

Thought and Language: Schleiermacher and the Tension Between Spontaneity and Receptivity

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Preview

In his dialectic, Schleiermacher proposes a view of cognitive activity in which the difficulties inherent in a vision of knowledge defined as original spontaneity come to light. At the origin of rationality, determination is also present, but not as a determination which limits or conditions, rather as a symbol of spontaneity and freedom, which is still insufficient in some aspects. Finding out what these insufficiencies consist in is a way of picking up the problematic tension between the spontaneous and the receptive, the extent of which goes beyond the limits of epistemology.

This paper explores Schleiermacher's transformation of the tension between spontaneity and receptivity in the opposition between the general and the individual, insofar as this tension is articulated by the relationship between thought and language.

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In his dialectic, Schleiermacher proposes a view of cognitive activity in which the difficulties inherent in a vision of knowledge defined as original spontaneity come to light. As it is well known, Schleiermacher takes his concepts and basic structure from Kant's philosophy, which he uses to construct the map of the different moments and operations which make up knowledge. To some extent he also takes on in good measure the tension between spontaneity and receptivity which is characteristic of Kant's epistemology. This tension is measured, on the one hand, by the ideal of autonomy, and on the other by the modern scientific paradigm. The background of critical philosophy is freedom, which is responsible for the task of knowing reality and possessing it as objectivity, the ultimate guarantor of the technological mastery of nature. But this same view of knowledge depends on the reception of sensory data through which subjectivity, defined as spontaneity or transcendental freedom, is determined by the senses; that is, knowledge appears also as receptivity.

The various hermeneutics of Kant's work concur in locating the limits of criticism in the tricky balance between what is spontaneous and what is receptive. Certainly, when we resolve the combination of what is given and what is spontaneous, we settle the consistency of what he himself called empirical realism or transcendental idealism. Kant himself was aware of this difficulty, as can be seen from his insistence on self-affection in the writings collected in his *Opus Postumum*. In spite of this, the brilliant intuition of transcendental freedom, without which we cannot understand Kant's criticism, also points to a path

towards self-knowledge of the subject which, going beyond the questions concerning the theory of knowledge, heralds a phenomenology of subjectivity.

Schleiermacher also clearly recognizes in his “dialectic” these two themes: spontaneity and receptivity. This discipline, whose profile amounts essentially to a theory of the sciences, is shaped from his development of Kantian theses. Indeed, the originality of his view of knowledge stands out precisely in these questions, which need to be rectified according to his phenomenology of the individual spirit and which establish a relationship between dialectic and hermeneutics. To this extent, the dialectic offers its own version of the tension we have mentioned between spontaneity and receptivity. By acknowledging that both dimensions contribute in irreducible ways to the objective synthesis, Schleiermacher seems to move away from the immanentism that underlies Kant’s scorn for what is merely given in experience. At the same time, he aspires to legitimately true thought as an integrating unity of what is spontaneous or active and what is received or passive. These are not two radically opposed dimensions, the definition of which can be made without their opposites. Schleiermacher considers that these are co-foundational sources, although they do not relate to each other in the same way, that is, their relationship is not symmetrical. He thus shows that the spontaneity of reason is exercised only in a mediated way, to the extent that it is affected, and vice versa, that everything that is affected is spontaneity exercised. In other words, the passive elements intentionally present an activity that is originally free. What is processual is an intentional sign of cognitive praxis, of that which is spontaneous; and at the same time, what is originally free is done concretely, in a form that is determined.

Far from the model of pure rationality defended by Kant, Schleiermacher already finds determination at the very origin of reason, not as a limit, but as a symbol of spontaneity or of a still insufficient consciousness. Proof of this is his thesis that thought is always carried out in language;¹ a difference is thus admitted in the case of pure spontaneity, understood now as a linguistic thought. It points also to the priority of praxis over theory that is at the basis of the assumed determination in the activity of reason.

Schleiermacher, in accordance with the linguistic nature of thought, transforms the *a priori* conditions of the knowledge of objects into linguistic conditions. The latter consist of a peculiar synthesis of the spontaneous and the passive, which replaces a logical-transcendental universality with a linguistic

¹ Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Einleitung zur Dialektik* (1833), *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGA) II/10, 1 (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 2002), 393.

universality. To this extent, universality bears within itself the processual or poetic. The pair formed by thought and language recreates to perfection the movement of the rational spirit, which finds itself free in the crossing from one thing to another, from one cognitive act to another. Having a language is not simply knowing a rule of speech, or applying a code. Language, the expression and the sign of acts of consciousness,² communicates insofar as it conveys thought. To do this, it has to be assisted from the first by thought; there is no place for the use of rules and terms into which the ideal breaks through. The rational act opens at its very origin to expression and linguistic communication. Naturally, we acquire a fair amount of knowledge through linguistic signs.

The construction of objectivity as the integration of the different operative levels expounded by the dialectic means not so much an unavoidable concession to the receptivity of our specific organic nature as a reflex of the finite individual conditions of the human being. Therefore Schleiermacher's genuine contribution to explaining the limit of knowledge is rooted in his understanding this, not as a consequence of the inevitable reception of the sense data, but as a consequence of existence in time. Passivity, limitation and receptivity constitute elements of human reason. Beginning in the middle is inevitable,³ that is, in relation to a knowing *in progress*. In this sense, the doctrine of dialectic can be supported by the linguistic dimension of human thought in order to explain why the processual, the receptive aspect of knowledge, is irreducible to the spontaneous.

Up to this point, I have been trying to introduce the terms of the problem, and I have presented Schleiermacher's solution in a synthetic manner. At the origin of rationality, determination is also present, but not as a determination which limits or conditions, rather as a symbol of spontaneity and freedom, which is still insufficient in some aspects. Finding out what these insufficiencies consist in is a way of picking up the problematic tension between the spontaneous and the receptive, the extent of which goes beyond the limits of epistemology.

The Production of Knowledge or the Art of Truth

Schleiermacher's evaluation of the concept of system is often debated. His stance towards this concept, common among the philosophers of his time, is linked to the

² Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ethik* (1812/13) (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1981), 65.

³ "Das Anfangen aus der Mitte ist unvermeidlich." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ausarbeitung zur Dialektik* (1814/15), KGA 2/10, 1, 186.

question about the “principles” that he tackles in his lectures on the dialectic. Among the meanings of the term “principle,” those prevail which indicate some first thing from which something else is generated or takes its being. In the notes for 1811, he states that the activity of the principles of all knowing is an artistic procedure. The dialectic emphasises that what is proper to the principle is to operate in the manner of a free activity and, therefore, suggests again the close connection between art and freedom. In his ethics of 1805/6, Schleiermacher shows that all the arts depend on ethics, that is, on the science of freedom; at the same time, he declares that art is the ethical fullness of everything else.⁴ Freedom corresponds to a universality, which always occurs individually, as a finite reason, which acts in the way of art. This is not the place to take this idea further. I simply want to emphasise the unity and coherence of a thought resting on a clear intuition of the tension that characterises human being. Each philosophical discipline provides indeed in its own object a setting for the living artistic unity of oppositions without which human being cannot be understood. Schleiermacher uses the image of the ellipse with two centres operating as tensors of its curve to avoid having to answer prematurely a question, which, according to Kant’s well-known text in the *Introduction to Logic*, brings together the main problems of philosophy, namely, what is human being?

When, in the development of his philosophical thought, Schleiermacher constructs the dialectic, the science of the sciences, he identifies the archetype of knowing (*Wissen*) as that which fully shows the different oppositions that occur in knowledge. This is not a kind of knowledge, which measures the other forms of cognition, but a form of knowing that is exercised in all the others. Therefore, the consciousness of the production (*Hervorbringung*) of knowledge indicates the highest form of human knowing; in other words, the consciousness of the rules of knowledge expresses the “wishing to know,” which triggers all cognitive activity. The point of the dialectic is to find something “*analogous* for knowing,” that is, a knowing about one’s own cognitive activity, which constitutes it as such and ensures the relationship between the human being and the world.⁵ This subsequent knowing, according to a certain viewpoint, invokes the common idea

⁴ Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brouillon zur Ethik* (1805/6) (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1981),

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⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (Kolleg 1811), KGA 2/10, 2, 9. “Die Dialektik in diesem Sinne kann mit Recht das Organon aller Wissenschaft heissen.” Ibid., 8.

in romantic thinkers that the higher form of reason is artistic.⁶ Knowing arises from the action of knowing. In this sense, we can understand that art is also a feature of cognitive action.

There is no sense in aspiring towards a form of knowing that precedes knowledge, since knowing can only be known when it is produced, that is, in the act of knowing. Art is united with the higher form of consciousness because this consists in “positing itself.” From this, it follows that consciousness in its full sense is instituted inasmuch as it is a cognitive activity, which knows something. Herein lies the ability of reason to account for the correctness and truth of knowledge. In the same vein of thought, consciousness is dispossessed of any ambition to achieve an absolute knowledge. Consciousness has no relation to the idea of totality, but only to the production of knowledge, as can be seen also from the fact that Schleiermacher often uses the expression “act of consciousness” to refer to consciousness.

The German term *Hervorbringung*, translated as “production,” has a clearly practical meaning; it means that which is brought forth from the same activity of bringing. Thus, knowing is a conscious act of knowing, or it is not at all. To this extent, at the beginning of the analysis of the principles of knowing, a certain heteronomy (or lack of foundation) arises, since the principles cannot be derived from consciousness, nor can they predate it. The subject of knowledge finds in himself the other, which does not come from him. Moreover, he finds it as a force (*Kraft*) or principles, which make of the cognitive act something that institutes meaning. Here we must note that, in conceiving of the principles as forces, Schleiermacher does not put rational action on par with physical action. These principles are in a certain way knowing, or else they cannot act as principles. However, they do not admit of a formulation, which would make it possible to derive knowledge; neither are they a measure or criteria of logical normativity. They are rather the rules of knowing, and as such they are available for rational discourse and discussion, that is, for difference and agreement. We can now see why the dialectic is also defined as the art of leading dialogue towards agreement, since the original knowledge that gives the rules for all thought is the same one that operates as the art of dialogue. The linguistic dimension of thought shows the common structure of human thought, and allows us to expect the discovery of truth in the confrontation between arguments from different sides. Dialogue can lead to better knowledge because the latter is what

⁶ “Jeder Act des Bewusstseins ist also je mehr er ein Wissen ist, um desto mehr ein gewolltes Hervorbringen, also aus Kunst her.” Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 77.

supports the former.⁷ This presupposes the identity of knowledge that permits us to understand and to agree with other discourses.

Schleiermacher's dialectic does not privilege one kind of knowing over others, even though his aim is to offer a doctrine of science. As I have briefly indicated, he does not understand the principles of knowledge merely as formal criteria for correct reasoning. Schleiermacher distinguishes but does not separate genesis and validation, the two aspects inherent to knowledge. His understanding of knowing as a production or as an artistic activity attempts to involve both the genesis and the validation in one and the same act. Consciousness, for its part, is a way of being relative to, and presents the pure being of human being insofar as he posits himself.⁸ It follows that the rules of the construction of knowledge depend on an original knowing or consciousness: that is, on the force *in actu* in all knowing which organises the higher human faculties. Thus to the extent that the final condition of knowledge is discovered as a producing which produces itself, the theses of the dialectic are distanced both from the Kantian "I" and from Hegel's "Absolute."

The consciousness or the knowing which knows itself, must be an act, which is exercised, that is, must be a real knowing. The knowledge which posits itself cannot be identified with what is known. It indicates the thinking, existing subject in the same way as that which is known indicates a being.⁹ So even though what is thought as such is only given in thinking, it exists outside of it.

Various conclusions follow from this. Knowing in its highest form depends on the consciousness of its production, an awareness that implies a certain *a priori* capacity that appears as the rules of knowing. Of course, these rules cannot be understood as formulations expressing contents; they are principles, which characterise the act of consciousness. Thus, they are only present in real knowing, that is, a knowing which knows something and which corresponds to a being that is known by it. Therefore, we find the justification for knowledge only in the activity or willing of knowing, since, given what we have seen above, knowing is the same as producing knowledge, linked to which there is a clear consciousness of its production. This reflexive character is also a sign of a free activity which, as we have seen, Schleiermacher includes in the category

⁷ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Einleitung zur Dialektik*, 404.

⁸ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 98–99, 108.

⁹ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1811), 12–13. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 90.

of art: “The act of consciousness is all the more a form of knowledge, the more it is a willing production, that is, through art.”¹⁰

At first sight this argumentation would seem to lessen the tension between thinking and being, tipping the scales in favour of spontaneity, and relegating what is received or given. Inasmuch as this position situates the ultimate basis for all knowledge in the immanence of consciousness, it seems not to take into account a possible effectiveness of being in thought. However, only an effectiveness of this type can break the conceptual link that binds sensory limitation and determination to what is merely received, and that understands it from the point of view of the subject, as pure passivity.

Schleiermacher’s argument does not end here. In his lectures of 1814/15 he opens up another perspective on the problem that concerns us, saying that the production of knowledge consists in an opposition between that which is received and that which is spontaneous. Even in common experience, which occurs without a particular willingness, it is necessary to recognise activity as a living principle without which there is no knowledge. Conversely, knowledge sought beforehand cannot culminate in knowledge unless the organs are affected, that is, unless something is received.¹¹ These statements do not contradict the initial ideal of the dialectic, according to which the spontaneous, free, and therefore artistic character of the human reason has principles or rules of production that formally validate knowledge insofar as they produce it. Consequently, such rules are necessarily principles of real knowledge in the twofold sense. Although the similarity of this view to Kant’s critical philosophy comes to mind, these are not logic-transcendental principles that grant validity to the empirical object insofar as they constitute it as such. We will return to this question, since it is linked to the correct understanding of the dialectic.

In the text quoted above, two points about knowing are clearly outlined. On the one hand, the coincidence of thinking with being, and on the other, the coincidence of thinking with itself. The explanation of these two points corresponds with the division of the dialectic into two parts: one transcendental, the other formal or technical. The first of these deals with the static dimension of knowledge under the form of the concept. By examining the structures of thought, it tries to justify the dialectical presupposition of a transcendental foundation for the agreement between thought and being. The transcendental argument identifies

¹⁰ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 77.

¹¹ “Im Hervorbringen des Wissens ist ein Gegensatz zwischen dem mehr receptiven und dem mehr spontanen.” Ibid., 155.

true knowing in that which is produced in the same way by all those who possess the capacity of thought,¹² and it must correspond to a being thought in it. Now, the technical part regards knowledge as a result of a construction or combination, which brings the intellectual function and the organic-sensory function into play. “Real knowing is that thinking which posits itself not with the difference but with the identity of the two functions and, equally from both, refers originally to what is outside itself as being.”¹³ Thus we cannot understand affection, that which is passive, as a moment which is immediately abandoned, that is, as something whose effectiveness is inoperative for true knowledge.

On the contrary, Schleiermacher asserts that the correspondence between thought and being is mediated by the relationship between the totality of being and the organisation that results from the functions of thought. The statement according to which the activity of reason produces knowledge is not contradicted by the fact that sensation is grounded in being. In summary, knowing arises from the coincidence of these very different origins. In knowledge, being is posited as thought, but for this to happen, it also has to appear as real by virtue of its effectiveness on the organic function. The receptive without which there is no knowledge does not disappear in the organic unity; it is what feeds it.

The following question therefore arises: how is being presented and distinguished in the immanence of thought? In response to this problem, the dialectic examines the forms of thought or the units of knowing, namely, concept and judgement, whereby knowing recognises itself as such, to the extent that it conceives and judges objective being. Concept and judgement each mean a different unit; while the concept fixes permanent units, judgement, supported by the senses, determines the concept and marks the diversity of the sensory data. These two kinds of thought require each other, as judgement is not possible without the fixing of concepts, and the concept is not possible without the determination of judgement. This interdependence is an image of the unity and diversity in ascending and descending thought which, at the same time, is also found in beings as a unity of essence and diversity of differences from other beings.¹⁴ In this sense, in the construction of knowledge, all the elements, including those which do not come from subjective spontaneity, are preserved.

¹² Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1811), 12–13.

¹³ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 92.

¹⁴ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1811), 17–18.

The correctness of the construction depends on the concept and the judgement, that is, on their respective formation and reciprocal combination.¹⁵

Now, the answer to the question mentioned above could be the following. It is precisely this combination of the two functions and the two forms of thinking that explains that thought is necessarily open to being, and that the corresponding objects do refer to the same one. In the concept and in the judgement knowing is present, and as both are reciprocally conditioned, we can say that the being at the basis of both the concept and the judgement is one and the same.¹⁶ Inasmuch as the construction of knowing means the differentiated unity of the universal and the individual, which is recognised in both the convergence and congruence of the intellectual and organic function and in the interdependence of judgement and concept, it guarantees the relationship of thought to being. This means also that both progress and discussion about an object of thought are possible. Disagreement *per se* presupposes the acknowledgement of the sameness of an object as well as the relationship of thinking to being itself.¹⁷

At this point, we can ask ourselves: do the theses of the dialectic contribute to clarifying the problem under discussion, the tension between spontaneity and receptivity? Three conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, spontaneity and receptivity cannot be understood as two radically different aspects of knowing. If purely organic affection meant the beginning of experience, whereas knowledge proper has its origin in spontaneity, then the principles of knowing which produce and validate thought would also be responsible for both the genesis and the validity of objects. But, as we have seen, what is receptive in knowledge is a constitutive dimension, required by the relationship between thinking and being. This means that the principles of thought are not able to produce objects of knowledge and also cannot on their own fulfil the function of being criteria for the adequacy of thought to what is being thought.

Secondly, as a result of the above, the correct combination of the organic and the intellectual implies true thought. Concepts and judgements arise from the constant ascending and descending movement, and are measured from themselves

¹⁵ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 155.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 113. Though Frank remarks the realistic aspirations of the Dialectic and maintains that it presupposes a common reference to an identical object transcending thought, he concludes: "Indecisiveness regarding why Being is transcendent to consciousness is one of the principal weaknesses of Schleiermacher's thought." Manfred Frank, "Metaphysical foundations: a look at Schleiermacher's Dialectic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 31.

¹⁷ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Einleitung zur Dialektik* (1833), 408.

as the forms of thought in its necessary articulation, while they conceive and judge objective being. In summary, the “real” and the “ideal” provide the foundation of authentic knowledge.

Finally, the diversification of functions and differentiation of forms of thought require a unity that is not constructed or relative, but absolute. If the being with which all these are related must be one, then the act of producing knowledge from its force (*Kraft*) must be a unity, as what is exercised must be an act of producing knowledge. Let us now take a closer look at this question.

The Two Types of Knowing in the Unity of Thought

The fact that the real and the ideal are inseparable co-principles leads us to the co-referentiality of thinking and being. Schleiermacher understood this co-referentiality in terms of limitation and finiteness. The difference and relationship between thinking and being that are perceived in the analysis of the forms of knowing reflect the mediation of our organic nature in knowledge. Insofar as knowledge is possible only under the spatiotemporal conditions proper to the senses, real thought is produced only through the above-mentioned unity of the intellectual and organic functions. This formulation is backed up by two ideas that are central to the dialectic as a whole. On the one hand, the being posited in thought is the totality of the being, but not the being of the totality. On the other, the integration of the different cognitive operations is not produced by itself as a simple addition: it has to be praxis, free or artistic activity.

In accord with this, and with the previous statement that real knowing consists of the coincidence of thinking and being, as well as of the coincidence of thinking with itself, we need to have recourse to the transcendental to produce this coincidence. Certainly, “knowing in the form of judgement as thinking produced by everyone in the same way is not based on the identity of either the intellectual or the organic function.”¹⁸ At this point, we should recall one of the initial theses of the dialectic: all knowing depends on an original knowing, in which are given the rules of all construction. To the question, how can the knowing which precedes any other knowing and the knowing which proceeds from it and realises it be alike? Schleiermacher replies by saying that this is possible only if the knowing that precedes shows itself in its exercise, that is, as a knowing which genuinely acts as a foundation for knowing. This antecedence is therefore not of a temporal nature. It corresponds to the kind of antecedence that exists between praxis and theory.

¹⁸ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 127.

And so we encounter once again the authentic task of the dialectic, which is to ensure “the identity of the supreme and most universal knowing and of the principles of scientific construction.”¹⁹ Only in consciousness, or the knowing that knows itself, can this identity and difference take place. Consciousness is presented as the formal constituent of all thought, which does not antecede it in time; it is first insofar as it is the force and activity of thought (wanting to think is the beginning of thought). We might think that this supreme knowing is the only one that knows. In this case, a new division would arise at the heart of the dialectic, as real knowing, that is, knowing in the strict sense, would not relate directly with the forms of thinking, i.e., with the objective units, but only through the original knowing. This division would trigger an infinite process of states of knowing which would further complicate the problem we are addressing. This is not Schleiermacher’s position. He aims to defend the notion that “the relativity of knowing is posited at the same time as that through which we are aware of its operations in their difference, that is, it is posited with the coincidence of the knowing and essentially with this.”²⁰ He therefore regards as insufficient any argument which, setting out from objective knowing, claims to reach original knowing, which is an existential, active force, and the absolute guarantee of the unity of thinking and being.

Schleiermacher insists precisely on this point, in which he differs from other thinkers of the day. He does not share the idealist position in which the subject is defined as intension towards self-knowledge so that the diversity of the phenomenal is converted into apparent knowledge vis-a-vis what is genuinely real: the subject. Similarly, Schleiermacher discovers a being which posits itself in place of the “I-think,” which Kant considers as the representation of representations, thus endangering the understanding of the differential mode of being of the unity of all representation. The difference in terminology is noteworthy. Self-consciousness designates the human being as pure positing (*setzen*). The way of positing itself is by producing itself in real knowing. In other words, the self, properly speaking, does not posit itself, but rather it is the “pure being” of human being considered as positing itself.²¹ In the arguments of the dialectic the distinction between immediate self-consciousness and reflexive self-consciousness is operative. The self has to do with the latter; it involves a certain thematization of the consciousness, which is no longer immediate. Schleiermacher does not speak about a self-consciousness that requires reflection, because this would require also another kind of previous consciousness.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1811), 7.

²⁰ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 99.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 99, 108.

The immediate self-consciousness, that is, the unity that founds all knowing, cannot be understood as such.

Is it still relevant to maintain that unity is the foundation of all knowing? The affirmative reply to this question obliges us to insist further on the balance of tension between the spontaneous and the receptive. We left the explanation considering that immediate self-consciousness can only mean the being of reason as positing itself. Schleiermacher frequently names the connection between different moments in thought or the determined or undetermined diversity in a being with the term *Übergang*, “crossing.”²² The being of thought consists of crossing from the indeterminate to the determinate, from concept to judgement, from thinking to wanting. Crossing indicates progress, but also preservation. Crossing as an essential modality of self-consciousness is the *ratio cognoscendi* of this unity, which is the basis of knowledge, but this unity operates as *ratio essendi* of all consciousness, of all real knowing. For Schleiermacher “knowing is that act of thought which, without any modification to what is posited in it, can pass from thought to perception and vice versa.”²³ In this text we can see the effort to preserve the existential character of consciousness; this is always lost in a reflective moment, when elements are attributed to the self which imply its hypostatization. Self-consciousness is merely the unity that guarantees the relationship between thinking and being and provides their agreement as respectively positing and developing. Therefore, that which serves as a foundation for real knowing is present as self-consciousness at its origin but is not available as knowledge. In summary, the relative condition of thought and being liberates the immediate self-consciousness from the task of providing the higher unity of knowing, which implies reflection and also knowledge. This is also consistent with the essential co-implication of spontaneity and receptivity, mentioned above.

In the brief essay entitled “Über den Begriff des höchsten Gutes,” Schleiermacher maintains that self-consciousness is linked to the experience of time. The temporal dimension of self-consciousness is what constitutes each individual as such and, for this reason, is in and by itself absolutely untransferable.²⁴ Thus, the individual is not reducible to a conceptual knowledge. As self-consciousness, it joins together thinking and desiring as a simple crossing; its actuality is that of an open, indeterminate present which gathers together moments of the past. Certainly, a kind of unity of consciousness must link the transition from one object to the other, but it

²² Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1811), 36–7, 58–59.

²³ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 99.

²⁴ Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Über den Begriff des höchsten Gutes,” *Schleiermachers Werke* (Leipzig: F. Meiner Verlag, 1910), Bd. 1, 487.

has to be existential as well as “transcendent.” In this way, it performs the union of the intellectual and organic functions, which are connected with the identity and the difference that characterise our individuality.

As I indicated at the beginning of this paper, the dialectic investigates the principles of real knowledge, and therefore of the thinking that happens in the existential context, that is, in relation to being. The assumption of the inaccessibility of self-consciousness is no reason for denying the capability to account for the correctness of our knowledge. The “transcendental” basis of knowing, however, must have a relationship to knowing as immediate as that between thinking and being. Moreover, this relationship is the only way in which one can hold oneself without reference to knowing or desiring: it is the possessed identity.²⁵ This explains why, as we have seen before, we cannot gain access to the foundations from the objective units. What is at stake is not the objectivity of objects; this merely depends on the correct combination of materials at the different levels of function and form. What is meant by the transcendental foundation is rather the unity which ought to precede every combination, without consisting of knowing about the knowledge, but rather of a knowing that knows. This foundation remains outside of thought and actual being, but is always the transcendent accompaniment and basis of both.²⁶

At this point in the argument, the distance between Schleiermacher and Kant becomes apparent. By noting it, we can account for one central theme of his philosophy, namely, hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline. Unlike Schleiermacher’s dialectic, Kant argues that only a fully spontaneous activity can redeem the passive nature of sensory experience. The “I-think” takes on a dual role. On the one hand, it signifies the identity of the subject, and on the other, its “being itself” is inseparable from the very action of bringing into play the *a priori* forms of all knowledge. Kant does not distinguish clearly enough between the type of action that constructs the object and the type that does not end in something thematic but which is an end in itself.²⁷ The “transcendental apperception” unifies without being a unity itself, as all unity is conceptual or representative. The “I-think” unifies the phenomena by positing itself, identical to itself, in the crossing from one

²⁵ “The identity of the foundation is present in a form of life.” Emilio Brito, “La ‘dialectique’ de Schleiermacher et l’absolu schellingien,” *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 84 (1992): 80.

²⁶ Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1822), KGA 2/10, 2, 575–576. See Jeffery Kinlaw, “Schleiermacher’s Transcendent Ground Argument,” in *The State of Schleiermacher Scholarship today: selected essays*, ed. Edwina Lawler, Jeffery Kinlaw, Ruth D. Richardson (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 295–313.

²⁷ Cf. Alejandro Llano, “Naturalismo y trascendentalismo en la teoría kantiana del conocimiento,” *Annuario Filosófico* 37/3 (2004): 553.

representation into another. Therefore, the identity of self-consciousness depends on the objectivity that results from its unification of the empirical diversity. The circularity of Kant's argument has been often remarked. The well-known formula in the *Critique of Pure Reason* summarises the key features of the spontaneity of reason: the *a priori* conditions of knowledge of the objects of experience are at the same time the *a priori* conditions of these objects.²⁸ In this way, truth is defined as pure objectivity, and this only on the basis of spontaneity. The subject, once it has been affected, produces knowledge by producing the object, so that the formality of what is objective offers also a logical-transcendental criterion for the truth of the object. Therefore, real knowing does not require a coincidence between thinking and being, but merely a coincidence of thinking with itself.

Kant says that the mature judgement of reason discovers the objective dispositions that respond to the nature of human reason. But this judgement (self-knowledge) is subsequent to the dispositions, the categorial structure of our thinking. The fact that these *a priori* conditions are intimately related to the identity of the "I" raises the question about their legitimacy. That is the task of the transcendental deduction of *a priori* conditions, it should also make us forget what we could call their unknown origin. *The Critique of Pure Reason* is content to assert that the basic forms of judgement provide a secure guide to distinguish the synthetic actions which are ordered to objectivity.²⁹ Various thinkers have expounded the close relationship between this way of recognising *a priori* concepts from the forms of judgment and the linguistic turn which took place a century after Kant. The "verbalisation" of the categories represents its *ratio cognoscendi*. The basic form of all synthetic function is syntactic. In this sense, from the linguistic nature of the conditions of possibility, we can deduce that the general form of knowledge proceeds from the natural principles of reason and is also the most reasonable. That is, it ensures that knowledge is communicable and that there is a community of knowledge, free from the limitations of the particular nature of empirical experience. But this idea is part of Schleiermacher's contribution, and as such obviously predates the linguistic turn, owing much to Hamann's and Herder's studies of language.³⁰

²⁸ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 158/B 197. See my article, "El giro hermenéutico de la filosofía de la conciencia. Kant y Schleiermacher," in *Anuario Filosófico*, 37/3 (2004): 797-821.

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, A 70/B 95.

³⁰ "[Schleiermacher] reflektiert nicht nur über die Möglichkeit, die dem Subjekt zur apriorischen Erkenntnis der Gegenstände gegeben ist, sondern bezieht in die transzendente Reflexion auch noch die Möglichkeiten des apriorischen Kommunikationsbezuges zwischen dem einen und dem anderen Subjekt und deren gemeinsamen apriorische Erkenntnisbewegungen ein." Friedrich Kaulbach,

The linguistic nature of thought shows that access to the foundation of knowing is always mediated. But it does not avoid recognising the irreducible being of the transcendental basis of its linguistic expression. Nor does it give up the pursuit of truth. Whereas in the production of knowing, elements proper to poetic action appear like linguistic rules, when we look at the identity of all knowing we find ourselves confronted by something ineffable that has not been produced: a kind of action which possesses its own end without distance or mediation. In knowledge, according to Schleiermacher's position, both types of action are distinguished, but not separated.

As I have tried to show in the foregoing pages, being is an essential principle of genuine knowledge; the ultimate foundation of knowing, which has to do with a possession of knowledge that is proper to personal being or consciousness, indicates the existence of another real principle. The tension between two different realities which are not mutually opposed is described by Schleiermacher by recourse to two correlates, God and the world, which, when formalised, appear as genuinely other with respect to knowledge and impede any understanding of reflexivity as having a completely free run of consciousness.³¹

The Art of Dialogue

Schleiermacher notes an intentionality in what is given in the organic function, that is, in what is a passive determination of the senses. This intentionality is present in his way of resolving the tension between the spontaneous and the receptive. It means that in the receptive moment there is a potentiality to symbolise that originally free activity through which reality is known. The being which is given in thought is already organised; it is developing, to use Schleiermacher's expression.³² What is processual in knowledge is, to this extent, an intentional sign of the originally free spontaneity. If the heuristic and the architectonic in knowing are reciprocally conditioned, and both are the basis for the correct combination of knowledge,³³ then we must admit that in cognition there is a sign of the freedom of the rational force. What is organised for the

"Schleiermachers Idee der Dialektik," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 10 (1968): 245.

³¹ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 136–151.

³² *Ibid.*, 93.

³³ *Ibid.*, 156. "Die Irrationalität der Einzelnen kann nur ausgeglichen werden durch die Einheit der Sprache, und die Irrationalität der Sprache nur durch die Einheit der Vernunft." *Ibid.*, 190.

senses should be so in terms of congruence not only with the intellectual, but chiefly with the free and spontaneous.

Language as such is symbol. It denies the opposition between the empirical and the *a priori*, and also between the spontaneous and the receptive. It is impossible to separate its organic and intellectual dimensions. This explains why Schleiermacher's dialectic necessarily involves a conception of language and confirms that he situates the foundation of knowing outside the monologic sphere in the realms of the dialogic. Thus the identity in the construction of thought as an element of knowledge is only manifest in language. But there is no general language.³⁴

Language bears witness to the reflexive ability of reason in the same way that reflection is exercised in syntactic form. Taking up Herder's thesis, Schleiermacher also sees that language expresses the soul's accord with itself and it is therefore a free spiritual act. Thought is spontaneity in formation, which is born of its own language, as an intimate development of the spirit and in agreement with its nature.³⁵ Otherwise expressed, word and reason equip the human being for agreement with itself; that is, they situate his intimacy in dialogue.³⁶ Consequently, the linguistic nature of thinking and the reflexive character of language offer a privileged example of the symbolic activity of reason as well as of its dependence on the receptive.

This pair of concepts, thought and language, perfectly recreates the movement of the spirit which finds itself free to move from one thing to another (*Übergang*), from one cognitive action to another. Having a language is not just knowing a system of rules or applying a code effectively; an utterance is communicative if it intentionally presents thought. The linguistic and the rational action are not two actions, which coincide at one point: the act of reason must be naturally expressible and communicable. Conversely, we also think and know through linguistic signs.³⁷ The idea that language only exists via thought, and vice

³⁴ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1822), 630.

³⁵ Schleiermacher, *Einleitung zur Dialektik*, 413–414. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache, Werke* (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985), Bd. 1, 722–723.

³⁶ Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, 733.

³⁷ "Das Denken ist ein inneres Sprechen. Daraus erhellt aber auch positiv, dass die Sprache das Fortschreiten des Einzelnen im Denken bedingt. Denn die Sprache ist nicht nur ein Complexus einzelner Vorstellungen, sondern auch ein System von der Verwandtschaft der Vorstellungen." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 78.

versa, and that each can only complete itself via the other, is central to Schleiermacher's philosophy.

As we have seen, the starting point for dialectic is an original knowing which contains the rules for the construction of knowledge, that is, the principles which ensure that thinking coincides with itself and, like real knowledge, does not form part of the subject's previous endowment.³⁸ This analogue of knowing also ensures the relationship of thought to the world as well as showing our being as a relative one. An interpretation of the dialectic as a theory of dialogue with exclusively formal implications does not consider how it contributes to knowing about thought and its expressive nature, in which it reveals the personal structure of the consciousness; this personal structure is inaccessible to the sciences, but decisive for their unity. Dialectic is the only science which has the ability to thematize itself; therefore, as the art of conversation, it constitutes a universal method of forming knowledge.³⁹

In fact, dialectic is also necessarily defined as the art of conducting dialogue because it offers a privileged means of access to the personal structure. Thought means necessarily "linguistic thought," and tends towards communication in dialogue from its very origins, the act of consciousness in crossing points reflexively, that is, in a linguistic way, to the effective presence of universal principles that regulate authentic knowledge. This original knowing in which the rules for the construction of all knowing are given is the same as that which operates as the art of dialogue. The linguistic dimension of thought reflects the common structure of human thought, which makes it possible to expect the revelation of truth in the course of arguments both for and against. Dialogue leads to knowledge because it is its natural expression. Schleiermacher defines language also as a "system of organic movements which are simultaneously the expression and the sign of the acts of consciousness as cognitive faculty."⁴⁰ Only through language can the identical structure and rules of human thought be articulated.

Here we must return to the thesis according to which Schleiermacher does not regard the finiteness and limitation of human knowledge as a sign of something negative that has to be counteracted. Our specific organic condition

³⁸ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1811), 9; Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 76.

³⁹ Cf. Wolfgang H. Pleger, "Die Kunst der Gesprächsführung. Zu Schleiermachers Hermeneutik und Dialektik," in *Dialogische Wissenschaft. Perspektiven der Philosophie Schleiermachers*, ed. Dieter Burdorf/Reinold Schmücker (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 132.

⁴⁰ Schleiermacher, *Ethik*, 65.

opens human existence to the external world and ensures that we take notice of the being of things and collaborate in forming the object of knowledge. But it also allows communication and discussion about the object. As Schleiermacher argues, disagreement of any kind presupposes the acknowledgement of the sameness of an object, as well as the necessity of the relationship of thought to being. “If we take away this relationship of thought to being there is no disagreement, rather, as long as thought remains purely within itself, there is only difference.”⁴¹ For as long as thinking cannot offer the full structure of the world, discussion and the exchange of thoughts are necessary. The dialectic as a theory of dialogue is thus presented as a method which assumes that the subject finds in itself the other which does not come from it; namely, a potential universality which cures the self-isolation of a transcendental “I” and opens particular knowledge to the sphere of shared knowing.⁴² To the extent that the unity of knowing is not identified with the conscious subjective unity, the rules of knowing are a discovery to which normal thought contributes. Real thought is exercised in a community of dialogue. In summary, Schleiermacher emphasises the importance of cognitive mediation and the need for everyone who takes part in the dialogue to work together on the task, never complete, of formulating the rules of genuine knowing, that is, agreement.⁴³

In the *Introduction* of 1833 the description of the principles which guide dialogue comes to represent the quest, in the nature of reason and in the course of exercising thought, for the conditions governing agreement in knowledge and, therefore, for true expression. That the reflection of thought is supported by language means that it is inseparable from a given perspective: that offered by concrete language. Although the formulation of the principles may always be indebted to the linguistic context, in the difference between languages Schleiermacher recognises a sign that none of them exhausts the thought of the human spirit.⁴⁴ He insists that rationality can be expressed linguistically but it is not in itself a language; rather it has to do with the non-formulated horizon in

⁴¹ “Denn nehmen wir diese Beziehung des Denkens auf das Seiende weg: so gibt es keinen Streit, sondern so lange das Denken nur rein in sich bleibt, gibt es nur Verschiedenheit. Daher auch dieses in sich bleiben des Denkens, das der skeptischen Ablehnung zum Grunde liegt.” Schleiermacher,

⁴² Emilio Brito, “La Dialectique de Schleiermacher,” *Dialogue* 32 (1993): 43–44. “Dialektik ist mit anderen Wörtern, das adäquate Modell für die Philosophie in ihrer nachkantischen Situation.” Guido Kreis, “Schleiermachers negative Dialektik,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 112 (2005): 362.

⁴³ Schleiermacher, *Einleitung zur Dialektik*, 398.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 404.

which an expression is significant and communicative. In the same way as real knowing is expressed in a given language, it is necessary to recognise that the criteria of science, the general principles of all research, are in part linguistic criteria. In their linguistic nature lies their suitability for discussion and agreement, that is, for truth.

In summary, discussion and dialogue are possible by virtue of both the difference and the common nature of the rules of combination: namely, original knowing founded on these rules always accompanies genuine thinking.⁴⁵ Knowledge of these rules can guide disagreement towards the true knowing which is the object of all communication. As I indicated above, dialectic does not invent the rules; it only confirms them in that true thought is realised within the human community as a result of ordinary thought. We should remember here the text quoted above: beginning in the middle is inevitable. In fact, each individual existence requires openness to others; by pursuing the knowledge that is available, the essential participation of the individual in humanity is made manifest. In harmony with this, the reasoning in the *Introduction* also develops a conclusion suggested in the lectures of 1814-15: the unity of language compensates for the irrationality of the individual. Similarly, the incommunicable remainder, which is latent in all individual linguistic expression, is balanced out by the unity of reason.⁴⁶ The tendency to communicate confirms the fact that the human being belongs to a particular species. We must assume that some kind of harmony is possible within the diversity and singularity of individuals.

As Schleiermacher suggests in the *Monologues*, everyone ought to recognise every other in his own singularity. It thus transpires that receptivity to other human beings is not a question exclusive to the moral order; it corresponds rather to the intersubjectivity that constitutes the condition of the possibility of individual subjects. Individuality is indebted to an expression of itself that is the result of the experience of being in the world as a pure and simple feeling of dependence; the self (I) does not understand itself except when faced with the other (you). And, as the dialectic shows, the human being becomes aware of itself in the world through language; he faces others and confronts his knowledge and experiences with them. Language operates at the very core of access to the truth about things and, at the same time, supports the movement toward identity, which is the human being's life task. Between these two interdependent centres, that of

⁴⁵ Cf. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1814/15), 81.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 190.

the link between thinking and being, and that of knowledge of itself, human life takes on its own structure.

Schleiermacher transforms the tension between spontaneity and receptivity in the opposition between the general and the individual, insofar as this tension is articulated by the relationship between thought and language.⁴⁷ Thinking linguistically contributes directly to the creation of personal unity from the plurality of thoughts and acts of willing; that is, it awakens interest in the individual being. It can then be concluded that the phenomenology of individuality is related to the central topics of the dialectic, which is the coincidence of thinking and being and that of thinking with itself. This step is also decisive for the possibility of philosophical hermeneutics. Thus the access to individuality requires rules whose application must be artistic, or even individual.

Thought and language are a praxis, a free activity. A linguistic expression involves the practical and the poetic aspects, which the hermeneutic task must respect. In understanding there is not properly representative mediation, only the resemblance of one thought to another, the recreation of one praxis through another praxis. The reconstruction of discourse, of the poetic, by the comparative procedure, will never render superfluous the “divination” procedure, the innovation of understanding, which it implies. Like thinking, the act of speaking is never a simple repetition; since language is the organ of the soul, it offers a kind of access to individuality. Interpretation is praxis and, like thinking, is interwoven with poetic elements; it therefore needs a method which always ends in a leap from the processual or poetic to the act or praxis. Hermeneutics incorporates this in its twofold task: grammatical interpretation and psychological interpretation. However, comprehension occurs when the interpreter captures the meaning; that is, when an identity is produced between the person who understands and what is understood. But this kind of identity is not to be grasped conceptually; at root it is an art. As if it were a question of thinking, the interpreter stands before a symbiosis of the general and the individual that always leaves out anything misunderstood as though it were ineffable. Dialectic is a basic science precisely because of the impossibility of attaining complete knowledge; our knowledge provides an inexhaustible supply of material for discussion. We depend on dialogue, on the understanding of others’s discourse, which hermeneutics performs according to rules in order to reach indisputable truths.

⁴⁷ Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Einleitung zur Dialektik*, KGA 2/10, 1, 393.