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ARTICLE

REFLECTION, ENLIGHTENMENT, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPONTANEITY IN KANT

Melissa McBay Merritt

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*Spontaneity* is arguably the central concept of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant distinguishes a spontaneous capacity of the mind to ‘bring forth representations itself’ from a capacity of the mind to ‘receive representations, insofar as it is affected in some way’ (A51/B75).<sup>1</sup> While sensibility is receptive, the intellect – or higher cognitive faculty – is said to be *spontaneous*.<sup>2</sup> What is the meaning of Kant’s appeal to spontaneity? Its silhouette, at least, can be traced as follows. In so far as our cognitive capacity is receptive, it may be affected by the causal order of material nature; but in so far as it is spontaneous, it is free from determination by that causal order. However, this tells us relatively little, except perhaps that spontaneity is a certain self-determination of the mind.<sup>3</sup>

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Naturally, this silhouette is underdetermined. One way of filling it in stresses the mind’s freedom from being determined by the material causal order, yet this leads directly to a puzzle about what can legitimately be said regarding the spontaneity of the mind. After all, Kant holds that cognition is limited to objects of possible experience; and the appeal to spontaneity is

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<sup>1</sup>References to Kant’s works, with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, refer to the volume and page of the German Academy of Sciences edition (*Gesammelte Schriften*, Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften edition, later the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 29 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter [and predecessors], 1902–)). References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* follow the pagination of the first (A) and second (B) editions. Translations are my own (unless noted otherwise), but I have consulted the commonly used English translations.

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<sup>2</sup>Kant distinguishes three aspects of the higher cognitive faculty: understanding, judgement and reason (A130/B169). Since the higher cognitive faculty as such is said to be spontaneous, I will not be concerned with the details of its further tripartite division. However, for reasons that should become clear, my account will focus on the power of judgement.

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<sup>3</sup>A remark from Kant’s lectures on metaphysics makes this explicit: ‘The intellectual cognitive faculty rests on spontaneity, or the faculty of determining oneself, for it is independent of sensation’ (*Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29: 881).

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precisely what would render the mind – or, at least, the intellect – inaccessible to experience.

This sort of worry is skewed, because it takes an overly narrow view of Kant's epistemological framework, and fails to recognize that the *Critique* is a normative project. Claims about the spontaneity of the mind, I will argue, are properly understood in light of certain practical and normative considerations. Indeed, in the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant suggests that the most basic picture we can have of our cognitive capacity necessarily makes reference to its state of excellence – or, at least, its health: 'sound [*gesund*] understanding' is that which 'can be required' and 'demanded' of everyone (5: 265). Regarding judgement, Kant remarks that 'its correct employment is so necessary and generally required that nothing other than this very faculty is meant by the name "sound understanding"' (5: 169). As I will show, this normative view of our cognitive capacity goes hand in hand with Kant's celebration of the ideal of *enlightenment*. Close examination of Kant's conception of enlightenment will bring into view Kant's account of *reflection* as the fundamental condition of the possibility of 'sound understanding'. In contrast to some recent commentators, who tend to think of Kantian reflection as an achievement, I will argue that it must be conceived as a practical attitude. Reflection is an activity oriented toward a certain ideal of cognitive virtue. While the bulk of my account will be devoted to the connection between reflection and enlightenment for Kant, it should put us in a position to appreciate the practical import of Kant's appeal to spontaneity by the end.

The general approach that I am taking in this paper arguably has its roots in Wilfrid Sellars' imaginative (but awkwardly titled) paper, "... this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks..." Sellars explores the meaning of spontaneity by way of a central notion of the Transcendental Deduction: the fundamental self-consciousness of the mind that Kant calls 'pure apperception'. In doing so, Sellars arrives at an account of the mind as an '*automaton spirituale*, a mind which conceptualizes, but only in response to challenges from without, and in ways which, however varied, realize set dispositions' (65).<sup>4</sup> Reaching this result is coming to an impasse: the cognitive life of this *automaton spirituale* – a 'conceptualizing machine' (71) – is so dramatically impoverished that it is not recognizably ours. So, Sellars suggests, while the first *Critique* may be able to account for our capacity to 'constitute phenomenal objects' (57), it apparently lacks the resources to account for our 'philosophizing ... cooking up plots for novels, or reflecting on what to do' (52). Sellars suggests that we might repair the inadequacy by finding the 'purpose which is, so to speak, *intrinsic* to the machine' (71). Sellars then gestures beyond the first *Critique*, finding this purpose in the moral law (76). Thus, in some way that remains undetermined here by Sellars, the moral law is supposed to provide the lens through which we may properly appreciate

<sup>4</sup>References to Sellars' article refer to paragraph number rather than page number.

the spontaneity of our cognitive activity: having this ‘intrinsic’ purpose in view would enable us to appreciate the activity of this ‘conceptualizing machine’ as dealing in genuine concepts and yielding genuine cognition. In *Science and Metaphysics*, Sellars suggests how this picture might be filled out, by gesturing towards a certain ‘domain of practical reason, *qua* concerned with epistemic values’.<sup>5</sup>

From this root arose two divergent lines of interpretation. Some commentators drew from Sellars’ work the promise of a functionalist reading of Kant: indeed, the attraction of functionalism for these commentators seemed to be that it provided resources for working out a Kantian philosophy of mind *without* a robust notion of spontaneity.<sup>6</sup> Opposing the functionalist line, other commentators stressed the centrality of Kant’s appeal to spontaneity. With still a nod to Sellars,<sup>7</sup> these commentators suggested – with varying degrees of emphasis and detail – that Kant’s appeal to spontaneity must be understood in light of his practical philosophy. Thus, as Henry Allison points out, Kant’s appeal to spontaneity is not meant to register as a theoretical or ontological claim: that is, there is no claim that a mind *is* the sort of thing that is free from affective determination because it lies outside the material causal order. Spontaneity is merely ‘an idea in light of which the act of thinking must be conceived in order to retain its normative status’ (64).<sup>8</sup> Because existing work of this second line of

<sup>5</sup>*Science and Metaphysics*, Chapter VII (175). Sellars opens the chapter with this remark about an employment of practical reason aimed at epistemic value. Straightaway, however, he notes that he shall not explore the content of the relevant norms (§3, 176). His aim is mostly to consider practical reason above the point of its divide into specifically epistemic ends, on the one hand, or specifically moral ends, on the other. Sellars does this by considering what he refers to as ‘categorically reasonable intentions’: i.e. intentions that are not relative to any other intention (e.g. in a means–end relationship) that a subject may already have. He considers the species of *derived* categorically reasonable intentions, before moving on to the crucial species of *intrinsic* categorically reasonable intentions. In the moral case, this refers to the categorical imperative. Sellars’ opening remarks suggest that there could be an intrinsically categorically reasonable intention of an *epistemic* sort, though again he does not specify what the content of that intention would be (perhaps: *I shall seek a system of knowledge*). At any rate, the concluding chapter of *Science and Metaphysics* suggests that the functionalist response to Sellars might miss the overall spirit of his endeavour, at least in so far as it overlooks Sellars’ preoccupation with these normative themes. My own work here takes up the issue of Kant’s interest in an exercise of practical reason aimed at epistemic value, to which Sellars here points; I am, however, more closely focused on exegesis than Sellars.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Patricia Kitcher (especially 266, n21). Kitcher maintains that the only conception of spontaneity that Kant can coherently invoke is the ‘relative spontaneity’ that Sellars attributes to the ‘*automaton spirituale*’ (253 n5; see also 122). Cf. Andrew Brook, a functionalist commentator who takes more notice of Sellars’ suggestions regarding the practical import of spontaneity (13, 288, and *passim*).

<sup>7</sup>Henry Allison notes that Sellars ‘take[s] the conception of spontaneity seriously’ (183 n.1), even as he sees Sellars as the natural father of subsequent functionalist interpretations of Kant (92). See also Pippin (especially 52).

<sup>8</sup>Or, as Allison says in another paper: ‘[J]ust as we can act only under the idea of freedom, so we can think only under the idea of spontaneity’ (103).

interpretation largely orients itself around refuting the functionalist commentators, its positive claims are left rather undeveloped. My aim here is to begin to fill in some of the crucial – and hitherto missing – details.<sup>9</sup>

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## 2. ORIGINALITY

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As I noted above, Kant suggests that the most basic picture we can have of our cognitive capacity necessarily makes reference to its state of *health* ('sound [*gesund*] understanding'). Prominently placed in the foreground of such a picture is *originality*. As we will see in the next section, the Kantian ideal of enlightenment is rooted in a conception of the originality of thought. Thus, as we will see, originality is in turn central to Kant's general conception of cognitive virtue. What, precisely, originality is in Kant's view, and why it is important, shall emerge as I compile Kant's picture of sound understanding. To render the picture more vivid, I begin with a contrast.

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In the *Critique's* Doctrine of Method, we find a vignette illustrating the dangers of imitative thinking. We are presented with a young Wolffian who has mastered the system of principles, definitions, and demonstrations, and yet he is thoroughly stumped by any challenge for which he has not been rehearsed.

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Dispute a definition with him, and he does not know where to get another one. He has formed himself according to an alien reason, yet the capacity to imitate is not the capacity to produce – that is, with him the knowledge did not arise *from* reason, and although, objectively considered, it was indeed rational cognition, subjectively considered it is nevertheless merely historical. He has grasped and preserved well – he has learned – and he is a plaster cast of a living human being.

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(A836/B864)

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<sup>9</sup>Pippin's *Idealism as Modernism* is anchored in his response to the functionalist interpretation of Kant's appeal to the spontaneity of the mind. For Pippin, 'the modern enterprise' is linked to 'an essentially practical goal' with robust political implications. Kant gestures towards such a goal in his essay on enlightenment; in Pippin's words, it is the cultivation of the 'free self-determination, agency, and spontaneity' of society at large – a goal developed further through the Hegelian idea of 'a necessarily collective agency' (8). The source of it all, Pippin recognizes, is Kant's account of the spontaneity of the mind – and most especially its normative significance. Hence Pippin begins with an attack on the functionalist interpretation of Patricia Kitcher, as it fails to give due acknowledgement of that normativity. Naturally, Pippin also underscores the Hegelian criticism regarding the ultimate incoherence of the Kantian *division* between the receptivity and the spontaneity of the mind. In Pippin's view, Kant's dualism compromises his capacity to appreciate fully the crucial normativity of spontaneity (11). It lies outside of the scope of this paper to adjudicate this classic Hegelian criticism, since it cannot even be brought into view without a close and sustained reading of the Transcendental Deduction also on the table – and that is not my project here.

The passage appears as a preamble to Kant's extensive taxonomy of the species of rational cognition. The express point of the vignette is to show that what counts as rational cognition 'objectively' may not be rational cognition 'subjectively'. Rational cognition in the objective sense is, for Kant, systematic knowledge drawn from a-priori principles.<sup>10</sup> Such knowledge is taught in schools and can be learned. The vignette illustrates the case in which putatively rational cognition is *merely* learned: the knowledge in question does not have its source in the rational capacity of the student who takes himself to possess it.

Kant suggests that the young Wolffian's knowledge, such as it is, rests on a 'capacity to imitate' and not a 'capacity to produce'. Yet, however imitative the young Wolffian may be, he cannot be merely parroting if he can be said to have mastered the Wolffian *system*: in order to have come so far, he must be sensitive to entailment and exclusion relations between claims of the relevant sort. We might compare his case with that of a certain young Euclidean, who has ready recall of the entire battery of definitions, axioms, postulates, theorems and propositions laid out in the *Elements*, and yet cannot solve a single problem according to its principles that is not already carried out in those pages. Here, too, we would seem to find a 'capacity to imitate' and not at all a 'capacity to produce'. This case is altogether too weird: we may doubt whether this Euclidean could be said to be thinking at all. If we are to learn anything from the vignette, then, we need to consider what sort of failure to think for oneself would nevertheless still be recognizable as thinking.

The young Wolffian, Kant complains, 'knows and judges only so much as was given to him' (A836/B864): nevertheless, he *is* knowing and judging after a fashion, albeit within fixed parameters. We might then suppose that he is able to clarify entailment relations within those parameters, and he can respond to a question – perhaps on the immateriality of the soul – in accordance with the principles of the system he has been taught. By contrast, it does not seem that the Euclidean we introduced can make such rational transitions within the Euclidean system; this incapacity is borne out by her evident lack of sensitivity to which principles would be relevant to the solution of any particular problem.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>See *Jäsche Logic* §95 (9: 139) and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, Preface (4: 467–8).

<sup>11</sup>In fact, Kant singles out mathematical cognition as the one sort of rational cognition that does not run the risk of dogmatism. This is because mathematics is cognition from the *construction* of concepts, whereas other modes of rational cognition are merely knowledge from concepts (*aus Begriffen*, A837/B865). This means that, in the case of mathematics, there is no real distinction to be drawn between mathematics as 'rational cognition' and mathematics as 'historical cognition' (A837/B865). Therefore, mathematics does not tend to produce slavish novices. The Euclidean being considered here is truly beyond the pale – a scarcely intelligible figure.

The detour we just took with the example of the Euclidean was meant to block a possible misunderstanding of the vignette. At the end of the passage, Kant points to something other than the distinction between a ‘capacity to imitate’ and a ‘capacity to produce’ to illuminate the difference between the young Wolffian and someone with more sound capacities.

Rational cognitions that are this in the objective sense (i.e., could have originated only from human reason proper) may take this name also in the subjective sense only if they have been drawn out of universal sources, or principles, of reason, from which also arises the criticism, indeed even the rejection, of what has been learned.

(A836-7/B864-5)

I wish to draw particular attention to the closing remark. Here, originality is bound up with the possibility of criticizing and even rejecting what one has learned.

From a commonsensical perspective, this is hardly a surprising connection to draw. How does Kant account for it? Our answer will need to accommodate Kant’s striking view that ‘learning is nothing but imitation’ (5: 308). In the passage under consideration, Kant remarks that learning is *cognitio ex datis*: what is ‘given’ to us through instruction are ‘universal cognitions’ (A836/B864). In simply learning them, we take them to be principles. A principle, in the most general sense that Kant recognizes, is simply a universal proposition from which further claims can be established; an inductive generalization can function as a principle in this loose sense (A300/B356). Any universal proposition counts as a principle in this general sense, as long as it may conceivably govern some other proposition (for example, as the major premise of a syllogism). Therefore, to take something to be a principle is to suppose that it has some cognitively significant application: it may govern our understanding of some particular; so what exactly are we imitating when we learn? It must be another person’s attitude toward the putative principles: we take them to be principles because they do, and *as* they do. We imitate, in short, their adoption and application of the putative principles.

This means that non-arbitrary *rejection* of what one has learned might be understood in the following way: I *try* to think for myself about what I have learned – that is, I try to grasp the applicability of the principles in question without taking cues from others – and I find that this remains elusive. Of course, the fault could lie in my own cognitive blindness. But I could claim to have been fed spurious principles: the failure of my sincere attempt to think for myself about what I have been taught leads me to wonder whether a certain independence of one’s thinking about the matter in question is indeed possible. It seems that all I can do is merely pretend to employ the rule, by imitating those who take themselves to be masters of it. If this is right, then the lesson of the vignette is that originality is a certain independence of one’s capacity to appreciate the relevance of what one has

been taught – the ‘universal cognitions’ – as rules governing particular cases. The more original one’s thought is, the more free this capacity, in the sense that it does not wait upon examples of others’ judgements.

If there is a line to be drawn between originality and imitation, it remains a fuzzy one. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant remarks that there is only a difference in degree, and not in kind, between the ‘greatest discoverer’ in the sciences ‘the most laborious imitator and apprentice’ (5: 309).<sup>12</sup> What does mark the distinction is a certain independence, which surely admits of degree, of one’s capacity to recognize the relevance of a rule to some particular context. How such independence takes hold, given that we learn first through imitation, Kant does not quite say. I think Kant would recognize, *should* recognize, that we cannot really be said to *possess* the ‘universal cognitions’ that have been imparted to us through instruction as long as we remain insensitive to the conditions and import of their applicability.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, the first Euclidean we entertained would not find a place on this continuum at all. We might find another Euclidean, call him the second Euclidean, somewhere on the imitative end of the continuum: he is able to carry out a demonstration that has not already been shown to him – but he generally does so only when given a particular problem to solve (he cannot, that is, identify the problems himself). A third Euclidean might be able to discover a non-trivial problem and provide its solution. There may even be a fourth, for whom the principled rejection of Euclid lies not beyond her ken.

The Euclidean example is atypical, because the standard of originality runs quite high – and it is not my intention to suggest that, for Kant, originality is especially extraordinary. Originality is simply thinking for oneself, whether or not the content of one’s thought happens to be novel, or promises to alter profoundly the cognitive landscape for everyone. If this is right, we might wonder whether Kant’s decree that learning is *nothing but* imitation may be somewhat overstated. Originality manifests itself as a certain independence in one’s capacity to recognize the relevance of a rule.

<sup>12</sup>In science, there is a continuum from the most slavish imitator to the most original and creative minds; but ‘genius’ (and by this Kant means exclusively *artistic* genius) is something altogether different, and this has to do with the fact that the insight of the greatest artists is something that cannot be taught. The work of a Newton can be taught – i.e. it can be made clear how one proceeds from ‘the first elements of geometry up to his great and profound discoveries’ (5: 309). The work of a Homer cannot – at least in the sense that it cannot be explained ‘how his ideas, rich in fantasy and yet also in thought arise and come together in his head, since he himself does not know and thus also cannot teach it to anyone else’ (5: 309). Kant’s way of putting genius beyond the pale in this way may leave him with rather little to say, really, about originality in the arts – but that is another matter that cannot be entered into here.

<sup>13</sup>Locke is vivid on this point: ‘In the Sciences, every one has so much, as he really knows and comprehends: What he believes only, and takes upon trust, are but shreds; which however well in the whole piece, make no considerable addition to his stock, who gathers them. Such borrowed Wealth, like Fairy-money, though it were Gold in the hand from which he received it, will be but Leaves and Dust when it comes to use’ (Liv.23, 101).



If Kant's envisaged *continuum* obtains, then even extremely imitative thinking must always already contain the possibility of this independence's taking hold. Imitative thinking is intelligible *as* thinking only with reference to original thinking, as a state of excellence. Originality itself admits of degree.

### 3. ENLIGHTENMENT AND ORIGINALITY

Kant's postulation of this continuum implies a connection between originality and the development of one's cognitive capacities. As one moves along the continuum, away from the laborious imitators, one's propensity to think for oneself strengthens, and this apparently correlates with increased significance of one's cognitive insights. In Kant's moral philosophy, the development of one's cognitive capacities is taken to be a duty of virtue.<sup>14</sup> If the foregoing is correct, then the cultivation of a propensity toward originality would be included among the duties of virtue.

Enlightenment, Kant argues, should be understood to be just this: a cultivated disposition to think for oneself, or 'freely'. In his essay on enlightenment, Kant declares the 'motto' of enlightenment to be: 'Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding!' (8: 35). The language of the essay is juridical – enlightenment is contrasted to 'minority' (*Unmündigkeit*) – and the theme is one of development or maturity, through which one comes to accept the right and responsibility of making 'use of one's own understanding without direction from another' (8: 35). Thus, enlightenment is conceived as an end that one is obligated to adopt as part of what it is to respect one's own humanity. Cognitive passivity leaves us, Kant says, like 'dumb' and 'placid' 'domesticated animals' (8: 35). With arguably greater rhetorical emphasis, Kant contrasts the disposition to think for oneself with a disposition to think in a way that would seem to express only the passive and fixed dispositions of a machine: enlightenment, Kant concludes, makes one '*now more than a machine*' (8: 42).

The foregoing points to the idea that enlightenment is virtue – excellence of understanding. Virtue, as Kant remarks in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, is a 'strength' that, as such, 'is recognized only through the obstacles it can overcome' (6: 394). Virtue thus manifests itself as a capacity to overcome an opposing inclination. The inclinations to be overcome belong to our sensuous nature or animality, while the cultivated dispositions of virtue belong to our rational nature or humanity (6: 392).<sup>15</sup> Kant complains that

<sup>14</sup>*Metaphysics of Morals* (6: 385–7, 391–2, and 444–6) and *Groundwork* (4: 422–3).

<sup>15</sup>Duties of virtue are conceived under the general rubric of the duty to make oneself 'worthy of the humanity' that dwells in one (*Metaphysics of Morals*, 6: 387 and 392). Moral virtue overcomes 'natural inclinations [*Naturneigungen*]' (6: 394). *Neigung*, in Kant's usage, consistently refers to sensuous inclinations; this contrasts his use of *Hang*, which refers more

‘so great a part of humankind’ accepts minority ‘for life’: we are inclined to be passive in the employment of our cognitive capacities, unless the opposing disposition of enlightenment is cultivated.<sup>16</sup>

For Kant, the cultivation of virtue requires the conscious adoption of a maxim, or rule of conduct. It is with this in mind that Kant points out the special way in which virtue is habitual, taking care to distinguish it from blind, unreflective custom.<sup>17</sup> Virtue, Kant implies, is a ‘readiness [Fertigkeit]’ that is ‘the effect of considered [*überlegter*], firm, and ever more purified principles’ (6: 383). The cultivation of virtue is distinguished from the way in which certain hankerings, or ‘lasting inclinations’, may become embedded in us ‘without any maxim, through repeated gratifications’ of the inclination in question (6: 479).

The rallying cry of the essay on enlightenment – to think for oneself – is a maxim. It is called, variously, the ‘maxim of the enlightened mode of thought’ in the *Logic* (9: 57; see also 8: 146n.), the ‘maxim of the *prejudice-free* mode of thought’ in the *Critique of Judgment* (5: 294), and the ‘maxim’ of ‘the compulsion-free mode of thought’ in the *Anthropology* (7: 228). It is joined by two other maxims, which together constitute what Kant calls the ‘maxims of common human understanding’ (5: 294). The second maxim is ‘to think in the position of everyone else’ (5: 294; 7: 228; but *cf.* 9: 57); and the third is ‘to think always in agreement with oneself’.

Much could be said about the relation of these three maxims to one another. Readers of Kant are familiar with a certain pattern in his ‘three-fold divisions’ in which the first thing is the ‘condition’, the second the ‘conditioned’, and the third something that arises from the ‘unification of the conditioned with its condition’.<sup>18</sup> Kant says that the third maxim is achieved ‘only through the combination of the first two, after they have come to a certain readiness [Fertigkeit] through frequent observance of them’ (5: 295). Together, this suggests that the first maxim – which Kant calls the maxim of enlightenment – may have a certain priority in the group, since it would *condition* our understanding of the second, and our appreciation of that relation would itself yield the third. If this is so, then all three maxims together are effectively maxims of enlightenment.<sup>19</sup>

broadly, and neutrally, to dispositions. Enlightenment, for instance, is a *Hang* – toward the active, rather than passive, use of one’s reason – not a *Neigung* (8: 41).

<sup>16</sup> It is so comfortable to be a minor. If I have a book that has understanding for me, a spiritual adviser [Seelsorger] who has conscience for me, a doctor who decides upon a regiment for me, and so on, then I need not trouble myself at all. I need not think, if only I can pay; others will gladly undertake the irksome business for me.

(8: 35)

<sup>17</sup>On Kant’s conception of virtue, and especially concerning this point, I have been helped by Engstrom, ‘The Inner Freedom of Virtue’ (292–3).

<sup>18</sup>I point here to a remark from earlier in the *Critique of Judgment* (5: 197n.), and very similar remarks are made in the first *Critique* as well.

<sup>19</sup>In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant claims that the three maxims together characterize the thinking of ‘*broad minded*’ individual, who ‘can set himself apart from the subjective, private

Kant's essay on enlightenment begins with the first maxim (presented as the 'motto' of enlightenment), and takes up the second maxim through its account of the importance of communicating one's thoughts freely before a public. At the heart of Kant's account lies a conception of *the* 'public' – as opposed to a 'private' – use of reason. A 'private' use of reason, as Kant illustrates it, is what one engages in as a member of society who has accepted the duties of a certain office. The first maxim should not be operative in such cases: the clergyman, for example, should not think for himself when he lectures to his 'catechism class'. In so far as he accepts the duties of his office, he in turn concedes to be passive in the employment of his intellect (8: 38). He represents the church, and so he must convey church doctrine and present, if possible and whenever appropriate, its official arguments. He might explain to some budding theologians that it *follows from* the concept of the trinity that such-and-such is true about the holy ghost. Like the young Wolffian, the clergyman has mastery of the admissible inferential moves within a body of claims. The use of reason attaching to one's civic role is properly 'private':

Thus the use that an appointed teacher makes of his reason before his congregation [Gemeinde] is merely a *private use*; for a congregation, however large a gathering it may be, is still always a domestic gathering; and with respect to it he, as a priest, is not and may not be free, since he is carrying out another's commission.

(8: 38)

The gathering is *private* because it consists of individuals who make up a community in virtue of their accepting the truth of a certain body of claims, and their deference (coerced or not) to the appointed masters of those claims. The curtains are drawn, the privacy created, through the shared and unquestioning acceptance of some body of fundamental claims. Presumably, such privacy may admit of degree: the greater the number of fundamental claims involved, and the more emphatically one's unquestioning acceptance of them is demanded, the darker and more withdrawn the chamber.<sup>20</sup> Enlightenment requires the 'freedom', Kant says, 'to make *public* use of one's reason in all matters' (8: 36). The enlightened clergyman differs from the young Wolffian because he recognizes that, in fulfilling the duties of his office, his claims rest on what are essentially 'private' considerations. Kant has the clergyman go on to engage in a 'public' use of his reason, in which he

conditions of judgment, between which so many others are as if bracketed, and reflects upon his own judgment from a *universal standpoint* (which he can only determine by putting himself into the standpoint of another)' (5: 295).

<sup>20</sup>Likewise, enlightenment admits of degree. This, at any rate, would follow from the point that I have argued here: namely that enlightenment is a virtue. Virtue is an ideal that finds no perfect realization (see, for example, 6: 409); it follows, for Kant, that virtue admits of degree. In a similar vein, O'Neill stresses that enlightenment 'is a *process*', not an all-or-nothing affair (37).

speaks ‘in his own person’ through his writings to ‘a public in the proper sense of the word’ (8: 37, 38).

The essay on enlightenment does not explicitly take up the third maxim, ‘to think always in agreement with oneself’. This maxim sets the internal coherence of thought as an end. To think in a manner that is *inconsistent* with oneself would entail, I take it, one’s lacking a fully unified appreciation of oneself as the *source* of thought. In this sense, the third maxim returns to the requirement of originality, but it does so by way of the second maxim. The second maxim’s criterion of publicity is crucial: on it depends a practice of judgement that maintains the intersubjective accessibility of claims as its end – and with that, the possibility of genuine cognition. Cognition, for Kant, is an objectively valid representation that purports to determine an object; and an object is an entity that is in principle accessible to any judging subject. The potential cognitive status of one’s claims depends upon their communicability.<sup>21</sup> If the third maxim returns to the theme of originality – the end of coherent thought marking one’s appreciation of oneself as the *source* of thought – it thereby clarifies the relevant conception of originality. Originality must be oriented toward the end of cognition, which is to say that it must be non-arbitrary.

We have gained some insight into how, on Kant’s view, enlightenment is possible – namely, through the resolved adoption of the three maxims of common human understanding. It is time now to turn to the other component of my account, which is Kant’s conception of reflection. That this is no change in topic should soon become clear. After exploring Kant’s conception of reflection in the next few sections, I will draw out its implications for the meaning of *spontaneity* in the end.

#### 4. REFLECTION

I would like to begin by considering one sense of the term ‘reflection’ in ordinary usage. To pursue this, let us return to the notion of prejudice, which surfaced earlier in Kant’s gloss of the first of the three maxims: the maxim of enlightened thinking was dubbed the maxim of ‘prejudice-free’ thinking. With this in mind, let us consider why prejudice is something from which we ought to free ourselves. One reason, surely is the *blindness* of prejudice: to take things to be a certain way on the basis of prejudice requires that one is indifferent to determining, at least adequately and with the correct spirit, the conditions of application of some putative principle of

<sup>21</sup>For a more detailed account of the public use of reason, see O’Neill, who stresses that the three maxims of common human understanding are maxims of *communication*, and sees the categorical imperative as something that ‘both emerges from and disciplines human communication’ (47); see also Deligiorgi (§II, 148–55).

500 knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Surely this is, in turn, related to the automatic or compulsive way in which prejudice operates. Hence, it is sometimes thought that a cure for prejudice, or at least an important step toward one, is for one simply to be made aware of one's prejudices and their automatic way of functioning. Therefore, there is a perfectly ordinary sense in which we suppose that an individual who has not been entirely hardened by prejudice may *reflect* and, upon recognizing how her thinking was overtaken, be resolved to uproot the prejudice and reassert herself as the master of her own thought. Kant takes up such commonsensical ideas about prejudice, and articulates in turn a conception of reflection as the self-awareness that promises to uproot or at least undermine prejudice.

505 Prejudices, we are told in the *Jäsche Logic*, are 'principles for judging based on subjective causes that are falsely held to be objective grounds' (9: 76). The 'subjective causes' are then specified by pointing to three principal sources of prejudice: '*imitation, custom, and inclination* [Neigung]' (9: 76). The distinction between 'causes' and 'grounds' here suggests that the former refers to a judging subject's place in the material causal order, while the latter refers to a judging subject's belonging to a domain in which membership consists of being subject to demands of justification. An 'objective ground' must be *in principle* accessible to any judging subject; which is to say, in the parlance of Kant's theory of enlightenment, that a judgement determined on such grounds should be 'communicable'.<sup>23</sup>

510 Prejudices, as based on 'subjective causes', would then be dispositions to take things to be a certain way accruing to one in virtue of one's particular place, and the particular history of one's trajectory, in that material causal order. If this is right, it is easy to see why *custom* would be a 'subjective cause' of dispositions to take things to be a certain way: either the regularities of nature, or the regularities of one's culture and community, impress themselves upon one, and create anticipatory dispositions that in turn function in an automatic and stimulus-driven way. Likewise, *inclination* could be a 'subjective cause' of dispositions to take things to be a certain way, particularly if sensuous gratification is understood broadly to refer to any pleasurable feeling answering to one's getting along well in the world. The three sources of prejudice are clearly not mutually exclusive: inclination will often provide a motivation for imitation, as Kant suggests when he

535 <sup>22</sup>In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant remarks that superstition – prejudice '*in sensu eminenti*' – leads to 'blindness' and 'even demands it as an obligation [Obliegenheit]' (5: 294). In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant remarks of 'old and rooted prejudices' that they are 'difficult to battle, because they justify themselves and are at the same time their own judges' (9: 81).

540 <sup>23</sup>It is possible that a negative version of this claim would be sufficient: i.e. that objective grounds cannot be in principle incommunicable. At any rate, Kant's account of objective grounds of judging is based on his presentation of the 'principles of the pure understanding'. My concern in this paper is not aimed directly at that fundamental epistemology, but rather, at the practical framework of Kant's account of sound understanding, or judgement.

points to the ‘prejudices of prestige’, where imitation is reinforced by our ‘desire to imitate what is described to us as *great*’ (9: 78).<sup>24</sup>

My aim in the next few sections (§§5–9) is to explore Kant’s conception of reflection. In the *Critique*, reflection is explicitly discussed only in the appendix to the Transcendental Analytic, i.e. the Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection. Kant opens the Amphiboly with general remarks on reflection, which closely echo the passages on reflection in his logic lectures. Kant then moves on to a polemic against Leibniz, charging him with a failure to engage in ‘transcendental reflection’. I will begin with Kant’s opening remarks on reflection in the Amphiboly, taking them together with the related passages in the *Jäsche Logic*. After exploring these introductory remarks on reflection, I will briefly go into the polemic against Leibniz in order to account for the overall consistency of Kant’s conception of reflection. One of my central interpretive claims will be that Kant’s conception of reflection is intimately bound up with his celebration of the ideal of enlightenment. Along the way, I will distinguish my interpretation from that of other commentators.

## 5. REFLECTION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

If Kant’s conception of reflection is informed by the apparently non-technical sense of reflection that I considered above (§4), then Kant would invoke reflection to account for what it is for one’s thinking to be free of prejudice, or enlightened. As I will now show, these enlightenment themes consistently inform Kant’s general account of reflection in the Amphiboly and in the logic lectures.

Repeatedly, Kant points to reflection as a *requirement* of judging. In the Amphiboly, Kant maintains: ‘All judgments . . . require [bedürfen] *reflection* [*Überlegung*]’ (A261/B317). And in the *Logic*: ‘we cannot and may [dürfen] not judge about anything without *reflecting* [*überlegen*]’ (9: 76). Reflection is thus presented as a normative requirement, suggesting that legitimate judgements are somehow ‘reflective’. Yet as a brute matter of fact, it seems, many judgements are unreflective:

Many a judgment is accepted owing to custom [Gewohnheit], or connected by means of inclination [Neigung]; but since no reflection precedes it, or at least critically follows upon it, it is taken to be one that has its source in the

<sup>24</sup>In contrast to custom and inclination, imitation would seem to involve deliberate activity. This may explain why Kant holds that prejudices of imitation are especially hard to uproot: they do a better job of mimicking genuine thought. In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant suggests as much by remarking that prejudices of imitation are ‘*inclination toward passive use of reason, or toward the mechanism of reason rather than toward its spontaneity under laws*’ (9: 76). I thank Bridget Clarke for helping me to appreciate this point.

understanding [so gilt es für ein solches, das im Verstande seinen Ursprung erhalten hat].

(A260-1/B316)

590 Since we know that Kant takes custom and inclination to be two of the three principal sources of prejudice, we can reformulate Kant's remark: judgements are often founded on prejudice, and when they are, no reflection is involved. A judgement founded on prejudice is nevertheless *taken* to be one that has its source in the understanding.

595 There are two ways to read this. One would be to say that an unreflective judgement is only presumptively a judgement. Another reading would take Kant at his word when he refers to *judgments* that are accepted on the basis of prejudice: the problem is that these judgements are taken to have their source in the understanding, when in fact they have their source in prejudice – and while this only mimics genuine understanding, nevertheless judgements are genuinely in play according to this second reading. In §7, I will argue that reflection must be conceived as a practical attitude, rather than an achievement that accompanies judgement; once that account is in place, we will better understand Kant's view that judgement requires reflection. First, we can offer a preliminary clarification of the point.

600 In the passage from the Amphiboly, Kant refers to reflection as 'the consciousness of the relation of given representations to our various sources of cognition' (A260/B317). In the *Logic*, to reflect is 'to compare a cognition with the cognitive power from which it should arise (sensibility or understanding)' (9: 76). In these formulations, we find that reflection is assessing the source of some representation. By 'given' representation, however, Kant cannot mean what he often means: *intuition*, or the singular representation that is the expression of *sensibility*. If he did mean this, it would not then make sense to ask 'to which of our various sources of cognition' – for Kant, that means *sensibility* or *understanding* – this representation belongs. By 'given' representation, Kant must here be referring to one's finding oneself to be taking things to be a certain way. Evidence for this reading gathers with Kant's formulation of a couple of questions that are supposed to articulate what reflection is. '[I]n which cognitive faculty do they [sc. these representations] belong together? Is it the understanding, or is it the senses, before which they are connected or compared?' (A260/B316). We can pair this remark with one from the *Logic*: prejudice causes deception because 'subjective grounds are falsely held to be objective, *due to a lack of reflection*' (9: 76). This suggests the following interpretation of the Amphiboly passage: what is 'given' is a certain connection or comparison of representations. The 'given' character of this refers to the phenomenology of one's *finding oneself* to be taking things to be a certain way. Thus, when Kant refers to 'the senses' in the passage above, he must mean our openness to the causal order of material nature. Therefore, reflection is an assessment of the grounds of one's taking

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things to be a certain way – whether those grounds are affective dispositions rooted in custom, inclination, or imitation, or whether those grounds are ‘objective’ in the sense that they are binding on any judging subject.

Let me offer a simple example. A gustatory judgement of taste – some cake, say, is connected to a pleasurable feeling – is a judgement that should, of course, have its source in one’s affective dispositions and will not, therefore, be ‘universally communicable’. One cannot go wrong in finding some cake delightful; but one certainly would go wrong in taking *that* delight to be accessible in principle to any judging subject, or in taking that judgement to be binding on all judging subjects. Affective dispositions functioning as principles of cognition are prejudices. Without reflection, a determination resting on such a disposition is ‘taken’ to have its source in the understanding, making us apt to treat it as binding on all judging subjects even though there are no grounds to do so.<sup>25</sup>

## 6. TRANSCENDENTAL REFLECTION

Kant’s conception of reflection belongs, then, to his philosophy of enlightenment: reflection is how we acknowledge the enlightenment ideals of originality and broad-mindedness. This enlightenment context is emphasized in the *Jäsche Logic*’s Introduction, from which I have quoted above; the same themes are rehearsed at the outset of the *Amphiboly*, as I have just tried to show. Kant’s reminder of these enlightenment themes at the outset of the *Amphiboly* alludes, I think, to one aspect of the debate between Locke and Leibniz: namely, over whether empiricism or rationalism is the proper philosophy of enlightenment. Therefore, while Locke claimed the title for empiricism, Leibniz countered that Locke should not be so fast to grab the prize.<sup>26</sup> If we give due weight to the enlightenment themes of the *Amphiboly*, we might find its general upshot to be the Kantian claim that only a properly ‘critical’ philosophy can meet the demands of enlightenment.<sup>27</sup>

Kant’s charge against Leibniz in the *Amphiboly* is that he failed to engage in ‘transcendental reflection’. So far, we have been looking at passages that

<sup>25</sup>In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant notes that we are less prone to reflective failure in matters of gustatory taste: we almost never presume that our taking things to be a certain way is anything other than idiosyncratic, even though there may in fact be widespread agreement (5: 214).

<sup>26</sup>Locke, *Essay* I.iv.23–5 (and especially §25) (100–3). In reply to Locke, Leibniz grants that philosophers often ‘maintain their prejudices under the name of innate principles’, but suggests that Locke may be too quick to grab the mantle of enlightenment for empiricism (74–5).

<sup>27</sup>The fact that Kant complains about Locke and Leibniz in one breath (A271/B327) suggests, at least, that Kant is thinking of their debate as presented in the *New Essays*. Although my remark here about the general upshot of the *Amphiboly* is meant to be suggestive rather than conclusive, it should not be controversial to suggest that Kant *takes* critical philosophy to meet – or at least acknowledge – the demands of enlightenment in a way that no prior philosophical system managed to do.



merely concern ‘reflection’ (without modifier). If reflection is a certain attention to the basis of one’s taking things to be a certain way, what then is *transcendental* reflection? Let us look very briefly into Kant’s polemic against Leibniz, to see if this question can be addressed.<sup>28</sup>

After the opening remarks on reflection, Kant identifies four pairs of ‘concepts of reflection’ – identity and difference, agreement and opposition, the inner and the outer, and matter and form – which he presents as covering the distinguishing features of Leibnizian metaphysics (A270/B326). Kant argues that these concepts take on a radically different sense, depending on whether they are considered as bearing on objects of the senses (phenomena), or objects of pure understanding (noumena). Leibniz, Kant charges, errs in metaphysics because he fails to engage in ‘transcendental reflection’:

But if we could get to the objects with these concepts, then transcendental reflection is necessary ... regarding which cognitive power they should be objects for – whether for pure understanding, or sensibility. Without this reflection, I can make only a very uncertain employment of these concepts, and there arise allegedly synthetic principles which critical reason cannot recognize, and which are based on a transcendental amphiboly, i.e. confounding the pure object of the understanding with appearance.

(A269-70/B325-6)

The Amphiboly follows directly upon the Phenomena and Noumena chapter, in which Kant underscores what may be the most basic lesson of the *Analytic*: theoretical cognition is limited to objects of possible experience. Leibniz, in Kant’s view, never appreciated this; and Kant wants to attribute this oversight to Leibniz’s failure to reflect. I would like to show how we can better understand this charge by appreciating how it fits into Kant’s enlightenment project. In doing so, I aim to draw out a consistent theme in Kant’s conception of reflection (across its ‘transcendental’ and ‘non-transcendental’ species). Once that consistent theme is in view, I will account for the ‘transcendental’ species.

To begin to appreciate the consistency of Kant’s conception of reflection, it will help to recapitulate and pull together some threads of my account thus far. First, as I have argued above, Kant’s conception of enlightenment is that of a steady disposition towards originality (‘thinking for oneself’) in which one robustly acknowledges all three maxims of sound understanding; that is, the originality at issue aims at intersubjective accessibility and universal validity (second maxim), and then aims, from that ‘broad-minded’ perspective, at internal consistency (third maxim). Second, the opposition

<sup>28</sup>I shall not, by any means, be offering a full account of the polemic against Leibniz in the *Amphiboly*; my concern here is solely to clarify the terms ‘reflection’ and ‘transcendental reflection’.

that Kant sets up between reflection and prejudice suggests that enlightenment is a propensity toward reflection. In other words, originality and enlightenment require – in some way that remains to be fully clarified – *reflection*. Third, as we learned through the example of the young Wolffian, or one of the more imitative Euclideans, originality in thinking requires that one independently appreciate the *relevance* of principles in a certain cognitive context. In this respect, there may be some degree of originality in one's thinking even if the principles in question were simply given to one through instruction. The critical employment of the principles – which is the expression of an enlightened propensity to think for oneself – begins with one's independently appreciating the *appropriate applicability* of a given principle to a particular cognitive context. And this, if the foregoing is correct, requires reflection.

Thus we find a theme that is consistent with Kant's polemic against Leibniz in the Amphiboly, for there Kant tries to reconstruct how, for example, the concepts of identity and difference give rise to the Leibnizian principle of the identity of indiscernibles. Leibniz's failure to reflect is tantamount to his blindness, or insensitivity, to the conditions under which such a principle is appropriate or relevant: the principle would only be appropriate if the objects to which it were applied were noumena (A264/B320). Kant's Leibniz is blind to the question of context quite generally, taking it that things that are indiscernible as far as our conceptual resources can make out must indeed be identical – when in fact they could be distinct objects standing in different regions of space. The concepts of reflection lend themselves particularly well to being misused because they do not, of themselves, require one to specify the frame of reference within which 'things' are being compared and considered as being (e.g.) identical. Thus, these concepts, Kant maintains, give rise to a system of principles that encourages this blindness to the difference between appearances and things in themselves – and, in turn, discourages the cultivation of a general sensitivity to the appropriate applicability of such putative principles. Critical philosophy, by contrast, is supposed to prepare us to be properly 'reflective' in metaphysics.

Of course, Leibniz stands apart from the young Wolffian in that he is not blindly mimicking the thought of another – he is no 'plaster cast of a living human being'. Reflective failure perhaps typically exhibits itself in what Kant refers to as 'minority': a general prejudicial tendency of thought, which as we know includes the prejudices of imitation. But even if Kant's Leibniz should not be dubbed a 'minor' of this sort, he still shares with the more ordinary cases of reflective failure an inability to appreciate the *appropriate applicability* of a putative principle of cognition. The shared failure here is an insufficient appreciation of the end of cognition: one must be capable of more than simply making sanctioned transitions within a system of principles; one must, rather, put those principles to the test, which

entails recognizing their cognitive relevance to the objective determination of particulars.<sup>29</sup>

770 What about the species *transcendental* reflection? While Kant points to reflection (without modifier) as a requirement of judging generally, he points to *transcendental* reflection as a requirement of judging a priori. Transcendental reflection is distinguished by the fact that there is a different kind of cognitive claim at stake. The fundamental question is the same: on  
775 what basis does some connection or comparison of representations appropriately support a claim about objects? Hence the fundamental reflective attitude that is required of one is the same: *all* judgements, after all, ‘require reflection’ (A261/B317).

## 780 7. REFLECTION AS A PRACTICAL ATTITUDE

I have been suggesting that Kant generally conceives of reflection as an assessment of the grounds of one’s taking things to be a certain way. To reflect, it seems, is to consider whether this is the result of ‘prejudice’ (the affective actualization of a mechanical disposition), or whether it is instead  
785 the result of an ‘enlightened’ exercise of one’s cognitive capacities. However, there is a difficulty lurking here, which must be brought to attention and resolved in order for us to have an adequate account of Kant’s conception of reflection.

In order to bring the issue I have in mind into focus, consider again the guiding question of reflection: is my taking things to be a certain way determined by the mechanism of prejudice, or does it instead express a certain self-determination of the mind that Kant links with notions of freedom and spontaneity? The difficulty is precisely this: this question cannot be answered. To appreciate why this question should be unanswerable,  
790 we will need to look into a certain aspect of Kant’s moral philosophy,

795 <sup>29</sup>This is a point that Allison overlooks in his account of spontaneity. Allison correctly notes that cognition is not a matter of simply ‘being in the appropriate cognitive state’, but rather requires ‘conceptual recognition or taking reasons as reasons’ (64) – this he sees as ‘essentially connected with the spontaneity of the understanding’ (102). The problem comes in Allison’s account of the matter:

if the understanding is to take its reasons as reasons and, therefore, as justifying its beliefs, it must connect them with these beliefs in a unitary consciousness in a judgment in accordance with some rule or principle of synthesis, which functions as an ‘inference ticket’.

(102)

805 In this account, one would be grasping reasons as reasons in the darkest ‘private’ sphere as long as that sphere was marked out by a coherent inferential scheme: one can determine what may count as a reason for what without thinking for oneself in the way that Kant celebrates in his account of enlightenment. Even the young Wolffian, our stock character representing imitative thinking, still takes reasons as reasons – by Allison’s lights – when he engages in his Wolffian catechism.  
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and then return to consider its relevance to what has been said about reflection so far.

In his moral philosophy, Kant speaks of our *inability* to know our own minds, at least in one respect: we can never determine, of a particular action that is in accordance with duty, whether some hidden sensuous inclination of self-love drives us to perform it, or whether instead we are motivated only by respect for the moral law – and thus are acting ‘from duty’ rather than merely in accordance with it.<sup>30</sup> The basis for this claim is metaphysical: freedom is not an object of possible experience, which is to say that we cannot make *theoretical* determinations regarding it. Acting *from* duty means that pure practical reason alone determines the will – without any influence from sensuous inclination. To suppose that an action is performed from duty is to think of it as an episode in the causality of freedom: the will is not ‘pushed’, as it were, by the impulse of sensuous inclination, but rather acts autonomously – moving itself through the moral law. To presume to be able to determine that a given action is performed from duty is to presume to have insight into noumenal particulars – namely, that pure practical reason alone (freely) determines the will. To presume this is to commit an error of the ‘dogmatic’ sort; it is to make a theoretical cognitive claim about something that lies beyond the bounds of possible experience. We can never *know* – determine in theoretical cognition – whether any given action is the result of pure practical reason alone determining the will. Our true motives, in other words, remain inscrutable.

Since Kant also claims that only actions performed from duty have genuine moral worth,<sup>31</sup> it might seem that this metaphysically grounded point about the inscrutability of motives should render moral reflection – i.e. an agent’s consideration of her motives and character – impossible. This could in turn be seen as a boon to the moral sceptic: since we can never be certain about what our motives really are, virtue and good character might as well be a mirage, ‘a mere phantom of the brain’. However, Kant does not take this point about the inscrutability of motives to provide any special support for the sceptical position (4: 407). Instead, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant maintains that the ‘first command’ of all duties that one has to oneself is to know one’s own heart: ‘whether it is good or evil, whether the source of your actions is pure or impure’ (6: 441). If the point about inscrutability holds, then the command here – ‘know thyself’ – can never be *satisfied*.

However, Kant does not take that to be a problem. The relevant point is not about the satisfaction of the Delphic command, if that means acquiring

<sup>30</sup>This point is made clearly at the outset of the second section of the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (4: 407), and figures throughout the many works of Kant’s moral philosophy (see, e.g., *Critique of Practical Reason* 5: 28–30; *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* 6: 21–2, 31, 41).

<sup>31</sup>See, for example, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (4: 397ff.).

determinative knowledge of a certain sort. The point, rather, is about living one's life in a properly reflective way: our lives ought to manifest a sensitivity to, and concern regarding, what our motives really are. The metaphysically grounded point about the inscrutability of motives entails that this is always a live question. One can never silence the Delphic command by winning some kind of definitive account of how things are with one's heart – whether it is good or evil, whether the source of one's actions is pure practical reason alone or whether one's motives are rendered impure due to sensuous influences.<sup>32</sup> Reflection must be ongoing: we can never pat ourselves on the back. Thus, Kant instead embraces the point about the inscrutability of motives – seeing it as a boon to moral reflection, which is itself indispensable to the development of good character, or virtue.

The lesson that I wish to draw from this has to do with the distinction between reflection and judging. To judge is to make an objective determination, whereas to reflect is merely to consider whether one is entitled to take oneself to be making an objective determination. Kant makes this point in the opening remarks of the *Amphiboly*:

*Reflection* [*Überlegung*] (*reflexio*) does not have to do with the objects themselves, in order to acquire concepts directly from them, but rather it is the state of mind in which we first prepare ourselves to find out the subjective conditions under which we can arrive at concepts.

(A260/B316)

As an assessment of the 'subjective conditions' of a possible judgement, reflection concerns the judging subject, and is not to be confused with determining whether some connection of representations correctly represents some objective state of affairs. In reflection, we are not yet directing 'attention to the grounds of the truth of a judgment', Kant clarifies (A261/B317; see also 9: 76). Kant calls that 'investigation' (*Untersuchung*), which he pointedly distinguishes from reflection (*Überlegung*). Reflection is here distinguished from determinative cognitive activity. Instead, reflection is presented as a kind of consideration of whether one is rightfully in a position to be making cognitive determinations at all.

The crucial point is that reflection is not to be conceived as a determinative investigation into our own minds. If we were to conflate judging and reflection, then we would take reflection to be the objective determination of particulars. The relevant particulars would be episodes of taking things to be a certain way; the act of reflection would be recognizing them as belonging either to the class of things determined by 'spontaneity' or the class of things determined by 'mechanism'. However, our brief foray into Kant's moral philosophy should teach us how to avoid conflating

<sup>32</sup>This point about the impossibility of silencing the Delphic command can be appreciated also from another angle, through Kant's account of conscience in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6: 401, 430 and 437ff.).

reflection and judging. Presumably the following inference can now be drawn:

Just as one cannot say that the autonomy of pure practical reason is the source of one's determination to perform a certain action (one could, after all, have been 'pushed' by sensuous inclination), so, too, one cannot say that the spontaneity of the understanding is the source of one's taking things to be a certain way.

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Thus, it does not make sense to say that one *judges* in making the reflective assessment regarding the sources of one's taking things to be a certain way. Reflection is not an introspective determination of particulars. Rather, as I have been suggesting, reflection is understood as an acknowledgement of the demands of judgement, which Kant presents through the three maxims of common human understanding.

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Of course, there may well be a sense of the term 'reflection', as we use it, that is quite different from anything Kant is concerned with in the critical context: this is the sense of 'reflection' as empirical introspection.<sup>33</sup> This is simply discovering, or explicitly determining, the goings on of one's mind – as when one takes note of a certain reluctance to do something (e.g. work). This reflective acknowledgement of one's state of mind differs from *not* reflecting on it in the following way: when we fail to reflect, in this sense, we allow the reluctance to work to manifest itself in some other way – perhaps in a sudden and feverish preoccupation with the appalling dust under one's desk. This sort of reflection can be conceived as making a theoretical determination, since it involves identifying some particular (something in one's state of mind) and determining it as a particular belonging to a certain kind (a feeling of reluctance).

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By contrast, Kant's conception of reflection does not refer to our making any sort of theoretical determination: we simply cannot hope to determine (by some kind of 'natural light', perhaps) whether a particular episode of taking things to be a certain way is an expression of the spontaneity, or self-determination, of the intellect. Yet the fact that such determinations lie beyond our ken is not itself a problem: Kant's moral philosophy teaches us this. What matters, in the development of character, is that we develop the sensitivity to and concern for the always live question about what our motives really are: it matters that we *are reflective*, which is itself a state of character that can admit of degree. Likewise, in the practice of theoretical judgement we are called upon to be reflective: this is nothing more, and nothing less, than our acknowledging the demands of the practice of judgement. This acknowledgement is manifest as a state of character ('sound understanding') that can itself admit of degree.

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<sup>33</sup>For example, for Locke, and the empiricist tradition stemming from him, 'reflection' refers an *introspective* awareness of the mind's own 'Operations'; this self-awareness of the mind is modelled sense perception, and accordingly dubbed 'internal Sense' (*Essay* II.i.4; 105).

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## 8. RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF TRANSCENDENTAL REFLECTION

950 Having argued that Kantian reflection must be conceived as a practical  
 attitude, I can now distinguish my interpretive position from that of other  
 recent commentators. Commentators sometimes look to the Amphiboly for  
 clues about the method of the *Critique*, and suggest that the *Critique* itself  
 carries out ‘transcendental reflection’. Reflection is then viewed as a possible  
 955 *achievement*, rather than a practical attitude. If we take the polemic against  
 Leibniz in a certain spirit, so that we treat transcendental reflection as an  
 achievement that Leibniz failed to attain, we then wonder where we are  
 meant to look to find it attained. From the Amphiboly, the natural place to  
 look would be back to the Transcendental Analytic. We would then find  
 ourselves saying that the *Critique* carries out transcendental reflection.  
 960 Two recent commentators – Houston Smit and Kenneth Westphal – have  
 offered such a line of interpretation. Westphal explicitly identifies trans-  
 cendental reflection as the *method* of the *Critique*: ‘Kant developed a new  
 philosophical method for conducting his critique of pure reason, and for  
 devising and assessing his transcendental proofs and his defense of  
 965 transcendental idealism, called ‘transcendental reflection’ (2).<sup>34</sup>

For Westphal, transcendental reflection is, on the one hand, ‘appreciating  
 both the strengths and the limits of our cognitive situation as human beings’  
 (10). On the other hand, ‘transcendental reflection determines whether or  
 how . . . representations . . . related as they happen to occur in our thoughts,  
 970 *ought* to be related in our judgment’ (16). It is both a highly general  
 assessment of the very bounds of human cognition, and also the resource  
 that a particular judging subject would employ to determine whether the  
 accidental order of representations in a given thought accords with their  
 necessary relation in a judgement.<sup>35</sup> When Westphal points to transcenden-  
 975 tal reflection as the highly general, or abstract, assessment of the bounds of  
 human cognition, he paints it as an achievement – the sort of achievement  
 that we might charitably attribute to the Transcendental Analytic. When he

980 <sup>34</sup>Smit suggests that the *Critique* engages in transcendental reflection – although he does not go  
 so far as to claim that transcendental reflection is the *method*. Smit aims to set up a parallel  
 between *pure general logic* and *critical philosophy*: they are in the business of making explicit the  
 fundamental principles of thought and cognition, respectively. Each of these enterprises engages  
 in a different mode of reflection: the one in logical reflection, the other in transcendental  
 reflection (210, 216). The task of critical philosophy is to make explicit the ‘reflective  
 cognition’ – a certain self-understanding of the spontaneous mind – that makes cognition of  
 985 objects possible in the first place (208). While I do not take issue with this last point as an  
 overarching interpretation of the task of critical philosophy, more careful handling of the  
 notion of transcendental reflection is required.

990 <sup>35</sup>Westphal also distinguishes a further species of reflection (‘epistemic reflection’) in which we  
 draw upon counterfactual reasoning to determine ‘just what our most basic cognitive capacities  
 are’ (17). The principal difference between this and transcendental reflection, on Westphal’s  
 account, seems to be that it draws on counterfactual reasoning.

points to transcendental reflection as a ground-level assessment of the grounds of one's taking things to be a certain way – then he portrays it as something more like a practical attitude.

A serious problem lurks in the suggestion that reflection could be an achievement: it overlooks the enlightenment context in which Kant consistently invokes the notion of reflection. If Kant means to claim that critical philosophy is the proper philosophy of enlightenment, then the appropriate aim of the *Critique of Pure Reason* can only be to help the reader cultivate a certain propensity to be properly reflective when engaged in metaphysics. The placement of Kant's polemic against Leibniz at the juncture between the Transcendental Analytic and the Transcendental Dialectic suggests not that the entire *Critique* is engaged in 'transcendental reflection' (whatever that would mean),<sup>36</sup> but rather that thorough study of the Transcendental Analytic might prepare one to develop – *for oneself* – a suitably 'critical' disposition in metaphysics. Perhaps we can say, again with a measure of charity, that this properly 'reflective' attitude is *exemplified* in the Transcendental Dialectic. That is not to fall into the trap of claiming that the *Critique* itself carries out transcendental reflection. Reflection, for Kant, is a practical attitude; it is not something that gets 'carried out' or is determinately 'achieved'.

## 9. GENUS AND SPECIES OF REFLECTION IN KANT'S USAGE

My aim in this paper is to shed light on the meaning of Kant's appeal to spontaneity: my proposal for doing so was to consider Kant's celebration of the ideal of enlightenment in conjunction with his remarks on reflection. We have yet to draw out the implications regarding the significance of Kant's appeal to spontaneity. Before turning to that final topic, however, I would like to clarify Kant's conception of reflection a bit more. We have found Kant appealing to reflection in a variety of contexts – with still more having been left out of the picture thus far. My attempt at clarification will come in the form of a taxonomy of senses of 'reflection' in Kant's usage. Providing this taxonomy will also provide an opportunity to account for differences in

<sup>36</sup>A further problem is that Westphal includes too much under the heading of 'transcendental reflection', leaving the term without any distinct meaning. See, for example, his claim that transcendental reflection

determines the origins of key cognitive representations in sensibility, understanding, or reason, and the *a priori* roles and relations of these representations in cognitive judgment, and thus their contributions to the possibility and validity of knowledge, especially of synthetic knowledge *a priori*.

(17)

While this may characterize the work of the *Critique*, it does not helpfully shed light on just what transcendental reflection is, or what it means to suppose that transcendental reflection is the method of the work.



scope between my account of reflection and that offered by Béatrice Longuenesse.

Reflection comes up in two distinct parts of the *Jäsche Logic*. We find it in the Introduction, in a passage underscoring the themes of enlightenment; this has been one of the principal passages of my interpretation. Later on, reflection figures in an account of concept formation according to a threefold ‘logical act of the understanding’ comprised of ‘comparison, reflection, and abstraction’ (§6; 9: 94). This is the passage on which Longuenesse bases her account. These two contexts, as I shall suggest, mark out two species of reflection.<sup>37</sup> To distinguish better the species, however, we must first ascertain the genus that unites them.

In the *Anthropology*, Kant refers to reflection as the self-consciousness that is proper to the spontaneity of the mind. He distinguishes it from a mode of self-consciousness that is modelled on sense perception and is accordingly known as ‘inner sense’. Reflection is ‘a consciousness of the understanding’: it is identified with ‘*pure* ... apperception’. Apprehension is the ‘consciousness ... of inner sense’: it is identified with ‘*empirical* apperception’. Reflection is concerned with the ‘I as *subject* of thought’, whereas inner sense is concerned with ‘the I as *object* of perception’ (7: 134n). Reflection is the self-consciousness that is proper to the intellect: it is not modelled on sense-perception, which is to say that it is a non-introspective mode of self-consciousness.

The point of the distinction drawn in the *Anthropology* passage should be familiar. I am suggesting that it outlines the generic idea of reflection, as the self-consciousness proper to the spontaneity of the mind. This, I have argued, must be understood in light of the idea that reflection is a practical attitude: otherwise we would take ourselves to making determinative – i.e. theoretical – claims about noumena. Logical reflection figures in Kant’s account of concept formation in the *Jäsche Logic*; Longuenesse is concerned with this species of the genus.<sup>38</sup> I have principally been concerned with the

<sup>37</sup>There is also, of course, the *judgment of reflection*, which is the topic of the *Critique of Judgment*: the judgement of reflection admits of ‘aesthetic’ and ‘logical’ species – i.e. the judgement of taste, and the teleological judgement. However, reflection as Kant discusses it in the texts that we have been looking at so far is pointedly distinguished from judgement. Therefore, we should not conflate ‘reflection’ and ‘the judgment of reflection’. An account of the relation between *reflection* and the *judgment of reflection* lies outside of the scope of this paper.

<sup>38</sup>Longuenesse notes that she is offering an account of *logical* reflection, not *transcendental* reflection. She is specifically concerned with what she refers to as ‘logical comparison’ – a term she uses interchangeably with ‘logical reflection’ – ‘in the broad sense’ (130). The ‘narrow’ sense of logical reflection, she remarks, is an ‘analytic’ comparison of concepts that is ‘performed in the understanding alone’; the ‘broad’ sense of logical reflection, which is the topic of her account, is ‘a comparison performed in the understanding subject to sensible conditions’ (127, n58). If the general trajectory of Longuenesse’s interpretation is sound, then it is logical reflection that is at issue in the formation of concepts. Her aim, I take it, is to account for the mode of reflection proper to the origin of the categories (i.e. to explain Kant’s view that the categories are not innate, but rather ‘originally acquired’).

other species of this genus: reflection as a requirement of sound judgement.<sup>39</sup> In order to appreciate better the coherence of Kant's conception of reflection, we will need to look into Kant's account of logical reflection.

Kant illustrates his account of logical reflection with the formation of an empirical concept (*tree*) (9: 94–5). It is a familiar story:<sup>40</sup> given representations are compared, so that one abstracts from, or leaves out of consideration, what makes them different from one another in order to arrive at the rule by which they bear comparison to one another. Representations are *compared* 'under one another in relation to the unity of consciousness'; we *reflect* as to 'how various representations could be conceived [*begriffen*] in a single consciousness';<sup>41</sup> and 'finally' comes the *separation* (*Absonderung*) 'of everything else in which the given representations distinguish themselves' (§6, 9: 94). Kant goes on to make a point of correcting what he takes to be a misuse of the term 'abstraction': 'We must not say that we 'abstract something' . . . but rather we 'abstract from something' (9: 95). In this way, Kant tells us to consider reflection and abstraction as flip sides of a single coin: while abstraction is the 'negative condition under which objectively valid representations can be developed', reflection is the positive one. Abstraction is leaving the particularity of our given representations out of consideration; reflection, in this account, is some kind of appreciation of a possible unification of consciousness. Reflection is appreciating a rule relevantly governing the comparison of these particulars.

This passage about logical reflection from the *Jäsche Logic* certainly accords with Kant's claim from the *Anthropology* that reflection is the 'inner activity (spontaneity) whereby a *concept* (a thought) is possible' (7: 134n.). It accords with the generic conception of reflection as the self-consciousness proper to the spontaneity of the mind; for this reflection is not the apprehension of an event, but rather the grasping of a rule governing the given particulars. At issue is the mind's capacity to 'bring forth representations itself' rather than its capacity to 'receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way' (A51/B75). What about the idea that reflection is not a theoretical determination of the spontaneity of the mind, but rather a practical attitude? While merely logical reflection may set aside questions about the potential cognitive value of the concepts in question – i.e. their ability to relevantly govern our understanding of particulars – still, such questions are always somewhere in view. Concepts, after all, are 'predicates of possible judgments' (A69/B94). Merely logical reflection will perhaps involve *bracketing* considerations about a given concept's value in a practice

<sup>39</sup>This species may then divide into transcendental and non-transcendental subspecies: transcendental reflection for when a-priori metaphysics are at issue, and non-transcendental reflection when a-posteriori claims are at issue.

<sup>40</sup>Longuenesse suggests predecessors in the Arnauld and Nicole's *Port-Royal Logic* and Locke's *Essay* (*Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, 112).

<sup>41</sup>Kant uses the term *Reflexion* here, glossing it with *Überlegung* (9:94); for more evidence that Kant uses the Latinate and German terms interchangeably, see A261/B316.

of judgement; but it may not *annihilate* such questions. Hence, even though the idea of reflection as a practical attitude may be more pronounced in the species of reflection that has been at issue in this paper – namely, reflection as a normative requirement of judging – it cannot be entirely absent from the reflection involved in the formation of concepts.

## 10. THE SPONTANEITY OF JUDGEMENT

We can now be explicit about the connection between reflection and spontaneity. Generically, reflection is the self-consciousness that is proper to the intellect: it is a spontaneous, rather than receptive, mode of self-consciousness. As I have argued, this must be understood in light of the idea that reflection is a practical attitude. The species of reflection with which I have been principally concerned with here is that concerned the practice of judgement. In judgement, the relation in which a subject stands to a putative principle of cognition is put to the test: at stake is one's ability to appreciate – independently – the relevance of a rule to a given context. I have argued that this independence, this freedom, admits of degree. It admits of degree as any virtue does in Kant's view: virtue is an ideal that manifests itself, if at all, by the varying degrees of our falling short of it. Enlightenment is excellence of human understanding – and what admits of degree here is the robustness of a judging subject's acknowledgement of the demands of the practice of judgement. While those demands are articulated in the three maxims of common human understanding, the fundamental demand is *reflection*.<sup>42</sup>

The difficulty that Kant's appeal to spontaneity presents to commentators stems, I take it, from the idea that 'spontaneity' refers to a certain self-determination of the mind: its freedom from being determined by the causal order of material nature.<sup>43</sup> The difficulties are insurmountable until we

<sup>42</sup>I do not mean to suggest that the three maxims *exhaust* the demands of the practice of judgement, but I do take it that they help us zero in on Kant's idea that reflection is the fundamental demand, or requirement, of the practice of judgement. What I have argued for here should provide a starting point for a more developed account that would examine the distinct realms of theoretical and practical judging: for in both contexts, Kant worries about prejudice and underscores the requirement of reflection. In the context of such an expanded account, the role of regulative ideals of reason would be addressed. Further development would also need to account for the systematic position of the *judgment of reflection* (which, as I noted above, should not be confused with reflection) and its implications for the central point that reflection is the fundamental demand of the practice of judgement.

<sup>43</sup>Moreover, it can seem that Kant's invocation of spontaneity threatens the viability of the critical project itself. For what can it mean for a *spontaneous* reason to engage in the project of self-knowledge (Axi, Bxxxv, A849/B877) that the *Critique* is supposed to be? If theoretical cognition is limited to objects of possible experience, and a spontaneous reason is not an object of possible experience (A556/B584), then how is the critical project coherent? In reply to this famous 'metacritical' question, Rescher suggests that the reasoning involved in carrying out

recognize that, for Kant, reflection is a practical attitude. For the very fact that the spontaneity of the mind remains off-limits as an object of theoretical cognition entails that it is *always a live question* whether one's judgement properly acknowledges the demand of reflection. Indeed, that question gives life to the practice of judgement: it is not an afterthought or an optional embellishment. 1175

This is arguably the point of a famous passage about judgement from the *Critique*. Judgement, Kant says, is the capacity 'to distinguish whether something stands under a given rule . . . or not' (A132/B172). No general instruction can be given about how to distinguish whether something may be subsumed under a general rule, for such instruction would itself have to come in the form of more rules. We would then have only shifted the worry from the first-order to the second-order register; and this could go on *ad infinitum*. So, Kant continues: 1180

[S]o it appears that, while the understanding is capable of being instructed and outfitted with rules, judgement is a special talent that wants not to be taught, but only practiced. Hence this is also what is specific to the so-called mother wit, and no school can compensate for the lack of this. Even if such a school were to fill a limited understanding up with rules that were borrowed from foreign insight, offering the rules and as it were grafting them onto it, still the capacity to make use of these rules correctly must belong to the student himself; and no rule which one may prescribe to him with this intention is, in the absence of such a gift of nature [Naturgabe], secure from misuse. 1185

(A133/B172). 1190

Let us begin with the term 'gift of nature' (*Naturgabe*) found at the end of the passage, which may lead readers astray, conveying the impression that lacking sound judgement is like being born without a limb.<sup>44</sup> What sense of 'nature' is at stake? To answer this, consider the contrast Kant draws. On the one hand, there is the 'natural gift' of a capacity to recognize the relevance of given rules; this is none other than 'sound [*gesund*] understanding'. On the other hand, there is the scenario in which an understanding is 'outfitted' and 'filled up' with rules that were 'borrowed from 1200

critical philosophy – i.e. accounting for the spontaneity of the mind – is itself practical (176). Compare Burge, who suggests that such reasoning is itself above the theoretical/practical distinction (250, 258). I do not take myself to be entering into this fray here. 1205

<sup>44</sup>David Bell's reading of this passage dwells in a different way on its reference to 'a gift of nature'. Perhaps thinking of Kant's conception of 'genius' as an inexplicable force of *nature* (see *Critique of Judgment* §§46–7), he draws on this passage to associate spontaneity with a 'blind' following of rules (226). He interprets this to mean that at the core of our cognitive capacities lies an 'ability to enjoy a spontaneous, criterialess, disinterested, presumptively universal, non-cognitive, reflective feeling that certain diverse elements of experience *as such* belong together' (239) – a capacity revealed in Bell's reading of the judgement of taste. I suppose that for Bell there is hope for those lacking 'mother wit' – namely through the cultivation of taste, as this is then the best practice for judgement. Yet this only refreshes my doubt that spontaneity, in any respect, should be characterized as 'blind'. 1210

1215

foreign insight'; the rules are offered or given to the student, and 'grafted onto' his 'limited understanding'. A branch grafted onto a plant comes from outside of that plant – it comes from another organism – and is bound onto the plant in the hope that it will stick and become as if it were natural part of the plant. However, it is not a natural part of the plant. Therefore, the rules that belong to a sound understanding are not merely grafted onto it, but belong to it the way that a branch belongs to a tree – as the proper expression of its nature.<sup>45</sup>

At issue here is the nature of the *understanding* – a nature which, in Kant's view, is 'spontaneous' rather than 'receptive'. The analogy of grafting versus natural growth directs our attention again to the *relation* that an individual may have to the rules that she may be said to possess for the purpose of cognition. Of course, in some sense, these rules almost always come from outside: there is much that is merely given to one, even if one ranks among the 'greatest discoverers', and not the 'laborious imitators'; yet the transition from the one end of the spectrum to the other is possible only through originality: that is, one must see for oneself if the rules one has been given have any meaningful, and non-arbitrary, application. A 'laborious imitator' takes it on faith that they do, since such an individual cannot independently recognize the relevance of certain rules to the particular situations he encounters. He must come to see the particulars *as* determined by the relevant rules, and he is helped along in the beginning by mimicking the examples of the judgements of others. As Kant goes on to say in this passage, he must lose the walking cart and walk freely.<sup>46</sup> Any genuine or non-arbitrary *endorsement* of what he has been taught can only arise out of a developing capacity to recognize the relevance of the rule to some situation without prompting from another. A corresponding point could be made about the possibility of his *rejecting* what he has been taught, as well. This independence is the spontaneity of judgement.

<sup>45</sup>An intriguing reference to 'grafting' comes at the very end of the *Critique of Practical Reason's* Doctrine of Method, where Kant addresses matters of moral pedagogy. There Kant endorses the 'grafting' of good moral dispositions, as long as the individual in question has developed an adequate propensity toward reflection and the sense of moral humility that goes along with that (5: 161). Kant even grants that one may be brought onto 'the track of the morally good in the first place' by exploiting the attractions of personal advantage or alarm at the prospects of disadvantage or injury; 'but as soon as this machinery, these leading strings have had even some effect, the pure moral motive must be brought to bear on the soul' (5: 152). Moreover, throughout the second *Critique's* Doctrine of Method, and again in the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant suggests that imitation may indeed play an important role in moral pedagogy – as when one is 'instructed through an example of virtue or holiness' – so long as this appeal to the *exemplary* does not degenerate into 'a mechanism of imitation' (5: 283). Close examination of these passages would belong to a more developed account of reflection than I am able to provide within the scope of this paper.

<sup>46</sup>*Gängelwagen* and *Leitbänder*, both instruments for teaching a child how to walk, are discussed in Kant's lectures on pedagogy (9: 461, 466). The term *Gängelwagen* is used both in this passage (A134/B173) and in 'What is Enlightenment?' (8: 35).

Kant claims that reflection is a requirement of all judging. I have argued that reflection can only be coherently interpreted as a practical attitude. This, in turn, entails that reflection must be conceived as a *normative*, not a constitutive, requirement of judging: for as Kant often reminds us, much gets passed off as judgement that does not adequately acknowledge this normative requirement. The normative requirement is spelled out through the three maxims of ‘common human understanding’. The maxims articulate aspects of the self-recognition that is internal to the practice of judgement. This self-recognition is simply an acknowledgment of the demands of the practice of judgement. In order to judge at all, we must be able to critically endorse or reject – *through the very practice of judgment* – the particular rules that allow us to think about things at all.

Are we, then, to conclude that the appeal to spontaneity is best conceived as belonging to a view about how our cognitive lives *ought* to be? Yes: it must be recognized that the appeal to spontaneity belongs to a normative or corrective project; and hence that project, the *Critique*, necessarily makes reference to a conception of how things ought to be with our cognitive lives. Indeed, as long as critical philosophy – in all three of its episodes – is conceived as an examination of the ‘higher faculties of the soul’, each taking this designation because it ‘contains an autonomy’ (5: 197), then practical considerations will not merely belong to the enterprise, but will indeed give it its distinctive character and shape.<sup>47</sup>

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