

The Imagination in Kant and Fichte, and Some Reflections on Heidegger's Interpretation

George J. Seidel

ABSTRACT The paper deals with the meaning of the transcendental imagination in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, comparing it with the productive imagination proposed by Fichte in his *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. It also presents Heidegger's views concerning both Kant and Fichte. Regarding Kant there is also a discussion of the difference between the first and second editions of the First Critique. It may be noted that Heidegger prefers the first edition to the second, since, in his view, the latter leads into German Idealism. In Fichte's philosophy the imagination plays a considerably larger role than it does in Kant. And Heidegger early on (in 1929) recognizes the importance of Fichte as a philosopher in its own right, and not just, as was customary in the period, a mere transitional figure between Kant and Hegel. The paper concludes with a critique of Heidegger's views regarding both Fichte and Kant. Though there is an addendum discussing the function of the imagination in the aesthetics of Kant (classicism), in that of Fichte (romanticism), and a brief comparison with Heidegger's own aesthetics.

KEYWORDS aesthetics; German philosophy; imagination; Kant, Immanuel; Fichte, Johann Gottlieb; Heidegger, Martin

In his *Philosophy of German Idealism*, first published in 1923, Nicolai Hartmann writes, "The theory of the productive imagination [in Fichte] may rightly be deemed the masterpiece of the *Wissenschaftslehre*."¹ In Fichte's thought this consists in taking the self as the true cause (*Realgrund*) of the self's being determined by the non-self. This does not mean

✉ George J. Seidel, St. Martin's University, 5000 Abbey Way SE, Lacey, Washington, USA ✉ gseidel@stmartin.edu

that the free consciousness, through the productive imagination, actually produces the world. What it produces is *knowledge* of its world, albeit unaware that it does so, in virtue of the (finite) self's positing of the absolute self, its infinite ideal. It is this positing of the infinite ideal self that gives rise to the non-selves that arise in op-position to the finite self's unending striving to attain its (essentially unattainable) ideal self.

On the other side, in his lectures on German Idealism from 1929, Heidegger, while acknowledging the importance of the productive imagination in Fichte as the basis for the swing (*Schweben*) between the activity and passivity of the self vis à vis the non-self and between the finite and the infinite self,² will later assert that Fichte did not really understand the meaning of the transcendental imagination in Kant and its role in the critical philosophy. In Heidegger's view the imagination cannot be understood, as Fichte understands it, as simply the soul's consciousness of beings (*Bewusstseiender Seele*).³

Obviously, Hartmann and Heidegger do not agree on Fichte, even though both are in the neo-Kantian tradition, more specifically in the Marburg school of Kant interpretation. Indeed, both were at Marburg at the same time. Though they did not particularly like each other, professionally or personally.⁴ Still, there may be a way of reconciling their divergent views on the meaning and role of the imagination in Fichte. From the experience of studying and restudying the tradition, one may conclude that as one philosopher reads another, the greater the philosopher the less historically accurate will be his treatment of his predecessors. In other words, the more original the philosopher the more likely he is to perform a "creative" misunderstanding of those that came before him. So here. Fichte's understanding of the role of the imagination out of Kant's First Critique is his own, even while he may insist that this is what Kant really meant to say. Later Hegel will carry out a creative misinterpretation of both Kant and Fichte. Likewise, Heidegger will subsequently develop a reinterpretation on all three.

In this paper I will be juggling three balls, maybe four: Kant's transcendental imagination, Fichte's productive imagination and Heidegger's

1. Nicolai Hartmann, *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960), 59.

2. Martin Heidegger, *Der deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart*, ed. Claudius von Strube, vol. 28 of *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997), 163. Hereafter *Gesamtausgabe* will be cited as GA, followed by the volume number and the page number.

3. *Ibid.*, 323.

reading of the two. Then, in an addendum to the piece, I will touch briefly on the role of the imagination in aesthetics, contrasting Kant's and Fichte's respective views, and still more briefly Heidegger's.

Kant's transcendental imagination, whether in the first and second editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, may best be described as vexed. In A (the first edition), the pure understanding mediates sense and apperception, bringing the manifold of sensible intuition into conjunction with the necessity of the pure apprehension, which is the ultimate condition for the possibility of objects of knowledge in general.⁵ And the means whereby the two are brought together is in and through the transcendental imagination. As Kant says in the first edition, in the production of the object of knowledge there is this spontaneity that is the ground of a three-fold synthesis, the necessary element (the categories) involved in the *apprehension* of representations as modifications of our mind (*Gemüt*) in and through intuition. But there is also its *reproduction* in the imagination. And finally, there is its *recognition* in the concepts (of the understanding). These three elements are the sources of our experience, making possible the constitution of an empirical object by the understanding (*KrV*, A 97). The product of the imagination is the transcendental schema, which is both intellective (in virtue of the a priori concepts of the understanding) and sensible (in virtue of the inner sense of time). It is through the unity of apperception relating to the sensory manifold with the concepts of the understanding (deriving from that unity), in and through the imagination, that representations come about (*KrV*, A 124). It is the pure imagination, a basic power of the human soul, that is the basis for all our *a priori* knowledge.

For Kant the understanding is essentially spontaneous in its activity. It is synthetic, or better, the syntheses are carried out by the imagination, with the exception of the understanding's synthesis of concepts (*KrV*, A 79, B 104–105). Some syntheses are conscious. It is possible for us to be aware of that spontaneous power of combination within ourselves. And this becomes the basis for self-identity in the second edition of the First Critique (*KrV*, B 133). The majority of syntheses are not, however, conscious; for the synthesis is only the effect produced by the imagina-

4. In the *Black Notebooks* Heidegger speaks of the two unfriendly brothers (Hartmann and himself) as understanding each other all too well. Martin Heidegger, *Anmerkungen I–V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)*, ed. Peter Trawny, GA 97 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2015), 242.

5. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Raymund Schmidt, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1956), A 124. Henceforth *KrV* with page numbers in the text.

tion, which Kant describes as a blind, but indispensable, function of the soul (*KrV*, A 78, B 103).

Kant was not particularly happy with the way he had presented the transcendental deduction, or perhaps better, the transcendental justification of the categories or concepts of the understanding, in the first edition. He recognized that his contemporaries had real problems following it. Thus, the argument is completely recast in the second edition of 1778.

In B (the second edition) the imagination is reproductive (the memory); it is subject to empirical laws (as with Hume's association of ideas); and it is likewise productive, since it is associated with the transcendental imagination, thereby providing a unity within a given sensory manifold, based ultimately upon the transcendental unity of apperception, the "I think" that must be able to accompany my any and every representation such that it might be called mine (*KrV*, B 132). It is through the unity of pure apperception that the schemata of sensibility and the schemata of the understanding are, for Kant, the same, the schemata being mediating principles between sensibility and understanding. Later, the inner sense of time will offer the possibility of self-knowledge, not as we are in ourselves, but as we appear to ourselves (*KrV*, B 152–3). This would presumably be the empirical ego, as distinguished from the transcendental ego. The latter could hardly be given within the space-time forms of sensible intuition.

Now I will grant that the above account glosses over the numerous problematic elements associated with the text of Kant's transcendental deduction and the role of the imagination, whether in A or B. Still, one must give Kant the benefit of the doubt, since it is never easy to say something in philosophy the first time it is said. Though what he might have meant to say may, or may not, become clearer when we later examine Heidegger's reading of Kant's First Critique.

Fichte's interpretation of the productive imagination, as distinct from Kant's transcendental imagination, is less vexed. The imagination for Fichte is the capacity or power that swings or oscillates in the middle between determination and indetermination, between the finite self and the finite non-self, between the finite and the infinite self (*SW*, 1:216).⁶ The self and the non-self do not determine each other immediately, but mediately (*mittelbar*) through the imagination (*SW*, 1:150). The action of the imagination, according to Fichte, grounds the possibility of our consciousness, our life,

6. The references (abbreviated as *SW*) in the text are to the volume and page numbers in the edition of *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämtliche Werke*, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte, 8 vols (Berlin: Verlag von Veit und Comp., 1845–1846).

our existence for ourselves (our consciousness), our existence as a self (*SW*, 1:227). The imagination looms large in Fichte. Indeed, the productive imagination produces reality, our world, unaware that it does so (*SW*, 1:233). The imagination in Fichte has a creative, or perhaps better, a constitutive function, rather than simply a coordinating function between sense and understanding, as it does in Kant. As the synthetic link between the opposites of infinite or absolute self—which, incidentally, has no consciousness—and the finite self (*SW*, 1:214), the finite self posits and holds the *Begriff* of the absolute self within its innermost self, not as somehow without or outside its-self (*SW*, 3:45). Even in the case of a societally shared ideal self, for example the ideal of freedom or equality, that ideal is within the self, or better, within selves. Still, while not itself conscious, the infinite self represents a definite and determinate ideal (*SW*, 1:264). There is a striving on the part of the finite self to attain the (admittedly unattainable) ideal self, so as to instantiate the infinite in the finite (*SW*, 1:214). The productive imagination is indeed productive in that it produces an object. The non-self is an object, in that it represents the product of the activity of the (productive) imagination, enabling me to see something (*Anschauung*, *SW*, 1:225). It is productive, again, because it is an out-going activity (*nach aussen gehende Tätigkeit*, *SW*, 1:230). There have to be these non-self obstacles, challenges, for the finite self in its unending pursuit of its ideal self so that (human) existence may have meaning. Clearly, the understanding in Fichte is not the same as it is for Kant. For Kant the understanding is the *a priori* structure for our knowledge of objects in general. For Fichte it is the vessel for what the imagination brings forth (*SW*, 1:239). Put simply, it is the difference between understanding as form and understanding as content.

We may not turn to Heidegger's reading of Kant and Fichte. His earliest publication on Kant is *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*,⁷ dating from 1929, and published two years after *Being and Time*, though containing material from lectures given earlier. This means that the issues taken up in the *Kantbuch* both feed into, and seep out of, Heidegger's *Being and Time*. They seep out of that work as one of the first projects Heidegger describes as the phenomenological destruction (*Destruktion*), or de-construction if one prefers, of the history of ontology.⁸ In the first place, one may note the adjective "phenomenological" in the above phrase, since in many respects Heidegger reads Kant's First Critique through the spectacles of

7. Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1951), henceforth *KM*, with page numbers in the text.

8. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, eighth edition (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1957), 39.

Husserlian phenomenology (cf. for example, *KM*, 70–71). There is a sizable literature surrounding Heidegger's *Kantbuch*, which I do not propose to enter into here.

Second, it may be noted that Heidegger prefers the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* over the second. He finds the treatment of the imagination in A better than that in B, because the first edition, in his view, stays closer to the innermost character of the problematic for grounding metaphysics.⁹ German Idealism, according to Heidegger, takes its cue from the second edition. This may, indeed, be the case with Hegel and Schelling, and the later Fichte, though it may be less the case with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794.

On Heidegger's reading, the transcendental imagination is at the root of the two stems (*Stämme*) of sensibility and understanding. They spring from the same root (*KM*, 40–41). Not surprisingly, he finds in Kant a tie-in with his own *Being and Time* when he notes that the stem which is the understanding is rooted in time (*KM*, 183). Thus, time, as the form of inner sense, becomes the way to understand being. The basis for metaphysics grows out of the ground of time (*KM*, 184). Heidegger gets around the problem of the Kantian dichotomy between phenomenon and noumenon by having being (which would be noumenal for Kant) appear in and through temporality. In the second edition, Heidegger maintains, Kant uproots the two stems in favor of the imagination as a third basic capacity alongside (*neben*) sensibility and understanding (*KM*, 147).

There are problems associated with Heidegger's reading of Kant. Appearances in Kant (phenomena) are not illusions but are themselves beings (*Seiende*), Heidegger insists. As beings they are thus things-in-themselves, as also appearances. As such, an object of experience is both a thing-in-itself, a representation relative to the same object (*KM*, 37), but also an appearance (*Erscheinung*, cf. *KrV*, B xxvii). For there is no appearance without something that appears. In other words, in Heidegger's view, being-as-it-appears is the being itself, that is, for *Dasein*.¹⁰ And being (*das Sein*)? Being is not a thing (*nicht ein Seiendes*). It is a nothing, a no-thing. According to its being (*Wesen*, "essence" taken verbally), it is the ultimate Correlatum: pure horizon (*KM*, 114). The dubious element in Heidegger's reading of Kant's *Critique* is his conflation of his own notion of being, as the being of beings, with Kant's object of the understanding.

9. "[D]eshalb bleibt die erste Auflage dem innersten Züge der Problematik einer Grundlegung der Metaphysik näher." *KM*, 179.

10. Cf. William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963), 14.

One historical reason for the divergence between Kant's views and Heidegger's reading of Kant has to do with the very different *points de départ* for the two. Kant's position comes out of his reaction to British empiricism—which, in the person of Hume, had so rudely awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumber—whereas the phenomenological part of Heidegger's ontology comes out of Husserl—note his understanding of being as pure horizon and as ultimate correlate.¹¹

In other words, Heidegger's difficulty here is not just with Kant but with his own philosophy. Thus, on the one hand, he faults Kant for his subjectivity, given the essentially *a priori* subject-derived character of the concepts of the understanding in Kant. Then at the same time, he wants to maintain the objectivity of the concepts of the understanding in Kant's transcendental deduction so he can conflate object with being. They really cannot be dovetailed so easily. There is a difference between Kant's *Gegenstand* and Heidegger's *Sein des Seienden*.

According to Heidegger's reading of Kant the pure imagination is at the center of the finite self (*KM*, 143). Referring to Kant (*KrV*, A 124), the Freiburg philosopher says that the transcendental imagination represents the basic capacity (*Grundvermögen*) of the soul; it is not an act. Fichte might well have gone along with the capacity aspect, though he would have insisted that it is an act, indeed a deed-act (*Tat-handlung*). Heidegger characterizes the schematism, the subsumption of sensible intuitions under a category, as the core (*Kernstück*) of the transcendental deduction. Indeed, as noted above, the schemata of sensibility and the schemata of the understanding are the same for Kant, though precisely how this comes about is, one might say, buried in the hiddenness of the transcendental subject. In his last years, Kant admitted that the schematism was the most difficult, albeit in his view, the most important point in the Critique (quoted in *KM*, 106, and n.). One can see this in his chapter on the schematism, where Kant considers time as the formal condition of the manifold of inner sense. It is at one with the category, an *apriori* rule, which constitutes its unity, and with appearance and every representation, as determined in and through the inner sense of time. The schematism mediates the subsumption of the appearances under the category (*KrV*, B 177–8, A 138–9).

As Heidegger reads Kant the transcendental imagination is simply spontaneous receptivity (*KM*, 142), with able assistance from the form that is the inner sense, namely time. It is no wonder that Heidegger prefers A

11. The ultimate correlate to consciousness in Husserl would be world. In Heidegger it would be *Dasein* and its temporality relative to *Sein*.

to B. But how does Heidegger get original time out of the transcendental imagination? And the answer he provides is, again, with the aid of Husserlian phenomenology. There are three empirical syntheses: intuitive apprehension (the present, now), the reproductive imagination (memory, the before), and recognition in concepts (anticipation, the future, *KM*, 142). In other words, Heidegger projects the protentions and retentions involved in the perceptions of conscious experience in Husserlian phenomenology onto Kant. Heidegger's approach to Kant's "metaphysics" is, indeed, phenomenological.

We may now turn to Heidegger's reading of Fichte. In his 1929 lectures on German Idealism (published in 1997), which came after the *Kantbuch*, Heidegger attempts to access the German idealists in the context of the neo-Kantian revival. The lectures concentrate especially on Fichte, whom he treats as a philosopher in his own right, and not just, as was customary at the time, as a mere transitional stage between Kant and Hegel.¹² Atypical of the philosophers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Heidegger maintains that the basic problem of philosophy is that of the possibility of metaphysics. In his view, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* was tied up with the self, thus with *Dasein* and being and time. This is of a piece with the view Heidegger had come to at the end of the *Kantbuch*. Being for Fichte is *Gesetzsein*, or as Heidegger would prefer, it is *Selbstsetzung*, since it is an activity (*Tat-Handlung*). So if "Sein Wesen ist sein Sein,"¹³ then in "essencing" myself (*Wesen*, again taken verbally) I make myself into what I would be. Again, *Selbstsetzung*, self-positing. Thus, Heidegger maintains that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is not epistemology but metaphysics, the metaphysics of *Dasein*, thereby "an indirect hermeneutic of facticity" (GA 28, 366). For Heidegger the *Wissenschaftslehre* represents foundationism, though not of the Cartesian sort. And the Absolute Self? Is it God or is it the ultimate condition for the possibility of knowledge? It is neither, Heidegger says (GA 28, 114). Rather, it is the task of its being (*Aufgabe seines Seins*, GA 28, 67) for the finite self. It is the can-be (*Sein-können*) of *Existenz*; it is not the freedom I am given, but the freedom to which I am given over (*aufgegeben*, GA 28, 112–3). For Fichte the task is infinite (in the sense that it is *un-end-lich*, un-ending); for Heidegger, on the other hand, it is infinitely open (*offen*, GA 28, 113). Fichte's third fundamental principle is a pre-emptive masterstroke (*Machtspruch*) of reason,

12. Cf. George J. Seidel, "Fichte and German Idealism: The Heideggerian Reading," *Ideological Studies* 28 (1998): 63–9, doi:10.5840/idstudies1998281/21.

13. Martin Heidegger, *Der deutsche Idealismus*, GA28, 67–8.

not, Heidegger insists, that of the individual philosopher. The German idealists took the first fundamental principle, the Absolute Self, rather than the third, which included the finite non-self. This meant that the Absolute took on the character of a non-self. The finite self (with its op-posed non-self) does not go up (*hinauf*) but down (*hinab*, GA 28, 124–125).¹⁴

My impression is that Heidegger's reading of Fichte's "metaphysics" labors under the same difficulty as his reading of Kant. For just as there is a difference between Kant's *Gegenstand* and Heidegger's *Sein*, so is there a difference between Fichte's *Gesetztsein*, posited being, and Heidegger's *Sein*. The latter is always the being of a being (*Sein des Seiendes*), which, at least in the case of *Dasein*, is always already a being-in-the-world. For both Kant and Fichte the mind creates its knowledge of the world. In Heidegger, on the other hand, the world is that to which *Dasein* (which is not just the knowing mind or consciousness) is given over (*Geworfenheit*).

Totally missing from Heidegger's treatment of Kant and Fichte is the moral dimension. There is no intimation of Kant's categorical imperative or of Fichte's moral idealism. In the end, one may say that when it came to the meaning and role of the imagination in Kant, Fichte had it right, concerned as he was to plumb the depths of human subjectivity. Thus, German idealism. Heidegger did not want to go there. In the first place, there is Heidegger's animadversion to the subjectivity of the modern era from Descartes onward. Secondly, he is blind to the ethical dimension of Fichte's philosophical enterprise.

As promised, I would like to conclude with a brief consideration of the meaning of the imagination in aesthetics for Kant and Fichte. Put simply, for Kant the self is always in control. The free-play of the creative imagination represents the possibility (the capacity, *Vermögen*) to present (*Darstellung*) aesthetic ideas, broadening out into art. But the artist always remains in control relative to what is produced, since, while the artist's imagination is free in its activity, it is always law-governed in respect of its accordance with the moral and the formal. It is *freie Gesetzmässigkeit*, as he says in the *Critique of Judgment*.¹⁵ It is formal in virtue of the forms (the concepts of the understanding), which, along with sensible intuitions, feed into the synthetic imagination where they are fit together. In other words, what we are dealing with here is classicism. Also, characteristic of aesthetic appreciation is that it is *ohne alles Interesse* (disinterested de-

14. Martin Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1947), 19.

15. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft und Schriften zur Naturphilosophie*, vol. 5 of *Werke in sechs Bände*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1957), 324.

light). One does not need to own the Dürer or the Cranach to appreciate their restrained beauty; one does not need to be married to Miss East Prussia to admire her comeliness.

In Fichte, on the other hand, the imagination is not only free but free-wheeling between self and non-self, between finite and infinite self. As he says in one of the series of letters dating from 1794 (*SW*, 8:290–291), the self and the non-self are joined through the marvelous capacity (*Vermögen*) of the productive imagination. The *Vorstellung*, reality for us, arises out of the productive imagination, which gives rise to our consciousness, our life, and our being for ourselves, all of which can come to our *Verstand* only through the imagination. Again, the imagination looms large, very large, in Fichte. He later identifies this with Spirit (*Geist*)—shades of the Hegel to come!¹⁶—and the development of our capacity to appreciate—it has our approval (*Billigung*) as an aesthetic object, while still *ohne alles Interesse*. Though one has the impression that this disinterested appreciation is less disinterested in Fichte. The romantic has a tendency to really get into his subject. This capacity of taste (*Geschmack*), this aesthetic drive (*ästhetischen Triebes*), this free creative capacity is Spirit; it judges the given that Spirit creates. One can have taste without spirit, Fichte says, but not Spirit without taste. Spirit broadens the sphere of taste through creative artistic production, opening up new frontiers (*eröffnen sich ihm neue Felder*), soaring aloft on its own wings (*Fellig*). Definitely romanticism!

Kant's aesthetic never departs from the moral and the formal. On the other hand, Fichte's transition from form and from a moral idealism to the aesthetic clearly does. In Fichte the concepts of the understanding and the categorical imperative have dropped out somewhere along the way.

Heidegger's aesthetic follows neither that of Kant nor that of Fichte, much less that of Hegel. Indeed, Heidegger's *Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* appears to lean more in the direction of Schelling and his brand of romanticism: the attempt to image the infinite in the finite as the Odyssey of Spirit.¹⁷

16. Hegel's *Vernunft*, while it may come out of, and include, Fichte's *Einbildungskraft*, encompasses a great deal more than the aesthetic. The meaning of Spirit in Hegel is significantly larger than the objective spirit that is art.

17. Cf. George J. Seidel, "Creativity in the Aesthetics of Schelling," *Idealistic Studies* 4, no. 2 (1974): 170–80, doi:10.5840/idstudies19744213. Special thanks to those members of the Northwest Conference on Philosophy who commented on the paper when it was given at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington on 15 October 2016; to the editors and readers of *Forum Philosophicum*; and to Prof. Eric Bugyis of the University of Washington (Tacoma) for helpful suggestions.

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