Stamer, G. (2021): *Kritik des lebendigen Verstandes. Erkenntnistheoretischer Entwurf zu einer Theorie der Einheit von Geist und Leben,* Königshausen & Neumann, 200 pp. ISBN-13: 978-3826074523.

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Already in its title, this publication subscribes to a certain philosophical stance: As a critique and an epistemological sketch, it follows Kant in his project of enlightenment, understood as the exit from a self-inflicted misery. It is critical to Kant himself, however, concerning the notion of this misery. For Kant, we must leave behind the lack of immaturity as sovereign and responsible rational subjects. What the author is opposing is the apparent lack of unity between spirit and life. For this lack, or at least its appearance, he holds Kants at least partially responsible. Kant, he argues, did not reach the concept of the 'living intellect' which enacts itself as the dynamic unity of spirit and life. So, this concept has to be recovered to correct and complete the critical business of Kant, also for the sake of human self-understanding as instantiation of that living intellect.

This attempt is presented explicitly as a discursive essay which is proceeding in six steps and according chapters: (I.) a closer look at the development of Kantian thought especially throughout the three critiques (pp. 11-63); (II.) a conceptualization of the human being as 'thing in itself' (pp. 63-80); (III.) an inquiry into human consciousness and intelligence (pp. 80-98); (IV.) an assertion of the reality of spirit (pp. 98-113); (V.) a critical discussion of contemporary naturalistic and/or agnostic positions

(pp. 113-171); and (VI.) a new understanding of the living spirit, also inspired by Kant (pp. 171-195).

(I.) Confronting Kant, the author acknowledges his emancipatory intention to dismantle the superiority claims of clergy and nobility by erecting the critical and self-critical forum of an autonomous reason. He also sees the positive impulse of Kant to protect modern science, as an instrument of intellectual emancipation, from sceptic doubts. For the author, the trouble starts as Kant tries to segregate science and subjectivity, for the sake of the latter: Science for Kant is Newtonian physics, which in turn follows the mathematical ideal of universal and necessary propositions and thus subjugates its objects, collectively named 'nature', to an inevitable causal necessity with no freedom at all. Subjectivity for Kant, on the other hand, is characterized by the ability to start a causal chain spontaneously. Subjects as such are free from the causal restraints of Newtonian physics. Therefore, they cannot appear as phenomena of experience which are thoroughly causally bound physical objects; they must remain 'things in themselves' which can only be thought and never be experienced. So, for Kant the realms of free subjects and necessity-bound nature fall apart. This is epistemologically coined out by the sublime position of the higher cognitive faculties: Natural objects enter human cognition only as sensual representations and are as such once removed from intellect (*Verstand*) subsuming them under its categories, twice removed from reason (*Vernunft*) operating on intellect in turn. Hence, by the way, the author engages in a theory of living *intellect* as the capacity which is, also for Kant, closest to sensuality and therefore also to nature. As the author observes, Kant's epistemological picture seems to be flawed by the fact that nature for him is at once under the jurisdiction of the intellect and at the same time evoked as the instance integrating the human faculties of cognition. So even for Kant nature is not a mere epistemic a posteriori whose laws are given by the intellect; it provides also some kind of a priori which precedes and grounds the very working of the intellect. Due to his fear of letting the human being become a determined object of science, however, Kant is unable to cash this out.

(II.) This could, and should, be cashed out in (modified) Kantian terms, however, as the author goes on arguing. Even Kant does and would not deny that the human being in epistemological reflection is seen as a source of spiritual activity, which is not only an appearance, but points to the human being as a 'thing in itself'. Already sensuality is not merely receiving, but active right from the start; and experience does not happen to human beings – also and especially not to scientists – but is actively created by them. Having gained a notion of the spirit of creative activity implying also intellectual and rational elements, there is no good reason to deny it to nature which already in Kant was glimpsed as the carrying background of human intellect.

(III.) In the operation of this intellect, central traits can be seen that justify its being called 'living': Human intellect does not happen as a mechanical process guided by mathematical structures; it is a conscious activity grounded in biological foundations, but not – at least not in an unqualified sense – identical to them. So the author is very outspoken against any kind of blunt naturalization of the human mind. There is a kind of identity between the natural side of the human being and its conscious intellect for him, nevertheless; that, however, is a dynamic identity of functional interplay, a lived identity, which sets human mind totally apart from 'Artificial Intelligence' as a dead mechanical product of human inventiveness.

(IV.) So, the 'reality of the mind' as topic of the fourth chapter has a quality of its own: It is a mediation between the dimension of the universal, to which the concepts of the intellect are striving, and the dimension of the individual which is the irreplaceable carrier of the concrete process of conscious life. Though being a mediation, mind also is 'original', it does not merely supervene on the poles between it mediates but constitutes them at the same time – in the concrete process of living consciousness. In the advanced civilizations of the human beings, this mediation becomes institutionalized and thus reaches its climax.

(V.) In our own civilization, however, there is a crisis in the understanding of the real living mind: Authors who are renowned for good reasons

like Stephen Hawking or Roger Penrose follow reductive or at least agnostic pathways. According to the author, this is a late effect of Kant's dichotomy: He, and thinkers in his wake like Wilhelm Dilthey, tried to keep science and the humanities apart in order to reserve some space for the latter; this reservation, however, could not hinder the ascendance of the empirical sciences which now reign supreme in the intellectual climate of our time. These sciences are not the problem, however; also for the author they remain eventual instruments of a humanization of the condition we live in. To exhaust this potential, we must acknowledge that also the sciences are the products of us as free subjects; we must acknowledge that freedom is the central motif not only of practical, but also of theoretical reason.

(VI.) When we reach this acknowledgment, we overcome the split in our self-understanding as empirically determined and rationally free entities. We can face our reality as essentially free subjects in experience and in our intellect. The mediative elements in this process are, according to the author, imagination and reason. Imagination is a sensitive capacity tending to the infinite, and reason is a cognitive capacity trying to conceptualize the infinite. Both intertwine in aesthetics, as already shown by Kant in his Critique of Judgment. This intertwining is and remains a free play, in which the nature of freedom and the freedom of nature is revealed. The nature of freedom is the choice individuals can and must make in concrete situations which are guided, but not totally determined by natural laws; the freedom of nature is that of an infinite, creative, diverse and diversifying process which encompasses both generality in its laws and individuality in its concreteness. No science in the strict sense, but aesthetics as a discipline of freedom and experience is the key to understand the human being as the chief agent of that process.

As mentioned, this book engages chiefly Kant, briefly mentioning also other figures of German Idealism like Hegel and Schelling, to whom, especially to his later philosophy, this ode to freedom at least implicitly is quite close. For this essay, it is allowed to circumnavigate the wide and deep seas of the scholarship in the history of philosophy and the shoals of

the specialized, sometimes overspecialized sub-disciplines of contemporary philosophy. Instead, it aims at and succeeds in speaking to everyone who is interested in a deeper understanding of one's subjectivity not in opposition to, but in a dynamic unity with nature – or in a conception of nature not as a mere object of the sciences, but as a creative subject in which our subjectivity is embedded. So, this publication is a challenge: to scholars in the history of philosophy who might be inspired to check the interpretations given here; to systematic philosophers who could be provoked to reflect on their own status as free subjects; and to all of us who, after the experiences of the past years, should not take their own freedom as given and granted but as something which has to be lived in an active way.

One merit of this book is that – in contrast to the philosophy of life in the late 19th and early 20th century – it does not exclude, but integrate rationality into that activity.

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