

Bildung and strategy

The fate of the ‘beautiful sciences’

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Kant's 1798 *Conflict of the Faculties* makes an explicit case for viewing philosophy as the romantic transdiscipline. The ‘lower faculty’ he explained there is less tied to the professional restrictions on research and teaching characteristic of the ‘higher faculties’ of law, medicine and theology dedicated to training lawyer-officials, doctors and priests. Philosophy served not only as the propaedeutic to the study of these disciplines – students had formally to pass through the lower faculty before being admitted to one of the higher faculties in the eighteenth-century German university – but also served to organize the content of those disciplines themselves. Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, philosophy seemed to have exceeded its propaedeutic vocation and was developing towards a romantic transdisciplinarity in which the philosophy of law, the philosophy of medicine and philosophical theology, united with the philosophy of art, sought to absorb and take the place of the vocational orientations of the higher faculties and produced an extraordinary fusion of civil (*Bildung*) and military energy.

This not entirely implausible hypothesis seems to make sense of the trajectory of German idealism, moving steadily forward with the claim to promote culture or *Bildung* through pure research and confident that its possession of the concept of ‘system’ will allow it to reorganize not only disciplinary knowledge but also its institutional articulation in the reformed Humboldtian university. Yet this is only a hypothesis, albeit one elevated to dogma by late-nineteenth-century historical scholarship, which had its own reasons for doing so. Indeed, it might be the case that philosophy could assume what can retrospectively be described as its transdisciplinary vocation only in so far as it was no longer philosophy but rhetoric in the process of assuming the form of philosophy. For far from undergoing an eclipse in the eighteenth century, the technical discipline of

rhetoric migrated, first, into the ‘beautiful sciences’ and then into philosophy.

Listening to the Devil can offer some insight into this metamorphosis. In a hilarious parody of a romantic transdisciplinarity in Goethe's *Faust*, Mephistopheles dons the robes of Dr Faust and interviews a prospective student. He advises him to attend the lower faculty: ‘So first, dear friend / You should make room / For the Collegium Logicum / This leaves the mind all trained and dressed / In Spanish trusses tightly pressed / So that it, slow and undistraught / Will potter down the road of thought.’ The demands on logic to organize the discourses of the higher faculties and prepare students for the study of this material perplexes the young man, whom Mephistopheles promptly reassures: ‘It will all soon grow more nearly clear / When you learn how to analyse / and properly categorize.’ Mephistopheles then moves on to the next philosophical discipline the student must learn: ‘Next, Metaphysics I should mention / As the foremost study for your attention! / There make your deepest insight strain / For things out of scale with the human brain; / For whatever fits into it and what doesn't / Some wondrous word is always present.’

Now, Mephistopheles is being really devilish in suggesting that not only logic and metaphysics but also the higher faculties are only a matter of manipulating words. This indeed is the skill that traverses all the disciplines. Law creates injustice through the manipulation of words, while for theology ‘Words are good things to be debated / With words are systems generated / In words belief is safely vested / From words no jot or title can be wrested.’ Medicine or the art of healing, or making money out of healing, too relies on the manipulation of words: ‘If you adopt a halfway decent air / You'll lure them all into your lair.’ For the Devil, philosophy as the lower faculty has in common with the higher faculties of law, medicine

and theology the ability to manipulate words to create an effect; it has become a form of rhetoric.

It is consistent with the deliberate anachronism of *Faust* that Mephistopheles identifies logic and metaphysics with the lower faculty, since this had already changed radically during the second half of the eighteenth century. The elements of the lower faculty began to assume a different character, being literally aestheticized into the ‘beautiful sciences’. The aestheticization that prompted Herder to complain, ‘We live, alas, in the age of beauty’, was none other than the infiltration of philosophy by rhetoric. The near disappearance of classical rhetoric was due less to obsolescence than to its successful philosophical metamorphosis. The classical discipline of rhetoric transmitted through the texts of Quintilian, Cicero and Longinus had two elements that made it eminently transdisciplinary: the attention to the speech or discourse delivered in a public forum to a public and the calculated effects of this speech on the formation of the citizen or subject. In the theory or rather the *techne* or art of rhetoric, these elements were discussed first according to the *composition* of a speech itself (with the category of a ‘speech’ in the process of expanding to include discourse, text, document, poem), then according to the medium through which it had an effect (reason, the sentiments, feelings of pleasure and displeasure), and finally the energies it released for moulding subjects (citizens, members of civil society, members of a nation).

The theoretical approach to the composition of a speech was to be of crucial importance. The scheme by which such theory was organized varied in the classical period but basically resolved into three linked elements known under the titles *invenitio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*. Invention involved the discovery of the materials of a speech; disposition the ordering of these materials into a sequence; and elocation its persuasive presentation. Although Ramus in the sixteenth century began to apply this scheme to philosophical materials, seeing invention and disposition as the ‘elements’ of rhetoric and elocation as its ‘method’, the pattern fully infiltrated itself into philosophy only with the publication of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s *Reflections on Poetry* in 1735 and his later, incomplete, *Aesthetica* of 1751. These texts, structured around the rhetorical schema of invention, disposition and elocation, quickly went viral, prompting an explosion of aesthetic texts that would have an enormous and still not fully understood or appreciated impact on philosophy.

Baumgarten effectively reorganized the content and aims of the lower faculty, understood equivocally as both a mental and a university faculty. The new transdisciplinary potential released by grafting rhetoric onto philosophy in this way is evident in the definition of aesthetic, of which Baumgarten proposed at least three, each with its own significant internal differences. The last and most influential version from his *Metaphysica* is also the most extensive: ‘Aesthetic is the science of sensible knowledge (the logic of the lower cognitive faculty, the philosophy of the arts and muses, lower theory of knowledge, the art of thinking beautifully and the art that is analogous to reason).¹ It is not just the philosophy of art but philosophy itself as the art of thinking beautifully which is the same as the logic of the lower cognitive faculty. Yet the real contribution made by Baumgarten consisted in his philosophical rephrasing of the doctrine of invention from the finding or discovery of the materials of a discourse (or thought) to one of creativity. It was not so much a matter of finding given materials for a discourse as of creating what precisely was not already there. Disposition remained close to its function in rhetoric except that as ‘aesthetico-logic’ it saw the logic of the understanding as continuous with the forms of organization characteristic of works of art, poetry or music. Elocution in its philosophical/aesthetic guise changed in a doctrine of affect or the pleasure that attended beautiful thinking and contributed to the formation of subjects. Longinus, who had reflected on this property under the name of ‘energy’, became increasingly prominent, especially in the reflection on sublime affect.

What kinds of subject were being formed by this new amalgam of philosophy and rhetoric, the ‘beautiful sciences’? The answer is complicated, but a clue is afforded by the changing place of the lower faculty of philosophy within the German university, during the second half of the eighteenth century. A now-classic and by no means incorrect explanation (associated with Charles McClelland and Rudolf Vierhaus) follows the transformation of the ‘beautiful sciences’ into the concept of *Bildung*. The new subjectivity interested in and emerging from the new lower faculty was no longer preparing for the study and a career in law, medicine or the church, but was trained to contribute to the emerging public sphere of commercial civil society and expanding provincial and state bureaucracies, which called for ‘cultured’ individuals who would not necessarily become professional specialists. This is McClelland’s view of the significance of the Göttingen reforms of

the traditional relationship between the lower and higher faculties described in his book *State, Society and University in Germany*:

in addition to the traditional introductory courses of logic, metaphysics and ethics Göttingen offered lectures in empirical psychology, the law of nature, politics, physics, natural history, pure and applied mathematics (including surveying, military and civilian architecture), history and its auxiliary sciences such as geography, diplomatics, science, art and ancient and modern languages.²

This was precisely the field opened by aesthetics – offering material for ordered discourses that could be invented or drawn from any practice and could be presented persuasively. When considered from a later standpoint, it seemed as if all these discourses could be gathered, and were gathering, under the title of *Bildung* or culture. Yet *Bildung* was more complicated than it first (and subsequently) appeared, as it was inseparable from civil and military forms of state building.

The new lower faculty in possession of the rhetorical doctrine of invention was not only the site for the generation of civil knowledge and subjects suggested by the term *Bildung*. The mention of military architecture in McClelland's list points to another professional group of growing importance in eighteenth-century Germany: the military, so far not represented in the higher faculties. One of the more curious outcomes of the reform of the lower faculty was the emergence of the so-called 'gallant sciences' – horse-riding, fencing, ballistics and fortification – that is to say, the knowledges and skills appropriate to the formation of military officers. The then-new University of Erlangen indeed concentrated most of its resources in the 'gallant sciences', with only a nominal presence of the old 'higher faculties'. War was increasingly a multidisciplinary enterprise – involving economics, politics, health, administration, ballistics, architecture – that required a transdisciplinary approach, one that it found in the new 'lower faculty'. Kant himself lectured to Russian officers on fortification and ballistics, and this approach to a militarized lower faculty would later inform the curriculum of the Berlin Military Academy; from this perspective the latter's role in the formulation of a military Kantianism does not seem at all anomalous. Many related discourses, including the economic discourse of cameralism, the health and internal order discourse of *Polizeiwissenschaft*, and even geography, were also associated with the military state and would later be combined by Clausewitz in the science

of strategy – one of the more unlikely fates of the 'beautiful sciences' of the expanded lower faculty. It would prove entirely compatible with the emergence of *Bildung* and the Humboldt university reforms, with Clausewitz accompanying his writings on war with a contribution to the aesthetic theory of genius.⁷

The migration of rhetoric into the philosophical lower faculty was the condition of possibility for the invention and collection of new discourses drawn from any number of new or previously untheorized practices from cameralistics to fencing. The new lower faculty became a machine for theorization, one that by definition could not be confined within a single discipline. The new lower faculty could be applied to emergent practices in search of a theoretical discourse or to existing discourses, as in the transformation of law, medicine and theology into the philosophy of law, medicine and philosophical theology; or even, more rarely, to the invention of previously unpractised disciplines such as anthropology. At the core of the reinvention of the lower faculty was the problem of art: Baumgarten's inaugural use of the rhetorico-philosophical fusion was dedicated to inventing an aesthetico-logical discourse on poetry. The scope of 'invention' in the beautiful sciences was in short very broad, and the moment when invention began to invent and codify itself as a discourse with its own invention, disposition and elocution, the discourse on invention itself or 'creativity' would quickly emerge as that process of thought and institutional change that we know as 'Romanticism'.

The fusion of the rhetorical schema of invention/disposition and elocution with the philosophical distinction between sensible and rational knowledge to produce a transdisciplinary machine for producing theoretical discourses of existing and novel practices was complex and is hard to describe briefly. An important stage in its development is marked by a splendid hybrid, a chimeric text that remains literally impossible to read in its entirety for precisely this reason: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Although Ekhard Forster has recently warned us, in his *The 25 Years of Philosophy*, against looking too closely at the architecture of the *critique*, its structural tensions are crucial to its philosophical expression.³ Kant restructures the Wolffian structure of general (ontology) and special metaphysics (psychology, cosmology and theology) according to a rhetorical 'doctrine of the elements' and 'doctrine of method' that attest to the presence at a structural level of the invention and disposition of the elements (transcendental aesthetic and analytic) of an experience/discourse with

their elocution of ‘presentation’ in the discipline of method.

The invention of a discourse on the invention of discourses – one that invents its own content, disposes its own disposition and articulates its own elocution – became characteristic of Jena Romanticism, appearing under various guises in the fragments of Novalis and Schlegel. It became closely associated with poiesis and creativity, mobilizing a term drawn from Longinus’s *On the Sublime* that had its own peculiar migration, becoming the core of nineteenth- and twentieth-century science: *energy*. Longinus’s treatise *Peri Hupsous* is usually remembered, quite properly, as one of the first theorizations of the sublime, but it was also a treatise on the capacity of speeches or discourses to produce effects in excess of the resources expended on their formulation and delivery. The capacity of a speech to produce something more, something new, became synonymous with creativity or the ability to create something that previously did not exist. It is a term that is ubiquitous in the writings of Humboldt, almost as prominent as *Bildung*, which, when aligned with the modal category of actuality by Clausewitz, became the inventive power of the strategist. In his reflections on genius, Clausewitz elaborated a concept of genius as the ability to act without a given rule – that is, with ‘energy’.

But before looking more closely at energy and its role in the formulation of a romantic transdisciplinarity I would like to focus on a specific episode: Schelling’s 1802–03 *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study*, which, through Schleiermacher and Fichte, would be pivotal in shaping the direction of the university reforms that led to the foundation of the University of Berlin and the seemingly idealist and still naively admired Humboldtian reforms. In these remarkable lectures, Schelling, fresh from the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and the lectures on the philosophy of art – some of which material he carries over into the *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study* – gives a critical report on the state of knowledge at the beginning of the nineteenth century and its institutional armature in the lower and higher faculties. Schelling’s first of fourteen lectures advocates the central role to be played by a reformed lower faculty guided by philosophy:

Philosophy which affirms humanity in its entirety and touches every aspect of its nature and is more qualified to liberate the spirit from the squalor of a professional education and to raise it to the realm of the universal and the absolute.

He continues by claiming that

Anyone who dedicates themselves to a specific discipline must know the function this has in the while, of the spirit which vivifies it and the way that it relates to the whole; it is thus important to study philosophy in order to think not as a slave, but as free and in the spirit of the whole.⁴

In developing the concept of philosophy in the succeeding lectures Schelling distinguishes it from mathematics and geometry as ‘original’ – that is to say inventive – knowledge, while acknowledging that the three disciplines share a foundation in the ‘absolute identity of the universal and the particular’: philosophy is distinguished by the invention of its own objects, unlike mathematics and geometry, which reflect on objects already given. Schelling concludes by defining philosophy as the ‘science of the idea or the eternal model of things’, declaring ‘There is no philosophy without intellectual intuition.’ Thus philosophy, the lower faculty, is for Schelling the discourse of invention or creativity, the discourse of the invention and expression of the form and content of the other discourses. The lectures end with a critical reprise of Plato’s expulsion of the poets at the end of the *Politeia*, now considered from the standpoint of the philosophy of art as the inventive discourse on invention. That this must be absolute and can tolerate no limits entail for Schelling the surpassing even of the discourse of genius that remains too bound to a notion of law, even if it is autonomous:

genius is autonomous, it removes itself from a legislation that is not its own, but only to submit itself under its own. Genius is always conceded to be the highest conformity to law. But it is philosophy that recognises absolute legislation in the artist, that is not only autonomous but tends also to become the principle of every autonomy.⁵

As the invention of invention, it is the giving of autonomy and law as well as their objects. The lectures end by returning to the anarchic model of a society perpetually inventing and reinventing itself, already intimated in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

I would like to end by returning to ways in which the application of the rhetorical doctrine of invention to invention itself sustained philosophy’s claim to be the main site for a transdisciplinary reflection upon creativity and energy. Schelling’s lectures were reviewed by Schleiermacher and their basic premiss adopted by Fichte in their memoranda to Karl Friedrich Beyme, who was charged by the Prussian

cabinet to found a new university in Berlin. The new university was to be dedicated not only to the primacy of the lower faculty but also to ‘invention’, or, in Schleiermacher’s words (shadowing the rhetorical schema), ‘the power to investigate, discover and present’ ‘new knowledge’ through research. When Humboldt assumed responsibility for the formation of the University of Berlin in 1809 he adopted this concept. Thomas Broman in his excellent study *The Transformation of German Academic Medicine, 1750–1820* (whose implications stretch far beyond its austere title) articulates the consensus of happy perplexity that attended this decision: ‘It was the peculiar idea of higher education for a government minister to use as the guiding principle for an expensive new institution’,⁶ but maybe not. The expansive view of invention that the Romantics believed would generate energy was wholeheartedly adopted by Humboldt and expressed in terms of ‘national energy’.

The claims of philosophy to represent the lower faculty were made possible by its incorporation of rhetoric that permitted it to serve as a means for theoretically organizing the emergent practices of state and civil society as well as for reorganizing existing practices. It came to serve in Romanticism as a discourse of creativity or invention itself, one dedicated to the release of energies that previously did not exist. The two complementary transdisciplinary discourses

that emerged from the alignment of philosophy and rhetoric were Schelling and Humboldt’s philosophies of creative energy and Clausewitz’s comprehensive concept of strategy. The main institutional forms they assumed were the University of Berlin and the reforms of the Prussian state and army. This romantic transdisciplinarity was the intensification of a fusion of rhetoric and philosophy inaugurated in the ‘beautiful sciences’ of the mid-eighteenth century, which would suffer that strange fate of becoming the complementary discourses of *Bildung* and *Strategy*.

Notes

This article is an output from the AHRC-funded project ‘Transdisciplinarity and the Humanities: Problems, Methods, Histories, Concepts’ (AH/1004378/1), 2011–2013, located within the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP), Kingston University London.

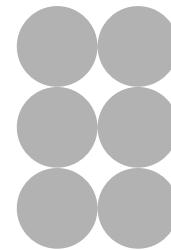
1. A.G. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, reprint of 7th edn, Hildesheim, 1963, p. 533.
2. Charles E. McClelland, *State, Society and University in Germany*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, p. 43.
3. Ekhard Forster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Reconstruction*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2012.
4. F.W.J. Schelling, *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*; ed. and trans. Fabio Palchetti and Claudio Cesa, Florence, 1989, p. 6.
5. Ibid., p. 118.
6. Thomas Broman, *The Transformation of German Academic Medicine, 1750–1820* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 169.

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