

# Thinking the Unconscious

*Nineteenth-Century German Thought*

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*Edited by*

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# Introduction: thinking the unconscious

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*Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher*

In the entire world one does not speak of the unconscious since, according to its essence, it is unknown; only in Berlin does one speak of and know something about it, and explain to us what actually sets it apart.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Friedrich Nietzsche in 1873, as part of his ironic response to the success of the *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (*Philosophie des Unbewussten*, 1869), written by the Berlin philosopher Eduard von Hartmann. If the influence of a concept can be gauged by the way in which it is received by the public at large, if not in academic circles, then Hartmann's volume, which ran to some eleven editions during his lifetime alone and was seen by some as introducing an entirely new *Weltanschauung*, might be regarded as marking one of the pinnacles of the career of *das Unbewusste* (the unconscious) during the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Although Hartmann's understanding of the unconscious was, like Freud's, subjected to a scathing critique at the hands of academic philosophy and psychology, it nevertheless took some half a century or so for Freud to supersede Hartmann's public role as the chief theorist and interpreter of the unconscious for the German-speaking public. Today the concept of the unconscious is arguably still first and foremost associated with Freud and with his successors such as Carl Gustav Jung and Jacques Lacan; in short: with psychoanalysis in general. And although the existence of "the unconscious," or of unconscious affects, continues to be questioned within large sections of the human and psychological sciences, it is indisputable that many people in the Western world still subscribe to the notion that they have, in some form or another, "an

<sup>1</sup> [In der ganzen Welt redet man nicht vom Unbewussten, weil es seinem Wesen nach ungewusst ist; nur in Berlin redet und weiss man etwas davon und erzählt uns, worauf es eigentlich abgesehen ist.] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente, Sommer 1872 bis Ende 1874, Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, part 3, vol. IV, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), 262.

<sup>2</sup> On the popular success of Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, see chapter 7 of this volume, by Sebastian Gardner.

unconscious” – generally understood to be an active component of one’s mental life that escapes one’s direct awareness, but which may nevertheless influence one’s behavior.

It is well known, especially in the German-speaking world but also to a lesser degree in the Anglophone territories, that Freud was not the first person to offer a detailed theoretical account of what is called “the unconscious.” Yet there has until now been no detailed study in English of the various ways in which the unconscious was conceptualized or “thought” by German-speaking intellectuals during the nineteenth century. The central purpose of this volume is to fill this gap by providing an in-depth account of key figures in this conceptual history, not only in terms of how they may or may not have influenced Freud and the origins of psychoanalysis generally, but also in terms of their independent historical and contemporary relevance for other fields such as philosophy, literature, and aesthetics. In accordance with this analytical framework, this volume has also been edited with a strong commitment to the philology of the German language, in an attempt to avoid the frequent mistranslations and misinterpretations that occur when analyzing cultural traditions in foreign languages (Anglophone mistranslations of Freud being perhaps the best-known case in point).<sup>3</sup> For this reason, all quotations from the German primary sources appear in the original German in the notes, and where a term has a particular resonance in German that cannot be captured in English translation, the original German term appears in brackets in the main text.

Nietzsche’s remarks, although directed first and foremost at Hartmann, also touch upon a series of irreducible philosophical questions with which this volume is confronted. If, by its very definition, “the unconscious” escapes our conscious awareness, then how is it possible to “think” about it at all? If we do in some way manage to “think” the unconscious, does it not thereby cease to *be* unconscious, thus defeating the purpose of the entire enterprise? Would it not be better to withdraw completely from any rational or “conscious” analysis of the unconscious, leaving the way free for other modes of expression – the visual arts, poetry, or music – to bring unconscious affects to light? If it is difficult or impossible to “think” the unconscious, how can it even be an object of knowledge expressed in the substantive form “*the* unconscious”? And can one in fact assume the ontological existence of “*the* unconscious,” or is this “object” or “realm” merely an invention of Western (in this case particularly but not exclusively German) thought? In short: does the unconscious exist

<sup>3</sup> On this subject see the Introduction to Bruno Bettelheim’s study *Freud and Man’s Soul* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

only in the West, only among certain socio-economic or cultural groups, or, as Nietzsche ironically suggests, “only in Berlin”?<sup>4</sup>

In answer to these questions, the chief English-language precursor to this study – Henri F. Ellenberger’s magisterial *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (1970) – proceeds on the assumption that “the unconscious” is, more or less like the brain, an aspect of human subjectivity which has an objective existence in all members of the human race, regardless of ethnicity, geography, and cultural or religious difference. Yet in light of the fact that the human sciences and the humanities in general necessarily play a role in creating their own object – the “human,” understood not only as an empirical or biological organism but also as a thinking subject capable of self-reflection, self-definition, and therefore also of self-transformation – this study remains open to the possibility that theorists of the unconscious actually invent or *think* the non-empirical “object” or phenomena which they attempt to describe.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the notion that the unconscious was “discovered” necessarily forecloses upon the question as to whether “the unconscious” or “unconscious phenomena” actually exist objectively and independently of their theoretical elaborations. Thus, despite its invaluable contribution to the history of Western psychiatry and psychoanalysis, Ellenberger’s study must be regarded as being methodologically inadequate. In light of this fact, the title of this volume – *Thinking the Unconscious* – attempts both to express and to preserve the fundamental ontological instability of its theme.

Two further important questions raised by the title of this study – why “German” and why the nineteenth century? – necessitate an account here of how and why the question of the unconscious became a central theme of German thought from 1800 onwards, and this account must commence, not at the beginning of the nineteenth, but at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Arnim Regenbogen has correctly pointed out that the history of the unconscious can be understood both as the history of a philosophical problem (*Problemggeschichte*) and as the history of a concept (*Begriffsgeschichte*).<sup>6</sup> Where and when this problem and this

<sup>4</sup> Similar questions are also raised by Elke Völmicke in *Das Unbewusste im Deutschen Idealismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 14.

<sup>5</sup> On the status of the “human sciences” in this respect, see: Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; London: Routledge, 2002), 375–87; Bruce Mazlish, *The Uncertain Sciences* (1998; New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2007), 1–36; Roger Smith, *Being Human: Historical Knowledge and the Creation of Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1–61.

<sup>6</sup> See Arnim Regenbogen and Holger Brandes, “Unbewußte, das,” *Europäische Enzyklopädie zu Philosophie und Wissenschaften*, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler, vol. IV (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1990), 647–61; here 647. See also, Thomas Mies and Holger

concept first arose is, however, a matter that could endlessly be debated. Some, for example, have found ideas relating to the unconscious in the ideas of Gautama Buddha (c.563–483 BCE); in Plato's (427–347 BCE) theory of the recollection of divine memory (*anamnesis*);<sup>7</sup> in the works of Plotinus (204–269 CE); in the theological writings of St. Augustine (354–430 CE) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–74); in German mystics such as Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) and Jakob Böhme (1567–1624); and even in poets such as Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and Shakespeare (1564–1616).<sup>8</sup> With this myriad of sources and possible historical and cultural origins in mind, Ludger Lütkehaus has rightly observed that any comprehensive historical exploration of the unconscious would necessarily have to overstep national and even European boundaries.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, if our central concern here is the discourses on the unconscious which took place in nineteenth-century German thought, then the origin of the problem which these discourses seek to address is relatively easy to identify.

### ***Petites perceptions* and the unconscious: Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, and Platner**

The problem turns out to have originated in seventeenth-century France. When René Descartes (1596–1650) posits, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), the central dualism of modern European thought – according to which being is divided into the categories of thinking and extended substance (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*) – he associates *res cogitans* or thinking substance exclusively with consciousness. The famous proposition *cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I am”) thus relates the core of human being – in other words, the soul – exclusively to thought and therefore to consciousness. Since conscious thought alone guarantees the existence of the human subject, then it is literally impossible, in Cartesian terms, to conceive of unconscious mental states, since to be without consciousness would mean to lack any being whatsoever, as

Brandes, “Unbewußte, das,” *Enzyklopädie Philosophie*, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler, vol. II (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999), 1657–65.

<sup>7</sup> See Plato's dialogues entitled *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*.

<sup>8</sup> See, in this connection, Lancelot Law Whyte, *The Unconscious before Freud*, 2nd edn. (London: Julian Friedmann, 1978), 77–86; George Frankl, *The Social History of the Unconscious* (London: Open Gate, 1989); M. Kaiser-El-Safti, “Unbewußtes, das Unbewußte,” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter et al., 12 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1971–2004), vol. XI, 124–33; here 124–5; David Edwards and Michael Jacobs, *Conscious and Unconscious* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 17–27.

<sup>9</sup> Ludger Lütkehaus, ed., “*Dieses wahre innere Afrika*”: *Texte zur Entdeckung des Unbewußten vor Freud* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2005), 11.

Descartes observes: “it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist.”<sup>10</sup>

Descartes’ definition of the human subject as *res cogitans* offers both a functional and a material definition of consciousness. In *functional* terms, Descartes outlines a structure, substance or ground within human subjectivity (that is, the soul) in which mental contents are cognized; while in *material* terms consciousness refers to those mental contents themselves which are apprehended: in everyday parlance the “facts,” “stream” or “field” of consciousness.<sup>11</sup> In the British empiricism of John Locke and David Hume, the latter (material) sense of consciousness is maintained, while the former is regarded as being unsubstantiated. Consciousness, for Locke, is merely the “perception of what passes in a man’s own mind,” while for Hume it is the “inward sentiment” that arises from one’s perceptions and ideas.<sup>12</sup> Since, however, the self or “I” to which these perceptions belong cannot be proven to exist on an empirical basis, the question as to the substantial ground of consciousness is regarded as being unanswerable, the self being, according to Hume’s well-known formulation, nothing more than a “bundle” of different perceptions.<sup>13</sup>

In Germany, by contrast, Descartes’ functional or substantial conception of consciousness received a more positive reception in the *Monadology* (1714) of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. At the same time, however, Leibniz attempted to replace Cartesian dualism with a monism that would unify thinking and extended substance. For Leibniz, the entire universe is constituted of simple, immaterial, and indivisible unities known as monads, all of which are capable, albeit to vastly differing degrees, of having perceptions.<sup>14</sup> Every monad is unique and develops according to its own internal law, being endowed with what Leibniz variously calls appetite or striving. Each monad strives to achieve what it regards, from within the limitations of its own position in the universe, to be the apparent good.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18 (II, 27). See also: Johannes Oberthür, “Verdrängte Dunkelheit des Denkens: Descartes, Leibniz und die Kehrseite des Rationalismus,” *Das Unbewusste*, ed. Michael B. Buchholz and Günter Gösde, 3 vols., vol. I: *Macht und Dynamik des Unbewussten: Auseinandersetzungen in Philosophie, Medizin und Psychoanalyse* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2005), 34–69; here 40.

<sup>11</sup> A. Diemer, “Bewußtsein,” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. I, 888–96; here: 891.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165.

<sup>14</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology* (§§1–3), trans. Nicholas Rescher (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 17; see also Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1989), 181. Quoted in Jolley, *Leibniz*, 67.



In being immaterial and directed towards the good, monads are seen by Leibniz as mirroring the qualities of God,<sup>16</sup> and in this respect they are at least theoretically capable of representing the whole universe, albeit only from their own particular points of view. The development of monads occurs in complete isolation: described by Leibniz as being “windowless,” they are neither susceptible of alteration by external sources, nor do they have direct relationships with other monads.<sup>17</sup> Thus, although separate monads may seem to interact with one another causally, Leibniz’s doctrine concerning the *harmonie préétablie* (pre-established harmony) between all forces or substances ensures that each monad develops independently and yet in perfect harmony with other monads.<sup>18</sup>

In Leibniz the ontological status of the human self, subject, or soul is thus secured by virtue of its status as a monad. Since the monad is constantly active and functions at all times as a mirror of the entire universe, it is (even during sleep) continually subject to perceptions about this universe; yet these perceptions are characterized by wide differences in terms of their clarity and distinctness, ranging from those of which the subject is completely unaware on the one hand, to those which are clear and distinct on the other, with endless gradations of clarity and distinctness existing between these two extremes.<sup>19</sup>

On the lower end of the scale of consciousness, there exist what Leibniz calls, in his *New Essays on Human Understanding* (*Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain*) both *petites perceptions* (small perceptions) and *perceptions insensibles* (unnoticed perceptions).<sup>20</sup> As its title suggests, this text (completed in 1705 but not published until 1765) constitutes Leibniz’s most comprehensive response to John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke had expressed doubts concerning the Cartesian idea that the essence of the soul lies in its thinking activity, arguing that certain non-conscious states – like, for example, the state of sleep – demonstrate that the soul may experience interruptions in its thinking, and that it is therefore not purely to be identified with the activity of thought. In this way, Locke rules out the possibility that “any thing should think, and not be conscious of it.”<sup>21</sup>

In response to Locke’s argument, Leibniz proposes “there is in us an infinity of perceptions ... of which we are unaware because these

<sup>16</sup> Leibniz, *Monadology*, §56, 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, §7, 17.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, §78, 27.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, §14, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. and trans. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55.

<sup>21</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (London: Penguin, 1997), 113; (see book 2, chapter 1, §§10–19).

impressions are either too minute and too numerous, or else too unvarying, so that they are not sufficiently distinctive on their own.” Thus, for example, what we experience as “the roaring noise of the sea” is actually the cumulative sensation of many individual waves crashing on the shore. Although each of these individual waves does not on its own create a sufficient impression to enter our consciousness, when combined they may in fact enter our conscious awareness. In this situation we are made conscious of the cumulative effect of the waves, but not of their discrete, individual existences. Similarly, when one has become habituated to living by a waterfall, the noise which it creates may escape our conscious awareness, fading into the background of our everyday existence.<sup>22</sup> In both the *New Essays* and the *Monadology*, Leibniz distinguishes between these *petites perceptions* (often termed simply *perceptions*), and what he calls *apperceptions*. Perceptions occur at a low level of consciousness and do not entail reflexive consciousness or thought, and for this reason Leibniz holds that even “beasts” may have perceptions. Apperceptions, by contrast, are perceptions of which the subject has a conscious or reflexive awareness, and which may be said to amount to conscious thoughts.<sup>23</sup>

Leibniz’s theory of *petites perceptions* or perceptions without consciousness is normally seen as having inaugurated the German philosophical discourse on the unconscious.<sup>24</sup> Yet here a particular caution with regard to the use of terminology is in order. It is clear from Leibniz’s argumentation that his notion of *petites perceptions* does not demarcate a type of perception that is radically different from what he calls apperceptions or perceptions of which one is reflexively aware; in fact, it may be argued that the difference consists only in the intensity, clarity and distinctness of these perceptions rather than in their fundamental type. As we shall see, this has led some to suggest that in the case of Leibniz, the term *unbewusst* (unconscious) might well be replaced by that of *unterbewusst* (beneath consciousness), designating a field of perception which merely exists beneath a particular threshold of conscious awareness, but which could easily become conscious upon the focusing of one’s attention.

This is certainly the sense in which Leibniz’s idea of *petites perceptions* was interpreted by two of his most important successors in the German tradition of psychology – Christian Wolff (1679–1764) and Ernst Platner (1744–1818) – both of whom are also seen as being key figures in the history of the unconscious. In his *Rational Thoughts on God, the Soul of Man, and Also All Things in General* (*Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und*

<sup>22</sup> Leibniz, *New Essays*, 54–5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 134; Leibniz, *Monadology*, §14, 18.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Lütkehaus, “*Dieses wahre innere Afrika*,” 19; Regenbogen and Brandes, “Unbewußte, das,” 648; Kaiser-El-Safti, “Unbewußtes, das Unbewußte,” 124–5.

*der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, 1720), Wolff defines consciousness as the self-reflexive knowledge that we represent things to ourselves as being external to us, and as the ability to differentiate individual things from one another (§§728, 729). Wolff argues, for example, that when he holds a mirror in front of his face, he is conscious of the fact that he is holding the mirror, that he sees his own image in the mirror, and that the mirror is an object which is differentiated from himself as well as from other objects in his immediate surroundings (§729). Were he not capable of such differentiation, then he would not be conscious of these objects, since “when we do not notice the difference between the things that attend us; then we are not conscious of the things that fall into our senses.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, when one is reading a book, although one may hear a conversation going on the background, if one does not pay attention to the conversation then one is not conscious of it (§729). Consciousness is thus defined by Wolff in Cartesian terms: in relation to clarity and distinctness. If we fail to differentiate between the things that occur to our senses, this leads to what Wolff terms (§731) “darkness of thoughts” (*Dunckelheit der Gedancken*).<sup>26</sup>

Wolff’s consideration of obscure or dark thoughts did not go unnoticed by his philosophical successors, and led, albeit indirectly, to the raising of aesthetic questions which would later re-emerge in German idealism and romanticism. In 1759, the Swiss mathematician Johann Georg Sulzer (1720–79) opined that philosophers should pay the closest attention to the dark areas of the soul (*die genauste Aufmerksamkeit auf die dunkeln Gegenden der Seele ... richten*).<sup>27</sup> Yet as Hans Adler has pointed out, Sulzer’s project was arguably couched in Enlightenment terms: that of exploring, conquering, and in a sense domesticating the dark areas of the soul by exposing them to rational analysis.<sup>28</sup> It was the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714–62) who thought that these dark areas of the soul called for a different method of consideration than that normally deployed by traditional metaphysics. Already in the first edition of his *Metaphysica* (1739), Baumgarten sees obscure or dark

<sup>25</sup> [Wenn wir den Unterschied der Dinge nicht bemercken, die uns zugegen sind; so sind wir uns dessen nicht bewußt, was in unsere Sinnen fällt.] Christian Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. J. École et al., part 1, vol. II (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1983), 455.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>27</sup> Johann Georg Sulzer, *Kurzer Begriff aller Wißenschaften und andern Theile der Gelehrsamkeit, worin jeder nach seinem Inhalt, Nutzen und Vollkommenheit kürzlich beschrieben wird*, 2nd edn. (1759), §206, 159; quoted in Hans Adler, “Fundus Animae – der Grund der Seele: Zur Gnoseologie des Dunkeln in der Aufklärung,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 62 (1998): 197–220; here 203.

<sup>28</sup> Adler, “Fundus Animae,” 203.

perceptions (*perceptiones obscurae*) as being the foundation of the soul (*fundus animae*), and in the fourth (1759) edition of the *Metaphysica* this Latin construction is replaced with the German *Grund der Seele*. In §1 of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (part 1: 1750; part 2: 1758) those perceptions which are obscure, dark, or inferior (*gnoseologia inferior*) are associated with the particular, sensitive, and sensuous modes of cognition (*cognitionis sensitiuae*) found in poetry, as opposed to the general, clear, and distinct modes of conceptual cognition found in philosophy; while the analysis of inferior, obscure, or sensuous cognition belongs to aesthetics – otherwise known as the theory of the liberal arts (*theoria liberalium artium*) – clear and distinct cognitions belong to metaphysics.<sup>29</sup>

A less innovative reception of Wolff can be found in the work of Ernst Platner, whose *Philosophical Aphorisms* (*Philosophische Aphorismen*, 1776) is widely regarded as the first German text to use the word *Unbewußtseyn* (unconsciousness).<sup>30</sup> Platner inherits the essentially Leibnizian epistemological framework of Wolff. The soul (*Seele*) is regarded as a substance (*Substanz*) and a power (*Kraft*) which brings forth impressions or ideas (*Wirkungen, Ideen*). Since power or *Kraft* is defined solely in terms of activity (*Thätigkeit*), the soul must always be active; otherwise it would cease to exist. This leads Platner to argue that the soul continues to have ideas during sleep, and that “the soul is not always conscious of its ideas” (*Die Seele ist sich nicht ihrer Ideen immer bewußt*). Following Leibniz and Wolff, Platner refers to those ideas with consciousness (*mit Bewußtseyn*) as apperceptions, and to those without consciousness (*ohne Bewußtseyn*) as dark or obscure representations (*dunkle Vorstellungen*). In this way, the life of the soul is seen by Platner as being an unbroken series of ideas or impressions, which wax and wane between apperceptions and perceptions, waking and sleeping (*Wachen und Schlaf*), consciousness and unconsciousness (*Bewußtseyn und Unbewußtseyn*).<sup>31</sup>

### Kant's anthropology and the “dark map of the mind”

With the possible exception of Leibniz, Immanuel Kant arguably determined the way in which unconscious phenomena were understood in nineteenth-century German thought more than any other philosopher of the eighteenth century. Although Kant's opposition to some of the ideas

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, §1 (1750), quoted in *ibid.*, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Kurt Joachim Grau, for example, describes Platner as the creator of the word “unbewußt.” See Kurt Joachim Grau, *Bewusstsein, Unbewusstes, Unterbewusstes* (Munich: Rösl, 1922), 63. See also Lütkehaus, “*Dieses wahre innere Afrika*,” 20.

<sup>31</sup> Ernst Platner, *Philosophische Aphorismen nebst einigen Anleitungen zur philosophischen Geschichte* (Leipzig: Schwickertscher Verlag, 1776), §11–19, §25, 5–9.

of Leibniz and particularly to the latter's notion of pre-established harmony is well known,<sup>32</sup> there is nonetheless, in the early (pre-critical) Kant, a positive reception of Leibniz's ideas of *petites perceptions*. The earliest example of this is to be found in Kant's *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy (Versuch, den Begriff der negativen Grössen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen, 1763)*, part 3 of which attempts to apply the mathematical concept of negative magnitude to psychology, and especially to the coming to be and passing away of thoughts. How is it, Kant asks, that at one moment he can be thinking of the sun, and the next minute this thought disappears, only to be replaced by new thoughts? His answer is that, just as in physics a force is cancelled by an opposing force of equal or greater intensity, so too in our minds are thoughts negated or cancelled by mental contents which oppose them. This argument is then advanced in terms of clarity and distinctness: "the clearer and the more distinct a certain idea is made," according to Kant, "the more the remaining ideas are obscured [*verdunkelt*] and the more their clarity is diminished."<sup>33</sup> Those thoughts which are, in Kant's words, *verdunkelt* (darkened or obscured) would thus appear to bear some similarity to Leibniz's *petites perceptions*, as well as to the "dark thoughts" (*dunkle Gedanken, dunkle Vorstellungen*) of Wolff and Platner respectively. For this reason it is no coincidence that Kant invokes Leibniz in this context, opining that

There is something imposing and, it seems to me, profoundly true in this thought of Leibniz: the soul embraces the universe only with its faculty of representation, though only an infinitesimally tiny part of these representations is clear.<sup>34</sup>

Kant's consideration of so-called "dark" or unclear thoughts (*dunkle Vorstellungen*) receives its most detailed treatment in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, 1798)*,<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See Kant's *The Employment in Natural Philosophy of Metaphysics Combined with Geometry, of which Sample I Contains the Physical Monadology* (1756), *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, trans. David Walford and Ralf Meerbore, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 47–66; see also the editors' introduction to this piece on pages lii–liv.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 234 (translation altered); [in je höherem Grade eine gewisse Idee klar oder deutlich gemacht wird, desto mehr werden die übrige verdunkelt und ihre Klarheit verringert]. Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, 6 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), vol. I, 810–11.

<sup>34</sup> Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, 237. [Es steckt etwas Großes, und, wie mich dünkt, sehr Richtiges in dem Gedanken des Herrn von Leibniz: Die Seele befasst das ganze Universum mit ihrer Vorstellungskraft, obgleich nur ein unendlich kleiner Teil dieser Vorstellungen klar ist.] Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. I, 814.

<sup>35</sup> Although this text appeared in 1798, towards the very end of Kant's career, it originally emerged from much earlier sources. As Manfred Kuehn and John H. Zammito

section 5 of which is entitled “On the representations that we have without being conscious of them” (*Von den Vorstellungen, die wir haben, ohne uns ihrer bewusst zu sein*). Here Kant takes issue with Locke’s doubts about the existence of unconscious perceptions or thoughts by positing two levels of consciousness: indirect or mediated (*mittelbar*) consciousness and direct or unmediated (*unmittelbar*) consciousness. Kant asks us to imagine that we see a human figure on a meadow in the distance; although at such a distance we cannot distinguish the person’s eyes, nose, and mouth, we nonetheless make the *assumption* that what we have before us is a human being. Yet, according to Kant, in this example we are strictly speaking unconscious (or at least not *directly* conscious) of that person’s individual parts (eyes, nose, mouth, etc. ...), which also means that we are unconscious or only indirectly conscious of that person as a whole. If we fail to represent to ourselves what Kant calls, in relation to the above example, the “part-representations of a whole” (*Teilvorstellungen eines Ganzen*), then we must also fail to achieve a clear and distinct representation of the object before us, since clarity consists in distinguishing an object from its surroundings, while distinctness lies in knowledge of the entire object in terms of all its parts. Conscious or unmediated representations are thus characterized by clarity and distinctness, and lead to knowledge, while mediated representations, of which we are conscious in only an indirect way, are described by Kant as being *dunkel* (dark or obscure).<sup>36</sup>

This argument prepares the way for one of the most influential and highly metaphorical passages on “unconscious,” “dark,” or “obscure” representations (*dunkle Vorstellungen*) to have appeared in the German language. Kant describes as “immeasurable” (*unermesslich*) “the field of sensuous intuitions and sensations of which we are not conscious, even though we can undoubtedly conclude that we have them.”<sup>37</sup> This leads him to conclude that our clear and distinct representations represent only “infinitely few points” (*unendlich wenige Punkte*) on the field of consciousness, to the extent that “only a few places on the vast map of our mind are illuminated” (*auf der großen Karte unseres Gemüts nur wenig Stellen*

have noted, Kant’s interest in anthropology began with his course in physical geography (inaugurated in 1758), as well as with his first lecture course on anthropology in the winter semester of 1772–3. Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 406–9; John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 284–92.

<sup>36</sup> Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 417–18. Translated by Robert B. Loudon as *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23–4.

<sup>37</sup> [das Feld unserer Sinnenanschauungen und Empfindungen, deren wir uns nicht bewußt sind, ob wir gleich unbezweifelt schließen können, daß wir sie haben ... sei ... unermesslich]. Kant, *Anthropology*, 24; Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 418.

*illuminieren sind*).<sup>38</sup> This passage would go on to inspire, either directly or indirectly, an array of Romantic speculations on the unconscious,<sup>39</sup> one of the most interesting of which is the novel by Jean Paul (Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, 1763–1825): *Selina or on the Immortality of the Soul* (*Selina oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, 1827). Here Jean Paul argues that “we make ... much too small or much too narrow measurements of the kingdom of the self, if we neglect the enormous kingdom of the unconscious, this true inner Africa,” a metaphor which has led Ludger Lütkehaus rightly to posit a relationship between the discourses of European colonialism and the supposed “conquest” of the unconscious.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the suggestiveness of Kant’s “dark map of the mind,” he goes on to argue that, although “the field of obscure representations is the largest of the human being,” it actually “belongs only to physiological anthropology, not to pragmatic anthropology, and so it is properly disregarded here.”<sup>41</sup> While *physiological* anthropology, in Kant’s view, describes only “what nature makes of the human being,” *pragmatic* anthropology investigates what man as a “free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself.”<sup>42</sup> The purpose of pragmatic anthropology is thus to prepare the way for what Kant calls practical philosophy or ethics: that of understanding human nature in order that we may change it by instituting moral laws arrived at by reason alone. This important distinction does not, however, prevent Kant from describing, almost as an aside, what physiological anthropology might be like. In this connection he opines that

often we are ourselves a play of obscure representations [*dunkeler Vorstellungen*], and our understanding is unable to save itself from the absurdities into which they have placed it, even though it recognizes them as illusions. Such is the case with sexual love, in so far as its actual aim is not benevolence but rather enjoyment of its object.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 24; Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 418.

<sup>39</sup> In this connection, see chapter 4 of this volume, by Rüdiger Görner.

<sup>40</sup> [Wir machen ... von dem Länderreichtum des Ich viel zu kleine oder enge Messungen, wenn wir das ungeheure Reich des Unbewussten, dieses wahre innere Afrika, auslassen.] Jean Paul, *Selina*, quoted in Lütkehaus, “*Dieses wahre innere Afrika*,” 77. For Lütkehaus’s discussion of the unconscious and colonialism, see 7.

<sup>41</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 25; [So ist das Feld dunkler Vorstellungen das größte im Menschen ... gehört die Theorie selber doch nur zur physiologischen Anthropologie, nicht zur pragmatischen, worauf es eigentlich hier gesehen ist.] Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 419.

<sup>42</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 3. [Die physiologische Menschenkenntnis geht auf die Erforschung dessen, was die Natur aus dem Menschen macht, die pragmatische auf das, was er, als freihandelndes Wesen, aus sich selber macht, oder machen kann und soll.] Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 399.

<sup>43</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 25; [öfter aber noch sind wir selbst ein Spiel dunkler Vorstellungen, und unser Verstand vermag nicht, sich wider die Ungereimtheiten zu retten, in die ihn



Here Kant's emphasis seems to have shifted from dark or obscure representations to something altogether more elemental: sexual desire. In Kant's mature critical philosophy, such desires are regarded as belonging to the broad class of inclinations (*Neigungen*), which, considered merely on their account (that is, in abstraction from their relation to the moral law), have no proper place in ethics. Ethics as such is referred to by Kant as pure moral philosophy (*reine Moralphilosophie*), and is to be prioritized over practical anthropology, being "cleansed of everything that may be only empirical and that belongs to anthropology."<sup>44</sup> Thus, while Kant seemed to have opened the door to what might be called "dark," "obscure," or even "unconscious" desires in §5 of the *Anthropology*, this door is, if not closed altogether, then certainly on the way to being shut by the time of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*) of 1785. And it is precisely this door to the unconscious which Kant's nineteenth-century successors in the related movements of German romanticism and German idealism would try to pry open. This is not to suggest that Kantian ethics takes no account of what Kant refers to as the empirical component of ethics and the possible unconscious desires which may underlie them; rather, it is to maintain that, as is arguably the case with respect to the critical philosophy in general, Kant's primary interest is to explore the nature of reason and to identify the rational grounds of thought and action. In short: Kant was more attuned to light than to darkness, and therefore shied away from direct consideration of the unconscious.

### The faculties and divisions of the Kantian subject

Despite the fact that Kant's discussion of dark, obscure, or unconscious representations (*dunkle Vorstellungen*) certainly emerges from the tradition of Leibniz, Wolff, and Platner, his position on this issue represents a marked departure from these earlier thinkers. As John H. Zammito observes:

What would differentiate Kant from the Wolffian school was his abandonment of the idea that all the mental faculties could be arrayed in a single *continuum*

der Einfluß derselben versetzt, ob er sie gleich als Täuschung anerkennt. So ist es mit der Geschlechtsliebe, so fern sie eigentlich nicht das Wohlwollen, sondern vielmehr den Genuß ihres Gegenstandes beabsichtigt.] Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 419.

<sup>44</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 44; [eine reine Moralphilosophie zu bearbeiten, die von allem, was nur empirisch sein mag und zur Anthropologie gehört, völlig gesäubert wäre]. Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. IV, 12–13.



of cognitive clarity and distinctness for the idea that there was a categorical *disjunction* between sensibility and understanding.<sup>45</sup>

In the *Anthropology*, Kant's distinction between the faculties of sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) and the understanding (*Verstand*) – a distinction which is outlined at greater length in the first *Critique* – appears almost immediately after his discussion of dark or obscure representations. In §7, Kant contrasts sensibility with the understanding, arguing that only the latter, when conjoined with sensibility, can offer us cognition and therefore knowledge. While sensibility is merely passive, providing us with only the raw sensory data relating to external objects, the understanding is active and discursive, bringing concepts (such as, for example, unity and causality) to bear upon the data provided by sensibility.<sup>46</sup> In this way, Kant argues that we can only have access to *phenomena* (things as they appear to us, filtered through our cognitive faculties) rather than to *noumena* (things as they may be “in themselves,” independently of our cognition of them). In §§8–11 of the *Anthropology*, Kant makes it clear that sensibility is not to be held directly responsible for the darkness or obscurity of our representations, arguing (for example, in §9) that while the senses do not in themselves confuse things, it is the understanding which may err if it judges too hastily.<sup>47</sup> Thus, if we refer back to Kant's earlier example of the human figure standing at a distance from us in a meadow, it is the understanding which judges this figure to be a human, but without the necessary sensory data which would make this into a conscious (in the sense of clear and distinct) object of knowledge.

Although the exact date of Kant's discussion of unconscious representations in the *Anthropology* is difficult to determine, through a comparative analysis of arguments which appear in the first and second versions of the “Transcendental Deduction” (*transzendente Deduktion*) of the first *Critique*, Arnim Regenbogen argues that this development must have taken place in the time between these two versions, that is: between 1781 and 1787.<sup>48</sup> In the “A” version of the first *Critique* (A100–103), imagination (*Einbildung*) has the role of synthesizing representations and of conjoining sensibility with the understanding. Kant sees the activity of the imagination as being executed a priori; that is, as making possible the synthetic unity of experience. On this basis, he assumes (at A117) that “all representations have a necessary relation to a possible empirical

<sup>45</sup> Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology*, 52.

<sup>46</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 29–30; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 424–425.

<sup>47</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 35; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 433.

<sup>48</sup> Regenbogen and Brandes, “Unbewußte, das,” 649.

consciousness: for if they did not have this, and if it were entirely impossible to become conscious of them, that would be as much as to say that they did not exist at all.”<sup>49</sup> Kant reiterates this view in §24 of the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (*Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*, 1783), where he states that there is no level of psychological obscurity or darkness (*Dunkelheit*) that cannot be regarded as a form of consciousness, since obscure or dark representations are only those which have been prevailed over by their stronger or more intense counterparts.<sup>50</sup>

Things change, however, in the “B” version of the “Transcendental Deduction.” At B132–136, Kant establishes what he calls the “original-synthetic unity of apperception” (*ursprünglich-synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption*), the “I” which accompanies and makes possible all representations that are given to me.<sup>51</sup> This “I” or thinking subject is, says Kant, an *object* of inner sense or intuition, yet at the same time this “I” is also a *subject* that thinks discursively through the operations of the understanding. As Kant makes clear at B150–156, this dual function of the “I” – as both the intuited *object* of inner sense, and as the active thinking *subject* made possible through the understanding – leads to what must be regarded as a split or divided “I.” Since the “I” as a thinking subject (as apperception) is dependent on the faculty of the understanding, it can have no direct cognitive access to itself as object, in intuition.<sup>52</sup> This, according to Kant at B153, is because the understanding has no capacity for intuitions, and can therefore not take intuitions “up into itself” (*in sich aufnehmen*), leading him to conclude (at B158) that “the consciousness of oneself is ... far from being a cognition of oneself” (*das Bewußtsein seiner selbst ist also noch lange nicht ein Erkenntnis seiner selbst*).<sup>53</sup>

A similar point is also made in §7 of the *Anthropology*. Here Kant argues that, although “it is true that I as a thinking being am one and the same subject with myself as a sensing being,”<sup>54</sup> full self-cognition

<sup>49</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 237; [Alle Vorstellungen haben eine notwendige Beziehung auf ein mögliches empirisches Bewußtsein: denn hätten sie dieses nicht, und wäre es gänzlich unmöglich, sich ihrer bewußt zu werden: so würde das so viel sagen, sie existieren gar nicht.] *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. II, 174.

<sup>50</sup> [keine psychologische Dunkelheit, die nicht als ein Bewußtsein betrachtet werden könnte, welches nur von anderem stärkeren überwogen wird]. Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. III, 174.

<sup>51</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 246–8; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. II, 136–40.

<sup>52</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 256–9; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. II, 147–52.

<sup>53</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 260; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. II, 153.

<sup>54</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 33; [Ich, als denkendes Wesen, bin zwar mit mir, als Sinneswesen, ein und dasselbe Subjekt.] *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 430.

remains impossible. This is because the “I” of apperception or reflection (*Ich der Reflexion*) is not equipped to cognize itself as “inner experience” (*innere Erfahrung*) which is described as “a manifold of empirical inner intuition” (*ein Mannigfaltiges der empirischen inneren Anschauung*).<sup>55</sup> Thus, if Kant’s definition of unconscious representations is applied to the cognitive state of affairs described here, then it would seem that, since clear and distinct *cognitive* knowledge of the self and all its parts is not possible, then parts of the self remain, in Kant’s terms, dark (*dunkel*), obscure, or unconscious.

The divided self which is presented in the “Transcendental Deduction” of Kant’s first *Critique*, in his writings on moral philosophy (including the second *Critique*), as well as in his *Anthropology* – a self which combines the natural necessity of physiological sensations, inclinations, and intuitions on the one hand with the discursive spontaneity of the understanding and the freedom associated with reason on the other – persists in the final part his critical philosophy: the *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790). This text can, alongside the *Anthropology*, be seen as having exerted a profound influence upon how ideas relating to the unconscious were theorized in nineteenth-century German thought, especially in relation to aesthetics.

In the second part of the *Critique of Judgment*, entitled the “Critique of Teleological Judgment” (*Kritik der teleologischen Urteilskraft*), Kant explains how a natural organism like a bird, in displaying harmonious and proportionate relationships between its constituent parts, gives rise to a sense of teleology or objective purposiveness (*objektive Zweckmäßigkeit*, §61, B267–268/A265–266). Since, however, we can only know things as they appear to us rather than as they are “in themselves,” we cannot know whether this apparent design exists in nature as an objective reality; rather, our judgment relating to the objective purposiveness of this bird is seen by Kant as being reflective (§75), in that we cognize the bird through the reflective concept of an organism or organized being (*organisiertes Wesen*, §66), according to which the parts of the bird (for example, its wings, and feathers) are seen as having interrelated functions which exist teleologically in relation to the whole.<sup>56</sup>

When we view such a bird, we may also deem it to be *beautiful*, and in so doing, we endow it with what Kant calls *subjective* as opposed to *objective* purposiveness. While the objective purposiveness of the bird exists in our thinking of it in conceptual terms as an organism whose integrated parts

<sup>55</sup> Kant, *Anthropology*, 32; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, 430.

<sup>56</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 247–8; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. V, 319.

are designed to help it survive and prosper, *subjective* purposiveness suggests a form of harmony which is without any apparent use or purpose, but which gives rise to certain feelings of pleasure (*Wohlgefallen*) that correspond with the term “beauty” (*Schönheit*, §17, B62/A61). The beautiful object in nature thus suggests a pleasing design at work in nature, but a design for which we can have no corresponding concept, since aesthetic judgments do not proceed by way of rules and concepts, but rather arise from what Kant calls (§9, B29/A29) the “free play” (*freies Spiel*) of our cognitive powers (*Erkenntniskräfte*).

For Kant, beauty in nature is prior to beauty in art. Yet like beauty in nature, the beautiful work of art must appear to be purely spontaneous and free from any “arbitrary rules” (*willkürliche Regeln*), producing in us the idea of a purposiveness which is free in the sense of being subject only to its own internal laws (§45).<sup>57</sup> In §46 of the third *Critique*, Kant insists that such beautiful works of art emerge from what he calls genius, defined as the talent or natural gift (*Naturgabe*) which “gives the rule to art” (*welches der Kunst die Regel gibt*).<sup>58</sup> This talent, which Kant describes as the inborn productive faculty of the artist, belongs to nature, and cannot be taught, conceptually reconstructed, or even explained by the artist or genius himself. Thus, as Kant observes of Homer (§47), he does not know how his ideas come into being, and so cannot teach his mode of composition as a method.<sup>59</sup>

In Kant’s third *Critique* we once again find a human subject that is split, and one which is now, in addition, not transparent to itself, in that the artist’s genius is given to him by the hand of nature (*von der Hand der Natur erteilt*, §47) and he cannot, therefore, explain on a conscious or conceptual level how he produces beautiful works of art.<sup>60</sup> Beauty in nature and the phenomenon of genius thus suggested to Kant that there may be a deeper, inherent relation between nature (or its supersensible ground) and the subject, than he had considered in the first *Critique*, while also pointing to a creative and possibly unconscious (in the sense of obscure or uncognized) role played by nature in human subjectivity and creativity.

As Andrew Bowie observes, Kant’s aim in the third *Critique* is to “link the harmony manifest in aesthetic apprehension of natural objects with the idea of natural teleology, thereby revealing the ultimate connection of nature as a whole to the ways in which we think about it.”<sup>61</sup> Yet these

<sup>57</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 185; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. V, 404–405.

<sup>58</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 186; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. V, 405.

<sup>59</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 187–188; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. V, 408.

<sup>60</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 188; *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. V, 408.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche*, 2nd edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 32.

speculative questions gestured beyond the bounds of Kant's critical philosophy, which explains how subjectivity makes cognition possible, while deliberately remaining silent about what nature and human subjectivity may be like "in themselves" as well as how they may be interrelated, since (according to the very terms of Kant's project) such questions are absolutely impossible to answer. Thus, as Birgit Althans and Jörg Zirfas have observed, although the unconscious is a theme which runs through Kant's metaphysics, his moral philosophy, his anthropology, and his aesthetics, it never became an explicit question for consideration in any of Kant's works, precisely because it could not be further developed within the framework of Kant's system.<sup>62</sup>

But in response to the highly suggestive arguments of the "Transcendental Deduction," the third *Critique* and the *Anthropology*, Kant's successors in nineteenth-century German thought stepped beyond the bounds of the critical philosophy in what were radically speculative, innovative and (in some cases) completely fanciful ways, actively theorizing about the role played by nature in the human subject, a role which they often described through the term *unbewusst* (unconscious). It is the nineteenth-century German responses not only to Kant's suggestive discussions of unconscious phenomena, but also to those found in figures like Leibniz, Wolff, Platner, and Baumgarten, that form the central subject of this volume.

### Reflections on recent scholarship, on methodology and on terminology

In recent years, as yet untranslated German-language scholarship has sought to offer a systematic account of how the concept of the unconscious and related ideas developed during the three centuries prior to its becoming the cardinal term of psychoanalysis. Volume I of the monumental three-volume project entitled simply *The Unconscious* (*Das Unbewusste*, edited by Michael B. Buchholz and Günter Götde, 2005–6) examines philosophical, medical and psychoanalytic theorizations of the unconscious from Descartes to the present;<sup>63</sup> while other studies – like Odo Marquard's *Transcendental Idealism, Romantic Philosophy of Nature, Psychoanalysis* (*Transzendentaler Idealismus, romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse*, 1987); Wilhelm W. Hemecker's

<sup>62</sup> Birgit Althans and Jörg Zirfas, "Die unbewusste Karte des Gemüts – Immanuel Kants Projekt der Anthropologie," *Das Unbewusste*, ed. Michael B. Buchholz and Günter Götde, vol. I (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2005), 70–94; here 72.

<sup>63</sup> Michael B. Buchholz and Günter Götde, eds., *Das Unbewusste*, 3 vols., vol. I: *Macht und Dynamik des Unbewussten: Auseinandersetzungen in Philosophie, Medizin und Psychoanalyse*; vol. II: *Das Unbewusste in aktuellen Diskursen: Anschlüsse*; vol. III: *Das Unbewusste in der Praxis: Erfahrungen verschiedener Professionen* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2005–2006).

*Before Freud: Philosophical-Historical Preconditions of Psychoanalysis* (Vor Freud: Philosophiegeschichtliche Voraussetzungen der Psychoanalyse, 1991);<sup>64</sup> and more recently, Elke Völmicke's *The Unconscious in German Idealism* (*Das Unbewusste im deutschen Idealismus*, 2005) – offer intensive analyses of how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers like Kant, Goethe, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), among others, either conceptualized the unconscious or may have influenced the origins of psychoanalysis by other means.

Some of the conceptual and terminological issues at stake in the present volume are highlighted in the introduction to Völmicke's book, and especially in her thoroughgoing critique of the earlier approach favored by Odo Marquard. Marquard's study is based on the premise that certain categories and concepts found in psychoanalysis – like, for example, the unconscious, repression (*Verdrängung*), defense (*Abwehr*), and resistance (*Widerstand*), among others – are philosophical categories which can already be found in German idealism and *Naturphilosophie*.<sup>65</sup> Transcendental philosophy, by which Marquard means the respective systems of Kant, Fichte and Schelling, offers a genetic-historical theory of the "I" or subject. What unites all three of these systems, according to Marquard, is the different ways in which they lead to what he calls (following Schelling) the depotentialization (*Depotenzierung*) or the reduction of autonomy of the rational "I" or subject. In being characterized by a series of tensions and contradictions – between the rational, free and autonomous self and the self of sensuous intuitions and natural-physiological proclivities (Kant); between the self-positing "I" or subject and the "not-I" upon which the identity of the "I" depends (Fichte); and between the self as conscious reason and unconscious nature (Schelling) – transcendental idealism leads to the empowerment (*Ermächtigung*) of what is variously conceived of as the not-I (*Nicht-Ich*), the non-rational (*Unvernunft*), and drive-nature (*Triebnatur*) within the subject. In Marquard's view, this empowerment of the "not-I" gives rise to a continuous tradition – beginning with Kant, and developing via Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Schelling, Carl Gustav Carus, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche – before entering the work of Freud. While Freud's attention to this tradition was blocked by the decidedly non-idealist scientific-medical culture of the late nineteenth century, Marquard contends that psychoanalytic categories *are* philosophical categories, because they *were* the philosophical

<sup>64</sup> Wilhelm W. Hemecker, *Vor Freud: Philosophiegeschichtliche Voraussetzungen der Psychoanalyse* (Munich: Philosophia, 1991).

<sup>65</sup> Odo Marquard, *Transzendentaler Idealismus, romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse* (Cologne: Dinter, 1987), 1.

categories of transcendental idealism before they *became* the psychoanalytic categories of Freud.<sup>66</sup>

Taking issue with Marquard, Völmicke's study underlines some of the radical discontinuities between the concept of the unconscious in both the German Enlightenment and in German idealism and the use of this term by Freud. As we have seen in the cases of Leibniz, Wolff, and Platner, as well as in Kant's *Anthropology*, unconscious (in the sense of dark or obscure) perceptions are merely weaker or lesser forms of consciousness which theoretically are capable of becoming conscious; while as Andrew Bowie shows in [chapter 2](#) of this study, the unconscious in the early Schelling revolves around the connections between subjectivity, nature, and freedom, and the capacity of art to unveil these connections. These various formulations are indeed difficult to equate with "the unconscious" in its various Freudian manifestations, and this diversity of unconscious phenomena in the German tradition has, in turn, led to diversity in the German terminology.

In a study published in 1922, Kurt Joachim Grau offers an account of this terminology which remains useful and provocative today. *Das Unbewusste* (the unconscious), according to Grau, refers to an area of mental life of which the self can have no consciousness or knowledge at all. For this reason Grau, who was a harsh critic of Freud, expresses doubts as whether it is meaningful to talk about "the unconscious" at all, since by definition we can have no experience of this realm as an object. The term *unterbewusst* (beneath or under consciousness) is associated by Grau with the *petites perceptions* or *dunkle Vorstellungen* of Leibniz, Wolff, and Platner – referring to those perceptions of which we are not directly aware, but which are "in" consciousness and which can, under the right conditions, come to our awareness. Finally the term *bewusstlos* (without consciousness) simply refers to non-living objects without mentality. Grau sees Ernst Platner as being the first person to use the term *Unbewusstsein* (unconsciousness) in his *Philosophical Aphorisms* of 1776.<sup>67</sup> To the best of our knowledge, the first German dictionary entry on the term *unbewusst* appears in Adelung's dictionary of 1780, in which it is simply defined as referring to things which are unknown. The substantive masculine form *der Unbewusst* (an interesting early variation on the eventual standard neutral usage, *das Unbewusste*) is simply described in Adelung as being the condition of not knowing something (*Der Zustand des Nichtwissens*).<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–5, 131.

<sup>67</sup> See Grau, *Bewusstsein, Unbewusstes, Unterbewusstes*, 63, 82, 89, 154.

<sup>68</sup> Johann Christoph Adelung, *Versuch eines vollständigen grammatisch-kritischen Wörterbuches der hochdeutschen Mundart, mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mundarten, besonders aber der oberdeutschen, Vierter Teil, von Sche-V* (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1780), 1220–1.



A glance at the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals that the word “unconscious” can, in the English language, carry a variety of meanings depending on context: not knowing or being heedless of something; not being endowed with or having temporarily lost consciousness in the sense of mentality; performing certain tasks or operations in an automatic way that does not require one’s direct attention; and finally the sense of *the* unconscious, associated with Freud and psychoanalysis. The term “sub-conscious” approximates the German *unterbewusst*, referring to partial or imperfect awareness, or to perceptions which are below the threshold of consciousness but which are capable of becoming conscious.

Although there exists in nineteenth-century British philosophy a number of thinkers – such as, for example, Herbert Spencer and William Hamilton<sup>69</sup> – who discuss different levels of consciousness and forms of latent mental activity that might be described as unconscious, the idea of “*the* unconscious” has, since Freud, often been received with skepticism in Anglophone philosophy.<sup>70</sup> This has led to a tendency to refer to a variety of “unconscious mental states” in the sense of automatic or latent forms of cognition, rather than to a single substrate or realm associated with “the unconscious.”<sup>71</sup> This state of affairs suggests a version of the nominalism versus realism debate, whereby empiricist positions would accept a variety of states associated with latent or “unconscious” mental processes, while also denying any common ground or essence to which they might be reduced. A historical analysis of the unconscious must keep in mind these tensions, while also being aware that in some cases – such as Kant’s “dark map of the mind,” Jean Paul’s eminently colonial “true inner Africa,” or Freud’s bourgeois-European understanding of the unconscious as a kind of “entrance hall” (*Vorraum*) – what we are dealing with is not only the history of a concept but also a history of culturally and historically conditioned metaphors.<sup>72</sup>

With regard to methodology, Elke Völmicke rightly points out that any attempt to find the roots of psychoanalysis in German idealism or in other pre-Freudian sources already constitutes a prejudice or pre-understanding concerning what the concept of the unconscious may

<sup>69</sup> See Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855); William Hamilton, *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1859). Both of these texts are discussed in Regenbogen and Brandes, “Unbewußte, das,” 653–4.

<sup>70</sup> The classical case in point is Alasdair MacIntyre’s critique of Freud in *The Unconscious: a Conceptual Analysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).

<sup>71</sup> See Georges Rey, “Unconscious Mental States,” *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 522–4.

<sup>72</sup> As is suggested by the title of a study by Günther Bittner: *Metaphern des Unbewussten: Eine kritische Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998).



actually mean in those sources.<sup>73</sup> This type of teleology can readily be found in studies such as Ellenberger's *Discovery of the Unconscious*, Lancelot Law Whyte's *The Unconscious Before Freud*, as well as in Hemecker's *Before Freud (Vor Freud)*, all of which proceed on the basis that history of the unconscious moves towards its decisive end-point in the works of Freud. As an alternative to this approach, Völmicke suggests that, when investigating pre-Freudian sources on the unconscious, one must endeavor methodologically to suspend or bracket out the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious, in order that one may see the pre-Freudian sources in their own independent historical and philosophical contexts.<sup>74</sup> This does not amount to dismissing in its entirety the notion that there may, in some cases, be significant similarities between pre-Freudian notions of the unconscious and Freud's own theoretical constructs, and for this reason this volume does (especially in [chapter 1](#), by Paul Bishop) include analyses that might be regarded as teleological in their approach. Yet at the same time, one must deploy a high degree of self-reflexivity with respect to the pitfalls of teleology in intellectual history. If we accept that, to use the hermeneutical language of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Freud's idea of the unconscious and its various manifestations in popular culture still belong to our Western cultural *horizon* – the collection of pre-understandings and presuppositions which constitute our historical world-view – then this type of self-reflexivity presents us with a task that is extremely challenging but also eminently worthwhile.

While the early phases of the historical period covered by this volume are addressed in great detail (albeit in German) by the respective studies of Marquard and Völmicke, the later stages of the nineteenth century are examined (again only in German) by Hemecker's *Before Freud* and Günter Götde's *Tradition-Lines of the "Unconscious": Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud (Traditionslinien des "Unbewussten": Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud, 1999)*. In what is probably the most detailed existing study on nineteenth-century philosophical sources on the unconscious and their possible influences on psychoanalysis, Götde understands these sources in terms of what he calls three tradition-lines (*Traditionslinien*) of the unconscious.<sup>75</sup> This approach allows him to offer a relatively differentiated account of exactly which nineteenth-century philosophical discourses on the unconscious exerted an influence on Freud and which did not. Götde is well aware that this story does not begin in the nineteenth century, and it is arguably the case that at least the early phases of each

<sup>73</sup> Völmicke, *Das Unbewusste im Deutschen Idealismus*, 17; see especially fn. 25.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–18.

<sup>75</sup> Günter Götde, *Traditionslinien des "Unbewussten": Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud* (Tübingen: edition diskord, 1999), 25–8.

of his tradition-lines can already be found, albeit to differing degrees, in some of the eighteenth-century sources that we have encountered in this chapter. Certainly the first of these tradition-lines – that of the *cognitive* unconscious, according to which perceptions only enter consciousness when they are characterized by sufficient levels of attention and intensity – can be found in Leibniz, Wolff, and Platner, as well as in elements of Kant’s *Anthropology*.<sup>76</sup> Chapter 8 of this volume, by Michael Heidelberger, examines two of the chief nineteenth-century theorists of this cognitive tradition: Johann Friedrich Herbart and particularly the father of “psychophysics,” Gustav Theodor Fechner.

The second tradition-line examined by Götde – which he describes variously as “romantic” and “vitalist,” and which he sees as having emerged from the aesthetic theories of German romanticism and *Naturphilosophie*, all of which take into account the aesthetic dimensions of nature, as well as the non-rational, biological, or natural elements within the human subject<sup>77</sup> – is explored in chapter 1 of this study (Paul Bishop on the aesthetics of the Storm and Stress and Weimar classicism), in chapters 2, 3, and 4 (Andrew Bowie on Schelling’s aesthetics and *Naturphilosophie*; Angus Nicholls on Goethe; and Rüdiger Görner on German romanticism), and in chapter 6 (Matthew Bell on Carl Gustav Carus). As we have seen, certain elements of this tradition-line can already be located in Kant’s aesthetic approach to the themes of beauty, nature, and genius in the third *Critique*.

The fact that two of the chapters associated with this second tradition-line are substantially devoted to Goethe (chapters 1 and 3, by Bishop and Nicholls respectively) requires a brief note of clarification. Perhaps more than any other German literary figure of the nineteenth century, Goethe – the iconic author of *Faust* and arguably the central figure of modern German literature – is seen to have exerted an enormous influence upon Freud, who claimed to have embarked on his medical career after listening to a public lecture, the text of which was (albeit incorrectly) attributed to Goethe.<sup>78</sup> Yet the centrality of Goethe in the history of psychoanalysis is a contested issue: some, like Bishop, see a deep-seated affinity between Goethe and Freud on the unconscious; while others, like Nicholls, see this purported affinity as being part of the historical mythology of psychoanalysis, which is based upon a fallacious teleology according to which earlier sources are seen as leading to Freud. These two chapters also demonstrate a theoretical precept of this volume: where teleological relations between earlier and later figures are

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–34.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–56.

<sup>78</sup> For further details concerning Freud’s claim, see chapters 1 and 3 of this volume.

explicitly posited (as is the case with regard to Bishop's view of Goethe's relation to Freud), this teleology is at the same time explicitly questioned (as is the case in the chapter by Nicholls).

Finally, a third tradition-line – which Gödde describes as “drive-related” and “irrational” (*triebhaft-irrational*), and which focuses on the sexual and sometimes destructive drives within the human subject<sup>79</sup> – is examined in [chapter 5](#) (Christopher Janaway on Schopenhauer); in [chapter 7](#) (Sebastian Gardner on Eduard von Hartmann); and in [chapter 9](#) (Martin Liebscher on Friedrich Nietzsche). Kant arguably recognizes such drives in his discussion of sexual desire in §5 of the *Anthropology*, only to turn away from what he sees as being “physiological” questions, in keeping with his preference for the “pragmatic” and “practical” dimensions of rational human behavior.

In the final chapter of the present volume, Günter Gödde examines the question as to whether, and if so to what extent, these three tradition-lines and the thinkers within them may have influenced Freud's various conceptualizations of the unconscious. Here a good measure of skepticism with regard to Gödde's posited tradition-lines is in order. It is certainly not the case that such tradition-lines represent completely independent and hermetic developmental streams within the greater flow of nineteenth-century German intellectual history, as Gödde occasionally seems to suggest. In fact, some of the thinkers examined in this volume arguably belonged to more than one “tradition-line” at once, and were in intense dialogue both with their forebears and contemporaries. Gödde himself points out, for example, that the works of Schelling can be seen to have contributed to both the “romantic/vitalist” and the “drive-related/irrational” tradition-lines of the unconscious.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, Sebastian Gardner's contribution to this volume ([chapter 7](#)) questions Gödde's view that the works of Eduard von Hartmann are *only* to be situated within a “drive-related/irrational” tradition-line of the unconscious, suggesting that elements of his work may also correspond with what Gödde's terms the “romantic/vitalist” tradition-line. The pitfalls of Gödde's approach demonstrate that if we make use of such tradition-lines without the appropriate level of reflexivity and skepticism, we run the risk of projecting our own clear-cut teleologies and schemata onto the messy and diffuse realities of intellectual history. Yet as Gödde's contribution to this volume shows, an appropriately tentative and heuristic deployment of such tradition-lines can also provide us with a differentiated answer to the question as to whether and to what extent nineteenth-century sources actually influenced the origins of psychoanalysis.

<sup>79</sup> Gödde, *Traditionslinien des “Unbewussten,”* 57–80.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–46, 57–60.

Sonu Shamdasani's Epilogue to this volume returns us to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter: is "*the* unconscious" a scientific object or phenomenon which was "discovered" and which can be interpreted and examined, or is it rather a non-empirical construct or effect of various discourses which originated in the nineteenth century, and which found their ultimate institutional realization in the psychoanalytic movement? In posing this question, Shamdasani explores some late nineteenth-century critiques of the concept of the unconscious that appeared both within and outside of the German-speaking world.