



BOOK REVIEW

Giovanni Pietro Basile and Ansgar Lyssy (eds.), *System and Freedom in Kant and Fichte*. New York: Routledge, 2022. Pp. xv + 232. ISBN 0367480585 (hbk) \$144.00

This collection of essays, a *Festschrift* in honour of Günter Zöllner, brings together eleven papers engaging with Zöllner's work, in particular with Zöllner's concern with the ideas of system and freedom in Kant and Fichte. The book's eleven chapters are divided into three parts. The first part, comprising four chapters, deals with the concept of system in Kant's Critical system. The second set of chapters looks at how Kant's drive to think systematically impacted his views on anthropology, philosophy of religion, and political philosophy. Part three is devoted to Fichte's reception of Kant's understanding of system and freedom. As my description of the pieces below demonstrates, this collection is highly useful to anyone interested in the ideas of both system and freedom in the thinking of Kant and Fichte, and in their interrelations.

Stephen Engstrom's piece on the identity of reason provides a foundation for the rest of the book. Its main goal is to identify the unity of practical and theoretical reason, illuminating Kant's insistence that 'there can be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in application' (G 4: 391). The essay makes two important claims: first, 'reason is first recognized in its theoretical use' (p. 12) and second, 'practical knowledge includes theoretical knowledge of its object' (p. 19). In order to develop these claims, Engstrom examines Kant's claim that 'the identity of the I of apperception in all consciousness is an identity of function' (A69). Such a function of unity makes possible not only the unity of different representations in a concept (through which diverse representations can be thought under one) but also 'the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition' (B105). This function is 'the highest point to which all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic, and after it, transcendental philosophy, must be attached' (B134n). It grounds the power of judgement and the ability to draw conclusions; all thinking depends upon this capacity to think many representations under one or to form concepts. Engstrom insightfully points out that the three powers, understanding, judgement, and reason 'are just moments of a single capacity to know, the understanding, distinguished by different grades of unity the latter can achieve' (p. 14).

This analysis forms the basis of Engstrom's understanding of the ground of systematicity in Kant's thought. The function of unification at the ground of the capacity to think is 'that of an activity, (*energeia*)' (p. 15), since in it many capabilities work simultaneously together. All true judgments must cohere with one another in that they must all be systematically relatable to the object in general = x and its relation to the temporal manifold. Furthermore, the unity of reason demands that we can think of this object as fully determinate in accordance with the laws of the understanding so that all judgments about the object = x, in general, must not only be

thought to cohere with one another but must also be thought to be interdependent. Reason's capacity to make universally valid judgments lies in its legislative capacity, namely the giving of universally valid principles through which the object *must* be thought.

This very same legislative function is at work for practical reason as well, only differently applied. Engstrom highlights the *theoretical* aspect of practical reason (p. 19). Practical reason's knowledge begins 'in a formal principle, a law of causality implicated in itself as efficacious' (p. 21). Practical knowledge is knowledge of the self's own action through law, and insofar as law is universally valid, this knowledge implicates all other practical agents as well. The law of the causality of the will thereby implies a community of persons. This is a difficult piece, but well worth studying carefully. Engstrom connects the function of the understanding with all activities of the knower, both theoretical and practical, for all practical activities themselves are based on a function of knowing.

Patricia Kitcher's piece 'Lichtenberg's "*Es denkt*" versus Kant's "*Ich denke*"', foregrounds questions that arise in an analysis of thinking. She takes up Günter Zöller's concern with Lichtenberg's aphorism (in Lichtenberg 1764-99/2012 K76) that '*It thinks*, we should say, just as one says, *it lightnings*' (cited in Zöller 1992: 417). While the saying was often interpreted as directed against Descartes, Zöller examined it against the backdrop of Kant's transcendental idealism. Lichtenberg's critique of the idea of the subject can be taken as directed against the identifiability of Kant's *I think* – the *I think* 'that must accompany all my representations' (B131). The difficulty pointed out by Lichtenberg is that since the self *must* make some contribution to how an object appears (for instance, through its capacities for being affected by the object in some particular way), it is extraordinarily difficult to separate the contributions of the self from the powers of the object. Given that cognition is a product of both, how can we draw a boundary line between dependent and independent representations? If this line cannot be drawn, there is no subject that thinks, but merely an act of thinking. The problem becomes yet more acute when we try to understand the ground of the identity between the self as the thinker of its thoughts and the self as its own object in self-consciousness – in other words, how we know that the self that is given in inner sense is the same self that thinks (p. 34).

Kitcher notes that Zöller rightly notes that Kant has the resources to answer Lichtenberg's first question. Cognition of objects implies a consciousness of thinking. This consciousness of thinking must be capable of recognising the identity of the function of thinking through different acts of thought. This means that the thinker must be able to distinguish between its function as self-identical thinker and the contents of the manifold coming to it from sensibility. Kitcher notes this takes care of one of Lichtenberg's problems. However, it does not take care of the second. The self-same identical function of thought required for both judgement and synthesis does not *individuate* the thinker since it functions identically in all cognizers such as ourselves. This is a function of synthesis according to laws. But only through individuation is it possible to speak meaningfully of the identity between the subject that thinks and the self as object of thought. Kitcher's solution to this dilemma is to point to the important passage at B134 where Kant notes that unification of representations in a self-consciousness presupposes the possibility of a synthesis of representations, that is, 'only because I can comprehend their manifold in a

consciousness do I call them all together my representations' (B134–5). This means that we cannot become aware of the identity of the act of synthesis without also becoming aware of the unity of what is thought, that is, the bringing together of a manifold of representations in a single consciousness. In other words, the act of synthesis cannot be grasped without also grasping the manifold that is synthesised. The contents of this manifold of sensibility will have a very particular – and individual character – and it is the product of this act of synthesis of *the manifold* that becomes the object of self-awareness in self-consciousness. This piece offers an ingenious solution to a significant problem in Kant interpretation.

In his piece 'Modal Concepts in Kant's Transcendental Discourse' Claude Piché explores the systematic character of Kant's modal theory, engaging Zöllner's 2017 piece '*Possibiliser l'expérience*'. Piché provides a close analysis of the difference between absolute necessity and absolute possibility. Something thought of as absolutely necessary is necessary in all contexts, without any conditions, and the same is true of absolute possibility. Finite beings such as ourselves not in possession of an intuitive intellect cannot meaningfully employ concepts such as absolute possibility or absolute necessity. For us, these concepts must remain conditioned ones: we can speak only of a hypothetical possibility and hypothetical necessity. The limitation of these concepts to the domain of possible experience is argued for from a higher, transcendental standpoint outside of experience, namely, one that seeks after the conditions of experience itself. The question then arises about the possible use of these modal concepts in transcendental discourse itself. Do restrictions for the use of modal categories also apply to their use in the description of the conditions of the possibility of experience, given that these conditions are determined from outside of experience? Piché argues that all modal categories must be considered as conditioned; the concepts of absolute possibility and absolute necessity cannot even be applied in transcendental discourse itself. The ultimate conditions for the possibility of experience are not unconditioned (p. 62). They are always themselves conditioned by two supreme principles, the forms of sensibility and transcendental apperception; beyond this, we cannot go. We cannot penetrate whether there is a 'common root' to the two powers of knowledge. Piché concludes that for Kant modal concepts acquire real meaning only when they are conditioned.

The fourth essay in this section, 'Can Practical Reason be Artificial?', moves to a more specific focus on Kant's practical philosophy. Dieter Schönecker looks at the functioning of artificial intelligence and asks whether it can be moral in Kant's sense. While various arguments are explored, Schönecker focuses on questions having to do with moral feeling. First, Schönecker argues that Kant is a moral intuitionist, 'someone who holds the view that we cognize the validity of the moral law [...] by means of a certain kind of self-evidence, by a feeling' (p. 76). Second, Schönecker looks at contemporary arguments concerning qualia, which can only be experienced from a first-person standpoint. The qualia experienced in mental states cannot be 'reduced to physical or functional facts'; the colours that I see or the emotions I feel are something over and above the brain and its function. Description of physical facts can never capture first-person experiences. They are a different animal altogether. Given the role that Schönecker attributes to feeling in Kantian moral agency, he concludes that computers cannot have practical reason. If computers cannot experience qualia, they cannot experience feeling, and so they 'cannot have practical

reason' (p. 77). Schönecker continues: 'For practical reason comes along with practical necessitation through the feeling of respect; the categorical imperative cannot be understood without this feeling' (p. 77). The success of this argument depends on reading Kant as an intuitionist, an interpretation that not all interpreters of Kant share. It can, for instance, be objected that a holy will necessarily acts in accordance with universal law but is not in need of feeling to understand it.

The second part of the book collects essays on Kant's religion, anthropology, and political theory, exploring how these relate to Kant's system as a whole. In his piece 'The Eye of True Philosophy', Robert Loudon looks at the relationship between Kant's systematic philosophy and his anthropology. He takes issue with interpreters such as Reinhart Brandt and Werner Stark who claim that for Kant, anthropology is not genuinely philosophical. Another position argued against is that of John Zammito, who makes anthropology subordinate to the critical philosophy. Loudon is more sympathetic to Zöllner, who holds that anthropology and philosophy have a 'mutually supplementary relationship' in Kant's corpus. Nevertheless, Loudon goes further than Zöllner, making the case that anthropology grounds Kant's philosophy, and that Kant considered it to give dignity and worth to philosophy. In her paper 'Kant *am Pregelflusse*', Susan Shell also takes up the issue of the relation between anthropology and the Critical philosophy and points out that this relation can only be properly understood when the fact that we are both observers *and* observed is taken into account. In this way, we can understand the role of the empirical element in anthropology and its relation to Kant's philosophy of the knowing subject.

Bernd Dörflinger's essay 'Kant's Philosophy of Religion—a Provocation to the Historical Religions' makes a strong case that *no* harmonisation is possible between Kant's rational religion and the historical religions of revelation. His position contrasts with that of authors such as Allen Wood, Lawrence Pasternack, and others (myself included) who have argued that while Kant's rational religion cannot be identified with historical religions, Kant held that positive religions had a rational core in accordance with which they could and should be interpreted. It is true that Kant roundly rejected many elements of worship practices, especially insofar as they instantiated a 'religion of roagation'. Nevertheless, Dörflinger makes too strong a claim when he argues that Kant had rejected positive religions and the role of revelation altogether: Kant is agnostic regarding whether a historical revelation is necessary to quicken the pure moral impulse since the true rationalist 'must hold himself within the limits of human insight' (6: 155). We are in no position to ascertain the dogmatic claim that revelation is impossible and unnecessary. The piece nevertheless puts forward important arguments that any scholar sympathetic to the view that Kant did not altogether reject the validity of positive religion must engage.

The last piece in this section is Paul Guyer's 'Hume and Kant on Utility, Freedom, and Justice'. Guyer compares Kant's account of justice, based on the innate right to freedom of every human being, with Hume's proto-utilitarian approach to the problems of political philosophy. For Hume, justice is valuable, and hence a virtue, because of its utility for the public interest, and because it promotes agreeableness. For Kant, on the other hand, the point of justice is to secure maximum freedom of action for all; right concerns only the form of action, and here there is no direct concern with happiness. Guyer concludes, however, that an in-depth comparison of both approaches reveals their normative differences are not too far apart from one

another. This is because while for Hume justice aims at happiness, this happiness is secured through freedom of action. Alternatively, for Kant, while justice aims at equal freedom, this equal freedom of action is aimed at what makes people happy.

The last section of the book is dedicated to Zöllner's work on Fichte and contains essays by Mario Ivaldo, Marina Bykova, and David James. In his piece 'Reading Fichte Today. The Prospect of a Transcendental Philosophy', Mario Ivaldo reflects on Zöllner's 'Thirty Theses on Transcendental Philosophy in Kant and Fichte', and asks whether there is a common transcendental project in Kant and Fichte. Ivaldo examines Zöllner's claim that in Kant transcendental philosophy is limited to theoretical philosophy and that practical philosophy employs a different method altogether. Fichte, on the other hand, integrates the transcendental method into a 'practical-theoretical basic science, a science of knowledge'. Here the ideas of freedom and the self-legislation of reason are systematically worked through in a 'critical theory of absolute knowledge' (p. 171). Importantly, since this science of knowledge aims to understand the genesis of the fact of consciousness, and consciousness stands at the basis of all human knowing and doing, it extends to both theoretical and practical reason. This science of knowledge aims to understand 'the being active of thought', through the practice of self-reflection, and hence is 'no lifeless structure of fixed concepts', but rather, 'a living organism of creative thinking' (p. 174).

Marina F. Bykova also examines Fichte's system in her penetrating essay 'Fichte's Original Presentation of the Foundational Principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*: the Question of Method'. Her discussion of Fichte's system proceeds through a comparison of his style of reasoning with that of Kant. Her analysis highlights two things. First, Fichte believed that philosophy can become a science only if it is derived from one single first principle. Second, Fichte's method is similar to that of Spinoza's appropriation of the geometric method (*modo geometrico*). It is employed as a descriptive construction of how the I performs itself (p. 185), namely, as an analysis of the original *Tathandlung* through which the I posits itself as an I. Bykova stresses the dialectical character of Fichte's synthetic method: synthesis is not simply a unity between two opposed principles, namely the I and the not-I, but rather this synthesis is achieved dialectically. The synthesis here employed is quite different from that of Kant's synthetic method, which descends from the conditions of experience and knowledge to what is conditioned.

Lastly, the volume concludes with an essay by David James on Fichte's political philosophy. James reconstructs Fichte's references to the idea of a universal monarchy in relation to the French Revolution. He asks whether Fichte provides an adequate transcendental account of the nature of territorial expansion, which he connects with the idea of a universal monarchy. Second, he looks at Fichte's account of how this tendency can be blocked. The expansionary tendency, according to Fichte, is associated with modern states and their engagement in international commerce. This conflict between states demonstrates the necessity of the commercial closure of each state. These issues are further analysed through a discussion of Fichte's theory of the drives; James argues that this theory explains why Fichte held expansionist tendencies are associated with a universal monarchy.

The book offers insightful contributions to the ideas of system and freedom in Kant and Fichte. Several of the essays deal specifically with Zöllner's work on these topics and respond to and critically develop several of his claims. The first set of essays in

particular provides in-depth analyses of fundamental claims grounding Kant's idea of system that any reader interested in the topic should consult. The latter two parts of the book are no less compelling. The book contains material that should be required reading for anyone interested in Kant's and Fichte's ideas of system and how they relate to their understandings of freedom.

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