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Spontaneity *before* the Critical Turn: The Spontaneity of the Mind in Crusius, the Pre-Critical Kant, and Tetens

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ABSTRACT The introduction of a spontaneity proper to the understanding in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is often thought to be one of the central innovations of Kant's Critical philosophy. Yet a number of thinkers within the eighteenth-century German tradition in the time before the *KrV* had already developed a robust conception of the spontaneity of the mind. In this paper, I consider three influential accounts of the spontaneity of the mind—those of Crusius, the pre-Critical Kant, and Tetens—which, while distinct, nonetheless relate to and explicitly draw upon one another in important ways, forming the interconnected and, thus far, largely overlooked pre-Critical context for Kant's discussion of the spontaneity of the understanding.

KEYWORDS Kant, Crusius, Tetens, spontaneity, understanding, principles

KANT'S INTRODUCTION IN THE *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*KrV*) of a spontaneity proper to the understanding is often thought to be one of the central innovations of his Critical philosophy. In contrast with previous accounts of cognition, which had emphasized the mind's passive reception of the data of the senses, and which accordingly minimized the role of any activity on the part of the cognitive subject, Kant identifies the understanding as "the faculty for bringing forth representations itself, or [as] the spontaneity of cognition" (A51/B75). Indeed, the cognitive

*In what follows, translations from the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* follow *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and translations of the pre-Critical works are taken from *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–70*, edited and translated by D. Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). As is conventional, citations from the *KrV* refer to the pagination in the first "A" edition and, where appropriate, to the second, "B" edition, while other citations to Kant's works refer to the volume and page number in the "Akademie Ausgabe" (AA) of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, *et. al.*, 1900–). Unless indicated otherwise, all other translations are my own.

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subject itself comes to be characterized in terms of its spontaneous activity in bringing synthetic unity to a manifold as the *I think* is labelled "an act of *spontaneity*, i.e., it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility" (B132).[1] This distinctive emphasis on the spontaneity of the understanding, and its connection with core Critical doctrines, is accordingly taken by many commentators to distinguish Kant's mature philosophy from the antecedent tradition and to inaugurate a radically new understanding of the subject and of the nature of its role in cognition. As Robert Pippin observes, "For Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, it was Kant's characterization of the subject as 'spontaneously' apperceptive that, more than anything else, convinced them that Kant had not simply destroyed the classical metaphysical tradition, but had begun a new kind of 'philosophy of subjectivity.'"[2]

However, this unqualified identification of Kant's ascription of a spontaneity to the understanding as a distinctively Critical innovation fails to do justice to the views on the mind of Kant's immediate predecessors. In fact, a number of thinkers within the eighteenth-century German tradition in the time before the *KrV* (including the pre-Critical Kant himself) had already developed a robust conception of the spontaneity of the mind,[3] a conception which in many respects lays the groundwork for Kant's later, rather more influential account. In order to illustrate this, the following is divided into three sections. In the first section, I present Christian August Crusius's trailblazing account of the spontaneity of the mind, which, while largely unacknowledged in the secondary literature, nonetheless represents the first such account in the period and, indeed, a common point of departure for subsequent discussions. In the second section, I turn to a consideration of a number of Kant's own pre-Critical works, and show that in, for instance, the *Nova dilucidatio* and Inaugural Dissertation, Kant does offer an account of the spontaneity of the cognitive faculties, albeit one that differs in numerous significant respects from his mature Critical doctrine. In the third and final section, I consider Johann Nicolaus Tetens's complex account of

[1] For discussions that emphasize the centrality of spontaneity (albeit in different ways) for Kant's conception of the cognitive subject, see Sellars, ". . . This I or He or It (the Thing) which Thinks . . ."; Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy*; Carl, "Apperception and Spontaneity"; and McBay Merritt, "Reflection, Enlightenment, and the Significance of Spontaneity in Kant."

[2] Pippin, "Kant and the Spontaneity of Mind," 451–52. Compare also Terry Pinkard, who writes that "[a]fter Kant, it seemed that we could no longer explain our powers of thought in terms of a set of natural dispositions or in terms of their fulfilling some metaphysical potentiality for their own perfection" (*German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism*, 44); Stephen Engstrom, who is quite explicit in tying the spontaneity of the understanding to "Kant's Copernican way of thinking" (see his "Understanding and Sensibility," 7); and Predrag Cicovacki, who claims that "Kant's revolutionary turn consisted in ascribing the production of . . . synthetic unity to the spontaneous activity of the cognizing mind" ("Kant's Debt to Leibniz," 87).

[3] Throughout the following I will sometimes refer quite generally to the "spontaneity of the mind." It should be noted that this is not intended to imply that the figures discussed took the mind to be spontaneous in the exercise of *all* of its faculties, since that is clearly not the case. Nonetheless, it would be too narrow and even occasionally misleading to refer simply to the 'spontaneity of the understanding': not only do the figures discussed claim that faculties other than the understanding (such as the imagination) can also be spontaneous but, in addition, the understanding itself is conceived differently by, for instance, Crusius (for whom, as we will see, it is identified with the sum-total of cognitive powers), than it is for Kant (for whom it is identified only with the *higher* cognitive power).

the spontaneous powers of the soul in the *Philosophische Versuche* of 1777, which likewise sets out from Crusius's discussion, though, as I show, Tetens also takes up important issues raised in Kant's Dissertation (but which are left unaddressed by Kant), and in so doing, he develops an account of the spontaneity of the mind that anticipates key components of Kant's later views on the topic. In this way, I will show that these three distinct accounts of the spontaneity of the mind nonetheless relate to and explicitly draw upon one another in important ways, and constitute the interconnected and (thus far) overlooked eighteenth-century background to Kant's discussion of the spontaneity of the understanding in the *KrV*.

1. CRUSIUS ON THE SPONTANEITY OF THE UNDERSTANDING

That thinkers in the eighteenth-century German tradition should become interested in the nature and extent of the spontaneity of the mind has its apparent source in Leibniz's treatment in the *Théodicée* of 1710. There, in the course of presenting his account of free actions, Leibniz explicitly takes as his point of departure Aristotle's discussion of "voluntary action [*hekousion*]" in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (as opposed to his discussion of "spontaneous [*automaton*] generation" in, for instance, the *Physics*), claiming that Aristotle mentioned "two conditions of freedom . . . , that is, *spontaneity* and *intelligence*."[4] As will be familiar, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle characterizes an agent's actions as voluntary when "he has within him the origin [*arche*] of the movement of the limbs that are the instruments" of the action.[5] Following Aristotle, then, Leibniz asserts that *spontaneum est cuius principium est in agente*,[6] which is to say that that action is spontaneous which has its source or beginning in the agent, where this applies most obviously in the case of an action that we will, rather than one that is merely the result of determination by external influences. Departing from Aristotle, however, Leibniz does not limit the attribution of spontaneity to actions on the part of the will. The reason for this lies in Leibniz's metaphysics, and particularly his system of pre-established harmony, in accordance with which every occurrence in a substance can only have its ground in the nature of its subject rather than in the natural influence of other substances.[7] Accordingly, Leibniz claims that *every* occurrence in a substance, including those that have nothing to do with the will and even those with respect to which we are typically viewed as passive, can be counted as spontaneous or as having its source within the subject: "more profound meditation shows us that all (*even perception and passions*) comes to us from our own inner being with complete spontaneity."[8] Thus, even if the spontaneity of the soul's perceptions and thoughts is not distinguished, in its nature or its effects, from the spontaneity of the soul's

[4] *Theodicy*, §302.

[5] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a15–17.

[6] *Theodicy*, §301.

[7] *Theodicy*, §291. For a useful discussion of some challenges this doctrine poses for Leibniz's specific attribution of a spontaneity to the will, see Rutherford, "Leibniz on Spontaneity."

[8] *Theodicy*, §296, my emphasis.

other acts, Leibniz nonetheless allows that the sphere of spontaneous activity extends beyond voluntary actions to include properly cognitive states of the monad.

Leibniz might thus be taken to open the way for a more detailed investigation of the spontaneity of the mind, yet his most prominent German defenders do not take up the challenge. Christian Wolff, for instance, stops short of his predecessor's attribution of spontaneity to the operations of a substance as such and instead returns to its original application to the will. As Wolff indicates, he adopts the German '*Willkühr*' in place of the Latin '*spontaneum*' in his *Deutsche Metaphysik*,[9] and in a later commentary on this work he affirms his essential agreement with that account of freedom found in the "Aristotelian philosophy."[10] By contrast, Alexander Baumgarten, being by most accounts the more orthodox Leibnizian, returns to Leibniz's position in the *Théodicée* and identifies *all* actions and passions, insofar as they depend on a sufficient reason internal to the acting thing, as spontaneous in the strict sense of the term,[11] and accordingly Baumgarten explicitly distinguishes spontaneity (*spontaneitas*) from *Willkühr* (Latin: *arbitrium*).[12] Despite this, however, Baumgarten still only treats spontaneity in the context of a discussion of the (higher) appetitive faculty as a preliminary to his discussion of freedom, without also considering how it might apply specifically to the cognitive faculty.[13] Similarly, Crusius, while he was no defender of Leibniz on this score, also initially takes up spontaneity only in its (putative) connection to acts of the will in his *Anweisung vernünftig zu leben* (*Guidance for Living Rationally* [1744]). So, after defining freedom as "a power of determining itself to an action without being determined to it through something else, either internal or external to us,"[14] Crusius contrasts this with the Leibnizian view in accordance with which an acting substance is determined to its actions "by its own representations and desires," which determination is called "*Spontaneität*" or equivalently "*geistige Selbstthätigkeit*," where Crusius employs Baumgarten's preferred German rendering for *spontaneitas* ('*Selbstthätigkeit*').[15]

Wolff vs Baumgarten

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[9]The most detailed account of the debate over the identification of spontaneity and *Willkühr* in this period is presented by Katsuoshi Kawamura in *Spontaneität und Willkür: Der Freiheitsbegriff in Kants Antinomienlehre und seine historischen Wurzeln*.

[10]*Anmerckungen zur Deutschen Metaphysik*, §163 (note that this is the second section in that edition labelled '§163' though it occurs immediately *after* §164). See also *Deutsche Metaphysik*, §519.

[11]*Metaphysica*, §704.

[12]*Metaphysica*, §712. In doing so, Baumgarten is following the lead of Friedrich Wagner, as has been documented by Kawamura (see *Spontaneität*, 47–49).

[13]It might be noted that, inasmuch as the appetitive faculty follows the higher cognitive faculty (cf. *Metaphysica*, §689), there is an available basis for extending Baumgarten's treatment of spontaneity in this direction, though obviously Baumgarten does not do so himself.

[14]*Anweisung*, §39.

[15]Baumgarten presents '*eine selbstthätige Handlung*' as the German equivalent of '*actio spontanea*' in *Metaphysica* §704, though in this he is likely following Friedrich Wagner, as has been argued by Kawamura (*Spontaneität*, 48–49). It is not clear whether Crusius was influenced in this directly by Wagner (or Baumgarten), though, as Marco Sgarbi notes, there are some continuities between their treatments of the spontaneity of the will; see Sgarbi, *Kant on Spontaneity*, 26. Kawamura points out that in volume 39 of Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* (which appeared in 1744), there is an entry for "Spontaneität oder Selbstthätigkeit," with reference to Wagner's treatment (Kawamura, *Spontaneität*, 80–81). While it is unlikely that this could have been the source for Crusius's use of the term (since the *Anweisung* was published in 1744), it does suggest that Wagner's rendering was more widely known and accepted.

influence as to the use of 'Selbstätigkeit'

Crusius continues to reject the Leibnizian-Wolffian treatment of the will in his subsequent textbook on metaphysics, the *Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten* (*Sketch of the Necessary Truths of Reason* [1745]), though he no longer frames his view in terms of an alternative to the reduction of freedom to mere spontaneity. In fact, Crusius now incorporates the notion of spontaneity into his ontology, taking it to pertain more generally to the fundamental actions on the part of substances, including the fundamental powers of the will and the understanding in particular. Beginning with chapter 5 (entitled "On Effective Causes"), Crusius begins with a consideration of power (*Kraft*), by which he understands a property connected to some substance through which something else is made possible,[16] and he contrasts two types of powers: the "ineffective capacity of existential grounds [*das unwircksame Vermögen eines Existential-Gründes*]" and "active power [*thätige Kraft*]."[17] By the former is understood the capability of a thing to bring forth some effect in virtue of an inessential property that thing possesses (such as figure or position), whereas the latter brings about its effect through "*an internal property of its essence, which is at that moment directed to the production of this effect.*"[18] Crusius next considers the *action* of a power, or that state of the power through which it can bring forth a given effect.[19] In some cases, these actions, while immediately grounded on a property internal to the substance performing it, will nonetheless depend upon the action of a further (finite) substance for its activity.[20] Since Crusius denies that there can be an infinite series of such actions (on pain of rendering all action impossible), he claims that there must be what he calls "fundamental actions [*Grund-Thätigkeiten, actiones primae*]," or actions that do not depend on any further, external cause for them to bring about their effect.[21]

Crusius proceeds to introduce a number of distinctions between types of fundamental actions, distinguishing between, first, those fundamental actions that happen constantly and those that do not.[22] Regarding those fundamental actions that happen constantly, Crusius claims that they require no further cause to operate other than the endurance of the essence of the acting substance itself: in the case of a necessary substance, such as God, such an activity will "endure eternally [*beständig fortdauern*]," whereas in the case of contingent substances, like matter, all that is required for the operation of "the active powers of the elements" is their preservation by God.[23]

Not all fundamental actions constantly occur, however, as some depend upon specific circumstances obtaining for their operation, and so Crusius introduces a further distinction:

> Of the fundamental activities, or *actionibus primis, which do not constantly occur*, we can conceive of *two classes*. First, namely, those which must occur under certain

[16] *Entwurf*, §63.

[17] *Entwurf*, §79.

[18] Crusius, *Entwurf*, §79.

[19] See *Entwurf*, §64 and *Anweisung*, §41: *[Z]wischen der Wirkung und der wirckenden Ursache die Action oder Thätigkeit darzwischen seyn muss.*

[20] Crusius, *Entwurf*, §81.

[21] *Entwurf*, §81.

[22] *Entwurf*, §81.

[23] *Entwurf*, §81.

> circumstances to which they are bound as their conditions, such that when these [conditions] are posited, these [actions] cannot fail to take place. . . . Further, those which are rendered no more than possible through the requisite conditions and therefore which can take place, or be left undone, or be otherwise directed, when these same [conditions] are met.[24]

Accordingly, among fundamental actions that do not constantly occur, Crusius further distinguishes between those fundamental actions that *must* occur under certain circumstances, or actions that occur unfailingly when the appropriate circumstances arise, and those fundamental actions that may or may not occur under given circumstances.[25] Put differently, fundamental actions of the former sort *necessarily* occur when appropriate conditions are satisfied, whereas those in the latter group are only rendered *possible* by such conditions. Crusius names fundamental activities of this latter sort "fundamental actions of freedom [*Grundthätigkeiten der Freyheit, actiones primas liberas*]," [26] and thinking, as a fundamental action of the understanding, is identified as an activity of the former sort.[27]

Crusius on all action as spontaneous

Significantly, in spite of distinguishing between types of fundamental actions, Crusius identifies *all* such actions as spontaneous. This is on account of the fact that these actions do not have their ground in any external effective cause but have their ground solely in the essence of the substance, or of a fundamental power of the substance, that performs them.[28] As Crusius writes, it is because "*the cause is effective by means of an internal property of its essence, which is at that moment directed to the production of this effect*" in such an action that a genuine activity (*Activität*) or "spontaneity [*Selbstthätigkeit*]," can be attributed to it.[29] Yet, while it might be clear how the initial sort of fundamental actions—those that constantly occur—can be taken to proceed directly from the essence of their respective substances and thus count as spontaneous, the same is not obvious in the case of those activities that are conditioned by external circumstances. As Crusius will point out, however, the fundamental actions of the understanding and will are not, strictly speaking, *caused by* some external power or activity, but rather the requisite external circumstances only provide the *occasion* under which the fundamental powers can effectively cause the activity:

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[24] *Entwurf*, §82.

[25] *Entwurf*, §82.

[26] *Entwurf*, §83 (1). (Note that two sections are numbered '83' in *Entwurf*—I will indicate whether I am referring to the first or second so-numbered passage in parentheses after the section number.)

[27] See *Anweisung*, §41; *Entwurf*, §79, where Crusius identifies *die thätige Kraft der Elemente, das Dencken und Wollen* as corresponding to these three sorts of fundamental activities; *Entwurf*, §81, where Crusius identifies *die actionen des menschlichen Willens und Verstand* as *Grundthätigkeiten* . . . welche nicht beständig geschehen; and *Entwurf*, §83 (2): *Die ersten gedancken der Seelen sind Grundthätigkeiten, aber sie sind an gewisse Bedingungen gebunden, bey deren Daseyn sie entstehen oder lebhaft werden. Die Thätigkeit der . . . Freyheit gehöret auch unter die Grundthätigkeiten. Sie werden aber allererst durch das Daseyn der darzu gehörigen Gedancken möglich.*

[28] See *Entwurf*, §81, where Crusius claims that these actions *aus der Kraft der Subjecte nicht vermittelst einen andern Action, sondern unmittelbar entspringen und nichts anders als die Anwendung der ersten Grundkräfte selbst sind.*

[29] *Entwurf*, §79; see also *Anweisung*, §41: *[V]or welchen [Grundthätigkeiten] nicht wiederum eine andere Thätigkeit einer wirckenden Ursache vorhergehen muss, sondern welche unmittelbar aus dem Wesen einer thätigen Grundkraft selbst entspringen.*

> *[N]o change in a thing is to be counted among the* actiones primas *that is, and insofar as it is, caused by something external.* What is at issue though [in the case of fundamental activities that depend on external circumstances is] that a change of state that originates externally is a condition under which an active fundamental power can or must begin to be effective. Yet, to that extent, it is not produced [*hervorgebracht*] through the external cause, but rather only made possible or occasioned [*veranlasset*] [by it].[30]

Despite depending on external circumstances for their operation, such as the presence of desires from which to choose or of some object to which to direct our thought,[31] *both* fundamental actions of freedom *and* the fundamental actions of the understanding remain immediately grounded solely in the essence of their respective fundamental powers, and so are also appropriately identified as spontaneous.

Even so, the fundamental actions of the will and understanding are grounded in the essence of their respective powers in rather different ways. In the case of the former, the will serves merely as the sufficient cause of such an action, whereas in the case of the fundamental actions of the understanding, the understanding is *also* the determining ground of those actions. Crusius claims, in apparent agreement with Leibniz and Wolff, that *all* actions can be understood to have a "sufficient cause [*zureichende Ursache*]" for their activity, including the appropriate circumstances arising and the presence of thoughts to serve as objects,[32] yet Crusius takes this to fall short of what Leibniz and Wolff intended in their principle of sufficient reason, namely, that every occurrence has a cause or ground why it is so *and not otherwise*.[33] In the case of a fundamental free action, it does find a sufficient cause in the will inasmuch as "nothing is lacking [in the will] which is required for causality and that it is through the power of the same that [the effect] must receive its actuality."[34] However, that the free action is caused by the will in this way does not exclude the possibility of other actions having taken place, since the essence of the will, as free, is taken to consist simply in the power to "choose one among our various desires upon which to act or with which to join its activity."[35] Accordingly, the free act of the will lacks a "determining ground [*determinirender Grund*]"[36] since the sufficient cause, or the essence of the will, falls short of determining that activity such that it excludes the possibility of something else having taken place.[37] It is for this reason, then, that fundamental actions of freedom are such that, even given the appropriate circumstances, they merely *can* take place or be

Crusius on free action and the will

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[30] *Entwurf*, §83 (2).

[31] See Crusius, *Anweisung*, §42: *Die Freyheit ist demnach eine Kraft, welche nur unter unsern vielen Begierden eine wehlen kan, nach welcher sie handeln oder mit welcher sie ihre Thätigkeit verknüpfen will*; and Crusius, *Entwurf*, §82.

[32] See *Entwurf*, §82, where Crusius refers to *die Empfindungen* and *die ersten Regungen der Begierden* as such conditions.

[33] *Entwurf*, §84.

[34] Crusius, *Entwurf*, §84. See also Benden, *Christian August Crusius: Wille und Verstand als Prinzipien des Handelns*, 74–76 and 121–22.

[35] Crusius, *Anweisung*, §43.

[36] Crusius, *Entwurf*, §84.

[37] For more detail on Crusius's criticism on this point, see Heimsoeth, *Metaphysik und Kritik bei Chr. A. Crusius. Ein Beitrag zur ontologischen Vorgeschichte der Kritik der reinen Vernunft im 18. Jahrhundert*, 175–76.

omitted by the agent. Yet, fundamental free actions constitute the sole exception to the principle of determining ground, as for all other actions it will be the case that the positing of a sufficient cause will imply that the action or effect could not have been omitted or have occurred otherwise.[38]

This also holds for the fundamental actions of the understanding, which, insofar as they have a sufficient cause in the essence of the understanding itself, are thereby also *determined* by the essence of that power in such a way that they could not have occurred otherwise, which necessitation Crusius nonetheless takes to be entirely consistent with their spontaneous character. Crusius here takes the understanding in the wide sense, that is, as the sum-total of fundamental powers devoted to representation,[39] among which are included sensation, memory, as well as what he refers to as the understanding in the narrow sense (which includes inner sensation, judgment, and the power of forming ideas or concepts),[40] where these diverse powers nonetheless share a common essence, identified as the "essence of the understanding [*Wesen des Verstandes*]." According to Crusius, the essence of the understanding is constituted by principles that serve as "the laws of the cognition of truth [which] must be unchangeable and therefore independent from the will of creatures."[41] These laws or principles govern what can and cannot be represented as possible (by the finite mind), which is to say, what can and cannot be thought. Crusius naturally counts among these principles the principle of contradiction (*der Satz vom Widerspruch*),[42] yet he does not think that this exhausts the essence of the understanding, a point that he contrasts with Wolff's identification of the principle of contradiction as the sole, sufficient criterion through which we can cognize what is possible or impossible. Rather, Crusius claims that we must also regard as impossible that which involves the separation of representations that cannot be thought in separation from one another, as well as that which involves a combination of representations that cannot be thought along with one another (where neither violates the principle of contradiction).[43] This yields two further principles, which Crusius dubs "the principle of the inseparable [*Grundsatz des nicht zu trennenden, principium inseparabilium*]" and "the principle of the incombinable [*Grundsatz des nicht zu verbindenden, principium inconiungibilium*]," respectively,[44] which are set alongside the principle of contradiction as the "three highest principles of reason."[45]

Crusius on the essence of the understanding

[38]Crusius, *Entwurf*, §84: [A]lle Grundthätigkeiten, welche aber nicht Grundthätigkeiten der Freyheit sind, *vermöge derer ausserhalb ihnen zugleich gesetzten Wahrheiten oder Bedingungen nicht anders seyn oder entstehen können als also, wie sie sind oder entstehen.*

[39]See *Weg zur Gewissheit*, §62–64.

[40]*Weg zur Gewissheit*, §106.

[41]*Entwurf*, §454.

[42]*Entwurf*, §13.

[43]As an example of inseparability of representations, Crusius later mentions the thought of the existence of something and the inseparable representation of that thing in space: *Nun wird iedweden die innerliche Erfahrung lehren, daß es ihm unmöglich sey, etwas als* existirend *zu denken, und doch nicht* irgendwo *zu dencken* (*Entwurf*, §50).

[44]*Entwurf*, §14.

[45]*Entwurf*, §15.

fundamental action

What it means, then, for an action on the part of the understanding to be a fundamental action, and consequently spontaneous, is that it has its determining ground wholly in the principles that constitute the essence of that power. As Crusius elaborates elsewhere, in fundamental actions of the understanding, a given arrangement of concepts (*Einrichtung der Begriffe*) follows

> according to the essence of the understanding, namely, inasmuch as that is taken together . . . which we are necessitated to think as combined in just such a way that the concept of the one vanishes, or our entire nature is set against itself, when we leave out the other concept and seek to deny it while positing the first.[46]

Thus, in the spontaneous actions of the understanding, "the understanding is not free but operates necessarily,"[47] namely, its fundamental actions combine or separate concepts in the ways necessitated by the essence of the understanding rather than merely "arbitrarily [*willkührlich*]."[48] Indeed, consistent with his broad conception of the understanding as the sum-total of all cognitive powers, Crusius is quite explicit in claiming that even the ideas that arise immediately through external *sensation* are governed by the principles of the inseparable and the incombinable such that, for instance, when we are granted a clear sensation, we are "constrained [*gezwungen*] to think [an external object] as existing and present."[49] Accordingly, acts of sensation are, like acts involving comparison of concepts, also taken to be necessitated by the laws of the mind, when appropriate external circumstances are present, and so are also counted as spontaneous. For Crusius, then, the spontaneity of the understanding, in all of its functions, involves the determination of its actions through the principles that constitute its essence, and as such he takes the *necessitation* of those actions of the understanding as completely consistent with their properly spontaneous character.

Crusius's central contributions

Thus, in spite of his account being uniformly overlooked in the secondary literature,[50] Crusius is the first in the German tradition to offer a focused treatment of the spontaneity of the cognitive faculty that clearly distinguishes the spontaneity of the understanding from that of the will. Moreover, and unsurprisingly, a number of innovations that would prove important for successive accounts can be traced

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[46] *Weg zur Gewissheit*, §259. In that section Crusius also considers as an example of such an arrangement of concepts *wenn wir die Begriffe also* trennen . . . *wie uns das Wesen unseres Verstandes dieselben zu trennen nöthiget.*

[47] Crusius, *Entwurf*, §454.

[48] Crusius, *Weg zur Gewissheit*, §259. Crusius accordingly distinguishes between "pure or unmixed" and "mixed" effects of the understanding (cf. *Weg zur Gewissheit*, §109), where this distinction turns on whether or not the will is involved in bringing about the effect. Pure effects are those which are brought about by the understanding itself (and so express combinations of concepts necessitated by the understanding) whereas mixed effects are directed by the will and, given its freedom, need not be constrained by the rules of what can be thought (*Weg zur Gewissheit*, §112).

[49] *Weg zur Gewissheit*, §257. See also *Entwurf*, §16, and *Weg zur Gewissheit*, §259 where Crusius characterizes arrangements of representations that are "taken together in the way in which they are represented as combined in *sensations* [*dasjenige zusammen genommen wird, was uns die Empfindungen als verbunden vorstellen*]" as likewise proceeding in accordance with the essence of the understanding.

[50] So, this attribution of a spontaneity to the fundamental actions of the understanding is overlooked by the two currently most extensive treatments of spontaneity, as both Kawamura and Sgarbi only consider Crusius's treatment of spontaneity in the context of willing; see Kawamura, *Spontaneität*, 61–65; and Sgarbi, *Kant on Spontaneity*, 26.

back to Crusius. For instance, it is Crusius who introduces the distinction (without presenting it as such) between what will later be called "absolute spontaneity" (*spontaneitas absoluta*), or a spontaneous action which is not conditioned by any circumstances (in Crusius's case, the spontaneous activity of God or the elements of matter), and "relative spontaneity" (*spontaneitas secundum quid*), or that spontaneity that is dependent upon appropriate external conditions. However, Crusius's identification of *both* the spontaneity of the understanding *and* that of the will as a relative spontaneity contrasts with, for instance, Kant's subsequent deployment of this distinction.[51] In addition, while Crusius can be seen to accept Leibniz's formulation in the *Théodicée* that *spontaneum est cuius principium est in agente*, in the case of the fundamental actions of the understanding those acts are not only spontaneous inasmuch as they merely have their *beginning* in the agent but also, and significantly, inasmuch as they are necessitated by certain (discursively articulated) *principles* internal to the agent, namely, those that are taken to constitute the essence of the understanding. As we will see, this rather more robust conception of the spontaneity of the understanding as consisting not merely in an activity on the part of a substance, but in one that is strictly determined and governed by principles internal to it, provides a foundation upon which both the pre-Critical Kant and Tetens would proceed to formulate their own accounts of the spontaneity of the understanding.

2. THE PRE-CRITICAL KANT ON THE SPONTANEITY OF THE MIND

The foregoing serves to illuminate Kant's own account of the spontaneity of the mind in the pre-Critical period, which is evidently formulated through direct engagement with Crusius's trailblazing account. Indeed, *that* Kant already accepts the spontaneity of the cognitive powers in his pre-Critical texts is not well-known given that the identification of a spontaneous cognitive faculty is frequently taken to be the hallmark of Kant's Critical conception of the cognitive subject. Yet, as I will document in this section, a look at a number of Kant's texts in this period makes clear that he does extend spontaneity to the cognitive powers well before the *KrV*, and that his account of spontaneity undergoes significant development in this period. Even so, Kant's pre-Critical conception of the spontaneity of the understanding remains some distance from his properly Critical account, in accordance with which he clearly distinguishes the understanding's spontaneity from the passivity of sensibility.

Beginning with the *Nova dilucidatio* of 1755, Kant indicates that, in spite of a number of differences, he follows Crusius in his ascription of spontaneity to the mind and in his conception of that spontaneity as an action determined by principles of our cognition. In the *Nova dilucidatio*, Kant attacks Crusius's account

the Nova dilucidatio

[51] See the *ML*$_1$ student notes to Kant's lectures on metaphysics (AA 28:266–68). Baumgarten introduces a similar distinction in *Metaphysica* §707 between actions that are absolutely free from outer necessitation and those that are merely relatively free from such necessitation. Yet, as Kawamura notes (cf. *Spontaneität*, 55), Baumgarten is clear that only the former actions are strictly speaking spontaneous.

of the freedom of the will as consisting in a perfect freedom of indifference. Kant contends that Crusius's principle of determining ground must in fact apply to all contingent things, including to acts of free will, since without such a ground no contingent thing could itself be determinate (cf. AA 1:397), and accordingly, Kant endorses the Leibnizian-Wolffian position in accordance with which freedom is just the determination of the will "*in conformity with the representation of the best*" (AA 1:402). In spite of challenging Crusius's treatment of the freedom of the will, Kant is noticeably less hostile toward his general ascription of a spontaneity to the activity of the understanding. So, like Leibniz, Kant takes 'spontaneity' generally to amount to an "action which issues from *an inner principle* [*spontaneitas* est actio a *principio interno* profecta]" (AA 1:402), but like Crusius Kant interprets this rather robustly in the case of the mind's cognitive activity, as he takes this activity to be governed by a principle or law; thus he refers to "the law which governs the reasoning of our mind [*legem argumentationum mentis nostrae*]" (AA 1:391). In attempting to formulate this law, Kant likewise disputes the primacy of the principle of contradiction, arguing that, as a negative principle, it cannot also serve as a principle for grounding affirmative truths (AA 1:391). In its place, Kant sets his novel twin-principle of identity ("*whatever is, is, and whatever is not, is not*" [AA 1:389]), which can serve as the "absolutely supreme and most general principle of *all* truths" (AA 1:390, my emphasis), and, as such, is taken to constitute the law of the mind that, Kant claims, it "cannot but employ . . . everywhere, doing so spontaneously [*sponte*] and in virtue of a certain necessity of its nature" (AA 1:391).

While Kant thus appears to allow, along with Crusius, that the mind is spontaneous inasmuch as its actions are grounded in laws or principles of its nature, he does not accept the additional principles Crusius proposes as constituting the essence of the understanding. This is already evident in the *Nova dilucidatio*, where Kant rejects the battery of principles with which Crusius supplements the principle of contradiction, but Kant is even clearer on this score in the *Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit* (1764) where he takes specific aim at Crusius's discussion of the understanding's essence.[52] As we have seen, Crusius had claimed that, along with the principle of contradiction, the principles of the inseparable and incombinable constitute the "three highest principles of reason,"[53] and Crusius proceeds to identify the latter two principles as material insofar as they "first provide the material" to which the otherwise empty principle of contradiction can be applied.[54] While Kant accepts Crusius's distinction between formal and material principles, and even accepts that "material principles constitute . . . the foundation of human reason" (AA 2:295), he rejects Crusius's suggested material principles as being insufficiently evident, contending that "it is not possible to invest some propositions with the status of supreme material principles unless they are obvious to every human understanding" (AA 2:295). In addition, against Crusius's claim that the essence of the understanding serves as the "supreme distinguishing feature

[52] For a presentation of other aspects of Crusius's relevance to Kant's development in this period, see Kanzian, "Kant und Crusius 1763."

[53] *Entwurf*, §15.

[54] *Weg zur Gewissheit*, §261; see also §§259–60.

[*Kennzeichen*] . . . of possible and actual things,"[55] which Kant interprets in terms of the claim that "*what cannot be thought other than true is true*," Kant argues that this cannot yield a firm grounding for cognition, since the principles that constitute the essence of the understanding are merely subjective and Crusius offers nothing by way of argument for taking them to be objective conditions of truth; thus, Kant writes, "the feeling of conviction which we have . . . is merely an avowal, not an argument establishing that they are true" (AA 2:295).

Kant's criticism concerning subjective conditions

This criticism of Crusius notwithstanding, Kant does not abandon the inquiry into the fundamental material principles that govern the activity of the mind, as this theme is once again taken up in the Inaugural Dissertation, where Kant turns to uncovering the "laws inherent in the mind" (AA 2:295) in which the form of the sensible and of the intelligible world has its ground. With respect, for instance, to what he labels the *real* use of the understanding (i.e. its use with respect to intelligible objects or noumena), Kant identifies the concepts and principles that govern its use as internal to the understanding itself: "[T]he fundamental concepts of things and of relations, and the axioms themselves are given in a fundamental fashion by the pure understanding itself" (AA 2:411).[56] In accordance with the foregoing, then, the activity of the understanding in its real use would be spontaneous insofar as it is governed by concepts, such as "possibility, existence, necessity, substance, cause," and related principles that are to be found in the "nature of the pure understanding" (AA 2:395). Such an account of the spontaneity of the understanding would seem to herald the properly Critical conception of the distinction between it and passive sensibility, and indeed just this strict distinction is suggested in the following passage from the Dissertation:

the Inaugural Dissertation

the understanding as spontaneous

> *Sensibility* is the *receptivity* of a subject in virtue of which it is possible for the subject's own representative state to be affected in a definite way by the presence of some object. *Intelligence* [*Intelligentia*] (rationality) is the *faculty* [*facultas*] of a subject in virtue of which it has the ability to represent things [*repraesentare valet*] which cannot by their own quality come before the senses of that subject. (AA 2:392)

However, it is important to note that this account of the activity of the understanding still differs significantly from Kant's properly Critical account. For instance, while Kant does seem to conceive of the understanding as spontaneous in its real use, the same would not seem to be the case with the understanding's activity in its *logical* use, or its use with respect to sensible cognitions. This is because Kant claims that, apart from the merely formal principle of contradiction (cf. AA 2:393), the principles governing the understanding's logical use are borrowed from sensibility: "[T]he *use* of the *understanding* . . . , the fundamental concepts and axioms of which are given by sensitive intuition, is only the *logical* use of the understanding" (AA 2:411). Accordingly, given that the principles that are employed do not stem from the understanding itself, the understanding would not be regarded as spontaneous (in the sense outlined above) in its application

[55] *Entwurf*, §15.

[56] See also AA 2:394: where the use of the understanding is real, "such concepts, whether of objects or of relations, are given by the very nature of the understanding."

to appearances, which is, of course, just the spontaneous use of that faculty that is primarily at issue in the *KrV*.[57]

A spontaneity of sensibility?

Perhaps more striking, however, considered in light of the Critical distinction between the spontaneous understanding and passive sensibility, is the fact that Kant frequently characterizes *sensibility* in the Dissertation in a way that suggests that it is capable of activity in its own right,[58] and indeed, *spontaneous* activity inasmuch as its action is likewise necessitated by certain principles internal to its nature. Kant claims, for instance, that external affections occasion the activity of sensibility, as when he claims that sensations excite the action of the mind, where this action consists in the co-ordination of sensations in space and time (AA 2:406).[59] This activity is, further, grounded in the essence of sensibility and, as such, is taken to be necessary in accordance with the laws of its nature; as Kant writes, "Time is rather the subjective condition which is necessary, in virtue of the nature of the human mind, for the co-ordinating of all sensible things in accordance with a fixed law" (AA 2:400). Concerning space, he claims that it "issues from the nature of the mind in accordance with a stable law as a scheme, so to speak, for co-ordinating everything which is sensed externally" (AA 2:403).[60] Significantly, that these actions on the part of sensibility might be taken as spontaneous would not necessarily be inconsistent with Kant's explicit distinction between sensibility and the understanding in the Dissertation (in the passage quoted previously), since Kant there only distinguishes between the understanding as a *faculty* and sensibility as the *receptivity* of a subject, where this does not on its own amount to a distinction between activity and passivity.[61] Moreover, the identification of sensibility as

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[57]The only case in which the understanding is arguably the ground of its own material principles in its application to sensibility concerns the "principles of harmony" discussed in §30 and which Kant identifies as proper to the understanding and resting "on the laws of the cognition which belongs to the understanding itself" (AA 2:418). In organizing sensitive (and intellectual) cognition by means of these principles, then, the understanding acts in accordance with its own laws. It might be noted in this regard that Kant will later claim that reason is spontaneous precisely inasmuch as, by means of its ideas, it projects an order of its own making upon the understanding's cognitions; cf. A548/B576.

[58]This point is noted by Falkenstein, who, while he contends that Kant introduces the "receptivity/spontaneity distinction," also notes that "Kant proceeds to violate the identification of sensibility as receptivity he had just introduced by ascribing a form of activity to sense; see *Kant's Intuitionism*, 46–47.

[59]See also AA 2:401 ("the action of the mind in co-ordinating what it senses would not be elicited without the help of the senses"); and 2:404 ("For things cannot appear to the senses under any aspect at all except by the mediation of the power of the mind which co-ordinates all sensations").

[60]See also AA 2:398 ("a fixed law of the mind, in virtue of which it is necessary that all the things which can be objects of the senses . . . are seen as *necessarily* belonging to the same whole"); 2:406 ("the law of the mind, according to which it joins together in a fixed manner the sense-impressions made by the presence of an object"); and 2:407 ("the sensitive laws of the subject").

[61]Crusius, for instance, likewise distinguishes the "*receptivity or capacity of objects* [*die Receptivität oder Fähigkeit des Objects*]" (*Entwurf*, §67) from the "faculty of a power [*Vermögen einer Kraft*]" (*Entwurf*, §69), but does not exclude all activity from the former, as he understands by a receptivity or capacity the "quality of an object through which it is capable [*geschickt*] of accepting [*anzunehmen*] an action and, to some extent, of determining what is thereby caused by it" (*Entwurf*, §67), so that a receptivity is not completely passive but rather "behaves simultaneously passively and actively" (*Entwurf*, §66). On this, one might also see Leibniz, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, 169. It bears noting, however, that Kant does suggest that the spontaneity of the understanding is implicit in its designation as a faculty in a number of *Reflexionen* dated roughly contemporaneously with the Dissertation. See for instance R 4434: "*In ansehung der receptivitaet des Gemüths ist continuitaet; die* facultas *hat spontaneitaet*" (AA 17:545), as well as R 202 (AA 15:78), R 204 (AA 15:59), and R 208 (AA 15:80).

spontaneous could be taken to avoid just the sort of difficulties Kant had previously diagnosed with Crusius's account in the *Untersuchung*. So, the laws or principles of space and time are themselves indemonstrable yet, despite this, it cannot be denied that they, as opposed to Crusius's proposed material principles, are obvious to any human understanding: the concept of space, for instance, is given in such a way that "anyone trying to imagine any relations other than those prescribed by this concept would be striving in vain, for such a person would have been forced to employ this self-same concept to support his own fiction" (AA 2:404).[62] Moreover, the claim that it is the nature of sensibility that serves as the supreme criterion of (real) possibility and actuality does not amount to a "mere avowal," or only subjective certainty, since, as a priori conditions of appearances, space and time necessarily hold for all possible objects of intuition: "[A]ll observable events in the world, all motions and all internal changes necessarily accord with the axioms which can be known about time" (AA 2:402).[63] And while Kant obviously stops short of explicitly identifying sensibility (or, for that matter, the understanding) as spontaneous in the Dissertation, such an identification would nonetheless find a precedent in Crusius's presentation, since, as we have seen, Crusius takes the spontaneity of the "understanding" rather broadly to amount to the spontaneity of *all* of the faculties that contribute to cognition, including sensation.

This is all to say that, while Kant endorses the spontaneity of the cognitive faculties well before the *KrV*, his pre-Critical account even as late as the Inaugural Dissertation still remains distinguished in numerous important respects from his Critical view. Indeed, the primary difference between sensibility and the understanding in the Inaugural Dissertation might be more appropriately taken to consist in whether the activity on the part of the subject in each case is necessarily conditioned by something that affects it (sensibility), or whether it occurs in principle independently of all such affection (the understanding in its real use), rather than in the distinction between purely receptive and spontaneous cognitive powers. This would in any case suggest that Kant's familiar strict distinction at the outset of the Introduction to the Transcendental Logic between "the *receptivity* of our mind to receive representations," or sensibility, and "the *spontaneity* [*Spontaneität*] of cognition," or the understanding (A51/B75), actually constitutes (yet another) important development in his views since the Dissertation, inasmuch as Kant would come to allow that the understanding is a source of its own (material) principles in its application to appearances and so is no longer wholly beholden to sensibility for their provision. In turning to Tetens's account of spontaneity in the next section, we will see that his extensive discussion of spontaneity in the *Philosophische Versuche* could very well have contributed to such a refinement in

[62] See also AA 2:405: "Therefore, all the fundamental properties of these concepts [i.e., space and time] lie beyond the limits of reason, and, thus, they cannot in any way be explained by the understanding. Nonetheless, these concepts constitute *the underlying foundation upon which the understanding rests*, when . . . it draws conclusions from the primary data of intuition."

[63] Regarding space, Kant writes, "Since, then, nothing at all can be given to the senses unless it conforms with the fundamental axioms of space and its corollaries (as geometry teaches), whatever can be given to the senses will necessarily accord with these axioms even though their principle is only subjective" (AA 2:404).

Kant's views regarding the spontaneity of the understanding, and its distinction from passive sensibility.

3. TETENS ON THE SPONTANEOUS POWERS OF THE SOUL

In contrast to Crusius and the pre-Critical Kant, for whom the spontaneity of the understanding (as opposed to that of the will) is at best a topic of secondary concern, Johann Nicolaus Tetens, in his *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwickelung* (*Philosophical Essays on Human Nature and its Development* [1777]), makes spontaneity in general, and of the cognitive powers in particular, a central focus of his thought, going so far as to identify our possession of a "perfectible spontaneity" as a fundamental feature (*Grundmerkmal*) of the human soul.[64] Though Tetens only expressly turns to the topic of the spontaneity of the soul late in the *Philosophische Versuche*, in the Twelfth Investigation (entitled "On Spontaneity and Freedom"), the issue comes up frequently throughout the two volumes of the work, particularly in the discussions of the cognitive powers early in the first volume. Like Kant before him, Tetens takes Crusius's treatment as his point of departure, though unsurprisingly he also takes issue with the specifics of Crusius's account. Tetens disputes, for instance, whether the understanding can really be taken to "act" in accordance with the principles of the incombinable and the inseparable, contending that "*Not-separating* is something other than *combining*, and *not-distinguishing* something other than *thinking-together*. The former is inactivity and impotence; the latter is activity and power."[65] In addition, in a line of criticism parallel to that of Kant in the *Untersuchung*, Tetens accuses Crusius of mistaking his inability to offer a comprehensive proof of the principles he takes to constitute the essence of the understanding for an independent, non-demonstrative basis for their justification; thus he claims that a "lack of insight into representations and into the combinations arising from them are no proof of a *spontaneous* [*selbstthätigen*] real power."[66]

Tetens does not, however, focus on criticizing Crusius's account, as he is interested in offering a rigorous defense of the spontaneity of the higher cognitive faculty in response to what he takes to be two recent challenges, namely, those of Abraham Tucker and Johann Georg Sulzer.[67] Concerning the former, in *The Light of Nature Pursued* (published in 1768 under the pseudonym Edward

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[64] *Versuche*, Essay XI, Chapter iii, Section 3; Volume I.759. Tetens's interest in the mind's spontaneity (in contrast to Cruisus's) has been acknowledged in the literature; thus, Beck credits Tetens with seeing more clearly than any other thinker between Leibniz and Kant "the active aspect of knowing" (*Early German Philosophy*, 418), and Dilthey goes as far as to claim (though incorrectly, as should now be clear) that Tetens introduced the concept of spontaneity into German (quoted in Baumgarten, *Kant und Tetens. Untersuchungen zum Problem von Vorstellung und Gegenstand*, 80).

[65] *Versuche*, I.xv.4; I.127.

[66] *Versuche*, I.xv.4; I.127.

[67] *Versuche*, XII.iii.1; II.20: *Einige Philosophen haben die Freyheit auf den* Willen *eingeschränkt; andere lassen auch der* Erkenntnißkraft *diese Beschaffenheit; und einige haben noch genauer die Stelle in der Seele angegeben, wo sie sitzen solle, da sie nur allein das* Vermögen aufmerksam zu seyn, *das ist, das Vermögen, die vorstellende und denkende Kraft auf einen Gegenstand hinzuwenden*. Tetens explicitly identifies the first position with that of Tucker (and the second is evidently his own). Sulzer is the likeliest intended proponent of the third position, as will become clear in what follows.

Search), Tucker had argued that while we frequently make use of active verbs, like 'reflecting' and 'deliberating,' in describing the workings of the understanding, these in fact only mask the passivity of that faculty which under the direction of the will (the sole active faculty) merely perceives a chain of thoughts whose order it cannot influence, much like a hound that "moves and sniffs by his own activity, but the scent he finds is not laid nor the trail he follows drawn by himself."[68] Against Tucker, Tetens argues that, even allowing that the function of the understanding consisted merely in perception, this would still require some activity on its part inasmuch as perception can sometimes involve "a preferential processing [*vorzügliche Bearbeitung*] of a sensory impression . . . through which it is strengthened, enlivened, and deepened, made conspicuous in us and separated out."[69] In making this point, Tetens draws attention to the fact that in German there are two terms for perceptual consciousness, *Gewahr-werden* ('to become aware') and *Gewahr-nehmen* ('to take awareness'), where the former seems to imply a kind of passively-obtained awareness (as when a loud noise draws my attention to it), but where the latter implies an active attention in generating the awareness.[70] Tetens proceeds to identify the act involved in *Gewahrnehmen* with the act of preferential processing, and inasmuch as such an activity cannot take place in a merely passive being, he concludes that "this act is a specific expression of the *spontaneous* power of the soul."[71]

Tetens on active and passive perception

As Tetens recognizes, this characterization of the activity of the mind in terms of an act of preferential processing, or more broadly, an act of "attention,"[72] might be taken to bring his account close to that of another rival view, namely that of Sulzer, who in contrast to Tucker allows that there can be a spontaneity in the mind outside of the freedom of the will, though rather than ascribing this spontaneity to the higher cognitive faculty as a whole, he instead traces it to the faculty of attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*). In his essay "*Zergliederung des Begriffs der Vernunft*" ("Analysis of the Concept of Reason"),[73] Sulzer defends Wolff's analysis of the faculty of reason, understood generally as the faculty of cognizing the connection between truths, into a host of sub-faculties and capacities,[74] including judgment, the use of language, reflection, and attention.[75] Even so, Sulzer goes beyond Wolff in claiming that the faculty of attention is primary among these elements of reason. Anticipating Tetens, Sulzer distinguishes between two different sorts of attention: a "coerced [*erzwungene*] attention" that is a purely passive state in which the strength of a sensation demands our attention until the sensation subsides, and an un-coerced attention that is occasioned by the distinctness of a representation. According to Sulzer, the latter sort of attention also involves an

activity and attention

[68] Search, *The Light of Nature Pursued*, 11.

[69] *Versuche*, III.v; I.289.

[70] For Tetens's introduction of this distinction, see *Versuche*, III.v; I.279.

[71] *Versuche*, III.v; I.289.

[72] On this see *Versuche*, III.v; I.289: *Wir nehmen nichts gewahr, ohne einigen Grad von Aufmerksamkeit, in der gewöhnlichen weitern Bedeutung dieses Wortes, nehmlich ohne eine Anstrengung unserer Erkenntnißkraft.*

[73] Sulzer's essay was originally published in 1758 (see Palme, *J.G. Sulzers Psychologie*, 17). My citations are from the edition included in Sulzer, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*.

[74] See Wolff, *Deutsche Metaphysik*, §368 and §866.

[75] Sulzer, "Zergliederung," 246.

activity, since the distinctness of the representation prompts the soul to consider the representation and its parts more carefully.[76] Inasmuch as it is through this act that parts of a complex representation become distinct such that we can apprehend the connections between them, Sulzer concludes that attention amounts to a "simple action" of the soul and constitutes "the true ground [*wahre Grund*] of reason."[77]

Tetens, however, rejects Sulzer's confinement of activity to a mere "corner of the soul";[78] he claims that spontaneity is to be ascribed to the power of thinking, which Tetens generally understands as that faculty through which the soul cognizes the relations among things,[79] which includes what others identify as the higher cognitive faculties but which also incorporates perception (*Gewahrnehmen*) and consciousness more generally.[80] Tetens concedes that Sulzer rightly stresses that an act of attention can initiate the series of states leading to the soul's insight into a truth,[81] yet Tetens claims that Sulzer unfairly limits the function of the higher faculty to the passive apprehension of the connection among things.[82] As Tetens argues, the very connections, or relations, among things that Sulzer takes to be the object of the act of attention are in fact effects of the activity of the power of thinking. In order to illustrate this point, Tetens turns to Hume's analysis of the causal relation. As Tetens takes Hume to have shown, our cognition of a causal relation between two objects cannot be traced back to simple sensation, as this only discloses that our idea of one object (the effect) follows that of the other (the cause).[83] As Hume recognized, this would imply that the causal relation must be contributed by the mind itself, though Tetens claims that the kind of necessary connection thought in the causal relation implies that it cannot be a function of the imagination, since an associative connection between ideas does not amount to the thought of their *dependence* on one another, where the latter properly characterizes the idea of causal connection.[84] Instead, insofar as causal dependence amounts to the fact that the effect is *conceived* through the cause, Tetens argues that the cognition of the causal relation is to be traced back to the activity of the power of thinking itself, and Tetens extends this claim to other relations, including identity and diversity: "[R]elation does not come to be from sensation, but rather is an effect added [*hinzukommende Wirkung*] by the power of thinking."[85] Against

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[76] *Die durch die Deutlichkeit der Vorstellungen verursachte Aufmerksamkeit ist von jener sehr verschieden. Sie richtet die Wirksamkeit der Seele auf einen genau ausgedrückten Gegenstand, dessen verschiedene Theile wir von einander unterscheiden* ("Zergliederung," 253). See also Palme, *J.G. Sulzers Psychologie*, 20–21.

[77] "Zergliederung," 252 and 255. See also 254: *Die freywillige* [as opposed to '*erzwungene*'] *Aufmerksamkeit hingegen erwecket natürlicher Weise Nachdenken. Denn, nachdem wir den Gegenstand im Ganzen gefaßt haben, können wir ihn zergliedern, weil wir seine Theile sehen. Wir hängen nach und nach den einzelnen Vorstellungen nach, woraus die Vorstellung des ganzen Gegenstandes zusammen gesetzt ist; wir vergleichen sie mit einander, um ihre Verhältnisse und ihre Verschiedenheiten zu entdecken.*

[78] *Versuche*, XII.iii.1; II.23.

[79] *Versuche*, IV.i; I.296.

[80] *Versuche*, IV.vii; I.347.

[81] See *Versuche*, XII.iii.1; II.24–25.

[82] Beck also recognizes that Tetens is critical of Sulzer on this point (*Early German Philosophy*, 416), as does Wilhelm Uebele; see *Johann Nicolaus Tetens, nach seiner Gesamtentwicklung betrachtet*, 120.

[83] *Versuche*, IV.iv.1; I.313.

[84] *Versuche*, IV.iv.1; I.316–17.

[85] *Versuche*, IV.vi.2; I.337. For additional discussion of this, see Kuehn, "Hume and Tetens," 372; and *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800*, 135–38.

Sulzer, then, Tetens will identify the activity of the power of thinking as a whole as spontaneous inasmuch as he takes that action to be spontaneous which "has the *first* source [*Quelle*] of action in itself," though Tetens evidently interprets this in a manner consistent with Crusius, namely, as implying that a spontaneous activity is necessitated by a *principle* internal to the acting (cognizing) subject.[86] In the case of the power of thinking, its activity in connecting ideas is governed by the forms of relation proper to the common human understanding; as Tetens writes, "The first acts of the power of thinking are to be found in every human understanding, and proceed according to certain necessary laws of the faculty of thought."[87]

This account of the spontaneity of the power of thinking, in accordance with which the relations among things are taken to be functions of the activity of the *Denkkraft*, leads Tetens to distinguish rather sharply between the spontaneity of that power and the soul's power of sensation or feeling (*Empfindung*, *Gefühl*).[88] Having attributed the cognition of all relations (including spatio-temporal relations) to the power of thought, Tetens takes the power of sensation quite generally to be that faculty in accordance with which the soul is able to receive new modifications;[89] thus, the power of sensation is identified as entirely passive, as Tetens observes that we never feel the activity that brings about a modification; rather, it is only felt as something already present in us, and so a sensation or feeling is always only "a passive modification of the soul."[90] In spite of this strict bifurcation between the spontaneous power of thought and passive power of sensation, Tetens maintains that both provide necessary components of cognition. So, Tetens follows Crusius's general characterization of the spontaneity of the understanding as a conditioned, or "roused spontaneity [*erweckte Selbstthätigkeit*]," [91] and emphasizes that the activity of the power of thinking is dependent on the availability of passively received external sensations to serve as its objects. Accordingly, and in a clear anticipation of Kant's Critical doctrine, Tetens conceives of the spontaneous element of the mind as working co-operatively with the passive power of sensation in order to yield cognition: "Passive changes are internally bound up with spontaneous ones, action with passion [*Leiden*] so precisely mixed . . . that in innumerable cases it becomes difficult to discern whether it is the former or the latter."[92]

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[86] *Versuche*, XI.iii.1; I.753. See also XII.ii.1; II.8. It should be noted that '*Quelle*' was an accepted German rendering for '*principium*' with its apparent source in Wolff; see his *Anmerckungen zur Deutschen Metaphysik* §39: *Im Teutschen habe ich kein bequemes Wort finden können, dadurch ich das Wort* principium *hätte ausdrucken können. Daher habe ich eines in uneigentlichem Verstande, nemlich das Wort Quelle, gebrauchen müssen.*

[87] *Versuche*, IV.iii.2; I.309.

[88] See *Versuche*, IV.ii; I.298.

[89] *Versuche*, II.i; I.166.

[90] *Versuche*, III.ii.3; I.173; and III.ii.3; I.171. Tetens occasionally mentions an "act of sensation [*Actus* der Empfindung]" or an "*act* of feeling [*Aktus* des Gefühls]" (cf. V.vi; I.398 and "Über die allgemeine," 54–55n), which would suggest that sensation admits of an activity, and even spontaneity (inasmuch as this act might proceed from some principle internal to it), yet, in these cases, I take the "act of sensation" to be an act that has sensations as its *object* (and so is performed by a separate faculty) rather than an act executed by the *Empfindungskraft*; see *Versuche*, IV.vii.4; I.360, where Tetens refers to an "act of *sensations* [Aktus der Empfindungen]" (my emphasis).

[91] *Versuche*, XII.ix.3; II.67–68.

[92] *Versuche*, II.ii.4; I.176; cf. also I.xvi.4; I.156–57 and XII.ix.3; II.68.

Significantly, however, Tetens's defense of the spontaneity of the power of thinking neither exhausts his discussion of the spontaneity of the mind nor its potential significance for Kant's later views. Tetens contends that the power of representation (*Vorstellungskraft*), the third power in his division of the general cognitive capacity (*Erkenntnißvermögen*), is also spontaneous in one of its functions. For Tetens, the power of representation is taken rather narrowly as the power that has representations, or modifications of the soul that are left as traces after the presence of a sensation (*Nachempfindung*), as its object.[93] Tetens proceeds to distinguish three different activities of this power performed in the course of its generation and manipulation of representations: the apprehension of a sensation and retention of its trace (which Tetens refers to as the act of the *Fassungskraft* or power of apprehension[94]); the reproduction of such representations of sensations (identified narrowly as an act of the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*]); and the production of a new simple representation (an act of the *bildenden Dichtkraft*). While Tetens designates these as one and all "activities of representation [*Vorstellungsthätigkeiten*]," [95] he is nonetheless clear that they differ in terms of the degree of activity they involve, a point he makes specifically through contrasting the activity of the imagination and that of the *Dichtkraft*.[96] With respect to the former, Tetens notes that philosophers since Locke have claimed that the reproduction of representations is governed by the ("so-called") law of association,[97] but Tetens denies that this law can account for the activity of the imagination. As he notes, what representation is reproduced in a given case is not a function of the activity of the imagination but rather of the observed co-existence or similarity of sensations, which is to say that the order among our representations that is effected through mere association is a function of an order to which the imagination ultimately contributes little.[98] In contrast to the "solely reproductive phantasy [*allein wiedervorstellende Phantasie*]," which accordingly behaves "more passively" inasmuch as the order of its representations is derived from the laws governing the external order of observed things,[99] Tetens identifies the activity of the *Dichtkraft*

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[93] *Versuche*, I.iii; I.16–17. On the contrast between Tetens's account of the power of representation and that of Wolff, see *Versuche*, I.ii; I.9–12.

[94] Tetens also refers to this apprehension as an act of '*Perception*,' where he makes use of the Latin term to distinguish this from perception understood as '*Gewahrnehmen*' or '*Gewahrwerden*,' where the latter terms token a consciously-had representation but *Perception* is an activity that is for the most part unconscious and, when it is conscious, it does not amount to a full-fledged awareness of the relation of a representation to an object; see *Versuche*, II.i; I.167.

[95] *Versuche*, I.xiii; I.105.

[96] I have chosen to leave references to the *Dichtkraft* untranslated. Among the available English renderings, some are unwieldy, such as the 'forming, creative power' (see Keach, "Poetry after 1740," 162), while others are misleading, such as 'fancy' (see Beck, *Early German Philosophy*, 417), which ignores the important cognitive role Tetens assigns to this faculty. Compounding these difficulties, Tetens refers to this faculty using a variety of terms, including (in addition to the above) '*schaffende Dichtkraft*,' '*Genie*,' and '*Dichtungsvermögen*' (see *Versuche*, I.xii.1; I.107 and I.xv; I.115 for some of these). I will, accordingly, simply refer to '*Dichtkraft*' in what follows.

[97] *Versuche*, I.xiv; I.108.

[98] See *Versuche*, I.xiii; I.106–7 and I.xiv; I.109–10.

[99] Kant similarly regards the connections effected by the merely reproductive synthesis as parasitic upon or determined by the (empirical) laws that govern the actions of objects external to the mind, rather than laws proper to the mind itself. As Kant claims, the synthesis of the reproductive imagination "is subject solely to empirical laws" (B152). See also A100: "This law of reproduction, however,

in its *production* of new simple representations as properly spontaneous.[100] Like the imagination, the activity of the *Dichtkraft* serves to bring about connections between our representations, but rather than merely juxtaposing representations, the *Dichtkraft* effects a new unity among them by "*driving them into one another* and *mixing them together* [*Ineinandertreiben* und *Vermischen*]."[101] The most obvious role for the *Dichtkraft* consists in artistic production,[102] and by way of illustrating its distinction from the reproductive imagination, Tetens compares the image of the Pegasus with Milton's representation of Sin: where the former amounts to merely laying one image upon the other, the latter involves "processing, dissolving, blending, separating, and taking [representations] together, and creating new forms and appearances."[103] Thus, as a source of a new order among representations, as opposed to being bound to a given one, the activity of the *Dichtkraft* can be taken as governed by laws of its own;[104] accordingly, Tetens distinguishes it from the merely reproductive imagination and also identifies it as the "spontaneous phantasy [*selbstthätige Phantasie*]."[105]

The spontaneity of the *Dichtkraft* is not limited to its use in artistic contexts, however, as Tetens assigns it a vital role in cognition, the need for which is evidently impressed upon him by his consideration of Kant's Inaugural Dissertation. Significantly (and rather exceptionally), Tetens accepts the main lesson of the Dissertation, namely, that concepts of space and time cannot be abstracted from sensations but have their source within the nature of our sensibility.[106] Even so, Tetens rejects as needlessly mysterious Kant's apparent explanation of the acquisition of the representations of space and time through a kind of immediate intuition of the activity of the mind; as Kant had claimed, the concepts of space and time have "*been acquired*, not indeed, by abstraction from the sensing of objects . . . . , but from the very action of the mind" (AA 2:406).[107] According to Tetens, rather than being drawn directly from some problematic direct insight into the mind's activity, the general concepts of space and time must instead have their source in the *effect* of that activity inasmuch as they are abstracted from a representation of a particular space or time that is originally constructed through the operation of the *Dichtkraft*. By way of illustration, Tetens considers a couple of striking examples:

> When I turn my gaze from the earth to the moon, this produces a series of individual acts of seeing which I do not distinguish from one another but take them together; and the same occurs when I trace a circle in the air with my hand without encountering

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presupposes that the appearances themselves are actually subject to such a rule, and that in the manifold of their representations an accompaniment or succession takes place according to certain rules."

[100] *Versuche*, I.xv.10; I.140.

[101] Tetens, *Versuche*, I.xv.2; I.117.

[102] Thus, at *Versuche*, I.xv; I.119–20n, Tetens indicates that his discussion of the *Dichtkraft* is modelled on Alexander Gerard's discussion of genius in his *Essay on Genius* (1774); see also *Versuche*, I.xiii; I.107.

[103] See *Versuche*, I.xv.2; I.117–18; and I.xvi.5; I.159–60.

[104] These laws are outlined at *Versuche*, I.xv.7; I.136–38.

[105] See *Versuche*, I.xiii; I.107; and I.xv.10; I.140. See also de Vleeschauwer, *La déduction transcendentale dans l'oeuvre de Kant*, 306–7.

[106] See *Versuche*, IV.vii.4; I.360.

[107] As Kant goes on to claim, "Each of the concepts is like an immutable image, and, thus, each is to be cognised intuitively" (AA 2:406).

> another body. This act, therefore, as a whole consists of many parts that are not distinguished from one another but are taken together as one and represented as an uninterrupted [*ununterbrochenes*] whole.[108]

The innumerable individual external sensations received from, for instance, observing my finger tracing the circle do not, on their own, amount to the representation of the circle. What is required in addition is an activity on the part of the mind by means of which these individual sensations are blended together into a representation of a single shape; performing this activity, as we have already seen, is just the function of the *Dichtkraft*. It is, then, by means of abstraction from the resulting representations that the abstract and more general representation of space is acquired,[109] but Tetens is also clear that the activity of the *Dichtkraft* in connecting the manifold of external sensations generated in the tracing of a shape is also essential for producing abstract (geometrical) representations of individual spaces and times.[110] As he writes, these ideas have their source in the representation, the "united whole of sensation" that is the effect of "the act through which the numerous feelings [i.e. external sensations] are *united* into a whole."[111]

Influence of Tetens on Kant wrt imagination

As should be clear, Tetens's account of the spontaneous function of the *Dichtkraft* in the acquisition of the concepts of space and time is at the very least a striking anticipation of Kant's own account of the role of the productive imagination in the *KrV*. Indeed, Tetens offers his account as a sort of friendly amendment to Kant's discussion in the Dissertation, and even suspects that Kant likely intended to say as much, though it was expressed in an opaque way.[112] Similar to Tetens, then, Kant would later claim that the activity of the productive imagination is properly identified as spontaneous since, as a priori, it is not subject to determination through empirical laws but proceeds in accordance with laws or principles internal to the mind: "[I]nsofar as the imagination is spontaneity, I also occasionally call it the *productive* imagination and thereby distinguish it from the *reproductive* imagination" (B152).[113] In fact, Kant specifically claims that the (productive) imagination acts spontaneously inasmuch as it produces a unity in the pure manifolds of intuition, writing that insofar as the synthesis of the imagination is an "exercise of spontaneity . . . the imagination is to this extent a faculty for determining the sensibility *a priori*" (B151–52).[114] There are, of course, important differences remaining in their treatments (for instance, Tetens discusses

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[108] *Versuche*, IV.vii.4; I.359.

[109] Tetens, *Versuche*, IV.vii.4; I.360: *Aus den Ideen von* einzelnen *Räumen und Zeiten entstehen die* Gemeinbegriffe *vom Raum und Zeit*; cf. also Tetens, "Über die allgemeine speculativische Philosophie," 54–55n.

[110] "Über die allgemeine speculativische Philosophie," 54n: *Der Begriff von* einem *Raum überhaupt ist ein* allgemeiner *Begriff aus einzelen Gesichts- und Gefühls-Handlungen durch die Abstraction* und Dichtung *gebildet* (latter emphasis mine).

[111] Tetens, *Versuche*, IV.vii.4; I.360.

[112] "Über die allgemeine speculativische Philosophie," 55n; and *Versuche*, IV.vii.4; I.360.

[113] See also A118: "[O]nly the *productive synthesis of the imagination* can take place *a priori*; for the *reproductive* synthesis rests on conditions of experience."

[114] One might, however, compare Kant's apparent slip into Tetens's terminology at B130 that the combination of the manifold "is an act of spontaneity of the power of representation [*Spontaneität der Vorstellungskraft*]."

the unification of a manifold of obscure representations rather than of pure intuition[115]), yet given Tetens's well-documented role in Kant's discovery of the cognitive function of the imagination,[116] and given the evidence of Kant's attention to passages related to Tetens's treatment of spontaneity and to his account of the role of the *Dichtkraft* in cognition in particular,[117] it would hardly be surprising if Tetens's treatment on this score served as a model for Kant's account of the spontaneous activity of the productive imagination in unifying the pure manifolds of space and time.

Naturally, Tetens's account of the spontaneous *Dichtkraft* does not exhaust the potential significance of his discussion,[118] or indeed, of the entire discussion elaborated above to the development and interpretation of Kant's Critical views on the spontaneity of the understanding. Even so, what I hope to have shown is that, independent of whatever relevance the foregoing context might have for Kant's mature account, Kant's attribution of a spontaneity to the mind in the *KrV* is hardly unprecedented but instead must be understood as engaging within an ongoing and vigorous, if largely overlooked, discussion among his contemporaries. From Crusius's initial, albeit almost incidental, characterization of the spontaneity of the understanding in terms of an activity necessitated by internal principles, through the pre-Critical Kant's efforts to elucidate the material principles that govern the activity of the understanding (and indeed of sensibility), and ultimately to the central role that the spontaneity of the power of thought and the *Dichtkraft* play in

[115]See *Versuche*, IV.vii.4; I.358. See also Kitcher, *Kant's Thinker*, 33–34.

[116]Among the first to draw attention to Tetens's influence in this regard, H. J. de Vleeschauwer claims that Tetens's analysis of the *Vorstellungskraft*, and particularly the role assigned to the reproductive imagination, served as a model for Kant's own discussion in the A-edition Deduction, and as evidence for this, he draws attention to the clear similarities between Tetens's threefold division of the functions of the *Vorstellungskraft* and Kant's account of the threefold synthesis of the imagination in the subjective deduction in the *KrV* (de Vleeschauwer, *The Development of Kantian Thought*, 85–86.). Similarly, Wolfgang Carl has contended that Tetens's influence is already clearly evident in the extensive discussion of the imagination contained in the ML_1 student lecture notes (cf. AA 28:235–38), which, accordingly, Carl takes to post-date the publication of the *Philosophische Versuche* (Carl, *Der schweigende Kant*, 118–19). Apparently, however, neither de Vleeschauwer nor Carl (nor indeed more recent commentators, such as Sgarbi, cf. *Kant on Spontaneity*, 26, 52–53) have recognized that Tetens's account of the spontaneous *Dichtkraft* bears a resemblance to Kant's account of the productive imagination in its role in the generation of the representations of space and time; indeed, de Vleeschauwer claims that, while Tetens (as we have seen) undoubtedly assigns a productive capacity to the *Dichtkraft*, he simply "has no idea of the specifically Kantian synthetic function attributed to productive imagination, which consists in an operation on the *a priori* spatio-temporal intuitions" (*The Development of Kantian Thought*, 86; see also *La déduction*, 314–15).

[117]Significantly, Tetens conceives of a role for the *Dichtkraft* in forming "*sensible abstracta*" or "phantasmata", that is, simple sensible representations (including geometrical representations) that serve as "*universal images*"; cf. *Versuche*, II.xv.6; I.128–32. Kant was undoubtedly familiar with this discussion since in his own edition of the *Versuche* he made marginal notations in sections relating to this activity on the part of the *Dichtkraft*; see R 4848 (AA 18:5) (see also the previous note, R 4847, where Kant writes 'Tucker' in the margin where Tetens had referred to 'Search').

[118]See, for instance, *Versuche*, I.vii; I.47–48, where Tetens, in the course of discussing Johann Bernhard Merian's treatment (in "Mémoire sur l'apperception de sa propre existence") of the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*, argues that Merian's claim that we can have no reflective awareness of the *I think* is in fact characteristic of the soul's spontaneous cognitive powers, thus suggesting that for Tetens the *I think* is also to be regarded as a spontaneous activity. On this point, compare Baumgarten, *Kant und Tetens*, 134.

Tetens's account of cognition, we can see that there was an active, sophisticated, and indeed evolving discussion of the spontaneity of the mind in the time before and during which Kant set to work on his own Critical account. This is all to say, then, that while Kant's treatment of the spontaneity of the cognitive subject in the *KrV* would undoubtedly succeed in inaugurating a new focus on the "philosophy of subjectivity" among the thinkers of the subsequent idealist tradition, the foundation for this emphasis on the spontaneity of the mind had already been laid well before.[119]

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