts of how they should be. A certain skill is also needed, a skill acquired and sharpened by practice²²¹.

This passage clearly illustrates the logic I have described, which structures Fichte’s morality not as a morality of asceticism but, on the contrary, as a morality of active engagement and

²²⁰ *GA*, I,3, 29.

²²¹ *GA*, I,3, 30-31.

commitment toward the reality that stands before us as finite consciousnesses²²². The unity demanded by our reason is therefore not merely the unity of the I with itself, but, at the same time, a *unity of the I with the world*. I believe that it is in this context that Fichte's doctrine of the highest good should be understood. Fichte writes in this regard:

The net result of all that has been said is the following: Man's ultimate and supreme goal is complete harmony with himself and – so that he can be in harmony with himself – the harmony of all external things with his own necessary, practical concepts of them (i.e., with those concepts which determine how things *ought to be*). Employing the terminology of the Critical Philosophy, this agreement is what Kant calls “the highest good.” From what has already been said it follows that this “highest good”, considered in itself, by no means consists of two parts, but is completely unitary: the *highest good* is the *complete harmony of a rational being with himself*. In the case of a rational being dependent upon things outside of himself, the highest good may be conceived as twofold: as harmony between the willing [of such a being] and the idea of an eternally valid willing (i.e., as *ethical goodness*), or as the harmony of our willing (it should go without saying that I am here speaking of our rational willing) with external things (i.e., as *happiness*)²²³.

This is a rather lengthy quotation, yet I believe it deserves a detailed analysis. In its first part, Fichte reiterates the position I have described thus far – namely, that the ultimate end of human being must consist not only in the harmony and unity of the self with itself, but also in the harmony of external things with the practical concepts that determine how those things ought to be. Since these concepts clearly have a rational and subjective origin, this ultimately entails a demand for the harmony of things with the I itself. Fichte then proceeds to make explicit that this harmony is what Kant had called the “highest good.” Here we encounter the most conceptually significant portion of the quotation. First of all, Fichte maintains that the highest good, considered in itself²²⁴, does not

²²² In this regard, I concur with Crowe in his critique of Beiser's interpretation. Beiser, in examining Schiller's reception of *The Scholar's Vocation*, writes that “when Schiller criticizes the excesses of a national education that would destroy all sensibility and individuality for the sake of conformity to universal laws, he appears to be countering Fichte's doctrine of striving, which explicitly states that all sensibility and individuality should disappear for the attainment of a purely rational freedom” (Beiser 2005, p. 229). Crowe, however, rightly observes that Schiller's reading is not in fact entirely accurate, insofar as Fichte himself does not seek to abolish sensibility in favor of rationality, but rather to harmonize the two dimensions through the doctrine of the highest good. The scholar thus correctly writes that “for Fichte, the elimination of sensibility is in fact contrary to the ‘highest good’, to the ultimate moral aim of humanity” (Crowe 2008, p. 381). This interpretation is confirmed by a note found in the practical part of the *Grundlage*, where Fichte distinguishes the *Wissenschaftslehre* from Stoicism. The latter, in fact, does not establish a distinction between absolute being and real being, and consequently conceives the finite I itself as God, attributing to it all the predicates of the latter, thereby failing to recognize its necessary sensible dimension (see *GA*, I,2, 410n.). For an analysis of the debate between Fichte and Schiller, see Fabbianelli 2002.

²²³ *GA*, I,3, 31-32.

²²⁴ The specification “considered in itself,” which renders the German “*an sich*”, is not included in the English translation and is therefore my own addition, since without it the subsequent passage – where Fichte discusses the highest good in relation to man as a finite rational being – would be difficult to understand.

consist of two elements (virtue and happiness), as Kant would have it, but is instead entirely unitary: it is simply the complete unity of the I with the I. In the following sentence, however, Fichte maintains that, when considered in relation to the self as endowed with both intelligence and sensibility, the highest good consists of two parts: moral virtue and happiness. It is evident, however, that these are not two distinct objects, but rather two different ways of regarding the same object. In the first case – namely, from the perspective of an infinite I – the highest good can only be unique and complete, for nothing stands in opposition to the absolute I, which is perfectly identical with itself. In the second case, by contrast, this unity becomes *dynamic*, conceived as the aim of an asymptotic process. From this standpoint, the highest good is articulated into the two aspects we have considered thus far: on the one hand, the conformity of the I with the moral maxim (virtue); on the other, the conformity of the world with the I (happiness). This means, on the one hand, that the subject’s virtue is determined by the extent to which it conforms to the moral maxim, and, on the other, that his happiness is determined by the conformity of the world itself to the ends of these actions. In other words, we can be happy only if the world responds to and is receptive toward our moral ends, shaping itself in accordance with them.

Such a distinction could not exist in the first case, since for the absolute I there is no objective world that stands before it. However, contrary to what Kant maintained, virtue and happiness are not wholly opposed, even from the perspective of the finite I. According to Kant – at least in the *Critique of Practical Reason*²²⁵ – happiness stands in outright opposition to morality, insofar as the pursuit of the latter distances human beings from the satisfaction of their sensible inclinations. Only the introduction of the postulates of the immortality of the soul and of God conceived as the true “distributor” (*Austeiler*) of happiness²²⁶, makes possible the realization of a future connection between these two components²²⁷. Put differently, in Kant, without these postulates, purely moral action estranges human beings from harmony with their sensible dimension, and consequently from the world itself. As the philosopher himself writes, “the moral law of itself still does not *promise* any

²²⁵ As is well known, Kant’s moral proposal cannot be said to be free from oscillations, some of them quite significant. I shall therefore not take into consideration here what Kant writes in the Canon of Pure Reason, the *Critique of Judgment*, the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, to mention only a few other works. Instead, I shall focus on his “canonical” treatment of the problem of the highest good, as presented within the Dialectic of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Even with respect to this latter work, however, I will necessarily offer an oversimplified account, in order to bring to light the contrast with Fichte’s proposal. I shall address the matter in greater detail in the following chapter. For some interpretations of the problem of the highest good in Kant and its development, see Basaglia 2016; Beiser 2016; Engstrom 1992; Kleingeld 1994; Fonnesu 2022; Kahn 2018; Marwede 2016; Tafani 2006; Förster 2000, pp. 117-147; Puzzolo 2024a, pp. 149-250.

²²⁶ See *KpV*, V 128.

²²⁷ I shall not here enter into the question of whether, for Kant, happiness can be realized in this world or only in a supersensible one. With regard to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, I am inclined toward the first option, given that in several passages Kant speaks of the obligation to promote the highest good “in this world” (see *KpV*, V 142).

happiness, since this is not necessarily connected with observance of the law according to our concepts of a natural order as such”²²⁸.

In Fichte, by contrast, it is precisely moral action that makes it possible for human beings to encounter the world in a way that harmonizes it with themselves. The world indeed presents a certain resistance to the subjective activity of self-determination, yet this resistance is continually displaced further through an asymptotic process of rational determination. In this sense, it is no longer necessary to await a future divine reward in order to find satisfaction in one’s moral action. Rather, satisfaction arises *from the action itself*, through the progressive realization of our ends in the world. It should be emphasized that this does not entail that, in Kant, the realization of the highest good is wholly consigned to a voluntaristic act of divine will, thereby absolving human beings of all responsibility for its attainment. For Kant, happiness is likewise attainable only as a *consequence* of moral conduct: one must render oneself *worthy* of happiness. Nevertheless, I maintain that Kant appears to conceive happiness less as a condition progressively brought about by human agency alone, and more as something conferred by God as a future reward. It is no coincidence that in the second *Critique* the philosopher speaks of happiness not as something produced by human beings, but rather as something “distributed” (*ausgeteilt*) by God²²⁹.

It is in this sense that I maintain that, in Fichte, virtue and happiness are by no means mutually opposed: even without direct divine intervention, the pursuit of virtue does not distance us from happiness, but is instead the very condition of possibility for its realization. This does not mean, as we shall shortly see, that Fichte entirely excludes the divine and religious dimension from the question of the realization of morality’s ultimate end. On the contrary, the former will continue to play a decisive role, but it will be reformulated in such terms as to allow Fichte’s moral philosophy to be disengaged from any form of theism which, in his view, was still operative in Kant’s solution to the problem of the highest good.

From the foregoing, it follows that for Fichte the unity of the highest good – that is, the synthesis of virtue and happiness – appears in its fully realized form only for the absolute I, within which no distinction between the two terms can even be posited, since there is no *external* world requiring harmonization with its ends. For the finite I, by contrast, this unity is rendered dynamic, becoming the ultimate goal of an asymptotic process whereby, in aligning its will with the moral maxim (morality), it simultaneously brings external reality into conformity with the ends prescribed by that maxim (happiness) – a task that, by its very nature, can never be brought to full completion.

²²⁸ *KpV*, V 128.

²²⁹ *KpV*, V 110.

As I noted at the beginning of this section, I consider that this solution has its roots precisely in the radicalization of the transcendental perspective inaugurated in the *Grundlage*. The complete exclusion of a dogmatic conception of the thing-in-itself and the establishment of an immanent relationship between subject and object mean that the world itself is not something that merely stands before us as an object of passive observation. Rather, it constitutes the objective correlate of our practical activity²³⁰, capable to accommodate the demands of our maxims and to transform itself accordingly, while nonetheless continuing to serve as a limit to our full self-determination. As we have seen, self-transformation and transformation of the world thus coincide: “[Man] exists in order to become constantly better in an ethical sense, in order to make all that surrounds him better *sensuously* [sinnlich] and – insofar as we consider him in relation to society – *ethically* [sittlich] as well, and thereby to make himself ever happier”²³¹. Once again, happiness is described not as a reward guaranteed to us by divine action for the merits we have earned through our conduct, but as something that we ourselves produce through the harmonization of the world with our ends.

If this is the case, it is therefore legitimate to ask what role Fichte attributes to God and to the religious dimension of human experience in general. Kant had, in fact, rather clearly delimited the respective spheres of morality and religion. Put simply, the former concerns the justification of the incentive for human practical action which, in order to be an authentically moral and autonomous incentive, must rest exclusively on the feeling of respect for the categorical imperative as such, regardless of the particular ends the action may produce. The religious dimension, on the other hand, made it possible to justify the realization of an *ultimate end* of our actions, an end that would endow the entirety of our moral conduct with sense and meaning. This distinction was made even more explicit by the separation between the respective domains of competence of human beings and of God: what lies within human power is the ability to act morally in accordance with the laws commanded by reason, thereby achieving the first element of the highest good, namely virtue. The realization of the second element, happiness – since it does not lie within our power – is entrusted to divine action, which must thereby “supplement our inability, for the possibility of the highest good”²³².

As we have seen, this distinction between what is within our power and what is not becomes far more fluid in Fichte. Happiness is not something “delivered” to us as a reward for our action, but something that we ourselves *directly* produce through the harmonization of the world with our moral

²³⁰ “The world is nothing more than the sensuous representation of our own inner activity, as pure intelligence, according to the clear laws of reason, within incomprehensible limits into which we are, once and for all, enclosed – says the transcendental theory. [...] Our world is the material of our duty, rendered sensible; this is the genuine reality within things, the true fundamental substance of all appearance” (*GA*, I,5, 353).

²³¹ *GA*, I,3, 32.

²³² *KpV*, 119.

ends. The question thus arises as to how Fichte intends to preserve the religious element, while at the same time producing a reconfiguration of it that allows it to coexist coherently with his moral framework. The formulation of this attempt, within the context of the Jena writings, appears in the text *On the Foundation of Our Belief in a Divine Government of the World*. This article appeared in 1798 in the *Philosophisches Journal* as an attempt to respond to the position expressed by F. C. Forberg in a contribution published in the same journal. In that article, the author, misunderstanding Kant's position, held that God and religion should be conceived merely as practical aids for supporting moral conduct. In this sense, it would not be necessary to believe in the realization of a divine kingdom of justice, but only to act *as if* such a realization were possible – thus grounding faith in an anthropological need rather than founding it rationally. Moreover, Forberg maintained that this very impossibility of subsuming God within a purely rational discourse made it possible, even for someone who denied the existence of God on the speculative level, to act morally on the practical level.

Fichte is therefore compelled to take a position against this interpretation, which seems dangerously to devalue the role of faith. Nevertheless, as is well known, it was precisely Fichte's response that provoked outrage in the academic and political spheres, leading to the so-called *Atheismusstreit* and to his removal from the chair at Jena.

The article opens with a reflection on the relationship between philosophy in the broad sense and faith. Fichte holds that the role of philosophy is not to demonstrate (*Beweisen*) in the strict sense the existence of God in order to convince others of the necessity of adopting a particular confession of faith. Rather, philosophy can begin from the fact of the existence of faith among human beings, and then proceed to explain this fact genetically. As Fichte writes: "Philosophy can only explain [*erklären*] facts, by no means produce any itself, except that it produces itself as a fact"²³³. The aim of the work is thus not to induce the public to believe in the existence of God, but rather to ground, according to the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the faith of those who already believe in a divine order of things: "we do not wish our reasoning to be regarded in any way as a refutation of the unbeliever, but rather as a derivation of the believer's conviction"²³⁴.

Fichte's argument begins with a rejection of natural teleology: the assumption of a divine intelligence as the cause of the sensible world is, according to Fichte, a "total absurdity" (*totaler Unsinn*). For the natural sciences, such an explanation would be entirely useless and devoid of meaning, since, within their framework, the world is something closed in upon itself and organized according to its own laws. To introduce an intelligible cause distinct from the world would amount

²³³ *GA*, I, 5, 348.

²³⁴ *Ibidem*.

to falling into an unjustified dogmatism that separates God and the world as two actually existing entities, without adding anything to our explanation of the world itself.

The only way to deduce the existence of God, therefore, is not to start from the existence of the natural world, whose evidence is guaranteed by our sensibility, but from the existence of an *intelligible* world, whose evidence is guaranteed instead by our reason and our freedom. As we have seen, even the existence of freedom is not something the philosopher can prove rationally, as though thereby able to convince others. Rather, it is a conviction (*Überzeugung*), a choice, which is nevertheless the only one capable of harmonizing with the practical requirements of our soul:

I cannot go any further without destroying my innermost being; and I can only not go further because I do not will to go further. Here lies that which sets a limit to the otherwise unrestrained flight of reasoning, that which binds the mind because it binds the heart; here is the point where thinking and willing are united into one, bringing harmony into my being. I could, in and of itself, indeed go further – if I were willing to place myself in contradiction with myself; for there is for reasoning no immanent limit within itself²³⁵.

The rational cogency of the reality of freedom finds its origin in the fact that it binds both mind and heart, bringing thought and will into unity, and thereby uniting our very being in its entirety. Now, the practical conviction of the existence of freedom entails not only the assurance of the possibility of moral action, but also the conviction – or, in this case, the faith (*Glauben*) – that such freedom is neither indeterminate nor directed toward futile ends, but rather oriented toward its own proper end. If such an end did not exist, freedom itself would be threatened, since it would be unable to exercise its effects upon the world, thereby causing us to doubt our own coherence and unity:

I must, absolutely, set before myself the end of morality; its execution is possible, and it is possible through me, that is to say, according to mere analysis: each of the actions I am to perform, and the states of mine which condition those actions, stand in the relation of means to the end set by me. My entire existence, the existence of all moral beings, and the sensible world as our common stage, now acquire a relation to morality, and a wholly new order emerges, of which the sensible world, with all its immanent laws, is only the inert foundation [*ruhende Grundlage*]. That world proceeds calmly on its course, according to its eternal laws, in order to furnish freedom with a sphere; but it has not the slightest influence upon morality or immorality, not the least power over the free being²³⁶.

²³⁵ GA, I,5, 351.

²³⁶ GA, I,5, 353.

Thus, the intelligible reality of freedom also entails the possibility of realizing the supreme end posited by reason itself, that which in the *Scholar's Vocation* was referred to as the highest good. In this way, an entirely new world emerges, namely the supersensible world of morality, in which the ultimate end of human beings is to produce a common good through the exercise of their freedom. Obviously, this world is neither a future realm nor one separate from the world we already inhabit. Rather, it unfolds as a new *perspective* on *this* world – one that, alongside the immanent laws governing its existence, is also shaped by the laws we ourselves institute for the sake of its progressive rational determination. As Fichte writes, through these laws, “[t]he whole world [takes] on a completely different aspect [*Ansicht*] for us”²³⁷.

It is precisely this new aspect that we ascribe to the world which constitutes the privileged object of our faith. We must have faith in the possibility of realizing a moral order of the world that exceeds its strictly sensible dimension, for otherwise the moral law itself would be void and futile. This means that, consequently, God itself is identified with such an order:

This is the true faith; this moral order is the divine [*Göttliche*] which we affirm. It is constructed through the right action [*Rechtthun*]. This is the only possible confession of faith: to carry out joyfully [*frölich*] and without reserve whatever duty demands at any given moment, without doubting or sophisticating about the consequences. In this way, this divine becomes living and real for us; each of our actions is performed in the presupposition of it, and all their consequences are preserved solely within it²³⁸.

Just as, within the context of natural teleology, it was illegitimate to infer from the existence of a certain order in the world the existence of a cause distinct from it, in the same way, according to Fichte, it is illegitimate to conclude, from the existence of a moral order of the world, to the admission of a cause distinct from it. To attribute to God any personal or voluntaristic attribute would inevitably mark a relapse into a form of dogmatism, forcing reason beyond the limits of what it can itself account for. The divine *is itself this order of the world*, which we ourselves produce through actions in conformity with duty. Faith therefore consists in holding firmly to this disposition, in the conviction that such an order can indeed be realized.

The true atheist, in this sense, is not the one who denies the personal existence of God, nor the one who denies that one day God will recompense us for the merit of our actions. Rather, the atheist is the one who doubts the consequences of his actions, the one who lacks faith in the possibility of

²³⁷ *Ibidem*.

²³⁸ *GA*, I,5, 354.

realizing a moral order of the world. It is precisely this anti-theistic orientation of Fichte's philosophy of religion that ignited the debate about his alleged atheism. Yet it is clear that Fichte's operation does not aim at denying the existence of God, but rather at reconfiguring the mode of its existence through the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

The concept of God is neither redundant nor superfluous: its existence is the condition of possibility both for the feeling of respect we experience toward the moral law, and for the joy we experience when acting to produce moral ends in the world. As Fichte writes in the citation above, "each of our actions is performed in the presupposition of it, and all their consequences are preserved solely within it". God, understood as the moral order of the world, represents the presupposition without which our moral action would not be animated by those sentiments that must constitute its foundation. The dialectic between the finite I and the infinite I, outlined in the *Grundlage*, thus defines the general contours of our practical activity, regardless of its particular declination within a specific human practice – whether politics, art, science, or philosophy itself. The introduction of the notion of divinity within this text is precisely what instantiates this movement within the properly religious sphere, making possible the justification of those sentiments that substantiate our moral life.

This is, clearly, a position inherited from and deeply rooted in Kant's primacy of the practical, yet with significant differences. First of all, for Fichte, religion no longer constitutes an extension of morality, as Kant maintained. For Kant, it was necessary to establish a synthetic link between morality and religion in order to safeguard the autonomy of the former. On the one hand, respect for the law had to be grounded solely in the feeling of respect we experience toward it; on the other hand, the realizability of the ultimate end of morality opened toward the religious sphere, which, however, neither had nor ought to have any influence on our moral incentive. This difference, I believe, was rooted in a conception of divinity still permeated by theistic elements. In Kant, the reality of God can be postulated only from a practical point of view; nevertheless, God continues to be conceived as a being "above humanity" whose *will* makes it possible to harmonize nature and freedom in such a way as to render the realization of the highest good possible²³⁹. To make faith in God a constitutive moment of our moral incentive would therefore mean, for Kant, grounding the motivation itself on something *external* to reason. For this reason, he is compelled to separate the moral and the religious spheres.

As Fichte on the contrary writes in the famous *Appellation an der Publikum*, published following the controversies that had emerged due to the 1798 article:

²³⁹ "Morality thus leads inevitably to religion, whereby it is extended to the idea of a moral lawgiver possessing authority above humanity, in whose will lies that ultimate end (of the creation of the world) which can and ought at the same time to be the ultimate end of humanity" (*Religion*, VI 6).

Morality and religion are absolutely one; both are a grasping of the supersensible – the former through action, the latter through faith. [...] Religion without morality is superstition, which deceives the unfortunate with a false hope and makes him incapable of any improvement. Pretended morality without religion may well amount to an outwardly respectable way of life, in which one does what is right and avoids what is evil out of fear of consequences in the sensible world; yet one never truly loves the good, nor performs it for its own sake²⁴⁰.

In this passage, Fichte is particularly clear in affirming the unity of morality and religion. Their object is indeed the same: the aspiration toward the supersensible. Only their means differ: morality enables us to realize the supersensible within the sensible through action; religion allows us to have faith in the possibility of the full realization of this task. Just as religion would not be possible without morality – since it would otherwise lapse into empty superstition – so morality would not be possible without religion, since there would be no genuine *love* of the good, and morality would degenerate into a sterile conduct of life.

The redefinition of the relation between morality and religion is possible, I argue, only in light of the very reformulation of the concept of God. God is no longer a being we postulate in order that, in an indeterminate future, it might reward our actions with a supersensible act of grace. Rather, God is “the living and active moral order”²⁴¹, which we ourselves constantly produce through our actions. What is divine is not the transcendent reward of God, but *our very activity* in conformity with the laws of reason. God is thus entirely immanent to our reason. As Fichte will later write in the *Anweisung zum seeligen Leben*, “knowledge is the divine being itself, absolutely and immediately; and insofar as we ourselves are this knowledge, we are, in our deepest root, the divine being”²⁴². Only in this way is it possible to unify religion and morality without undermining the autonomy of the latter. God is not a being we postulate as external to ourselves, but a principle immanent to our own rationality. To obey God means nothing other than to obey the divinity that dwells within us as rational beings. Likewise, to have faith in God means nothing other than to have faith in the realization of the ultimate end of our actions.

This also leads to the reevaluation of the connection between virtue and happiness to which I have already alluded. It must indeed be emphasized that this reformulation of the concept of God does not lead Fichte to embrace a renewed form of Stoicism. Just as with the concept of God, the concept of happiness is not excluded from Fichte’s system, but rather reformulated so as to render it consistent with his new moral proposal. Happiness is no longer conceived as something bestowed

²⁴⁰ GA, I,5, 428.

²⁴¹ GA, I,5, 354.

²⁴² GA, I,9, 93.

upon us by God in the form of a future reward, but as something we ourselves produce through the exercise of virtue, thereby healing another of Kant's dualisms. Fichte explicitly affirms that "[t]he system in which happiness is expected from an overpowering being is the system of idolatry and superstition"²⁴³.

In Fichte's framework, happiness is the feeling we experience when we encounter harmony between ourselves and the world. In other words, it is grounded in our awareness that the world does not frustrate our aspirations by remaining entirely impervious to them, but rather is shaped and transformed precisely through these very actions, thereby conforming to our ends. If this is true, then it is no longer God who must operate this harmony, as it were, from without. As Rotta writes, "[t]he Kantian problem of the harmony between nature and morality is thereby overcome, since, according to Fichte, such harmony occurs simply through human action within the sensible world [...]. Thus the necessity of a creation that guarantees to the sensible world a purposiveness in accord with the moral nature of the human being falls away, and the hypothesis of an intelligent God thereby becomes superfluous – a hypothesis which, for Fichte, is not only theoretically unfounded but also morally useless"²⁴⁴. The harmony between the I and the world is realized *directly* through the action of the I upon the world, in its attempt to determine it rationally. This harmony is certainly realized *through* faith in God, understood as the completed realization of this project. And yet, the only truly active agent in this process is the I itself.

It should be emphasized that, starting from this essay, Fichte appears to prefer designating the feeling that arises from the harmony between the I and the world no longer as "happiness," but rather as "beatitude" (*Seeligkeit*)²⁴⁵. For whereas the term "happiness" points to the idea of mere sensible enjoyment, beatitude is "that absolute self-sufficiency of reason, that complete liberation from all dependence"²⁴⁶. Beatitude is the state attainable through the self-determination of the self and the determination of the world, in the attempt to progressively unify them. A harmony which, as we have seen, is possible only thanks to the radicalization of the transcendental perspective inaugurated in the *Grundlage* and the removal of the rigid dualism between subject and object, between I and world. In this way, the exercise of morality is not something that distances us from satisfaction and enjoyment, but, on the contrary, something that allows us to orient ourselves toward their realization. In this sense, this joy is determined by the certainty that, in a morally ordered world, "every rational

²⁴³ *GA*, I,5, 437.

²⁴⁴ Rotta 1995, p. 174.

²⁴⁵ "In this sense, it becomes superfluous, as Fichte will argue in another text prompted by the *Streit*, to posit an idea of happiness as a future reward for virtue: in the moral order, understood as a universal order, the good is its own reward, or rather, it is itself blessedness (*Seligkeit*), while the question of how an adequate *Glückseligkeit* might be proportionate to the virtue of each individual loses its meaning" (Rotta 1995, p. 153).

²⁴⁶ *GA*, I,5, 426.

individual has his determinate place,” and that, consequently, “every truly good action succeeds, every evil one surely fails, and that for those who truly love the good, all things must serve for the best”²⁴⁷.

Thus, while in the *Scholar's Vocation* the highest good was still conceived in Kantian terms as a synthesis of virtue and happiness, in *On the Ground of Our Faith* it takes the form of beatitude, which will play a central role in Fichte's later writings. Regardless of these terminological differences, it is clear that both texts share a common underlying perspective: namely, the idea that the reward for human moral action is not “distributed” by God from the outside proportionally to virtue, but is directly produced by human beings themselves through their actions and through the progressive synthesis between the reality of the world and their moral dispositions. As we have seen above, faith in the realization of a moral order of things allows us “to carry out joyfully [*frölich*] and without reserve whatever duty demands at any given moment,” thus avoiding the reduction of Fichte's morality to a form of abstract rigorism that disregards the human projection of an end for one's actions. The reward for action, once again, must not be deferred to an indeterminate future: each single action *is already in itself a reward* for our moral disposition, insofar as it brings us closer to the idea of beatitude: “Only where just action proceeds from a clear vision does it occur with love and delight, and the act rewards itself, is self-sufficient, and requires nothing external”²⁴⁸.

To conclude, in this paragraph we have seen how the removal of the rigid dualism between subject and object, between I and world, leads Fichte to a substantial reevaluation of the moral question in contrast with Kantian thought. The demonstration that the world is the objective referent of our practical activity, “the material, made sensible, of our duty”, makes it possible to conceive morality as that medium which progressively unites the I and the world, without the need to appeal to faith in an external divine intervention, to an act of grace. Together with the dualism between subject and object, the rigid dualism between virtue and happiness is also removed: it is not God who must actively unite these two elements, but we ourselves who can do so through the progressive harmonization between ourselves and the world in the direction of attaining beatitude. In the following paragraphs, I will show how, despite this orientation marking a rupture with the “critical” phase of Kant's thought, one can nevertheless discern, within the last fascicles of the *Opus postumum*, a line of reflection that seems to bring the Kantian perspective closer to that of the early Fichte.

²⁴⁷ GA, I,5, 356.

²⁴⁸ GA, II,8, 381.

3.2 Subject and world in the last fascicles of Kant's *Opus postumum*

3.2.1 The *Selbstsetzungslehre* in fascicle VII

In the preceding paragraphs, I have examined several key aspects of the early phase of Fichte's thought, with the aim, first, of outlining the general contours of his philosophical project through a comparison with Reinhold, Schulze, and Maimon, and subsequently of addressing two more specific dimensions of his reflection. The first concerned the problem of immanence and its relation to Spinoza; the second, the moral articulation of the subject's practical activity and its connection with the religious sphere. The attempt has been to show how these two problems are intimately connected, and how they represent a direct consequence of Fichte's stance against the skeptical tendencies of his contemporaries. On the one hand, it became evident that Maimon's skepticism was ultimately grounded in a dogmatic presupposition of his philosophy – namely, the retention of an objective dimension irreducible and “external” to the operations of our understanding. Fichte's aim, by contrast, is to demonstrate that, from a theoretical standpoint, the immanence of thought is an assumption from which we cannot dispense. Objects, insofar as they are represented, are generated by the imagination, stabilized by reason, and preserved by the understanding; for this reason, no “exceeding” objective dimension can exist beyond our theoretical faculties.

From a practical perspective, however, the immanence of the relation shifts from the opposition between the finite I and the not-I to that between the finite I and not-I, on the one side, and the absolute I, on the other. While it is true that from the theoretical standpoint no transcendent dimension exists beyond our faculties, from the practical standpoint the not-I represents a limit that ought to be constantly overcome. From this perspective, there thus emerges and transcending dimension of objects, one that *we ourselves create* through our freedom and through our asymptotic striving toward the absolute I. The absolute I therefore encompasses, within an immanent relation, both the finite I and the not-I in a unity that does not yet exist but that ought to exist.

Subsequently, I examined the moral articulation of this dynamic, showing how, despite the fact that Fichte's moral proposal radicalizes Kant's practical philosophy, it also displays elements of undeniable originality. The radicalization of the immanence of the relation between I and not-I, between subject and world, implies that it is no longer necessary to appeal to faith in an external divine act as the sole means of synthesizing freedom and nature, virtue and happiness. The subject's activity is already an activity *upon* the world: a constant attempt to determine it rationally and to render it conformable to our ends. It is already the activity of the moral subject that directly produces a union between happiness and virtue – what in the 1798 essay will be designated as *beatitude* –

without the necessity of appealing to a divine intervention. God is thus stripped of any theistic element and becomes the moral order of the world, which we ourselves concur to produce through the exercise of our morality.

In this chapter I shall attempt to show that, although this proposal represents a significant development with respect to the moral philosophy Kant articulated in the so called “critical” period, it nonetheless exhibits elements of undeniable affinity with the final fascicles of Kant’s manuscripts. As in the case of Maimon, my aim will not be to determine or to measure the actual influence of Fichte’s thought on the late Kant. As is well known, after an initial interest in directly supporting the young Fichte – through his recommendation to the publisher Hartung for the publication of the *Critique of All Revelation* – Kant would later distance himself publicly from Fichte in 1799, through his well-known public Declaration. Here Kant writes that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is “nothing more or less than mere logic” and, as a consequence, “a wholly untenable system”²⁴⁹.

Moreover, in a letter to Tieftrunk dated April 5, 1798, Kant admits that he had not fully read the *Grundlage*, which had been sent to him by Fichte himself, and that he knew it primarily through a review published in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, whose author was most likely Reinhold²⁵⁰. These considerations, however, do not imply that Kant remained entirely indifferent to the publication of Fichte’s system. Even if Kant did not possess a thorough, first-hand knowledge of Fichte’s writings, it is undeniable that he was aware of the considerable influence it exerted on the philosophical debates of the late eighteenth century. To take but one example: Reinhold himself – one of the most ardent defenders of Kant’s critical philosophy – would publicly declare his conversion to the *Wissenschaftslehre* following its publication. The debate that unfolded in the decade after 1794, and which involved figures well known to Kant, such as Maimon, the young Schelling, Beck, and Lichtenberg, must surely have made clear to him that the *Wissenschaftslehre* had become a reference point that could neither be ignored nor dismissed as mere artificial sophistry.

In this sense, even if it is difficult – and perhaps impossible – to establish a direct influence of Fichte on Kant, it is nevertheless legitimate to assume that the final fascicles of the manuscripts (1799–1803) were composed within this vibrant philosophical climate and that they may have borne the imprint of certain tendencies that were gradually taking shape in those same years. At the same time, I will argue that some authors well known to Kant and mentioned in the manuscripts, such as Lichtenberg himself, turn out to be closer to Fichte’s philosophy than they were prepared to acknowledge. The version of Fichte that these authors so often targeted was an abstract, even caricatured one, much like the portrayal offered by Jacobi. This does not mean, however, that the

²⁴⁹ *BW*, XII 370.

²⁵⁰ *BW*, XII 240.

genuine spirit of Fichte's thought may not have taken hold – perhaps even unconsciously – to a greater extent than they were willing to concede. At the end of this chapter, I will attempt to show that there are indications suggesting that this tendency may also be true of Kant himself.

However, contrary to what much of the earlier scholarship has attempted to do, I believe that the indications of a theoretical proximity between Kant and Fichte are to be found not so much, or not only, in the seventh *Konvolut*, where the so-called doctrine of self-positing (*Selbstsetzungslehre*) is set out. This doctrine can certainly be understood as a springboard for the further development of Kant's thought, but in my view it is in the first *Konvolut* that the most evident intersection between the two authors is to be found. Yet, as I shall show in this section, it is indeed within the theory of self-positing that we encounter the earliest signs of this development.

In the second part of this study, I have shown and analyzed the problems Kant addresses in the opening fascicles of the *Opus postumum*. As we have seen, these concern primarily the philosophy of nature and the justification of the scientific character of the *physica specialis*. However, I have also pointed out that such issues are only apparently restricted to this order of problems, since they in fact seem capable of reshaping and reconfiguring the very fundamental instruments of transcendental philosophy itself. As Pecere argues, “his new epistemology of physics, which has reshaped the task of exhibition, plays now a crucial role for the reconsideration of transcendental philosophy as a whole”²⁵¹. In this sense, it has become clear that the doctrine of schematism, the doctrine of the thing-in-itself, and even the concept of experience undergo significant transformations, especially in fascicles X and XI. I would suggest that fascicle VII, which follows those just mentioned, constitutes the definitive confirmation that Kant's interests progressively shift from more technical issues tied to the philosophy of nature toward broader reflections on the very status of transcendental philosophy.

In particular, I maintain that the developments presented in the preceding fascicles made Kant aware of the need to elaborate a theory of subjectivity compatible with these new conceptual instruments. To put it very bluntly, the attempt to reformulate the rigid dualism between form and matter, between sensibility and understanding, was bound to have repercussions for the way in which Kant conceived the distinction, introduced in the second Transcendental Deduction of the first *Critique*, between an analytic and a synthetic unity of apperception.

We have briefly seen that Fichte himself criticized the relation that Kant establishes between these two unities. The philosopher wrote for example:

Unity is not a product of multiplicity, but multiplicity is the product of unity. Thus, through an analysis of unity, I have generated multiplicity. The dispersion of absolute *multiplicity* over *unity*

²⁵¹ Pecere 2015, p. 174.

is a central point of my entire philosophy. [...] [Synthetic unity] only becomes synthetic under the presupposition that there is an analytic one; synthetic only by means of passing through the manifold. In this sense, Kant's proposition, the proposition of the synthetic unity, would be correct; only, it is not the first, not the absolute proposition. What precedes as the absolute proposition is the proposition of a unity that is, that does not become, and the proposition of the analysis of this unity. For this belongs to apperception²⁵².

We have seen that Fichte's entire philosophy can be conceived as an attempt to justify the systematic character of philosophy by grounding difference and multiplicity in an original identity. Fichte in fact adopts a foundationalist conception of knowledge, according to which knowledge can be regarded as systematic only if there exists an ultimate and certain foundation capable of transmitting its certainty to the other propositions of the system. In order to possess these characteristics, the foundation must express an absolute identity: if it were to contain within itself any difference, it would no longer be the ultimate principle, since one could still seek a higher principle that abstracts from the multiplicity present in the first. In this sense, any analytic unity must precede and make possible, from the logical–transcendental standpoint, any synthetic unity, that is, any unity composed of a synthesized multiplicity.

It is interesting to note that, in this passage, Fichte maintains, on the one hand, that Kant's proposition concerning synthetic unity is correct, but on the other, that it cannot be regarded as the first and absolute proposition, since it presupposes a more original analytic unity. The passage to which Fichte is most likely referring is the famous §16 of the second Transcendental Deduction, where Kant introduces the notion of the "I think" (*Ich denke*), understood as the unity of consciousness that makes possible the synthesis of the perceived manifold. In this paragraph, Kant also distinguishes between a synthetic unity of apperception and an analytic unity. The former expresses the unity of diverse representations effected by the "I think" itself, whereas the latter is the representation of the simple unity of consciousness with itself, independently of the empirical synthesis it performs²⁵³.

However, the passage in this paragraph that Fichte most likely finds problematic is the one in which Kant states the following:

Therefore it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations *in one consciousness* that it is possible for me to represent the *identity of the consciousness in these*

²⁵² *GA*, IV,5, p. 326. In a similar manner, in a manuscript from the same years, Fichte wrote that "the synthetic unity of apperception is only an image [*Nachbild*] of the analytical unity" (*GA*, II,14, p. 245).

²⁵³ See *KrV*, B 132–133.

representations itself, i.e., the *analytical* unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some *synthetic* one²⁵⁴.

Kant thus appears to distinguish between a unity of consciousness that functions as the unifying principle of representations – namely, synthetic unity – and the representation of this very unity through a form of self-reflection – namely, analytic unity. The passage I have just quoted shows that, for Kant, it is the synthetic unity of apperception that makes the analytic unity possible. This means that the unity of consciousness itself is possible only insofar as it performs an activity of connecting the manifold. In other words, the representation of the *unity* of consciousness always presupposes the synthesis of a *difference* within the manifold represented. As Kant himself recognizes in a footnote, the synthetic unity is indeed “the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy”²⁵⁵.

As I briefly mentioned in section 3.1.2, the issue is in fact more complex. It is true that, in that passage, Kant explicitly states that the analytical unity must presuppose the synthetic unity. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the analytical unity of apperception cannot simply be regarded as the mere result of a series of successive empirical perceptions. Were this the case, it would not properly constitute a unity, but would rather be subject to constant alteration. The unifying function of the “I think” must therefore, in some sense, precede a priori the very connection of representations and make it possible, so that a unified and stable consciousness can arise. As Kant himself writes in the §15 of the Transcendental Deduction:

But in addition to the concept of the manifold and of its synthesis, the concept of combination also carries with it the concept of the unity of the manifold. Combination is the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold. The representation of this unity cannot, therefore, arise from the combination; rather, by being added to the representation of the manifold, it first makes the concept of combination possible. This unity [...] precedes all concepts of combination a priori [...]²⁵⁶.

In this passage, Kant emphasizes that conjunction itself – and hence synthesis – cannot be possible without a unity that makes it possible, a unity that must therefore precede a priori every

²⁵⁴ *KrV*, B 133.

²⁵⁵ *KrV*, B 134. On this priority of the synthetic I, see e.g. Adinolfi 1994, p. 103: “This is [...] the foundation of the transcendental deduction of the possibility for the pure concepts of the understanding to refer a priori to objects: that the relation of apperception to sensibility is the first and original. If we were able to see the concept arise together with the synthesis [...], it was then because consciousness itself, which attains its own unity in the concept, has always already, in turning toward itself, been directed toward the synthesis of the manifold”.

²⁵⁶ *KrV*, B 130-131.

synthetic combination. Kant thus seems to sketch a circle: on the one hand, the analytical unity of apperception is made possible by the synthetic unity, that is, by the connection of different representations; on the other hand, this same analytical unity constitutes the condition of possibility of the synthesis itself, which could not operate without a unifying function that remains identical to itself. Zahn writes in this regard that “[t]he fact that the affirmed *immediacy* and the *mediation* of the *consciousness of this immediacy* by the consciousness of the synthesis of *given* representations are contemporaneous raises a transcendental problem, one that Kantian criticism brought up but apparently was never able to recognize as a genuine problem”²⁵⁷. The problem lies in what I have just pointed out: namely, that on the one hand the existence of an analytical unity of apperception is mediated by the synthesis of the manifold, while on the other hand the very synthesis of the manifold is possible only on the presupposition of an originary and immediate identity.

However, I maintain that the inability of Kantian criticism to explicitly thematize the circularity of this problem should not be interpreted as a failure on its part, but rather as the expression of the fact that this very circularity constitutes the essence of critical philosophy itself. If it is true, as Fichte maintains, that the principal limitation of Kant’s philosophy lies in its failure to identify the ultimate foundation of knowledge, this means that it halts at the presupposition of difference without tracing it back to an original identity. This does not imply, however, that the presupposition of difference entirely excludes unity or subordinates it to difference. Rather, what is presupposed, so to speak, is the *very difference between difference* (synthetic unity²⁵⁸) and *identity* (analytical unity), both of which are thus taken as given and not further justified. If both are given, they thereby possess the character of immediacy. Yet, insofar as they cannot exist independently of one another, they also both simultaneously possess the character of mediacy. To quote Zahn once again, “Kantian thought stops short at the difference between identity and synthesis. It does not attempt to understand genetically the synthesis from the action of identity itself”²⁵⁹. The circularity between analytic unity and synthetic unity is determined by the fact that both terms are at once immediate and mediated. For Kant, however, this does not constitute a difficulty but rather marks the distinctive feature of critical philosophy. Put differently, the givenness of the empirical manifold – and thus of difference – secures the system’s capacity to sustain a form of empirical realism without collapsing into absolute idealism. Conversely, it is the immediacy attributed to the unity of apperception that allows critical philosophy to preserve its transcendental idealism while avoiding reduction to a form of empiricism.

²⁵⁷ Zahn 1964, p. 169.

²⁵⁸ The synthetic unity is, in itself, an expression of difference. As Furlani writes, “[s]ince difference is constituted by both unity and difference, to conceive consciousness as unity means to understand it within the relational dynamic between subject and object” (Furlani 2019).

²⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 175.

The *presupposition* of the difference between these two poles therefore constitutes the very origin of all other Kantian dualisms, such as between form and matter, understanding and sensibility, etc. Fichte, however, could not accept Kant's starting point. For the latter, to stop at the givenness of difference means, in the end, to remain at the threshold of transcendental reflection without authentically entering into it. To presuppose difference and to claim for it the status of immediacy means failing to recognize that it can exist only by virtue of the identity expressed by knowledge itself, thereby reinstating a form of transcendent relation between knowledge and its object.

It is for this reason that, in the passage cited above, Fichte contends that the synthetic unity to which Kant appeals ought not to be expelled from the system, but rather traced back to, and grounded in, an originary analytic unity that alone can serve as its foundation. In another passage he writes, for example, that "the synthetic unity of apperception is only an image [*Nachbild*] of the analytic unity"²⁶⁰.

As we have seen in the second part of this study, within the manuscripts many of Kant's dualisms appear to be progressively attenuated. This suggests that even for Kant it becomes necessary to develop a doctrine of subjectivity that no longer takes the difference between difference and identity as an originary presupposition, but rather derives difference from identity itself. This, in my reading, is precisely what takes place within the seventh *Konvolut*. Let us consider, for instance, the following expressions:

The "I am" is not yet a proposition (*propositio*), but merely the copula of a proposition; not yet a judgement. "I am existing" contains merely apprehension, that is, it is not merely a subjective judgement but makes myself an object of intuition in space and time. Logical consciousness leads [*führt*] to real [consciousness], and progresses from apperception to apprehension and its synthesis of the manifold. [...] The whole of objects of intuition – the world is only in me (transcendental idealism)²⁶¹.

The understanding begins with the consciousness of itself (*apperception*) and performs thereby a logical act. To this the manifold of outer and inner intuition attaches itself serially, and the subject makes itself into a limitless sequence. This intuition is not empirical. It is not perception, that is, not derived from a sense-object, but determines the object by the subject's a priori act, [through which] it is the owner and originator of its own representations. [...] First, the consciousness of myself (*sum*), which is logical (*cogito*) – not an inference (*ergo sum*), but by the rule of identity (*sum cogitans*). In this act of representation (of thought) no synthesis of the manifold of intuition is yet met with; it merely contains an analytic judgement. The first progress of the faculty of representation (*facultas repraesentativa*) is that from pure thought in

²⁶⁰ *GA*, II, 14, p. 245.

²⁶¹ *OP*, XXII 96-97.

general to pure intuition: space and time, which contain synthetic a priori knowledge. They are not objects (*entia*), but mere forms of a priori intuition²⁶².

I consider these passages to be of the utmost significance insofar as, despite the somewhat unsystematic character of the exposition, they appear to shed light quite clearly on an evolution in the doctrine of subjectivity with respect to the Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique*. Once again, Kant distinguishes between an analytical consciousness, here also referred to as logical, and a synthetic consciousness, also called real. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is the absence of the circularity that had characterized their relation within the first *Critique*. Kant explicitly states that it is logical consciousness – namely, the consciousness of the pure identity of thought with itself – that leads to real consciousness, that is, to the consciousness of the synthesis carried out in the apprehension of the manifold²⁶³.

This would seem to constitute an attempt – certainly not developed in a systematic fashion comparable to Fichte's – to ascribe a logical-transcendental primacy to identity over difference. Put otherwise: identity and difference would not both be conceived as presupposed, and thus as simultaneously immediate and mediated. Rather, what possesses the character of immediacy would be solely the simple identity of thought with itself. The latter, then, "makes itself into an object *mediately*, according to the form in which it is affected"²⁶⁴.

As we have seen above, in the first *Critique* the equiprimordiality of analytical and synthetic unity was grounded in Kant's need to avoid reducing transcendental idealism to a form of subjectivist metaphysics in which the I would possess the capacity to create the contents of its own experience *ex nihilo*. This meant that the difference expressed in the synthetic I between a knowing subject and a known object had to be regarded as just as originary as the identity of the subject with itself expressed by the analytical I. The finitude of the I in fact required the original assumption of a givenness external to the I as a condition of possibility for its operations.

²⁶² *OP*, XXII 82-83.

²⁶³ I believe Choi arrives at a similar conclusion when she writes: "In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, on the basis of the claim that the existence of myself is immediately given in self-consciousness, the situation could only be conceived as though the occurrence of apperception were necessarily bound to perception and thus to the passive, receptive faculty. Accordingly, the identity between apperception and perception, through the existence of myself, could never in the *Critique of Pure Reason* be taken as an indication of the possibility of a unified relation of the two in their essential features. At most, it would imply the simultaneity of the two faculties in the actual process of cognition, not logical but genealogical. By contrast, in the *Opus postumum*, the existence of myself in self-consciousness is properly understood as the product of the subject's active activity, and arises only in this act. Self-consciousness here, as was clearly shown earlier, can be understood only as the act of self-positing; and through this act the subject makes itself into an object, namely into something existing. Consequently, the existence of myself is traced back to the act of self-positing, and it is this act that brings it about" (Choi 1996, p. 49).

²⁶⁴ *OP*, XXII 20.

Fichte's charge, however, would be that this perspective remains confined to an empirical level and does not rise to a genuinely transcendental reflection. Such a reflection would in fact make it possible to understand how the givenness of the object, assumed as originary, is always posited *in* and *by* thought itself, and is therefore, *mediated* by the self-positing of the latter. It seems to me that Kant has a similar concern in mind when, in the first quotation he writes that transcendental idealism is that form of thought which recognizes that the world – that is, the totality of objects of intuition – exists only *within* me.

This means that the positing of objects, and of real consciousness as the form of apprehension of the latter, can, from a logical–transcendental standpoint, only follow the self-positing of thought itself, and be contained within it. Mathieu writes in this regard that “[w]hat characterizes this definitive achievement of transcendental philosophy is that the self-positing of a sensing and receptive I is presented as an extension of the self-positing of the *thinking* I [...], a consequence that the *Critique* had not foreshadowed”²⁶⁵. As I have repeatedly emphasized, while in the *Critique* the receptivity of the synthetic I was simply assumed, in the *Opus postumum* Kant seems to acknowledge that this very receptivity always presupposes an original activity that posits it as receptivity. Kant assigns particular importance to this problem, as is evident from the numerous passages in which he thematizes the status of space and time. The dualism, and thus the difference, between the forms of sensibility and those of the understanding is one of the cornerstones that, in the *Critique*, underpins Kant's transcendental idealism. This dualism, in turn, is grounded in the original difference between a synthetic I and an analytical I: if the former must constitute the presupposition for the existence of the latter, this means that the difference contained within it, between the forms of thought and the forms of sensibility, cannot be derived from the pure identity of thought expressed by the analytical I. It is on this basis that Kant coins the famous expression according to which “there are two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root, namely sensibility and understanding, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought”²⁶⁶.

²⁶⁵ Mathieu 1991, p. 179. Even Emundts, who in a recent article dwells on the continuity between the doctrine of self-affection in the *Critique* and in the *Opus postumum*, nevertheless contends that with the doctrine of self-positing a genuine discontinuity emerges between the two texts: “It seems obvious to me that Kant wants to follow closely the *Critique* with this conception: In both the *Critique* and the *Opus postumum*, an act is meant in which spontaneity is in the foreground (nothing is already given in order, but it has to be put into order). In both, determinations of the self and its states and those of external objects are closely connected, although in the *Opus postumum* it becomes clearer that (as well as how) both determinations come about through the same act. That the concept of self-affection remains roughly the same concept, even though it is spelled out in more detail in the *Opus postumum*, was the first thesis I wanted to present in this third part. As we have seen, Kant takes up self-affection once again within the further development of the *Opus postumum* and translates the thought into a theory of self-positing. With this theory, I have argued, there is a change because its formulations present apperception more as something that is real and progresses to determination” (Emundts 2023, p. 124).

²⁶⁶ *KrV*, A 15-B 29. As Choi argues, this quotation shows that, according to the first *Critique*, “understanding and sensibility are originally given as the absolutely contraposed fundamental sources of human cognition” (Choi 1996, p. 139).

Now, the fact that Kant states in this passage that both stems of our cognition may derive from a common root does not in fact undermine his underlying dualism. The overcoming of this dualism would only be possible if this root were actually identified and it could be explained how the two forms of our cognition derive from it. To assert the impossibility of determining the identity from which difference originates simply amounts to affirming, for our understanding, the impossibility of moving beyond the presupposition of difference itself. It is no coincidence that Kant introduces the doctrine of schematism precisely in order to address the problem of the heterogeneity between understanding and sensibility, by demonstrating the possibility of their mediation through an intermediate faculty, namely the imagination. As we have seen in the second part of this study, the doctrine of schematism in the *Opus postumum* undergoes a substantial reformulation. In *Konvolute X* and *XI*, Kant explicitly examines how the forms of the understanding are not merely to be applied to a material already given to sensibility, but rather participate actively in the very production of this material. More specifically, what the understanding generates through its spontaneity are the dynamic moving forces of matter – or the ether – conceived as indirect appearance. For this reason, Kant writes that “[t]he concept, or rather the invention [*Dichtung*], of an all-pervading ether is precisely what makes space into an object of sense”²⁶⁷.

The indirect appearance constitutes the transcendental structure that the spontaneity of our understanding introduces into experience in order to account for the genesis of the various attributes of material bodies as they are situated within the intuitions of space and time. If this reconstruction is correct, it follows that the forms of sensibility are no longer to be regarded as a source of knowledge entirely heterogeneous with respect to the operations of the understanding, but are rather grounded in the latter’s activity. This dynamic, introduced in *Konvolute X* and *XI*, is reaffirmed in the *VII Konvolute* in the context of the doctrine of self-positing. It seems to me that this development is in fact a consequential, and indeed necessary, step.

The doctrine of the indirect appearance has shown how the very genesis of the objects of experience must be derived from an operation of the understanding, then, for the reasons outlined above, it was also necessary to derive the synthetic unity of apperception itself from its analytical unity. The crucial point is to demonstrate that the I think is not merely an organizing *function* of a simply presupposed givenness, but that this very givenness, together with sensibility, is to be recognized as the product of an *activity* of positing on the part of the I. As also Mathieu highlights, “[t]he original source of the [unity of experience], the ‘I think,’ *coincides* with the activity that creates such an experience”²⁶⁸.

²⁶⁷ *OP*, XXII 109.

²⁶⁸ Mathieu 1991, p. 185.

This continuity between the problem of the indirect appearance and the doctrine of self-positing is indicated precisely by the attention that, in the seventh *Konvolut*, Kant devotes to the question of the pure intuitions, and in particular to space. For it is space, as the form of inner sense, that is most directly implicated in the new doctrine of moving forces, conceived as the genetic principles of the empirical material exhibited in the direct appearance. It seems to me that this is exactly what Kant intends to underscore when he writes that “space with its manifold cannot be apprehended, but is apperceived [*appercipirt*] as the original consciousness of oneself, as positing such a manifold”²⁶⁹, and that “[s]pace and time are, on the one hand, acts of the spontaneity of the subject in intuition, and, on the other hand, affections of receptivity”²⁷⁰.

The first passage clearly highlights that space, as the pure form of sensibility, cannot be empirically perceived. Up to this point, there do not appear to be any significant divergences from the first *Critique*. The second part of the quotation, however, contains an interesting specification. Space is not only not an object of perception, but is even traced back to the very activity of apperception as self-consciousness. This means, as I have already noted, that Kant now acknowledges in the form of intuition a root in the very activity of spontaneity. As the quotation itself showcases, the subject does not merely receive a manifold from the outside, but rather posits it according to its own rules in the pure form of space. If this is true, namely, if space is the place in which objects are “posited” through the activity of the understanding, then it too must partake of this active dimension²⁷¹. But what does it mean that the understanding “posits” objects in space?

As I already noted when discussing the problem of the indirect appearance, this nuance in the distinction between spontaneity and receptivity does not mean, for Kant, that the latter is entirely dissolved into the former. The impossibility of dispensing with the receptive dimension of the subject is indicated by the second brief quotation I have just cited, in which Kant emphasizes the simultaneity of activity and passivity within the forms of sensibility. To recognize that these forms are the product of the subject’s activity simply means acknowledging that, in the objects themselves, there are material determinations which can be traced back to genetic rules constructed by the understanding within the dimension of the indirect appearance, for the sake of the collective unity of experience. This does not imply denying the capacity of objects to affect the subject’s senses, but rather

²⁶⁹ *OP*, XXII 41.

²⁷⁰ *OP*, XXII 42. I believe these passages clearly contradict Adickes claims, according to which “the lengthy discussions of the VII *Konvolut* on space and time [...] bring nothing new and no further development in comparison with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, indeed already in comparison with the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770” (Adickes 1920, p. 593).

²⁷¹ “The fact that space and time can be conceived of also within the framework of the understanding’s spontaneous activity means that, by representing to itself a spatio-temporalized manifold, the subject is not simply setting the manifold as a *dabile*; rather, it is unifying this manifold according to a principle a priori. By doing so, the subject shapes this manifold *dabile*, thereby acknowledging its inner structure as a *cogitabile*” (Lorini 2023, p. 101).

establishing that their very givenness cannot be affirmed apart from an originary activity of the understanding²⁷². To maintain, therefore, that the understanding “posits” the manifold in space does not entail claiming that it materially *creates* the objects that present themselves to us. Rather, it means acknowledging its role in the generation of that “indirect apperance” which determines the empirical attributes of the direct appearance that we perceive in space as given. Thus, as Choi writes, “[p]ure intuition belongs equally, on the one hand, to apperception as the faculty of acting spontaneously, and, on the other hand, to apprehension as the faculty of being affected”²⁷³.

This means that the affection of objects upon our sensibility is subordinated to, and made possible by, that spontaneous activity of the subject through which the indirect appearance is posited as the transcendental condition of the empirical properties of bodies. In this sense, as Kant writes., affection is in fact nothing other than self-affection. Let us read for example the following passages

The perception of external objects is nothing other than the act of the subject through which it affects itself; and perceptions are nothing other than moving forces of this very same subject, connected with consciousness, through which the understanding extracts for the empirical (the passive side of representations) only so much according to principles as it has itself laid into them for the sake of possible experience²⁷⁴.

In regard to matter and those of its forces which affect the subject externally (hence, are *moving* forces), perceptions are themselves moving forces combined with reaction (*reactio*), and the understanding *anticipates* perception according to the uniquely possible forms of motion: attraction, repulsion, enclosure (surrounding) and penetration. Thus the possibility of establishing a priori a system of empirical representations (which otherwise appeared impossible) and of *anticipating* experience *quoad materiale*, is illuminated²⁷⁵.

These formulations seem to summarize rather effectively the fundamental issues involved in the transition from the metaphysical principles of natural science to physics. What Kant tries to show here is that there is no “brute” affection of the given upon our senses, since such affection is always already conditioned by a spontaneous activity of positing the moving forces of matter, thereby making possible the anticipation of perceptions even *quoad materiale*. Thus, the subject impresses itself to

²⁷² See also Mathieu 1991, p. 167: “In this way, the *Opus postumum* does not negate the sensible and receptive character of our intuition, but enriches it with a new consideration of its active component”.

²⁷³ Choi 1996, p. 54

²⁷⁴ *OP*, XXII 392.

²⁷⁵ *OP*, XXII 502.

the extent that the object acting upon its senses is already determined and ordered by that indirect appearance which the subject itself has inserted into experience through a spontaneous act²⁷⁶.

Now, it should be emphasized that the concept of self-affection is by no means a novelty of the manuscripts: already in the first *Critique*, and especially in the second edition. In this text, self-affection is described by Kant as the act through which the subject can to know itself as an appearance:

Hence if we admit about the latter that we cognize objects by their means only insofar as we are externally affected, then we must also concede that through inner sense we intuit ourselves only as we are internally affected by ourselves, i.e., as far as inner intuition is concerned we cognize our own subject only as appearance but not in accordance with what it is in itself²⁷⁷.

In the *Critique*, Kant distinguishes “self-consciousness” which is nothing other than the representation of the “spontaneity of thinking” exercised by the I think, from “self-cognition”, which requires the representation of the manifold present in inner sense and given through sensibility. In other words, I can *know* myself only insofar as I am aware of the contents that are given to my consciousness. In other words, self-consciousness may be conceived as the reflective structure of the analytic unity of apperception, understood as the mere identity of the transcendental I with itself, whereas self-knowledge is the mode of reflection that pertains to the synthetic I, as the synthesis of form and content of experience. For example, if I observe the white table before me, I can be said to “know” myself only if I am conscious of the representation “white table” that is generated within my inner sense. It is for this reason that Kant maintains that I can know myself solely as I “appear” to myself: the object of my self-cognition is always an appearance, a representation present within my inner sense, which I apprehend through an act of reflection. In this sense, whereas in empirical cognition of the external world we are impressed by objects, in the cognition of ourselves as empirical subjects we are impressed by our own inner sense, and thus we are *affected by ourselves*.

Obviously, this role of self-affection within the first *Critique*, together with the distinction between self-consciousness and self-knowledge, would require more detailed attention than I can provide here. What nevertheless seems possible to affirm is that, within the first *Critique*, the process of self-affection appears to play a rather marginal systematic role, and does not seem to be connected in any particular way with the justification of the possibility of empirical knowledge²⁷⁸. Rather, it

²⁷⁶ “We are affected by moving forces, but ‘experience does not arise of itself as the influence of moving forces upon sense; rather, it must be produced’ (XXII 320). Hence the subject must itself perform and bring about ‘that very movement by which it is affected’; it must—and this is precisely self-affection—insert a priori into itself ‘what it receives from without’ (XXII 321).”

²⁷⁷ *KrV*, B 156.

²⁷⁸ I thus agree with Emundts when she writes: “I think it is important to remember that these passages are additions to the second edition. This suggests, in my view, first the thesis that self-affection is an aspect that is not equally fundamental for the arguments of transcendental philosophy as others (e.g., apperception and the categories). I admit that this is

seems to be introduced in order to justify only the possibility of a form of *reflection* of the I upon itself, which enables the I to *know* itself not as a thing-in-itself, but as an appearance; that is, as an I that is in turn affected by something external to it.

By contrast, in the *Opus postumum* the process of self-affection appears to play a decisive role in making possible the very justification of the subject's external experience. This thesis has been particularly advanced by Lehmann, who, in my view correctly, speaks of an inversion of the relation between perception and self-affection in the manuscripts as compared to the *Critique*. In the latter, the subject's perception is the condition of possibility for self-affection; that is, only insofar as the subject is affected by external objects and "translates" them into inner sense can it also reflect upon this inner sense and recognize itself as a phenomenal subject. By contrast, in the *Opus postumum* perception itself would not be possible in the first place without self-affection²⁷⁹. For perception, in fact, is nothing other than the effect of the action on the subject's senses by means of empirical objects, which in turn are determined by the moving forces of the indirect appearance, generated through the spontaneity of the subject. Kant writes for example:

In this way, it can be understood how it is possible that that which can only be represented as empirically given (immediate sensible representation - *intuitus*) may yet, as made by the subject itself (hence mediately - *per conceptus*), and thought a priori, be counted among the objects of experience. The reason is, namely, that sensation (which is the perceiving subject's own effect) is, in fact, nothing other than the moving force which determines itself to composition, and the perception of outer objects is only the appearance of the automacy of the conjunction of the moving forces affecting the subject themselves²⁸⁰.

Consequently, self-affection is not a reflective act of the subject that occurs once perception has already taken place, but rather that act of spontaneity through which perception itself is generated.

disputable since the second edition may, after all, provide new essential elements. It also seems to contradict the secondary literature, which has recently tended to place self-affection at the center of the *Critique*'s interpretation. But the thesis is also supported by the fact that Kant introduces the remarks in the second edition as a kind of excursion" (Emundts 2023, p. 121). Emundts rightly notes, moreover, that in certain passages Kant seems to conceive self-affection not merely as a form of self-reflection of the I separated from the synthetic operation carried out by the I think, but precisely as the act through which the understanding itself, being impressed by inner sense, synthesizes it by means of the categories (see e.g. *KrV*, B 155). However, the obscurity and fragmentary manner in which the problem is posed within the *Critique* makes it difficult to determine to what extent the process of self-affection is actually involved in the empirical cognition of external objects.

²⁷⁹ "One could, according to the earlier conception, or at any rate *modo recto*, say that empirical (external) affection is the presupposition of self-affection, that without it self-affection is not possible; now, however, self-affection is the presupposition of empirical [affection], and this is not possible without self-affection" (Lehmann 1969, p. 386).

²⁸⁰ *OP*, XXII 384.

Or rather, one could say that self-affection *is* perception²⁸¹; the two acts are identical, insofar as, in perceiving, the subject does nothing other than *perceive its own activity*:

The perception of external objects is nothing other than the act [*Actus*] of the subject through which it affects itself, and perceptions are nothing other than moving forces of this very subject, connected with consciousness, through which the understanding extracts, according to principles, only as much for the empirical (the passive in representations) as it itself has inserted for the sake of possible experience²⁸².

The principle of the ideality of the objects of the senses as appearances: by which we ourselves make the empirical representation, by which the subject affects itself and perceives that which it has itself inserted into empirical intuition (perception), and is the author of its own representation²⁸³.

On the basis of these reflections, it becomes evident that self-affection and self-positing must be regarded as intrinsically interconnected, as several other scholars have likewise observed²⁸⁴. Self-positing may, strictly speaking, be understood as an extension of the theory of self-affection, which is introduced in the fascicles preceding the seventh. For if the transition from metaphysics to nature to physics entails the necessity of conceiving even material determinations as “made” by a spontaneous activity, this implies that the receptivity of the subject itself can no longer be conceived as a faculty entirely distinct from spontaneity. If what we perceive is a result of our own activity, then perception itself must be understood as an “extension” of activity itself. Since the synthetic I is itself a synthesis of activity *and* receptivity, it can no longer be understood as originary, but must instead be derived from the analytic I conceived as the pure spontaneity of apperception.

In the first *Critique*, apperception is thus kept apart from self-affection. The former is the condition of possibility for every synthesis, which, however, as an analytical unity, is distinct from synthesis itself. The latter, by contrast, is made possible only as an act of reflection of the synthetic I

²⁸¹ “Thus, self-affection does not *pertain* merely to the feeling of being affected; rather, being affected externally and affecting oneself are *one and the same*. And although at first it may seem as if this identity applies only to inner perception and self-affection, it soon becomes clear that the doctrine of affection in the *Nachlass* is based on the thesis that *perception as such is identical with self-affection*” (Lehmann 1969, p. 364). See also Choi 1996, p. 88: “From this one can undoubtedly infer that the affection taking place here is precisely self-affection, since the subject or substratum of affection is no longer the so-called thing in itself, but the subject itself, which actively posits the representation”. I therefore do not agree with Beiser when he argues that “appearances arise from the affection of our sensibility, whereas appearances of appearances arise from self-affection” (Beiser 2002, p. 202). Beier therefore seems to maintain that perceptions are the result of the affection of the subject’s senses by direct appearance, while self-affection is the process through which we generate indirect appearance as the condition of possibility for the former. However, I do not see how indirect appearance, being grounded in the pure spontaneity of the subject, could be produced through an act by which the subject impresses itself. Rather, they are the condition of possibility of self-affection, not its product.

²⁸² *OP*, XXII 392.

²⁸³ *OP*, XXII 477.

²⁸⁴ See Adickes 1920, Lehmann 1969, Mathieu 1991, Pecere 2009, Emundts 2023.

upon itself, since only within it is there a content of inner sense capable of impressing our spontaneity. Yet, as Emundts observes, “the question is whether [Kant] can really separate them. In the *Opus postumum*, there are passages where Kant does not make this distinction in this way. If this is true [...], then it can be understood that Kant speaks in such a way that apperception progresses to apprehension”²⁸⁵. In other terms, if self-affection is not separate from apperception, than apperception itself should not be merely conceived as a mere *function* that unifies the apprehended manifold, but as an *act* that progresses to its own self-determination and *becomes* apprehension, namely, synthesis²⁸⁶.

This transition from the logical and analytic dimension to the empirical and synthetic one is signaled by Kant several times in this fascicle.

The representation of apperception which makes itself into an object of intuition contains a twofold act: first, that of positing itself (the act of spontaneity); and [second], that of being affected by objects and combining the manifold in representation to a priori unity (the act of receptivity)²⁸⁷.

Logical consciousness leads [*führt*] to real [consciousness], and progresses from apperception to apprehension and its synthesis of the manifold. [...] The whole of objects of intuition – the world is only in me (transcendental *idealism*)²⁸⁸.

The understanding begins with the consciousness of itself (apperception) and performs thereby a logical act. To this the manifold of outer and inner intuition attaches itself serially, and the subject makes itself into an object in a limitless sequence²⁸⁹.

As most of the literature has signaled, the self-positing of the subject thus contains a twofold act: the first, in which the subject posits itself as a mere logical I, and the second, in which the subject posits itself as a synthetic I, namely, as an empirical subject which is affected by external objects. The link between the two acts lies in the positing of space and time: through them, the subject is no longer grasped merely as pure thought, but as a finite being situated within pure intuitions²⁹⁰. Kant writes in this regard that “[t]he first progress of the faculty of representation (*facultas repraesentativa*)

²⁸⁵ Emundts 2023, p. 125.

²⁸⁶ As also Förster writes, “[t]he task of the *Selbstsetzungslehre* is precisely to show how the I as mere object of thought (*cogitabile*) can become an empirical object in space and time (*dabile*)” (Förster 2000, p. 103).

²⁸⁷ *OP*, XXII 31.

²⁸⁸ *OP*, XXII 96-97.

²⁸⁹ *OP*, XXII 82.

²⁹⁰ As Lehmann notes, “[t]he determination of space and time as forms of self-positing is the most important development that the transcendental aesthetic of the manuscripts contains” (Lehmann 1969, p. 359).

is that from pure thought in general to pure intuition: space and time, which contain synthetic a priori knowledge”²⁹¹.

For the purposes of this paragraph, I do not consider it necessary to dwell on the various stages that the theory of self-positioning might comprise, nor on the different interpretations that have been proposed²⁹². I will discuss them in more detail in the following paragraph. What seemed more important to me, rather, was first of all to highlight Kant’s explicit attribution of a logical-transcendental primacy to analytic unity over synthetic unity (and thus to identity over difference), as well as the continuity of this doctrine with the reflections contained in the opening pages of the *Opus postumum*. As I have tried to show, the *Selbstsetzungslehre* is not an extrinsic addition to the preceding sections, or, as Lehmann seems to argue, an attempt to substitute the ether deduction²⁹³, but the consistent outcome of Kant’s reflections up to this point. It is in this light that we should understand his attempt to reformulate the dualism of form and matter through the new doctrine of schematism and the introduction of the notion of the indirect appearance.

If the material determinations of objects of experience can be anticipated a priori, this means that the matter of the appearance no longer presents itself as a brute and wholly contingent “given”, but must instead be pre-determined by the subject. As Kant writes, the “understanding anticipates the influence upon the senses”²⁹⁴. This does not imply, once again, that the “given” itself is eliminated or reduced to a pale manifestation of the understanding; rather, it indicates that its *properties* can be determined a priori²⁹⁵. Such a solution entails the necessity of rethinking the very status of the subject and, in particular, of transcendental apperception, by resolving the circle between the analytic I and the synthetic I on which the dualism of the first *Critique* ultimately rested. If the “given” loses its character of immediacy, then likewise the synthetic unity of apperception must also lose it, since it exists and is constituted precisely by virtue of the manifold to be synthetized.

As I have tried to demonstrate in this paragraph, I maintain that the relation between the analytic I and the synthetic I should be understood as a development of the doctrine of the I

²⁹¹ *OP*, XXII 83.

²⁹² See e.g. Förster 2000, pp. 101-116; Mathieu 1991, pp. 167-193; Beiser 2002, pp. 194-207; Pecere 2009, pp. 775-794; Puzzolo 2024a, pp. 103-129.

²⁹³ See Lehmann 1969, p. 399.

²⁹⁴ *OP*, XXII 509.

²⁹⁵ See on this regard Beiser 2002, p. 197: “To what extent did Kant really abandon the dualism between form and matter in the *Opus postumum*? It is indeed the case that Kant expands the domain of form insofar as the system of moving forces is made into a constitutive principle of experience itself. But the border line has only been moved, not abolished. There is still a realm of matter that remains contingent for the dynamic categories. The problem is that the basic categories of the system of forces are still very general, such that they do not determine a priori how any specific object exemplifies them. Of course, for something to be an object of perception, it must illustrate in some manner all the dynamic categories – ponderability (quality), coercibility (quantity), cohesion (relation), and exhaustability (modality) – because these determine *necessary* characteristics of any moving force. But this still leaves room for the realm of the a posteriori, because these categories do not determine the *degree* to which any specific object is ponderable, coerceable, and cohesible”.

think articulated in the first *Critique*. In the following paragraph, I will attempt to examine this issue more closely, particularly in relation to Fichte's theory of subjectivity

3.2.2. Fichte and Kant on self-positing

In the preceding paragraph, I identified the structural elements that make it possible to speak of an evolution of Kant's doctrine of subjectivity within the seventh *Konvolut*. However, establishing the priority of the logical I over the synthetic I, as well as the derivation of the forms of intuition from pure thought, is not yet sufficient to determine how this transition from the I qua thought to the I qua thought *and* sensibility actually takes place. The aim of this paragraph is to analyze this issue in greater detail, while at the same time attempting to highlight both the affinities and the differences with Fichte's notion of self-positing. In this sense, I will argue that, despite persistent divergences, the confrontation between these two theories of self-positing should not be seen as an utterly irreconcilable opposition, as much of the contemporary literature suggests.

Rather, the issue is to understand: (1) whether, in the manuscripts as well, one finds an attribution of a logical-transcendental primacy of the spontaneity of the I over its passivity; (2) in which way the relation between these two terms ought to be conceived, so as to avoid the complete subsumption of passivity within spontaneity; and (3) what consequences this reformulation of the doctrine of subjectivity entails for the problem of the relation between practical reason and theoretical reason. As we have already seen in the previous section, with respect to problem (1) the answer must be in the affirmative: the manuscripts present a reformulation of the theory of subjectivity that assigns a privileged role to the spontaneity of pure apperception over against the passivity of the synthetic "I". The question is now to address the remaining two problems.

As I have already emphasized on several occasions, the aim here is not to measure the extent of Fichte's possible influence on Kant's thought. It is, of course, entirely plausible that some of Kant's reflections were at least provoked by the debates among Reinhold, Beck, Schulze, Maimon, and Fichte. As I have noted, and as we shall see shortly, the reformulation of the thing-in-itself we find in the VII *Konvolut* can clearly be understood as an explicit attempt by Kant to take a position with regard to this debate. Yet it remains difficult to determine to what extent each of these authors may have *individually* shaped the thought of their master. The aim, rather, is to systematically reflect on the structure of Kant's theory of subjectivity through a comparison with the *Grundlage*. This work represents, among the writings of the authors just mentioned, the most significant attempt to develop

a theory of self-consciousness that tries to remain faithful to the central tenets of critical philosophy, while at the same time sensibly radicalizing most of its aspects.

In order to do this, however, it is first necessary to clarify which interpretation of Fichte one intends to adopt in order to investigate his relation to Kant's doctrine of self-positing. It is noteworthy that Mathieu, for example, interprets the *Selbstsetzungslehre* in a way that in many respects coincides with my own concerning the reformulation of the relation between analytic unity and synthetic unity. At the same time, however, he insists upon the complete incompatibility of Kant's position with that of Fichte. As the scholar observes, for instance:

In the finitude of the subject, which is maintained, alongside the novelty there is also a moment of continuity with the preceding thought. The autonomous activity, which makes the subject the 'author and possessor' of its own representations, can be accepted only because it influences the form of receptivity [...]. The subject must, therefore, from the very beginning be receptive, in order to be a subject that posits itself and does everything. In relation to Fichte, for example, the difference is evident: in Kant it is not a matter, as in Fichte, of an infinite I that posits, in front of itself, a finite I.²⁹⁶

I believe this passage exemplifies the "misinterpretation" of Fichte's thought by certain commentators on the *Opus postumum* to which I alluded in the introduction to this work. Mathieu, in particular, grounds the divergence between the two authors in a markedly tendentious reading of Fichte, as though, for him, external reality were wholly reducible to the spontaneity of an absolute I; that is, as though the not-I were completely "created" by the I, in a manner reminiscent of Jacobi's interpretation. This would also entail an ontological separation between an infinite I – endowed with capacities akin to the divine understanding – and a finite I. As I have tried to demonstrate in the preceding part of this study, however, such a distinction in fact does not exist. For Fichte as well, properly speaking, there exists only one single and indivisible I; the "finite I" and the "infinite I" are nothing other than figures generated through philosophical reflection. In other words: there is no chronological and ontological succession whereby the infinite I *first* posits itself, *then*, through an act of intellectual intuition, posits before itself a not-I, and *finally* presents itself as limited by this not-I, thereby becoming a finite I. Within the empirical domain, everything is simultaneous, and the distinctions that are introduced hold validity only on the transcendental level, as conditions of possibility for what appears in the phenomenal world.

In a recent study, Sala, despite expressing skepticism about bringing Kant's position closer to that of Fichte, nevertheless admits that "[a]s interpreters of Kant's *Selbstsetzungslehre* almost

²⁹⁶ Mathieu 1991, pp. 190-191.

universally refer to this commonplace reading of Fichte – whether it is the correct reading or not – when attempting to ascertain whether this doctrine somehow is ‘Fichtean’, this question, in the end, boils down to whether the late Kant ascribes intellectual intuition to the subject”²⁹⁷. As I have noted in paragraph 3.1.2, however, the issue is considerably more complex, for one must first determine what *kind* of intellectual intuition is at stake. The notion of intellectual intuition to which Sala refers, conceived as a “creative and productive activity”²⁹⁸, seems to correspond to the meaning Kant himself assigns to the term in the *Critique of Judgment*, where it designates the mode of cognition proper to God. In this sense, intellectual intuition would consist in an infinite understanding’s production of its own objects. As we have seen, however, such a conception cannot be ascribed to Fichte. While Fichte does employ the term “intellectual intuition”, he does so in ways that are not always uniform, yet never in the sense given by Kant in the third *Critique*. In the *Aenesidemus Review*, for instance, the term designates the self-positing of the absolute I, pointing to the absolute identity of its logical structure. In the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, by contrast, it signifies the manner in which the finite I attains knowledge of the absolute I. However problematic these accounts of intellectual intuition may be, what is clear is that in none of these cases can this form of cognition be taken as a capacity to generate objects of knowledge, or one’s own experiential contents, out of nothing. As Fichte explicitly writes in the *Second Introduction*, “[t]he intellectual intuition alluded to in the *Wissenschaftslehre* [...] simply finds no mention in Kant (unless, perhaps, under the title of *pure apperception*)”²⁹⁹. In this passage, Fichte is unequivocal in distinguishing his own notion of intellectual intuition from that of Kant. He also emphasizes that the only parallelism which seems to exist is the one between his notion of intellectual intuition and the act of pure apperception. Within the framework of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, intellectual intuition pertains solely either to the mode of self-positing of the I (or pure apperception, to use Kantian terminology) or to the mode by which the finite I gains access to the absolute I itself.

Trough the analysis of §4E of the theoretical part of the *Grundlage*, we have seen in particular that the reality of the subject’s cognitive faculties, and thus its capacity to generate representations through imagination, is determined and made possible by the existence of the *Anstoß*. The latter is to be conceived as the action exercised by the Not-I upon the self-positing activity of the I, which,

²⁹⁷ Sala 2023, p. 174n. The aim of Sala’s article is to argue that the doctrine of self-positing is in fact entirely consistent with Kant’s theory of self-consciousness as developed in the *Critique*, and that the use of the term “*setzen*” does not constitute a novelty, since Kant had already employed it in his critical writings. In this sense, the use of the term should not be understood as stemming from Fichte’s influence, but rather as “deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition of his time, where the concept of ‘positing’ played a central role in logic and metaphysics” (Sala 2023, p. 171), particularly thanks to Baumgarten’s work. However, in this paragraph I will try to show that, although the term “*setzen*” does not in fact appear for the first time in Kant’s *Opus postumum*, the way in which it is employed there and the systematic role assigned to it find no parallel in his earlier writings.

²⁹⁸ Sala 2023, p. 159.

²⁹⁹ *GA*, I,4, 225.

strictly speaking, cannot be *deduced* from a theoretical standpoint³⁰⁰. Already the second principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* made it clear that the Not-I could not be derived from the *Thathandlung*, insofar as the *form* of opposing is entirely contraposed to, and therefore independent of, the form of positing. This impossibility was translated, at the end of the theoretical part, into the impossibility of explaining or deducing the *Anstoß* as a necessary moment for the activation of the oscillatory movement of the imagination. As Fichte writes, “the infinitely outreaching activity of the I is to be checked at some point, and driven back upon itself; and hence the I is not to exhaust the infinite. *That* this occurs, as a fact, is absolutely incapable of derivation from the I, as has frequently been pointed out”³⁰¹.

Thus, when Fichte insists on imagination as the productive faculty of reality, he does so solely on the assumption that imagination does not create the Not-I *as such*. Rather, *on the presupposition* of the action of the Not-I, imagination creates the world of its own representations, that is, of objects *as represented objects*. At the same time, however, in the Practical Part Fichte makes clear that the assumption of the reality of the *Anstoß* is by no means an entirely unjustified or merely presupposed fact. For if it were, the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself would in fact take the difference between I and not-I as its first principle, thereby lapsing into a form of dogmatism. The doctrine of *Streben* instead shows that it is the striving of the I to posit itself that constitutes the real condition of possibility of the I as intelligence, and thus of the very oppositional relation between finite I and not-I. Yet, it seems to me that the most significant passage in relation to this problem is that concerning the reiteration of positing. For it is precisely this latter, as Fichte himself states, that constitutes “the point of union we were seeking between the absolute, the practical and the intellectual characters of the I”³⁰².

The reiteration of positing shows that the I, in order to be an I in the proper sense, must possess a reflexive structure. In other words, it must posit itself while at the same time being aware of its own positing. As we have seen, this generates a double positing: first, the I posits itself; but second, it must also posit itself as posited by itself – that is, it must reflect upon the initial act of positing by positing once again its own positing. Through the repetition of positing, the I breaks open its original unity, exposing itself to the *possibility* of external influence. As the philosopher writes, “[t]he original striving after a causality in general within the self is genetically derived from the I’s law, that it shall reflect upon itself”, for “this necessary reflection of the self upon itself is the basis of all *its going forth outside itself*, while the demand that it exhaust the infinite is the basis of its striving after *causality in general*”³⁰³. Thus, although the *reality* of the *Anstoß* cannot be strictly deduced from the

³⁰⁰ See *GA*, I,2, 264.

³⁰¹ *GA*, I,2, 408.

³⁰² *Ibidem*.

³⁰³ *Ibidem*.

I, the ground of possibility of an influence of the not-I upon the I is nonetheless found within the I itself, namely, in its necessarily reflexive character. This dialectic between possibility (ideality) and reality constitutes the very essence of the structure of self-consciousness. On the one hand, according to the former, everything depends on the I; whereas according to reality, the very existence of the finite I that *depends* on the check imposed from the Not-I. The following passage summarizes this logic with particular clarity:

And in this connection a further important observation, which alone would be sufficient to set the *Wissenschaftslehre* in its true perspective, and to render its characteristic doctrine perfectly clear. According to the account just put forward, the principle of life and consciousness, the ground of its possibility, is admittedly contained in the I; but this gives rise to no genuine life, no empirical existence in time; and any other kind, for us, is absolutely unthinkable. If such a genuine life is to be possible, we need for the purpose another and special sort of check to the I on the part of a not-I³⁰⁴.

These considerations therefore allow me to decisively refute any interpretation that seeks to attribute to Fichte a form of intellectual intuition according to which the infinite I would have the capacity to create both the finite I and the Not-I out of nothing. Fichte's position is, in fact, far more complex. Although the philosopher identifies in the I the ideal ground of its own passivity and of the existence of the Not-I, the latter can be concretely experienced by the finite I only as an *Anstoß*, as an impact coming from something that the finite I *feels* as external to itself. At the same time, this very impact is what *effectively* acts upon the tendency of the I to posit itself absolutely, checking this activity and turning it back upon itself, thereby generating both reflection and the very practical life of the finite I.

It is therefore true that, in Fichte's thought, both the not-I and the passive dimension of the subject are *ideally* grounded in the original self-positing of the I. However, the *reality* of these elements cannot be strictly *deduced*, or created, by the I itself. Rather, they are *felt* as limitations of its practical activity. As we have seen in paragraph 3.1.5, such a deduction would in fact amount merely to an "inverted Spinozism" in the Jacobian sense. Receptivity and passivity of consciousness are therefore not denied, but rather affirmed as real conditions for consciousness itself.

It is through this interpretive lens, I believe, that the question of the relationship between Fichte's idealism and Kant's manuscripts ought to be read. The problem does not concern the attribution to the Kantian subject of a form of intellectual intuition in a creationist sense, since, as we have seen, this faculty does not even belong to the Fichtean subject. Rather, the problem lies in trying to understand how Kant seeks to assign a logical-transcendental priority to the spontaneity of the

³⁰⁴ GA, I,2, 410-411.

apperception, deriving passivity from it, while at the same time preserving the finitude of actual consciousness, as in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. My aim will be to show that, in this case, the solution offered by Kant is different, and probably weaker, than the one proposed by Fichte.

As we have seen in the previous section, the VII *Konvolut* reveals an evident attempt on Kant's part to reformulate the relation between the analytic unity of apperception and the synthetic unity, deriving the latter from a movement of self-positing of the former. Kant's aim, in this respect, was to trace the difference contained in the synthetic unity (the union of sensibility and understanding) back to an original identity. We have seen that, from this perspective, the operation is not dissimilar to the one developed by Fichte in the *Grundlage*. Moreover, we have also noted that in certain lectures and notes from his so-called Berlin period, Fichte himself explicitly referred to the necessity of deriving Kant's synthetic unity of apperception from the analytic one.

The problem, however, is now to analyze *how* Kant justifies the transition from identity to difference without lapsing into a form of subjectivist metaphysics. As I examined in particular in paragraph 2.2.4, in these fascicles there is no intention on Kant's part to devalue or abolish the epistemic dimension of sensibility. It is therefore necessary to show how the synthetic character of the I can be derived from its absolute spontaneity without being entirely absorbed into it. This intention is clearly reiterated within the *Selbstsetzungslehre*. Let us read for example the following passages:

"I am" is the logical act which precedes all representation of the object: it is a *verbum* by which I posit myself. I exist in space and time and thoroughly determine my existence in space and time [...] as appearance according to the formal conditions for the connection of the manifold in intuition; I am both an outer and inner object for myself³⁰⁵.

The first act of the faculty of representation is the consciousness of myself, which is a merely logical act underlying all further representation, through which the subject makes itself into an object. The second act is to determine this object as pure a priori *intuition* and also as *concept*; that is, [to progress] to knowledge, as the complex (*complexus*) of representations, completely determined according to a principle of the categories; [...] and thus to represent the manifold in appearance as belonging to the unity of experience³⁰⁶.

These passages seem to me to summarize effectively what I have just argued, namely, Kant's concern to hold together the primacy of the I's spontaneity with the simultaneous requirement not to disregard its passive and receptive dimension. In my reconstruction, the justification of this transition

³⁰⁵ *OP*, XXII 85.

³⁰⁶ *OP*, XXII 77.

from spontaneity to receptivity in the manuscripts proceeds through two interconnected steps. Kant must in fact demonstrate (1) that it is the subject itself that posits the object of experience, and (2) that it is the subject that posits itself as an empirical subject determined by the object.

With regard to point (1), as I have already suggested over the course of this study, these fascicles contain an interesting and significant clarification of the status of the thing-in-itself. Likely prompted by the controversies that had arisen in the final decade of the eighteenth century, Kant appears in these manuscripts to feel compelled to take a renewed position on this issue. It is impossible for me to provide here a comprehensive and adequate reconstruction of the problem of the thing-in-itself in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and of the history of its interpretations³⁰⁷. Yet I believe that the very fact that this theme has generated a debate that remains unsettled to this day is itself indicative of a certain lack of complete clarity, at least at the level of exposition, within the first *Critique*.

As is well known, in the context of the post-Kantian debate the greatest difficulties concerning the status of the thing-in-itself stemmed from those passages in which Kant affirmed its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)³⁰⁸ and conceived of it as a sort of material “ground” of sensible objects³⁰⁹, despite simultaneously declaring it to be wholly unknowable. Moreover, the attribution of a strong ontological status to the thing-in-itself gives rise to another problem, namely the question of affection. If the thing-in-itself is the real ground of representations, then it must be that which impresses itself upon the senses of the subject, producing those representations, as Kant appears to maintain in certain passages³¹⁰. Yet, in another passage of the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant explicitly affirms that only empirical objects endowed with motion can affect the senses³¹¹. The thing-in-itself, however, not being situated within the intuitions of space and time, certainly possesses no motion. This gave

³⁰⁷ In more recent scholarship, there are two specific ways of understanding the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. The first, known as the *Two-World Theory* (see Bennet 1974; Aquila 1979; Guyer 1987; Adickes 1924), includes all those authors who have read the difference between appearances and things in themselves as a genuine ontological distinction: in this sense, things in themselves would be numerically distinct from appearances and would constitute their foundation. By contrast, the *Two-Aspect Theory* understands this difference as an *epistemic* distinction between two ways of conceiving objects. The latter, however, branches into two entirely heterogeneous directions: one metaphysical, the other methodological. The first holds that the thing-in-itself is nothing other than the very same appearance considered apart from the pure forms through which we are able to cognize it. According to the defenders of this view (see Ameriks 2003; Allais 2015; Onof 2019) the thing-in-itself is thus to be understood as an existing object, whose properties are nevertheless unknowable to our finite understanding. By contrast, the methodological interpretation (see Prauss 1974; Allison 1978, 2004) rests on a supposed de-ontologization of the thing-in-itself: once we abstract from the forms through which we cognize an object, no “thing” remains, no material substratum endowed with certain properties and conceived as independent of the subject. For an accurate reconstruction about these interpretative differences, see Chiba 2012, pp. 66-91.

³⁰⁸ See e.g. *KrV*, B xx.

³⁰⁹ See e.g. *KrV*, A 614-B 642.

³¹⁰ See e.g. *KrV*, A 358.

³¹¹ See *MAN*, IV 476.

rise to a debate over whether the process of affection should be attributed to the empirical object, to the thing in itself, or to both³¹².

Now, regardless of which interpretation one wishes to give of these issues in the context of the so-called “critical period,” it is entirely clear that in the manuscripts Kant takes a firm stance in favor of a de-ontologized conception of the thing-in-itself, thereby avoiding the attribution to it of any direct role in the process of the subject’s affection. Kant writes for example:

The material element – the thing-in-itself, is = X, the mere representation of one’s own activity [*die bloße Vorstellung seiner eigenen Tätigkeit*]³¹³.

The thing-in-itself (*objectum noumenon*) is here only a thought-entity without actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] (*ens rationis*), in order to designate a place for the representation of the subject³¹⁴.

The thing-in-itself is not an object given outside representation, but merely the position of a thought-entity [*Gedankending*] which is thought of as corresponding to the object³¹⁵.

Compared to the opacity with which the first *Critique* addresses this theme, one cannot fail to be struck by the Kant’s remarkable clarity on the matter. It seems that such perspicuity stems precisely from Kant’s need to take a definitive stance on what had by then become the raw nerve of his philosophy. The thing-in-itself is now stripped of any strong ontological characterization, reduced instead to a mere thought-entity (*Gedankending*) posited by the object for the sake of possible experience. As the first passage quoted explicitly acknowledges, the thing-in-itself is a product of the subject’s spontaneity, and in no sense something that could affect our senses from the outside³¹⁶.

The I, therefore, in the first moment of the process of its own self-positing, does not posit merely itself as a pure object of thought, but also posits an object = x as the objective correlate of its own activity. I thus maintain that the subject’s first act of self-positing in fact comprises two moments: the first, in which the subject posits itself according to the principle of identity; and the second, in which it posits the idea of an object = x as a necessary condition for the possibility of experience. The

³¹² See e.g., Vaihinger 1884, Adickes 1929, Krause 1888. For an historical and systematic reconstruction of the debate, see Basile 2008.

³¹³ *OP*, XXII 37.

³¹⁴ *OP*, XXII 31.

³¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁶ As I have shown in paragraph 2.2.3, I take it to be possible to discern a certain similarity between the status of the thing-in-itself and that of the ether. More specifically, it seems legitimate to suggest that the ether itself may be understood as a particular form of thing-in-itself – one that renders possible not merely experience in general, but, more precisely, the *collective unity of experience*. What concerns me in the present section, however, is not to investigate the possible relation between the concept of ether and that of the thing-in-itself, but rather to indicate the role of the latter within the context of the subject’s process of self-positing.

“x” produced by the subject is thus not an empirical object, but solely the *concept* of an object conceived in its absolute indeterminacy. In terms not dissimilar to Fichte’s arguments, the thing-in-itself is that noumenon which we ourselves produce in order to explain the passivity of our sensibility, and thereby for the possibility of an empirical experience in which we are affected by external objects³¹⁷. In other words, the concept thing-in-itself expresses nothing more than the *thought* of the externality of objects with respect to the subject, but it is in no way to be identified with *something* that *actually* exists in a metaphysical sense. In another passage, Kant states that the thing-in-itself “is only a concept of absolute position [*absolute Position*]: not itself a self-subsisting object”³¹⁸.

To recapitulate: in the first act of positing, the subject posits itself as a logical I, but at the same time it also posits that indeterminate “x” as the object of its own activity. Yet this latter does not act upon the logical subject, as the theory of double affection advanced by Adickes and Vaihinger would have it³¹⁹, since affection in the proper sense can only be caused by the mechanical forces of empirical matter. The thing-in-itself therefore exists in its complete indeterminacy, as a “place” (*Stelle*) created by the subject for the sake of the faculty of representation; a place that, as it were, will be then “filled” by the empirical object in the context of empirical and real knowledge. In another passage it is stated that “the thing-in-itself = x (*objectum noumenon*) is only a thought, intended merely to present the object as appearance”³²⁰. Within the first self-positing act of the subject, the x thus remains an empty place, a “correlate for pure understanding, not as something that is given [*dabile*], but as something that is thought [*cogitabile*”³²¹.

Now, however, neither the self-positing of the subject in its logical identity with itself nor the spontaneous positing of an object = x as the correlate of its own activity is sufficient to account for

³¹⁷ As Fichte argues in the *Second Introduction*: “What, then, is the object? *That which is added* to appearances by the understanding, a mere thought [ein bloßer Gedanke]. – The object affects us; *something that is merely thought affects us*. What does this mean? If I have even the slightest trace of logic in me, the meaning is simply: it affects us insofar as it exists, that is, *it is merely thought of as affecting us*” (GA, I,4, 241).

³¹⁸ OP, XXII 28. Now, the term “absolute position” is not, in fact, a novelty in the context of Kant’s works. Therefore, it cannot be taken as an indication of Kant’s move toward extreme idealistic positions. Already in the 1763 text *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, Kant employs the term “position” as a synonym for “being in general [*Sein überhaupt*]” and distinguishes between a relative position and an absolute one (see *Beweisgr. Gottes*, II 73–74). In the first case, position amounts to nothing more than the attribution of a predicate to an object x, whereas in the second it concerns the very positing of the *existence* of the object x. It is therefore not difficult to understand why Kant also speaks, in these passages of the *Opus postumum*, of an *absolute Position*. What the subject posits is the existence itself of the thing-in-itself, or more precisely, that particular kind existence which pertains to the *ens rationis*. As we have seen in analyzing the status of the *Gedankendinge*, this position does not entail affirming the existence of something that would subsist in a metaphysical beyond independent of the subject. The *ens rationis* exists only *in thought*, thought as a necessary condition for experience. As Vetö puts it, “[t]he thing in itself [in the *Opus postumum*] designates an objective reality, which, however, is found only within the subject. It stands in opposition to the appearance, though not as one object in relation to another. [...] The thing-in-itself is the subject in its fundamental spontaneity. The appearance is merely a precipitate, or a reflection, of this actuality insofar as it is activity” (Vetö 2018, p. 325).

³¹⁹ Both of these authors admit two kinds of affection: that of the thing in itself upon the subject in itself, and that of the empirical object upon the empirical subject. See, for example, Adickes 1920, pp. 235–247, and Vaihinger 1884, pp. 150–159.

³²⁰ OP, XXII 416.

³²¹ OP, XXII 33.

the passive dimension of the subject itself. For if the subject posits itself as pure apperception on the one hand, and posits an object as pure thought on the other, it is not immediately clear how these two moments could explain the possibility of empirical cognition. Kant therefore requires an argument in order to make this transition. Now, Kant's argument is not in fact entirely explicit; nevertheless, I believe it is possible to reconstruct a fairly coherent line of reasoning.

First of all, in order to justify the possibility of empirical cognition, it is necessary to justify the possibility that such cognition is, to begin with, situated within a spatio-temporal framework. As I have shown in the previous section, in the VII *Konvolut* Kant conceives space and time no longer as (solely) forms of the passive faculty of sensibility, but as derived from an act of spontaneity of apperception itself. Yet the mere *fact* of tracing the origin of space and time back to an act of the subject's spontaneity does not in itself legitimate the philosophical validity of the proposal. One must also explain *how* pure intuitions of space and time, through which objects are *given* to us, can arise from an act of spontaneity. As just noted, there is no structured and systematic argument for this "deduction." It is, however, possible to reconstruct at least Kant's intentions in this regard. For example, let us read:

The first act of the faculty of representation (*facultas repraesentativa*) is the representation of oneself (*apperceptio*) through which the subject makes itself into an object (*apperceptio simplex*); and its representation is intuition (*intuitus*), not yet concept (*conceptus*): that is, representation of an individual (*repraesentatio singularis*), not yet that which is common to many (*nota, i.e. repraesentatio pluribus communis*), that is, a generally valid representation, which is to be encountered in many [things], in contrast to the [representation of the] individual³²².

The first act takes place through the understanding, by means of which the subject determines itself, with regard to objects in space and time, as an object; and it apprehends in perception both outer as well as inner intuition, the *dabile* as appearance, together with the *cogitabile* in empirical intuition within space and time³²³.

At first sight, these two passages seem to do nothing more than repeat what I have already said concerning the logical-transcendental priority of the spontaneity of apperception over apprehension. They do, however, also add a remark of significance for the issue I am now addressing. In both cases, in fact, Kant specifies that, in positing itself as logical subject, the subject simultaneously posits itself as object (of its own act of positing). Moreover, in the first passage quoted, Kant clarifies that the first act of self-positing actually comprises two moments: the first, in

³²² *OP*, XXII 43.

³²³ *OP*, XXII 507.

which the subject represents itself, and thus simply and actively *posits* itself (as apperception); and the second, in which it *makes itself into an object* (apprehension). It seems to me that this second moment implies a form of reflection of the subject upon itself: first, I posit myself, and secondly, I reflect upon myself *as* posited. Kant calls this form of reflection upon itself “intuition” (*Anschauung; intuitus*)³²⁴. Thus, when I reflect upon myself as posited by myself, I *intuit* myself. It is an intuition, as Kant immediately specifies, because it is the immediate representation of something singular, and not (yet) a concept that is common to other objects:

An act of personality, to make *itself* object of its representation – *cogitabile ut dabile*. This representation is intuition, that is, an immediate representation, not a mediated one proceeding from the particular to the universal as a mark or characteristic³²⁵.

It is therefore on this that Kant seems to ground the genetic origin of intuition itself. The second citation appears to add a further element to this reasoning. By positing itself and reflecting upon this positing, the I makes itself, in the proper sense, into an *object*, and thus *determines* itself. To determine oneself means to render oneself not only an active subject but also, at the same time, a passive one, since what I determine – and thereby limit – is nothing other than myself. This means that the subject is no longer mere spontaneity but also *receptivity*. Insofar as it is receptivity, the subject is therefore able, as Kant writes in the second quotation, to apprehend external objects through the forms of space and time³²⁶. Moreover, the philosopher argues:

Appearance is the subjective form of the mode of representation in intuition – namely, the way in which the subject is affected by the object, not in accordance with what the object is in itself (immediately) in intuition. First, in how the subject posits itself as absolute unity; second, in how it is affected by the object³²⁷.

³²⁴ As Choi argues, “The important point here, first of all, is that the primitive intuition of oneself does not consist in the intuition of the manifold, but rather in the intuition of the principle itself, since what is posited through the act of self-positing can be nothing other than the principle itself, or the activity of the subject in accordance with a principle” (Choi 1996, p. 95).

³²⁵ *OP*, XXII 115.

³²⁶ I also believe that this reconstruction can be reconciled with the doctrine of self-affection discussed in the previous paragraph. We have seen how the doctrine of self-affection serves Kant to explain that the origin of perception is never a brute “given”, but rather a something already previously determined by a subjective activity of positing, through the indirect appearance. In this sense, the perception of the object is nothing other than the perception of one’s own activity, and thus a self-affection. The theory of self-positing enables Kant to develop a new account of subjectivity that is compatible with this reformulation of the status of perception and of the perceived object. If the matter of the object is no longer simply given, but instead produced by a spontaneous act, then, as we have seen, the receptivity of the subject can no longer be taken as immediate, but must itself be traced back to an act of spontaneity. In this way, the intuitions of space and time are derived from the intuition that the I has of its own spontaneity. The I posits itself as the object of its own activity and, in so *determining* itself, also renders itself a *passive* subject

³²⁷ *OP*, XXII 30.

Therefore, the subject's capacity to represent objects in space and time is ultimately grounded in its spontaneous self-positing and in its self-determination. As Kant writes, "[t]he first thought from which the power of representation proceeds is the intuition of oneself"³²⁸. If my reconstruction is correct, this means that the possibility of intuiting objects is grounded in the self-intuition of the subject, for, in intuiting itself, the subject simultaneously posits itself as limited, and thus as passive. But if the subject is passive, this means that there must be something – the object – that *acts* upon it, generating affection. In this way, that is, through the positing of space and time, the indeterminate object = *x* (the thing-in-itself), which had been posited by the I as an act of absolute spontaneity, becomes an empirical object, that is, an object capable of acting upon the senses of a subject now understood as finite and determinate. Let us read for example the following passage:

I posit myself as object of intuition according to the formal principle of the determination of the subject of self-consciousness, and of combination to the unity of the object (space and time), but, In virtue of this, as something *existing* in relation to myself, consequently as appearance (object of sensible intuition). I am the *cogitabile* according to a principle and likewise the *dabile* as object of my concept: the representation of the thing-in-itself and then in appearance³²⁹.

The first part of the quotation appears to confirm what it has been argued thus far, namely, that it is the reflective character of self-consciousness that inevitably leads to the determination of oneself as something existing as appearance, and thus as object in sensible intuition. The latter part of the quotation, however, refers to the question of the distinction between the thing-in-itself and appearance: the I, as pure *cogitabile*, is that which posits the thing-in-itself as an act of mere spontaneity. Through its own determination as an empirical subject, however, that thing-in-itself, merely thought by the spontaneous I, is now conceived as an appearance, that is, as a sensible object which acts upon the I insofar as it is a phenomenal I.

I believe Choi summarizes quite clearly the self-objectivation of the I, when she writes: "Space and time are the original, subjective forms through which the subject posits itself, on the one hand, as an object in general, whereby the subject attains a merely logical, analytical consciousness of itself, but, on the other hand, also posits itself as an object of the senses, through which the actual cognition of a sensible object can take place"³³⁰. In other terms, the self-positing of the I *qua* logical I immediately leads to the self-positing of the I *qua* synthetic I, for in positing myself *as* myself, I

³²⁸ *OP*, XXII 11.

³²⁹ *OP*, XXII 32.

³³⁰ Choi 1996, p. 109.

recognize myself as a *determinate object* of my own act of positing. This means, as Choi continues, that “[a]s soon as the subject [...] posits itself as an object in general, it simultaneously posits itself as something existent, and thereby also as an object of the senses”³³¹.

Now, I consider Choi’s reconstruction to be quite plausible and capable of accounting for the transition that Kant attempts to establish between the logical I and the synthetic I. At the same time, however, I believe that the author does not emphasize, or does not *sufficiently* emphasize, the problematic aspects of this argument. In particular, I take the limitations of this proposal to be twofold, and closely interconnected. First, there is the attempt to deduce the intuitions of space and time from the logical self-positing of the subject. As we have just seen, it seems that Kant intends to deduce the pure intuitions by grounding them in the act of self-intuition whereby the subject posits itself³³². Yet it seems to me that the act of reflection (self-intuition) which the subject exercises upon its own act of positing has nothing to do with intuition understood as the spatio-temporal framework within which the empirical objects are given to us. Put otherwise: why should the intuition that the subject has of itself as pure spontaneity generate space and time, if this intuition is nothing more than a mere reflection on a logical and self-identical activity? It seems to me that Kant does not present any truly convincing argument to legitimate such a transition from the logical act of self-positing and the deduction of a spatio-temporal framework.

The second problem is the following: if, as I have tried to show, the deduction of space and time is not sufficiently justified by Kant, then also the self-positing of the I as an empirical I cannot hold. For, what legitimates the transition from the I’s reflection upon itself to the positing of the I as empirical subject? Put differently, to say that the I posits itself as the *object* of its own positing, that is, that it posits itself in its pure logical identity, seems to me to be different from saying that the I posits itself as an *empirical* object, that is, as a corporeal being capable of receiving the affection of external appearances. The impression is that Kant makes an unwarranted transition from the transcendental to the empirical dimension, attempting to “generate” the latter from the former. This is, as we have already had occasion to observe, a risk that Fichte had been particularly careful to avoid. Fichte wrote in this regard that “the principle of life and consciousness, the ground of its possibility is admittedly contained in the I; but this gives rise to no genuine life, no empirical existence in time; and any other kind, for us, is absolutely unthinkable. If such a genuine life is to be possible, we need for the purpose another and special sort of check to the I on the part of a not-I”³³³. In other

³³¹ *Ivi*, p. 110.

³³² See also Tuschling 2002, p. 155: “With the theory of the self-positing of the I sketched in the quoted passages—which is conceived at once as the constitution of the objectivity of nature and, ultimately, of freedom – the subjectivization of space and time is radicalized [...] – once again: space and time [...] become nothing but products of the original acts of the I, of subjectivity”.

³³³ *GA*, I,2, 410-411.

words, for Fichte the reflective dimension of the I accounts only for the possibility of an encounter with the not-I, but not for the assumption of its reality – a reality that is always *given* and never strictly deduced. By contrast, the logic of Kant’s self-positing seems to imply that from the purely logical and reflective structure of self-consciousness there *emerges* real life, that is, empirical and determinate life within space and time. But if that’s true, this also means that from the reflective character of self-consciousness also an *empirical world* must emerge, for no empirical subject would exist without an empirical object. As Kant writes, “I am an object of myself and of my own representations. That there is something else outside me is my own product. I make myself. Space cannot be perceived [...]. We make everything ourselves [*Wir machen alles selbst*]”³³⁴.

Paradoxically, and perhaps even provocatively, one could say in this sense that Kant’s *Opus postumum* expresses an even more pronounced subjective idealism than Fichte’s one. By this, I certainly do not mean to suggest that Kant’s own *intention* was to develop such a radical and problematic form of idealism. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the inner logic of his argument, if pursued to its ultimate consequences, runs the risk of leading to such an outcome. We have seen that also Mathieu acknowledges in the manuscripts a priority of the logical I over the synthetic I; yet, he nevertheless maintains that this development does not, in fact, represent a conceptually significant advance beyond the doctrine of the *I think* already articulated in the first *Critique*. Mathieu writes in this regard that “[i]n the *Opus postumum*, Kant is no longer a mere spectator describing the *product* of the act, but rather [...] he ‘actualizes’ the synthesizing understanding. Yet this does not amount to carrying out a ‘vertical synthesis’ of the ‘I think’ and intuition; rather, the I think posits itself *simultaneously* as an intuiting I, in the act with which it synthesizes the manifold”³³⁵.

It seems to me, however, that even in this case Mathieu conflates a transcendental sequentiality with a merely temporal one. It is clear that for the late Kant, just as already in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, thought and intuition are given *simultaneously* from a temporal point of view. As we have seen, the synthetic unity of the I is precisely the unity of thought and intuition as given in one and the same act: there is no intuition that temporally *precedes* its subsumption under categorial forms. Accordingly, there can be no object given prior to its categorial determination; rather, the object is given exactly *in* and *through* that determination, which is effected by the understanding³³⁶. I take it that this position is maintained in the manuscripts as well, insofar as there is no spontaneous I that first posits itself in the logical self-identity and only thereafter posits itself as synthetic. From a temporal perspective, everything is, of course, simultaneous. It is on the transcendental level, however, that a shift occurs. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* there was an

³³⁴ *OP*, XXII 82.

³³⁵ Mathieu 1991, p. 185.

³³⁶ On this point, see e.g. Adinolfi 1994, p. 122; Fabbianelli 2014, pp. 273-274.

equiprimordiality between the logical I and the synthetic I, in the sense that each was reciprocally the condition of possibility of the other. In the case of the *Opus postumum*, by contrast, as I have tried to show, transcendental priority is assigned to the analytic I, insofar as it is from the latter that the synthetic I properly derives. It is this kind of priority that is decisive, and not the temporal unfolding of the act, which always takes place in one and the same moment. When thus Mathieu writes that “the I think posits itself *simultaneously* as an intuiting I” he is in fact acknowledging the transcendental priority of the pure apperception over a intuiting I, for he recognizes that *it is the first that posits itself as an intuiting I*.

As I have noted at the beginning of this section, this kind of conflation between the temporal and the transcendental planes also undermines Mathieu’s interpretation of Fichte. The scholar locates this discrepancy in the claim that, for Kant, it is not a matter of an infinite I positing before itself a finite I. What is at stake here is a “spatial” characterization of the relation between the two “I” which nevertheless assumes a temporal meaning as well. It is as if Mathieu were suggesting that, for Fichte, the infinite I *first* posits itself and then, through a *second act that temporally follows the first*, posits *before* itself a finite I. Yet, as is evident, in Fichte there is neither a spatial nor a temporal characterization of the process of self-positing: everything takes place in a single instant and in the same I, and the various figures that describe the process of self-positing are nothing other than abstractions introduced by the transcendental philosopher. In my view, this is not the perspective from which the relationship between the two authors should be assessed. Rather, the issue concerns the *logical-transcendental* relation between the analytic and the synthetic unity of apperception.

In both cases, what is at stake is the attempt to assign priority to the analytic unity over the synthetic unity, thereby avoiding the circularity that characterized their relation within the *Critique*. We have thus seen that Kant and Fichte appear, at the very least, to share the intention of breaking this circle by definitively attributing to the one the character of immediacy and to the other that of mediacy. Yet it seems to me that their respective outcomes diverge sensibly, and not for the reasons one might expect.

According to Fichte, the synthetic character, and thus the finitude, of the I is always grounded in the existence of a “check” that cannot be theoretically deduced. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the check can be explained in its *conditions of possibility* through the doctrine of striving and the reiteration of positing of the Practical part³³⁷. The *ideal* foundation of the check is therefore to be

³³⁷ For this reason, as I will try to show, the relation that must be analyzed between Kant’s doctrine of subjectivity in the manuscripts and Fichte’s one should not refer to the section on principles of the *Grundlage*, but rather to the Practical part. As Petrini argues, “[t]his is confirmed by the fact that the positing I and the posited I are clearly distinguished by Kant: the former (*cogitabile*) is a pure logical-transcendental function, whereas the latter (*dabile*) is the abstract form of each real I. The exact correlate of this *Setzen* is not to be found in the section on principles of the *GWL*, but in the practical

found in the original identity of the I with itself and in the possibility of its self-reflection; yet the occurrence of the check itself, and hence the reality of finite consciousness, cannot be linearly derived with a deduction in the strict sense. The primacy of identity in Fichte is thus an ideal primacy: it establishes the condition of possibility of difference *without generating difference itself*, which is instead always determined, in its occurrence, by the traumatic encounter of the I with the check. This, as we have seen, is in itself sufficient to refute any interpretation of Fichte's absolute I as endowed with an intellectual intuition that would allow it to "create" both the Not-I and the finite I.

It seems to me that what is lacking in Kant's manuscripts is precisely the dimension of the check. If one accepts the *logical-transcendental* priority of the pure identity of the I with itself, while at the same time dispensing with the practical reality of the check, the risk is that of adopting an emanationist perspective with respect to the relation between identity and difference, that is, between the analytic I and the synthetic I. As we have seen, to maintain that the I posits itself as *object of itself* does not inevitably lead to its simultaneous positing as *object of the senses*, that is, as the phenomenal I, as Kant nevertheless seems to suggest. The idea according to which "logical consciousness leads to the real and proceeds from apperception to apprehension and to the synthesis of the manifold"³³⁸ is, from my point of view, unjustified if one does not assume the reality of the check. In other words, the "self-unfolding of the subject [*Selbstentfaltung des Subjekts*]" as Choi calls it³³⁹, cannot take place unless the activity of the I is originally checked. It cannot therefore simply proceed *from the subject's pure logical identity*.

Moreover, the Kantian attempt to derive the thing-in-itself from an original positing of the I is also insufficient to guarantee this transition from identity to difference. In fact, the thing-in-itself, being posited by the I as an object of pure thought without reality, is in fact "reabsorbed" into the identity of the I with itself, and does not allow the I to step outside itself. In other words, if the thing-in-itself is nothing more than a mere concept posited by the subject, it is unclear how it could play any role in the explanation of affection and thus of the emergence of empirical consciousness. Fichte himself was well aware of this problem, and for this reason, although he too conceived the thing-in-itself as an object of pure thought, he nevertheless clarified that, on the practical side, the thing-in-itself had to be *felt* by the finite I as opposed to it, thus generating the "check"³⁴⁰. The practical reality

part, and it has already been cited several times: it is the 'reiteration of positing' through which the I 'opens itself' to the influence of the Not-I, posits itself as self-positing, and becomes real self-consciousness" (Petrini 2015, p. 255).

³³⁸ *OP*, XXII 96.

³³⁹ Choi 1996, p. 112.

³⁴⁰ As Fabbianelli correctly argues, "if one leaves aside the practical relation between the thing-in-itself and feeling, one inevitably arrives at the conclusion that the alogical non-I is regarded as a logical moment of the pure knowledge of the I only because it is precisely the I itself, through its own act, that opposes it to itself" (Fabbianelli 2020, p. 189).

of the latter was therefore what made it possible to explain both the finitude of consciousness and the opposition of an object to a finite subject - something that, in Kant's manuscripts, is missing.

Let it be clear: my intention is not to argue that Kant ultimately made a deliberate decision to embrace a form of subjectivist metaphysics, nor that he fully absorb the limitations of the subject within its spontaneity. On the contrary, I have already shown at length how Kant consistently upholds the passivity and receptivity of the subject, and how these continue to play a decisive epistemic role. In this respect, I am in full agreement with Mathieu. Nevertheless, it does not seem to me that this is the criterion by which the divergence from Fichte can be measured, since Fichte is equally, if not more, careful in developing an argument capable of accounting for this dimension. What I take to be the proper ground for assessing the relation between the two authors with regard to the problem of self-positing lies in the way they articulate the relation between the purely spontaneous dimension of the I and its finite, synthetic dimension. As I have attempted to show, it seems to me that for both thinkers the issue is how to resolve the circularity inherent in the relation between the two I's by assigning logical-transcendental priority to the former. At the same time, however, when one examines the arguments they advance in support of their positions, it appears that Kant's manuscripts there is a lack of a solid justification for the transition from identity to difference; a transition that, by contrast, substantially occupies the entirety of §5 of Fichte's *Grundlage*. The problem, then, does not lie in any supposed intention on Kant's part to annul syntheticity in favor of the absolute spontaneity of the I – an intention which, in my view, does not emerge from the manuscripts. Rather, what proves problematic is the absence of a sufficient argument that would allow him to justify the transition from spontaneity to receptivity.

Without claiming to exhaust the problem of subjectivity in the two authors, my primary aim has been to show how an alternative reception of the results of the *Grundlage*, in contrast to the common interpretation usually ascribed to Fichte, might lead to different and original outcomes regarding the relation between the *Grundlage* and the manuscripts. A relation that need not be read in wholly oppositional terms, and that, on the contrary, reveals elements of significant theoretical proximity. In the following chapters I shall attempt to show how this affinity can also be discerned in Kant's later notes devoted to themes of moral philosophy. As Zahn writes:

A transposition of Kant's doctrine of the identical act of consciousness and of synthetic acts of consciousness must necessarily entail consequences for all the concepts and distinctions that stand at the core of his critical philosophy. This applies in particular to the decisive distinctions between appearance and thing-in-itself, but also to the relation between theoretical and practical philosophy, to

the interpretation of the “categorical imperative” and to its relation to the concept of freedom. It is symptomatic that in the *Opus postumum* we find precisely many determinations of these concepts³⁴¹.

In other words, just as in Fichte, also in Kant’s manuscripts the reformulation of the relation between spontaneity and receptivity of the subject must necessarily have repercussions on other parts of the system. We have already seen how the doctrine of self-positing was in fact already the result of a conceptual shift, concerning the attempt to rearticulate the relation between form and matter initiated in the early fascicles. At the same time, I have also shown how it directly involves the problem of the thing-in-itself. In the following chapters, the task will be to show how it also has repercussions on Kant’s moral philosophy and on the very idea of the theoretical and practical unity of the system.

3.2.3 Subject, world and highest good in Kant’ last fascicles

In the previous sections, I examined Kant’s reformulation of his doctrine of subjectivity, highlighting both its affinities and divergences from Fichte’s position. In this section, however, I will turn to the practical implications of the *Selbstsetzungslehre*. As in Fichte’s case, the consequences of this doctrine are not only theoretical but also practical. Kant’s discussions of moral philosophy and philosophy of religion emerge in the middle of the VII *Konvolut*, directly after the account of self-positing. This placement, I would suggest, signals the close link between the two issues. It is as if Kant, in developing these reflections, became acutely aware of their practical force and chose to dedicate the last of his intellectual energy to this very question.

It should immediately be noted that there exists another evident difference between Fichte’s doctrine of subjectivity and that found in Kant’s manuscripts. In the latter, in fact, there is no identification of the pure I with an idea of practical function. The pure identity of the I with itself therefore has solely the theoretical-cognitive role of constituting the foundation of the synthetic character of representational knowledge in any finite subject. Yet it is nowhere conceived in terms of an “idea” that ought to constitute the ultimate goal of our practical life. In this sense, in the manuscripts we do indeed find a radicalization of the immanent demand of transcendental knowledge, but one which, up to this point, unfolds only on the theoretical level. In other words, this concerns the first level of immanence that I had also identified in Fichte’s thought: both Kant and Fichte appear to acknowledge that objects exist only in and for the I, and that it makes no sense to speak of a reality

³⁴¹ Zahn 1964, p. 180.

“external” to the represented object itself. The passivity of the subject, therefore, is not caused and determined by some presumed thing-in-itself, but rather finds its origin in an act of the subject’s own spontaneity, which, by reflecting upon itself, posits itself as the object of itself, and thus as a finite subject.

The issue, then, is to understand whether the second level of immanence can also be traced in the manuscripts, namely, the level involving the practical dimension. Are subject and world still two elements which, in order to be synthesized, require the introduction of a divine action? Or, as in Fichte, do we instead witness a radicalization of their relation, such that it is the subject itself that directly aligns the world with its own ends, without having to place its hope in a future divine intervention? The aim of this paragraph will be to attempt to answer these questions.

Now, the shift from a theoretical issue to problems of a practical order is marked in the seventh *Konvolut* by the following passage:

There is one world as my sense-object; for space and time constitute the whole complex of sense-objects. These forms of sensible intuition represent objects, however, only as *appearances* (because we must be affected by them in order to intuit them), not as things-in-themselves, because they contain merely the formal element of the relation of things to the affecting subject. There is, however, apart from sensible representation, yet another faculty of knowledge, which contains not merely receptivity but also spontaneity (as highest faculty of knowledge): namely, understanding, judgment and reason. The latter can be either technical, intuition-constructing reason or moral-practical reason, both combining a priori the manifold of representations to knowledge under a principle. Moral-practical reason, if it contains laws of duty (rules of conduct in conformity with the categorical imperative), leads to the concept of God³⁴².

Kant’s aim here seems to be to remind us that reason is not limited to justifying the conditions that make experience possible as cognitive experience; it must also be grasped in its practical dimension. In this respect, reason provides the principles that should guide human action. In these passages, then, the philosopher appears to broaden the scope of his inquiry: he is no longer concerned solely with the human being as a knowing subject, but also as an agent capable of acting in the world. Only in this way can one reach what Kant calls “the highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy” (*der höchste Standpunkt der Transzendentalphilosophie*), where theoretical and practical reason are finally united.

In this sense, Kant also establishes a parallel between the moving forces that act upon the subject’s senses to make cognitive experience possible, and the ethical-practical forces that ground

³⁴² *OP*, XXII 116.

the possibility of his moral experience. “Even the ideas of practical reason,” the philosopher writes, “have moving forces that act upon human nature. This means, indirectly, to fear the divinity [*die Gottheit fürchten*]”³⁴³. At the same time, just as in *Übergang I-14* Kant deemed it necessary to identify a principle that would guarantee the unity and systematicity of the moving forces of matter, namely, the ether, so too in these last fascicles he feels compelled to do the same, assigning the role of synthetizing the moral moving forces to God. What is particularly striking, however, is both the status and the function that Kant seems to attribute to God in these notes. My aim, therefore, will be to show that, despite the apparent paradoxical character of his proposals and the fragmentary nature of the exposition, one can nonetheless discern here a coherent line of thought, one that moreover remains consistent with the arguments developed in the earlier fascicles.

In the course of this work, I have tried to show that what generally characterizes Kant’s undertaking in the manuscripts is his attempt to develop a radically immanent philosophy, one that dispenses with the absolute character of the classical Kantian distinctions between form and matter, subject and object, spontaneity and receptivity, appearance and thing-in-itself, and so forth. I believe that a similar move can be observed in the moral sphere, where Kant seeks to radically reformulate his dualism between *subject and world*. To demonstrate how this takes place, however, one must begin with his rethinking of the concept of God.

In discussing Fichte’s moral doctrine, I briefly pointed to the elements of Kant’s position from which Fichte sought to distance himself. These consist, above all, in Kant’s continued adherence, at its core, to a voluntaristic and theistic conception of God, and in his formulation of the relation between morality and religion in synthetic terms. I also suggested that these two aspects are deeply interconnected: *precisely* because Kant still conceives of divinity in theistic terms, he is compelled to construe the bond between morality and religion synthetically, for otherwise morality would lose its autonomous and self-legislating character. It seems to me that this conception is aptly summarized in the well-known first Preface of the *Religion*, where Kant addresses both the autonomous dimension of morality and the necessity of its extension into the religious sphere.

As Kant writes in the first lines of the Preface, “the human being [...] binds himself through his reason to unconditional laws, [and] it is in need neither of the idea of another being above him in order that he recognize his duty, nor, that he observe it, of an incentive other than the law itself. [...] Hence on its own behalf morality in no way needs religion [...], but is rather self-sufficient by virtue of pure practical reason”³⁴⁴. Morality in itself would therefore have no need to rely on religion in order to assert the unconditionality of its command. It is grounded in the self-legislating power of

³⁴³ *OP*, XXII 59.

³⁴⁴ *Religion*, VI 3.

pure practical reason and, consequently, would see its autonomy undermined if its imperatives were based on God's will. In this passage, Kant thus makes clear that God is neither a condition for the possibility of recognizing duty as such (that is to say, it is not the principle that secures the normative character of duty), nor the one who promises rewards or threatens punishments in order to motivate human beings to act morally.

At the same time, however, Kant acknowledges shortly thereafter that the human being, as a finite rational agent, requires the representation of an ultimate end for his actions. In other words, morality in itself is absolutely valid and in no need of any further "supports"; yet the original anthropological limitation of the human condition makes it necessary the extension of morality into the religious sphere. For morality as such is not concerned with the ends of action, but only with the incentives that move us to act morally. Religion, by contrast, enables us to conceive as realizable the ultimate end of morality, namely, the highest good. In this sense, Kant thus maintains that "[m]orality thus inevitably leads to religion, and through religion it extends itself to the idea of a mighty moral lawgiver outside the human being, in whose will the ultimate end (of the creation of the world) is what can and at the same time ought to be the ultimate human end"³⁴⁵.

As I already noted in §3.1.6, this passage is particularly significant because it underscores the theistic root of Kant's conception of God in the "critical" phase.. Kant, in fact, speaks of the necessity of assuming the existence of God "above" the human being, and in whose "will" lies the possibility of realizing the highest good in the world. The underlying idea thus seems to be that of a divine action which, through acts of grace, is capable of actively assisting and promoting the human pursuit of the good. As Kant himself writes in Book I of *Religion*, for example, "some supernatural cooperation is also needed for this becoming good or better, whether this cooperation consist merely in the diminution of obstacles or also in a positive assistance"³⁴⁶. Moreover, when in Book III the highest good is articulated in terms of an ethical community, Kant continues to uphold the active role of God in its promotion³⁴⁷:

To found a moral people of God is, therefore, a work whose execution cannot be hoped for from human beings but only from God himself. Yet human beings are not permitted on this account to remain idle in the undertaking and let Providence have free rein, as if each could go after his private moral affairs and entrust to a higher wisdom the whole concern of the human race (as regards its moral destiny). Each must, on the contrary, so conduct himself as if everything depended on him. Only on

³⁴⁵ *Religion*, VI 6.

³⁴⁶ *Religion*, VI 44. On the problem of "grace" in the *Religion* and on its ambiguities, see Stevenson 2014.

³⁴⁷ However, as several scholars have pointed out, the role of God becomes increasingly problematic in light of the communitarian articulation of the highest good that we find in the *Religion*. See e.g. Michalson 1999, p. 107; Rawls, p. 318.

this condition may he hope that a higher wisdom will provide the fulfillment of his well-intentioned effort³⁴⁸.

As Kant repeatedly stated in his works, starting from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, what human beings can do is only to make themselves *worthy* of happiness, whereas the actual realization of this condition is ultimately entrusted to divine action. God is thus conceived as a being whose will is to guarantee the success of human actions carried out with good intentions. Despite the practical nature of the necessity of its existence, it nevertheless appears that Kant conceives of God as *external* both to the human being and to the world, and as the guarantor of the possibility of synthesizing the two for the realization of the highest good. As I have suggested, this transcendent relation between human being and God is confirmed by the synthetic relation that Kant attributes to the very connection between morality and religion: exactly because God is not identified with our reason, we must think of the necessity of its existence as an *extension* of morality, without thereby undermining the autonomy of the latter:

The proposition, “There is a God, hence there is a highest good in the world”, if it is to proceed (as proposition of faith) simply from morality, is a synthetic a priori proposition; for although accepted only in a practical context, it yet exceeds the concept of duty that morality contains (and which does not presuppose any matter of the power of choice, but only this power's formal laws), and hence cannot be analytically evolved out of morality. But how is such a proposition a priori possible? Agreement with the mere idea of a moral lawgiver for all human beings is indeed identical with the moral concept of duty in general, and to this extent the proposition commanding the agreement would be analytic. But the acceptance of the existence of this lawgiver means more than the mere possibility of such an object³⁴⁹.

This passage effectively summarizes what I have argued thus far. Kant maintains that the propositions concerning the existence of God and the highest good are synthetic a priori propositions, albeit practical ones, since they cannot be analytically derived from the concept of duty. A few lines after the ones just cited, Kant indeed writes that “the mere idea of a moral lawgiver of mankind is no doubt identical with the ethical concept of duty, and to this extent a proposition ordaining such coincidence would be analytic”. However, he immediately specifies that “to assume its existence [*Dasein*] says more than what is expressed by the bare idea of the possibility of such an object.” In this passage, Kant suggests that only the *idea* of God as universal lawgiver can be analytically contained within duty. Nevertheless, as the Transcendental Dialectic has taught us, from the mere

³⁴⁸ *Religion*, VI 100-101.

³⁴⁹ *Religion* VI, VI, 6n.

concept of a thing we cannot also derive its existence. The clarification just quoted seems to indicate that in the *Religion* Kant is not satisfied with establishing the mere *possibility* of a concept, but rather seeks to show how religion can extend morality toward the admission of the *Dasein* of an all-powerful moral lawgiver above the human being.

As we have seen, Fichte rejects both the synthetic character of the relation between morality and religion, the dualism inherent in the concept of the highest good, and the necessity of admitting the existence of a God above the human being who would have to intervene actively in the promotion of the highest good. As I shall attempt to demonstrate, these are elements that, in my view, are also present in Kant's manuscripts.

I do not find this surprising, given what occurs in the VII *Konvolut*: the attempt to subordinate the synthetic unity of apperception to the analytic unity corresponds to an effort to overcome the distance between I and world. As Adinolfi writes with reference to the distance between the analytic I and the synthetic I in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "It must only be said that this very distance constitutes the specificity of the Kantian institution, capable of bearing within itself this state of intimate tension. Distance from the world, in thought; and in thought, from the unreachable ground of its own being. Only at a distance does a world appear for the first time"³⁵⁰. In my view, the entire project of the *Opus postumum* is an attempt to reduce this distance, and the doctrine of self-positing represents nothing other than the culmination of this attempt: namely, the removal of the absoluteness of the synthetic I and the recognition of the logical-transcendental priority of the analytic I. As I have briefly noted in paragraph 3.1.6, this distance between I and world in the "critical" phase of Kant's thought had significant consequences on the practical level. If the I and the world operate, so to speak, at a distance, then from a moral standpoint we are likewise faced with a rupture: human moral action seems to run counter to sensible desires, undermining the possibility of a harmonious encounter with the world. As Kant writes in the second *Critique*,

Happiness is the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence *everything goes according to his wish and will*, and rests, therefore, on the harmony of nature with his whole end as well as with the essential determining ground of his will. Now, the moral law as a law of freedom commands through determining grounds that are to be quite independent of nature and of its harmony with our faculty of desire (as incentives); the acting rational being in the world is, however, not also the cause of the world and of nature itself. Consequently, there is not the least ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between the morality and the proportionate happiness³⁵¹.

³⁵⁰ Adinolfi 1994, p. 126.

³⁵¹ *KpV*, V 124. In a *Reflexion* from the 1790s, Kant even defines God as the very *author* of the highest good: "Now the representation of the world as of a *systematis causarum finalium moralium* for the highest good. For humankind, which is a member of the *nexus finalis physici* but also touches on a principle of a higher *nexus finalis* in itself, also relates its

In this case, Kant states quite explicitly that morality, in and of itself, distances us from harmonious encounter with the world and with nature, rather than bringing us closer to them. To heal this rupture, it is therefore necessary to postulate the existence of God, understood as the “cause of nature by understanding and will (hence its author)”³⁵², which makes it possible to conceive of a reconciliation between the moral subject and the world. In other words, only the existence of an intelligent author of the world makes it possible to conceive the world itself as systematically organized in order to be “permeable” to our moral ends. As Guyer writes, “morality [...] requires that we be able to conceive of nature as an arena within which the end it imposes can be achieved”³⁵³, but this is possible only under the condition of God’s existence as the author itself of this moral arena. This perspective is restated in the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant argues:

we must assume a moral world-cause, that is, an author of the world, if we are to set before ourselves a final end in conformity with the requirements of the moral law. And as far as it is necessary to set such an end before us, so far, that is in the same degree and upon the same ground, it is necessary to assume an author of the world, or, in other words, that there is a God³⁵⁴.

Naturally, the problem of the relationship between morality and nature within the critical writings would require a more detailed analysis. Nevertheless, it seems legitimate to maintain that the postulate of the existence of God as the intelligent author of the world serves precisely to bridge the gap between subject and world, a gap that has its roots precisely in the very distance and circularity between the analytic and synthetic unity of the “I” of the first *Critique*.

One should expect that the reformulation of this relation would have to lead to a reformulation of Kant’s very practical philosophy. Indeed, I argue that this is exactly what happens. First of all, what becomes immediately evident is Kant’s attempt to eliminate the transcendent relation between subject and God typical of the critical writings, and with it every theistic residue of the concept of divinity. This will lead, as I will show, to an identification of morality and religion and at the same time also to a revaluation of the relation between subject and world. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, Kant seems to establish an analogy between the moving forces of objects that act upon the subject’s senses and the “moral” moving forces that act upon his will. While in the first case the unifying principle of the former was the ether, in the second it is God. Now, what strikes one first

existence in regard to the same intelligent author; but the concept of that is that of a being as the author [*Urheber*] of the highest good, because this alone is appropriate to the end-relation of the moral human” (R 6451, XVIII 723).

³⁵² *KpV*, V 125.

³⁵³ Guyer 2005, p. 298.

³⁵⁴ *KU*, V 450.

is the similarity in the ontological status of the ether and of God, since both are defined in terms of *ens rationis* or *Gedankendinge*.³⁵⁵ As we have seen, the concept of *ens rationis* designates an object that necessarily exists, but exists only insofar as it is *thought* by the subject. Not by chance, in the *Opus postumum* we find formulations such as the following:

It cannot be denied that [God] exists; yet it cannot be asserted that it exists outside rationally thinking man. In him – the man who thinks morally according to our commands of duty – we live (*sentimus*), move (*agimus*) and have our being (*existimus*). [...] In man there dwells an active principle, arousable by no sensible representation, accompanying him not as soul [...] but as spirit, which, like a particular substance, commands him irresistibly according to the law of moral-practical reason³⁵⁶.

God is not a being outside of me, but merely a thought within me. God is the moral/practical reason that gives laws to itself. Hence, there is only one God in me, around me, and above me³⁵⁷.

There is a being in me, which is different from me and which stands in an efficient causal relation (*nexus effectivus*) towards myself [...]; itself free (that is, not being dependent upon the laws of space and time) it judges me inwardly (justifies or condemns); and I, man, am this being myself – it is not some substance outside me³⁵⁸.

It seems to me that these passages constitute a preliminary proof of a sensible evolution in Kant's conception of God. As I will try to show more clearly, this is not merely a shift in emphasis, as Guyer maintains³⁵⁹, but rather an attempt to reformulate his moral doctrine. What is striking above all is the insistence with which Kant underscores the immanence of the relationship between practical reason and God, something that appears to me entirely absent within the critical works³⁶⁰. As we have briefly seen, both in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the *Critique of Judgment*, and the *Religion*, Kant is quite explicit in affirming the necessity of conceiving of God as a being distinct from man and placed above him. This is easily understandable in light of the function attributed to God: namely,

³⁵⁵ See e.g., *OP*, XXI 27, XXI 32. Moreover, the correlation between ether and God is explicitly thematized by Kant in sheet 9 of the VII *Konvolut*: “The concept, or invention [*Dichtung*], of an ether that fills everything is precisely what makes space into a sensible object; whereas, on the other hand, the ethical-practical concept of God (not as the soul of the world), [...] requires that, through the categorical imperative, all human duties be taken as divine commands” (*OP*, XXII 109). On the similarities between the concepts of ether and God, see e.g. Mathieu 1991, pp. 255-281, Blomme 2017, Roemer 2024, pp. 321-338.

³⁵⁶ *OP*, XXII 55.

³⁵⁷ *OP*, XXII 145.

³⁵⁸ *OP*, XXI 25.

³⁵⁹ See Guyer 2005, p. 310.

³⁶⁰ The identification between God and practical reason is underscored, among others by Mathieu (Mathieu 1991, p. 155, 281), Tomaszewska (Tomaszewska 2023, pp. 179-198), Ward (Ward 1972, p. 165), Dekens 2001 (Dekens, pp. 233-239).

that of the (moral) author of the world, whose role, through his will, was to “synthetize” subject and world in order to make the highest good attainable.

This interpretation finds solid confirmation in the note to the first Preface of the *Religion*, where Kant speaks of the synthetic relation between the moral law, produced by pure practical reason, and God himself. If the existence of God is not already contained within the categorical imperative, on pain of undermining the autonomy of the latter, then it must be *distinguished* from the imperative, and thus from the very reason that produces the latter. In that passage, Kant maintained that only the *idea* of God could be contained within the moral law, but not its existence. However, we have seen that the new doctrine of the *ens rationis* leads Kant to reformulate the relation between ideality and existence, synthesizing them with one another³⁶¹. It is for this reason that, even in the case of God, its existence can be affirmed while still preserving his ideal status:

That this idea has objective reality – that is, that it has the force appropriate to the moral law [in] the reason of every man who is not wholly bestially crippled and that man must inevitably confess to himself: There is one and only one God, requires no proof of its existence, as if it were a natural being; its existence already lies, rather, in the developed concept of this idea, according to the principle of identity: The mere form here counts to the being of the thing [*die bloße Form macht hier das Seyn des Dinges aus*]. The enlightened man can do no other than himself to condemn or to pardon, and that which pronounces this judgment in him (moral-practical reason) can, indeed, be anesthetized through sensible impulses, so that [*breaks off*]. Whether there is a God in nature (as a world-soul) cannot be asked, since this concept is contradictory; but he reveals himself in moral-practical reason and the categorical imperative³⁶².

It seems to me that this passage is rather striking when compared with Kant’s “critical” period, yet entirely consistent with the early fascicles of the *Opus postumum*. As in the case of the ether, the existence of God is analytically contained within its concept, since both, although not directly perceptible or knowable, constitute conditions of possibility for experience: cognitive in one case, moral in the other. This represents, I believe, an evident development with respect to the *Religion*, where Kant was explicit in defining the relationship between the idea of God and its existence in synthetic terms³⁶³.

³⁶¹ “This God not only has *Existenz* as an ideal being, deduced from His concept, produced by human reason, but has *Daseyn* and *Realität*, true reality and present actuality, while still remaining an ideal, and therefore indescribable by imagination: a God whose essence is inscrutable, whom man recognizes first of all with fear and in adoration, aware as he is of his imperfect nature” (Kajon 2018, p. 196).

³⁶² *OP*, XXI 92. See also *OP*, XXII 113: “Also a necessary being is one whose concept is, at the same time, the foundation of sufficient demonstration for its existence. Such a proposition must rest on identity”.

³⁶³ For this reason, I do not agree with Förster when he claims that the concept of God we find in the *Opus postumum* is identical to the concept of God we find in the Book III of the *Religion*, for in both cases Kant would have analytically

Moreover, in the passage cited above, Kant maintains that the idea, and therefore the existence, of God is manifested immediately in the categorical imperative of duty. This, too, appears to me to mark a further development. In the *Critiques*, Kant had been scrupulous in separating the binding force of duty from the question regarding God's existence. The latter was conceived as a condition of possibility for the *unconditioned object* of pure practical reason (the highest good), but not for the binding character of the categorical imperative as such, lest the autonomy of reason itself be undermined³⁶⁴. In the *Opus postumum*, by contrast, we can find many passages in which Kant derives the existence of God directly from the moral law as such:

*To prescribe all human duties as divine commands is already implicit in every categorical imperative [...]. Now, a being that possesses only rights and no duties is God. Consequently, the moral being conceives all duties, even in their formal aspect, as divine commands*³⁶⁵.

The categorical imperative is the pronouncement of a moral and holy will that commands absolutely, that is at the same time all-powerful, and that—needing no incentives nor even permitting them—exists autonomously, uniting freedom and law within itself. — The idea of this will is that of a substance unique in its very concept and not subject to any classificatory distinction of human reason³⁶⁶.

The philosopher's position seems thus to be clear: God is no longer merely a postulate that makes possible the realization of the unconditioned object of pure practical reason, but rather emerges as the very condition of possibility for the normative power of the moral law itself. In other words, it is no longer possible to conceive the binding force of the moral law without presupposing the existence of God. In this regard, what Kant remarks in the first quotation is particularly noteworthy: the very *form* of the moral law is here traced back to a divine origin. As Tomaszewska notes, “Kant ‘infers’ the existence of God from our awareness of the moral command given in the form of the categorical imperative”³⁶⁷. In this sense, there is no longer any need to appeal to an “unconditional object” of pure practical reason in order to extend morality toward religion. The moral law is, *in its*

derived the concept of God from the categorical imperative (see Förster 2000, p. 137). For a more detailed critique to Förster's position, see Puzzolo 2024a, pp. 206-234.

³⁶⁴ See e.g. *KpV*, V 126: “Moreover, it is not to be understood by this that it is necessary to assume the existence of God as a ground of *all obligation in general* (for this rests, as has been sufficiently shown, solely on the autonomy of reason itself). What belongs to duty here is only the striving to produce and promote the highest good in the world, the possibility of which can therefore be postulated, while our reason finds this thinkable only on the presupposition of a supreme intelligence”.

³⁶⁵ *OP*, XXII 120.

³⁶⁶ *OP*, XXII 123.

³⁶⁷ Tomaszewska 2023, p. 187.

very essence, divine³⁶⁸, and this divinity endows it with all the authority it requires to exercise its binding power upon humanity.

However, this reformulation of the relationship between duty and God does not, in fact, lead to a form of heteronomy of morality, since the very existence of God is not external to pure practical reason itself. As Kant writes, "[t]he concept of such a being is not that of substance - that is, of a being which exists independent of my thought - but the idea (one's own creation [*Selbstgeschöpf*]), thought-entity [*Gedankending*], *ens rationis* of a reason that constitutes itself as a thought-entity"³⁶⁹.

When Kant speaks of the fear of God, he does not understand this fear as a feeling we experience toward an external authority that can punish or reward us according to the conformity of our actions to duty. Rather, the fear is the reverence we devote to the authority of the law itself, insofar as it is a product of practical reason, which, in its pure dimension, is itself divine. The fear is thus generated by the very essence of the moral law, by its incontestable authority, by its being the very voice of God.

The good person, as we shall see more clearly shortly, is not one who acts in accordance with the law because he is drawn by divine rewards or intimidated by possible punishments, but rather one who recognizes the divinity of the law itself. In other words, such a person is one who feels incapable of evading the imperative's command, whatever his hopes or desires may be, because that command is the expression of God's holy and unappealable will³⁷⁰.

Now, one might ask about the reasons for these considerable changes in doctrine. As I have attempted to show in a previous work³⁷¹, I believe that this reformulation of the relationship between morality and religion is due to structural problems inherent in the very concept of the highest good, which Kant seems to have recognized for the first time in the essay *On the Failure of All*

³⁶⁸ "Now, in some of the notes in the *Opus Postumum* Kant hints at a philosophical attitude by which morality in its very essence must lead to religion (and that is why the human heart responds to it)– an attitude which is different to the one by which morality extends to religion only when it reflects on putting an end to itself, outside the world and in the world" (Kajon 2018, p. 196).

³⁶⁹ *OP*, XXII 27.

³⁷⁰ It is certainly true that the *Opus postumum* is not the first text in which Kant refers to the necessity of conceiving moral duty in terms of a divine command. In particular, in the *Religion*, Kant employs the same expression (see e.g. *Religion*, VI 152, 179n.). However, I believe there is a fundamental difference. In the *Religion* it was exclusively the synthetic extension of morality into the religious sphere that led to the recognition of our duties *als göttliche Gebote*. In other words, the necessity of conceiving duties as divine commands was a prerogative of religion, not of morality itself. In the manuscripts, by contrast, it is the very essence of morality that requires the categorical imperative to be regarded as the voice of God. In this sense, I completely agree with Kahn when he argues that "[a]lthough there is continuity [with] the *Opus postumum* argument (in the idea of regarding duties as divine commands), there is a crucial difference: the stepping stone of the highest good all but disappears in the first and seventh convolutes. The reason this is so crucial is that it manifests and, I think, magnifies a difference in the structure of the arguments" (see Kahn 2018, p. 79). What Kahn is arguing here is that the absence of the question of the highest good as a mediating element, one that should connect morality to religion, significantly alters Kant's argument. Faith in God, and thus the consideration of moral duty as a divine command, is no longer conceived as an extension of morality arising from the need to regard the unconditioned object of pure practical reason as realizable. Rather, it is already contained within moral duty "according to the principle of identity" (see *OP*, XXII 111) in order to guarantee the normative force of the law itself.

³⁷¹ See Puzzolo 2024a, pp. 206-234.

Philosophical Attempts at Theodicy. I will not go into the details of this issue here. In a recent article, Fonnesu proposes a brief but persuasive argument³⁷²: in the *Canon* of the first *Critique*, Kant explicitly assumes hope in future divine rewards and fear of punishment as genuine motives guiding our actions, thereby undermining the autonomy of morality. The *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the second *Critique* are thus to be understood as attempts to resolve this difficulty. However, even in the latter work, the concept of the highest good proves highly problematic. Here Kant defines the highest good not merely as an object of hope but also as an object of *duty*. But then the problems arise: What is the relationship between this duty and the duty commanded by the categorical imperative? Are they identical or not? And I would further add: if the highest good consists in the proportion between virtue and happiness, what does it mean to say that we have a duty to seek this connection, when we ourselves cannot realize it, but only God's action can? I therefore agree with Fonnesu that in the second *Critique* Kant was not completely clear on these points, and that this lack of clarity led him to reformulate his moral doctrine in later writings, especially in the *Opus postumum*³⁷³.

What I am interested in examining in this work, therefore, are not the causes that led Kant to reformulate his moral doctrine, but rather the *consequences* of these developments. In particular, what remains to be analyzed is this: what does it mean that morality and religion are now identified? Does this not risk depriving both of their distinctive prerogatives? Moreover, does this identification – which entails a devaluation of the systematic role of the highest good as their mediating element - not risk leading to a form of stoicism? Put differently: if God is merely that principle immanent to our rational structure which guarantees the normative force of the law, what becomes of the possibility of happiness, and of the hope that one day it will be proportionally distributed to us? Might Kant, then, have resigned himself to erasing the very possibility of future happiness as a consequence of moral action, thereby reducing his doctrine to a form of radical rigorism? In the following paragraph I will give an answer to these questions, showing that Kant seems to come very close to a Fichtean solution to these problems.

³⁷² See Fonnesu 2022. On the crisis of the concept of the highest good, see also Landucci 2017.

³⁷³ For example, already in the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant states that the aforementioned implication of the concept of God in moral self-consciousness as its condition of possibility should in no way lead to the admission of the existence of a supreme being who commands man, as it were, from the outside. Rather, this judge is nothing more than “an ideal person, whom reason constructs for itself” (*MdS*, VI 439). In this sense, in order to conceive the obligatory nature of duty, reason feels compelled to admit the existence of a divine principle that grounds the coercive power of law. This principle, however, does not exist *outside* reason, but is somehow *identified* with it. The duty toward God is thus properly nothing more than “a duty of man toward himself” (*MdS*, VI 487). The perspective of the *Opus postumum* does not substantially differ from what Kant already states in this text. This is certainly not surprising, given the fact that fascicles VII and I began to be drafted only a couple of years after the publication of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. However, unlike this latter text, where the topic is certainly dealt with but not in an extensive way, in the manuscripts the question and the status of God's existence plays an absolutely prominent role.

3.2.4 Kant on wisdom

In the previous paragraph we saw that, in the final sections of his manuscripts, Kant attempts to reformulate both the status and the function of God. On the one hand, God is stripped of all the theistic traces still present in the critical works, and its immanence with respect to the rational structure of the subject is definitively affirmed. On the other hand, precisely this immanent relation between practical reason and divinity means that God is no longer that being whose existence must be postulated, from a practical standpoint, to make possible the distribution of a future happiness. Rather, it is now conceived as the normative principle that grants authority and coercive power to the law itself, insofar as it is understood as the very voice of God.

The problem now, however, concerns the risk of an excessively rigorist drift in Kantian morality, something the philosopher had already intended to avoid since the second *Critique*. Emblematic, in this sense, is the criticism Kant directs in that work toward the Stoics³⁷⁴. Fonnesu and Landucci, for example, hold that in the final phase of his thought Kant ultimately contented himself with proposing a form of neo-Stoicism, in which the problem of happiness is definitively set aside to avoid the difficulties into which he had fallen, in the critical writings, regarding the concept of the highest good³⁷⁵. Nevertheless, although I agree with them in asserting that the problem of the highest good changes significantly, my aim is to show that it is not entirely removed from the Kantian system. At the same time, I will attempt to show that it leads to a reassessment of the relationship between subject, God, and world that recalls some features of Fichte's proposal.

Now, before turning directly to this problem, it is useful to recall what Kant attempts to do in the very last notes of the *Opus postumum*. As can be seen from the overall reconstruction I have provided of the manuscripts, these seem to be divided into a first part devoted to questions of theoretical philosophy and philosophy of nature, and a second part concerned with topics more specifically related to moral philosophy. Kant himself seems to have noticed this discrepancy, to the point that in his final notes his aim appears to be explicitly that of bringing these two dimensions into unity.

In the second sheet of the first *Konvolut*, Kant thus lays out the successive steps that should convey this program:

³⁷⁴ See *KpV*, V 126-127.

³⁷⁵ See Landucci 2017, p. 301; Fonnesu 2022, p. 14. In Puzzolo 2024a, I shared this interpretation, whereas in this paragraph I attempt to offer an alternative solution to the problem of happiness.

(1) Transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics. (2) Transition from physics to transcendental philosophy. (3) Transition from transcendental philosophy to the system of nature and freedom. (4) Conclusion. Of the universal connection of the living forces of all things in reciprocal interaction: God and the world³⁷⁶.

Despite Kant's evident and frequent difficulty in holding his thoughts together and giving them systematic order, I believe that the passage just quoted rather comprehensively summarizes the path traced throughout all the manuscripts. The first point can in fact be found in the earlier *Konvolute*, which, as we have seen, deal almost exclusively with problems concerning physics and the philosophy of nature. It concludes, roughly, with *Übergang* 1-14 and with *Konvolute* X and XI, that is, with the deduction of the existence of the ether and with the doctrine of moving forces, through which the fusion between metaphysics and physics is definitively accomplished. The VII *Konvolut*, although it does not entirely abandon the issues treated in the previous sections, nevertheless marks a shift toward themes that pertain more strictly to transcendental philosophy as such, for example, the problems of the thing-in-itself and of the self-positing of the subject.

In the penultimate *Konvolut* the shift from transcendental philosophy to the system of nature and freedom is completed through a renewed grounding of morality. The first *Konvolut*, in turn, offers the culmination of this arduous journey in the linkage of “the living forces of all things”: in other words, in the unification of the “theoretical-speculative” forces synthesized in the idea of the World with the “ethical-practical” forces whose source is God. In the first *Konvolut*, Kant therefore introduces the idea of the World as the counterpart to the idea of God. While God represents “the whole of the supersensible object,” the World represents “the whole of the sensible objects”³⁷⁷. The problem for Kant thus seems to be to show how these two elements can be unified in order to reach what he calls “the highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy”.

Now, I believe that “the highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy” is nothing other than a reformulation of what, in the Doctrine of Method of the first *Critique*, was defined as the “cosmic concept” of philosophy. It is well known that the question of the systematicity and completeness of philosophy was a central concern for Kant, one which he endeavored to address in the Doctrine of Method of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and more specifically in the section devoted to the Architectonic of Pure Reason³⁷⁸. Here Kant writes that, as a rational knowledge, philosophy must

³⁷⁶ *OP*, XXI 17.

³⁷⁷ *OP*, XXI 20.

³⁷⁸ However, if this reconstruction is accurate, it must also be acknowledged that the idea of the highest good cannot, for Fichte, serve as an adequate principle to guarantee the unity of the philosophical system. It, too, may be regarded as a Kantian attempt to justify the unification of the system's elements only *ex post* – that is, only *after* they have already been presented in their distinct articulations. The highest good, for example, does not allow for the deduction of space and time intuitions, the categories, the I think, and so forth. Rather, it presupposes these distinctions and, at most, indicates how

take the form of a system. With the term “system” the philosopher means “the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea”³⁷⁹. Now, Kant proposes two ideas as candidates for giving systematic form to our rational knowledge: the scholastic and the cosmic concept of philosophy. According to the scholastic concept of philosophy, our rational knowledge would be organized “only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge, thus the logical perfection of cognition”³⁸⁰. In this sense, the scholastic concept of philosophy would allow us to give systematic form to the various branches of philosophical knowledge – to distinguish, for example, between a metaphysics of morals and a metaphysics of nature, to further specify the latter into an immanent and a transcendent physiology, and so on, up to the well-known division into ontology, rational physiology, rational cosmology, and rational theology. However, as Kant underscores in a footnote, the school-concept of a science is determined only by arbitrary and contingent ends³⁸¹. Therefore, it cannot achieve a true systematic and *definitive* unity. According to the cosmic concept of philosophy, by contrast, philosophy is to be understood as “the science of the relation of all cognition to the *essential ends* of human reason”³⁸². A few lines later, Kant specifies what these “essential ends of human reason” consist in, when he writes:

Essential ends are on this account not yet the highest, of which (in the complete systematic unity of reason) there can be only a single one. Hence they are either the final end [*Endzweck*], or subalternate ends, which necessarily belong to the former as means. The former is nothing other than the entire vocation of human beings [*die ganze Bestimmung des Menschen*], and the philosophy of it is called moral philosophy³⁸³.

So, even if in the previous quotation Kant talks about essential ends in the plural, I believe it is possible to argue that ultimately there is only one essential (final) end of reason, which Kant defines as the “entire vocation of human beings” and which pertains not to theoretical, but to practical philosophy. Kant does not further specify this definition within the Architectonic, nor does he tell us more precisely what this final vocation of human being consists in. However, as Gava shows in his

theoretical and practical knowledge – each assumed in its difference – might jointly contribute to the realization of humanity’s ultimate end. While this is a theme we shall address more thoroughly at a later stage, it already indicates, at least at a preliminary level, that the conception of systematicity articulated by Kant in the first *Critique* could not satisfy Fichte’s philosophical demands. On the relation between Fichte’s idea of the system and Kant’s account of the systematic ambition of philosophy in the Architectonic, see Bucci 1985.

³⁷⁹ *KrV*, A 833-B 861.

³⁸⁰ *KrV*, A 838-B 867

³⁸¹ *KrV*, A 839-B 867n

³⁸² *KrV*, A 839-B 867.

³⁸³ *KrV*, A 840-B 868.

recent book³⁸⁴, it is possible to argue that the highest good, understood as happiness distributed in proportion to virtue, can be conceived as that “final end” of human beings Kant is describing here. If that is true, then philosophy according to the world concept should be understood as that discipline that informs us on how the realization of the highest good can be conceived as possible. In this way, the highest good should be the idea that fulfills the systematic ambition of transcendental philosophy. It is indeed interesting to note that, in his *Logic*, Kant defines philosophy according to the cosmic concept as a “doctrine of wisdom” (*Weisheitslehre*)³⁸⁵, and that, in the second *Critique*, he identifies the highest good as the supreme object of the doctrine of wisdom³⁸⁶. This becomes all the more significant, as we shall see, in relation to the *Opus postumum*, since in the manuscripts, despite the near-complete disappearance of the concept of the highest good, the concept of “wisdom” occurs repeatedly.

We have also seen that in the critical period the actual realization of the highest good, understood as the proportion between virtue and happiness, is ultimately demanded to a divine action. Hence, God can be conceived the *ultimate* guarantor of the highest good’s realization in the world, because it ensures the possibility of harmonizing the subject with the world. As Kant also states in the *Religion*, since human efforts are insufficient to achieve the highest good³⁸⁷, some form of *supernatural* cooperation is required, whether by removing obstacles or by providing positive assistance³⁸⁸. This confirms that, while human striving is essential, the actual *realization* of the highest good ultimately depends on practical faith on God’s supersensible action.

Now, if the systematic ambition of philosophy depends on the possibility of realizing the highest good, and if the possibility of realizing the highest good ultimately depends on the existence of God, this means that God must be conceived as the true keystone of the entire philosophical system. As Kant himself writes in the first *Critique*, God is a “concept which concludes and crowns the whole of human cognition”³⁸⁹.

As noted earlier, I take the “highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy” to be nothing other than a reformulation of the cosmic concept of philosophy. If this is correct, then it, too, must be closely connected to the question of the highest good. The point that now requires examination is the

³⁸⁴ “In his account of the worldly concept of philosophy, Kant speaks of essential ends in the plural. He submits, however, that there is a hierarchy of such ends, with a single ‘final end’ at the top. It remains unclear what he has in mind when he speaks of ‘essential ends’. By contrast, we are in a better position to determine what the final end is. This end concerns ‘the entire vocation [*Bestimmung*] of human beings and the philosophy of it is called moral philosophy’ (A840/B8-8). Therefore, the final end of reason is a topic for *moral* philosophy. If we then consider that for Kant philosophy according to the worldly concept is a doctrine of *wisdom*, and that the chief object of a doctrine of wisdom is the highest good, we can submit that the final end of reason is the highest good” (Gava 2023, p. 31).

³⁸⁵ *Logik*, IX 24.

³⁸⁶ See *KpV*, V 108.

³⁸⁷ See *Religion*, VI 98.

³⁸⁸ See *Religion*, VI 44.

³⁸⁹ *KrV*, A 641-B 669.

following. As I have tried to show in the previous section, the evolution of Kant's practical doctrine appears to imply a substantial coincidence between morality and religion, since God is identified with practical reason itself, and the normative force of the moral law is traced back to its authority. It is therefore necessary to determine what role Kant still intends to assign to the highest good, given that, in the critical works, it was precisely this intermediate element that allowed morality to be extended into the religious sphere. In the manuscripts, the highest good is mentioned only a handful of times³⁹⁰; nevertheless, its first occurrence already signals, in my reading, a redefinition of the concept in contrast to its classical formulation:

The totality of things, the universe, contains God and the world. 'World' means the whole of sensible beings. Now, here there is a relation between two heterogeneous objects – namely, that of efficient causes (*nexus causalis*), but this relation is not objective, but subjective (not placed in the things themselves, but in the thinking subject) when the totality of beings is conceived: the highest good³⁹¹.

The passage is certainly obscure, yet it already offers several significant clues. First of all, the highest good seems to be identified with the totality of beings, both sensible and supersensible, which are represented, respectively, by the ideas of World and of God. This already marks an intriguing development of the classical concept of the highest good: the problem here is not that of synthesizing subject and world, but rather of reconciling God and world. Another important clue concerns the relationship between these two elements. Kant writes that they are “heterogeneous” and that their relation can be thought only “within the thinking subject”. In my view, this description anticipates what Kant will elaborate more fully throughout the entire *I Konvolut*: the connection between the totality of sensible beings and the supreme supersensible object can take place only through the mediation of a being that participates in both dimensions, namely, the human being itself.

As Kant states, “[t]he division into God and World is not analytic (logical), but synthetic, that is, through real opposition”³⁹². The two concepts are therefore not analytically contained within one another but represent two absolutely opposed objects. For such a synthesis to be possible, there must therefore be a *tertium* that belongs to both dimensions – the sensible and the supersensible – and that, by virtue of this constitution, can bring them into unity. As Kant repeatedly stresses throughout the fascicle:

³⁹⁰ See e.g. *OP*, XXI 22; XXI 23, XXI 149; XXI 150.

³⁹¹ *OP*, XXI 22.

³⁹² *OP*, XXI 22.

The highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy: God, the World and the thinking being in the world (Man)³⁹³.

God, the World and Man as a person: that is, as a being who unites these concepts³⁹⁴.

The highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy in the system of the two ideas by God, the World and the subject which connects both objects, the thinking being in the world. God, the World and what unites both into a system: the thinking, innate principle of man in the world³⁹⁵.

Quotations such as these call for two preliminary considerations. First, it is noteworthy that the idea of Man (*Mensch*) appears in the *Opus postumum* for the first time in the context of Kant's entire production, and that it seems to substitute the idea of soul. Now, the idea of the soul, especially in its formulation as a practical postulate, had all but disappeared from Kant's writings of the 1790s, probably to the increasing secularization of the concept of the highest good³⁹⁶. As several scholars have observed, its function was highly problematic and decidedly ambiguous when considered in light of Kant's insistence that the highest good must be realized *in this world*, and not in some future one³⁹⁷.

The fact that Kant replaces the idea of the soul with the idea of Man is probably indicative of his explicit intention to provide a non-transcendent version of the highest good. The latter is something that must be produced directly by the human being through practical activity within this very world. This substitution appears to highlight more effectively the human being's direct responsibility in the production of the highest good.

The second consideration concerns the *role* that Kant assigns to the idea of Man. Indeed, Kant seems to grant this idea a privileged status compared with the other ideas, since it is man himself who must connect the idea of the world with the idea of God. As Blomme argues, "[w]ithin the highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy, it is man, as the world's thinking principle, who is able to unite the opposing ideas of 'God' and 'World'"³⁹⁸. I believe that this change, apparently merely terminological, nonetheless reveals a substantive shift in Kant's moral doctrine. As we have just seen, the keystone of the cosmic concept of philosophy is the idea of God, as the ultimate guarantor of the possibility of the highest good and of the conjunction between subject and nature. Now, the principle

³⁹³ *OP*, XXI, 32.

³⁹⁴ *OP*, XXI, 30.

³⁹⁵ *OP*, XXI, 35

³⁹⁶ See e.g. Reath 1988.

³⁹⁷ On this problem, see Kleingeld 1994; Byrne 2006, pp. 101-120; Guyer 2003, Bojanowski 2016, Römer 2024, p. 357.

³⁹⁸ Blomme 2017, p. 10.

in which the highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy culminates is *the subject itself*, who appears to bear the task of holding together God and the world. But what does this mean?

First of all, it must be clarified that the “Man” of whom Kant speaks in these passages is not just any finite rational being, but the *wise man*³⁹⁹. As the philosopher makes clear several times, the latter is to be understood only as an *ideal* toward which every subject can, and must, strive, without ever being able to reach it completely. Kant indeed talks about a “love for wisdom, and a striving [*streben*] to [reach] it”⁴⁰⁰. *Weisheit* is therefore conceived as that never fully attainable dimension in which the perfect unity between the two constituent components of human experience finds fulfillment. Kant writes for example that “man is not in possession of *wisdom*: he only tends to it and can have only *love* for it”⁴⁰¹ and this tension is identified with philosophy as such⁴⁰². In these notes we indeed find a reappearance of the scholastic distinction between *Weisheit* and *Philosophie*, which in the eighteenth-century German lexicon is also called *Weltweisheit*. The latter is defined precisely as an “atrium [*Vorhof*] of science leading to wisdom”⁴⁰³, and is thus conceived, rather than as a doctrinal system, as an *activity* of the philosopher in the direction of the final synthesis of the three ideas of World, Man and God.

Wisdom therefore consists in the complete unification of these three ideas. But in what way should it be considered a rearticulation of the problem of the highest good? We have just seen that Kant himself defined the highest good as the object of a “doctrine of wisdom.” This did not mean, however, that wisdom as such was identified with the highest good. Wisdom, that is, the complete conformity of the finite rational being’s maxims with the laws commanded by its own pure practical reason, was rather the necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the realization of the highest good. The latter, as we have seen several times, was ultimately entrusted to a divine action, which had to “provide the fulfillment of his well-intentioned effort”⁴⁰⁴. It seems to me, however, that in the manuscripts there is a complete identification between wisdom and the highest good. If the highest good is no longer something distributed by God but directly produced by human action, then it becomes identical with the very practical disposition of the subject to conform its maxims to the law of willing. This reading is confirmed by the very fact that Kant here defines wisdom as an object of *love* (*Liebe*)⁴⁰⁵.

³⁹⁹ On this point, see e.g. Förster 2000, p. 145.

⁴⁰⁰ *OP*, XXI 130.

⁴⁰¹ *OP*, XXI 141.

⁴⁰² It is interesting to note that Fichte does not seem to assign a significant systematic role to the concept of “wisdom” during the Jena period. However, it would become a central concept in his subsequent works. See e.g. on this topic Rametta 2018.

⁴⁰³ *OP*, XXI 5.

⁴⁰⁴ *Religion*, VI 101.

⁴⁰⁵ See *OP*, XXI 121; XXI 130; XXI 155.

In his earlier writings, particularly in the *Religion* and in *The End of All Things*, Kant ascribed to the unconditioned object of pure practical reason, as well as to religion understood as the means for its attainment, the function of rendering the moral law a genuine object of love⁴⁰⁶. The awareness that this unconditioned object of practical reason—the highest good—could be realized in the future through divine assistance endowed the law not only with the status of an object of reverence and respect, but also of admiration and approval. In the manuscripts, Kant appears intent on preserving this twofold dimension of the moral law, in order to avoid a slide into a radical form of Stoicism. Here, however, it is the very object of love itself that undergoes a sensible transformation. The “ultimate end” that we aim to produce, from a practical-moral point of view, and with respect to which we feel an intimate feeling of love, is no longer the synthesis of two opposed elements such as virtue and happiness, but *wisdom* as such. “The highest standpoint of human practical reason,” the philosopher writes, “is a striving [*Bestreben*] of knowledge [*Wissen*] to wisdom [*Weisheit*]: philosophy”⁴⁰⁷.

At first glance, it would seem that this approach does not, in fact, soften Kant’s moral rigorism. Put differently: in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant had shown that the Stoic perspective was limited in deriving happiness directly from moral action. Yet in that work he clearly distinguished between self-contentment (*Selbstzufriedenheit*) and happiness in the proper sense⁴⁰⁸. The former is also defined as “a negative satisfaction with one’s existence, in which one is conscious of needing nothing”. In other words, *Selbstzufriedenheit* is the feeling we experience when we act morally in the awareness that our abstraction from sensible and worldly needs renders us independent of them. Kant, however, seems to suggest that this condition cannot provide genuine fulfillment, because sensibility, and thus our relation to an external world, can never be fully overcome. True happiness requires a *harmony* between subject and world, guaranteed by God, rather than the annihilation of one of these elements, as the Stoics would have it.

It would therefore seem that identifying the highest good with wisdom as such confirms Fonnesu’s thesis regarding a neo-Stoic shift in the final phase of Kant’s thought. Yet this reading appears to be undermined precisely by the fact that, in the manuscripts, wisdom does not in fact lead to any form of abstraction from the world. On the contrary, it is the privileged mode of *engaging* with the world in order to harmonize it with our ends. Let us read for example also the following passage:

The intelligent subject which grounds the combination of God with the world under a principle.

⁴⁰⁶ See e.g. *Religion* VI, 7; *EaD*, VIII 377.

⁴⁰⁷ *OP*, XXI 121.

⁴⁰⁸ See *KpV*, V 117.

The highest nature

The highest freedom

The highest good (beatitude [*seeligkeit*] - happiness [*glückseeligkeit*])⁴⁰⁹.

As once again becomes evident, Kant assigns to the subject, and thus to the wise man, the task of unifying nature and freedom, and thereby of “combining” the world and God for the sake of the realization the highest good. It is also noteworthy that Kant associates the concept of happiness with that of beatitude. This is certainly not the result of Fichtean influence, since Kant was already speaking of beatitude in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Yet in that work, beatitude was presented as a condition never directly attainable, the state of an absolutely pure and holy will⁴¹⁰. The fact that in this passage from the manuscripts beatitude is brought into direct relation with happiness may suggest a shift in both concepts: on the one hand, happiness should not be understood as mere sensible enjoyment, but rather as a state of progressive fulfillment grounded in the determination of the world in accordance with the ends of freedom. On the other, beatitude is not to be conceived as the condition of a pure and completely independent will, but as a form of realized harmony that we can progressively produce through the rational determination of both ourselves and the world.

The limitless strive toward self-perfection which the *Weisheit* requires, should therefore not be understood as state of mere subjective and egoistic self-satisfaction. For the late Kant the striving of the subject toward the unity with the pure part of himself is immediately reflected in the realization of a unity of the world with the subject. As we have seen, the unity of God and World in the idea of Man constitutes indeed the “highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy”. This could mean that when we act morally in the direction of the *Weisheit* we change *both ourselves and the world*, trying to make the latter conform as far as possible to our rational ends, without the need of an external act of grace. Consequently, when Kant writes that, at the highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy, the idea of Man links the ideas of World and God, he is telling us that human being’s task is to shape and determine the world ever more fully in accordance with the ends imposed by God itself, conceived as the highest expression of our very rationality. This means that when we act morally in the attempt to unify the world with our ends, we are in fact unifying the world with the ends established by God itself.

It is therefore plausible that, in the final phase of his thought, Kant did not intend to abolish altogether the function of the highest good, but only to reformulate it in accordance with the new relation between morality and religion. If God is identified with our very practical reason, then no intermediate element is needed to extend morality into the religious sphere. Rather, the role of the

⁴⁰⁹ *OP*, XXI 23.

⁴¹⁰ See e.g. *KpV*, V 118.

highest good seems to be merely that of guaranteeing the possibility of an ultimate end to our conduct, which is *already both rational and divine* at the same time, because it is grounded in divine origin of the moral law.

It seems to me that this argument shares important affinities with Fichte's moral proposal. As we have seen, for Fichte the pursuit of the highest good consists in the progressive determination of the non-I according to the ends posited by the I. He also makes clear that this activity does not distance us from happiness (or beatitude), but rather draws us closer to it, since moral action is itself inherently joyful. The resulting blurring of the boundaries between morality and religion has, in both Kant and Fichte, significant theoretical value. The dissolution of a rigid demarcation between these two domains does not amount to a mere reduction of one to the other, but instead allows each to acquire a distinctive specificity through its relation to the other⁴¹¹.

In other words, morality is no longer, in itself, something that distances us from the attainment of happiness. Rather than separating us from the world, morality brings us closer to it, enabling us at the same time to transform it through our actions. As Römer argues, "Man transforms the world by introducing into it laws whose ultimate source lies in pure practical reason"⁴¹². Every moral action we perform already contains an implicit faith in the successful realization of the highest good, for this latter is not something to be awaited at some indeterminate future moment, but the direct consequence of our free agency. For this reason, morality is itself a source of happiness. Conversely, through its complete subordination to morality, religion is stripped of any theistic elements that are difficult to justify on rational grounds. Even Kant, in *Religion*, was compelled to admit that, when we inquire how God's action might be exercised to secure the realization of the highest good, we are confronted only with an "abyss of mystery"⁴¹³. It would seem that this abyss, in the manuscripts, is definitively bridged through the recognition that divinity lies not in the action of an external being, but in our own activity in conformity with the laws of pure practical reason.

It seems reasonable to argue that this reformulation of the relationship between morality and religion is, in fact, nothing other than Kant's attempt to resolve yet another dualism, this time within practical philosophy. Indeed, just as we have seen that, from a theoretical standpoint, the manuscripts represent a more radical effort than the critical works to bridge the gap between form and matter, subject and object, it was inevitable that such an undertaking would have repercussions in the practical-moral sphere as well. The world of freedom and the world of nature no longer appear as two opposing realms requiring divine intervention in order to be reconciled. On the contrary, nature

⁴¹¹ For further arguments supporting the claim that religion cannot be fully reduced to morality in the manuscripts, see also Tomaszewska, 2023.

⁴¹² Römer 2024, p. 341.

⁴¹³ See *Religion*, VI 139.

becomes, so to speak, the very stage for the unfolding of freedom: it is the arena where freedom manifests itself through human action. In this way, nature itself is shaped in accordance with our moral ends, without the need for an act of grace or external divine assistance. In other words, Kant's reworking of practical philosophy in the final fascicles of the *Opus postumum* likewise bears the mark of a radical intensification of the immanent dimension of human knowledge and action, which will be proved in the next, final paragraph.

3.2.5 Kant, Spinoza and Lichtenberg in the *I Konvolut*: a Fichtean trace?

In the previous section, I analyzed Kant's evolving treatment of the doctrine of the highest good, which appears to lose its mediating function between morality and religion, since these are *already* united in the moral law itself. Moreover, we observed that the highest good now seems no longer to consist of two heterogeneous elements requiring synthesis by a divine understanding. Rather, it represents "how the subject determines itself a priori"⁴¹⁴. Wisdom is nothing other than the rational self-determination of the subject, which in turn is reflected in a determination of the world according to the ends posited by the subject itself. We have seen how this shift seems to contain Fichtean traces, rooted in the attempt to reformulate, in dynamic terms, the relation between freedom and nature, between the I and the world, and in the ambition to preserve the function of religion while stripping it of any lingering theistic residue.

As I have tried to show, this reformulation is ultimately grounded in the very doctrine of the subject's self-positing, which removes the absolute character of the opposition between the I and the world. It is certainly true that, within Kant's doctrine, the analytic unity of apperception does not seem to perform the same function as the absolute I. The latter represents only, from a theoretical standpoint, the absolute identity of the I from which synthesis and difference are to arise, but it does not reappear, from a practical standpoint, as the ideal of the subject's absolute determination. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the practical dialectic between finitude and infinitude is recovered in the final fascicles through the idea of Man and its wisdom. As Beiser correctly observes, the *Selbstsetzungslehre* thus represents "a clear attempt to enhance the autonomy of the subject not only on the theoretical level, as was the case in the earlier fascicles, but also on the practical level"⁴¹⁵.

As I have already suggested, this does not mean that in the critical works the autonomy of the subject did not play a central role, both in the theoretical and in the practical domain. However, the

⁴¹⁴ *OP*, XXI 58.

⁴¹⁵ Beiser 2002, p. 196.

manuscripts seem to broaden the scope and function of the subject's autonomy. In the practical sphere, this broadening amounts to attributing to the moral agent not only the capacity to determine its will in accordance with the law of duty, but also the power to produce autonomously the ultimate end of its action – the synthesis of virtue and happiness, of I and world. In the theoretical realm, the immanent character of knowledge is radicalized through the explicit rejection of a transcendent thing-in-itself or any matter that “eludes” conceptual determination. In the practical realm, a similar radicalization occurs: the immanence of action is deepened by doing away with the transcendence of divine agency.

In the final fascicle, Kant seems to go even further. After having demonstrated the respective immanence of theoretical knowledge and practical action, he now appears intent on showing the possibility of their unification. The idea of the World, in fact, represents not merely the stage for human practical action but also for theoretical knowledge, insofar as it is conceived as the “totality of all objects of sensible representation”⁴¹⁶. The synthesis of World, Man, and God must therefore be conceived not only as their unification on the practical level, but also the connection between the practical sphere itself and the theoretical dimension. Wisdom, in this sense, cannot refer only to the practical dimension of our experience but must also incorporate the theoretical one. As Kant observes in the *Logic*, “[t]he one who hates science but all the more loves wisdom is called a misologist. Misology generally arises from a lack of scientific knowledge and a certain kind of vanity associated with it”⁴¹⁷. Kant's intention, therefore, cannot have been to eliminate science in favor of practical wisdom, but rather to integrate these two dimensions with one another. At the same time, science remains subordinate to wisdom, insofar as the philosopher describes science as an “organ of wisdom” that is nonetheless indispensable to it⁴¹⁸. Thus, the synthesis of science and wisdom – of theoretical and practical knowledge – must take place under the primacy of the latter over the former.

As I already mentioned in paragraph 2.1.1, Kant had in fact always sought this kind of unity, and the *Critique of Judgment* could itself be understood as an attempt to unify the two dimensions of knowledge articulated in the first two *Critiques*. That unity, however, was, so to speak, generated *ex post*, only *after* the distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical reason had been posited and *presupposed*. Now, by contrast, it seems that the two dimensions of human knowing both descend from a single act: the subject's self-positing itself. Tuschling correctly observes in this regard that “the very same activity that grounds the legislation of nature, namely, the activity of self-

⁴¹⁶ *OP*, XXI 13.

⁴¹⁷ *Logik*, IX 26. On this topic, see Gava 2023, p. 38.

⁴¹⁸ See *Logik*, IX 26.

consciousness that makes itself into the object of an a priori intuition, should also, as morally practical reason, ground and constitute the legislation of the moral world, that is, of freedom”⁴¹⁹.

As we have seen, according to Kant the subject posits itself as finite, and therefore as a knowing subject; yet the very movement through which this process takes place is *practical* in nature, for it expresses an act by which the subject *determines* itself⁴²⁰. For this reason, in the *Opus postumum*, the practical character of reason seems to take precedence over its theoretical dimension, since the latter derives from an original act of self-determination. More than that, what Kant argues in the I *Konvolut* is not merely that theoretical reason has a practical origin, but that theoretical reason *is itself inherently practical*. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the manuscripts, Kant appears to identify theoretical reason with *technical–practical* reason. Indeed, if the idea of God, as the supreme practical idea, depends on ethical-practical reason, the idea of the World, as the supreme theoretical idea, depends on technical-practical reason (sometimes also called technical-theoretical reason)⁴²¹. Kant writes for example:

God and the world. A system of transcendental philosophy, of technica-theoretical and moral-practical reason⁴²².

The totality of beings (*universum*), God, and the world presented as united in one system of the ideas of transcendental philosophy: technical/practical, moral/practical reason, the freedom of the human being, and with it the categorical imperative⁴²³.

World is the complex (complexus) of things in space and time; thus, since neither are something given objectively, in appearance. God is a rational concept of freedom, insofar as there lies in him a principle of the connection of the manifold which only pertains to a person. Concept of duty. The concept of freedom, which points in the direction of the concept of duty, is that of a person – both of man in the world and of God. With respect to the world, a technica-practical; with respect to God, a moral-practical concept⁴²⁴.

⁴¹⁹ Tuschling 1991, p. 120.

⁴²⁰ See e.g. *OP*, XXII 87.

⁴²¹ “Just as the idea of God belongs to moral-practical reason, so too the idea of the world belongs to technical-practical reason. And although from earlier writings—particularly the two Introductions to the *Critique of Judgment*—the distinction between the moral-practical and the technical-practical is well known, the transfer of the sphere of theoretical reason (in contrast to practical reason) to technical-practical reason, as Kant undertakes it in the *Opus postumum*, is nevertheless surprising” (Lehmann 1969, p. 266). See also La Rocca 2001, p. 53: “It should be noted, in general, that during these years the predominant distinction employed by Kant is not that between theoretical reason and practical reason, but rather between technical–practical reason (or theoretical–technical, or techno–speculative, as it is sometimes called) and moral–practical reason. Thus, within the unified perspective adopted by late transcendental philosophy, the overarching horizon remains that of human action [...], which also encompasses the domain of the sciences and the arts”.

⁴²² *OP*, XXI 19.

⁴²³ *OP*, XXI 51.

⁴²⁴ *OP*, XXI 24.

Now, at the beginning of the *Introduction to the Critique of Judgment*, Kant distinguishes between *technical-practical* and *ethical-practical* principles. By the latter, Kant means those moral principles capable of determining the causality of the will according to the laws of freedom, whereas the former include those precepts capable of determining the will in accordance with the laws of nature⁴²⁵. Among the technical-practical principles, Kant places those pertaining to the domain of art and skill in general. In other words, a technical product is something that we generate according to ends that are not essentially moral ends. Moreover, in a brief essay from 1790 entitled *On a Discovery whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is Made Superfluous by an Older One*, Kant distinguishes between mathematical production and technical production, claiming that:

In the general sense one can call construction any presentation of a concept through the (spontaneous) production of a corresponding intuition. If this occurs through mere imagination in accordance with an a priori concept, it is called pure construction [...]. If, however, it is carried out on some kind of material, one can speak of empirical construction. The first may also be called mathematical construction, the second technical construction”⁴²⁶.

Technical activity, and with it artistic activity, differs not only from moral-practical activity, but also from mathematics: the latter produces its concepts in pure intuition, whereas the former generates them in empirical intuition. It is therefore likely that, in the manuscripts, Kant broadened the concept of technical-practical reason to encompass theoretical reason itself. In this sense, philosophy in its totality becomes a genuine creative and generative process: “Philosophy” Kant writes “*statuere, agere, facere, operari*”⁴²⁷.

The reason for this is, in fact, readily intelligible in light of what I have argued thus far. Theoretical reason is, to some extent, practical, because: 1) the very sensible matter received by the senses turns out to be the product of an act of positing by the subject of indirect appearance⁴²⁸; and 2) according to the doctrine of self-positing, the subject’s sensibility and finitude are themselves the outcome of a spontaneous act of self-determination. In this respect, the activity of technical-practical reason becomes indispensable for the very constitution of sensible intuition, for without the indirect appearances even those direct appearances that properly affect the senses could never arise. The

⁴²⁵ See e.g. *KU*, V 172.

⁴²⁶ *ÜeE*, VIII 191.

⁴²⁷ *OP*, XXI 141.

⁴²⁸ Not by chance, Lehmann calls designates the indirect appearances as “technical appearances” (see Lehmann 1969, p. 293).

grounding role of technical-practical reason with respect to intuition itself is explicitly recognized by Kant, when he writes:

[B]esides sensible representation, there is also a faculty of cognition which contains not merely receptivity but also spontaneity (as a higher faculty of cognition), namely understanding, judgement, and reason; and this can be technical/constructing intuition [*Anschauung konstruierende*] or moral/practical reason, both a priori, binding the manifold of representations into a cognition under a single principle⁴²⁹.

Reason constructs intuition insofar as it produces those indirect appearances that form the foundation for determining the empirical properties of direct appearances. This means that even what we perceive as external to ourselves is, in reality, a product of ourselves. Kant writes in this regard: “[t]hat there is still something outside me is a product of myself. I make myself. [...] We make everything ourselves [*Wir machen alles selbst*]”⁴³⁰. And also: “[t]he thinking subject creates [*schafft*] for itself a world as an object of possible experience in space and time. This object is only one world. In this world, moving forces, for example, attraction and repulsion, without which there would be no perceptions, are posited”⁴³¹.

It seems to me that these passages concisely summarize everything that has been expressed up to this point. Any assumption of the object’s material as simply given is abandoned in favor of viewing it as spontaneously constructed. Of course, according to Kant, what we do is not to construct empirical appearance *directly* in space and time through an act of intellectual intuition. The act of construction takes place exclusively at the level of the indirect appearance, for the sake of the possibility of concrete experience and unitary experience⁴³². What proves surprising, compared to the *Critique*, is that the construction of the object no longer appears to be confined to its purely formal dimension but, as we have repeatedly observed, comes to encompass, indirectly, even its empirical determinations. This allows Kant to say that “we make everything ourselves” and that we ourselves create the world through the positing of moving forces.

Another striking formulation is the following: “[o]ne cannot philosophize about any object as though it were already given, but only about it as a mere thought-entities arising from the subject

⁴²⁹ *OP*, XXII 116.

⁴³⁰ *OP*, XXII 82.

⁴³¹ *OP*, XXI 23.

⁴³² “These sentences are found in the last part of the marginal text on the left edge of the third page of Appendix VII, in an enlarged, hurried hand. This may be an indication that the new standpoint was, even for Kant himself, somewhat surprising. But the conditions under which the cited statement holds must not be left unmentioned. They may be summarized as follows: ‘We make everything ourselves’, because the synthesis of the pure manifold of realized space constitutes the necessary basis of experience an experience that is produced by us and can only be one. The product of our making is an (indirect) appearance that serves exclusively the direct one, that is, the appearance of an appearance, which is not sensible and thus not the product of an intellectual intuition” (Mathieu 1991, p. 186).

itself; and the philosophy that thereby creates such ideas out of itself according to a priori principles is transcendental philosophy”⁴³³. I believe that these formulations once again confirm the radicalization of the immanent instance of the later Kant’s thought and his attempt to meaningfully reformulate the dualism between sensibility and understanding, between form and matter. But, from a higher standpoint, the dualism that Kant believes he has finally resolved is that between theoretical reason and practical reason, since he has shown that even the former is, to some extent, practical, and that the world of the sciences, just like the moral world, is a world that we ourselves concur to construct even in its empirical determinations. In this sense, the world becomes something entirely permeable and shapeable both by our technical-practical (theoretical) and moral-practical reason. In this sense, I agree with Römer when she argues that “Kant conceives of man, with all his faculties, as a *Mittelbegriff*, a mediating concept, who discovers the world through the natural sciences and, ultimately, gradually transforms this discovered world in view of the highest good”⁴³⁴.

For this reason, I maintain that the numerous references to Spinoza we find in the final fascicle must be interpreted precisely in light of this immanent turn. This is a question that has long preoccupied the scholarly literature. In these notes, in fact, Spinoza’s name appears, for the first time within the entirety of Kant’s writings, not as a polemical reference. As we shall soon see, in some instances Spinoza is even regarded as a representative of transcendental idealism. From this perspective, several scholars argue that Kant’s rapprochement with Spinoza should be understood in the context of Kant’s reformulation of his philosophy of nature, with particular reference to the doctrine of the ether as a universal substance. For example Edwards interprets Kant’s references to Spinoza as the philosopher’s acknowledgment of the necessity of positing a dynamic reality as the foundation of our perceptions, distinct from the purely formal structures of critical philosophy⁴³⁵. In Edwards’s specific reading, Kant’s Spinozism is understood as an attempt to radicalize the realist tendency within transcendental philosophy and, ultimately, the separation between form and matter. By contrast, my aim is to show that these references to Spinoza are not evidence of a naïve “realist” turn on Kant’s part, but rather of a radicalization of his idealist commitments.

I maintain that the question of the ether is connected with Spinozism only indirectly. First of all, as we have repeatedly observed – and as Edwards fails to recognize – the ether does not exist as a substance independent of the subject, but is only a product of the latter, a thought-entity. It would

⁴³³ *OP*, XXI 96.

⁴³⁴ Römer 2024, p. 244. I do not agree with Römer’s use of the term *Mittelbegriff* to describe the idea of Man, since this term appears only in the early sections with regard to the moving forces of matter. Likewise, I disagree with her identification of the highest good in the *Opus postumum* with the ethical community described in *Religion* (see *ibidem*) as Kant makes no reference to the communal or social dimension of the supreme good in these manuscripts.

⁴³⁵ See Edwards 2000b. For further interpretations of the relationship between Kant and Spinoza in the *Opus postumum*, see Förster 1990, Lord 2011, Onnasch 2009.

therefore be mistaken to interpret the reference to Spinoza as an attempt to acknowledge the necessity of positing a universal substance existing independently and self-sufficiently. The question of the ether plays only a collateral role in the issue of Spinozism, since it shows, on the contrary, that all reality must be constituted by the subject and that it is impossible to step outside the immanent circle of consciousness. As in Fichte, Spinoza's system itself must be amended in order to render it compatible with transcendental idealism. Kant himself indeed writes that "Spinoza's transcendental idealism, according to the letter, is transcendent – that is, an object without a concept: to represent the subjective as objective"⁴³⁶.

Kant does not intend to refer to Spinoza's original doctrine, to its letter, since the latter clearly represents a metaphysical and transcendent thought. Spinoza's substance is posited as an object without a concept, that is, as external to the sphere of transcendental knowledge. In this sense, what is in fact subjective is represented as objective, that is, as independent of the subject itself. Understood in this sense, Spinozism is also called "fanatical" since it places everything outside the subject, as a thing-in-itself in the dogmatic sense of the term, as substance: "[t]he concept is fanatical [*schwärmerisch*] when that which is within the human being is represented as something outside him, and his product of thought [*Gedankenwerk*] is taken for a thing in itself (substance)"⁴³⁷.

Nevertheless, Kant at the same time seems to envisage the possibility of reconciling transcendental idealism and Spinozism. He also writes, for example:

(1) Transcendental idealism is Spinozism insofar as it posits the object within the totality of its own representations⁴³⁸.

(2) The transcendental idealism of that which our understanding is itself the originator. Spinoza. To intuit everything in God. [...] Reason precedes, with the projection of its forms (*forma dat esse rei*), because it alone carries with it necessity. Spinoza⁴³⁹.

(3) Transcendental philosophy is the principle of constituting itself as an object according to ideas, even prior to its self-determination in space and time, yet for the sake of that very self-determination (Lichtenberg's Spinozism: to look oneself in God as the totality of beings)⁴⁴⁰.

⁴³⁶ *OP*, XXI 22.

⁴³⁷ *OP*, XXI 26.

⁴³⁸ *OP*, XXII 64.

⁴³⁹ *OP*, XXI 15.

⁴⁴⁰ *OP*, XXI 98.

(4) We can know no objects, either in us or as lying outside us, except insofar as we insert in ourselves a priori the *actus* of cognition, according to certain laws. The spirit of man is Spinoza's God (so far as the formal element of all sense-objects is concerned)⁴⁴¹.

All these quotations clearly show that the Spinoza to whom Kant is referring is one already bent to the demands of transcendental idealism. What Kant seems to value in Spinoza's thought is its radical immanence, which is nevertheless, from a transcendental perspective, betrayed through the identification of the principle with substance. As in Fichte's case, Kant also laments that positing a principle as external to and independent of consciousness causes Spinoza's philosophy to fall into a form of "fanaticism", insofar as it confuses what is merely an object of thought with a thing-in-itself. At the same time, according to Kant it is possible to reconcile the radical immanence of Spinozism with the structures of transcendental philosophy by substituting Spinoza's substance with the spirit of man. In this sense, for Kant the task is not to bring transcendental philosophy closer to Spinozism, but rather to integrate the latter within the conceptual framework of the former. As Tuschling notes, "this self-constitution of the I through an original act of the subject [...], it is but a single step to the self-identification of Kantian transcendental idealism with Spinozism"⁴⁴².

In this sense, as Kant writes in quotation (1), transcendental idealism is Spinozism insofar as it does not separate the object from the representation of the object – that is, insofar as it locates the entirety of the object within the sphere of the consciousness that thinks it. Reason, in this sense, is what grants existence to things (*forma dat esse rei* – quotation (2)), since nothing that is not *thought* as existing can exist. Quotation (3), moreover, seems to refer directly to the doctrine of self-positing. What Kant is asserting, in fact, is that one's self-determination in space and time, as we have already seen, is nothing other than the consequence of one's self-determination as a pure object of thought. Put differently: I become a spatio-temporally determined subject only insofar as I posit myself as an *object* of my own thought, thereby determining and limiting my spontaneity. Here again, what Kant seems to suggest is that the very passivity of the subject is not determined or caused by something external to the subject itself, but by an act entirely internal to thought, which, in reflecting upon itself, determines itself.

Quotation (4) is the one that best represents the meaning of Kantian Spinozism within the manuscripts, through the recognition that Spinoza's God is nothing other than the spirit of the human being. This, however, just as in Fichte's case, does not amount to a dogmatic inversion of Spinozism, as if the I were to create the matter of objects *ex nihilo*. Kant insists, in fact, that what depends directly on the I is only the form of the object. Now, this qualification could, at first glance, appear problematic

⁴⁴¹ *OP*, XXI 99.

⁴⁴² Tuschling 2002, pp. 156-157.

for my interpretation, insofar as it seems to reduce the scope of the manuscripts' extension of the subject's autonomy, confining it merely to the production of the objects' forms, as it was in the first *Critique*.

Nevertheless, I believe this qualification is fully consistent with the fundamental thesis of this study. As I have already suggested, the extension of the subject's spontaneity with respect to the empirical determinations of objects does not entail the spontaneous creation of the very matter of the perceived object, that is, of the direct appearance. Rather, it is limited to the production of the indirect appearance as the determining ground of the direct appearance. Even this latter, although it allows us to explain the genetic origin of the empirical properties of matter, remains a pure thought-entity, and thus distinct from the empirical and material dimension of direct appearances. The material therefore remains something *given* to the subject, and yet it can be given only because the subject itself has spontaneously posited itself *as* receptive in the first place. In this way, the givenness of matter and the passivity of the subject are not eliminated, but they lose their immediacy and absolute character. Kant writes in this regard that "[r]eceptivity for knowledge (*receptivitas*) is founded on the faculty of creating receptivity in oneself – Lichtenberg"⁴⁴³. As we have seen, as a consequence of this, space and time are no longer merely forms of the subject's passivity, but also of its activity. The radicalization of the immanent thrust of transcendental philosophy, represented by the equation between the latter and Spinozism, thus leads not to a subjectivist and solipsistic metaphysics, but only to the recognition of the logical-transcendental priority of spontaneity over receptivity, of form over matter.

Obviously, this equation between transcendental philosophy and Spinozism can also be traced on the practical level. Not only the world, and thus the totality of sensible objects, is contained within the consciousness of the subject, but so too is the very idea of God: "These ideas of God and the world lie necessarily a priori in reason, and this division is a priori – Lichtenberg"⁴⁴⁴. In this way, it is confirmed once again that the unity of these two ideas can occur only within the human being, and not outside of it, through the subject's asymptotic striving toward the ideal of wisdom. As Guyer correctly notes, "[t]hus Spinozism is right in its general form of seeing both nature or the order of causes and thought or the order of reasons as modes of an underlying substance, but wrong in identifying God as that substratum of which nature and ourselves are modes. We ourselves are the substratum from which both God and nature are projected unities"⁴⁴⁵. Here too, however, the

⁴⁴³ *OP*, XXI 52.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴⁵ Guyer 2005, p. 307. Unlike Guyer, however, for the reasons already mentioned, I interpret this position as an evolution and radicalization of the conceptual structures of critical philosophy, whereas the scholar believes it can already be discerned within the *Critique of Judgment*. I thus agree with Werkmeister in viewing these formulations of the *Opus Postumum* as a development of Kant's thought and even as a movement toward Fichte's philosophy: "And, as we have

“reversal” of Spinozism does not consist in attributing to the subject powers of a divine nature. The idea of God that the subject itself produces remains the asymptotic point of a progressive approach toward the dimension of our pure rationality, which, in order to affirm itself, must nonetheless continually confront and clash with reality. The unity of the I with itself and with the world thus always remains a deferred unity, namely, something that we must construct in unceasing progress through the exercise of our morality.

At this point, however, one further observation is in order. It is readily apparent that in the last quotations it is not only Spinoza’s name that recurs with particular frequency, but also that of Georg Cristoph Lichtenberg, a well-known physicist and familiar with Kant’s work, with whom he had also maintained a correspondence. After his death in 1799, Ludwig Christian Lichtenberg published some of his brother’s personal notes under the title *Vermischte Schriften*, whose second volume Kant had not only read, but also briefly commented⁴⁴⁶. Kant’s reception of Spinozism appears to have been mediated precisely through his reading of Lichtenberg, given that the two names often appear together⁴⁴⁷. As Tuschling writes, “Kant’s remarks on ‘Lichtenberg’s Spinoza, a system of the intuition of all things in God’ are not a misunderstanding of the history of philosophy, but rather (in the literal sense) a profound self-assessment: for they show that even at this late time Kant was aware of the hidden and underlying connections of his philosophy with that of Spinoza”⁴⁴⁸.

What is interesting to note, however, is that Lichtenberg, despite being particularly critical of Fichte, actually seems, in these writings, to embrace a position not so distant from the authentic spirit of Fichtean philosophy. Lichtenberg seems to fault Fichte for elevating transcendental philosophy to such a level of abstraction that it became severed from the practical concerns of lived experience, confining it within a self-enclosed system largely divorced from empirical reality. In the second volume of the *Vermischte Schriften* he writes for example:

Herr Fichte seems to forget that there are people for whom it is impossible to see in the distance without glasses, who cannot hear without an ear trumpet, and who cannot walk without crutches. He should now teach the people to eat raw meat because the animals in the field have no kitchen⁴⁴⁹.

seen, it is the subject, as rational being, it is We, who, in the highest form of transcendental philosophy, project this unity of Ideas in primordial self-determination. It is the ‘I’ which, in positing itself, also posits the ‘non-I’ – i.e., the whole of Reality, including God and the World – over against itself. If this sounds Fichtean rather than (traditionally) Kantian, so be it. It is precisely what Kant was coming to in the *Opus postumum*” (Werkmeister 1980, p. 202),

⁴⁴⁶ See AA, XVIII 693 ff.

⁴⁴⁷ See e.g. *OP*, XXI 69; XXI 87

⁴⁴⁸ Tuschling 1991, p. 121.

⁴⁴⁹ Lichtenberg 1801, p. 102.

The core of Lichtenberg's critique lies in the claim that Fichte's transcendental philosophy seems to disregard the empirical limitations of human beings, which vary from case to case and from person to person. Yet this criticism entirely misses the mark, insofar as the defining feature of transcendental philosophy as such – including Kant's – is precisely its differentiation from any form of empirical psychologism. The transcendental structures of experience, such as the absolute I understood as a practical ideal, exist and are the same in every individual, regardless of the particular empirical configuration of their sensory organs.

In a letter of 18 February 1799 to his brother Ludwig Christoph, Lichtenberg further writes: "A dogmatizing Kantian is certainly not a true one. Even Fichte – *quod pace tua dixerim* – has offended more against prudence than against philosophy. In my view, it was culpable mischief on his part to speak as he has done now, and it will probably always remain so"⁴⁵⁰. What is clear in this passage is that Lichtenberg's criticisms are directed not so much at Fichte's philosophy as such, but at the practical ramifications of his thought. In other words, Lichtenberg appears to fault Fichte less for philosophical error than for a lack of moderation and prudence (*Klugheit*). The remark is most likely a reference to the recently erupted Atheism Dispute, in which Fichte seems to have overstepped the bounds of discretion by emphasizing too strongly the anti-theistic implications of his position. As Lichtenberg writes in the same letter, even if the Christian God is not made of "wood and gilded tinsel," it nevertheless "remains an image, merely another link in the same chain, more subtle perhaps, but still an image"⁴⁵¹. From this perspective, Fichte would have been a "hasty fool"⁴⁵² to imagine that humanity could embrace a wholly pure conception of God, stripped of all sensible and personal representation. In another letter, also from February 1799, addressed to Blumenbach, Fichte is accordingly described as a "God eater" who "has not yet even been properly born into the very world he seeks to instruct"⁴⁵³.

As all these passages suggest, Lichtenberg's criticisms of Fichte thus appear to be largely prejudicial and based on only a superficial acquaintance with his thought. Moreover, they seem to target Fichte's prudence and practical judgment rather than his philosophical system. My view is further supported by the impression that many of Lichtenberg's reflections on transcendental philosophy in the *Vermischte Schriften* in fact sound more Fichtean than he himself would have been willing to admit.

The first chapter of the second part of volume II of the *Vermischte Schriften* is entitled *Philosophische Bemerkungen* and is devoted almost entirely to reflections on Kantian thought

⁴⁵⁰ Lichtenberg 1992, p. 1019.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵³ *Ivi*, p. 1014.

and the innovations it introduced in the philosophical and scientific debate. In particular, the main idea that the latter had introduced is that “instead of saying that the world is mirrored within us, we should rather say that our reason is mirrored in the world”⁴⁵⁴. What Kant’s Copernican revolution introduced was the idea that it is not the self that is constituted by the world, as the empiricists believed, but rather the world that is constituted by the self. What seems to characterize the *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, however, is a distinctive emphasis on the need to radicalize the immanent relation of objects to the subject that thinks them. We read, for example:

However matters might stand, we are and remain simple idealists; indeed, we cannot do otherwise. For nothing can be given to us except through representations. The belief that these representations and sensations are caused by objects outside of us is just another representation or idea. [...] The reason so many people are not conscious of this is that they associate the word *representation* with a very incomplete concept, namely, that of a dream or a fantasy. These are certainly species of representations, but they do not exhaust the genus. [...] What indeed is *outside*, *external*? What are objects *praeter nos*? What does the preposition *praeter* imply? It is a merely human invention, a name to indicate a difference from other things we *do not* designate as *praeter nos*. Everything is a feeling [*Alles sind Gefühle*]. To say we cognize external objects is contradictory; it is impossible for man to go outside of himself. Where we believe we see objects, we see only ourselves. We can actually know nothing of the world except ourselves and the changes that occur within us⁴⁵⁵.

This passage clearly belongs to the framework of Kantian “classical” transcendental idealism, according to which everything we can know is given to us solely in the form of representation. Yet, the passage also seems to mark a radicalization of critical philosophy, by insisting on the radical immanence of the relation between the subject and the “external” reality. Lichtenberg claims here that not only is the knowability of thing-in-themselves called into question, but their very existence as causes of sensation is forcefully denied. By this I do not mean to claim that the Two-World Theory and the assumption of the thing-in-itself as the cause of affection constitute the correct interpretation of Kant’s transcendental idealism, but only that they represent a *possible* reading supported by certain passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the *Prolegomena*⁴⁵⁶, which Lichtenberg, alongside Maimon and Fichte, strongly reject. According to them, to attempt to step outside the circle of consciousness in order to explain what occurs within consciousness would be absurd, for to posit a cause of representation already means to conceive that cause *as* a representation, precisely insofar *as it is thought* as a cause.

⁴⁵⁴ Lichtenberg 1801, p. 41.

⁴⁵⁵ Lichtenberg 1801, pp. 62-64.

⁴⁵⁶ See e.g. *KrV* A 358, A 614-B 642, *Prolegomena*, IV 314

The final portion of the quotation supports this reading, insofar as Lichtenberg denies that the objects of our knowledge can be genuinely external to us, since everything we know is given within consciousness. As Maimon had already stressed, the phrase “external to us” is really only a conceptual device for making the distinction between subject and object intelligible. Yet such an object cannot exist outside the very circle of consciousness of which it is the object: as Lichtenberg observes, it is self-contradictory to claim that we know something standing completely outside us. Equally striking is the physicist’s suggestion that all reality ultimately reduces to sensation. This does not, of course, imply that reality is a mere arbitrary fabrication, but rather that it is not possible to conceive the object as something numerically separate from the feeling through which it is directly given to the subject. As Lichtenberg explains in the above quotation, the word “representation” does not refer to a mere dream or a phantasy, for the objectivity of the represented object is granted by the universal and transcendental laws of reason.

As we have seen, Fichte himself conceives feeling (*Gefühl*), as the first and immediate access of the finite subject to reality. In the *Grundlage*, it was designated as that state through which we become aware of the occurrence of the check from the Non-I. However, I believe it is in this passage of the *Vocation of Man* that the epistemic role of feeling is emphasized with the greatest force: “*Spirit* – [...] Can you say: I am aware of external objects? – *I*. Definitely not, strictly speaking. For the seeing and feeling, etc., with which I take hold of things is not consciousness itself but only that of which I am first and most directly aware. Strictly speaking, I could only say: I am conscious of my seeing or feeling things”⁴⁵⁷. The final part of this quotation is strikingly similar to the last sentence of Lichtenberg’s quote. Both, in fact, maintain that what we have knowledge of is not external objects themselves, but solely the subjective state (the feeling) through which the object is manifested within our consciousness

I thus believe the positions of Fichte and Lichtenberg share significant points of convergence, although the latter, also due to the aphoristic character of his reflections, does not explain *how* feeling can arise within the subject. As we have seen, in Fichte this cause was identified with the *Anstoß* exercised by the Not-I on the finite I. Lichtenberg offers no argument of this kind, although he is clear in affirming that feeling is not a mere arbitrary fabrication, but rather designates the immediate mode of our objective access to reality. Another key difference lies in the different weight each assigns to the systematic form of philosophical knowledge – a difference that does not, however, affect the issue of the object’s immanence to consciousness. Moreover, despite Lichtenberg’s criticisms of Fichte’s conception of God, the *Vermischte Schriften* also contain strikingly similar expressions. Lichtenberg, for example, writes: “There is absolutely no other way to worship God than by fulfilling one’s duties

⁴⁵⁷ GA, I,6, 217.

and acting according to laws given by reason. In my opinion, that there is a God can mean nothing other than: I feel myself, despite all my freedom of will, compelled to do what is right. What further need have we of a God? That is God”⁴⁵⁸. Here again Lichtenberg seems to radicalize Kant’s classical position by identifying God with the very realization of the moral law. In this sense, God is not the guarantor of future recompense for actions performed in accordance with duty, but rather the simple enactment of the freedom inherent in the moral law itself⁴⁵⁹.

Of course, the aphoristic nature of Lichtenberg’s writings does not allow us, in this context, to extract a fully coherent and systematic doctrine. What I wished to highlight, however, is the evident radicalization that Lichtenberg appears to apply to Kantian transcendental idealism, one not so different from what Fichte himself had undertaken during his Jena period. Kant’s Spinozism in the manuscripts can thus certainly be read within this context. Quoting Lichtenberg and Spinoza together would thus have served to radicalize the immanent thrust of transcendental philosophy, grounding the latter not on substance but on the subject. Put differently: the emphasis on immanence expressed in Spinoza’s philosophy is nothing other than an attempt to bridge the gap between human being, world, and God – assigning not to God but to Man itself the task of holding the other two members together⁴⁶⁰.

Now, the only scholar who has examined the significance of Lichtenberg’s presence in the manuscripts and his relation to Spinoza is Tuschling. In line with the position I am advancing, Tuschling holds that Lichtenberg’s *Vermischte Schriften* represent an attempt to radicalize Kantian critical idealism in the direction of a complete elimination of the ontological difference between representations and things in themselves, a move that Kant himself endorses in the manuscripts. However, Tuschling maintains that the key to understanding this relation between Lichtenberg, Spinozism, and Kant’s doctrine of self-positing is not Fichte, but Schelling. In defense of this thesis, from a philological perspective, Tuschling notes that Schelling’s name appears twice in the I *Konvolut*⁴⁶¹. From a theoretical perspective, on the other hand, Tuschling claims that “what is lacking in Lichtenberg, can be found in Schelling (*and, as far as I can see, only in Schelling*), is the specific connection between the polemic against things-in-themselves and the doctrine of self-positing”⁴⁶². To corroborate this hypothesis, Tuschling cites some passages from the *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre* (1796/1797), which Kant had probably read, and

⁴⁵⁸ Lichtenberg 1801, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁵⁹ The affinity between Kant’s concept of God in the manuscripts and Lichtenberg’s notion in the *Vermischte Schriften* is also noted by Tuschling (see Tuschling 1991, pp. 120-121).

⁴⁶⁰ In a letter to J. D. Ramberg dated 3 July 1786, Lichtenberg himself invokes Spinoza to affirm the need to overcome ‘the infamous duo in the world, body and mind, God and world’ (see Zöller 1992, p. 431)

⁴⁶¹ See *OP*, XXI 87, XXI 97.

⁴⁶² Tuschling 1991, p. 128 (emphasis mine).

in which Schelling indeed proposes his own theory of self-positing. The latter should explain why the object must be conceived not as “something given to us from the outside as such, but rather [as] a product of the self-activity (*Selbsttätigkeit*) of our mind”⁴⁶³.

What is striking, however, is Tuschling’s claim that the only author in whom the theory of self-positing appears to be connected with the denial of the existence of objects independent of consciousness is Schelling, especially in light of the title of the work he quotes. The latter explicitly presents itself as an “elucidation” (*Erläuterung*) of the idealism of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, a term which, of course, was not coined by Schelling. It is therefore not true that “only in Schelling could Kant have found this idea”⁴⁶⁴ since these very thoughts have their roots in Fichte’s *Grundlage*, which served as the principal source of inspiration for the entire first phase of Schelling’s philosophy.

Given that, as I have already emphasized, my concern lies less with historical and philological parallels than with the systematic articulation of a problem, even the hypothesis that Kant had positively received Schelling’s idealism should be understood as a confirmation of his own rapprochement with Fichte’s thought. Of course, I am not claiming that Schelling’s early writings are entirely coherent with, or assimilable to, the Jena phase of Fichte’s thought. Nevertheless, it is clear that the systematic framework from which they set out is Fichte’s doctrine of self-positing, and that Kant’s reference to Schelling, in my view, cannot be separated from an analysis of the manuscript’s relation to the *Grundlage* itself. I believe this is further confirmed by what I am about to argue.

It seems reasonable to argue that, in Lichtenberg’s case, his reaction to Fichte’s thought was motivated primarily by extra-philosophical considerations and that, paradoxically, the trajectory of his reflections in the *Vermischte Schriften* was not so far removed from the radicalization of the structures of transcendental philosophy presented in Fichte’s *Grundlage*. I believe that Kant himself, in fact, when referring to Lichtenberg, did not *intentionally* wanted to draw closer to Fichte’s position. As we know, Kant publicly distanced himself from Fichtean idealism in the famous 1799 *Declaration Against Fichte*, in which the *Wissenschaftslehre* is accused of being “mere logic”⁴⁶⁵ and where Kant rejects Fichte’s judgment that critical philosophy itself is merely a “*propaedeutic* to transcendental philosophy and not the system of this same philosophy”⁴⁶⁶. From this perspective, it is difficult to regard the developments in Kant’s thought in the manuscripts as a direct endorsement of the results of the *Grundlage*. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to argue that the final fascicle of the

⁴⁶³ Schelling 1856, p. 357.

⁴⁶⁴ Tuschling 1991, p. 127.

⁴⁶⁵ *BW*, XII 370.

⁴⁶⁶ *BW*, XII 371. This critique is repeated by Kant in the manuscripts, when he writes: “A *Wissenschaftslehre* in general, in which one abstracts from its material (the objects of cognition), is pure logic. It is a futile circling with concepts to think of yet another, higher, and more general theory of science, which could itself contain nothing other than what is scientific in cognition as such (its form)” (*OP*, XXI 207).

manuscripts was written as a *response* to Fichte's position regarding the status of critical philosophy, and that Kant himself, in answering these charges, came closer to certain aspects of Fichtean thought than he was prepared to acknowledge.

As Pecere writes, “*completing* the system of critical philosophy and *contrasting* Fichte's formalism are evidently two sides of the same problem”⁴⁶⁷. In other words, Kant's attempt to bring the system of transcendental philosophy to completion in the I *Konvolut* can be understood, on the one hand, as an effort to defend critical philosophy against the accusation of being a mere propaedeutic to knowledge, and, on the other hand, as a demonstration that transcendental philosophy cannot be reduced to a mere logic. Indeed, in numerous passages we encounter formulations such as the following:

Philosophy [understood] not as the formal aspect of pure reason drawn from concepts, but as the material content of ideas (of God, the world, the human soul), subjectively as well as objectively (both united and presented as wisdom itself)⁴⁶⁸.

Transcendental philosophy is the principle of the thoroughgoing determination of reason into theoretical-speculative and moral-practical reason, founding the unity of the unconditioned whole as the totality (*universum*) of things in their synthetic unity, according to a priori concepts of its elements: God, the world and man in the world subject to the law of duty⁴⁶⁹.

Transcendental philosophy is the act of consciousness whereby the subject becomes the originator of itself and, thereby, also of the whole object of technical-practical and moral-practical reason in one system ordering all things in God, as in one system [...]. Analogy with mathematics in space. Theoretical-practical reason, in conformity with its nature, creates objects for itself, namely, independent ideas - the system of an all-embracing reason which constitutes itself into an object. Transcendental philosophy does [not] occupy itself with something which is assumed as existing, but merely with the human spirit, which [is] its own thinking subject⁴⁷⁰.

It seems to me that these quotations clarify, on the one hand, Kant's insistence on the necessary completeness of transcendental philosophy and, on the other, its genuinely productive character, both in the theoretical and in the practical respect. As Kant maintains in the first quotation, transcendental philosophy does not concern itself merely with the form of objects, but also with their

⁴⁶⁷ Pecere 2015, p.173. Also de Vleeschauwer conceives Kant's evolution of the concept of transcendental philosophy as a response to Fichte's charges. See e.g. de Vleeschauwer 1937, pp. 660 ff.

⁴⁶⁸ *OP*, XXI 5.

⁴⁶⁹ *OP*, XXI 79-80.

⁴⁷⁰ *OP*, XXI 78.

content as idea. What does this mean? From the theoretical point of view, it indicates that transcendental philosophy is capable of constructing its own object within the dimension of the indirect appearance, in the asymptotic attempt to thoroughly determine its empirical properties. From the practical point of view, by contrast, the productive dimension of the subject consists in the asymptotic determination of the world according to maxims that conform to the law of duty, whose authority is guaranteed by the divinity of our very reason. Both of these movements, when joined together, are what ultimately lead to wisdom. This position seems to be reiterated also in the second quotation, where Kant affirms that the “complete determination” of reason must be articulated both in the theoretical and in the practical dimension, thereby grounding the possibility of establishing a synthetic unity of the totality of objects. Finally, the third quotation emphasizes the centrality of the subject in this new task assigned to transcendental philosophy.

The synthesis of the objects of technical-practical and ethical-practical reason can only be achieved insofar as both ultimately stem from an “act of consciousness” of the subject, through which the latter posits both itself and the ideas of World and God within a systematic unity⁴⁷¹. It is worth noting that Kant alludes to an analogy with the mathematical method. This reference, I contend, serves to underscore once again the genuinely productive character of transcendental philosophy. Just as, through mathematics, we construct objects within the pure intuition of space, so too through transcendental philosophy we are able to construct both the objects of empirical sciences in the dimension of the indirect appearance and a moral world as the objective correlate of our free action. For this reason, as Kant specifies at the end of the passage, transcendental philosophy never concerns something merely assumed as *given*, but rather with the human spirit itself – that is, with the mode through which objects are authentically constituted in accordance with both technical-practical and moral-practical reason. This means, for instance, that the ideas of world and of God no longer represent merely regulative ideas, serving to organize the experience given to the senses and structured through the forms of the understanding. Rather, they are objects that we ourselves “produce” through the progressive practical determination of reality in the attempt to attain the ideal of wisdom. In other words, both the World and God become objects of our experience not because they can be given to us through the senses, but because they constitute the product of our activity. On the one hand, we ourselves “become” God through the progressive and asymptotic determination of

⁴⁷¹ On this point, see also La Rocca 2001, pp. 51-52: “If philosophy [...] is also the autonomy of the ideas themselves, the self-production of the peculiar contents that organize the totality of nature and of human moral action within it, it is less surprising that it should be defined not as a science, or as a collection of philosophoumena, but as an act of consciousness. Alongside the notion of philosophy as a body of knowledge, there is, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as well as in the *Nachlaß*, a philosophy as the natural logic of reason, that is, a philosophy identical with the movement of self-production and self-comprehension of reason itself in relation to the most original interests of man. This movement may find its guidance and orientation in transcendental philosophy understood as a doctrine, but it can only be realized as a concrete act of reason, never exhausted in a doctrinal complex of propositions”.

our will in accordance with the laws of duty; on the other hand, we “construct” the world in two respects: from the technical-practical perspective, as the object of scientific inquiry, and from the moral-practical perspective, as the object for our moral action, capable of receiving and shaping itself in accordance with the ends that we ourselves posit for the sake of the realization of the highest good. Therefore, as Römer argues,

This final Kantian perspective on transcendental philosophy could not be further removed from the idea of a transcendental philosophy that would merely inquire into the conditions of possibility of what is. Although Kant’s late transcendental philosophy remains a theoretical discipline and by no means becomes, in whole or in part, a moral philosophy, it nonetheless arrives, on the basis of moral philosophy, at a form of knowledge [...] of two a priori objects, namely God and the world. These, in turn, serve as the *highest objective framework for the transformation of the world* [...]. Thus, the late Kant *introduces a practical dimension into transcendental philosophy, without thereby transforming it into moral philosophy*⁴⁷².

In other words, in his manuscripts Kant distances himself from the definition of transcendental philosophy that he had offered in the first *Critique*, where it was described as a “system of concepts” that makes experience in general possible⁴⁷³. Put differently, transcendental philosophy no longer concerns itself merely with investigating the conditions of possibility of what presents itself as given, but rather becomes an activity through which the *given itself is constructed and transformed, both in the theoretical and in the practical domain*. As we have already seen, Kant in fact affirms that “ideas precede phenomena in space and time”⁴⁷⁴ and “provide the material [*Stoff*] for synthetic a priori laws from concepts”⁴⁷⁵, in the sense that they constitute that unity of appearances which alone can guarantee the possibility of an organic experience. “Thought,” Kant further writes, “[...] creates the object for itself. Everything is transcendental; pure idealism (which is found only in the idea of the subject)”⁴⁷⁶. This means that transcendental philosophy can no longer be confused with a mere propaedeutic, since it becomes genuinely *productive* of the known object and of the world as progressive manifestation of our moral action according to rational, and therefore divine, laws. At the same time, this conception of transcendental philosophy can be read as an attempt to respond to the excessive formalism that Kant had attributed to the *Grundlage*. That this new reconfiguration of the status of transcendental philosophy is conceived by Kant as a counteraction to Fichte’s system is indicated by one of his final annotations, written at the center of a blank page, as a possible heading

⁴⁷² Römer 2024, p. 361.

⁴⁷³ *KrV*, A 11.

⁴⁷⁴ *OP*, XXI 88

⁴⁷⁵ *OP*, XXI 20

⁴⁷⁶ *OP*, XXI 90.

for a paragraph: “Philosophy as *Wissenschaftslehre*, established in a complete system by [missing]”⁴⁷⁷. It is likely that the missing name is precisely that of Kant, who, in this final fascicle, was attempting to bring the system of transcendental philosophy to a definitive close.

What I have sought to demonstrate is that, in carrying out this operation, he nevertheless reshaped certain conceptual structures of his system in a direction not entirely irreconcilable with that which Fichte himself had pursued in his attempt to provide a firm foundation for critical philosophy. From this perspective, the use that both make of Spinoza seems to me to offer supporting evidence for this interpretation. To put it briefly, in both cases Spinoza’s thought is employed in order to draw upon the potentialities of its radical immanence, while nonetheless relocating the principle of this immanence on the side of the subject rather than on that of the object.

This does not imply, once again, that Kant explicitly intended to align himself with Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, or that he was in any straightforward sense positively influenced by it. It can, however, be reasonably argued that the publication of the *Grundlage* at least served as a stimulus for Kant, as the final quotation suggests; yet the degree to which the I *Konvolut* was composed with explicit reference to Fichte remains difficult to determine. As Förster notes, what can legitimately be asserted is that “the declaration against Fichte cannot be regarded as the definitive expression of Kant’s assessment of Fichte’s thinking”⁴⁷⁸.

My aim in this third part of the study has been to show, first and foremost, that Fichte’s thought represents the most radical attempt within the post-Kantian debate to reformulate Kant’s classical dualisms, such as those between form and matter, understanding and sensibility, and, more broadly, subject and world. From this perspective, Fichte provides a theoretical model that can serve as a valuable point of reference for assessing potential developments within Kant’s own thought. Even if Kant himself never fully endorsed Fichte’s conclusions, the fact that his manuscripts gravitate toward questions that Fichte himself addressed suggests that the two can be brought into a productive philosophical dialogue, which does not reduce their relation to mere opposition or to an irreducible theoretical divide, but instead illuminates a shared terrain of problems and possible solutions. The analysis carried out in these final paragraphs has therefore sought to demonstrate that, by situating Kant’s evolving reflections alongside Fichte’s system in the Jena period, it is possible to recover a richer picture of the place of Kant’s manuscripts within the post-kantian debate.

⁴⁷⁷ *OP*, XXI 155.

⁴⁷⁸ Förster 1990, p. 162.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study has been to offer the first systematic analysis of the confrontation between the *Opus postumum* and the post-Kantian debate, with particular reference to Maimon and Fichte. As I have tried to show throughout the work, the point was not so much to demonstrate or to establish concrete influences of these two authors on their master's thought. My conviction is that the most significant developments in the core structures of critical philosophy arise from an internal, endogenous dynamic within the Kantian system. At the same time, however, a comparison with the positions of Fichte and Maimon offers further insight into these developments: it helps to elucidate and mutually clarify a set of problems rooted in a shared ground, thereby also assigning a new and original place to Kant's manuscripts within the post-Kantian debate.

The choice of these authors was determined by the fact that their thought represents, within this debate, the most radical attempt to reformulate Kant's classical dualisms while still striving to remain within the framework of critical philosophy. As I have argued, Kant's attempt to develop his own conceptual structures actually originates in rather specific and localized problems internal to his system, which however begin to multiply and expand until, in the final fascicle, they come to affect the very status of transcendental philosophy as such.

In the first part, I therefore sought to determine the problems that Kant tries to address in the early fascicles, which concern above all his attempt to justify the scientific character of *physica specialis* by means of the a priori classification of the dynamic moving forces of matter and the deduction of the existence of the ether. At the same time, I have tried to show how precisely this attempt to implement such goals made Kant aware of the need to reformulate some of the key assumptions of his system, such as the opposition between form and matter, between sensibility and understanding, and between phenomenon and thing in itself.

This preliminary analysis thus allowed me to turn, in the second part, to Maimon's philosophy, which, before Fichte, constitutes the most serious attempt to rethink and to bridge precisely these oppositions. Through an analysis of Maimon's early works, I have sought to provide a general account of his skepticism and his critique of the Second Analogy of Experience, and thereby of the possibility of applying the category of causality to empirical objects. The gulf Maimon discerns between the spontaneity of the understanding and the receptivity of sensibility, between form and matter, makes it impossible, while remaining within the Kantian framework, to justify the very possibility of passing from one dimension to the other.

Maimon's solution to this problem is to draw from the rationalist tradition the concept of a "divine understanding", in which form and matter, understanding and sensibility are wholly identical, and to graft it onto critical philosophy, rendering it merely an idea toward which we must asymptotically approach in the attempt to make matter ever more conform to form. At the same time, Maimon introduces into transcendental philosophy the mathematical concept of the "differential," in an effort to show how the process of reducing empirical material to its genetic rule of production may take place.

In my reading, these attempts to respond to the question *Quid juris?* led to a reformulation of three fundamental elements of transcendental philosophy: (1) A new doctrine of schematism, by means of which we can justify the possibility of transition not only from understanding to sensibility as a priori faculties, but from understanding to the object in its particular empirical and a posteriori determinations; (2) A rethinking of the status of the thing in itself, conceived no longer as a "thing" independent of the domain of representations, but as the genetic and immanent rule of their construction; (3) A new concept of experience, conceived not merely as the correspondence between the forms of the understanding and empirical intuitions, but as an idea toward which we must asymptotically approach, and which, for that reason, can never be fully attained by the finite rational being. Following this analysis, I returned to Kant's manuscripts in order to show how the tensions that first emerged in the early fascicles led to a substantial reworking of the key concepts of critical philosophy; a development that, perhaps unexpectedly, brings Kant back to reconsider precisely the three issues just outlined.

The problem of moving from the *a priori* domain of the metaphysics of nature to the *a posteriori* domain of empirical physics resulted, first of all, in a reformulation of the doctrine of schematism. The dynamic moving forces of matter, as *Mittelbegriffe*, are conceived as "schemata" that allow not only the purely formal determination of objects of experience, but also their empirical and material determination. Secondly, the relation between empirical objects and these dynamic forces is expressed as one between appearances and things in themselves. Yet Kant makes clear that this does not mean taking the dynamic forces as entities existing independently of the phenomenal domain, but rather as "thought-entities" posited by the subject in order to make an organic and systematic experience possible. Third, experience in the strict sense can never be fully attained, since it is now identified with the "complete determination" of objects of experience, which remains a mere idea.

After highlighting these affinities with Maimon's reformulations of critical structures, I also stressed the points of divergence. Above all, Kant's developments are not conceived as an attempt to replace the achievements of the *Critiques*, but as an effort to extend them so as to ground not

only *physica generalis* but also *physica specialis*. From this perspective, I underscored the limits of Maimon's criticisms: while they do not seem to undermine the objectivity of the mathematised sciences, they can be effective when directed toward disciplines that, at the time, had not yet undergone a thorough mathematical formalization, such as chemistry and biology. Kant's project in the manuscripts appears to be precisely that of securing the objectivity of these latter sciences.

Moreover, I noted that the rationalist framework of Maimon's philosophy is absent from Kant's manuscripts. The unification of sensibility and understanding is in no way grounded on a divine understanding, nor does Kant envisage the progressive absorption of sensibility into understanding. For Maimon, reality is anchored in the divine understanding, sensibility is treated as a deficiency, and empirical objects are reduced to imperfect expressions of rational structures – a move that risks sliding back into pre-critical metaphysics. Kant, by contrast, broadens the subject's spontaneous role in positing the framework for the a priori determination of the properties of matter, while still preserving the epistemic relevance of sensibility and empirical inquiry.

This difference also allows Kant to avoid Maimon's skeptical outcome. For Maimon, skepticism arises from the fact that only the divine understanding could truly unify form and matter, whereas the finite subject can never attain fully objective knowledge. Sensibility, regarded as an obstacle, prevents matter from being completely reduced to rational principles (the differentials). Kant, however, avoids this conclusion by maintaining the epistemic role of sensibility. Empirical access to reality, through observation and experiment, is not an impediment but a necessary condition of knowledge. In this way, Kant considers it possible to establish an ordered system of nature, resisting both theological dogmatism and empirical skepticism.

In the third part of the dissertation, I turned to an analysis of the relationship between Fichte's philosophy and the last two fascicles of Kant's manuscripts. These notes suggest that Kant had come to realize that the conceptual reformulations introduced in the earlier fascicles, initially framed as an extension of the critical project and seemingly confined to problems in the philosophy of nature, inevitably entailed a rethinking of both the status of subjectivity and of transcendental philosophy as such, in its theoretical and practical dimensions. From this perspective, Fichte provides a theoretical model against which the late Kantian developments can be read and measured.

My analysis began with a reconstruction of the aims of Fichte's project of a *Wissenschaftslehre*. Such a reconstruction proved necessary given the widespread tendency in the secondary literature to interpret Fichte as advancing a subjectivist metaphysics in which the I, through an act of intellectual intuition, generates reality *ex nihilo*. If one accepts this reading, any comparison with Kant's manuscripts would inevitably reveal only incompatibility between the two projects. I therefore started from the debate between Fichte, Reinhold, and Schulze concerning the systematicity

of philosophy and the need to establish its ultimate foundation, which Fichte locates in the *Thathandlung*. The *Thathandlung* expresses the absolute identity of the I with itself, which must ground and precede, from a transcendental standpoint, the emergence of difference. From this perspective, the principle of philosophy can be neither Reinhold's principle of representation nor Kant's synthetic unity of apperception. In both cases, we face not an absolute identity, but rather a synthesis between the I's identity with itself (form) and the difference constituted by the manifold given to the subject (matter). However, according to Fichte, to assume difference as given amounts to adopting a dogmatic standpoint, since it fails to explain the emergence of difference itself from the absolute unity of the I.

At the same time, I noted that Fichte's confrontation with Maimon was equally crucial for the development of his system. In this regard, I showed that the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* represents not only an attempt to ground Reinhold's principle of representation but also a strategy to counter Maimonian skepticism. By demonstrating the genuinely productive role of imagination in relation to the objects of experience, Fichte dissolves the problem of applying the forms of the understanding to sensible content.

Yet I also emphasized that the radical subjectivism often attributed to Fichte is avoided: the activity of productive imagination is "activated" by the check exerted by the Not-I upon the finite I, a resistance that cannot be theoretically deduced. Thus, when Fichte presents imagination as the productive faculty of reality, he does so only on the assumption that imagination does not create the Not-I itself. Instead, on the presupposition of its action, imagination produces the world of representations, that is, *of objects insofar as they are represented objects*. From this standpoint, the logical-transcendental priority of the spontaneity of the I over its receptivity is an ideal priority. As Fichte states, "our consciousness originates in the immediate awareness of our activity, and only by means of this do we subsequently find ourselves to be affected"⁴⁷⁹. In my view, the reiteration of positing constitutes the key theoretical knot of this problem: in positing itself *as* itself, the I duplicates its own positing, breaking up its absolute unity and thereby opening itself to the possibility of an encounter with a Not-I, whose *actual* occurrence cannot however be deduced from a theoretical standpoint. The impossibility, for the I, of positing itself absolutely makes it experience the practical reality of a limit, a check on the part of the not-I. This check, however, exists only insofar as the I strives to posit itself absolutely, and could not exist independently of that striving.

This analysis led me to consider the relation between Fichte's philosophy and Spinoza's system. Both systems affirm the necessary immanent relation between the principle and its determinations. Yet Fichte criticizes Spinoza for grounding this relation in an external, independent

⁴⁷⁹ GA, I, 5 95.

substance, thereby making his system transcendent in relation to consciousness. For Fichte, true immanence requires that both principle and determinations exist only within the I. This leads to Fichte's characterization of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a "systematic Spinozism" on the theoretical level, since it deduces all faculties from the finite I, but also as a "moral Spinozism," since it requires a practical part to ground the theoretical. Unlike Spinoza's substance, the absolute I is not a given being but an idea, a goal toward which finite consciousness must strive through its free activity.

Accordingly, I detected two levels of immanence in Fichte's *Grundlage*: (1) theoretical immanence, where the finite and intelligent I produces objects through imagination and no transcendent thing-in-itself is supposed to exist beyond consciousness; (2) practical immanence, where the finite I and Not-I are unified asymptotically in the absolute I as an idea to be realized through our practical striving. Indeed, even though the represented object is created by the theoretical I, the *Anstoß* exercised by Not-I occurs independently of any decision of the I. From this perspective, the ultimate unity between I and Not-I is never definitively given, but must be progressively produced through the I's practical and free action to determine the Not-I. Thus, Fichte preserves Spinoza's demand for systematic unity while integrating it into the transcendental framework, avoiding a relapse in dogmatic form of metaphysics.

Finally, I briefly considered the practical implications of this radicalization of the immanent relation between I and Not-I, between subject and world. Once the absolute character of their opposition is removed, it becomes unnecessary to postulate the existence of God which, through an act of will, should reconcile the two. This gives rise to a reformulation of the doctrine of the highest good. Unlike in Kant, the harmony between virtue and happiness is not to be understood as a future divine reward, but as something we ourselves produce through the progressive determination of the Not-I in accordance with the ends we set for ourselves. The moral order is the product of our own action, and within this framework God is nothing other than this order itself. Faith in God, therefore, is not faith in the expectation of a future recompense, but faith in the realization of a result that we ourselves produce.

Once the main trajectories that enabled Fichte to develop his project of a *Wissenschaftslehre* had been established, I turned to the last two fascicles of Kant's *Opus postumum*, with the aim of showing how it is possible to construct a conceptual dialogue between the two authors without reducing their relationship to a mere opposition. First, I argued that Kant's formulations in the early fascicles led him to redefine his doctrine of subjectivity. The doctrine of the indirect appearance and the ether deduction removed the immediacy of the material "given" tracing it back to a genetic process of production. From this perspective, even the passivity of the subject can no longer be regarded as original; it must instead be grounded in an act of spontaneity. This, in turn,

entails a redefinition of the relation between the analytic and synthetic unity of apperception. Whereas in the first *Critique* Kant had regarded both unities as equally original, in the *Opus postumum* the synthetic unity (that is, the synthesis of unity and difference) is derived from the analytic unity (that is, the absolute identity of the I with itself). In this sense, Kant insists that the intuitions of space and time are no longer to be understood merely as forms of the subject's passivity, but also as products of its spontaneity.

At the same time, however, I tried to show that, despite Kant's intentions, he does not appear to provide a fully satisfactory argument to justify the transition from the unity of the analytic I to the difference of the synthetic I. Unlike Fichte, for whom the self-positing of the I as identical with itself yields only the *possibility* of an encounter with the world, in Kant this act seems to guarantee the *reality* of such an engagement. In this respect, despite Kant's intentions, his solution appears in fact more idealistic than Fichte's. Without the practical function of the "check" (*Anstoß*), the transition from identity (spontaneity) to difference (receptivity) risks taking on an emanationist form and sliding into an overly subjectivist position.

Despite these problems, Kant's intention remains clear: to reformulate the relation between subject and object in such a way as to eliminate any metaphysical residue that would absolutize their opposition. This becomes evident above all in the final fascicle, where Kant explicitly extends his reflections to questions of a practical and moral nature.

First of all, the radicalization of the immanence of thought also has practical implications. In the I *Konvolut*, Kant explicitly affirms that God is not to be conceived as a being external to ourselves, but as a principle immanent within our very pure practical reason. From this perspective, God coincides with the authority of the moral law itself and no longer appears, as he seemed to in the *Critiques*, as a being external to humanity whose role was to guarantee the possibility of reconciling subject and world in the realization of the highest good. In this respect, the risk of a stoic hardening of Kant's moral doctrine is real; nevertheless, Kant does not abolish the concept of the highest good but rather reformulates it, identifying it with *Weisheit*, understood as a regulative ideal and the ultimate goal of moral action. Wisdom is not conceived as an egoistic withdrawal of the subject from the world, but rather as an attempt to engage with it, shaping it ever more in accordance with our ends.

The program of the last fascicle thus appears to be an attempt to unify nature and freedom, world and God through the idea of Man, that is, the figure of the wise man who, while never fully attaining it, tends toward wisdom as the fulfillment of his rational vocation. *Weisheit* thereby becomes the true object of love for our action: it does not lead to an indissoluble unity with the world, but rather to its progressive transformation in accordance with rational ends. In this way, happiness is no

longer an external promise but an enacted beatitude, gradually realized through the growing harmony between subject and world. Nature thus becomes the arena in which freedom both manifests and fulfills itself. In this sense, the vision of the late Kant comes close to that of Fichte: the highest good is the work of the subject itself, who determines the world according to its own ends, finding in moral action not merely obligation but also an intrinsic form of joy.

Finally, I have show that the reference to Spinoza acquires precise meaning in this context: Kant does not embrace a realist substantialism, but rather assimilates Spinozian immanentism into transcendental idealism, replacing substance with the “I” as the principle of knowledge. Theoretically, this entails acknowledging that the “I” cannot escape the circle of its own representations; practically, it means that the unity expressed by the “I” is not a static given but a task of subjectivity, which reconstitutes World and God within the idea of Man in an asymptotic process.

At this juncture, Kant’s frequent references to Lichtenberg function as a hinge: the physicist’s insistence on the radical immanence of thought and his identification of God with the realization of the moral law converge with Kant’s outcome, while at the same time bordering on the Fichtean register. From this standpoint, transcendental philosophy becomes an authentically productive discipline: on the theoretical side, through the construction of the object of the sciences within the dimension of the indirect appearance; on the practical side, through the “production” of a moral world in conformity with our own ends. In conclusion, I have tried to show that, even if it is highly probable that Kant did not *explicitly* intend to approximate Fichte’s thought, he nonetheless did so indirectly, by responding to Fichte’s observations on the merely propaedeutic character of critical philosophy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Kant's works

Works of IMMANUEL KANT in AA: *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften [Bd. XXIII: hrsg. von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin; Bd. XXIV –: hrsg. von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen] Reimer, Berlin [De Gruyter, Berlin-New York] 1900 – Akademie-Ausgabe.

- *Der einzig möglich Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*, (1763), AA Bd. II.
- *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, I Aufl, (1781), AA Bd. IV.
- *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, (1783), in AA Bd. IV.
- *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, (1785), AA Bd. IV.
- *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, (1786), in AA Bd. IV.
- *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, II Aufl, (1787), AA Bd. III.
- *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, (1788), in AA Bd. V.
- *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, (1790), in AA Bd. V.
- *Über das Misslingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee*, (1791), in AA Bd. VIII.
- *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, (1793), in AA Bd. VI.
- *Das Ende aller Dinge*, (1794), in AA Bd. VIII.
- *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, (1797), in AA Bd. VI.
- *Briefwechsel*, in AA Bd. X-XIII.
- *Logik Jäsche*, in AA Bd. IX.
- *Logik Dohna-Wundlacken*, in AA Bd. XXIV
- *Logik Philippi*, in AA Bd. XXIV.
- *Reflexionen zur Metaphysik*, in AA Bd. XVII-XVIII.
- *Opus postumum*, in AA Bd. XXI-XXII.

2. Maimon's Works

Works of SALOMON MAIMON in MGW: *Maimons Gesammelte Werke*, hrsg. V. Verra, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim, 1965-1976.

- *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie* (1790), in MGW, II.
- *Baco und Kant*, (1790) in MGW, II.
- *Philosophisches Wörterbuch oder Beleuchtung der wichtigsten Gegenstände der Philosophie in alphabetischer Ordnung*, (1791), in MGW, III.
- *Streifereien im Gebiete der Philosophie*, (1793), in MGW, IV.
- *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens. Nebst angehängten Briefen des Philatetes an Aenesidemus*, (1794), in MGW, V.
- *Kritische Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Geist*, (1797), in MGW, VII.
- *Briefwechsel*, in MGW, VI.

3. Fichte's Works

Works of JOHANN GOTTLIEB FICHTE in GA: *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, hrsg. v. R. Lauth, H. Gliwitzky, E. Fuchs, P.K. Schneider, G. Zöllner u. A., Verlag Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart 1962-2012.

- *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1790, 1793), GA I, 1.
- *Rezensionen: Creuzer, Gebhard, Aenesidemus* (1793-1794), GA I, 2.
- *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* (1794, 1798), GA I, 2.
- *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre. Als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer* (1794-1795), GA I, 2.
- *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (1794), GA I, 3.
- *Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre, in Rücksicht auf das theoretische Vermögen* (1795, 1802), GA I, 3.
- *Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), GA I, 4.
- *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), GA I, 4.
- *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800), GA I, 6.

- *Ueber den Grund unseres Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung* (1799); *Appellation an das Publikum* (1800), GA I, 5.
- *Einige Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus*, in GA, II,1.
- *Eigne Meditationen über ElementarPhilosophie*, in GA, II,3.
- *Wissenschaftslehre* 1804, in GA, II,8.
- *Wissenschaftslehre* 1811, in GA, II,12.
- *Vom Unterschiede zwischen der Logik und der Philosophie selbst*, in GA, II,14.
- *Die Staatslehre*, in GA, II,16.
- *Kollegnachschrift. Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, in GA, IV,2.
- *Vom Unterschiede zwischen der Logik und der Philosophie selbst. Nachschrift Halle/Lisco*, in GA, IV,5.
- *Vorlesung über Logik und Metaphysik* SS 1797, in GA, IV,1.
- *Briefwechsel* (1775-1793), in GA, III,1.
- *Briefwechsel* (1793-1795), in GA, III,2.

Secondary literature:

- Adickes, E. (1920), *Kants Opus postumum dargestellt und beurteilt*, Reuther & Reichard, Berlin.
- Adickes, E. (1924), *Kant und das Ding an sich*, Berlin, Pan.
- Adinolfi, M. (1994), *La deduzione trascendentale e il problema della finitezza in Kant*, Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane.
- Allais, L. (2015), *Manifest Reality: Kant's Idealism and his Realism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Allison, H.E. (1978), "Things in Themselves, Noumena, and the Transcendental Object", in *Dialectica*, 32-1, pp. 41-76.
- Allison, H.E. (2004), *Kant's Transcendental Idealism. An Interpretation and Defense*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press.
- Ameriks, K. (2003), *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Anthony Bruno, G. (2023), "From being to acting: Kant and Fichte on intellectual intuition", in *British Journal for the History*, 31-4, pp. 762-783.
- Aquila, R.E. (1979), "Things in Themselves and Appearances: Intentionality and Reality in Kant", in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 61-3, pp. 293-308.
- Asmuth, C. (2019), "Salomon Maimon und die Transzendentalphilosophie ganz grundsätzlich", in Azzariti-Fumaroli, L.; Gasperoni, L., (ed.) *Salomon Maimon: alle origini dell'idealismo tedesco*, in *Discipline Filosofiche*, XXIX-1, pp. 31-46.
- Atlas, S. (1964), *From Critical to Speculative Idealism. The Philosophy of Solomon Maimon*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague.
- Atlas, S. (1969-1970), "Salomon Maimon's Doctrine of Fiction and Imagination", in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 40-41, pp. 363-389.
- Basaglia, F. (2016), "The Highest Good and the Notion of the Good as Object of Pure Practical Reason", in Höwing, T. (ed.), *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, pp. 17-32.
- Basile, G.P. (2008), "Idealismo e realismo nella ricezione neokantiana dell'Opus postumum", in *Kant e-Prints*, Campinas, Série 2, 3-2, p. 103-114
- Basile, G.P. (2013), *Kants Opus postumum und seine Rezeption*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston.
- Beck, L.W. (1974), "The Conception of Lawlikeness in Kant's Philosophy of Science", in Beck, L.W. (ed.), *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, Dordrecht.
- Beiser, F.C. (1987), *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Beiser, F.C. (2002), *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

- Beiser, F.C. (2003), "Maimon and Fichte", in Freudenthal, G., (ed.), *Salomon Maimon. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 233-248.
- Beiser, F.C. (2005), *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Beiser, F.C. (2006) "Moral Faith and the Highest Good", in Guyer, P. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 588-629.
- Bennet, J. (1974), *Kants Dialectic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bergman, S.H. (1967), *The Philosophy Of Salomon Maimon*, At the Magnes Press, Jerusalem.
- Blomme, H. (2013), "Dieu en vue du système. Le statut de l'ens summum dans l'Opus postumum de Kant", in Theis, R. (ed.), *Kant: Théologie et religion*, Paris, Vrin, pp. 107-116.
- Blomme, H. (2017), "Wer steht an höchster Stelle? Die Idee 'Gott' in der Kritik der Reinen Vernunft und im Opus postumum", in dos Santos, L.R, Loudon, R.B., de Azevedo Marques, U.R. (ed.), *Kant e o a priori*, Marília-São Paulo, Oficina Universitária-Cultura Acadêmica, pp. 129-140.
- Blomme, H. (2023), "Kant's Paradoxical Reception of Lavoisier", in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant's Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York, pp. 9-26.
- Bojanowski, J. (2016), "Life without Death. Why Kantian Agents Are Committed to the Belief in Their Own Immortality", in Höwing, T. (ed.), *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, pp. 181-197.
- Branca, A. (2024), "Kant et le formalisme de la raison. Considérations sur la dernière conception kantienne de l'idéalisme", in *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*, CXVI-2, pp. 275-286.
- Breazeale, D. (1981), "Fichte's 'Aenesidemus' Review and the Transformation of German Idealism", in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 34-3, pp. 545-568.
- Breazeale, D. (1992), *Editor's Introduction to Fichte, J.G, Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo (1796–99)*, Cornell University Press.
- Breazeale, D. (1995), "Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self", in Ameriks, K., Sturma, D. (ed.), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, Albany, State University of New York Press, pp. 87-114.
- Breazeale, D. (2002), "Fichte's Philosophical Fictions", in Breazeale, D., Rockmore, T., (ed), *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, Evanston, Northwestern UP, pp. 175-208.
- Breazeale, D. (2014), *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre. Themes from Fichte's Early Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Breazeale, D. (2019), "Fichte's Spinoza: 'Common Standpoint', 'Essential Opposition', and 'Hidden Treasure'", in Emundts, D., Dedgwick, S. (ed.), *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus International Yearbook of German Idealism*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, pp. 103-138.
- Bucci, P. (1985), "'Architettonica' e 'Dottrina della scienza': Filosofia e costruzione sistematica del sapere in Kant e Fichte", in *Giornale Critico della Storia della Filosofia*, LXVI-3, pp. 414-428.

- Buchdahl, G. (1966), "The Relation between 'Understanding' and 'Reason' in the Architectonic of Kant's Philosophy", in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 67, pp. 209-226.
- Buchdahl, G. (1971), "The Conception of Lawlikeness in Kant's Philosophy of Science", in *Synthese*, 23-1, pp. 24-46.
- Buchenau, A., Lehmann, G. (1925), *Der alte Kant. Haffe's Schrift: Letzte Äusserungen Kants und persönliche Notizen aus dem Opus postumum*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Leipzig.
- Busche, H. (2010), "Der Äther als materiales Apriori der Erfahrung. Kants Vollendung der Transzendentalphilosophie im Opus postumum", in Busche, H., Schmitt, A. (ed.), *Kant als Bezugspunkt philosophischen Denkens*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 53-83.
- Byrne, P. (2006), *Kant on God*, London-New York, Routledge.
- Carpi, O. (1997), "Il problema dell'analogia in Kant", in *Divus Thomas*, 100-1, pp. 9-33.
- Cassirer, E. (1920), *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, III, Verlag Cassirer, Berlin.
- Cesa, C. (1990), "Zum Begriff des Praktischen bei Fichte", in Apel, K.O.; Pozzo, R. (ed.), *Zur Rekonstruktion der praktischen Philosophie: Gedenkschrift für Karl-Heinz Ilting*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, pp. 461-480.
- Chiba, K. (2012), *Kants Ontologie der raumzeitlichen Wirklichkeit, Versuch einer anti-realistischen Interpretation der Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston.
- Choi, S.I. (1996), *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstanschauung. Eine Reflexion über Einheit und Entzweiung des Subjekts in Kants Opus postumum*, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter.
- Crowe, B.D. (2008), "Fichte's Fictions Revisited", in *Inquiry*, 51-3, pp. 268-287.
- De Boer, K. (2014), "Kant's Multi-Layered Conception of Things in Themselves, Transcendental Objects, and Monads", in *Kant-Studien*, 105-2, pp. 221-260.
- De Boer, K. (2020), *Kant's Reform of Metaphysics. The Critique of Pure Reason Reconsidered*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- De Vleeschauwer, H.J. (1937), *La déduction transcendantale dans l'oeuvre de Kant*, III, Paris, Leroux.
- Dekens, O. (2001), "De Dieu qui vient à l'idée. Notes sur la réduction du divin dans l'Opus postumum", in Erismann, C. (ed.), *Années. 1796–1803, Actes du 4 Congrès international de la Société d'études kantienne de langue française. Kant, Opus postumum*, Paris, Paris, pp. 233-239.
- Duffy, S. (2014), "Maimon's Theory Of Differentials As The Elements Of Intuitions", in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 22-2, pp. 228-247.
- Duque, F. (2001), "Le rapport de Kant à Fichte et à Schelling", in Erismann, C. (ed.), *Années. 1796–1803, Actes du 4 Congrès international de la Société d'études kantienne de langue française. Kant, Opus postumum*, Vrin, Paris, pp. 185-216.
- Dürr, S. (2018), *Das Princip der Subjektivität überhaupt. Fichtes Theorie des Selbstbewusstseins (1794–1799)*, Paderborn, Fink Verlag.

- Edwards, J. (2000a), *Substance, Force, and the Possibility of Knowledge. On Kant's Philosophy of Material Nature*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press.
- Edwards, J. (2000b), "Spinozism, Freedom and Dynamics in Kant's Final System of Transcendental Idealism", in Sedgwick, S. (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, New York, Cambridge University Press, pp. 54-77.
- Elon, D. (2019), "Skepsis und System. Salomon Maimons Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie und Gottlob E. Schulzes Aenesidemus in chiasmatischer Gegenüberstellung", in Azzariti-Fumaroli, L., Gasperoni, L. (ed.), *Salomon Maimon: alle origini dell'idealismo tedesco*, in *Discipline Filosofiche*, XXIX-1, pp. 87-112.
- Elon, D. (2021), *Die Philosophie Salomon Maimons zwischen Spinoza und Kant Akosmismus und Intellektkonzeption*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner.
- Emundts, D. (2004), *Kants Übergangskonzeption im Opus Postumum*, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York.
- Emundts, D. (2023), "Self-affection in Kant's Opus postumum and in the Critique of Pure Reason", in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant's Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York, pp. 108-130.
- Engstler, A. (1990), *Untersuchungen zum Idealismus Salomon Maimons*, Stuttgart, Frommann-Holzboog.
- Engstrom, S. (1992), "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 52-4, pp. 747-780.
- Fabbianelli, F. (2000), *Antropologia trascendentale e visione morale del mondo. Il primo Fichte e il suo contesto*, Milano, Milano, Guerini e Associati.
- Fabbianelli, F. (2002), "La posizione speculativa di Fichte nel dibattito morale postkantiano", in *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 57-3, pp. 413-428.
- Fabbianelli, F. (2010), "'Antropologia', 'psicologia' e 'trascendentale' nel pensiero di K.L. Reinhold e J.G. Fichte", in *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, XII-2, pp. 47-60.
- Fabbianelli, F. (2014), 'Condizione di possibilità dell'esperienza' o 'relazione d'essenza'? Apriori teoretico e apriori etico in Kant e Reinach", in Caroti, S., Siclari, A. (ed.) *Filosofia e religione. Studi in onore di Fabio Rossi; E-Theca*, pp. 258-259.
- Fabbianelli, F. (2020), "Die Freiheit des reinen Wissens. Karl Leonhard Reinholds Auffassung der Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes", in Bondeli, M., Imhof, S. (ed.), *Reinhold and Fichte in Confrontation A Tale of Mutual Appreciation and Criticism*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, pp. 179-201.
- Fichte, I.H. (1830), *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Leben und litterarischer Briefwechsel*, Bd.2, Sulzbach, I.E. v. Seidel'schen Buchhandlung.
- Fonnesu, L. (2022), "The Highest Good and Its Crisis in Kant's Thought", in *Journal of Transcendental Philosophy*, 3-3, pp. 369-384.
- Förster, E. (1990), "Fichte, Beck and Schelling in Kant's Opus postumum", in Ross, G.M., McWalter, T. (ed.), *Kant and his influence*, Bloomsbury Publishing, Bristol, pp. 146-169.

- Förster, E. (1993), *Introduction to Kant, I., Opus postumum*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Förster, E. (2000), *Kant's Final Synthesis. An Essay on the Opus postumum*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Franks, P. (1997), "Freedom, Tatsache and *Thathandlung* in the Development of Fichte's Jena Wissenschaftslehre" in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 79-3, pp. 310-323.
- Franks, P. (2003), "What should Kantians learn from Maimon's Skepticism?", in Freudenthal, G., (ed.), *Salomon Maimon. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 200-232.
- Freudenthal, G. (2003), "Maimon's Subversion of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: There Are No Synthetic a priori Judgments in Physics", in Freudenthal, G., (ed.), *Salomon Maimon. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 144-175.
- Freudenthal, G. (2006), *Definition and construction Salomon Maimon's philosophy of geometry, Dissertation*, Max-Planck-Inst. für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin.
- Friedman, M. (1992a), *Kant and the Exact Sciences*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Friedman, M. (1992b), "Causal Laws and the Foundations of Natural Science", in Guyer, P. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 161-199.
- Friedman, M. (2010), "Eckart Förster and Kant's Opus postumum", in *Inquiry: Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 46-2, pp. 215-227.
- Friedman, M. (2014), "Laws of Nature and Causal Necessity", in *Kant-Studien*, 105-4, pp. 521-533.
- Furlani, S. (2012), "La logica trascendentale di Emil Lask", Rametta, G. (ed), *Metamorfosi del trascendentale*, II, Cleup, Padova, pp. 47-79.
- Furlani, S. (2019), *La differenza tedesca. Considerazioni sulla filosofia trascendentale*, Udine, Forum.
- Furlani, S. (2023), "Il sapere e l'irrazionale: la 'logica della filosofia' di Emil Lask", in *I castelli di Yale*, XI-2, pp. 91-100.
- Gambaro, G. (2020), *Filosofia trascendentale e orizzonte pratico nell'ultimo Fichte*, Padova, Cleup.
- Gambaro, G. (2022), *Emil Lask e le matrici neokantiane dell'empirismo trascendentale*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis.
- Gasperoni, L. (2010), "Perché fare ricerca sulla filosofia di Salomon Maimon oggi?", in *Analysis. Rivista di cultura e politica scientifica*, 3-4, pp. 16-22.
- Gava, G. (2023), *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the Method of Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Groß, F. (1993), *Immanuel Kant. Sein Leben in Darstellung von Zeitgenossen. Die Biographien von L.E. Borowski, R.B. Jachmann und E.A.Ch. Wasianski*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Guyer, P. (1987), *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- Guyer, P. (1990a), “Kant’s conception of empirical law”, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 64, pp. 221-242.
- Guyer, P. (1990b), “Reason and Reflective Judgment: Kant on the significance of systematicity”, in *Noûs*, 24, pp. 17-43.
- Guyer, P. (2003), “Beauty, Systematicity, and the Highest Good: Eckart Förster’s Kant’s Final Synthesis” in *Inquiry*, 46-2, pp. 195-214.
- Guyer, P. (2005), “The Unity of Nature and Freedom: Kant’s Conception of the System of Philosophy”, in Guyer, P., *Kant’s System of Nature and Freedom. Selected Essays*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 277-313.
- Guzmán-Grez, N. (2021), *Kants Theorie der Selbstsetzung Versuch über die Epigenesis des transzendentalen Subjekts als Form und Materie der Erkenntnis*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg.
- Guzmán Grez, N. (2025), “Metafísica, Dinámica y Éter en la Filosofía Teórica de Kant”, in *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, 42-1, pp. 107-117.
- Haag, J. (2012), “Fichte on the consciousness of Spinoza’s God”, in Förster, E., Melamed, Y., (ed.) *Spinoza and German Idealism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 100-120.
- Haag, J. (2019a), “Fichte’s Critique of Spinoza in the Grundlage”, in Emundts, D., Dedgwick, S. (ed.), *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus. International Yearbook of German Idealism*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, pp. 139-163.
- Haag, J. (2019b), “Imagination and Objectivity in Fichte’s Early Wissenschaftslehre”, in Gentry, G., Pollok, K. (ed.), *The Imagination in Post-Kantian German Idealism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 109-128.
- Hall, B.W. (2015), *The Post-Critical Kant. Understanding the Critical Philosophy through the Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York-London.
- Hall, B.W. (2023), “A Kantian answer to Aenesidemus. Appropriating Kant’s doctrine of self-positing in the Opus postumum”, in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant’s Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York pp. 131-153
- Hanna, R. (2000), “Kant, Truth, and Human Nature”, in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 8, pp. 225-250.
- Hoffer, N. (2020), “The Dialectical Illusion in Kant’s Only possible Argument for the Existence of God”, in *Kantian Review*, 25-3, pp. 339-363.
- Hogan, D. (2009), “Noumenal Affection”, in *Philosophical Review*, 118-4, pp. 501-532.
- Hoppe, H. (1969), *Kants Theorie der Physik: Eine Untersuchung über das Opus postumum von Kant*, Klostermann, Frankfurt.
- Howard, S. (2023a), “Physics as system in fascicles X/XI of Kant’s Opus postumum”, in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant’s Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York, pp. 50-70.
- Howard, S. (2023b), *Kant’s Late Philosophy of Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- Hoyos, L.E. (2008), *Der Skeptizismus und die Transzendentalphilosophie. Deutsche Philosophie am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg-München, Karl Alber.
- Ivaldo, M. (1992), *Libertà e ragione. L'etica di Fichte*, Milani, Mursia.
- Ivaldo, M. (2019), "Die praktische Konstitution des 'Setzens' nach der Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes" in Emundts, D., Dedgwick, S. (ed.), *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus. International Yearbook of German Idealism*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, pp. 165-186.
- Kabitz, W. (1902), *Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Fichteschen Wissenschaftslehre aus der kantischen Philosophie*, Berlin, Reuther & Reichard.
- Kahn, S. (2018), "Kant's post-1800 Disavowal of the Highest Good Argument for the Existence of God", in *Kant Yearbook*, 10, pp. 63-83.
- Kajon I. (2018), "From anthropologia transcendentalis to the Question on the Transcendental. Thinking of God in Kant's Opus postumum", in Tommasi, F.V. (ed.), *Der Zyklus in der Wissenschaft. Kant und die anthropologia transcendentalis*, Hamburg, Meiner, pp. 185-199.
- Karampatsou, M. (2023), *Der Streit um das Ding an sich: Systematische Analysen zur Rezeption des kantischen Idealismus 1781-1794*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston.
- Kemp Smith, N. (1923), *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, London, Macmillan.
- Kleingeld, P. (1994), *Fortschritt und Vernunft. Zur Geschichtsphilosophie Kants*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann.
- Krämer, F. (1997), "Parallelen zwischen Maimon und dem frühen Fichte", in *Fichte-Studien*, 9, pp. 275-90.
- Kroner, R. (1921), *Von Kant bis Hegel*, Mohr Verlag, Tübingen.
- La Rocca, C. (2001), "Chi è lo Zarathustra di Kant? Filosofia trascendentale e saggezza tra la Critica della ragion pura e l'Opus postumum", in Kant e l'Opus postumum", in *Convegno della società italiana di studi kantiani*, Pisa-Roma, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, pp. 35-62.
- Lachière-Rey, P. (1931), *L'idéalisme kantien*, Félix Alcan, Paris.
- Landucci, S. (2017), "L'ultimo Kant: la svolta del 1791", in *Rivista di filosofia*, 3, pp. 281-308.
- Lask, E. (1902), *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte*, Mohr, Tübingen und Leipzig.
- Lauth, R. (1971), "Genese du Fondement de toute la Doctrine de la science a partir de ses Meditations personnelles sur l'Elementarphilosophie", in *Archives de philosophie*, 54, pp. 51-79.
- Lauth, R. (1989), *Transzendente Entwicklungslinien. Von Descartes bis zu Marx und Dostojewski*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Lehmann, G. (1969), *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Interpretation der Philosophie Kants*, Berlin, de Gruyter.
- Léon, X. (1922), *Fichte et son temps. Avec de nombreux Documents inédits*, Paris, Librairie Armand Colin.

- Lichtenberg, G.C. (1801), *Vermischte Schriften*, Bd. 2, Göttingen, Dieterischen Abhandlungen.
- Lichtenberg, G.C. (1992), *Schriften und Briefe in vier Bänden*, Bd. 4, hrsg. von Mautner F.H., Leipzig, Insel Verlag.
- Lord, B. (2008), "The Virtual and the Ether: Transcendental Empiricism in Kant's Opus Postumum", in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 39-2, pp. 147-166.
- Lord, B. (2011), *Kant and Spinozism. Transcendental idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Lorini, G. (2023), "The forms of 'composition' and the role of mediating concepts in Kant's Opus postumum", in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant's Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York, pp. 91-107.
- Mandt, A.J. (1984), "Fichte's Idealism in Theory and Practice", in *Idealistic Studies*, 14-2, pp. 127-147.
- Marinelli, M.C. (2019), "Maimon's Implicit Influence in the Eigne Meditationen über Elementar-Philosophie of Fichte", in Azzariti-Fumaroli, L.; Gasperoni, L., (ed.) *Salomon Maimon: alle origini dell'idealismo tedesco*, in *Discipline Filosofiche*, XXIX-1, pp. 223-230.
- Marinelli, M.C. (2021), "Filosofia e vita nello scetticismo di Maimon", in *Fogli di Filosofia*, XIV, pp. 55-72.
- Marinelli, M.C. (2024), *Alle origini della Dottrina della scienza. Maimon, Reinhold e Schulze*, ETS, Pisa.
- Marwede, F. (2018), *Das Höchste Gut in Kants deontologischer Ethik*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter.
- Mathieu, V. (1958), *La filosofia trascendentale e l'Opus postumum di Kant*, Edizioni di Filosofia, Torino.
- Mathieu, V. (1991), *L'Opus postumum di Kant*, Bibliopolis, Napoli.
- McNulty, M. B. (2014), "Kant on chemistry and the application of mathematics in natural science", in *Kantian Review*, 19-3, pp. 393-418.
- McNulty, M.B. (2015), "Rehabilitating the regulative use of reason: Kant on empirical and chemical laws" in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 54, pp. 1-10.
- McNulty, M.B. (2016), "Chemistry in Kant's Opus postumum", in *HOPOS: The Journal of the International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science*, 6-1, pp. 64-95.
- Michalson, G.E. (1999), *Kant and the Problem of God*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Moiso, F. (1972), *La filosofia di Salomone Maimon*, Mursia, Milano.
- Nenon, T. (1986), *Objektivität und endliche Erkenntnis. Kants transzendentalphilosophische Korrespondenztheorie der Wahrheit*, München, Alber.
- Nisenbaum, K.A. (2016), "The Legacy of Salomon Maimon: Philosophy as a System Actualized in Freedom", in *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 41, pp. 453-498.

- Noack, L. (1862), *Johann Gottlieb Fichte, nach seinem Leben, Lehren und Wirken*, Leipzig, O. Wigand.
- Okruhlik, K. (1983), “Kant on the Foundations of Science”, in Shea, W.R. (ed.) *Nature Mathematized, The University of Western Ontario Series in Philosophy of Science*, 20, Dordrecht, Springer, pp. 251-268.
- Olk, C. (2020), “Fichtes Intellektualisierung der Anschauung: Die Rolle der anschauungskonstituierenden Einbildungskraft mit einem Blick auf Kants Spätwerk”, in *Fichtes Bildtheorie im Kontext*. Leiden, Brill, pp. 45-66.
- Onnasch, E.O. (2009), “Kants Transzendentalphilosophie des Opus postumum gegen den transzendentalen Idealismus Schelling und Spinozas”, in Onnasch, E.O. (ed.), *Kants Philosophie der Natur. Ihre Entwicklung im Opus postumum und ihre Wirkung*, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York, pp. 307-355.
- Onof, C. (2019), “Reality in-itself and the Ground of Causality”, in *Kantian Review*, 24-2, pp. 197-222.
- Pareyson, L. (1976), *Fichte e il sistema della libertà*, Milano, Mursia.
- Pecere, P. (2009), *La filosofia della natura in Kant*, Pagina, Bari.
- Pecere, P. (2015), “The Systematical Role of Kant’s Opus postumum ‘Exhibition’ of Concepts and the Defense of Transcendental Philosophy”, in *Con-Textos Kantianos. International Journal of Philosophy*, pp. 156-177.
- Petrini, G. (2015), *Teoria della coscienza e fondazione del sapere. Un confronto fra la Wissenschaftslehre di J.G. Fichte e la Science de l’Homme di P. Maine de Biran*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Padua.
- Petrini, G. (2018), “Il dibattito sulla cosa in sé nell’Aetas Kantiana e la sua rilevanza per la genesi della Dottrina della Scienza di Johann Gottlieb Fichte”, in *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 73-1, pp. 119-144.
- Philonenko, A. (1981), “Die intellektuelle Anschauung bei Fichte”, in Hammacher, K. (ed.), *Der transzendente Gedanke. Die gegenwärtige Darstellung der Philosophie Fichtes*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, pp. 91-106.
- Piché, C. (1998), “The Role of Feeling in Fichte’s Rejection of the Thing in Itself”, in *Idealistic studies*, 28-1, pp. 71-82.
- Prauss, G. (1974), *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich*, Bonn, Bouvier.
- Prauss, G. (1980), *Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Pringe, H. (2024), “Maimon and Cohen on the Differential Calculus. Transcendental Philosophy and Metaphysics”, in *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, 68-2, pp. 229-249.
- Putnam, H. (1981), *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- Puzzolo, D. (2024a), *L'Opus postumum di Kant. Verso una nuova concezione del trascendentale*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis.
- Puzzolo, D. (2024b), "The Ens Rationis and the Transcendental Problem in Kant's Opus Postumum", in *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, 68-2, pp. 403-431.
- Rametta, G. (1995), *Le strutture speculative della Dottrina della scienza. Il pensiero di J.G. Fichte negli anni 1801-1807*, Genova, Pantograf.
- Rametta, G. (2002), "Estraneità e verità in Emil Lask", in Curti, U., Giacomini, B. (ed.), *Xenos. Filosofia dello straniero*, Padova, Il Poligrafo, pp. 77-102.
- Rametta, G. (2012), *Fichte*, Roma, Carocci.
- Rametta, G. (2013), "Fichte e l'idea della filosofia trascendentale come dottrina della scienza", in *Trópos*, 6-2, pp. 45-65.
- Rametta, G. (2018), *Fichte, o il trascendentale come saggezza*, in Fichte, J.G., *Dottrina della scienza del 1813*, italian tr. by Gambaro, G., Roma TrE-Press, Roma.
- Rametta, G. (2019a), Donà, M., *Essere e divenire. Riflessioni sull'incontraddittorietà a partire da Fichte*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis.
- Rametta, G. (2019b), "Filosofia trascendentale e ontologia della differenza in Salomon Maimon", in Azzariti-Fumaroli, L.; Gasperoni, L. (ed.), *Salomon Maimon: alle origini dell'idealismo tedesco*, in *Discipline Filosofiche*, XXIX-1, pp. 177-200.
- Rametta, G. (2021a), "Trascendentale", in *Nova Theoretica. Manifesto per una nuova filosofia*, Roma, Castelveccchi, pp. 213-220.
- Rametta, G. (2021b), *Take Five. Cinque contributi su Fichte e la filosofia trascendentale*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis.
- Rauscher, F. (2010), "The Appendix to the Dialectic and the Canon of Pure Reason: The Positive Role of Reason", in Guyer, P., (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 290-309.
- Rawls, J. (2000), *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge-London, Harvard University Press.
- Reid, J.D. (2023), "On the Unity of Theoretical Subjectivity in Kant and Fichte", in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 57-2, pp. 243-277
- Reinhold, K.L. (1789), *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, Prag u. Jena, Widtmann u. Mauke.
- Reinhold, K.L. (1791), *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens. Nebst einigen Erläuterungen über die Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögens*, Jena, J.M. Mauke.
- Rockmore, T. (2010), "Fichte, German Idealism and the Thing in Itself", in Breazeale, D., Rockmore, T., (ed.) *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, Leiden, Brill, pp. 9-20.

- Rollmann, W.J. (2015), *Apperzeption und dynamisches Naturgesetz in Kants Opus postumum. Ein Kommentar zu 'Übergang 1-14'*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston.
- Römer, I. (2024), *Kant et la métaphysique pour l'homme*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Rotta, G. (1995), *La "Idea Dio". Il pensiero religioso di Fichte fino all'Atheismusstreit*, Genova, Pantograf.
- Rousset, B. (1967), *La doctrine kantienne de l'objectivité. L'autonomie comme devoir et devenir*, Paris, Librairie Philosophique Vrin.
- Rumore, P. (2002), "Una via all'idealismo: la concezione reinholdiana dell'oggetto trascendentale", in *Studi kantiani*, 15, pp. 199-210.
- Sala, L. (2023), "Fichte or Baumgarten? On Kant's use of 'positing' in the Selbstsetzungslehre", in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant's Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York, pp. 131-178.
- Scaglia, L. (2023), "The analogical use of schematism from the Critique of Pure Reason to the Opus postumum", in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant's Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York, pp. 71-90.
- Schechter, O. (2003), "The Logic of Speculative Philosophy and Skepticism in Maimon's Philosophy: Satz der Bestimmbarkeit and the Role of Synthesis", in Freudenthal, G., (ed.), *Salomon Maimon. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 18-53.
- Schmid, J. (2021), "Philosophical Fictions: Maimon's methodological criticism of Kant", In Serck-Hanssen, C.; Himmelmann B. (ed.), *The Court of Reason: Proceedings of the 13th International Kant Congress*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, pp. 389-400.
- Schulz, G. (1993), *Veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei. Untersuchungen zur Wahrheitslehre des Thomas von Aquin und zur Kritik Kants an einem überlieferten Wahrheitsbegriff*, Leiden, Brill.
- Schulze, S. (1994), *Kants Verteidigung der Metaphysik: eine Untersuchung zur Problemgeschichte des Opus Postumum*, Marburg, Tectum Verlag.
- Senderowicz, Y. (2003), "Maimon's 'Quid Facti' Argument", in Freudenthal, G., (ed.), *Salomon Maimon. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 176-199.
- Stevenson, K. (2014), "Kant on Grace", in Michalson, G.E. (ed.) *Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 118-136.
- Tafari, D. (2006), *Virtù e felicità in Kant*, Firenze, Olschki.
- Thielke, P. (2001a), "Discursivity and Causality: Maimon's Challenge to the Second Analogy", in *Kant-Studien*, 92-4, pp. 440-463.
- Thielke, P. (2001b), "Getting Maimon's Goad: Discursivity, Skepticism, and Fichte's Idealism", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 39-1, pp. 101-134.
- Thielke, P. (2003), "Intuition and Diversity: Kant and Maimon on Space and Time", in Freudenthal, G., (ed.), *Salomon Maimon. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 89-124.

- Thomson, T. (2019), "The Understanding in Transition: Fascicles X, XI and VII of Opus Postumum", in *Con-Textos Kantianos. International Journal of Philosophy*, 9, pp. 23-48.
- Thomson, T. (2022), "Kant's Opus postumum and Schelling's Naturphilosophie: The Very Idea", in *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 27-1, pp. 97-117.
- Thorndike, O. (2018), *Kant's Transition Project and Late Philosophy: Connecting the Opus postumum and Metaphysics of Moral*, London-Bloomsbury Academic.
- Tomaszewska, A. (2022), *Kant's Rational Religion and the Radical Enlightenment. From Spinoza to Contemporary Debates*, London, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Tomaszewska, A. (2023), "Kant's 'deification' of reason in the Opus postumum. An attempt at reconciling God and autonomy", in Basile, G.P., Lyssy, A. (ed.), *Perspectives on Kant's Opus postumum*, Routledge, New York, pp. 179-198.
- Tuschling, B. (1971), *Metaphysische und transzendente Dynamik in Kants Opus postumum*, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York.
- Tuschling (1991), "Die Idee des transzendentalen Idealismus im späten Opus postumum", in *Übergang. Untersuchungen zum Spätwerk Immanuel Kants*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, pp. 105-145.
- Tuschling, B. (1993), "The Concept of Transcendental Idealism in Kant's Opus Postumum", Dancy, R.M. (ed.), *Kant and Critique: New Essays in Honor of W.H. Werkmeister*, Dordrecht, Springer, pp. 151-167.
- Tuschling, B. (2002), "Transzendentaler Idealismus ist Spinozismus – Reflexionen von und über Kant und Spinoza", in Schürmann, E., Waszek, N., Weinreich, F., (ed.), *Spinoza im Deutschland des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, pp. 139-167.
- Vaihinger, H (1884), "Zu Kants Widerlegung des Idealismus", in *Strassburger Abhandlungen zur Philosophie*, Mohr, Freiburg-Tübingen.
- Valpione, G. (2012), "Il trascendentale nel Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie di Salomon Maimon", in Rametta, G. (ed.), *Metamorfosi del trascendentale*, II, Cleup, Padova, pp. 11-45.
- Van Cleve, J. (1973), "Four Recent Interpretations of Kant's Second Analogy", in *Kant-Studien*, 64, pp. 69-87.
- Van den Berg, H. (2014), *Kant on Proper Science. Biology in the Critical Philosophy and the Opus postumum*, Springer, Dordrecht.
- Vetö, M (2018), *Von Kant zu Schelling. Die beiden Wege des deutschen Idealismus*, Boston, de Gruyter.
- Visentin, M. (2020), "L'impegno per la verità. Argomentazione, dimostrazione, prova", in *La cultura*, I, Il Mulino, Bologna, pp. 85-113.
- Ward, K. (1972), *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Werkmeister, W.H. (1980), *Kant, the architectonic and development of his philosophy*, La Salle, Open Court Publishing Company.

Wood, A. (2012), "Fichte on freedom: The Spinozistic background", in Förster, E., Melamed, Y.Y., (ed.) *Spinoza and German Idealism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 121-135.

Zac, S. (1986), "Noumène et différentielle dans la philosophie de Salomon Maïmon", in *Revue d'histoire des sciences*, 39-3, pp. 255-272.

Zahn, M. (1967), "Identité et synthèse dans la dernière philosophie de Kant et la théorie de la science de Fichte", in *Archives de Philosophie*, 27-2, pp. 163-185.

Zöller, G. (1992), "Lichtenberg and Kant on the Subject of Thinking", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 30-3, pp. 417-441.

Zöller, G. (1998), *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, New York, Cambridge University Press.