The *Darstellungsproblem*

There are many ways of trying to characterize the difference between analytical and continental philosophy – none of them, it seems to me, very satisfactory. One of the difficulties in constructing a properly balanced historical account is that when philosophers write in English about the history of European philosophy they do so, whether consciously or not, with the intention of helping to vindicate their subject-matter to an audience that is unfamiliar with it. In consequence, there is a tendency to present the continental tradition as responding to issues with which readers trained in Anglo-American philosophy are already familiar. Frederick Beiser's wonderful account of early German Idealism [*German Idealism*: Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P.], for example, traces the developments of the 1790s as a series of responses to the problem of subjectivism. German Idealism should be seen, Beiser claims, as "an attempt to prove the reality of the external world and to break out of the egocentric predicament". [check reference] This gives the uninitiated reader a welcome way in to the material; one does not need to have been brought up reading Kant and the post-Kantians to recognize the problem – Descartes, Berkeley, Russell or Ayer would be quite enough. Yet, as readers of Beiser's book will know, the picture that Beiser gives us traces the development from Kant through Reinhold and Fichte to Schelling's Absolute Idealism as a transition from epistemology to metaphysics – a conception of philosophy that, as Beiser puts it, "begins with the independent reality of nature". While this is, I believe, historically accurate (more accurate, certainly, than those who depict German Idealism as a kind of socialised neo-Kantianism without the thing in itself) it hardly looks like a cogent development. If the German Idealists really did see the central problem of philosophy as finding a satisfactory response to the egocentric

predicament how did it lead them to a conception of philosophy whose starting point takes the existence of the external world for granted?

Much though I admire Beiser's book, I propose in this talk to approach some of the same material from a rather different perspective. The *Darstellungsproblem*, as I shall call it, is a problem of the first importance, I shall argue, for German Idealism – and, indeed, for a great deal of continental philosophy in the twentieth century – but it does not appear to have been recognized, much less addressed, by most of the thinkers in the analytical tradition. My aim too is (somewhat) vindicatory. I want to argue that, whether you agree with the Idealists' solutions or not, the *Darstellungsproblem* is an important philosophical problem, one whose presence enriches the continental tradition in philosophy.

I

Towards the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously summarizes the tasks of reason in the form of three questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope? (A805, B833) The *Darstellungsproblem*, as I shall describe it, does not fall clearly under any of these three questions – to some degree it cuts across all three – but it is best introduced with reference to Kant's answer to the first question: what can I know?

For Kant, our knowledge is a system of judgements, uniting universals and particulars, organized in deductive-nomological structures. In its essential structure it corresponds – corresponds necessarily, indeed – to an objective reality made up of extended matter, enduring objects, properties, events and causal connections. Beyond

these limits, however, knowledge is not possible because knowledge must be confined to what can become a possible object of experience:

> Knowledge involves two factors: first, the concept, through which an object in general is thought (the category); and, secondly, the intuition, through which it is given. ... Now, as the Aesthetic has shown, the only intuition possible to us is sensible; consequently, the thought of an object in general, by means of a pure concept of the understanding, can become knowledge only in so far as the concept is related to objects of the senses. (B146)

This is the aspect of Kant's epistemology that has been most congenial to philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition – Kant as an ally of empiricism in the battle against the pretensions of metaphysics to *a priori* knowledge. It is central to the most celebrated of analytically-inspired Kant interpretations, P.F. Strawson's *The Bounds of Sense* – indeed, it gives the book its title. *The Bounds of Sense* turns on what Strawson calls Kant's "principle of significance". As Strawson expresses it, the principle of significance states that "there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application". [*BoS*, check ref.] Yet the claim that Kant subscribes to the principle of significance embodies an important misconception of Kant. It asserts not just that Kant restricts our knowledge to what can be related to intuition (which is obviously true) but that there can be no "legitimate employment" of ideas that transcends the bounds of sense, which is not Kant's view at all. If that were the case, Kant's famous description of his position in the Critical Philosophy as "deny[ing] knowledge to *make room for faith*" [Bxxx, my emphasis] would make no sense. For if, as the principle of significance claims, ideas that cannot be made to correspond to the senses to yield knowledge are without meaning, would not faith

itself be rendered meaningless? At a stroke, a major aspect of Kant's project would be eliminated.

But, if we concede that in Kant's view there can be significant thoughts that do not yield knowledge by being related to the senses, a problem arises. How can such thoughts be conveyed or communicated? Whatever our thoughts may get up to in the privacy of our own consciousnesses, it is an undeniable fact that, to pass from one mind to another, they have to do so via some sensible medium. So how does that sensible medium have the power to convey them? In general, how can something (a thing, an idea, an experience or whatever) that exists (or is thought of) in one medium be presented or expressed in another one that is different from it? This, in first approximation, is the *Darstellungsproblem*. Thus, to the three famous Kantian questions we might add a fourth: what can I convey?, or, what can I express?, or, what can I represent? I shall argue, however, that, although the *Darstellungsproblem* has its roots in Kant, it is not present in Kant in its full form.

At this point, it is perhaps time to explain why I call this problem – untranslated – the *Darstellungsproblem*. The answer is that any other formulation risks carrying misleading associations – perhaps, indeed, begging the question. The question cannot be: what can I *say*? Certainly, the nature of language is crucial, but we should not take it for granted that the *Darstellungsproblem* is a question about language alone or, to the extent that it *is* a question about language, that it is a question about that aspect by which we use language to *say* or *state* things. Nor would "expression" be the right term, I think, although the *Darstellungsproblem* is indeed closely related to the trend in late eighteenth-century German thought that Charles Taylor has called "expressivism" and Isaiah Berlin "expressionism". The German word *Ausdruck* is too easily associated with the idea of the *expressive* in the sense of

emotionally charged. The presentation of emotional content may be an aspect of the *Darstellungsproblem*, but it is not essential to it. Finally, it would not be right to talk about the *Darstellungsproblem* as a problem of *representation*. In English, when we talk about "representation" the prinicipal association is of a two-place relationship in which the one stands as a proxy for the other. However, precisely this association is out of place in dealing with the German word "*Vorstellung*". "*Vorstellung*" was introduced into German philosophical vocabulary to meet a translation requirement: the need for an equivalent in German to the Lockean term "idea". For Kant, "*Vorstellung*" is the generic term for whatever can be a mental item, but it is conventionally translated as "representation". Thus Kant writes "The genus is *representation* [*Vorstellung*] in general (*repraesentatio*)" (A320, B376). Representations/*Vorstellungen* divide up into intuitions, concepts and, in Kant's particular Platonic sense of the term, ideas (*Ideen*). For the later German Idealists, however, as we shall see, *Vorstellungen* do not comprehend all kinds of mental item, but are mental items of a particular kind – ones that may, in fact, be inadequate to convey the highest forms of mental content.

What it is that Kant believes is thinkable but not knowable? The simple answer that he gives is "ideas". An idea, in the definition that Kant gives in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is a concept that is itself formed from pure concepts "transcending the possibility of experience" (A320, B377). Such ideas play a regulative role in organizing our empirical knowledge but do not form part of it – they are, as Kant puts it, a *focus imaginarius* for our reasoning. By the time of the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant sub-divides ideas into two kinds: aesthetical and rational. Neither, however, can become objects of knowledge. In the case of aesthetical ideas, this is because an aesthetical idea is "an intuition for which an adequate concept can never

be found"; in the case of a rational idea, "because it involves a concept corresponding to which an intuition can never be given". (*CJ*, Sect. 57, Remark 1)

In Kant's use of the term, a presentation (*Darstellung*) must be sensible. Hence it cannot express the character of ideas objectively. However, aesthetical ideas, inasmuch as they engage the imagination, are capable of conveying their content through an indirect, subjective mode of presentation. This is especially true of the sublime, which Kant defines as "an object (or nature) the representation of which determines the mind to think the unattainability of nature regarded as a presentation [*Darstellung*] of ideas." (*CJ*, Sect. 29). Although "literally and logically, ideas cannot be presented", reason intervenes in our efforts to make representations adequate to ideas and "forces us, subjectively, to *think* nature itself in the totality as a presentation of something supersensible, without being able objectively to arrive at this presentation." (*CJ*, Sect. 29). Art, then, for Kant, enables the sensible presentation of content that cannot amount to knowledge. This is a view that will be seminal for German Idealism – and for the continental tradition in philosophy more generally.

However, Kant does not present this thought in the context of what I have called the *Darstellungsproblem* for the following reason. *Darstellung* as Kant conceives it – sensible presentation – is not necessary for the expression or communication of content that transcends sense-experience. Although Kant has very little to say in the Critiques about the nature of language, he seems to be committed to a dualistic view of the relationship between thought and language. Recall that, for Kant, the only ideas that are capable of *Darstellung* are the "aesthetical ideas", intuitions for which adequate concepts cannot be found. What about "rational ideas", those for which an intution cannot be given? As we have seen, the sublime – by the way in which intuition fails to be adequate to ideas – can, in an indirect way, *evoke*

rational ideas, but it is not necessary to do so in order for rational ideas to be conveyed. All that is required to communicate an idea that goes beyond the limits of sense, Kant appears to think, is a conventional sign. Thus, when he discusses symbolism in the *Critique of Judgement*, he makes it clear that, in his view, it is important to contrast symbols in the weightier sense in which (for example) he asserts that beauty is a symbol of morality, with a conception of symbolism as a matter of arbitrary signs. Such symbols are "mere characterizations or designations [*bloße Charakterismen, d. i. Bezeichnungen*] of concepts by accompanying sensible signs which contain nothing belonging to the object and only serve as a means for reproducing the concepts according to the law of association of the imagination and consequently from a subjective point of view. These are either words or visible (algebraical or even mimetical) signs, as mere expressions for concepts [*bloße Ausdrücke für Begriffe*]." In other words, a conventional sign in the realm of sense can be associated with an entity in the realm of thought whose character may be quite different from it. The sign itself lacks content – all it does is point to content in the domain of thought. This is why I have called Kant's account of the relationship between thought and language "dualistic". There is no intrinsic relationship between content in one domain (thought) and content in another domain (external, sensible reality) so the puzzling question of how content can be translated from one medium to another that lies at the heart of the *Darstellungsproblem* does not arise.

Note how limited this dualist conception makes our capacity to communicate sense-transcendent ideas. The sign, being simply a sensible token, can offer no guarantee that the thought in the mind of the speaker corresponds to that in the mind of the listener. The sign itself contains no (relevant) content, and, by assumption, it cannot indicate the intended content by pointing you to some item in reality that you

can observe. You can't point someone towards the idea of immortality in the way that you can point them towards Trinity College. Hence, if I want to convey an idea to you by means of an arbitrary sign, you must, in a sense, already be in possession of the same content as me (or, at least, have the internal resources to form it).

A dualistic account of language is not the only reason that the *Darstellungsproblem* might not arise. For dualism as I have described it, thought and language are heterogeneous, but, since the connection between them is an external one, it does not matter that the nature of the two media is so different. On another view, however, the *Darstellungsproblem* does not arise because thought and language – internal and external reality – are sufficiently homogeneous for the two to correspond. The clearest exemplar of this approach is Hume. Hume, of course, has a fundamentally associationist view of language (as he does, indeed, of all mental phenomena). His causal conception of the mind as interacting bundles of atomistic impressions and ideas is consciously modelled on the corpuscularian physics that, he believes, gives us our best account of the nature of external reality. For Hume, mental and physical reality are continuous with one another. Hence there is nothing in the mind that could not also be given in sense, no possibility in principle of a radical disjunction between mental contents and sensible ones.

A philosopher whose sympathies are with empiricism and naturalism might think that the subject-matter that we are dealing with here is just a regrettable hangover in Kant's thought from rationalism. But that would be to understate seriously the scope and force of the *Darstellungsproblem*. It is true that Kant focuses on the presentation of what he calls "ideas" in a consciously Platonic sense and it might seem to a modern, secular thinker that these are the kind of entities that we could do without – if they cannot be thought and communicated except by conceiving

of the mind as radically discontinuous with external reality, perhaps we would do better to get rid of them. But it is not just crypto-theological conceptions that go beyond the limits of sensible knowledge: there is, above all, the self itself (whether as knowing consciousness or as agent). If that is not an object of knowledge in the way that extended things in the physical world are, how is it to be communicated?

What Kant has to say about self-knowledge is complex – he is plainly struggling to give an account of the self that, while not denying its reality, makes it neither a matter of inner intuition nor an unknowable noumenon. Thus he writes at B423 for example:

> ... when I called the proposition 'I think' an empirical proposition, I do not mean to say thereby that the 'I' in the proposition is an empirical representation. On the contrary, it is purely intellectual because belonging to thought in general.

But, if that is so, can there be a presentation of the self? Our self-consciousness is at once the most salient feature of our mental life, but at the same time something to which nothing in Kant's account of objective reality can correspond. If it is not a *Vorstellung* but that which gives unity to our *Vorstellungen*, does it not threaten to disappear? At this point, we naturally return to Hume – and reflect how Hume's rigorous mental atomism (the drive to resolve all thoughts into impressions) leads him to deny the knowability of the self entirely since it has no corresponding impression. Things are similar when we look at the self from the point of view of agency. As Kant says, "the inscrutableness of the idea of freedom quite cuts it off from any positive *Darstellung*." (*CJ*, sect. 29)

II

The post-Kantian idealists retain the idea that significant aspects of mental life lie outside the domain of sensible intuitions and concepts. Indeed, they re-inforce it.

As is well known and widely agreed, the development of German Idealism owes a great deal to Reinhold's popularization and subsequent criticism of Kant's theoretical philosophy and to Fichte's further development of Reinhold's critique, as found in his response to "Aenesidemus" and after. [See, for example, Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* and Paul Franks, *All or Nothing*.] Reinhold, you will remember, criticizes the Critical Philosophy as incomplete. Kant founded a "science [*Wissenschaft*] of the objects of possible experience", Reinhold writes, [di Giovanni and Harris (eds.), *Between Kant and Hegel*, p.66] but what he did not do was to produce a "science of the characteristics (detemined a priori) of mere *Vorstellungen*" [*BKH*, p. 67]. "It belongs to the groundwork of a *Wissenschaft*", says Reinhold, "as the ultimate condition for its foundation and as sign that it has been completed, that its *first principle* should be discovered and expounded." [*BKH*, p. 66] What, then, is the first principle of the *Wissenschaft* of *Vorstellungen* that Reinhold envisages? Reinhold's answer is that such a principle would have to be the foundation of philosophy, but that it could not itself be a part of philosophy:

> What has to stand at the head of the Philosophy of the Elements – and hence of all philosophical explanations and proofs – cannot itself be established through a proof drawn from any part of philosophy whatsoever, nor for that matter can any philosophy, past or future, prove it....
>
> The concept of *Vorstellung*, which the science of the faculty of *Vorstellung* is to determine analytically, must have already been synthetically determined to this end. So determined – independently of all philosophizing, for the latter depends on this original determinateness for its correctness – the concept of

> *Vorstellung* can only be drawn from the consciousness of an actual fact [*Tatsache*]. This fact alone qua fact must ground the foundation of the Philosophy of the Elements – for otherwise the foundation cannot rest, without circularity, on any philosophically demonstrable proposition. It is not through any inference of reason that we know that in consciousness *Vorstellung* is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both, but through simple reflection upon the actual fact of consciousness, that is, by comparison between what is present in it. (*BKH*, p. 70)

So we see that, for Reinhold, *Vorstellung* does not exhaust the contents of the human mind. To the contrary, it is precisely that aspect of the mind that precedes *Vorstellung* that provides the foundation for a systematic understanding of *Vorstellung* itself. In a sense, of course, this is simply a development of Kant's account of the self as neither a noumenon nor an intuition, but Reinhold is going further in two ways: in asserting that this is the source or foundation for conscious experience in general and in explicitly contrasting it with *Vorstellung* (rather than seeing it simply as a species of *Vorstellung*).

In his review of *Aenesidemus*, Fichte responded to "Aenesidemus" (that is, G.E. Schulze's) critique of Kant and Reinhold. In a letter written at the time when he was working on his review, Fichte makes clear what an impact it had on him:

> *Aenesidemus*, which I consider to be one of the most remarkable products of our decade, has convinced me of something which I admittedly already suspected: that even after the labours of Kant and Reinhold, philosophy is still not a science. *Aenesidemus* has shaken my own system to its very foundations, and, since one cannot very well live under the open sky, I have been forced to construct a new system. I am convinced that philosophy can become a science

> only if it is generated from one single first principle, but that it must then become just as self-evident as geometry. Furthermore, I am convinced that there is such a first principle, though it has not yet been established *as such*. I believe that I have found this first principle, and I have found it to hold good, to the extent that I have advanced in my enquiries so far. (*Early Philosophical Writings*, p.14)

There are, of course, many ways in which Fichte's philosophy differs from Reinhold's but what is striking to me is the degree to which the position that Fichte takes in the review of *Aenesidemus* endorses precisely those aspects of Reinhold's views emphasized above: that philosophy requires a systematic "first foundation" and that that foundation must lie "outside" philosophy itself. Thus Fichte writes:

> This reviewer anyway is convinced that the Principle of Consciousness is a theorem which is based upon another first principle, form which, however, the Principle of Consciousness can be strictly derived, a priori and independently of all experience. The initial correct presupposition, and the one which caused the Principle of Consciousness to be proposed as the first principle of all philosophy, was precisely the presupposition that one must begin with a fact. We certainly do require a first principle which is material and not merely formal. But such a principle does not have to express a *fact*; it can also express an *act*. (*EPW*, p.64)

As we can see, Fichte is going even further than Reinhold himself in making the contrast between *Vorstellungen* and the principle on which they rest. What underlies and gives a foundation to *Vorstellungen* is not, as Reinhold would call it, a matter of fact (*Tatsache*) but an action (*Tathandlung*). Actions are discontinuous with representations, and that is just the point. But, if an action (a special kind of action, of

course, but an action nevertheless) is at the centre of philosophy, does that not create a problem for the communication of the content of philosophy itself? How can such agency be expressed in language? Indeed it does, and Fichte is well – we could say, painfully – aware of it. Philosophy, for Fichte, is to be rigorous – a *Wissenschaft*. On the other hand, the very condition of its being a *Wissenschaft* (that it has as its foundation a form of inner action) prevents it from being expressed in the kind of public, regimented language characteristic of mathematics or the natural sciences. Its central core involves intuition – not in Kant's meaning of the term as a form of sense-perception – but as denoting a kind of insight that cannot be grasped conceptually. It is the task of the philosopher to convey such intuitions to his readers, as Fichte makes clear in a letter to Reinhold in 1795:

> What I am trying to communicate is something which can neither be *said* nor *grasped conceptually*; it can only be *intuited*. My words are only supposed to guide the reader in such a way that the desired intuition is formed within him. I advise anyone who wishes to study my writings to let words be words and simply try to enter into my series of intuitions at one point or another. [*EPL*, p.398]

This is, of course, more a recognition of the problem than a solution: it is not at all clear *how* words are supposed to "guide" the reader into "forming the desired intuition". On the one hand, Fichte is searching for – indeed, believes he has found – a rigorous foundation for philosophy as a *Wissenschaft*. But, in contrast to the *Wissenschaft* of mathematics and to the natural sciences more generally, there is no publicly agreed, clearly defined, language within which the *Wissenschaft* can be discussed and developed: it is precisely its non-conceptual character that marks it out.

In locating the foundation of philosophy in a *Tathandlung*, Fichte is bringing together two aspects of the self – self-consciousness and free agency – to which neither sensible intuitions nor concepts can correspond. The problem of the representability of the self became a central problem of the 1790s not just for the philosophers whom we now count as German Idealists but for the aesthetic theorists of Romanticism. It is one reason, for example, for Friedrich Schlegel's famous claim that Fichte's philosophy – along with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and the French Revolution – was one of the "greatest tendencies" of the age. [K. Wheeler (ed.), *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: the Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, p. 34] The problem of the representability of the self is closely connected to the development of Romantic irony. Irony, with its interruption of expectations, provides a mode of presentation that conveys the freedom and independence of the self from its particular acts and engagements.

III

It was in the same year as Fichte's letter to Reinhold that the young Schelling (he was only 20 years old) published his essay "Of the 'I" as the Principle of Philosophy", in which he articulates his own version of Fichte's basic idea. Like Fichte, Schelling insists that a systematic philosophy requires something unconditional as a first foundation and that that must be something different in kind from what is conditioned by it. In fact, it cannot be a "thing" at all:

> Thus the word I have used casually so far, the word *bedingen* (to condition), is an eminently striking term of which one can say that it contains almost the entire wealth of philosophical truth. *Bedingen* means the action by which anything becomes a *thing* [*Ding*]. *Bedingt* (determined) is what has been

> turned into a thing.... Consequently, the unconditional can lie neither in a thing as such, nor in anything that can become a thing, that is, not in the subject. It can only lie in that which cannot become a thing at all; that is, if there is an absolute I, it can only lie in the *absolute I*. (O'Connor & Mohr, p.67)

The 'I", for Schelling, is opposed not just to sensible intuitions but to concepts too:

> The I cannot be given by a mere *concept*. Concepts are possible only in the sphere of the conditional; concepts of objects only are possible. If the I were a concept then there would have to be something higher in which it could find its unity, and something lower which would furnish its multiplicity. In short, the I would then be conditioned throughout. Therefore the I can be determined only in an intuition. (OCM, p. 76)

Thus Schelling, like Fichte, believes that philosophy requries a first foundation and that such a foundation can be neither a concept nor a (sensible) intuition, but must lie in a special kind of agency, accessible through a special kind of intuition. The problem is: how can such an intuition be communicated, given the discrepancy between that inner principle and the structure of empirical knowledge?

During the later 1790s, Schelling was increasingly pre-occupied with the philosophy of nature, based on his study of chemistry and medicine in Leipzig. When we look at nature, he believed, we must grasp it as *natura naturans*, not just *natura naturata*:

> Insofar as we regard the totality of objects not merely as product, but at the same time necessarily as productive, it becomes *Nature* for us, and this *identity of the product and the productivity*, and this alone, is implied by the idea of nature, even in the ordinary use of language. *Nature* as a mere *product* (*natura naturata*) we call Nature as *object* (with this alone all empiricism

deals). *Nature as productivity (natura naturans*) we call *Nature as subject* (with this alone all theory deals). (OCM, p.375)

The perspective which continues the project of Reinhold and Fichte, of providing a first foundation for a science of mental life (Schelling calls it "transcendental philosophy") must be complemented by an explanation which accounts for the dynamic and developmental character of the natural world:

> If the task of transcendental philosophy is to order the real under the ideal, then, conversely, the task of the philosophy of nature is to explain the ideal by means of the real. (OCM, p. 368)

But Schelling did not by any means lose sight of the *Darstellungsproblem*: how can "intellectual intuition" become objective (and, hence, communicable)? We see it clearly, for instance, in a manuscript revision that he made to his *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800:

> The whole of philosophy starts, and must start, from a principle which, as the absolute principle, is also at the same time the absolutely identical. An absolutely simple and identical cannot be grasped or communicated through description, nor through concepts at all. It can only be intuited. Such an intuition is the organ of all philosophy. – But this intuition, which is an intellectual rather than a sensory one, and has as its object neither the objective nor the subjective, but the absolutely identical, in itself neither subjective nor objective, is itself merely an internal one, which cannot in turn become objective for itself: it can become objective only through a second intuition. This second intuition is the aesthetic. (OCM, p. 258)

The passage makes clear that Schelling believes that philosophy requires a starting point that is neither conceptual nor sensory, just as firmly he had done five years

earlier. Yet this creates a problem of communication. The forms of discourse that enable us to express descriptive judgements about the causal relationships between objects (*natura naturata*) are, just because they are suited to that task, inadequate to communicate the non-conceptual nature of intellectual intuition. But, fortunately, we have other resources at our disposal, Schelling believes. His proposed solution at this time is very close to Kant's account of the role of art in communicating aesthetic ideas in the *Critique of Judgement*. Art, however, is not just the sensible presentation of content that cannot amount to knowledge; it is itself a privileged form of knowledge. The work of art is "the infinite finitely *dargestellt*" (OCM, p.255). Art has a privileged role in conveying what the combination of sensible intuitions and concepts in empirical judgements cannot: it is art for philosophy's sake.

> If aesthetic intuition is merely intellectual intuition become objective, it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious. Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burn in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart. (OCM, p. 260)

From the point of view of the *Darstellungsproblem*, we can summarize the development from Kant as follows. For Kant, the realm of the knowable is confined to what can constitute objective experience: extended objects in their causal relations. Thus, if the merely thinkable is to be presented, it must be in the sphere of subjective experience: the aesthetic. For Reinhold, the task of philosophy is to provide a

foundation for a *Wissenschaft* whose task it will be to give a systematic account of *Vorstellungen*. Fichte and Schelling take this up to argue that what founds philosophy cannot itself be a *Vorstellung*, in the sense of being either a concept or a (sensible) intuition. Moreover, for independent reasons, Schelling wishes to challenge what he sees as Kant's excessively restrictive conception of objective experience. In so doing, he comes up with a new kind of structural correspondence: the elements of mental life that transcend *Vorstellung* correspond to dynamic elements of reality that do not figure within the account of reality as a system of objects and events under causal laws.

IV

In the 1790s, Schelling regarded his friend Hegel as an ally and disciple and even much later he had difficulty in seeing in Hegel's philosophy more than a subordinate variation of his own. At least as far as the *Darstellungsproblem* goes, there is some truth. But Hegel goes further than Schelling in his explicit critique of *Vorstellung*. *Vorstellung*, for Hegel, is not just a generic term for whatever can be a mental content; it is a mental content of a particular kind, one that is associated with the "understanding". When we think from the perspective of "common sense", we do so in the mode of *Vorstellung*, which combines two kinds of material: material drawn from the world of sense, and material that comes from "self-conscious thought". "The peculiarity of *Vorstellung*, however, is in general to be seen in this regard, that such content likewise stands in isolation within it." [Enz. Para. 20] Thought, however (a technical term for Hegel) stands in contrast to *Vorstellung*. While *Vorstellung* can give philosophy an initial conception of its subject-matter, true philosophy is about the transformation of *Vorstellungen* into thoughts:

> The difference between *Vorstellung* and thoughts has a more particular importance because it can be said in general that philosophy does nothing else except to transform *Vorstellungen* into thoughts. [Enz. Para. 20]

Yet language itself, for Hegel, is associated with *Vorstellung*. And this creates the problem that he faces in the presentation of his philosophical system. Like Schelling, Hegel endorses a conception of objective reality that is much richer than Kant's. But even that is not sufficient to provide a medium of expression that is adequate to truly "scientific" philosophy, for the latter has been purged of any sensible characteristics whatsoever. While art ("das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee" – the idea as it shines forth sensibly) and religion (truth in the form of *Vorstellung*) are vehicles for philosophical content, neither is adequate. When we express the rigorous truth of philosophy in language, we risk producing what seem like contradictions or even paradoxes (for instance, in the notorious claim that being and nothingness are one and the same) so long as we interpret what is being said from the perspective of *Vorstellung*. Only a consciousness that has ascended beyond the need for such images and metaphors – that has advanced, as he puts it in the *Phenomenology*, to the "infinite judgement" – can see the underlying truth being expressed therein. The combination of the profound and the shallow in the consciousness of *Vorstellung*, should be compared to the way in which nature combines the organ of generation with that of micturition:

> The infinite judgement as infinite would be the fulfilment of life that comprehends itself, but consciousness of it that remains in *Vorstellung* acts as pissing. [*Phenomenology*, Miller trans., p. 210]

Where Fichte is tormented by the need to adapt language to "force the reader to understand" [*Sonnenklarer Bericht an das größere Publikum über das eigentliche Wesen der neuesten Philosophie. Ein Versuch, die Leser zum Verstehen zu zwingen*

(1801)] and to form the "desired intuition", Hegel adopts a strategy in which consciousness is initiated into philosophical "*Wissenschaft*" so that it emancipates itself from the metaphors and analogies that hold it to the realm of *Vorstellung*.

V

I hope that I have shown that the *Darstellungsproblem* helps us to understand some of the more puzzling features of German Idealism: it is, for example, a part of the process by which the German Idealists were led to reject Kant's restrictive conception of the scope of objective experience. But if what could be *experienced* extended beyond the particularity of the senses, so too could what could be *known*. Hence we have part of the explanation for the apparent inversion of Kantian philosophy that took place in the twenty years after the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: the return to just that speculative terrain that Kant had dismissed as a "battlefield peculiarly suited for those who desire to exercise themselves in mock combats" (Bxv). But my claim was that the *Darstellungsproblem* leaves an important legacy to later philosophy. In my conclusion, I shall sketch very briefly two ways in which I think that that is true.

For the later German Idealists, to put it most simply, content that goes beyond the senses can be presented objectively because objective reality is not to be restricted in the way that Kant had supposed it must be in order to be knowable. But this was based on a metaphysics which, however much we may understand how highly intelligent and open-minded thinkers could have found it compelling in the context of contemporary developments in science, cannot now, surely, be sustained. So where does that leave the *Darstellungsproblem*?

Earlier in the paper, I said that the *Darstellungsproblem* did not appear to have been recognized or addressed by most of the philosophers in the analytical tradition. There are reasons for this. First, of course, naturalism is extremely prevalent among analytical philosophers and this leads to a desire to give an account of mental content compatible with the natural scientist's account of objective reality that is no less strong than (although, of course, different in content from) Hume's. Moreover, another feature of analytical philosophy, not the same as naturalism, although not incompatible with it, is what Dummett has called "the priority of language over thought" : the belief that language as a system of public rules sets limits to the thinkable, which Dummett claims to be the chief legacy of Fregeanism in philosophy [check ref.]. Thus Searle's "principle of expressibility", that "whatever can be meant can be said" [*Speech Acts*, p.20] simply stipulates the *Darstellungsproblem* out of existence. However, when I said "most" I did so deliberately with one important exception in mind: Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's approach to the *Darstellungsproblem* is instructive. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein, no less than Kant, tries to establish a parallel between the structure of our judgements and the structure of knowable reality. This sets the limits, not just of the *knowable* but also of the *sayable*. Now one way to respond to the *Darstellungsproblem* is to look for an alternative medium in which what can be thought but not said can be expressed. Ramsey famously once remarked that "what we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either" [Ramsey, 'General Propositions and Causality', in R.B. Braithwaite ed. *F.P. Ramsey: The Foundations of Mathematics* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1931), p.238] You might say that the German Idealists were trying to extend the sayable to include the whistleable. But Wittgenstein's response as I understand it is different: it is that there are things that

can be shown precisely if we *do not* try to say them. It is the response of Kierkegaard (and, before him, arguably, Jacobi) to the *Darstellungsproblem*: do not respond to the limits of reason by trying to extend it; accept only that there are things that lie outside reason's boundaries. In not attempting to say what cannot be said, there is no quarrel with the natural scientists' account of knowledge and objective reality; only with philosophers who try to extend scientific principles to give an exhaustive account of the nature of human thought. By a strict separation between what can be said and what can only be shown we can find a place not just for the apparently "meta-linguistic" propositions of logic but for features of value and meaning that point beyond the knowable world but that cannot be stated.

A response to the *Darstellungsproblem* that is closer to Ramsey's joke can be found in Heidegger. Like the German Idealists (indeed, if anything, more radically) Heidegger believes that an account of mental life that sees it as modelled on *Vorstellung* (Heidegger's near-equivalent term is "*Vorhandenheit*") seriously obscures the most significant features of human thought and consciousness. Unlike Hegel and Schelling, however, Heidegger's philosophy does not set out to challenge the knowledge-claims of the natural sciences by revising our conception of the domain of the knowable but, only, phenomenologically, to restrict the scope of such claims. Like Wittgenstein, his target is the scientifically-inspired philosopher who thinks that an account should be given of mental life that connects it back to our best scientific explanation of external reality, thus substituting, as he puts it, the "ontic" for the "ontological". His approach, however, is quite different. Where Wittgenstein aims to show what cannot be said by a strict, Kierkegaardian parsimony about direct saying, Heidegger appeals to the intrinsic expressive capacity of language to extend the sayable beyond what is merely designated. Our received language is saturated

with the misconceptions of *Vorhandenheit*. If he is to find a way of presenting his insights, Heidegger believes that he must forge a philosophical language that is, so far as possible, exempt from received prejudices: hence the language – rivalling even Hegel for obscurity – in which his philosophy is expressed. It is not the result of an abandonment of the search for philosophical rigour but of a particular understanding of what the need for rigour entails.

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