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The human person as an epistemic agent: the theological contours of creaturely cognition in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*

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In Memoriam

Andrew Fraser McFarlane
(1919 – 2004)
Declaration:

I declare that this thesis has been wholly written by me, that it represents my own research and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Andrew G. G. McFarlane

2007
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The human person as an epistemic agent: the theological contours of creaturely cognition in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics

In the main, scholars have assumed that Karl Barth exhibited little theological interest in human knowing as a distinct topic in the Church Dogmatics, and that his pronouncements on it are mere footnotes in his exposition of the doctrine of revelation. However, my thesis is that in that work Barth crafts a vibrant and highly nuanced theological account of cognition as part of his actualistic conception of the human creature and its telos as God’s covenant partner.

This study describes the contours of Barth’s account of the creature as an epistemic agent. I discuss how the basic shape of knowing in Barth’s theology is conditioned by the function it is ordained to serve as the creaturely presupposition of the knowledge and service of God. Evidence also suggests that Barth endorses the broad outlines of Kant’s understanding of the architecture of cognition on theological grounds, and so affirms it to be a “spontaneous” act – thus situating the creature as an epistemic agent. However, so construed, human knowing integrates well with Barth’s wider conception of human subjectivity and freedom insofar as ‘epistemic spontaneity’ – the idea that the creature actively determines the object of cognition – is a modulation of the type of freedom the creature is created for. Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether Barth carries his theological commitment to the creature as a spontaneous knower into the environments in which the act of cognition is said to be operational, namely, in the event of the knowledge of God and the knowing of everyday objects.

The significance of this thesis to Barth studies is that it establishes how, far from being a peripheral issue, cognition functions as a distinctive and highly significant element of Barth’s conception of human creaturehood. It therefore contributes to efforts made to rescue that conception from the mistaken view that Barth allows divine sovereignty to suppress creaturely reality. Moreover, this thesis makes additional contributions to discussions about the creaturely ground of moral agency, Barth’s relationship to Kant, and the role human cognition receives in the event of the knowledge of God.
# Table of Contents

## I. PREFACE

- Declaration iii
- Acknowledgements iv
- Abstract of thesis v
- Table of contents vi
- Method of citation and key to abbreviations ix

## II. INTRODUCTION

- Overview of topic 1
- Significance of research 2
- Research questions 6
- Chapter outline 7
- Method 10
- Key terms 13
- Limitations of research 15
- Statement of thesis 17

## III. MAIN INVESTIGATION

1. Under the shadow of natural theology: the place of ‘human knowing’ in Barth studies today 18
   - 1.1 Introduction 18
   - 1.2 Barth’s rejection of the place of the knower in natural theology 19
     - 1.2.1 Approach to the subject 20
     - 1.2.2 “Natural theology” as problem of the ‘knowability’ of God 22
     - 1.2.3 The human knower in natural theology: the analogy of being 25
   - 1.3 Explanations for Barth’s ‘silence’ on the significance of knowing 32
     - 1.3.1 Fear of the analogy of being (von Balthasar) 32
     - 1.3.2 Natural theology and the problem of dualism (Torrance) 34
   - 1.4 Barth’s ‘denial’ of the creaturely: the critique of “christomonism” 36
     - 1.4.1 Barth’s “narrow” “christocentrism”: von Balthasar 37
     - 1.4.2 Two contemporary readings: Gunton and Roberts 38
       - 1.4.2.1 Colin Gunton 38
       - 1.4.2.2 Richard H. Roberts 39
   - 1.5 The status of the topic today: the insignificance of human knowing 40
   - 1.6 Conclusion 43

2. To know and serve God: the significance of knowing as a component of human creaturehood 45
   - 2.1 Introduction 45
   - 2.2 Creating a space for the person as knower: Barth’s theological anthropology 47
     - 2.2.1 The politics of self-knowledge 47
       - 2.2.1.1 Invalid modes of access to self-knowledge 47
       - 2.2.1.2 Christological-theological anthropology: the valid mode 52
         - 2.2.1.2.1 Human being as coexisting in covenant with God 52
         - 2.2.1.2.2 Overcoming the epistemic barrier of sin in Christ 54
3. Sense and spontaneity: Barth and Kant on the architecture of human cognition

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Life-long conversation partners: Barth’s acquaintance with Kant’s philosophy
3.3 Kant on the structure of human cognition
   3.3.1 Sensible intuition
   3.3.2 Conceiving
   3.3.3 The spontaneity of cognition
3.4 Barth’s account of the structure of cognition in CD II/1
   3.4.1 Graham Ward on Barth’s “Analysis of Cognition”
   3.4.2 Barth’s use of Kantian language in CD II/1
   3.4.3 The two-fold cognitive act
      3.4.3.1 Barth on “viewing”
      3.4.3.2 Points of agreement with Kant
      3.4.3.3 Barth on “conceiving”
      3.4.3.4 Points of agreement with Kant
   3.4.4 Epistemic spontaneity in CD II/1
3.5 Testing the resilience of the ‘spontaneity thesis’: cognition in CD III/2
   3.5.1 “Awareness”
   3.5.2 “Thought”
   3.5.3 Epistemic spontaneity in CD III/2
3.6 Critical appraisal of Ward’s account
3.7 Conclusion: the significance of epistemic spontaneity in Barth’s theology

4. Knowing and selfhood in Barth and Kant: epistemic spontaneity as a modulation of human freedom

4.1 Introduction
4.2 Kant on spontaneity and freedom
   4.2.1 Free will and rational agency in Kant
   4.2.2 Practical spontaneity
   4.2.2 Epistemic spontaneity
   4.2.3 Summary of findings
4.3 Barth on epistemic spontaneity as a modulation of human freedom
   4.3.1 Soul and subjectivity: spontaneity as freedom from nature
Method of Citation and Key to Abbreviations

1. Works by Karl Barth

All references to the *Church Dogmatics* (eds. G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance *et al*; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1977) are made in the first instance to the English translation in the form standard in the field of “CD [volume number/part], [page number]”. References to corresponding sections of the German original, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* (Evangelischer Verlag A. G.: Zollikon-Zürich, 1932-1968), are made by affixing “= n” to the English citation, where n represents the page number in the German original.

In addition, the following lists, in alphabetical order, the abbreviations of other works by Barth that are consulted in this study. I reserve details of publication for the bibliography, for in most cases there is only one edition of each work available in German and in English.

“Commandment“ “The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology” (1933)
“Fate” “Fate and Idea in Theology“ (1929)
“Gift” “The Gift of Freedom” (1953)
“No!” “No! Answer to Emil Brunner” (1934)
“Philosophy” “Philosophy and Theology” (1960)

*PT* *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (1952)

*Romans II* *Epistle to the Romans (second edition)* (1922)

2. Works by Immanuel Kant

References to works by Immanuel Kant are to the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, which are translations of the multi-volume *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences). The *Cambridge Editions* always give standard Academy pagination, a practice I follow throughout.

References consist in the short title of the work, followed by the volume and page number separated by a colon.
The only exception to this method is with respect to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where no short title is given. Citations are made by reference to the pagination of Kant’s first [“A”] and/or second [“B”] editions of this work. Short titles and the works to which they refer are given below.

- **An / Bn**  
  *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787)

- **Conflict**  
  *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798)

- **Groundwork**  
  *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)

- **Practical Reason**  
  *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)

- **Religion**  
  *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793)

### 3. Journal title abbreviations

I use shortened titles for the following journals.

- **AJTP**  
  *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*

- **CTJ**  
  *Calvin Theological Journal*

- **IJPS**  
  *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*

- **JAAR**  
  *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*

- **NZST**  
  *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*

- **Ph&PhenR**  
  *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

- **SJT**  
  *Scottish Journal of Theology*

- **ZDT**  
  *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie*
Thesis Introduction

Overview of topic

The eminent Swiss theologian Karl Barth wrote much on the topic of human knowing over a career that spanned five decades. Whilst it is thought that Barth never sought to systematically present a theological ‘epistemology of the human creature’ in the Church Dogmatics, he clearly finds human knowing an intriguing topic of conversation in that work.¹ For it is a topic that explicitly surfaces in connection with his exposition of a multitude of doctrinal themes, including the “knowability” of God, faith, sin, the constitution of human creaturehood, the goal of election, the telos of the Christian community, and human action.²

Yet, human knowing does not register as a topic of note in introductory manuals to Barth’s theology.³ And to date, there exists not one critical study of his conception of the architecture and operation of human cognition, its divinely ordained role within human creaturehood and covenant history, or the matrix of background doctrinal connections that give it shape, content and significance within his theology. Indeed, as things stand in the field, Barth’s positive treatment of human knowing has been missed altogether or received only limited attention. On the one hand, Ronald Thiemann and Bruce Marshall have stated in passing that how humans come to know things is a subject of little interest to Barth, given his theological interests and concerns.⁴ And whilst commentators such as Eberhard Jüngel, Bruce McCormack, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Thomas Torrance have discussed the issue in more depth, they typically see it as merely one aspect of Barth’s theological epistemology.⁵ The overriding impression is therefore that Barth’s handling of

¹ See section 1.3 below.
² E.g., sin, CD III/2 403-4 = 483-485; constitution, CD III/2, 399-404 = 478-484; community, CD IV/1, 776; action CD III/2, 406-408 = 487-8.
human knowing is minimal and critical, and that he regarded human cognition as a subject of limited theological significance.

This project challenges those impressions by demonstrating that human knowing is a distinctive and highly significant strand of Barth’s theology in the Church Dogmatics. Indeed, my contention is that in that work Barth offers a vibrant and positive theological account of human cognition that is inextricably interlinked with his actualistic conception of the human person and its telos as God’s covenant partner. This study identifies and analyses the main contours of that understanding.

I discuss how cognition is a significant component of human creaturehood, for Barth, insofar as it is ordained to serve as a necessary creaturely condition of the knowledge and service of God. I also describe how Barth endorses the broad outlines of Kant’s understanding of the architecture of cognition on theological grounds. This makes human knowing a “spontaneous” act. But as I will further show, this conception of knowing is integrated in, and reflective of, Barth’s wider conception of human subjectivity and freedom. The question then arises as to whether Barth carries his theological commitment to the creature as a spontaneous knower into the environments in which he says the act of cognition is operational, in “intra-worldly” knowing and in the event of faith.

Examination of these contours shall show that Barth crafts a nuanced account of the human creature as an epistemic agent – as an ‘active’, spontaneous knower – in virtue of its calling to know and serve God as God’s covenant partner.

**Significance of research**

The thesis that Barth offers a richly textured theological account of the human creature as an epistemic agent makes four distinctive contributions to Barth studies. I outline those below.

(1) This project contributes to the development of a fully-orbed understanding of human creaturehood in Barth’s theology. Excellent studies by Eberhard Jüngel, John Webster, Stuart McLean, and Joseph Mangina, amongst others, have already done much to retrieve Barth’s affirmative and highly nuanced treatment of human

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creaturehood from the common misunderstanding that Barth’s Christological starting point so pulverises it, and creation generally, that neither possess distinct reality or significance in his theology. 6 Despite these constructive moves, the program of reassessing Barth’s anthropology is not yet complete. Crucially for this study, little attention has been given to human knowing, an item which Barth explicitly identifies as “essential” to the ontological constitution of the human person. 7

This project shall augment our understanding of Barth’s conception of human creaturehood by salvaging this ‘missing’ element, and by isolating the significance Barth attributes to it therein. As understood by Barth, human knowing is determined by God in its shape and orientation for a particular purpose: it is designed to make a crucial contribution to the fulfilment of the creature’s telos as God’s covenant partner in the world. It does this by enabling the creature to be claimed by God in the event of faith, and on that basis, to serve God. This fact challenges and defeats the existing perception that Barth regarded the topic of human knowing as peripheral or even alien to his chief theological intentions and concerns.

(2) In connection with point 1 above, this project also makes a notable contribution to the discussion of human agency in Barth’s thought. Much pioneering work has been done in recent years on the subject of human freedom and ethical agency in Barth’s thought by John Webster, Archibald Spencer, Nigel Biggar, and David Clough, for example. 8 These scholars have all accentuated in different ways how

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7 CD III/2, 399ff.

8 E.g. J. Webster, Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); A. Spencer, Clearing a Space for Human Action: Towards an Ethical Ontology in the Early Theology of Karl Barth, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2003), ch.5; N. Biggar, The Hastening
Barth’s anthropology does not annul free human agency and with it the question of moral action, but presents the creature as part of a “morally textured reality” in which it is posited and oriented as an ethical agent. However, in construing human agency in purely ethical terms, I believe these commentators have overlooked how knowing not only functions as a mode of agency in Barth’s theology, but actually conditions the possibility of ethical agency.

For Barth, human knowing is a brand of human agency because it is an act – the creature has its “being-in-action”. This is reflected in Barth’s insistence that knowing is “spontaneous”, which is to say that the creature is not a patient in cognition, but is an agent that actively and ‘autonomously’ conditions the object of cognition. Moreover, ‘epistemic agency’ undergirds moral agency in Barth’s theology. At least, an awareness of epistemic agency is needed to properly grasp the creaturely basis of moral agency owing to the way Barth makes the act of knowing the creaturely, and therefore the relative, conditio sine qua non of all forms of rational and responsible activity. Both these outcomes complement current studies of human agency (whilst offsetting their overt ‘ethical concentration’) by referencing human cognition as another pillar in Barth’s thought that upholds the integrity of human activity in all its variety.

(3) This study also contests the view advanced by von Balthasar and Torrance that Barth remained silent about the structure of human cognition. I show that he had far more interest in the ‘architecture’ of cognition than they thought, and that his understanding of it is deeply rooted in his theological conception of human selfhood. Firstly, my research shows that Barth explicitly assumes the validity of the chief elements of human cognition as a “spontaneous” act as presented by Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason – and does so as late as CD II/1 and III/2. This essentially means that our knowing of entities is not wholly brought about by the object which impacts the mind in sense-experience, but requires and results from the self-initiated


9 CD III/2, 407.

10 See section 1.3 below.

or “spontaneous” activity of the mind in organising the data of experience. This is significant because it raises far-reaching questions about the place knowing receives in other parts of Barth’s theology: for instance, does Barth carry his commitment to the creature as a spontaneous knower through to his descriptions of the event of faith?

Secondly, this model of knowing is intrinsically bonded to Barth’s notion of creaturely selfhood. Spontaneity is not isolated to the act of knowing; spontaneity is proper to that act because it is first proper to Barth’s theological notions of subjectivity and freedom. Like Kant, Barth conceives of spontaneity as the person’s ability to act independently of natural necessity, but his acceptance of such spontaneity is predicated on theological grounds: he sees it as being essential to and included in the freedom in which the creature acts in line with the command of God. Thus construed, ‘epistemic spontaneity’ is a modulation of the specific type of freedom the creature has been created for, i.e. the freedom for obedience (the other modulation being the freedom of the will).

Both these findings evidently shed new light on points of convergence and divergence between Barth and the theoretical and practical philosophy of Kant. These contributions will be discussed in the course of expositing these themes.

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12 This is not in itself surprising, given the well-documented fact that Barth came into contact with Kant’s work via his teachers Wilhelm Herrmann and Hermann Cohen at Marburg. Nevertheless, it is only Graham Ward who has explicitly noted the presence of Kantian thought-forms in this particular area of Barth’s thought. David McKenzie also hints at this, but rests content with arguing that evidence from the section on Kant in PT shows that Barth accepted Kant’s noumena/phenomena distinction. See G. Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), chap. 1, and D. McKenzie, “Kant and Protestant Theology”, *Encounter* 47 (1982), 157-167.

(4) Finally, this study goes some way to resolving the perennial angst surrounding the place and weighting human knowing receives in Barth’s theological epistemology. Scholars such as Thomas Torrance and Hans Urs von Balthasar have expressed anxieties over where Barth’s rejection of natural theology leaves the human knower in the event of faith. Others have pointed to the ‘mediated subjectivity’ the creature receives therein, but have neglected or dared not hypothesise as to the shape and texture of the subjectivity Barth has in mind.

This study shows that, notwithstanding important qualifications, Barth is keen to position the creature as an epistemic agent in the event of faith, and does so with varying degrees of success. Despite difficulties that threaten to obscure the point in CD II/1, Barth works hard to establish the creature as (derived) subject of the act of knowing, and to show how God’s self-giving as object conditions that act to be cognitive in character. In CD IV/1 he gives a full account of faith as a free and spontaneous creaturely cognitive act that is an integral aspect of the dynamic of the Christian life. In that volume, Barth does not simply present the knowing that takes place in faith as ‘active’, but discusses its social, practical and transformative dimensions as well.

**Research questions**

The exposition of my thesis and its significance receives its shape from the following set of questions. These have arisen in the course of my research into this subject and are the prescribed lines along which I will describe the contours of creaturely cognition in Barth’s thought. They are:

1. Why has Barth’s positive understanding of human knowing received such scant treatment in the field?
2. Is a theological description of creaturely cognition possible and legitimate for Barth? And if so, does he ever articulate the significance and purpose of knowing?
3. Does Barth pass comment on the architecture of human cognition? If so, where do its conceptual foundations lie, and what are its chief characteristics?

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14 See sections 3.1 and 4.3.2 below.
15 See section 1.3 below.
16 See section 1.3.1 below.
4. Is Barth’s conception of the knowing process left ‘free-standing’, or is it part of his understanding of creaturely selfhood?

5. Does Barth carry through his commitment to the creature as an ‘active’ knower to his description of the knowing of worldly objects? And what is the theological significance and function of “intra-worldly” cognition?

6. Does the creature remain an epistemic agent in the event of faith? Or is human cognitive activity eclipsed by Barth’s emphasis on the primacy of the divine act of self-revealing?

**Chapter outline**

These six research questions map directly onto the six chapters that make up this project. Broadly speaking, chapters 1 and 2 handle questions of the subject’s significance within the field and within Barth’s theology. Chapters 3 and 4 analyse the theological mechanics of knowing as a spontaneous act, both in terms of its architecture and its place within human selfhood. The final two chapters consider the wider implications of Barth’s account of the human creature as a knower: they examine whether the integrity of creaturely knowing as a spontaneous act is reflected in Barth’s description of the environments in which he says that act is operational. I now outline each chapter in more depth.

Chapter 1 offers one way of accounting for why Barth’s understanding of human knowing has received such scant attention in the field. My hypothesis is that Barth’s rejection of the ‘elevated’ status human cognition receives in “natural theology” has done most to shape attitudes to human knowing in his theology in the English speaking domain. I show how, on the back of that rejection, scholars such as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Thomas Torrance have come to assume that Barth’s handling of the topic is critical and negative. I then suggest that what might have cemented the impression Barth had little positive to say about the human knower – even in the event of faith – is the influential view that Barth’s Christological starting point robs creaturely reality as a whole of dignity and integrity. I conclude by assessing the current status of the topic.

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Chapter 2 begins the process of challenging such misperceptions by analysing how human knowing is actually highly significant, indeed essential, to Barth’s conception of human creaturehood in CD III/2. I establish warrant for that analysis by first clarifying the grounds on which objective human self-knowledge is made possible, for Barth, and how such knowledge is to be interpreted for its significance in light of the creature’s telos as God’s covenant partner. The analysis itself has its centre in a little discussed passage in CD III/2. There, Barth describes how the act of knowing is so moulded as to help the creature know God, and on that basis, serve God. It firstly functions as the divinely appointed means by which God ‘reaches’ the creature, despite the noetic effects of sin. In the second place, it operates as the creaturely condition of the ability to serve God as a rational and responsible agent. Thus understood, far from having been passed over as theologically irrelevant by Barth, knowing makes a significant double contribution to the fulfilment of the creature’s destiny as God’s covenant partner.

Chapters 3 and 4 narrow the focus of the study to the content of the cognitive act and to how it links-up with Barth’s understanding of human selfhood.

Chapter 3 shows that Barth’s engagement with human knowing is not limited to matters of its significance, but extends to the architecture of human knowing, too. Barth offers two skeleton accounts of the processes of cognition in CD II/1 and III/2, both of which show that he accepts – on theological grounds – the broad outlines of Kant’s understanding of knowing as a spontaneous act. To draw out the parallels, I outline Kant’s intuition/conception model of cognition as presented in the Critique of Pure Reason and establish why it has been considered to be spontaneous. I then demonstrate that Barth’s first ‘description’ of cognition (CD II/1) follows the contours of Kant’s, owing to the clear analogies that exist between their respective understandings of the acts of anschauen (“intuition”) and begreifen (“conceiving”). I then show that the spontaneity Barth attributes to knowing in virtue of its structure is a characteristic position in the Church Dogmatics through analysis of Barth’s second skeleton account of knowing (in CD III/2). Ward’s account of Barth’s commitment to Kant on human knowing is also described and assessed. And in conclusion, I map out the significance of Barth’s endorsement of ‘epistemic spontaneity’ in terms of the wider questions it raises about the place of knowing in his theology.

Chapter 4 considers how the model of knowing Barth affirms – a model in which the creature controls and determines its experience of objects – is consonant with and
derived from his conception of human selfhood. Using passages from CD III/2, IV/1 and IV/2, I argue that ‘epistemic spontaneity’ is rooted in and is a modulation of Barth’s theological conception of human freedom (i.e. freedom for God), to the extent that he regards spontaneity (freedom from natural necessity) as an intrinsic function of it. This is borne out in considering how Barth thinks such spontaneity characterises human subjectivity, operates as a function of the freedom of obedience, and is reflected generally in the rational order of the human constitution, as well as in the particular acts of knowing and willing. As in chapter 3, I pinpoint how Barth’s conception of spontaneity as independence from natural necessity models Kant’s, and discuss throughout the ways in which their accounts of spontaneity and freedom dovetail and diverge. On this basis, I also assess Webster’s contention that human freedom is remarkably “unmodern”, for Barth, because it does not rely on any such philosophical notion of independence.

Chapters 5 and 6 test whether Barth carries through his commitment to the creature as a spontaneous knower to his descriptions of the two environments in which he says the act of knowing is operational.

Chapter 5 focuses on Barth’s description of “intra-worldly” knowing, that is, the knowing of created, worldly objects. My contention is that far from leaving that act stripped of any theological significance, passages in CD II/1 and III/2 indicate that Barth affirms the integrity and success of intra-worldly knowing on account of how it operates as a function of the purpose for which the creature was made cognisant, namely, to know God. After defining intra-worldly knowing vis-à-vis the knowing of God, I analyse the nature of that significance and show how on that basis knowing comes to view as a spontaneous act in virtue of the motifs of “mastery” and “precedence” that characterise it. Since the knowing of created objects must be ordained by God for success if it is to facilitate encounter with God, I conclude with an outline of the theological-ontological grounds within the human creature and creation generally that guarantee its integrity, for Barth. These conditions are: “self-consciousness”, “resemblance”, and a “unity of being” underlying the apprehension of created entities.

Having ascertained how Barth’s commitment to epistemic spontaneity is carried through to this first environment, chapter 6 considers whether his commitment extends to his descriptions of the event of faith. My argument is that Barth advances two accounts of the creature’s cognitive involvement in faith. The first comes in CD
II/1 amidst his exposition of the “knowability” of God over against natural theology. There, Barth’s commitment to the creature as an active, spontaneous knower is present but inadequately worked through on account of his failure to resolve how cognition is meant to be simultaneously “active” and an “instrument” in the event of faith. This calls into question the place of creaturely epistemic agency in faith. But without any retraction or modification of his commitment to God as subject of the event, Barth in CD IV/1 contrastingly gives a full account of how the human knowing of God functions as part of the integrated, self-involving response the creature freely and spontaneously makes in faith to God’s call to cognitive and active fellowship. An analysis of both these accounts leads me to contend that irrespective of the complications that dog Barth’s first account, in both he takes seriously the need to affirm epistemic spontaneity in the event of faith.

**Method**

Two issues are considered under this heading: (1) engagement with and approach to texts, and (2) my conceptual starting point and the ‘reading’ of Barth it assumes.

(1) The method used in this analysis is based firmly on Barth’s presentation of human knowing in the *Church Dogmatics*. Though I acknowledge that Barth frequently broaches the issue in essays in the late 1920s and early 1930s in connection with questions about natural theology and theological method, I choose to limit the scope of this study to knowing as described in Barth’s multivolume *magnum opus*. The rationale behind this decision is that I want to annul the perception that Barth’s handling of the subject is reducible to such questions. Focusing on the *Church Dogmatics* facilitates that because – as this project shows – it is in that work that Barth’s multi-faceted understanding of human knowing comes into clear view. Moreover, to have included other pertinent literature from other periods of Barth’s career would inevitably force up to the surface wide-ranging genetico-historical issues that cannot be treated comfortably in a work of this size.

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18 *CD* II/1, 3-31, 179-257.
19 *CD* IV/1, 757-779.
20 Such essays include “Fate” (1929), “Commandment” (1933) and “No!”.
The absence of any real secondary literature dealing with Barth’s positive exposition of human knowing means that constructive synergies with other authors in the process of describing what Barth has to say are at a premium, unfortunately. In consequence of this fact, this study is largely one of textual exposition; and although many of the passages under scrutiny will likely be familiar to the Barth scholar, there are many important passages on human knowing (particularly found in CD III/2, III/3, IV/1 and IV/2) that have not yet, to my knowledge, received detailed scholarly attention in the English speaking domain of Barth studies.

My approach to each passage consulted has been to start with the English translation of Die kirchliche Dogmatik and to use secondary literature to help set context, illustrate points and establish significance. Passages that bring out something essential of Barth’s positive conception of knowing are explicitly compared with the German original in order to prevent loss of meaning through inadequate awareness of how German terms and phrases are being used by Barth.

As lengthy tracts of chapters 3 and 4 are dedicated to expositing Kant’s understanding of human cognition and its place within human selfhood vis-à-vis Barth’s, some indication of how I shall read Kant is warranted. My method here is to base all discussion on the Cambridge Editions of primary texts, but to principally use the work of one of the foremost Kant scholars of our time, Henry Allison, to guide my interpretation of them. Allison chiefly informs my understanding of Kant’s concept of spontaneity. And for the purposes of this study, I assume his reading of Kant on spontaneity as standard. To aid clarity and flow, I do not engage at any length with issues of interpretation raised in the secondary literature. Neither do I attempt to build on Allison’s interpretation, nor do I construct and advance my own reading of Kant’s conception of cognition or the cognitive subject.

(2) Having dealt with these preliminary methodological issues, I turn now to clarify my conceptual starting-point.

Traditionally, scholars have tended to assume that human knowing is simply one aspect of Barth’s theological epistemology, and so have tended to link it to Barth’s

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discussion of the “knowability” of God and/or natural theology. But this approach creates problems. Bruce McCormack’s excellent study of that epistemology in the early phases of Barth’s theology provides a good case in point. In that study, McCormack presents Barth as exhibiting interest in the form and structure of human knowing only insofar as they are implied in the answer he develops to the question that lies at the heart of Barth’s theological epistemology, namely, how does God give Godself to be known by the creature without ceasing to be God, i.e. without becoming subject to the human cognitive apparatus which conditions its objects? But thus presented, the unintended impression takes root that Barth’s discussion of human knowing is so closely bonded to his desire to safeguard the primacy of God’s sovereign revelatory act, that Barth appears to be only concerned with its limits as made manifest under the critique of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Such approaches prove problematic precisely because in locating human knowing so strictly under the rubric of his theological epistemology or his invective against the elevated status cognition receives in natural theology, Barth’s handling of the subject is made to look one dimensional, minimal and critical. In presenting it thus, scholars give the impression that Barth had nothing positive to say about the creature as a knower, and as such, they furnish no way of explaining why Barth would go on to offer an expansive, positive description of cognition as an element of human creaturehood – a description that far transcends the mere delineation of its limits.

In contrast to these approaches, I identify Barth’s theological anthropology (set out in CD III/2) as the proper entry point into a discussion of human knowing in his theology. And whilst I concur with George Hunsinger that there can be no single interpretative master-key for reading the Church Dogmatics as a whole, I believe there does exist one for bringing to light Barth’s positive explication of human

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23 These assumptions are outlined in chapter 1.


26 This is also true of Torrance’s, von Balthasar’s and Jüngel’s discussion of the topic insofar as they too restrict human knowing to one aspect of Barth’s theological epistemology. See n.4 above for citation details.
knowing in particular. Indeed, if there be one insight above all others that has conditioned the organisation and presentation of material in this study, it is Barth’s affirmation that the human creature has been created for the purpose of knowing and serving God, and that its ontological constitution has been structured with that end in mind. This study proceeds on the basis that all Barth has to say about the structure and significance of human knowing as part of his conception of human creaturehood makes most sense as the unfolding of that one basic theological-anthropological insight.

This is the starting point from which I will move to substantiate the thesis that Barth offers a vibrant and highly nuanced account of creaturely knowing. Although this work is certainly not then an essay on Barth’s theological epistemology, it should not be assumed that the method adopted seeks to minimise what can be learned about human cognition – that is, the human knowing of God – from Barth’s understanding of the event of the knowledge of God or from his rejection of natural theology. Natural theology is significant as a contour of creaturely cognition in its own right, and is treated as part of chapter 1. And I attempt to re-read the place of human knowing in the theological epistemology of CD II/1 only after having first grasped the shape and significance of creaturely cognition in Barth’s thought.

Key terms

A definition of the key terms that drive this study will further help delineate the exact area to be covered by the project, as well as inform the discussions to come.

(1) Human knowing: Barth associates das Erkennen with the act of human knowing in the Church Dogmatics. This is translated into English as “knowing” or “cognition”, and both these renderings are treated as synonyms by the translators and

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27 It must be acknowledged that there exists a certain danger in pinpointing and working from supposed ‘governing principles’ in Barth’s theology. George Hunsinger has shown that any attempt to generate a ground principle that systematises and makes sense of an opus as vast and as nuanced as Barth’s Church Dogmatics is doomed to failure. Far from using the methodological principle advanced above in such a reductionist agenda, I simply deploy it as the basic framework for understanding what Barth has to say about human knowing as a component of human creaturehood. Nothing further than that is being claimed for that starting point. Consult G. Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3ff.

28 A detailed description of this affirmation is given in section 2.2.2 below.

29 To be sure, this insight is possible only because of the way Barth triangulates the doctrines of creation, Christology and election. Moreover, it has its ground in the doctrine of God, in the overflowing of the divine self-knowing. (CD II/1, 74).
are thus used inter-changeably throughout the text. Taken in its everyday sense, *das Erkennen* refers to the act of acquiring or generating knowledge (perceiving, realising, and recognising etc.). Though there is clear potential for ambiguity in that *die Erkenntnis* can overlap with the *das Erkennen* – just as “cognition” in English can similarly designate the act of knowing or the outputs in which that act results (i.e. knowledge) – Barth makes a clear distinction between them, reserving *das Erkennen* for the cognitive act and the capacity for that act.  

Barth also uses the term *das Vernehmen*.

This word can refer to knowing as a whole or ‘sense perception’ in particular. Additionally, *das Vernehmen* carries the particular sense of ‘hearing’ and comprehending, which reflects Barth’s understanding of the divinely-ordained purpose of human knowing, which is to enable the creature to hear the Word of God.

Importantly, then, the interest of the study lies not with ‘knowledge’, the outputs of the act of knowing; and nor is it concerned with Barth’s answers to broader epistemological questions about how knowledge of world or God is authenticated or justified as true. As I use it here, “human knowing” strictly refers to the act of knowing, and the subjective means (faculties and capacities) Barth thinks comprise it. A discussion of the terms Barth uses to describe the faculties and act are give in 2.3.1.2 and 3.4.2 below.

(2) Spontaneity: In the philosophy of Kant, “spontaneity” (*die Spontaneität*) signifies human freedom as the capacity for self-initiated action (i.e. the ability to act as a subject freely of natural necessity). In this study, I shall therefore use “spontaneity” – whether in connection with Barth or Kant (since I regard their conceptions of spontaneity to be analogous) – to refer to the idea that the human person is capable of acting wholly or partly of itself independently of the causality of nature.

The correlative phrase “epistemic spontaneity” simply denotes this freedom as inflected in the act of cognition. It is the autonomy the person enjoys with respect to the object of cognition, i.e. for both thinkers it is the mind’s independent action on the object, and not the impact of the object on the mind, that makes the decisive

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30 See CD II/1, 60f = 66f and §27, but also 16 = 16, 22 = 22; 25 = 26; 57 = 62; 181 = 203.
contribution to knowledge-generation.  

(3) Though not used by Barth himself, I use the term “epistemic agency” to specifically convey his idea that the human creature is an ‘agent’ rather than a ‘patient’ with respect to the objects of cognition in virtue of the spontaneity that characterises the act of knowing. Occasionally, I also use ‘active knower’ to specify the same thing. Since this study shows that Barth typically characterises the creature as a spontaneous knower, I also use ‘epistemic agent’ more generally to refer to all that falls under the idea that the creature is created a knower. But I do not refer to the creature as a ‘cognitive subject’ because this would wrongly imply that I equate Barth’s distinctly theological understanding of creaturely epistemic agency with modern, philosophical alternatives from which, I believe, it has to be set apart.

Limitations of research

There are unfortunately several important issues that cannot be treated here, but which are essential to note to further demarcate the range of subjects to be treated. In brief, these are:

(1) Pneumatology and Epistemology. Much implicit attention is devoted to the Trinitarian basis of human knowing in this study. In chapter 2, I show how God determines the structure of human knowing according to the purpose it will serve, whilst I consider in chapter 6 how, in Barth’s Christologically-based doctrine of revelation, the creature is brought to participate in the divine self-knowing through the Son. Nevertheless, I do not describe the nuanced role Barth gives to the Holy Spirit as he who facilitates cognitive union between subject and object, and nor do I explore the way in which Barth thinks the Spirit helps cognition reach its telos in ecclesial witness. Had time permitted, attention to the bridge in Barth’s thought between epistemology and pneumatology would have allowed for a more complete description of knowing as an act which is grounded in the life of the Trinity.

(2) Philosophy and Theology. As has already been intimated, this study hopes to enhance our understanding of Barth’s relationship with Kant by highlighting points of convergence and divergence between both thinkers’ respective conceptions of human knowing and its place within human selfhood. Whilst I will stress the

33 For more on spontaneity see chapters 3 and 4.
34 The clue to such a reading is given in CD III/2, 393-395.
distinctively theological grounds on which Barth’s acceptance of Kantian thought-forms is predicated, I will not reach firm conclusions concerning the place and function of philosophical thought-forms in his theology in general. And neither will I discuss whether his handling of such concepts reflects or contravenes the protocols he thinks philosophy and theology should abide by in their relationship with one another.\(^{35}\)

As an aside, although I believe Graham Ward to be correct in detecting Kantian thought-forms in Barth’s understanding of the structure of human cognition, this study is not aligned with the broader reading of Barth he advances, namely, that Barth’s theology is built upon a philosophical problematic of language. That is to say, I do not read Barth’s theology – and do not believe he himself read it – as emerging from philosophical questions about language or human cognition, and nor do I reduce it to an attempt to resolve or make sense of those issues within a religio-theological paradigm.\(^{36}\)

(3) Barth’s Contemporaries: It would have proved instructive to evaluate and compare the place Barth gives to human knowing in his theology vis-à-vis those of his peer group. But to pinpoint and examine just how cognition functions in the theology of Brunner, Tillich or Bultmann, say, would have required a study of its own largely because of their similarly complex treatments of the subject. As with Barth, the subject arises in connection with their treatment of theological method, doctrines such as revelation and anthropology, and involves various philosophical conversation partners. The size of the task therefore places it out with the scope of the current work.

\(^{35}\) Barth addresses these topics in e.g. “Philosophy” and PT, 252-299.

\(^{36}\) Graham Ward’s controversial position is that underlying Barth’s theological conception of language is a shared philosophical problematic: “When we place Barth in the context of German philosophy of language (and discourse), then, we see that his problematic remains the same as that of both the philosophers of dialogue and Heidegger. They are each examining and attempting to clarify the transcendental condition for language. Barth’s is a very specific use of language – Christian speaking about God – but...insofar as Christian speaking about God can only be understood within a more general economy of representation, then his problematic is identical to that analysed in Redephilosophie and Heidegger’s ontology of Logos”. (102-3) See G. Ward, Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).
Statement of thesis

The novel thesis which provides unity to the project described above is simply that in contrast to mistaken perceptions in the field, Barth offers a highly significant and richly textured theological conception of human cognition that is inextricably interlinked with his actualistic conception of the human person and its telos as God’s covenant partner. What follows is an exposition of the contours of creaturely cognition in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics.
1. Under the shadow of natural theology: the place of ‘human knowing’ in Barth studies today

1.1 Introduction

My thesis is that Barth’s understanding of the creature as a knower is an important strand of his conception of human creaturehood. But if this aspect of Barth’s thought is really as significant as I suggest, then why has it received such scant attention in Barth studies? Eberhard Jüngel and Thomas Torrance have each noted in passing how the creature receives a mediated subjectivity in the event of the knowledge of God, but there is in fact little clear sense in the literature of the significance and function knowing receives in Barth’s theology.¹

No single theory or schema can hope to exhaustively explain this state of affairs, and so none will be offered. I shall simply present one way of accounting for the existence of this lacuna. My hypothesis is that Barth’s rejection of the ‘elevated’ status human cognition receives in “natural theology” has perhaps done most to shape attitudes to human knowing in his theology in the English speaking domain of Barth studies. On the back of that rejection, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Thomas Torrance – both key figures in the reception of Barth’s theology in Britain – have assumed that Barth gives little weight and discussion time to the human knower in his theology for fear that it would lead back to natural theology.² The impression that Barth’s handling of the topic is minimal and critical has also been consolidated by the view – seemingly deeply rooted in British thinking about Barth – that his theology denies the human subject any ontological or epistemological integrity on account of its Christological starting point.³ Despite recent work on Barth’s


³ During the earliest phase of Barth's reception in Britain this critique was lodged first in Wales by D. Miall Edwards (1929), John Jenkins (1931), and Philip Jones (1931). See D. Morgan, “The Early Reception of Karl Barth's Theology in Britain: A Supplementary View”, SJT 54 (2001), 504-527.
anthropology which has unseated this view, human knowing remains a subject of little interest to scholars in the field.

The discussion falls into four sections. In the first, I identify the place of human cognition in natural theology by examining the epistemological structure Barth thinks lies at its centre, namely, the “analogy of being”. I explain how the status accorded to the human knower on account of that analogy is precluded by Barth’s insistence in the *Church Dogmatics* that knowledge of God is grounded exclusively in God’s good pleasure to reveal himself. Whilst this discussion of natural theology certainly provides essential background to the analysis that follows, this is also an important aspect of human knowing as Barth thought of it. It therefore constitutes a ‘contour’ of creaturely cognition in its own right.

Sections two and three discuss the widely-held perception that Barth remained silent about the significance and structure of human knowing. In section 2, I discuss von Balthasar and Torrance’s view that Barth’s reticence about the human knower results from his rejection of natural theology – a rejection that consequently creates problems for his theology. The third section suggests that the impression that Barth never offered a constructive account of the creature as knower is likely cemented by the once widely-held view that Barth’s Christological starting point leads to the denial of creaturely reality and integrity. Here, I describe von Balthasar’s classic articulation of this position, and point to Gunton and Roberts as offering two contemporary examples of this type of critique.

In section 4, I shall outline the status of human knowing in the field today. I point to the fact that scholars think this is a subject which Barth had little interest in, and I identify possible readings of Barth that reinforce this view.

1.2 Barth’s rejection of the place of the knower in natural theology

assumes. As I shall read him here, Barth’s target is the idea that God can be known under the stream of human knowing independently of God’s act of self-revelation in Jesus Christ in virtue of a readily detectible analogy of being between creator and creation. Essentially, Barth’s problem with natural theology is that, in virtue of the “analogy of being” – what he considers to be the epistemological mechanism of the type common to Roman Catholic theology – it promises a way of knowing God that competes with and undercuts the notion that God gives himself to be known by the way of his own choosing, i.e. by an act of his own good pleasure.

This section breaks down into three parts. After outlining my approach to the subject, I define what Barth means by natural theology and isolate his specific target in CD II/1, before considering the place the human knower receives in natural theology on account of the analogy of being. I explain how Barth rejects this analogy in its static form.

1.2.1 Approach to the subject

Our entry point into Barth’s rejection of natural theology is not the well-documented debate over the issue between Barth and his one time dialectical ally, Emil Brunner, that took place in the autumn of 1934. This debate has been shown to provide an inadequate hermeneutical context for understanding why Barth objected to natural theology for two reasons. Its popularisation in the Anglo-Saxon world, Anthony Thiselton amongst others points out, led to its abstraction from the wider Barth-corpus with the result that in becoming the authoritative frame of reference for Barth’s position on natural theology, the misconception took root that what Barth was objecting to was “public theological discourse”. Overplaying the significance of the debate has also, as recent studies evidence, allowed the well-rehearsed historical context surrounding it, i.e. Barth’s participation in the German church’s struggle and his five year long disagreement with Brunner over the relation of nature and grace, to become explanatory factors which

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effectively eclipse Barth’s inner theological reasons for that rejection.\textsuperscript{7} Indeed, Bruce McCormack cites evidence that suggests these historical factors were not preconditional to Barth’s rejection of natural theology, for even as early as the second edition of the \textit{Commentary on Romans} (1922), he notes, Barth had laid the basic theological principles of the knowledge of God which precluded natural theology as a legitimate enterprise.\textsuperscript{8} In other words, it was Barth’s prior theological commitments that legislated against the possibility of natural theology and not the politico-ideological milieu of the early 1930s, which only caused those commitments to fizz noisily to the surface. Those commitments were not then formed in response to the German Church struggle, as James Richmond supposes.\textsuperscript{9} All this is not, of course, to devalue the significance of these historical circumstances for understanding the \textit{character} of Barth’s angry response to Brunner. It is merely to point to the hermeneutical inadequacy of the debate and its historical context for explaining what Barth meant by natural theology and why he came to reject it.\textsuperscript{10}


Given that, I follow the approach of George Hunsinger and Timothy Gorringe of describing the logic of that rejection as it comes to view in Barth’s account of the “knowability” of God in CD II/1. I shall read his rejection of natural theology through the lens of his commitment to the idea that the possibility of knowing God is grounded in God’s act of self-revelation and does not then result from or presuppose the ability of human cognition to know God independently of that act in nature.

1.2.2 “Natural theology” as problem of the ‘knowability’ of God

My aim here is to show how natural theology contrasts with Barth’s account of the knowability of God in virtue of the emphasis Barth thinks it places on the human knower; I only highlight aspects of that account which help me make this point.

One would think that nothing could be simpler or more obvious than the insight that a theology which makes a great show of guaranteeing the knowability of God apart from grace and therefore from faith, or which thinks and promises that it is able to give such a guarantee – in other words, a “natural” theology – is quite impossible within the church, and indeed, in such a way that it cannot even be discussed in principle.

To abstract from all complexities, “natural theology” is the idea that God can be known independently of his self-revelation in Jesus Christ, for Barth. Yet, Barth does not consider natural theology as something that must be raised as a question which is in the first place open for assessment. Natural theology is precluded from the outset because the only possibility of knowing God is given within the actuality of the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is mediated uniquely through God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. And God confirms himself to us as real and true in virtue of the fact that in God’s act we know him in the reality of his being. The possibility of knowing God is therefore grounded in God’s “readiness” and openness towards us – in the “good pleasure” of his own self-giving. And as such it is a miracle of his grace. This is not to say human capacities have no part to play: “it is true that a
possibility or a capacity on man’s part must correspond logically and materially to this event”. But Barth’s point is that this capacity is not under human control, it is not an ability we “bring”, but is something given in and with the Word of God. To be sure, knowledge of God does not require, and nor can it find, an independent basis for its validation in capacities indigenous to the human creature – revelation is self-authenticating. “God”, Barth writes, “is known by God” (italics mine);

[Although the knowledge of God certainly does not come about without our work, it also does not come about through our work, or as the fruit of our work. At this very point the truth breaks imperiously and decisively before us: God is known only by God; God can be known only by God. At this very point, in faith itself, we know God in utter dependence, in pure discipleship and gratitude.]

Natural theology stands opposed to this view of the knowability of God because whatever its specific form – a subject I shall address shortly – it leads to the reduction of knowledge of God to an anthropological basis. George Hunsinger describes well how it contrasts with the view of God’s knowability Barth endorses;

According to natural theology, as Barth understands it, our access to God is not something mediated exclusively in and through Jesus Christ; rather it is, at least in part, immediately open to us (and we to it). Again, it is not something miraculously enacted and bestowed (in and by Jesus Christ) by virtue of a special and self-renewing event, but is rather, at least in part, at the disposal of our own innate capacities. Again, it is not something uniquely grounded in itself both ontically and noetically, but is rather, at least in part, independently and generally given to us apart from the particular history of divine self-revelation as centered in Christ.

Natural theology makes the knower foundational: knowledge of God is something we are intrinsically capable of grasping without need of mediation and apart from God’s self-revelation in Christ. It presupposes that the creature has an intrinsic predisposition or “openness” to grace in the form of some such potentiality of its cognition or language. Barth’s rejection of natural theology (and the view of the self it presupposes) receives its most vehement and extensive articulation in the pages of

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17 CD I/1, 194.
18 CD I/1, 188, 190f; II/1, 30. Gary Dorrien has argued that Barth learned the idea of revelation as ‘self-authenticating’ (autopistia) from Wilhelm Herrmann, though the idea has its roots in Calvin. See G. Dorrien, Theology without Weapons: the Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 5-6, 113-4, 121-8.
19 CD II/1, 182-3.
CD II/1. There, Barth states time and time again that human cognition and language have no such “potentiality” or “intrinsic capacity” for taking God as an object of knowledge.21

Any native and original capacity which is ascribed to our viewing and conceiving of God or to our human language must mean that on the strength of this capacity we have a second source and norm of the revelation of God within ourselves.22

Broadly speaking, there are two type of natural theology Barth objects to. On the one hand, he holds no stock in the cosmological proof for the existence God: an enterprise which attempts to infer the existence and attributes of God from the workings of the natural world without any appeal to special revelation.23 In seeking to give knowledge of God an exclusively rational basis in metaphysics, it is antithetical to Christian theology because of the Deism to which it leads, he argues.24 On the other hand, he also rejects what Ned Wisnefske describes as the "the non-objective, non-cognitive relation to God which dominated theology after Kant".25 Here, the knowledge of God is rooted in subjectivism and psychologism; this he feels was the characteristic position of modern Protestant theology.26 Both these forms of natural theology (cognitive and non-cognitive) are unacceptable to Barth because

21 E.g. CD II/1, 179–204, but also CD I/1, 94-98, 227.
22 CD II/1, 196.
23 Barth’s rejection of classical natural theology was conditioned by the neo-Kantian strain of theology propounded by the Ritschlian School as he encountered it in the theology of his teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann, during his student days at Marburg. On the back of Kant’s repudiation of classical natural theology and separation of philosophy and theology, both Herrmann and Ritschl argued that theology was not to be constructed on any kind of ‘speculative’ metaphysics and that the dogmatic foundations of theological objectivity could only be secured by holding to Kant’s insistence on the strict separation of theology from philosophy and science. A theology that grounds itself on “revelation” alone has no need of a philosophically based apologetic, i.e. natural theology, to establish knowledge of God. Although the extent to which they themselves successfully carried out this separation is open to question, the important point is that Barth, even after his break with modern theology, stands in line with Ritschl, Herrmann and Kant in rejecting natural theology and affirming the distinction between philosophy and theology. For further information, consult J. Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1956), 3-15; S. Fisher, Revelatory Positivism?: Barth’s Earliest Theology and the Marburg School, (Oxford: OUP, 1988); B. McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936, (paperback) (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 49-68; A. Ritschl, “Theology and Metaphysics”, in Three Essays by Albrecht Ritschl, (trans. P. Hefner) (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1972), 149-217.
24 CD II/1, 140.
26 CD I/1, 192f.
both assume the human knower as the initiator of knowledge of God by its own
independent means. It therefore stands opposed to God’s ontic and noetic
absoluteness in his self-revelation. In opposing natural theology, Barth is in essence
objecting to anthropological foundationalism in theology.27

In CD II/1, however, Barth singles out the classical type of natural theology for
treatment. He believes this type is “basic” to the theology of the Roman Catholic
Church, and has also found expression and justification in the work of his one-time
dialectical ally, Emil Brunner.28 In capsule form, Barth sees their respective positions
as consisting in the idea that a) God is revealed in nature, b) that human beings are
able to discern this however much the imago Dei is corrupted by sin, and therefore c)
that knowledge of God is attainable apart from his self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Barth’s response is to show that this type of natural theology is flawed on account of
the epistemological structure that operates at its centre: a static analogy of intrinsic
attribution that links the being of God with creation in a way such that allows
humans to move directly from knowledge of qualities proper to themselves (or the
world) to knowledge of qualities proper to God. In the following section, I describe
Barth’s understanding of the analogy of being and explain the grounds he gives for
its rejection. As we shall see, his central problem is with the foundational place it
gives to the human knower in matters of knowledge of God.

1.2.3 The human knower in natural theology: the analogy of being

In his 1929 essay “Fate and Idea in Theology” Barth treated for the first time the
problem of the analogy of being, and his understanding of it there, McCormack
informs us, became characteristic of his later discussions of it.29 By CD II/1, Barth’s
position on it is thus well-established and clearly formulated: if God is only known
by God, he is not then known by virtue of an already existent and humanly
discernible analogy between the being of God and humanity.30 Barth rejects this

27 CD I/1, 227.
28 Barth rejects Brunner’s natural theology because of its proximity to the Catholic position on the
imago Dei. See J. Baillie, Our Knowledge of God, (London: OUP, 1939), 31; G. C. Berkouwer,
Studies in Dogmatics: General Revelation, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 41-2; T. Hart,
Regarding Karl Barth: Essays Towards a Reading of His Theology, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press,
1999), 170-1; and J. O’Donovan, “Man in the Image of God: The Disagreement Between Barth and
29 Barth, “Fate”; and B. McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its
30 CD II/1, 75.
analogy because it prescribes the wrong sequence of knowing.\textsuperscript{31} Putting aside his objections to it for the moment, how does Barth conceptualise this analogy?

Barth begins by considering how the \textit{analogia entis} functions in the Roman Catholic understanding of revelation as set out by the First Vatican Council. According to that council;

\begin{quote}
The same Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the light of natural human reason from the things He created, for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made…If anyone says that the one and true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be certainly known with the natural light of human reason by means of the things that have been made: let him be anathema.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

That God can be known as creator by the natural light of reason supposes, for Barth, that an analogy exists between the being of God and the being of creation. To clarify what this analogy involves, he engages the description of it offered by the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Lutheran dogmatician, Andreas Quenstedt. Accordingly, he reads Quenstedt as saying that the analogy between God and his creatures is one of \textit{attribution} rather than \textit{proportionality}, which is to say that there exists;

\begin{quote}
[A] similarity of two objects which consists in the fact that what is common to them exists first and properly in the one, and then, because a second is dependent upon it, in the second.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

But this analogy is not merely “extrinsic”, i.e. proper to the creature “only externally in the existence and form of its relation to the \textit{analogans} [primary analogate]”, but is “intrinsic”.\textsuperscript{34} Sebastian Matczak describes the analogy of intrinsic attribution in the following terms

\begin{quote}
This analogy is a similarity between two things such that what is common to them is found first and properly in the primary analogate, and only relatively and derivatively in the other…Hence God and creature fall under the same common concept [of being]. Moreover, this type of analogy is not extrinsic, and does not refer to any external relation, form or state between the \textit{analogans} and the \textit{analogatum}, since the common concept is properly intrinsic to both analogates. Consequently, this type of analogy is intrinsic to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{CD} II/1, 83.

\textsuperscript{32} This text is from \textit{Constitutio dogmatica de fide catholica}, and is cited by Barth in Latin on \textit{CD} II/1, 79. English translation of that text is cited in S. Matczak, \textit{Karl Barth on God: The Knowledge of the Divine Existence}, (London: St. Paul Publications, 1962), 221-2.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{CD} II/1, 238.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{CD} II/1, 238.
both God and creatures, although creatures participate in it *per dependentiam* [by dependence].” 35

An analogy of intrinsic attribution means that God (cause) creates in a way such that there is a similarity or likeness to him in the world (effect). This is to say that both cause and effect possess the quality properly and literally – even if in differing magnitudes or fashions – as they fall under the same concept of being. 36 So when we recognise the quality of Lordship or cause, say, in ourselves or in other beings, it can be attributed to God as a quality intrinsic to him. Bruce McCormack points out Barth’s chief concern with an analogy of intrinsic attribution. He writes;

> It is clear why Barth is concerned about making the analogy to rest on something “intrinsic” to the creature. If that is done, it will not matter that we also say the attribute under consideration belongs to the creature only derivatively and in dependence on God. Once it has been made “intrinsic” to the creature, it will then be a fixed datum, something that can be apprehended and used to reason from the analogatum to the analogans. God, in other words, may be known from the creature. So Barth is concerned throughout to close the door to natural theology. 37

Barth’s issue with this type of analogy is that it is made a predicate of the creature, of its being and of its words, such that it can know itself as the *analogatum* in relation to God but independently of God’s self-revelation. On the basis of our mutual participation in being, and therefore our “similarity, partial correspondence, and agreement” with God, it becomes possible to compare God and humanity under the steam of our own cognitive and linguistic apparatus. 38 Barth describes the order of knowing thus;

> As himself a being, man is able to know a being as such. But if this is so, then in principle he is able to know all being, even God as the incomparably real being. Therefore if God is, and if we cannot deny His being, or on the other hand, our being and that of creation, necessarily we must affirm His knowability apart from His revelation. For it consists precisely in this analogy of being which comprehends both Him and us. 39


36 *CD* II/1, 238.

37 B. McCormack, “§27 “The Limits of the Knowledge of God”: Theses on the Theological Epistemology of Karl Barth”, *ZDT* 15 (1999), 75-86 (citation, 84).

38 *CD* II/1, 225, 228-9.

39 *CD* II/1, 81.
Whilst von Balthasar correctly notes that there are several different reasons for Barth’s rejection of the analogy of being, the one that I want to focus on is its epistemological ramifications.\textsuperscript{40} It is quite clear from what has been said so far that the epistemological mechanism at the heart of this type of natural theology contravenes God’s knowability as Barth understands it. This analogy glorifies sinful humanity in its disobedience, who is now in a position to compare itself with God “irrespective of any particular act of God to restore this fellowship” in virtue of the similarity of being proper to both – and all this despite the noetic effects of sin.\textsuperscript{41} It gives the knowability of God an anthropological basis in the human knower. Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it this way;

In the hands of a sinner, the concept of being becomes the most dangerous instrument for disobedience, because with it the sinner purports to produce something from within himself that can only come as a gift from God. In this respect, it is the most direct expression of disobedience. It secularises, falsifies and superficialises our real status before God by abusing the grace of that relationship.\textsuperscript{42}

In order to falsify the place he sees natural theology attribute to the human knower on account of the intrinsic analogy of attribution, Barth attacks the conceptual coherence of that analogy along three interconnected lines and shows how it violates the principle of God’s good pleasure which lies at the heart of a ‘correct’ understanding of God’s knowability.

In the first place, Barth asks how can the author of creation, the source of being, participate in “some being in general” in the same way we do? What God is towards us – as Lord, Creator, Judge, Redeemer – so he is in himself, and what he is \textit{in se} and \textit{pro nobis} is wholly incomparable with the sinful, temporal being of humans to the extent that there can be no analogy of being between them by which we might know of God as Creator in advance of and apart from knowing God as all these other things.\textsuperscript{43} It is true that we possess an idea of lordship, of cause etc., but these ideas have no reality in themselves and obscure the knowledge of God because they point only to the limits of our knowledge. They are not analogue because they cannot be

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{CD} II/1, 80, 83.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{CD} II/1, 83.
extended to the point where they tell us of God’s real Lordship over us, of God’s creating _ex nihilo_ and of Creation is His work, of His reconciling the world. The content of these ideas is so incomparable that it is impossible to arrive at their reality through the normative meanings we ascribe to them.\^44

Secondly, this analogy divides between God’s being and his act. The being of God gets treated first and established as knowable in advance of and in “abstraction” from his activity towards us.\^45 Barth designates such a move (encapsulated in the formula _Operari sequitur esse_ [Works follow being]) as “convenient”, for it affirms that God’s being is known _in se_ apart from revelation and enables the human knower to attribute to itself a being of a similar yet different sort.\^46 And because God’s being is known independently and prior to his activity towards us, so the possibility of knowing him does not depend on his “good pleasure”.\^47

Thirdly, natural theology creates a false partition between God the Creator, who is known without revelation, and his other activities, which only he reveals.\^48 The problem here is that in its heavy emphasis upon God as _rerum omnium principium et finis_ (first cause and goal of all things) natural theology fails to carry through the essential unity of God to the knowability of God, so that he cannot now be said to reveal himself in his unity and totality as Lord, Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer.\^49 To have only one “side” of God in view, is not however, to have the true God in view precisely because Scripture speaks only of the one triune God in His unity as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Evidently, there can be no continuity, similarity or “partial correspondence” between the being of God and humanity such that God is perceptible independently of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The knowledge of God is not a potentiality of creaturely cognition which can be exercised on account of its participation in being.

\^44 My paraphrase of _CD_ II/1, 75-9.
\^45 _CD_ II/1, 81. Timothy Gorringe describes well what Barth means be ‘abstract’ here: “Barth argues that natural theology puts in place of the objective liberating biblical God the illusory abstraction of speculative being … Barth regards abstraction as the original sin in theology for it represents a failure of engagement with theology’s real object”. See T. Gorringe, _Karl Barth: Against Hegemony_, (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 133. On the same point consult also C. Gunton, “Salvation”, in _The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth_, (ed. J. Webster) (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 143f.
\^46 _CD_ II/1, 81.
\^47 _CD_ II/1, 80-1.
\^48 _CD_ II/1, 80.
\^49 _CD_ II/1, 79.
That said, there has been much debate over whether Barth fully rejected the analogy of being, and the form in which he might have retained it. According to McCormack, Barth agrees with Quenstedt that the analogy between God and creation must be one of attribution. Whilst he refuses to endorse the intrinsic version of it – because this analogy is not a predicate of creaturely being – he reads Barth as offering a qualified endorsement of the analogy of “extrinsic” attribution. The idea here is that the analogy occurs “only externally in the existence and form of its relation to the analogans [primary analogate]”. Since the form of the relationship is one of covenant and event, McCormack can write that;

>'Analogy of being’, understood in Barthian terms, is an analogy between an eternal divine act of Self-determination and a historical human act of self-determination and the ‘being’ (divine and human) which is constituted in each. Human being in the act of faith and obedience in response to the covenant of grace corresponds to the being of the gracious God; that is the shape of the analogy. Barth’s conflict with the Roman Catholic version was and always remained a conflict between his own covenant ontology and the essentialist ontology presupposed by the Catholic tradition…

It is therefore in the event of faith that God “elevates” our concepts and words and “gives” them their truth. Faith is therefore an analogy of correspondence between the being of God and humanity instantiated in and by God’s freedom and love.

Therefore, the analogy is forged and recognisable only in the event of God’s self-disclosure and is not generally available for cognition apart from that event. To reverse the order of knowing as the analogia entis (of intrinsic attribution) does, is not to come face to face with God, Barth insists, but with an idol.

The aim of this section was to ascertain the status human knowing receives in natural theology and to get a clear handle on why Barth rejects it. To do this, I outlined Barth’s view of the “knowability” of God and described the broad contours of his

52 CD II/1, 230.
54 CD II/1, 83-4.
conception of natural theology. I then moved to examine the epistemological structure that he thinks lies at the heart of natural theology, the *analogia entis*, and showed that Barth rejects it because it makes the knowledge of God the result of a self-initiated act of an independent being, and also supposes a deficient concept of God. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this is an important finding for the study as a whole, for it shows the negative boundary beyond which Barth’s positive description will never pass and which he will always be mindfully aware of.

In pointing to this one aspect of Barth’s treatment of natural theology we have by no means exhausted the subject. Indeed, Barth would go on in the same volume to critique the false view of the self it presupposes, namely, that humans possess an intrinsic “readiness” for grace.  

Barth’s invective would also spread as far as its justification in scripture and its pedagogic value in the Church. Nevertheless, the extent and vehemence of this rejection of natural theology – and the place of the human knower within it – occasioned a major response, especially in the English speaking world of theology, where debate continues even today over what Barth was in fact was rejecting (general revelation or natural theology), whether he had grounds from Scripture or tradition for doing so, and whether a rejigged natural theology was acceptable to him or is even necessary to the integrity of his own theology.

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55 *CD* II/1, 130-6.


1.3 Explanations for Barth’s ‘silence’ on the significance of knowing

Barth’s critique of natural theology – of the idea that the creature can know God independently of God’s self-revelation – leaves no room for doubt about the role he does not want human cognition to have in theological epistemology. It is not surprising, then, that scholars should have thought it inconceivable that Barth could eventually develop a constructive account of the creature as knower. For viewed from the narrow perspective of his rejection of natural theology, the human knower almost appears to disappear from view, losing any significant role it was once attributed in the production of knowledge of God.

Indeed, Barth’s rejection of natural theology appears to have done most to shape perceptions of his handling of human knowing in the field. Scholars have not only raised concerns about where this leaves the human knower, especially in the event of faith, but have assumed in consequence of that rejection that Barth has little constructive to say about the structure and significance of human knowing.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Thomas Torrance. Both these scholars have done much to shape impressions of Barth’s theology in the English speaking world. Importantly for our study, both assume that Barth does not clarify the significance and status of the human knower, and argue – albeit in different ways and with different entailments – that his reticence is directly linked to his rejection of natural theology. Analysis of von Balthasar and Torrance’s readings shall enable us to see how perceptions about Barth’s handling of knowing have been intimately linked to his invective against the *analogia entis.*

1.3.1 Fear of the analogy of being (von Balthasar)

Von Balthasar’s reading of Barth’s book on Anselm (1930) brings him into direct contact with the Basler’s assumptions about knowing, and with the limits of that description in his theology as a whole. He argues that, for Barth, the human knowing (the “noetic ratio”) is conceived of as the “primary faculty for the formation of concepts and judgements in relation to experience”; it is thus “spontaneous”, it has an “act-character”. Now, in his *Anselmbuch,* Barth normally subordinates the “noetic ratio” to the “ontic ratio” (i.e. “the truth content of created things”), which is

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to say that human knowing is not given a “continual pervasive presence of the truth”. It only participates in objective truth in the event of knowing the object. Von Balthasar believes Barth is saying that whilst objects retain the truth which is inherent to them despite sin, the capacity to “discover” that truth by a spontaneous act of knowing has been compromised.\textsuperscript{61} God’s revelation (the “eternal ratio”) in an object (the “ontic ratio”) cannot be discerned owing to sin.

Yet, von Balthasar’s point is that however much the act of human knowing has been damaged by sin, it nevertheless retains its act-character, for Barth, even in the event of revelation. To von Balthasar, this suggests that sin does not annul the ontic integrity of human knowing, even if it perverts its outputs – the structure of knowing continues as an “image of the Ur-Subjekt God”. And if Barth is willing to affirm the spontaneity of knowing even here, then this raises an interesting question;

The spontaneity of knowing belongs to its nature, which has not been annulled by sin. This spontaneity means that the question of the a priori structure of cognition, so often discussed and debated by Catholic philosophy, cannot simply be passed by. In giving equal billing to the will, to the act of decision at the very core of reason’s reality, Barth clearly shows that he is unwilling to deny this spontaneity. But he lapses into a deep silence when it comes to the issue of the a priori structure of the agent intellect, the intellectus agens. For here is the Danger Zone where the concept of Being as such and the analogia entis lie.\textsuperscript{62}

Von Balthasar is clear on the fact that Barth does not exposit the structure of knowing supposed in the event of faith. He traces this to Barth’s fear of introducing the analogia entis – a static analogy between the being of God and the creature that enables the creature move from knowledge of itself to knowledge of God. Barth’s problem is this: no matter how “receptive” the act of faith is, if it involves an act of spontaneity (in knowing as well as deciding for or against faith), then it is quite clear that such spontaneity is characteristic of human creaturehood in general. And if the analogy between itself as derived subject and God as original subject is not one simply instantiated in faith, then it is one detectible outside of that event.\textsuperscript{63} In addition, it also raises the problem of how to co-ordinate God’s action (as absolute subject) with human action (as relative subject) without annulling the former.

\textsuperscript{61} von Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Karl Barth}, 159.
\textsuperscript{62} von Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Karl Barth}, 160.
\textsuperscript{63} von Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Karl Barth}, 161.
1.3.2 Natural theology and the problem of dualism (Torrance)

In his article “The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth” Torrance attempts to show that Barth’s rejection of natural theology ultimately creates problems for his theology because it renders him unwilling to discuss and take seriously the corresponding human act of knowing which God presupposes for the subjective actualisation of knowledge of God. This, he feels, ultimately calls into question Barth’s commitment to the goodness and rationality of the created order, and leads to the separation of theological knowledge into two discontinuous frames of reference. The solution requires the re-inclusion of natural theology under revealed theology, something which he supposes Barth’s theology allows for.

To grasp the issue at stake for Torrance we must note his distinction between an “interactionist” and “dualist” theology: the former testifies to God’s involvement with the human person and creation, the latter posits something of a “deistic breach” between God and “nature”. Torrance points to the tension that exists between these two types in Barth’s theology. Certainly, he acknowledges that Barth’s theology has been pictured as being dualistic in character owing to his stance on natural theology. But this is problematic, he says, because Barth only so stressed the otherness of God from creation so that he could testify to the “impact” or “invasion” of God in his self-revelation on the human creature. Moreover, Barth’s rejection of natural theology in its Roman Catholic form can be read as a critique of dualism within theology, for natural theology splits the being of God from his action so that knowledge of God can be obtained “behind his back”, that is, apart from his Word, Jesus Christ.

Torrance’s commitment to an interactionist reading of Barth on the point of natural theology is expressed most clearly in his affirmation that Barth does not reject the “rational structure” of natural theology – that is, the idea that God can be known by the creature in nature – but objects to its independent character. Nature is not then

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67 Torrance, “The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth”, 123.

annulled by God’s revelation, but is necessarily included and “brought to light” within it. Importantly for this study, this entails that when God reveals himself he makes use of and includes the means we have for actualising knowledge;

[W]hile knowledge of God is grounded in his own intelligible revelation to us, it requires for its actualisation an appropriate rational structure in our cognising of it. But that rational structure does not arise within us unless we allow our minds to fall under the compulsion of God’s being who really is in the act of self-revelation and grace, and as such cannot be derived from an analysis for our autonomous subjectivity.69

Much to Torrance’s disappointment, however, Barth does not give an account of the “rational structure” we have for cognising God that is supposed and involved in the event of God’s revelation. Torrance resultantly positions his assessment of the problem alongside Henri Bouillard’s: Barth’s failure to attend to the subjective foundation of knowledge of God undercuts the idea that it is we who know God.70 Torrance thus assumes that Barth does not even offer the rudiments of a creaturely epistemology, something von Balthasar contrastingly affirmed. In a like manner to von Balthasar, however, Torrance thinks the origin of Barth’s unwillingness to account for the “ontology of the creaturely structures” supposed in revelation rests in “anxieties” he held about reintroducing natural theology by the back door.71

For Torrance, Barth’s rejection of natural theology leaves behind vestiges of dualism that threaten to annul the integrity of the creaturely elements supposed by God in his dealing with the human person. If indeed there is no creaturely presupposition that can be taken seriously as included in God’s dealing with us, Torrance asks, then does this not open up something of a “deistic breach” between God and his creation in which God’s revelation becomes disconnected with our knowing of it? Moreover, does it not lead to the wider problems of how general ethics is related to Christian ethics, and how the self-understanding of the Christian is connected to the self-understanding of the person under sin? In Torrance’s view, these discontinuities are entailments of Barth’s unwillingness to take seriously the integrity and inherent rational order of creation in relation to God on the back of his rejection of natural theology.72 Torrance avers that in order to hedge against such entailments it is

70 Torrance, “The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth”, 134.
71 Torrance, “The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth”, 133-4.
72 Torrance, “The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth”, 133.
necessary to avoid casting natural and revealed theology as mutually exclusive categories. Instead, we must regard the former as subsumed under and completed by the latter because only this rendering of their relation does justice to the integrated character of theological knowledge.

From analysis of both their accounts, it is quite clear that both Torrance and von Balthasar assume that Barth is reticent about the structure and significance of human knowing – even within the event of faith – on account of his rejection of natural theology. Admittedly, their ways of framing the issue and its emergent problems are different. Nevertheless, the aim in this section was not to critique such impressions. It was simply to point to two significant instances where perceptions of Barth’s rejection of natural theology directly shape understanding of handling of human knowing.

1.4 Barth’s ‘denial’ of the creaturely: the critique of “christomonism”

The preceding section has shown how perceptions about Barth’s handling of human knowing are strongly tied to his rejection of natural theology and his critique of the elevated status knowing receives therein. However, the idea that Barth gives no positive descriptive weight to the creature as knower is further mediated by the influential view that he ‘suppresses’ creaturely realities. Indeed, in the English speaking domain of Barth studies in particular, many scholars have viewed his vehement and thorough rejection of natural theology as the outworking of his Christological starting point, which, they say, so emphasises God’s act in Jesus Christ that it not only crushes the creature as a knower of God, but throws into question the integrity and reality of human being and creation as a whole. Whatever form this argument takes, its thrust is that all doctrines are squeezed through Christology with the effect that reality is construed christomonistically – humanity and creation are thought to only be apparently real, by contrast.⁷³

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⁷³ Whilst a full account cannot be given here of how this view ill-fits Barth’s theology, we might note that Barth himself rejected this characterisation of his theology in an interview given in 1962. He said, “Sound theology cannot be either dualistic or monistic. The Gospel defies all ‘isms,’ including dualism and monism. Sound theology can only be ‘unionistic,’ uniting God and man. Christomonism (that’s an awful catchword!) was invented by an old friend of mine whose name I will not mention. Christomonism would mean that Christ alone is real and that all other men are only apparently real. But that would be in contradiction with what the name of Jesus-Christ means, namely, union between God and man. This union between God and man has not been made only in Jesus Christ but in him as our representative for the benefit of all men. Jesus Christ as God’s servant
In this section, I offer a capsule account of the classical form in which this critique was lodged against Barth, as articulated by von Balthasar. I then briefly point to the varieties in which the critique exists today, to show that it may still be a live factor in scholars’ perceptions of knowing in Barth’s theology. Again, I do not engage in critique with the opinions described, but simply point to these readings as items which likely reinforce and lend credence to the assumption that Barth had nothing positive to say about the creature as a knower.

1.4.1 Barth’s narrow ‘christocentrism’: von Balthasar
Whilst von Balthasar considers Barth to be ultimately critical of the use of idealist thought-forms in theology, he argues that Barth allows his Christological starting point to function as a transcendental theological category that conditions and constrains all discussion of creaturely significance and reality.\(^\text{74}\) Barth’s tendency, von Balthasar notes, is to construct theology systematically from that starting point but in a way such that there is a “narrowing of everything to that one point”.\(^\text{75}\) This is to say that Barth so emphasises the determinative priority of Christ that the creature and creation are “painfully forced to occupy the Procrustean bed of Barth’s christological schema”.\(^\text{76}\)

Yet, von Balthasar is not objecting to Barth’s starting point in itself: he recognises that it is the “essential” basis of discussion if as theologians we take seriously God’s revelation as attested to in Scripture. His point is rather that Barth’s brand of Christocentrism is too restrictive; it leaves no “breathing room” between human being and Christ (anthropology and Christology), between “creation and covenant” (creation and Christology) such that all too often Barth is led to “equate” what is distinctively human with revelation itself.\(^\text{77}\) Barth certainly attributes to creation a

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derived and therefore relative autonomy and significance, but in explicitly “deducing” its status as such from Christ, Barth gives the impression that this relative autonomy and significance is not proper to creation and the human creature as such. To cite von Balthasar,

> But every time Barth tried to draw out the proper essence of an anthropological or universal cosmological principle, he ends up slipping back into the old danger of not only reducing the sought-for meaning to its christological roots but also deducing it from them.\(^78\)

Von Balthasar is convinced that Barth’s rather bleak depiction of the creature does not result from some inner desire to see the creaturely annulled, but simply from his constant desire to emphasise God’s victory, i.e. “the light by which we are made victorious in God”.\(^79\) But in allowing anthropology to become almost indistinguishable from Christology, theological reality becomes christomonistic – the creature has no independent reality of its own.

### 1.4.2 Two contemporary readings: Gunton and Roberts

The critique of “christomonism” found much currency in certain quarters of Barth studies, and is still advanced in various forms today. The basic thrust remains the same, however: Barth’s method of describing the covenantal reality between God and man through Christology ultimately causes creaturely reality and integrity to dissolve. I describe this critique as advanced by Colin Gunton and Richard H. Roberts.\(^80\)

#### 1.4.2.1 Colin Gunton

Colin Gunton has pin-pointed the problem of Barth’s treatment of creaturely reality and freedom as resulting from a failure on the ground-level of his doctrine of God.\(^81\)

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In failing to distinguish adequately between the three persons of the Trinity, too little is made of the distinctive work of the Spirit in conceiving of how God relates to the world. According to Gunton, the Spirit is traditionally understood to be he in whom God (the Son) is present to the world as the *transcendent* God. In Christ, by contrast, God identifies himself with part of the world and is therefore *immanent* to it. Because Barth conceives of God’s relation to the world in a way that diminishes the former and emphasises the latter (i.e. God’s immanence and identity with the world) – owing to the christological grounding of the doctrines of anthropology and creation – Barth runs the risk of “making the world too much a function of God’s presence to it, too little its own autonomous reality”.82

Whilst Barth does well to establish creaturely freedom on the grounds that it has been determined by God to exist autonomously from God in the world, in construing this determination christologically without proper emphasis on God’s transcendence over the world (the pneumatological dimension of that Christology), the creature and its freedom are too closely identified with God such that their independence is called into question.83 Gunton puts the matter this way;

Barth’s weakness is a weakness of balance; there is insufficient weight given to the distinctions between the three divine persons and, in particular, to the reality and distinctive functions of the Spirit, with the result that too much is thrown on to Christology, too much on to the immanent and eternal; and so too little on the particularities of history.84

1.4.2.2 Richard H. Roberts

The idea that Barth denies worldly reality and creaturely freedom has taken its most extreme form in the work of Richard H. Roberts. In his article, “The Ideal and the Real in the Theology of Karl Barth” Roberts accuses Barth of basing his understanding of reality completely on the event of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ in total abstraction from nature and worldly reality.85 The result is that theology is removed from the arena of public discourse and becomes “ensnared…in the logic of total self-isolation”. According to Roberts, Barth achieves this by allowing “God’s

84 Gunton, “The Triune God and the Freedom of the Creature”, 64.
time” to become equated with “God’s substance”.

Since God’s time is a “temporal fulfilment” (as opposed to a succession of past, present, and future), when he extends his being in the act of self-revelation, creaturely time is done away with. In Roberts’ view, reality is then reduced to God’s time of revelation in Jesus Christ, and because God’s time is simply the extension of God’s being, so reality is nothing other than the extension of God’s own substance. This led Roberts to assert elsewhere that Barth conducted the most “profound and systematically consistent theological alienation of the natural order ever achieved”.

In sum, his point is this;

The principle of *analogia fidei* applied to a doctrine of God who reveals himself with utter exclusivity in his act in Jesus Christ leads to a dangerous and ambiguous recreation of reality as the structure and receptacle of revelation itself. The logic of such containment is the form of the doctrine of time, which is itself the vehicle of the divine being, indeed the very manifestation of its substance...

Obviously Gunton and Roberts approach Barth’s theology from very different angles, and see his christomonism as entailing different type of problems: for Gunton, human independence is not annulled but called into question, for Roberts, however, creaturely reality collapses completely into the event of God’s self-revelation. Both these examples point in different ways and strengths to the idea that Barth does not safeguard, or is inattentive to, creaturely reality.

**1.5 The status of the topic today: the insignificance of human knowing**

Recent work in the field has challenged the impression that Barth’s christomonism annuls or suppresses creaturely reality and autonomy. Indeed, recent studies have explored Barth’s rich conception of human creaturehood and described the ways in which human action flourishes on account of the ethical shape of Barth’s theological ontology.

John Webster has stated that;

Barth’s theology was never one in which anthropology had, as it were, to struggle to the surface from underneath the crushing weight of assertions about absolute divine subjectivity. Even less was it a theology in which

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89 For a list of scholars see Thesis Introduction, ‘Significance of Thesis’ (1), p.2-3 above.
human subjectivity and agency were so radically taken apart that no sense of human substance remained. It was a theology which spoke of God and humanity: only because and precisely because it spoke of God – Israel’s God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – it also spoke of the human creature and the creature’s world.  

Whilst there has been a resurgence of interest in Barth’s concept of creaturehood and in his understanding of human freedom, there has of yet been no reversal in the fortunes of the topic of creaturely knowing. As things currently stand, human knowing as an aspect of creaturehood remains ignored, largely on the assumption that it was a subject of little interest to Barth.

The few contemporary commentators who have touched on human knowing in Barth’s theology have tended to construe it as the act by which the creature knows God. They have picked up on the many occasions in the Church Dogmatics where Barth appears to shy away from discussing how the subjective act of knowing comes about, what it involves, or the way in which it is presuppositional to the reception of knowledge of God vis-à-vis God’s act of grace. Take for instance Bruce Marshall’s claim that Barth makes “no stipulation regarding the…best way to describe the process or event by which we assimilate redemption through Jesus Christ”. More explicitly, Ronald Thiemann has written that;

For Barth, revelation denotes the content of our knowledge of God, and his reflections concerning the process by which we come to know have a distinctly secondary status.

This is also reflected in paraphrases of the opening chapters of CD II/1. As I noted earlier, Eberhard Jüngel points to the mediated subjectivity into which Barth thinks the human creature is drawn in the event of faith, but remains silent about the particular shape of that subjectivity, about the form of the divinely-effected creaturely act which is constitutive of it and by which the creature participates in the


91 E.g. CD I/1, 227; II/1, 179-204; III/2, 151-2.


knowledge of God.94 Such readings contribute to the impression that human knowing is an issue of little or no import for Barth’s theology.

Whilst these views may in part be determined by perceptions of Barth’s handling of the issue in natural theology, and of the place of the creaturely in general, it is impossible to determine this with utter certitude owing to the general lack of engagement with the subject. Given that, it is just as likely that there are other factors in play here – factors that we would do well to mention. In the first place, it may well have been assumed that revelation’s self-authenticating character or the idea that God is known by God eliminates the need for Barth to engage in a description of human knowing. It is accounted for by other aspects of his theology, in other words.

Another explanatory possibility emerges from the work of George Hunsinger. Hunsinger remarks that Barth’s theology is occupied with describing the content of the event of the triune God’s self-revelation rather than with explaining the miracle of how it comes about.95 It is concerned to preserve the categories of miracle, mystery and paradox that would be quickly abandoned if theology thought it could do more than attest to that which is made knowable by God. And since theology is only to re-present and bear witness to the actuality of revelation, it can only reiterate the miraculous and mysterious fact that revelation is continually subjectively appropriated; that, in other words, we as humans really do come to know God. But it is impossible to ask about how we come to know God, that is, about how our creaturely cognitive apparatus is involved in revelation’s apprehension. For as Barth himself tells us, to postulate an answer would be to explain “the way in which the work of the Holy Spirit is done”.96 It could therefore be legitimately construed that Barth does not give a positive account of human cognition in revelation, or elsewhere, because to have done so would have violated the limits of theological description in his theology.

Whilst it must be conceded that it is difficult to quantify the extent to which any of these readings may have been wider factors in shaping commentators’ appreciation of human knowing in Barth’s theology, they nevertheless reinforce the mistaken idea that knowing was not an issue for Barth. What can be asserted with adequate warrant

94 See note 1 above.
96 CD IV/1, 648-9.
is that when scholars touch on human knowing in his theology, they assume that Barth had little to say on it and that he regarded it as a peripheral issue. The existence of this perception is ultimately confirmed by the modicum of treatment the topic has received in the field to date.

1.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to outline one possible cause for why Barth’s positive account of human knowing has been overlooked in Barth studies. What I have suggested is that Barth’s rejection of the elevated status human cognition receives in “natural theology” has perhaps done most to convince scholars that Barth’s handling of human knowing is minimal and critical. To that end, I described Barth’s critique of the place human cognition receives in natural theology by outlining his rejection of the analogia entis. This helped me establish the model of knowing Barth thinks is alien to the human creature: Barth will not accept the idea that the human knower is capable of reaching knowledge of God independently of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ by virtue of innate epistemic or linguistic capacities.

I then showed how, on the basis of that rejection, highly influential scholars such as von Balthasar and Torrance have assumed that Barth is unwilling to make any positive comment about the structure and significance of cognition for fear of reopening the door to natural theology. What has further reinforced these perceptions, I suggested, is the widespread view that Barth’s Christological starting point leads to the violent suppression of creaturely reality. On this view, no such positive account is possible. I concluded the analysis by assessing the non-status of the issue in the field today.

As I mentioned earlier, recent work has done much to unseat the christomonistic caricature of Barth. These studies display the human creature in a new, far more nuanced light; they accentuate the way in which human action and ethical agency is affirmed in Barth’s dogmatics. Yet it is an interesting fact that whilst human action has been so ‘rescued’, human knowing not only remains subject to the critique above, but has been left under the long shadow cast by Barth’s rejection of natural theology. But it is now time to reassess the status of the human knower in Barth’s thought. For human action was never solely definitive of human creaturehood, for
Barth. The human creature is an ethical agent, to be sure, but in and with that it is also, and no less importantly and essentially, an *epistemic agent* – a knower.

It is therefore to the task of unfolding this neglected element of human creaturehood that I turn in the following chapters. In the next, I will specifically address how human knowing is a valid topic of theological concern for Barth, and describe the significant theological function he explicitly gives it within the human constitution.
2. To know and serve God: the significance of knowing as a component of human creaturehood

2.1 Introduction

Scholars have traditionally undervalued the significance of human knowing in Barth’s theology because they have all too often viewed it through the lens of Barth’s rejection of natural theology. This chapter begins the process of disrupting such readings by showing that human knowing is a highly-significant, indeed “essential”, element of Barth’s understanding of human creaturehood. Reduced to essentials, my contention is that Barth’s theological anthropology creates the space within which Barth develops an account of human knowing as a highly significant aspect of human creaturehood – this is the first contour of creaturely cognition. That anthropology does not present the creature as a self-sufficient being with the ability to know so that it can pursue its own ends; knowing is rather proper and significant to the creature because the human person has been called and created for the particular purpose of knowing God, and on that basis, to serve God as his covenant partner in the world.

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: it is to describe how Barth’s anthropology creates space for the human creature as an epistemic agent, and then to analyse the significance cognition receives as an aspect of human creaturehood. The warrant for that analysis lies in a little discussed passage in CD III/2 wherein Barth describes how knowing is significant because of the double contribution it makes to the fulfilment of the creature’s telos: it helps the creature both know and serve God.

1 The basis of creaturely cognition therefore lies in the doctrine of the Trinity. God wills us to participate in his own self-knowing in the Son and by the Spirit. See CD II/1, 10, 181.


Only in studies by Stuart McLean and Geoffrey Bromiley is there any acknowledgement of the role Barth gives to knowing; but even here, both authors do not develop or evaluate this point, but simply attend to it fleetingly and only inasmuch as it serves their purpose of describing the broad contours of Barth’s doctrine of the human person. See S. McLean, Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 47-9 and G. Bromiley, Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 130-4.
shall describe both of those contributions. In the first place, I shall clarify how the creature is made an epistemic agent for the original and proper purpose of knowing God, and consider how this purpose is reflected in the “sensible-rational” structure of the act of knowing. Of relative importance is the manner in which the epistemic component functions as the necessary “presupposition” of encounter with God, and how the “perception” of “natural man” is distorted on account of sin. Discussion of the second contribution is briefer, and centres upon the link between creaturely epistemology and ethics: it consists in unpacking Barth’s assertion that the epistemic component helps the creature serve God insofar as it constitutes the creaturely and therefore relative ground of the morally-textured activity of which the creature is created capable, and so of the particular activity of ecclesial witness which Barth says in CD IV/1 is the goal of the knowing of God.

Before proceeding to that analysis, it is necessary to properly establish the grounds internal to Barth’s theology by which such an analysis becomes possible. The discussion of how Barth’s anthropology makes space for the human creature as a knower divides into two parts. Under the heading of the ‘politics of self-knowledge’, I examine the grounds on which knowledge of human being in general, and knowing in particular, is possible and legitimate for Barth. I establish that ‘objective’ self-knowledge is possible within the strict parameters set down by a theological anthropology that is grounded on the doctrines of Christology and election. There, the human person is not defined by an ontological and epistemological self-sufficiency, but as a being that coexists in covenant with God. This view of the self is essential to note because it enframes and is supposed in what Barth has to say about human knowing and its significance.

The second preparatory task builds on the first by assessing how Barth measures human being for its significance. Examination of this point will enable us to later grasp how the significance of human knowing in particular is to be evaluated. To that end, I consider Barth’s claim that the significance of human being can only be measured against the horizon of the purpose for which it was created, in virtue of his assertion that the creature’s “constitution” is determined by that purpose. I then define this purpose as a) hearing the Word of God and b) serving God as covenant partner.
2.2 Creating a space for the person as a knower: Barth’s theological anthropology

2.2.1 The politics of self-knowledge

As mentioned above, the aim of the opening section is to establish the conceptual framework for understanding the significance of human knowing as a component of human creaturehood. The first part of that groundwork involves ascertaining whether objective knowledge of human knowing is possible for Barth. Indeed, if there is any merit at all to the assertion that previous readings are wrong, and that Barth does offer a positive explication of human knowing in the *Church Dogmatics*, then it stands to reason that knowledge of cognition must be reachable and justifiable as true by the measure of his own theology. Ascertaining whether this is so is no straightforward task largely because ‘knowledge of human cognition’ was never a subject Barth considered for analysis. Having said that, in *CD III/2* he does explain the theological procedure by which true and objective knowledge of human being as a whole is obtained. I begin with this more general account on the reasonable assumption that my specific topic of interest is subsumed under it.

I divide this discussion into two sections: the first describes modes of access to self-knowledge Barth deems invalid on account of the view of the self it presupposes, the second covers the valid option offered by a theological anthropology that is constructed on the doctrines of Christology and election. I discuss Barth’s view of human being as a ‘being in covenant’ since this is presupposed in what Barth says about human cognition. It is also central to understanding how he will measure the significance of that being and its composite elements – a subject for the second part of this context-setting exercise.

2.2.1.1 Invalid modes of access to self-knowledge

In the opening pages of volume III/2 Barth acknowledges that over time both science and philosophy have developed elaborate accounts of human being. His contention, however, is that the findings of these disciplines cannot be considered valid *prima facie* because they do not arise from what “man” is *objectively* revealed to be in relation to God, as witnessed to in Scripture. In short, this means that these

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3 It is important to identify the various terms Barth will use to describe “man” from its various perspectives in *CD III/2*. By “real man” (*wirkliche Mensch*) Barth means the human person as *objectively* characterised in the Word of God. As therein revealed the person is not an isolated, self-sufficient subject, but is a creation of God whose being is constituted by its (covenantal) relationship

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disciplines cannot be the theologian’s first port of call in the quest for justified knowledge of human knowing and its significance, or of human being in general, for they are not equivalent to the quality lens offered by a ‘well-constructed’ theological anthropology. But why does so-called “non-theological anthropology” fail to yield an objectively valid account of how human knowing works?

The key to the whole issue is the pivotal distinction Barth draws between disciplines that take up the one perspective on human being that yields objective self-knowledge, and those that do not. Unlike theological anthropology, science and philosophy, he writes, have no direct access to an objective picture of human being, i.e. as God sees and creates it to be – they do not take “real man” as an object of knowledge. Far from laying bare what is “inner” and “real” they are confined to knowledge of the phenomenal, that is, to the “outer” or “immediately accessible and knowable” characteristics of human nature, Barth tells us. The resultant self-understanding generated by such phenomenal knowledge is “autonomous” in the sense that it is manufactured without reference to the Word of God, yielding what Konrad Stock describes as a “speculative theory” of the human person, i.e. an account generated in abstraction from the reality of how human being is presented in the Word of God.

What scientific and philosophical anthropologies offer, then, is an account of “phantom man” (Schattenmensch) rather than of “real man”.

Who is the man who to know himself first wishes to disregard the fact that he belongs to God…Only a phantom man thinks that of himself he can know himself. But we cannot believe that what this phantom man will come to
to God as modelled on “the man Jesus” – this is the proper object of theological anthropology. (CD III/2, 205f) By contrast, “natural man” (natürlicher Mensch) refers to the person who “speculates” about himself apart from God using science or philosophy as independent means of knowledge-acquisition, and whose being is thus veiled to it by sin. “Phantom man” (Schattenmensch) is the name given to any such self-understanding that is generated autonomously of revelation. In addition, Stuart McLean notes that “Real man refers to the God-man relationship, humanity to the man-man relationship, and whole man to the unity of soul and body in he individual person”. For more on the category of “real man” in Barth’s theology, consult, for instance, C. Frey, “Zur theologischen Anthropologie Karl Barths”, NZST 19 (1977), 199-224, (esp., 206f).

4 CD III/2, 198-9.

5 K. Stock, “Die Funktion Anthropologischen Wissens in theologischem Denken – am Beispiel Karl Barths“, Evangelische Theologie 34 (1974), 523-538, (esp., 527, 529). Stock’s aim in this article is to characterise how anthropological knowledge functions in theology, and to ask how its statements can be significant for the other anthropological sciences (523). He focuses on the work of Barth and attempts to pinpoint how Barth’s anthropology stands over against secular types based on their differing use of the empirical principle (524).
know will be “real man”. And in what he declares he knows we can only recognise himself, a phantom man, and not “real man”. It seems settled, then, that scientific and philosophical investigations cannot cut through the veil of appearances: phenomenal knowledge (whether that be empirical or philosophical) does not of itself “convey… knowledge of real man”. Intriguingly enough, however, Barth does not conclude that phenomenal knowledge is of no value, just because the conceptions of human being in which they are put to work are autonomously generated. Phenomenal knowledge is by no means “objectively empty”, Barth insists. Its justification as true knowledge hinges on whether it can be shown to accord with what is known of human being in reality. The measure of its truth consists in first taking up that one perspective from which “real man” comes to view. With prior knowledge of it one can then look back at phenomenal knowledge and make a critical judgment about whether it really does indicate real human nature, i.e. is “symptomatic” of it. John Macken lucidly describes Barth’s position as follows;

Within the proper context, that of divine Revelation, the human phenomena fit into place; they refer to a reality that does not become apparent on the path of autonomous human self-understanding; in the light of this reality they can be called symptoms of the reality of man, that is their relation to the reality is apparent.

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6 CD III/2, 75 = 87.
7 CD III/2, 76, 198.
8 Barth was critical of the limits and scope of science and the knowledge it produces. He avers that the remit of science is to access and describe phenomenal characteristics. This is the proper scope of its activity. However, the sciences must remain conscious of the Popperian insight that whilst their information is relevant and useful it is at the same time ‘falsifiable’: it can only say what human nature appears to be from this or that empirical aspect, knowing full well that further scientific development will one day set aside its current theories. The relativity of this type of knowledge means that science should prevent its conclusions from becoming definitive statements about the reality of human being. When it fails to keep them in check, when it “dogmatises on the basis of its formulae” – when it constructs an anthropology from the knowledge it has garnered – it actually trespasses beyond its limits and ceases to be “exact science”. As long as it desists from mutating its “temporarily valid picture” of these external characteristics into universal axioms concerning human being, theology need not oppose it, in Barth’s view. (CD III/2, 23-4 = 25-6) Because when science keeps within its limits it does not “prejudice in any way the hearing or non-hearing of the Word of God” and so does not stand in need of reproof. (CD III/2, 24-5 = 27).
9 CD III/2, 202.
10 CD III/2, 75-6.
Understood thus, Barth’s gripe is not with phenomenal knowledge *qua* knowledge, but with the idea that it could stand as “genuine knowledge of a real object *independently* of a prior knowledge of real man” (italics mine). One might express this differently by saying that Barth takes issue not with the data, but with the underlying supposition that science and philosophy are capable of arriving at an objective description of human being in its totality without recourse to revelation. They try to adopt an independent epistemological perspective in which they “arbitrarily look at man from the standpoint of himself”. This exclusive first-person viewpoint esteems human self-understanding and human cognitive capacities above or at the total expense of what the Word of God reveals to be really true of human being.

Barth objects to what we might call ‘epistemological independence’ (in theology too, it should be noted) because, in his view, it is predicated on the modern philosophical assumption that the human person is “the measure of the real” on account of being a “self-conscious autonomous individual” who is capable of existing, maintaining and knowing itself apart from God. Barth regards this “self-sufficient” and “absolutist” conception of human subjectivity as having characterised modern philosophy, particularly in the work of Descartes and Kant.

Yet, Barth’s Cartesian brand of anti-essentialism does not derive from prior philosophical convictions about the existence and nature of the transcendental ego, but stems from a theological commitment: when viewed from the standpoint of revelation (and thus reality), the human creature has no right to regard itself as self-grounded, and therefore as the foundation and sufficient measure of knowledge, whether of itself or of other entities, including God. He writes;

> Man as soul and body is in no case so made that he is simply there, as though self-grounded, self-based, self-constituted and self-maintained. His constitution is in no case that of a first and last reality; nor is it one that

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12 CD III/2, 199.
13 CD III/2, 75-6, 78.
15 CD III/1, 407-11 = 468-73.
16 I regard Barth’s rejection of natural theology as having certain parallels with his rejection of non-theological anthropologies. In both instances, Barth is rejecting the idea that true knowledge is available independently of revelation.
enables and empowers him to understand himself by himself, or to hold the
criteria of his own perception and thought, however he may define them, as
standards by the help of which he can, secluded in himself, arrive at the core
of the matter. As he is not without God, he cannot understand himself
without God.\textsuperscript{17}

However, an intermediary step in the argument is missed should one interpret Barth
as writing off all non-theological standpoints because they are independent of God’s
self-revelation. The point at issue is that under the objective critique of revelation,
the first-person perspective adopted by non-theological disciplines is revealed to be
non-objective not because it is independent, but because the very notion of an
independent epistemological position is shown up by revelation to be a category
error.\textsuperscript{18}

The idea of independent knowing is a category error, for Barth, because it
presupposes and builds upon the ‘absolutist’ view of the self—a view that revelation
shows to be drastically out of sync with reality. Far from having an ontological and
epistemological self-sufficiency, the human person (as viewed from the perspective
of what God created and sees it to be) is characterised by an essential relatedness to
God on account of being created by him.\textsuperscript{19} The human person is defined by its co-
existence in covenant with God, and as such its being is relative (to God’s) and not
absolute.\textsuperscript{20} Any conception of human being that overlooks the fact that “man is not
without God” is but a “fanciful picture”, a fiction;

Man without God is not; he has neither being nor existence. And man
without God is not an object of knowledge.\textsuperscript{21}

Therefore, epistemological independence is an invalid metaphysical position for
Barth because there is no ontological warrant for it; it is rendered defeasible by his
competing claim—a claim that shall be explored in the subsequent section—that the
human creature does not exist in isolation but has an intrinsic relatedness to God (an
ontological assertion that is ultimately grounded on the doctrine of election).

\textsuperscript{17} CD III/2, 345.
\textsuperscript{19} W. Krötke, “The Humanity of the Human Person in Karl Barth’s Anthropology”, in The Cambridge
\textsuperscript{20} CD III/2, 345. See also K. Stock, “Die Funktion Anthropologischen Wissens in theologischem
\textsuperscript{21} CD III/2, 345. According to Barth, the conception of humanity which he rejects finds perhaps its
most “explosive and dangerous” form in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, who not only asserted
man is without God, but is also without “fellow-man”, living as Zarathustra in “azure isolation”.
For Barth’s interesting characterisation of Nietzsche’s position, see CD III/2, 231-242.
In consequence, non-theological anthropology cannot be a point of departure for an investigation of human knowing and its significance, so long as it advocates this type of independence. This does not entail that these disciplines cannot instruct concerning it, or that Barth will not use their insights in his description of it. As I noted earlier, the issue for him is not whether such disciplines offer up knowledge, but whether what they yield can be considered true when measured against what is revealed of human being in the Word of God. And revelation, for Barth, is the objectivating, authenticating matrix of all “understandings” such disciplines produce.

2.2.1.2 Christological-theological anthropology: the valid mode

There is no knowledge of humanity “in itself” apart from an appraisal of humanity in relation to God and God’s action in Jesus Christ.22

On the basis of the reading outlined above, any attempt to glean knowledge of human knowing is invalid should it begin from an independent epistemological perspective that presupposes an ontology that has not been ratified by revelation. What then, it must be asked, counts as a valid mode of access to self-knowledge? The answer requiring explication is Barth’s contention that true self-knowledge is obtained only when one looks at human being from the one objective perspective of what the Word of God reveals it to be. This perspective reveals the fact the creature possesses an essential relatedness to God – and we shall see in the next section how this fact provides Barth with the basis of his strategy for understanding the significance of the creature as a cognitive subject. My present aim, however, is simply to draw out this fact in more detail in the course of establishing how objective knowledge of human knowing – understood as a component of human creaturehood – is both possible and legitimate for Barth when pursued within parameters set by a properly founded, well-rounded theological anthropology.

2.2.1.2.1 Human being as coexisting in covenant with God

A good point of departure is Barth’s insistence that theological anthropology is distinguished from phenomenally orientated rivals by the fact that it enquires into the “essence” (Wesen) of humanity, into “real man”. It does not begin from a consideration of the characteristics of human being as imagined in splendid isolation and then make these axiomatic for all other disciplines. Theological anthropology is

rather constrained and commanded to view human being from the perspective of the Word of God as attested to in Scripture. This is because it is only there that one learns of God’s “attitude” or “behaviour” (Verhalten) towards humanity insofar as “the man Jesus” (representative of humanity), who is the revealing Word of God, is the referent of his acts (deeds, commands, promises) as therein described. In essence, then, Scripture supposes and reveals a picture of the creature (its limits, constitution and status) as God created and sees it to be.\textsuperscript{23}

Now, the basic insight of theological anthropology as revealed by the Word of God is the point I picked up on earlier, namely, that human being is not without God but is created to \textit{stand in relation to God}. “Real man” is a ‘being in relation’, not a ‘being in isolation’. In other words, over against the neutral and self-sufficient view of the human person he sees presented in much modern philosophy, Barth asserts that the basic ontological ‘fact’ of human being is that “to be man is to be with God”, and that this is the “necessary and constant determination” of human being.\textsuperscript{24} This basic ontological relatedness to God is not then something the creature can escape or attain – it is constitutive of it in virtue of the fact God establishes, defines and destines it as such. It is important to note that by this ‘being in relation’ Barth is not talking of a fixed and static relation between two entities of differing magnitudes that fall under the same concept of ‘being’. He is describing a \textit{relationship} that is instantiated and constantly upheld by God who, in the gracious act of creation and election, wills that the human person be his \textit{creaturely} covenant partner. This is the basic status and definition of “real man”, and Konrad Stock sums this up well in writing;

In the first place, the concept [of real man] indicates the being of man in the history of the covenant. Moreover, the particularity and actuality of man comes from the fact he is a being in covenant with God. Just in this way, it [this being in covenant] is a basic ontological structure.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{CD} III/2, 40-1 = 46-7.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{CD} III/2, 72, 139ff. Stuart McLean has said that it is on the basis of its relatedness to God – or rather, on the basis of the I-Thou form that characterises human relationships in virtue of being modelled on and inhering in the humanity of Christ, whose activity is \textit{for} God and so \textit{for} fellow-man – that the human person is also defined and constituted by its relatedness to (or fellowship with) fellow human beings. For analysis of the ‘man-man relationship’ and how it reflects the ‘God-man’ relationship (and at bottom the intra-Trinitarian relationship), consult S. McLean, “The Humanity of Man in Karl Barth’s Thought”, \textit{SJT} 28 (1975), 127-147.

God is “to, for and with” man from the beginning, so in Jesus Christ the human person is revealed to have its being “with, from and to” God. Though the content of those designations need not detain us here, the point to note is they denote a history of action between God and man which is inaugurated by God, and not merely a state of relatedness. The creature is dependent on God for its being and so does not have its being apart from the act in which God creates, summons and approaches it. On account of this, it is created to have its being as a responsive act that follows and corresponds to God’s action towards it. As such, the creature has its being in actuality and in history with God; it has no history or teleology apart from the history of the covenant between itself and God. Moreover, the history of the creature is patterned on the history of “the man Jesus” who is the enactment of our real human being before God.

Leaving aside for the moment how the humanity of Jesus in particular determines the basic human form of the human person in general, Barth regards the fundamental fact of the creature’s relatedness to God sets the task of theological anthropology, which is to describe human being on the basis of its relationship with God. The positive epistemological ramification of theological anthropology so construed is important to note for the purposes of the current chapter: the acquisition of objective self-knowledge depends on seeing oneself as a being in covenant with God, as revealed in the Word of God. And only with this conception of the human person in hand, can one understand the meaning and purpose of human being as a whole (and ultimately then of the role knowing plays).

2.2.1.2.2 Overcoming the epistemic barrier of sin in Christ

So far, so good, then; the perspective offered by theological anthropology seems to promise a relatively straight-forward path to objective self-knowledge. Yet the question quickly surfaces as to whether one can really be sure that the knowledge it

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27 It is the task of dogmatics generally to present the revelation of the truth of the relationship between God and Man in the light of the biblical witness to its history as a whole. Anthropology confines its enquiry to the human creatureliness presupposed in this relationship and made known by it, i.e., by its revelation and biblical attestation. It asks what kind of a being it is which stands in this relationship with God. Its attention is wholly concentrated on that relationship.” (CD III/2, 19 = 20-1)
yields is objective and true. Might not theological anthropology as Barth envisages it not in practice prove an idealised vantage-point which is unobtainable for a human subject wishing to understand its own cognitive processes? At least, such might be the inference drawn from the Word of God, for whatever else it has to say about humanity as a creature of God, Barth insists, it also depicts it as a being that has despoiled its relationship with God on account of its disobedience. The noetic consequence of sin is that the human person is incapable of acquiring true knowledge of God and so of itself under the steam of its own cognitive capacities.

Sin would seem to throw a proverbial spanner into the works of theological anthropology as depicted here by Barth: “natural man” has no ability to move from autonomous descriptions of himself to an understanding of “real man”. But why then does he allow theological anthropology to retain its status as the valid mode of access to true self-knowledge? Barth’s answer is quite clear. Since human being is veiled to the human person by sin, theological anthropology cannot obviously perform its epistemic function (i.e. describe “real man” in covenant with God) if the object of investigation were simply “natural man”. Barth therefore avoids this very problem by grounding anthropology on Christology from the start: he makes “the man Jesus” the focus of theological anthropology. Jesus is “real man” who as the revealing Word of God conveys the attitude of God to humanity. He reveals the divine-human relation. For in “the man Jesus” God’s act to judge sin and deliver humanity from sin by the work of atonement is made evident, and in him God’s pardon from sin is revealed to be effective for all.

Thus outlined, the epistemic success of theological anthropology is granted by turning away from “man in general” to “the man Jesus” and only then by moving back to the human person in general. By looking at “the man Jesus” who reveals the divine-human relation, therefore, the human creature can see its real being in its relation to God precisely because in Jesus sin – as the epistemic barrier to real-self-knowledge – has been lifted. Barth defines the role of Christology in anthropology as follows;

We have now reached...the most important thesis of this section: “As the man Jesus is Himself the revealing Word of God, He is the source of our

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28 CD III/2, 27 = 30.
29 CD II/1, 41-54 = 47-63.
30 CD III/2, 48-9 = 56.
31 CD III/2, 53 = 61.
knowledge of the nature of man as created by God.” The attitude of God in which the faithfulness of the Creator and therefore the unchanging relationships of the human being created by Him are revealed and knowable, is quite simply his attitude and relation to the man Jesus…

Christ is the ground of human self-knowledge, i.e. the point at which we know ourselves truly and objectively. Yet, Barth holds that this is true only insofar as he is also the constitutive principle of human being as such. Indeed, the human creature could not come to know itself truly in “the man Jesus” if there were no identity of being between them. A total identification would, however, cause anthropology to collapse into Christology. To avoid this Barth works hard to showcase the differences in the way each has its being – the mystery of sin and the mystery of the Son’s identity with the Father are sure marks of this difference.

In truth, the relationship between “the man Jesus” and “humanity” is for Barth analogical – there exist similarities between two largely dissimilar things. Indeed, Barth states that “to be man is to be…like Jesus” (italics mine). Their similarity consists in the fact that the history of “the man Jesus” in relation to God – his election, life, death, and resurrection – is the history of every person. Moreover, it is the history of the person in covenant with God. The being of Jesus therefore has “determinative priority” over all others’ insofar as his is the “prototype” and “archetype” (as the analogans) on which the human creature’s is unalterably modelled (as the analogatum). This leads Barth to contend that;

In spite of every difference – and this point must be emphasised again and no less strongly – we share the same nature with Jesus…The threefold fact that it is first in Him, that in Him it is kept and maintained in its purity, and that it is manifest in Him, implies a different status but not a different constitution of His human nature from ours.

It is clear from the foregoing that the success of theological anthropology as a mode of access to self-knowledge depends on this mediated kinship between ourselves and

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32 CD III/2, 41 = 47.
34 CD III/2, 145, 160.
35 CD III/2, 160, 162.
36 CD III/2, 53 = 61-2.
“the man Jesus”. Without it the human person cannot see itself as the being it is: a being in covenant with God.

2.2.1.2.3 Election as the ground of self-knowledge

In truth, however, the epistemic success of Barth’s anthropology hinges not simply on its tie-up with Christology, but on the way Barth triangulates those two doctrines with the doctrine of election. Whilst this is not the place to introduce the subject of election at any length, the basic point I want to stress is that the mediated kinship, as the essential presupposition of the creature’s knowledge of “real man”, is grounded in God, who freely and graciously decides to be “to, for and with” the human creature. God is \textit{for} us; we are thus elected from the beginning “along with or into Jesus”.\footnote{CD III/2, 145. According to Colin Gunton, Barth’s understanding of election is highly innovative because it is not simply to be conceived of the creature’s election to a final destiny, i.e. heaven or hell, as the Augustinian tradition has construed it, but is “this-worldly”. Election is always for Barth complemented by ethics. The human person is elected to participate in obediential service as God’s covenant partner in the world. See C. Gunton, “The Triune God and the Freedom of the Creature”, in \textit{Karl Barth: Centenary Essays}, (ed. S. W. Sykes) (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 46-68 (esp. 51).}

Leaving aside the question of God’s preceding self-election, what this means in the first place is that Jesus is the First Elect insofar as God determined him before the creation of the world to be the “executive and revelatory spearhead” of his will to save the creature from evil.\footnote{CD II/2, 168.} God makes humanity the “fellow-elect” of Christ, bringing it to share in the being of “the man Jesus” and therefore also in the history of his relationship with the Father. God’s decision to elect humanity into Christ, and so into covenant history, is made in accordance with the divine purpose in which “man…is predestined to be victor and not the vanquished”.\footnote{CD III/2, 147.} John McDowell sums up well the role of election vis-à-vis Barth’s Christologically-based anthropology:

> What it means to be human and creaturely has a christological basis since, originally and properly, God’s election of \textit{another} takes a particular christological form. It is this Other who is the “Real man”, the type and ‘prototype’, and ground of others’ election, since from, in and for him everything else receives existence.\footnote{J. McDowell, “Learning Where to Place One’s Hope: the Eschatological Significance of Election in Barth”, \textit{SJT} 53 (2000), 323.}

Without election, then, there would be no mediated kinship and therefore no way for the creature to transcend the epistemic barrier of sin through Christ, who is the
enactment of our real human being before God. Election is therefore crucial to establishing knowledge of “real man”.\textsuperscript{41} Expressed positively, this is to say that the doctrine of election is the lynch-pin of the method Barth prescribes for theological anthropology, just as it functions as the basis and eschatological horizon of creation.\textsuperscript{42} But if Barth’s deployment of the doctrine of election is what ensures the success of theological anthropology, it does so for the additional reason that it is the basic point from which ‘ontological and epistemological independence’ is elided and shown up as an invalid metaphysical position. To reiterate a point previously made, if the creature’s mediated kinship with Christ and its relationship with God is constitutive of human being, then it cannot simultaneously be held without contradiction that human being is ontologically independent and undetermined, and so capable of knowing independently of that relationship.

To sum up, the possibility of knowledge of human being – and of human cognition in particular – is not excluded by Barth’s anthropology. Indeed, it can be successfully obtained and legitimately pursued within the parameters set by theological anthropology, whose task is to describe the human creature as created and seen by God in “the man Jesus”, i.e. as it is in its objective reality as determined by God. Thus viewed, the pre-requisite and starting point for any analysis of human cognition in Barth’s theology is the awareness of his conception of the self which undergirds all he has to say about knowing. It would be a mistake to suppose that he will treat knowing as an element of a being with an ontological and epistemological self-sufficiency. As we shall see, Barth’s discussion of it is enframed by and indeed reflects his assertion that human being is constituted by a relatedness to God in virtue of the mediated kinship with Christ it is created and elected for. It is how cognition has been determined to function within the history of the creature’s interaction with God that is the concern of the analysis to come.

2.2.2 Measuring significance: the ‘hermeneutics of human creaturehood’

Knowledge of human being in general, and so of human knowing in particular, is possible and legitimate within the parameters set out above. Yet if we are to understand the significance Barth attributes to human cognition it is necessary to


\textsuperscript{42} J. McDowell, “Learning Where to Place One’s Hope: the Eschatological Significance of Election in Barth”, \textit{SJT} 53 (2000), 316-338.
consider how human being should be interpreted for its significance. Because the
human creature is not a self-enclosed essence but is characterised by a constitutive
relationality to God (as a being in covenant), so Barth’s contention is that the
significance of the human ontological constitution can only be grasped against the
horizon of the purpose for which God created it. This hermeneutical strategy is
dictated by the necessary link Barth draws between the creature’s “constitution” and
its “calling”: human being has been created and equipped according to its purpose,
and thus cannot be properly understood or interpreted apart from it.

The first part of this section explicates that linkage. The second outlines the nature of
that purpose, and how that purpose is generally inflected in Barth’s understanding of
the human constitution. I consider how the creature is created both to hear the Word
of God, and serve God as his covenant partner. As a whole, however, this section
will conclude that if the significance of the human constitution resides in the purpose
it is designed to play, so the significance of human knowing – as one element of that
constitution – must lie in the ordained contribution it is designed to make to the
creature’s status as covenant partner. This is then tested in the next section.

2.2.2.1 The creature’s “constitution” determined by its “calling”
Barth’s strategy for interpreting the significance of human being as a whole issues
from the ontological fact that the creature is not a self-enclosed entity in the mould of
modern philosophy, but a being who has an essential relationship with God on
account of being derived, determined and summoned by him. Therefore, the
creature cannot view itself objectively or grasp the real meaning of its own being
when it abstracts from that constitutive relationship. For Eberhard Jüngel, this is
reflective of Barth’s general hermeneutical stance: one does not isolate the reality of
human being for description, but begins with the Word of God and then moves to
describe the articles of faith.

What self-knowledge requires, therefore, is an epistemic ‘detour’ through the Word
of God in which the human creature learns about itself through God’s acts towards it

43 CD III/2, 344f.
as therein revealed. Indeed, in revelation the creature learns that God has created and addressed it and has called it for a particular purpose.

45 Barth’s hermeneutical strategy exhibits interesting parallels with the ontological turn in hermeneutics embodied in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

In the work that has brought him most attention, Being and Time (1927) (hereafter, BT), Martin Heidegger presented a hermeneutics that departed significantly from previous philologically-oriented models. For him, hermeneutics concerns that which is most basically true about human being, the fact that it is not a subject in isolation but possesses an intrinsic relatedness to the world. “Dasein’s” basic ontological state of “being-in-the-world” (In-der-Welt-sein) means that it is constituted by a relation to a broader whole of which it is a part. (BT, 78ff) Answers to hermeneutical questions about the meaning and truth of human life cannot bypass the ontological fact of Dasein’s relatedness. Dasein cannot and does not understand itself apart from the world, even if that understanding should only be “pre-ontological”. Rambert and Gjesdal write;

According to Heidegger, Dasein is distinguished by its self-interpretatory endeavours. Dasein is a being whose being appears as an issue. However, because Dasein is fundamentally embedded in the world, we simply cannot understand ourselves without the detour through the world, and the world cannot be understood without reference to Dasein's way of life.

For both Barth and Heidegger, then, the human person evidently comes to know itself in light of its understanding of the x to which it is inextricably and ontologically related, whether world or God. The hermeneutical circle in both instances is ontological in character, resting as it does on the shared assumption of the person’s intrinsic relationality, though Barth, unlike Heidegger, would source this back to the theological ground of the doctrine of election and would not suppose any parity of being.

Moreover, Heidegger’s insistence on this fundamental relatedness – though ultimately of a different texture and type to Barth’s – is, like the Swiss theologian’s, intended to stand diametrically opposed to the Cartesian/Kantian picture of the self as an enclosed repository of subjectivity set apart from that x. (Dreyfuss, 45-6) Nowhere is this more acutely felt than in Heidegger’s critique of Enlightenment epistemology. Heidegger argues that the state of “being-in-the-world” amounts to being tacitly amidst and actively involved with other entities. Knowing the world is simply a mode of that basic relatedness. (BT, 88) He argues that awareness of this practical and involved type of knowing is lost when one considers the self in abstraction from its relatedness to the world, as modern philosophy since Descartes has done. On that view, the human subject appears to occupy an independent “inner sphere” autonomous of the world in which it appropriates into the “cabinet” of the mind objects that are external to it. (BT, 87, 89f) In consequence, Dasein’s relation to the world becomes one of subject to object, a schema that not only belies Dasein’s essential relatedness to the world, but generates pseudo distinctions (e.g. theory and practice) and pseudo problems (e.g. reality and appearance). (BT, 86-7; Dreyfuss, 46) In nuce, Heidegger, like Barth, rejects any position that views the human person as existing independently of the x to which it is fundamentally related.

These conceptual parallels in strategy should not eclipse the real fact that there is little evidence yet to suggest that they result from a conscious, yet unacknowledged, appropriation on Barth’s part of Heideggerian ideas. (In actual fact, it is more likely that Barth is drawing from the rich pool of Reformation thought stemming from John Calvin, who argued that the sinner could only know itself rightly in first knowing God.) Moreover, there exists an ocean of difference between the fundamental aims and convictions of both thinkers. Barth would certainly not acquiesce to the notion that the human person knows itself truly in light of the world. Additionally, he would baulk at the suggestion that the human person enters into the interpretative circle through the mood of angst generated by “uncanniness” [unheimlichkeit]. For Barth, the creature steps into the hermeneutical circle of objective self-interpretation when in faith it is brought to adopt the one perspective of the Word of God from which it can see and interpret itself as God sees and interprets it.
Man is the creaturely being which is addressed, called and summoned by God. He is the being among all others of whom we know that God has directly made Himself known to him, revealing Himself and His will and therefore the meaning and destiny of man’s own being.⁴⁶

The meaning of human being lies in the purpose for which God created it. Importantly, Barth opines that the creature has not been created for a purpose it is in no position to actually fulfill. The Word of God makes clear that the ontological constitution of human creaturehood is moulded by God to fit the end he has in mind for it. This “transcendental determination of the human constitution”, as Barth calls it, amounts to the “grounding, constituting [konstituieren], and maintaining [erhalten]” of human being by a free act of God.⁴⁷ This is to say that the creaturely “constitution” is not simply “determined” in the sense of being derived from God; it is also concretely modelled on its “calling”;

Just as man is distinguished from the rest of the created world by the fact that, as the likeness and promise of the divine covenant of grace, he is called to responsibility before God, so his special constitution [Beschaffenheit] corresponding to this calling [Berufung] is determined by the fact that he owes it to the God who is Lord of the covenant of grace.⁴⁸

The “constitution” responds to its “calling”. But what is the nature of this correspondence? In the first place, Barth claims they are inextricably linked: the creature is what it is only on account of the summons, and cannot be what it is apart from that summons;

He is a man as he is summoned, and his endowment merely follows as part of the summons, his constitution being his equipment [Ausstattung].⁴⁹

As Barth envisages it, the creaturely “endowment” is conditioned (bedingt) by and grounded in the divine “summons”. Its being follows from and reflects the divine call


⁴⁶ CD III/2, 149.
⁴⁷ CD III/2, 348.
⁴⁸ CD III/2, 347 = 417. Though “Beschaffenheit” can simply mean ‘character’ or ‘nature’, it more specifically refers to the structure and composition of a thing, which makes “constitution” an appropriate rendering.
⁴⁹ “Sein Menschsein ist eben sein Aufgerufensein, und auf dieses folgt erst, zu ihm gehört, seine Ausstattung, und Befähigung bildet dann alles, was seine Baschaffenheit ausmacht.” (CD III/2, 152 = 181)
as its response. The human constitution is not formed independently of this summons, as if the creature were called by God on the basis of its possessing certain intrinsic qualities that make it ‘employable’ as a covenant partner. Rather, Barth wants to say that the divine summons precedes and therefore grounds and determines the human person’s ontological constitution. This constitution is fashioned in accordance with the divine summons, and as such, the various elements of that constitution are the “equipment” the creature is commanded to use to fulfil that summons. Use of the language of equipment suggests that just as ordinary equipment always has its end in the activity it is created for, so Barth thinks the human constitution, and all the elements that comprise it, is tailored for service from the beginning.

2.2.2.2 The two-fold telos of human creaturehood

Yet, what is the human constitution equipment for? What is the nature of the purpose which the creature is created to fulfil with the capacities allotted to it on the basis of God’s gracious act of creation and election? And how is that purpose or calling most generally reflected in the creature’s ontological constitution such that Barth is able to say that, as it stands before God, human being is fit for service? The answer I shall explore in this section is that the creature is created for cognitive and active encounter with God; it is called to hear the Word of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and to serve God as his covenant partner. I outline both these elements of the creature’s telos because the significance of the epistemic component for that cognitive encounter – and indeed for that service – is established against this background.

2.2.2.2.1 Hearing the Word of God

In the first place the human creature is called to participate in the event of the knowledge of God, and so to receive God’s grace.

50 CD III/2, 152.
51 Consider also the following two passages: “He does not become this being…he is from the very outset, as we may now say, “in the Word of God.” He is a being which is summoned by the Word of God and to that extent historical, grounded in the history inaugurated in this Word.” (CD III/2, 150). And secondly, “It is not the fact that he has ear and reason and the character of logos that makes him this specific creature. The case is rather that he has these qualities only because he is this creature…He is man as he is summoned by God.” (CD III/2, 164).
God wills to both approach and to enter man. He wills to be both known and recognized by man as God. From this angle, this is the meaning of the event of the covenant between God and man for which man is made.\textsuperscript{52}

The creature is called to know God; it is created to hear the Word of God, and it is this hearing that makes the human creature what it is. This hearing is definitive of human being in the sense that man is “addressed, summoned and called” for encounter from the very beginning. This is the goal of election. The human person does not then exist apart from the Word of God and then comes to hear it in virtue of some capacity within itself. No, it has been posited within the sphere in which God’s Word is sounded. God becomes creaturely in Jesus Christ so that his Word will be heard by the “equipment” which the person has been allotted for that purpose.\textsuperscript{53}

This hearing is not then one modulation of human being, it is that in which human being “consists” in virtue of the fact its being is in history with God, that is, insofar as it has its being as a responsive act that corresponds to God’s prior act towards it in Christ. Archibald Spencer sums up well what Barth means in saying that human being “consists” in the hearing of the Word of God. He writes;

\begin{quote}
[M]an’s being as a being which consists in hearing the Word of God is a being in actuality and not just potentiality. Man has not just the capacity to hear but is engaged in “real hearing”. Man’s being in the Word of God denotes not just the state of man but man’s being as a history. In his hearing the Word of God he is confronted with “the new and other” thereby being transcended from without and transcending himself outwards. As he hears the Word of God, he becomes among all other creatures, “this specific human creature”.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Although the creature has been created to know God, it is necessary to add the caveat that this does not entail that it is only the cognitive apparatus that is involved in that event. Certainly that apparatus is the main focus of interest in this study, but that is not designed to obscure Barth’s assertion that the event of the knowledge is God is wholly self-involving. As early as CD I/1, Barth could insist that there is not simply one “anthropological centre” that is addressed. Because every aspect of human being has been created and determined by God there is no reason to exclude any area

\textsuperscript{52} CD III/2, 403 = 483.
\textsuperscript{53} CD III/2, 149f.
(feeling, will, conscience etc.) from being involved in the event in which God meets us. Indeed, in that event we retain our derived status as “self-determining” subjects.  

2.2.2.2 Serving God as covenant partner

The human person is not simply called and created to know God; it is also called to serve God as his covenant partner. The merit of treating this aspect of the creature’s purpose lies in setting the ground for the later discussion of how the epistemic component helps the creature serve God. It shall also prove essential background to chapter 4 wherein I tackle how knowing itself functions as a modulation of human freedom in Barth’s theology.

Barth contends that the human person is called to share in the joy of its election by serving God as his creaturely covenant partner on the basis of this divinely-ordained cognitive encounter that takes place at God’s behest between them. Barth describes the nature of human service in his essay The Gift of Freedom:

> God wants man to be His creature. Furthermore, he wants him to be His partner. There is a causa Dei in the world. God wants light, not darkness…He wants man to administer and receive justice rather than to inflict and suffer injustice…He wants man, not as a secondary God, to be sure, but as a truly free follower and co-worker, to repeat His divine “Yes” and “No.” This is the meaning of God’s covenant with man. This is the task man is called to fulfil when God enters into the covenant relationship with him.

As God’s covenant partner, the creature is created to use its being in the service of God. It is called to participate in the causa Dei, and to do so in “thankful obedience” to the God who has delivered it from sin and death in the corporate work of Christ. Its being is therefore an active response to God’s grace. Moreover, the human person is to serve God in freedom. Though now is not the place to tackle Barth’s multi-layered concept of freedom, he asserts that the human person has and makes use of this freedom only as it chooses to obey God in love and faith. This ‘freedom in obedience’ is what marks off the human person as a creature of God; it is the exercise of the freedom to obey that “makes man free to be not more and not less

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55 This is affirmed in CD I/1, 202-4, but it is in CD IV/1 that Barth gives a fine-grain account how faith is self-involving. See also section 6.3 below.

56 K. Barth, “Gift”, 81.

57 For more on “responsibility” see A. Spencer, Clearing a Space for Human Action: Towards an Ethical Ontology in the Early Theology of Karl Barth, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2003), 273f.

than human.” It renders it a being called to responsibility in its acts towards God and others. As such, freedom is therefore intrinsic to the service the human person is called to offer to God. Barth describes the linkage between human freedom and the purpose for which it was gifted. The human person is called and commanded to:

[R]ealise in his life the divine intention of true humanity inherent in the gift [of freedom]. Glorifying God and loving his neighbour are sure signs of man’s commitment.59

Understood thus, it is quite clear that this gift of freedom for obediential action – not an arbitrary ‘freedom of choice’ – is the basic way in which human being is marked out for, and reflects, its telos as God’s covenant partner, for Barth. Freedom is reflected in the creature’s ontological constitution in several different ways that cannot be discussed here in any detail. Most generally, however, the freedom to obey supposes that the human person has been created a self-determining subject – a rational agent capable of acting in line with the command of God. Indeed, as John Webster has pointed out, God’s determination of the creature does not annul creaturely freedom, but actually establishes it: the divine determination is the basis of the creaturely self-determination.60 Just how this self-determination is to be understood is a subject that will be tackled in chapter 4.

To round off, we have seen that God has not simply created the creature so that it might pursue its own ends or history; Barth’s assertion is rather that it has been created for the purpose of hearing the Word of God and serving God as his covenant partner.61 Indeed, this purpose is reflected in the very ontological constitution of human being, which has been thoroughly modelled by God in every aspect on and for its calling. Barth is thus clear that one cannot properly understand and interpret the significance of human being apart from the telos for which it is created. As we shall see in the following section, the corollary of this, which Barth himself endorses, is that the significance of cognition – as one element of the human constitution – cannot be seen apart from the role it is designed to play in the fulfilment of the divine

59 Barth, “Gift”, 80.
60 J. Webster, Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 104f, 108, 110. Moreover, the command of God does not meet the creature as an “alien demand” that crushes the integrity of human action, but is God’s rightful claim over that which he has created – a command we are therefore “predisposed” to accept, in Barth’s view (CD III/4, 566). See also CD III/2, 194f and F. Kerr, Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity, (London: SPCK, 1997), 39.
61 CD III/2, 348.
purpose. My aim is thus to analyse the worth of the epistemic component from the perspective of its purpose as that by which the creature hears the Word of God.

But before proceeding along that path it is worth quickly noting the progress that has been made in this section as a whole. I have asked about the proper mode of access to objective self-knowledge in Barth’s theology, and have considered how the significance of any one element of the human constitution can only be measured and understood against the horizon of the call to covenant partnership on which it is modelled. Barth’s answers to these questions have pointed to the two structures that I believe generate the ‘space’ wherein the creature receives its significance as an epistemic agent. The significance of the epistemic component of human being can only be understood against the background of the fact that a) the creature is not independent but is defined by its co-existence with God, and b) that its constitution has been determined and formed on the basis of the purpose for which the creature was created, namely, for cognitive an active covenant partnership with God. This is the way in which Barth’s anthropology creates space for the creature as a knower.

2.3 The significance of the epistemic component of human creaturehood

Having completed the groundwork, we are now ready to describe what Barth has to say about human knowing as a component of human creaturehood, and to evaluate its significance in terms of how Barth thinks it reflects and contributes to the fulfilment of the divine purpose. I argue that, for Barth, knowing is designed to make two distinctive contributions to the creature’s status as an active creature partner. In section 2.3.1 below, I describe how the cognitive apparatus is ordained by God to be that by which the creature comes to know God: knowing is essential to human creaturehood because it facilitates the chief end of hearing the Word of God in Jesus Christ. It is so structured to that end and, as Barth himself says, is the ‘necessary presupposition’ of that encounter.

On this basis, I consider in section 2.3.2 how knowing also helps the creature serve God. It does this insofar as Barth makes the epistemic component of human creaturehood the sine qua non of all forms of the morally-textured activity of which the creature is made capable, including the particular activity of ecclesial witness. Thus conceived, human knowing is secondarily significant as the creaturely foundation of ethical agency in Barth’s theology.
The analysis of these two ‘contributions’ comprises, in the main, an exposition of two little discussed passages in *CD* III/2, “Man as Soul and Body”. The first contribution outlined above is found on pages 399-406, the second, on 406-418. 62 Barth’s broader aim in section 46 is to describe how body and soul, as ontologically constitutive of human being, exist in their unity, differentiation and order. Indeed, Daniel Price notes Barth’s desire to emphasise that body and soul exist in a unity over against the various dualistic conceptions that have blighted even the Christian understanding of the self over the centuries. 63 Be that as it may, I limit discussion of that broader theme to that note, for although it is certainly the context in which Barth comes to treat of the significance of knowing as a component of human creaturehood, it is not conceptually essential to grasping the points Barth makes in the passages under discussion.

2.3.1 Contribution 1: knowing facilitates cognitive encounter with God

Exposition of the first contribution takes the following path. I begin by outlining the particular purpose Barth thinks human knowing serves before considering how that purpose is reflected in the very structure of the act of knowing and in the integrity Barth accords to it. Next, it is essential to explain the precise way in which knowing is “presuppositional” to the human creature’s encounter with God, in Barth’s view. In conclusion, I evaluate how sin impacts the cognitive apparatus vis-à-vis its purpose.

2.3.1.1 The primary purpose of creaturely cognition

What interests Scripture…is that even man’s ability to perceive [*Vernehmenkönnen*] is one of the properties presupposed in his meeting with God, his standing before Him and his finding Him present, which we must thus regard as essential [*wesentlich*] for his creaturely nature. 64

Far from exhibiting an abstract interest in human knowing, Barth’s treatment of it is *theological* and is closely wedded to his description of the human creature as hearer of the Word of God. This is reflected in Barth’s use of language throughout this passage. He uses the word *vernehmen* (translated “to perceive”) and *die Vernehmen* (translated “perception”) – rather than *erkennen* or *wahrnehmen* – to describe

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62 See pages 479-487 & 487-502 respectively in the German original.
64 *CD* III/2, 402 = 482.
knowing. Whilst his discussion of the processes that make up the \textit{Vernehmenkönnten} clearly indicates that he is discussing “perception” as broadly and ordinarily understood as the act of knowing, his use of the word \textit{vernehmen} is particularly apposite in this context. Certainly, \textit{Vernehmen} is a generally accepted synonym of \textit{Wahrnehmung} (which is most commonly translated as sense-perception). However, it can also carry the particular meaning of ‘hearing’ – a sense that is lost in the English translation.\textsuperscript{65} I believe \textit{Vernehmen} indicates how tightly bonded Barth’s understanding of knowing is to his conception of its purpose. For, as I have already shown, the human person is created to \textit{hear} the Word of God – a hearing that takes place in the divinely-effected act of faith and which is mediated through the ecclesial witness of the Church in the speech and words in which it bears testimony to God in his self-revelation (see section 2.3.3 below).

That the significance of the epistemic component is intimately connected to its purpose is clearly evidenced in the following statement;

\begin{quote}
If God created him [man] to have his being in His Word and as His partner, it is already decided that He created him as a percipient being.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

It is important to stress that this “percipience” is not general in type; Barth is not saying that the creature is created to know objects in general so that it can then know God in particular. Certainly, Barth accepts that Scripture does admit that the creature possesses the capacity to know objects other than God. But whatever function and weighting Barth might attach to ‘intra-worldly’ knowing he remains adamant that the significance of cognition does not primarily lie in the ability to take created entities as objects of knowledge. According to Scripture, the human person is fundamentally a “God-perceiving man”: God is the original and proper object of human knowing.\textsuperscript{67} “Percipience”, for Barth, therefore consists first in the fact;

\begin{quote}
\ldots that man is capable of perceiving \textit{[vernehmen fähig ist]} the God who meets him and reveals Himself to him; that he is capable of distinguishing Him from himself and \textit{vice-versa}; that he can recognise His divine being as such, and His Word and His Will; and that he can understand the order which subsists between himself and God.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{66} \textit{CD} III/2, 399 = 478.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{CD} III/2, 402 = 482f; \textit{CD} II/1, 228-9.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{CD} III/2, 399 = 478.
For Barth, then, the human person’s destiny lies in encounter with God; it is for this encounter that it is created “perciptent”. The ability to perceive is therefore proper and “essential” to human being only when that being is rightly understood as created and called for covenant partnership. It does not have this ability for any other purpose in the same way that its being as a whole does not exist apart from God and his summons.

But it is important to stress the point that whilst the human person is established as a knower on the basis of its calling to know God, this by no means entails that its cognition is intrinsically capable of apprehending God, i.e. is equipped with the power and range to do so. There is no violation here of the free act of God’s self-giving as object. That the creature is ordained to know God does not make the human person the primary, active subject in the event of the knowledge of God. The cognition that is proper to the creature is that which is limited to the apprehension of created, worldly objects. 69 “Perception” is not to be understood as the means by which the person reaches up to God. Barth rather places emphasis on the idea that human cognition is the means by which God reaches the creature: it is the capacity “of letting God approach and enter him”. 70 It involves “reception”, as Barth’s very definition of perception suggests;

To perceive means to receive [aufnehmen] another as such into one’s self-consciousness. 71

In consequence, human cognition has a definite limit placed upon its range and power. It is very much responsive in character: it is the hearing that follows, is established by, and so corresponds to God’s gracious decision to be known in Jesus Christ. 72

Understood thus, the function of the epistemic component of human creaturehood does not simply derive from Barth’s definition of “real man” as hearer, but has its

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69 This raises the question as to the status and function of ‘intra-worldly’ knowing vis-à-vis the knowing of God – a subject I discuss in chapter 5.

70 It does not necessary follow that the act of ‘hearing’ the Word of God is passive and purely receptive on account of the fact it is established and determined by God’s summons. For although aufnehmen carries the passive sense of ‘accepting’ and ‘admitting’, it can also mean ‘to incorporate’, which would make the act more active. I believe this latter signification better reflects Barth description of the structure of the act of knowing – a subject pursed in chapter 3.

71 “Vernehmen heißt: ein Anderes als solches in sein Selbstbewuβtein aufnehmen.“ (CD III/2, 399 = 478)

72 See section 6.2.1.2 below.
basis in Trinitarian ontology. God knows himself in his primary objectivity, and it is out of his good pleasure that he wills the human person to participate in this knowledge through the Son and by the Spirit. He acts in creation and election to establish and claim the human person as hearer for that purpose. As such, the corresponding human act of “perception” (or rather hearing) can only follow and not precede God’s own self-knowing.

2.3.1.2 The structure of knowing reflects its purpose

In line with his claim that the creature’s constitution is modelled and follows from its calling, Barth asserts that the epistemic component is so designed by God to take him as an object of knowledge (insofar as he has ordained as the equipment by which he will reach the creature). My aim in this section is not to analyse Barth’s handling of the architecture of the act of knowing per se – for that is the task of chapter 3 – but simply to address how the purpose of “perception” (das Vernehmen) is reflected in the structure of the act of knowing. I begin with Barth’s broad characterization of “perception”;

To perceive [vernehmen] means to receive another as such into one’s self-consciousness. To be percipient thus means to be capable of receiving [aufnehmen] another as such into one’s self-consciousness [Selbstbewuβtsein]. A being capable of only a purely self-contained self-consciousness would not be a percipient being. Man is not such a self-contained being. He is capable of self-consciousness, but he is also capable of receiving another as such into this self-consciousness of his.

Thus construed, “perception” is generally structured in such a way that by it the human person can become conscious and know “another”. It is the basic openness of the human person to things other than itself. More particularly, Barth’s use of Vernehmen carries with the idea of ‘hearing’ that of ‘comprehension’ or ‘realisation’, which again indicates that the act is not simply one of sense-perception or hearing in the narrow sense. Barth argues that what is distinctive about human knowing is precisely that it can be broken down into two specific acts or “functions”. The reception (or incorporation) of entities into self-consciousness does not occur

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74 CD III/2, 399 = 479.
through passive awareness, he writes, but is a “sensible-rational” act: it involves human activity, particularly the interplay of “awareness” or sense-perception and “thought”.  

[W]e know that this perception always takes place in a compound act of awareness [Wahrnehmung] and thought [Denken]. It is not a pure [reinen] act of thought, for in a pure act of thought we should not surmount the limits of our own self-consciousness and so we should be unable to receive and accept another as such into our self-consciousness. Neither is it a pure act of awareness, for when I am merely aware of something and do not think it, it remains external to me and is not received into my own self-consciousness.

It is necessary to here define this “compound act” in a little more detail. As Barth conceives of it, Wahrnehmung is basically an act of the senses; it is the means by which the person becomes aware of entities to which it is proximally related. As such, it is an act of the body, which is itself the “openness of soul”. Barth maintains that such sense-perception does not in itself generate knowledge of objects, however. What is required is a subsequent act of thought (Denkakt) by which those entities then “come into me”. By thought the object is “posited” (gesetzt) as real for the person; it is “recognized” (erkannt) and “understood” (versteht).

It should not be assumed that this description of the act of “perception” is an arbitrary choice perhaps loosely based on a fleeting recollection of a philosophical epistemology in which Barth was once schooled. Barth is adamant that far from open to conjecture, Scripture itself stipulates that knowing is necessarily a two-fold act of awareness and thought in view of its purpose. Von Balthasar correctly identifies this in asserting that the structure of knowing, for Barth, is actually reflective of our status as creatures of God. Paraphrasing Barth, he writes;

Perception of God is primarily a matter of sensing what lies outside the mind, for the creature is not God but in need of God, who can be admitted only in perception [Wahrnehmung], strictly speaking. But it is also a perception from within, because it involves finding the real God through God, and this is a matter of thinking (ratiocination). This doubleness of reason simply corresponds, in the viewpoint of theology, with the essence of

76 CD III/2, 399f = 479f.
77 CD III/2, 399-400 = 479.
78 CD III/2, 375 = 451.
79 CD III/2, 401 = 481.
80 CD III/2, 401 = 480-1.
81 CD III/2, 404 = 484.
being a creature before God.\textsuperscript{82}

The knowing (or “perception”, \emph{Vernehmen}) of God necessarily involves \emph{Wahrnehmung} because God reveals himself in the world, letting himself be “seen and heard in one of His witnesses”, in Scripture as the first amongst all signs.\textsuperscript{83}

Cognition of God is not then a direct intuition – it is not simply an act of sense-perception. The human knowing of God also involves \emph{thought}. Indeed, God does not simply will to “approach” us and so remain ‘outside’. Rather, he gives himself in such a way that he “enters into” the human person, that is, is appropriated as an object of knowledge;

God wills to both approach and to enter man. He wills to be both known and recognized by man as God. From this angle, this is the meaning of the event of the covenant between God and man for which man is made. What kind of a being is it to which this event can happen? Clearly the presupposition made on the side of man is that he is capable of letting God approach and enter him. This capability is his capacity of awareness and thought. He is a percipient person in this two-fold sense. It is essential that he should be it in this two-fold sense.\textsuperscript{84}

Clearly, the structure of creaturely knowing is intrinsically suited to its purpose, even if it is not intrinsically capable of actualizing it. This suitability is further reflected in the fact that this structure is designed to hold together in its \textit{unity}. Indeed, whilst “normal” perception, i.e. that which is originally oriented to God, is decisively an act of thought, it is quite clear that sensing is also presupposed, because the act of perception is a single act of the whole self, of body and of soul, for Barth.\textsuperscript{85} In other words, Scripture supposes that perception occurs as a \textit{unified} act – an act that is grounded in the work of the Holy Spirit who acts to hold body and soul together.\textsuperscript{86} In


\textsuperscript{83} \textit{CD} III/2, 404 = 484.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{CD} III/2, 403 = 483-4.

\textsuperscript{85} S. McLean, \textit{Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth}, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 47.

\textsuperscript{86} The necessary unity of the act of knowing reflects and rests upon the unity of the body and soul, insofar as Barth assigns sensing to the body and thinking to the soul. To characterise the distribution of the functions of knowing in this way is to paint a relatively unsophisticated picture of Barth’s position, however. For whilst he maintains it is true that sensing enjoys a “special relation” to the body, and thinking likewise to the soul, sensing also involves the soul, and thinking, the body. How so? Well, sensing is also an act of the soul, for Barth, because although it is the body alone that executes the act of sensing, sensible awareness is predicated on the possession of soul (the capacity for independent action). In the same manner, thinking is also an act of the body: it would not take place without the contribution of sense-perception by which the “reception” of entities becomes possible. Ultimately, the unity of body and soul is made possible by an act of the Holy Spirit. See \textit{CD} III/2, 401 = 480-1.
essence, this unity is reflected in the relationship that pertains between the two elements of perception: “awareness makes thinking possible and thinking makes awareness actual”.

Barth writes that;

Neither aspect [awareness or thought] may be lacking. In neither by itself would he [man] be a rational nature [vernünftige Natur]. Neither permits replacement by the other. Neither can be interchanged with the other, though each takes place with the other as a single differentiated but not dissociated act.

It is worth making the tangential point that we can see even from this rudimentary description of the structure of the act of knowing that the human creature is established as an epistemic agent by God insofar as knowing is determined to involve activity rather than simply passive reception. The extent to which Barth is willing to carry through this idea to the doctrine of revelation is a subject discussed in chapter 6.

2.3.1.3 Knowing as the “presupposition” of cognitive encounter with God?

As I have read Barth so far, knowing serves God’s purpose of bringing the creature into cognitive fellowship with Godself. However, Barth also says that the act of perception is the “presupposition” of such encounter. It is the task of this section to unfold just how Barth thinks this is so. I begin with his claim that;

[M]an is capable of perceiving the God who meets him and reveals Himself to him…In dealing with man, God appeals to this ability. He presupposes that in man as the subject of a decision of his own, in his existence as his own centre of his own periphery, this ability at least may be appealed to. Without this ability, every appeal would obviously be without object; and the meeting between God and man, as it took place in the history of the covenant, would obviously be impossible. (Italics mine)

The rhetorical force of the above quotation should not be lost: God has already made himself known in Jesus Christ, in Barth’s view. Barth is not then considering a potentiality, but an actuality, and more particularly, what is presupposed on the creaturely side in the actual, historical encounter between God and the person which takes place in faith. However, in earlier volumes, Barth speaks out against the idea of

87 “…in welchem die Wahrnehmung das [D]enken möglich, das Denken die Wahrnehmung wirklich macht.” (CD III/2, 400 = 479)
88 CD III/2, 404 = 484.
89 CD III/2, 399 = 478.
90 See CD II/1, 3ff.
an anthropological presupposition in connection with his discussion of God’s ‘knowability’.\textsuperscript{91} So the important question naturally arises as to whether this affirmation marks a concession to natural theology or whether it is perhaps indicative of a general softening of position along Brunnerian lines, as von Balthasar thought?\textsuperscript{92} Indeed, in what sense is the cognition properly attributable to “real man” the \textit{sine qua non} of the creature’s encounter with God?

In the first place, Barth’s view of the self excludes the idea that cognition is necessary in the sense that the knowing of God hinges on this capacity \textit{above all else}, including God’s act of revelation. Such would be to wrongly attribute to cognition the status of being a metaphysical necessity, i.e. the absolute ground of our knowing of God. The upshot of this can be expressed negatively: the person cannot know God without this capacity. Positively expressed, it is to say that God is known on the basis of this capacity above all else or irrespective of any other condition, i.e. he can be known in advance or independently of God’s self-revelation. Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, Barth outright refuses to consider “perception” as an independent basis of the knowledge of God. The human creature does not enjoy an epistemological self-sufficiency in relation to God because, as was earlier pointed out, its being does not exist prior to and independently of God and his summons. In the statement that knowing is a presupposition of encounter with God, then, there is clearly no relapse into an ‘uncritical’ dualistic ontology or lurch into natural theology.

\textsuperscript{91} E.g. \textit{CD} I/1, 189f, 196-7f, \textit{CD} II/1, 179ff.

\textsuperscript{92} Interestingly, Brunner himself thought this a step too far. In his published reading of \textit{CD} III/2, Brunner certainly finds much conceptual concord between their respective anthropologies. To be sure, his contention is not that Barth has come to endorse a natural theology such as what fuelled their vituperous debate of 1934. His point is rather that Barth’s treatment of the human person exhibits a new found “humanism” that would seem to vindicate elements of his own stance in that debate, and his work since then. For instance, Brunner insists that Barth’s claim that the human person is created to stand in a fundamental relationship to God accords with the dialogical I-Thou relation between God and Man (and man-man) – the \textit{analogia relationis} – he had developed on the basis of Ehnbner’s philosophy of communication. More important for present purposes is that Brunner ruthlessly twists this point of ‘agreement’ against Barth: in making this basic determination \textit{ontological} (i.e. constitutive of human being) Barth’s \textit{analogia relationis} becomes an \textit{analogia entis}. However, Brunner misses the fact that Barth’s theological ontology is dynamic in nature and not static; the \textit{analogia relationis} may well be ontological, but it is an ontological fact only on account of God’s active decision to maintain human being in existence as such. See E. Brunner, “The New Barth”, \textit{SJT} 4 (1951), 123-135 and H. U. von Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation}, (trans. E. Oakes), (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), 152-3.
A more plausible interpretation of this affirmation emerges against the backdrop of Barth’s assertion that it is God who establishes and claims the human person as an epistemic agent for the purpose of knowing him.

As a being capable of such perception, man is claimed in his relation to God, and it is the ability for such perception that has to be ascribed to him through the fact that he is claimed in this way...It is thus proper to him to be capable of this act [of perceiving God].

Knowing is not presuppositional in the sense of being an independent capacity with the power and range for encounter with God. What must be drawn out here is that the status of “perception” as a presupposition is contingent on the fact that it is ordained by God to be the very means by which the creature will apprehend God. As such, cognition is not the necessary ground of God’s meeting with the creature – God is not obliged to conform to the way of human knowing; it is rather posited by God as the creaturely basis of the person’s meeting with God. Cognition thus possesses not an absolute, but a relative and creaturely necessity that is derived from God’s gracious creation and election of the human creature.

Another way of expressing this is to say that creaturely cognition is presuppositional to the encounter with God because it is presupposed by God in the act of self-giving in which he meets the creature as object. In revealing himself, he presupposes that we stand ready to take him as an object of knowledge on the basis of the equipment we have been given for that very task. God does not have to abolish, side-step or supplement human cognition in that event – nor conversely is he “mastered” by cognition such that his hiddenness is annulled; he freely chooses to give himself in a manner “appropriate” and proper to us as his creature, i.e. by human cognition.

This is why Barth can write in CD II/1 that when God reveals himself, he does not seize something that is not his property but rather “claims” and makes use of something over which he has “the right of disposal” as its creator.

With our views, concepts and words we have no claim on him that He should be their object. He Himself, however, has every – the best founded and most valid – claim on us and all our views, concepts and words, that He should be there first last and proper subject.

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93 CD III/2, 400 = 479.
94 CD II/1, 207, 228. See also CD I/1, 237.
95 CD II/1, 228-9, 243, 258f (as background consult pages 13, 21, 204-6 in the same volume).
96 CD II/1, 229.
Understood thus, human knowing is a presupposition in the sense that God has established it as necessary for the creature, and because it is by this ordained means that he claims the person in the event of the knowledge of God. Given that, it is quite clear that Barth does not deny or diminish knowing as the “subjective” basis of faith. Far from leaving “hanging in the air” the “creaturely structures” supposed in our meeting with God, as Thomas Torrance and Hans Urs von Balthasar feared, I have shown that he describes them and their necessity – in spite of any anxieties he may have held about a creeping natural theology!\(^\text{97}\)

Barth does not make knowing a presupposition of encounter on the back of the sorts of concerns that prick both Torrance and Bouillard, however: it is not driven by the nagging fear that in rejecting natural theology he has undervalued the existential moment in the event of revelation such that the creature loses its integrity as an agent, and is reduced to a patient. Barth’s overriding concern in the doctrinal environment of theological anthropology is simply to convey what is proper to the human person as a being created and called to stand in relation to God and who is determined and destined for (cognitive and active) fellowship with God. Only within the framework set by his theological ontology, it should be stressed, does Barth affirm the integrity of the cognitive apparatus as the necessary precondition of the creature’s encounter with God. Its status as a presupposition derives from God, who wills to be known and so creates the creature with the “equipment” ready to respond to his self-revelation.

### 2.3.1.4 The impact of sin on cognition

The last element requiring treatment under the heading of the first contribution relates to the effect of sin on “perception” (i.e. knowing, cognition). I consider how in sin the human person operates with an “abstract” perception insofar as it is a) estranged from its proper object, and in consequence b) divided.

A useful departure point is Barth’s distinction between the “normal” perception attributable to “real man” (i.e. proper to human being) which is oriented to God, and the “abnormal” (Abnormal) perception that is characteristic of sinful “natural man”.\(^\text{98}\) As Barth understands it, “abnormal” perception is a perception that is “loosed” from God as its first and proper object. It consists in the idea that the

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\(^\text{97}\) See section 1.3 above.

\(^\text{98}\) CD III/2 403-4 = 483-5.
general capacity we have for knowing ordinary, worldly objects is basic and proper to our being.

If there is also in the biblical sphere a purely general perception, i.e. one that is loosed from that particular object and content, if even here men sense and think the creaturely in itself and as such, these are [deficient] phenomena [Defizienzerscheinungen], and as such perception must be described as improper, as abnormal rather than normal.99

Barth states that it is clear from the Bible that the human person is prone to thinking of its perception in this way, and that this is symptomatic of its attempt to “evade” God as the proper object of its knowing.

In virtue of being “abstracted” from its proper object, human perception is “perverted and darkened” in two ways in relation to its objects. Firstly, it twists our knowing of ordinary, worldly objects out of shape. Those objects are meant to be evaluated and appraised in terms of the purpose they serve as God’s creation.100 When they are stripped of that significance and so made the primary and proper end of knowing, idolatry results because they are imputed with a priority over God they were not originally intended to have, irrespective of the significance any object in particular may be thought to possess or lack. Secondly, the denial of the original purpose of human knowing drives the perception of God into what Barth terms “a religious corner”.101 It evicts encounter with God from the sphere of knowledge and cognition, making it non-cognitive, whether by that one understands a matter of private ‘faith’ and conscience (Kant) and/or experience and intuition (Schleiermacher).102 In either case, encounter with God refers and is reduced to the ‘religious’ aspect of the human person, however that be conceived.

In addition, the denial of God as the end of human knowing results in an “abstract” view of the order and unity of the act of cognition.103 Human perception is basically perception of God and so necessarily unfolds as a unified act of awareness and thought, as we have seen. This is borne out in the “representative men of the Bible” who “live with their eyes and ears” and in the “faith of their hearts” (where the heart is understand as the centre of decision-making, the mind). Under sin, the human

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99 CD III/2, 403 = 483.
100 CD III/2, 403 = 483.
101 CD III/2, 403 = 483.
102 CD III/2, 403 = 483.
103 CD III/2, 404 = 484-5.
person fails to grasp the proper structure of cognition because it has missed the purpose which determines that structure as such. Indeed, Barth notes the tendency to reduce cognition to one or other of its elements, and so to miss its divinely ordained unity and order. It becomes either the work of the senses (empiricism) or the work of the mind or thought (idealism). Resultantly, the “natural man” gains a perverted view of the objects it does cognise. If it only understood that God is the original and true object of its cognition, it would consequently see that its perception has to involve both elements.

As far as Barth is concerned, then, sin is the barrier which prevents “natural man” from seeing the structure and purpose of its perception (and its structure as determined by its purpose). According to Barth, “natural man” lives in “denial” of God and so of its true nature and purpose. In consequence, it does not perceive objects properly but improperly. It is symptomatic of this perverted perception that “natural man” should think either that God cannot be known by the measure of human cognition, or that its cognitive capacity possesses the inbuilt ability to receive or reach God. Ironically enough, the human creature under sin cannot even know that its own perception is so limited and distorted – it can only learn this under the critique of revelation, Barth tells us.104

Having said all this, the noetic consequences of sin do not rob the creature of its status as an epistemic agent in Barth’s theology. Sin does not actually smash the integrity and unity of the act of knowing, nor does it actually untether perception from God as its primary end. Barth is quite clear that the nature and purpose of human perception persists intact despite sin;

Human perception, when displayed as his own act, is indeed a divided capacity. But this division has nothing to do with his human nature. It is the consequence of the fact that human perception is accustomed to evade its first and last object and content, i.e. God, and thus becomes improper and abnormal in relation to all its objects and contents. But this does not affect its nature in the very slightest. Man cannot change into a being for whom it is natural to perceive in this divided way. Nor can he prevent intending and missing unity…in all his dividedness.105

\footnote{104 CD II/1 179ff.}
That is why Barth can say on account of this that the creature is “qualified, prepared, and equipped” to perceive God, and to be reached by him despite sin.

2.3.2 Contribution 2: cognition as the creaturely ground of ethical agency

In the foregoing section we saw how human knowing is a significant aspect of human creaturehood in light of the contribution it is designed to make to the knowing of God. Yet, the knowing of God is not an end in itself. The purpose for which the creature is created a knower – or rather, an *epistemic agent*, since knowing always involves activity – is so that it can *serve* God in its action. My aim in this section is to show that the epistemic component of the human constitution helps the creature serve God insofar as Barth gives it the distinctive mantle of being the ground and presupposition of the morally-textured “activity” which is expected of it, and so also of the particular activity of ecclesial witness. Understood thus, epistemic agency is the creaturely and therefore relative condition of ethical agency. This is the second contribution knowing makes to the creature’s status as covenant partner, and so another angle from which its significance within Barth’s understanding of human creaturehood is highlighted.

I shall begin by describing the contours of the capacity of action (or “activity”) as described in *CD* III/2, 406ff (= 487ff). I then turn to consider Barth’s contention that knowing (or “percipience”) conditions the possibility of the morally-textured “activity” of which the creature is created capable. I round off by unpacking Barth’s assertion in *CD* IV/1 that knowing is also presuppositional to the particular activity of ecclesial witness, insofar as the goal of knowing God resides in confession.

2.3.2.1 “Activity”: the capacity for free action

[God] presupposes from the very outset that even on man’s side the fellowship between man and Himself must not be limited to a fellowship of knowledge [*die Erkenntnis*], but that it can become a fellowship of action [*das Handeln*].

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106 The link in Barth’s thought between epistemology and ethics is not a direct subject of interest in this thesis. I touch upon it here only as the exposition of “perception” in its relation to “activity” necessitates. For more on the broader topic of how ethics is part of Barth’s dogmatics, consult particularly A. Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action: Towards an Ethical Ontology in the Early Theology of Karl Barth*, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2003), ch.5 and P. D. Matheny, *Dogmatics and Ethics: The Theological Realism and Ethics of Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*, (Studien Zur Interkulturellen Geschichte Des Christentums) (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990).

107 *CD* III/2, 406 = 487.
Alongside “percipience”, “activity” \((\text{Handeln})\) ranks for Barth as the other “great presupposition” of human creaturehood, and it is one that, in connection with knowing, contributes to the creature’s fulfilment of the divine purpose.\(^{108}\) Indeed, the creature is not simply summoned and created to know God; it is, on that basis, also summoned to serve God in its action, to bear witness to the grace of God in all the acts of its life – to live as the likeness of God in the world. The creature is not to pursue its own ends in relation to others around it, but has been created for the particular purpose of living and acting “according to the divine freedom” and so is posited as a moral agent.\(^{109}\) Human activity is true and proper, i.e. distinctively human, when it is undertaken “in line with the command of God”.

The purpose of human action is reflected in the fact God establishes the creature with the capacity for action. Indeed, although knowing is certainly the presupposition of its encounter with God, Barth writes, it is the capacity for action that makes the human person able to obey the summons in responsibility.\(^{110}\)

If man is summoned to personal knowledge and responsibility over against his Creator, besides the bare perception of God, which is of course an indispensable and most important presupposition, he is summoned to decisions. And…if it is really possible and not impossible for him to make decisions, to do this or that, and thus to be obedient to the summons which he meets and hears, this means God has made him an active being.\(^{111}\)

The human creature is therefore “ordained for action” by God, it is a “doer” and not a “non-doer”. Moreover, the purpose of human action is reflected in the structure of the capacity for action, Like perception, “activity” is also a compound act, for Barth. We “desire” \((\text{begehren})\) – which has a special relation to the body – and “will” \((\text{wollen})\) which is of the soul (i.e. the capacity for independent action).\(^{112}\) As proper to the creature, activity occurs in an undivided act wherein both elements are presupposed: “desire makes the willing possible and the willing makes the desiring actual”.\(^{113}\) However, it is crucial to note that Barth does not operate with a weak concept of the will. The creature is not “moved” or ‘pushed around’ by God as a blind automaton. Barth is adamant that the human creature is capable of free, self-

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\(^{108}\) \(\text{CD III/2, 406ff} = 487ff.\)

\(^{109}\) K. Barth, “Gift”, 77.

\(^{110}\) For more on Barth’s understanding of “responsibility” see \(\text{CD III/2, 175f.}\)

\(^{111}\) \(\text{CD III/2, 406} = 487.\)

\(^{112}\) \(\text{CD III/2, 407f} = 488f.\)

\(^{113}\) \(\text{CD III/2, 407} = 488.\)
initiated movement in relation to other entities with which it is acquainted through “perception”. It is able to decide for itself whether and how to act, and so it is not simply causally necessitated to act by its desires or by influences external to it in the world.

Only in virtue of the capacity for self-determination is the creature capable of the distinctive morally-textured type of action for which it was created. Only as it subjects desiring to willing is it able to rule itself, and thus participate in the freedom of obedience which consists in acting in line with the command of God.

2.3.2.2 “Perceiving as the presupposition of doing”

I now want to show how Barth regards “percipience” – the ability to know, cognise – as the anterior basis of the morally-textured activity for which the creature is created. This is to explore the relation between creaturely ethics and epistemology. This connection has been overlooked in much of the main literature devoted to examining the nature of creaturely freedom and ethics in Barth’s theology. John Webster, for instance, correctly sources human freedom back to divine freedom as its ground, but fails to notice – or at any rate fails to treat – how moral agency, as a derivative (but original and therefore proper) mode of the creature’s capacity for action, is conditioned by the creature’s percipience.

My contention is founded on Barth’s claim that;

[I]t is essential for man to be capable of perceiving as it is of doing, and of doing as perceiving. Between the two presuppositions, there exists the same relation as between sensing and thinking and desiring and willing. The real life-act of real man can and will never consist in pure perception or pure activity. Perception is itself wholly and utterly human activity. Without desiring and willing I cannot sense and think.

Perception and activity are mutually entailing acts. They are the two presuppositions of the creature’s encounter with God in covenant history, and so both together are designed to serve God’s purpose. In the first place, their indissoluble unity is evident

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114 CD III/2, 406-7.
115 CD III/2, 406 = 487
117 CD III/2, 407.
in the fact that, as Barth claims, perceiving does not occur without activity. As we have seen, knowing itself is an act. One might also read Barth as saying that the human person is not simply a cognitive agent; its relation to the objects which it perceives is also characterised by desiring and willing. Correlatively, Barth also states that human activity does not occur without an ingredient act of perception; the creature is gifted the ability to perceive the objects on which it acts. Far from existing in isolation then, both knowing and activity render the structure of human selfhood dialogical.

Nevertheless, Barth holds that a priority does exist between them in which knowing precedes and activity follows, with the latter depending on the former.

It is indeed proper to him [man] to be capable not only of perceiving but also of doing, of perceiving as the presupposition of doing, and so doing as the end and goal of his capacity for perceiving. (italics mine)

Yet how does Barth quantify the necessity of “perception” to “activity”, and particularly to moral activity? Though Barth does not offer a definitive answer in this passage, it is unlikely that he considers perception to be ontologically necessary to activity, that is, he does not say that action is impossible without an accompanying act of knowing. A more adequate depiction of the necessity of knowing to doing is that without an act of knowing, human action would be blind and undirected, the work of a being without self-consciousness. And if the creature were a non-cognitive subject it could not serve God. For it would not be capable of the type of free, moral activity Barth thinks is distinctively proper to it as God’s creature. The following quote bears this out;

[A]ll my activity depends absolutely on the fact that I perceive. Without sensing and thinking I should not desire and will. Barth’s point is that the creature cannot will in relation to an object if it has no conscious awareness of it. This is true of theological necessity. Without the ability to know other entities, it follows that the creature is incapable of rational, directed action. The creature cannot exercise the gift of freedom and decide how to relate responsibly to other entities through a determination of its own will – to act in line with the command of God – without prior cognitive acquaintance with the object(s)

118 “Ohne zu begehren und zu wollen, kann ich auch nicht wahrnehmen und denken.” (KD III/2, 489).
119 CD III/2, 407.
120 CD III/2, 407.
in question. The existence of urges and desires clearly supposes that the creature is first cognitively acquainted with objects in its proximity.

Therefore, perception (i.e. knowing, cognition) is presuppositional to activity for Barth simply because otherwise the creature’s status as a moral agent is jeopardised. Its status as such hinges on God, who has created and called it to determine its own will in accordance with the divine command in relation to entities with which it is first acquainted through “perception”. Only this formulation of the relation between knowing and doing does justice to the nuanced theological role knowing – or rightly conceived, epistemic agency, since cognition involves activity – receives in Barth’s thought as the creaturely condition of the possibility of directed activity and ethical agency. The creaturely prerequisite of moral agency is not “activity” alone, but “activity” and “percipience”, with the latter founding and directing the former.

Understood thus, it is quite clear that Barth establishes a strong metaphysical link between creaturely epistemology and ethics: the former necessarily entails the latter, and the latter presupposes the former. But this assertion should not allow us to diminish the weight Barth accords to activity vis-à-vis knowing. The passages under review here have shown that both knowing and activity are presupposed and claimed by God in his encounter with the human creature. From that angle, both are given a relative creaturely necessity in that meeting with God. Moreover, they are as such established by God as mutually necessitating acts: covenant partnership would be incomplete if knowing did not involve and entail activity or if activity did not presuppose perception of objects. Yet, as we have seen, a clear priority exists between them: just as individually perception is decisively an act of thought, and activity decisively an act of will, so activity depends on the ability to perceive. Therefore, perception comes to view as the creaturely basis of the creature’s cognitive and active participation with God in covenant history.

2.3.2.3 Ecclesial witness as the goal of human knowing

From the discussion so far it is evident that knowing not only helps the creature know God, on that basis, it also enables it to serve God in active service. The epistemic component is presuppositional to the morally-textured activity in which the human person relates to other entities in general insofar as it is called to act in line with the command of God. As such, creaturely epistemology and ethics are closely linked in Barth’s thought in virtue of the tie-up between “perception” and “activity”.
My aim in this final section is to cast further light on this linkage by attending to Barth’s claim in _CD IV/1_ that the knowing of God issues in the particular activity of _ecclesial witness_.

The human person is certainly created percipient so that it can serve God in all the acts of its life, as was discussed in the section above. However, the person does not heed this call alone, but in community. The church is the “earthly-historical form” of Jesus Christ and as such it has a “special visibility” in the world, a confessing role. Corporate and individual witness is the necessary entailment of knowing God. From the “taking cognizance” of God which occurs in faith necessarily arises a “giving” in the form of “confession” (_Bekennung_), Barth tells us. Yet this necessary relation should not be conceived of in mechanistic terms as if the spectre of divine monism were here raising its head; it is rather intrinsic to the “dynamic of faith” that the person who knows and who has been set free on account of God’s work in Christ cannot help but confess him to others.

The goal of the freedom in which He [Jesus Christ] makes a man genuinely free – free to believe in Him – is the freedom to be His witness. And so the goal of faith as the free act of man is the act of his witness and therefore of his confession.

The confession of the Christian is the goal of the divine summons and is founded on knowledge of that summons that occurs in the divinely effected act of faith. Yet what does this involve?

The purpose of confession is to make known to others what the Christian has come to know by divine grace. In a very narrow sense, the corporate dimension of confession involves “speech”. It involves re-presenting that which is already known about God in verbal “public” images. Knowing God gives rise to knowledge of God in “views” and “concepts” and these are then expressed in words which are spoken in the church’s proclamation of the Word of God. Irrespective of how Barth thinks human speech come to bear witness to God – a subject that cannot be treated here – his point is that when confession is understood as speech, it becomes the ‘cognitions’ in which those who are not part of the Community come to share in the knowledge of God by

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122 _CD IV/1_, 776.
123 _CD IV/1_, 776.
faith (which involves an act of perception, to be sure). Knowledge of God is mediated by the Christian community by the power of the Holy Spirit;

It is not on the basis of his own discovery and private revelation, but by the mediatorial ministry of the community which is itself in the school of the prophets and apostles, that a man comes under the awakening power of the Holy Spirit and therefore to faith. This is his starting point in the act of faith, and to what other goal will he return? He can as little deny it as a child its mother. He needs it…

To sum up: the goal of human knowing lies in the particular human activity of ecclesial witness. Knowing God is not an end in itself, the purpose for which the creature knows God is to make him known. That is, in cognising God the creature is commanded to make him cognisant to others through the act of corporate and individual confession thus described.

This section as a whole has described the second contribution the epistemic component of human creaturehood makes to the creature’s status as covenant partner. It has shown how the creature serves God on the basis of the fact it knows him. The epistemic component therefore appears to function as the creaturely and therefore relative ground of the human person’s morally-textured activity, and so also of the particular activity of ecclesial witness. Taken as a whole, this analysis has shown how human knowing – individually and in its link up with “activity” – is a highly significant, indeed essential, aspect of Barth’s account of human creaturehood in virtue of the two-fold contribution it makes to the fulfilment of the creature’s telos as God’s covenant partner.

2.4 Conclusion

Work done in this chapter contributes to our understanding of human creaturehood by showing that far from having been overlooked by Barth, human knowing is an essential and important ingredient of it. It has come to view that God establishes the creature with the ability to know so that it can a) know God, and b) serve him. The human person is created for knowing God insofar as the act of cognition is structured by God in a way such that it functions as the appointed creaturely presupposition by which God reaches the person, despite the noetic consequences of sin – and irrespective of the fact this capacity does not have the intrinsic range and power to make God an object of knowledge. Human knowing also helps the creature serve

124 CD IV/1, 778.
God insofar as it is the necessary creaturely ground of its morally-textured active response to God’s calling, and so of the particular activity of ecclesial witness by which God brings others to share in his life by the Spirit. This is the two-fold contribution human knowing is designed to make to the fulfilment of the creature’s telos as God’s covenant partner.

Yet this analysis would not have been possible at all had we failed to establish how self-knowledge is possible for Barth, and through that, how he conceives of the human person as a being in covenant with God, rather than as having an ontological and epistemological self-sufficiency. Moreover, it would not have been possible to evaluate the significance of human knowing in particular without understanding how Barth measures the significance of human being as a whole against the horizon of its determination and telos as God’s covenant partner. Attention to those details brought clearly into view how Barth’s anthropology positions the human creature as an active knower of God.

The findings of this chapter have opened up several interesting avenues for further research. For instance, I noted how there is a definite connection between creaturely epistemology and ethics in Barth’s thought in virtue of the close tie up between “perception” and “activity”. Though I could not exposit that link in any depth here – nor was it my aim – the analysis showed that human knowing functions as the presupposition of human action and so of ethical agency, and that human activity is the ordained and necessary outcome of human knowing. If the link is as intimate as has been suggested here such that knowing and doing cannot really be considered apart from one another in Barth’s thought, then the question arises as to whether human knowing is itself to be thought of as a morally-textured act?125 Does Barth give any clues for understanding how our knowing of objects might be responsible and obedient? The ‘ethics of cognition’ is an interesting topic that unfortunately falls out with the scope of the current study.

To round off, this chapter has begun the process of disrupting the perception in the field that Barth had very little to say about human knowing and that what he did say is of little importance for his theology. The next chapter will continue to challenge that assumption by attending to Barth’s understanding of the architecture of

125 Having considered the link-up of these two items on the ontological level of the creaturely constitution, in chapter 6 I will exposit the ‘practical’ linkage they receive from Barth as the two conjoined acts of the Christian life.
cognition in the *Church Dogmatics* – something that was only lightly touched on here. That study will show how Barth’s conception of cognition is significant in virtue of the far reaching questions it poses to his theology.
3. Sense and spontaneity: Barth and Kant on the architecture of human cognition

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I examined the theological purpose human knowing serves as a component of human creaturehood. Assuming its findings as context, the current chapter shows that Barth’s interest in human cognition was not simply limited to considerations of its significance; Barth’s understanding of the architecture of the cognitive component is also a distinctive contour of Barth’s conception of the creature as knower. However, it is often thought that Barth passed over ‘the structure of knowing’ for fear of natural theology.¹ But whilst it is certainly true that Barth never exhibits an ‘abstract’ or purely philosophical interest in the capacities or processes by which knowing takes place, those who read Barth this way fail to notice his discrete handling of the topic.

Indeed, my argument is that there are detectible within the Church Dogmatics two skeleton theological ‘accounts’ of the structure of cognition, in CD II/1 and III/2.² Those light descriptions not only suggest that Barth actually holds very definite assumptions about what cognition looks like and how it functions, but that his assumptions about it are ostensibly philosophical, and in particular, Kantian in character. A comparative analysis will reveal that Barth’s two descriptions broadly follow the contours of Kant’s account of cognition as presented in the Critique of Pure Reason – a book Barth was familiar with throughout his life.³ Crucially for this study, however, the analysis will show that Barth appropriates Kant’s idea that human knowing is a “spontaneous” act in virtue of its architecture. This means that creaturely cognition, for Barth as for Kant, is not wholly determined by the act of the object on the mind in sense-perception, but results from the self-initiated action of the mind which organises the data of sense-experience and so constitutes our knowledge of objects. Such spontaneity is what makes the creature autonomous with respect to the objects of cognition.

¹ See section 1.3 above.
² I use the term ‘account’ advisedly, for Barth does not present a full-blown, systematic account of human cognition, but lightly touches on it’s structure when it helps him make a point of doctrine.
³ See section 3.2 below.
Whilst this linkage is hardly surprising given that Barth was schooled in Kant’s thought by his teachers Wilhelm Herrmann and Hermann Cohen at Marburg, the aim of bringing out this point is not so that we can simply point to a philosophical element in Barth’s theology, nor is it so that we can present Barth as a theologian primarily interested in the sorts of issues that concern philosophers. The premise of this chapter is that Barth follows the contours of Kant’s understanding of cognition as a spontaneous act because it provides him with the best theological option for describing the type of cognition with which the creature has been created for the purpose of knowing God. As we saw in the last chapter, Barth rules out the idea that knowledge of objects wholly results from sense-experience (empiricism) or is a pure act of thought in which the person creates its own objects (idealism of the neo-Kantian brand). Cognition certainly requires awareness of objects in sense-perception, but for comprehension of God to take place we must also think him in an act of thought – a view of cognition which connotes Kant’s idea of epistemic spontaneity. My point is that Barth’s commitment to Kant on the architecture of cognition is critical: it is qualified and conditioned by broader theological concerns.

Yet, Barth’s broad acceptance of epistemic spontaneity along Kantian lines is significant for my study because of the important questions it raises. If the creature is created with an ‘active’ type of knowing in virtue of the spontaneity that characterises it, then is Barth willing to consistently affirm or assume epistemic spontaneity in other doctrinal contexts, or does it slip from view? In particular, does he carry his theological commitment to the integrity of human knowing as a spontaneous act into the environments in which he says cognition is operational? These questions are outlined in conclusion and pursued in subsequent chapters.

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4 That Barth uses philosophical material in his exposition of human knowing is by no means problematic for his theology. He himself never ruled out such a possibility. As we saw in the last chapter, far from writing off philosophical knowledge as non-objective, Barth claimed that it may accurately represent reality, but that this can only be known in revelation. Now, if Barth believes that what Kant wrote on human cognition is ratified by revelation – and this we can only ascertain through the explication of the parallels up for consideration – why should he then step-back from using Kant’s description in his exposition of doctrine? Barth would only have to refrain from using that philosophical device if it began to control his theology. There is little evidence to suppose that he considered it a threat, for as is common knowledge in the field, Barth does not allow the anthropological pole to become the pivot on which his theological epistemology turns. There is therefore no question of a philosophical epistemology of the human subject determining the broader shape of his doctrine of revelation.
Barth’s acceptance of epistemic spontaneity along Kantian lines also contributes to our understanding of the relationship between Barth and Kant – a relationship that current literature tends to narrow to the question of how and whether Barth’s theological epistemology as a whole is a response to Kant’s philosophy of religion.\(^5\) Others, such as Bruce McCormack, have even argued that Barth drops his commitment to Kant’s model of the cognitive subject as early as 1924 because of its theological limitations. In arguing that Barth’s commitment extends as far as *CD II/1* (1940) and *III/1* (1948), this study clearly challenges that claim.\(^6\)

In truth, Graham Ward’s contribution to the subject cannot be ignored because only he has recognised and described the influence of Kant on Barth as late as *CD II/1*, and has pointed to the presence of spontaneity.\(^7\) Although I use Ward’s account to set context for Barth’s discussion of the topic in *CD II/1*, I am unable to presuppose

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\(^6\) McCormack’s point is that Kant’s model of knowing was useful insofar as it helped Barth to envisage in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* (1924) how the subjective realisation of revelation was made possible for the disciples. Talk of intuition and conception is appropriate for first-hand sightings of Jesus because cognition of Jesus would have occurred through the senses and the categories – he was perceived and comprehended. What led Barth to ultimately dispense with this model after 1924, McCormack claims, was his later consideration of God’s being and faith. It became apparent to Barth that Kant’s model is not appropriate for descriptions of how people today come to know God because, unlike the disciples, we are separated from “the man Jesus” in both space and time and so do not intuit and conceive him. Knowledge of God is mediated through the eyes of faith, not of the body, McCormack reads Barth as saying.

Though a critique of this position must be postponed in view of the genetico-historical issues involved, I believe there is no reason to suppose from Barth’s own work in the *Church Dogmatics* that he had abandoned or “qualified” his commitment to Kant in the way McCormack suggests. In the first place, and as the last chapter showed, the human knowing of God always has an element of perception and conception – Barth does not restrict this to first-hand disciples, it is characteristic of “real man”. Indeed, his account of ecclesial witness reinforces this point: confession involves bearing witness to God in words and images, and faith itself is a cognitive act that presupposes the hearing and seeing of those representations. See B. McCormack, “Der theologiegeschichtliche Ort Karl Barth’s”, in *Karl Barth in Deutschland (1921-1935): Aufbruch – Klärung – Widerstand*, (eds. Michael Beintker, Christian Link & Michael Trowitzsch) (Beiträge zum Internationalen Symposium vom 1. bis 4. Mai 2003, Emden), (Zürich, TVZ, 2005), 15-40 (esp. 29-34).

its validity because Ward tends to assume Kant’s influence without really making explicit the grounds on which that assumption lies. The comparative analysis will repair that lacuna, and as such it will also provide grounds for critique. Although correct in essentials, I shall argue that Ward overlooks the distinctly theological motifs that condition Barth’s understanding of the architecture of human knowing.

The structure of this chapter reflects its central contention that Barth broadly follows Kant’s understanding of knowing as a spontaneous act. The first section establishes basic warrant for the comparative analysis by showing that Barth was intimately acquainted with Kant’s philosophy from his early days onward. Section two outlines the contours of Kant’s account of cognition as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and establishes how it is spontaneous. The aim of section three is to show that Barth’s first ‘description’ of the architecture of knowing in *CD* II/1 follows the contours of Kant’s, insofar as broad parallels exist between his account of “viewing” (*anschauen*) and “conceiving” (*begreifen*) and Kant’s notions of “empirical intuition” and conceiving. I lay the ground for that discussion by describing Graham Ward’s contribution to the subject. After that, I cite additional evidence that suggests epistemic spontaneity is Barth’s typical position in the *Church Dogmatics*. This amounts to analysing Barth’s second skeleton account of knowing in *CD* III/2. To round off, I revisit Ward’s account and assess its limitations. And in conclusion I chart the significance of the finding that Barth endorses epistemic spontaneity by outlining the questions it raises for his theology.

By way of a final introductory remark, it is necessary to ask whether it is in fact legitimate to treat this aspect of Barth’s thought as a subject in itself. Is the effect of this concentration on the architecture of cognition not that it pushes into the foreground and attaches undue significance to an issue that ultimately lies in the background as a secondary – perhaps philosophical – concern, for Barth? It must certainly be granted that when it is discussed at all in the literature, common practice is to raise questions about the architecture of cognition within the context of Barth’s theological epistemology and the background commitments that shape it. Bruce McCormack, for instance, approaches the question of whether Barth in the *Götingen Dogmatics* thinks ‘intuition’ and the ‘categories of the understanding’ are involved in knowing God within the context of his exposition of how Barth’s Christological formulation of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling allows him to overcome the
restrictions Kant placed on the cognitive subject. 8 Without coming to a judgement about the success of such approaches to the topic, the advantage of my own approach of directly comparing what Barth has to say on the topic with Kant is that it offers a clearer path to the highly significant insight that human knowing is a spontaneous act, for Barth.

3.2 Life-long conversation partners: Barth’s acquaintance with Kant’s philosophy

As a way of contextualising the main argument of this chapter, it is necessary to establish the extent of Barth’s knowledge of and engagement with Kant’s philosophy. The aim of this section is to pin-point Kant as an important and life-long dialogue partner for Barth, and to show that Barth was intimately acquainted with his thought. It cannot explore the many ways or points at which Barth engages with Kant, or is thought to have been influenced by him.

In recent years, much constructive work has been done to assess the significant impression philosophers have made on Barth’s theology and its development. Indeed, Kierkegaard, Hegel and Cohenian neo-Kantianism have all been cited as key influences on Barth’s thought at one or other stage of its development. 9 Yet, it is


9 Hegel’s influence has not received much attention in the English speaking world. Lively debate in Germany was initiated by Trutz Rendtorff, whose essay on the radical autonomy of God gave rise to a series of studies that assessed whether the structure of Barth’s theology and arguments reflected a commitment to Hegelian idealism. John Macken offers a good summary of the key players and positions in that debate. J. Macken, The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 124-143.

The most recent area of study has been Hermann Cohen’s neo-Kantianism which Johann Lohmann, Bruce McCormack and John Lyden, amongst others, believe Barth came into contact with at Marburg through his teacher Wilhelm Herrmann, and through his attendance at Cohen’s own lectures. Apart from Simon Fisher’s study, which focuses on Barth’s appropriation of Cohen’s neo-Kantianism pre-war, most effort has been expended in ascertaining which elements of neo-Kantianism were maintained by Barth after his break with liberalism. Lohmann argues that Barth retained the concept of Ursprung, Cohen’s brand of anti-psychologism, and his polemic against the “givenness” of objects to the mind, with the latter of those finally giving way in the Church Dogmatics to a form of theological realism. The main work on this topic is by J. Lohmann, Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus:Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im „Römerbrief“ und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barths, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1995). See also Bruce McCormack’s review of this book in the Journal of Religion 78 (1998), 129-30, as well as the opening chapters of his own book, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: its Genesis and Development, 1909-36, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Consult also S. Fisher, Revelatory Positivism?: Barth’s Earliest Theology and the Marburg School,
surprising – given the extent of Barth’s engagement with Kant – that only a modicum of research has been devoted to plotting the significance and influence of Kant on Barth (see note 3 above).

This should be surprising because, as Eberhard Busch tells us, Barth had an excellent knowledge of, and seriously engaged with, the philosophy of Kant throughout his life. From his early student days at the feet of Wilhelm Herrmann at Marburg, Barth was schooled in Kant's philosophy. He read the *Critique of Practical Reason* but apparently devoted more attention to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which he read twice during this period.¹⁰ The conclusions of Kant's epistemology for theology and destruction of natural theology were widely accepted by theologians such as Herrmann. Insofar as Barth came to accept these conclusions, Kant can be said to have certainly informed the brand of theological liberalism that permeated the day and to which Barth was committed in his early years.¹¹

Barth's break with liberalism in 1914 did nothing to diminish the stature Kant had acquired in his mind. This is clear from the fact that, as Bruce McCormack notes, in the early months of 1916 Barth revisited and tried to think afresh the work of Kant. In the preface to the second edition of *Romans* (1922) he acknowledged that it was in part the new understanding of Kant he received from his philosopher-brother Heinrich, that helped him make progress in cementing his new theological starting-point.¹² Gary Dorrien summarises well the enduring influence of Kant as mediated by his one time teacher Herrmann;

> Like Herrmann, Barth wrote theology with unfailing mindfulness of the restrictions placed on theological reasoning by Kant...Like Herrmann, he

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¹² B. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, (paperback) (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 216. John Macken contests this point. He argues that Barth dropped the endeavour of trying to overcome modern Protestantism by means of Kant because he realised Kant could not help him establish the independent reality of God. In his commentary on Romans, we are told, Barth engaged in a “polemical assertion of the claims of the divine subject” which could be maintained by opposing the reduction of theology to ethics and so to anthropology (in Kant), and more broadly against Idealism and religionistic theology’s preoccupation with human subjectivity and its autonomy. See J. Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics of Karl Barth and His Critics*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 22-5.
insisted that the revelatory basis of faith is its own basis and must not be supported or defended with outside arguments.\textsuperscript{13}

A full length chapter detailing Kant's foundational role in the theology of the 19th century appeared in the late 1920s – and included a meditation on the relationship between philosophy and theology as espoused by Kant in the \textit{Conflict of the Faculties}.\textsuperscript{14} Here, Barth floated the suggestion that Kant's separation of philosophy from theology made space for a “biblical theology” such as his own that has its own independent basis (justification) in the Word of God.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, during the Second

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\textsuperscript{14} K. Barth, \textit{PT}, 252-299. See also Kant's \textit{Conflict} 7:14-73.
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\textsuperscript{15} It is worth discussing this point in more detail to highlight the critical relationship Barth believes his theology has with Kant’s own program.
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[T]he Kantian enterprise consists in a great ‘if…then’ sentence: if the reality of religion is confined to that which, as religion within the limits of reason alone, is subjected to the self-critique of reason, then religion is that which is fitting to the ideally practical nature of pure reason, and that only. (PT, 291)

Barth opines that principles such as radical evil and the mysteries of grace cannot be shown as anything other than contrary to reason. As such, their existence highlights a fundamental inconsistency in Kant’s project of setting religion within the limits of reason. Yet to which part of this conditional statement does the inconsistency belong, the premise or conclusion? Whatever, the answer, Barth’s claim is that “three possibilities arise…for the understanding of the theological relevance of Kant’s teaching”. (PT, 291)

The first possibility, taken up by Ritschl and Herrmann, involves accepting the premise of statement to be true as it stands. This allows for carrying out Kant’s project in a new way that perhaps might try to address its inconsistencies. The second possibility open for theology is to hold to the premise as Kant envisaged it only as far as \textit{method}. For instance, it may be argued that the concept of reason with which Kant here operates is too limited, it fails to acknowledge another \textit{a priori} capacity which Schleiermacher himself talked of, that of a “capacity for feeling”. Both these possibilities allow theology to accept the “peace-terms” as laid down by philosophy by letting itself be transformed into philosophy of religion. (PT, 292) The third possibility, by contrast, involves not merely questioning of how Kant’s project might be best executed, nor can be even considered a corrective; it is nothing less than the throwing into doubt of Kant’s formulation of the problem itself. In formulating the problem as ‘religion within the limits of reason’, Barth suggests, only one aspect of the problem gets brought out, “namely religion as a human function” thereby “restricting the validity of the enquiry”. (PT, 293) Barth’s point is that in order to do justice to religion as a function it is necessary to pay homage to God, the architect of that function. And God himself cannot be equated and reduced to human reason. In consequence, this third possibility would consist in;

[T]heology resigning itself to stand on its own feet in relation to philosophy, in theology recognising the point of departure for its method in revelation, just as decidedly as philosophy sees its point of departure in reason, and in theology conducting, therefore, a dialogue with philosophy, and not, wrapping itself up in the mantle of philosophy, a quasi-philosophical monologue. (PT, 293)

Barth reads this “third possibility” as tenable from Kant’s own standpoint in virtue of the fact that Kant saw this third type of theology not as philosophical theology, but as a “biblical theology” whose possibility is founded upon the church and scripture. (PT, 294-5) This theology speaks faithfully according to the laws set down by its own governing authority – the Bible. Since the
World War Barth held discussion groups in which Kant's philosophy of religion was considered. All this is to say nothing yet of the countless implicit and explicit references to Kant littered throughout the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth liaises with Kant on such issues as the categorical imperative as the ground of ethical agency (*CD* III/2, 422f) and theological method and the limits of human knowing (*CD*, II/1 182f) – to name but a few points of interaction.

The data presented here clearly suggests that Barth was, throughout his life, seriously interacting with Kant’s work. Therefore, it should hardly be surprising to learn that Barth was also largely indebted to Kant for his epistemology of the human subject, even if in the end his appropriation of it was conditioned by prior theological commitments. Given this background, the following study shall contribute to our understanding of the relationship between Barth and Kant by showing that Barth’s bare-bones understanding of the architecture of cognition builds clearly on Kant’s own model insofar as it utilises the intuition/conception split. That Barth did not explicitly admit as much is of little consequence. That is partly a matter of style and also reflects the critical nature of his engagement: Barth uses Kantian conceptual apparatus in his distinctively theological explication of the type of knowing proper to the human creature and its purpose.

### 3.3 Kant on the structure of human cognition

Our cognition arises from two fundamental sources in the mind; the first of which is the reception of representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty for cognising an object by means of these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the former an object is given to us, through the latter it is thought in relation to that representation (as a mere determination of the mind). Intuition and concepts therefore constitute the elements of all our knowledge...  

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Bible prescribes what is to be believed, authentication of this historical faith ought to occur through reading the bible and not through proofs for God’s existence. In other words, biblical theology relies on the biblical witness, on the fact God has spoken through it, to prove God’s existence – it has no right of appeal to philosophy for justification of its claims. With its premises of church, Bible, historical revelation and grace, Kant suggested that biblical theology ought to take its place amongst other branches of learning, *alongside* philosophy. At bottom, Barth sees Kant creating the space for a theology independent of philosophy and reason, a theology such as his own which is ecclesially grounded and which takes God’s self-authenticating self-revelation in scripture as its sole norm.

17 A50 / B74.
The breadth and depth of Immanuel Kant’s treatment of human cognition over both critical and pre-critical periods of his career means that a single, definitive account of it, if at all possible, lies well beyond the scope of the present study. The aim of the current section is therefore restricted to a broad examination of the key elements of the architecture of cognition as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Reduced to essentials, Kant’s aim in that work, according to Paul Guyer, is to establish the objective validity of the knowledge of science, maths and philosophy over against David Hume’s contention that the “basic forms” of such knowledge (e.g. cause and effect) are simply fanciful generalisations from experience of some objects that cannot therefore be assumed to necessarily and universally apply to all objects of whatever type.¹⁸ To make this point, Kant argues that although those ‘basic forms’ (of “sensory representations” and “conceptual organisation”) cannot be deduced from experience, they can be proven to lie “a priori” in the mind.¹⁹ And if those forms are a priori then it follows that an object can only be known insofar as it “conforms” to those forms.²⁰ In other words, Kant overcomes Humean scepticism by arguing that the basic forms of experience function as the conditions of the possibility of cognition insofar as they are needed for the experience of any given object. Guyer writes that;

>[W]hat Kant will argue throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not just that objects must conform to the conditions of our cognition of them if we are to have success in coming to know them, but that we can actually impose such conformity to the conditions of our cognition upon them.²¹

Leaving aside the complex ‘transcendental arguments’ by which Kant will deduce the existence of those a priori ‘basic forms’ (or what he calls pure intuitions and

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¹⁸ P. Guyer, *Kant*, (Routledge Philosophers Series) (ed. B. Leifer) (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 45-51. Negating Humean scepticism by establishing “synthetic a priori” knowledge is a recognised aim of Kant’s First Critique. Nevertheless, work done recently challenges the idea that this is to be read as the central epistemological problem his account of cognition sought to address. See P. Kitcher, “Kant’s Epistemological Problem and its Coherent Solution”, *Noûs* 13 (Supplement 3: Epistemology) (1999), 415-441.

¹⁹ Essentially, Kant uses the term ‘a priori’ to designate knowledge which is ‘pure’, i.e. which does not have its source in experience but in reason. For a good overview of the various ways Kant uses this word, and how this contrasts with his predecessors, consult P. Kitcher, “*A Priori***”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, (ed. P. Guyer) (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 28-60.

²⁰ Knowledge has a narrow range of meaning in virtue of the transcendental forms that condition the experience of any object. Indeed, it is restricted to the object as given in sense-experience, since no object is knowable apart from the forms that condition experience. (Bxx; Bxxvi; A96) The upshot is that knowledge is only ever of how the object appears to the mind and not as it is itself.

concepts), I want to outline the two conditions of the mind which must be satisfied if knowledge of an object is to come about.\textsuperscript{22} In particular, \textit{empirical} knowledge, that is, knowledge of an object as given in sense experience (as opposed to philosophical or mathematical knowledge) requires “intuitions” and “concepts”. More precisely, it requires a) sensible representations (or “empirical intuitions”) and the faculty we have for receiving them, “sensibility”, and b) a spontaneous act of thought in which the object of empirical intuitions is thought and known in an “empirical concept”.\textsuperscript{23} I discuss intuiting and conceiving in turn and then ascertain what the spontaneity of cognition consists in for Kant.

### 3.3.1 Sensible intuition

Kant does not endorse a type of transcendental idealism in which the human subject creates its own objects of cognition by an act of thought. He affirms empirical reality by insisting that the condition of empirical knowledge is awareness of the object in representations as given to us through the senses.\textsuperscript{24} But as we shall see from his account of intuition and sensibility as set out in the “Transcendental Aesthetic” Kant is not snared by a crude empiricism such that objective knowledge of an object cannot be established.\textsuperscript{25} For the main aim of Transcendental Aesthetic is to establish that space and time are the “pure forms of our [sensible] representations of things”, and so that the object can only be known on the basis of how it appears to the mind in intuition. In consequence, Kant validates intuition as a \textit{source} of our knowledge of objects.\textsuperscript{26}

Kant’s use of the word \textit{intuition} must be distinguished from its contemporary meaning as pre-philosophical feelings, thoughts, or instincts that act as a guide to a

\textsuperscript{22} A ‘transcendental argument’ is one that tries to deduce the existence of the necessary a priori conditions of knowledge without recourse to experience as a source of justification. An example of one is found in the Transcendental Aesthetic, where Kant tries to show that space and time, as the ‘basic forms’ of all sensible intuitions of objects, cannot be derived from experience of objects but exist a priori in the mind and condition experience. See R. Walker, “Kant and transcendental arguments”, in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy}, (ed. P. Guyer) (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 238-268.

\textsuperscript{23} A50 / B74.


\textsuperscript{25} Kant tells us that he is not using ‘aesthetic’ in the recent sense then adopted of the investigation of art or taste, because he thinks this is impossible. (A21 / B35) By it he means the “science of all principles of \textit{a priori} sensibility”. (A21)

given situation. Kant considers intuition to be a form of “perception”, and he defines it thus;

In whatever manner and by whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition [Anschauung].

Empirical intuitions are images of an object that is immediately present to the mind in sense-experience. In more precise terms, Kant considers these to be singular representations (Vorstellungen) in which we consciously and directly view a particular property of an object through the senses. These images are generated by the independently existing object which impacts or “affects” the mind. The particular way in which the mind is “affected” by objects Kant calls “sensation” (Empfindung). Indeed, empirical intuition requires the object to act on the mind in sensation. For example, when I have an empirical intuition of my computer screen it is because the object in front of me reflects light-waves which I receive through my eyes and retina such that I am able to represent to myself its shape, colour, and the icons on the screen etc. I can only do this as they appear to me in sensation. Thus understood, sensations are the ‘stuff’ of empirical intuitions, and it is through sensation that empirical intuition (or sensory representations) relates to its object directly and particularly.

Essential to the account above is Kant’s affirmation that empirical intuition requires the object to impact the mind;

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27 For Kant, “perception” (Perception) is not merely the apprehending of an object through the senses. Perception is any “representation with consciousness” of which there are two types: sensations (subjective perceptions) and objective perceptions. The latter category gives rise to knowledge of objects, and can itself be of two kinds: intuition (representations in which objects are apprehended directly) and concept, (in which we relate to an object indirectly by means of something common to several objects). (A319 / B376 – A320 / B377) The term perception, for Kant can thus refer in general to all the kinds of representations or can stipulate any one of them specifically.

28 A19 / B33.

29 Charles Parsons, for one, suggests that by immediate knowing Kant is talking of an object's “direct phenomenological presence to the mind, as in perception.”. Immediate perception characterises intuition, and this is contrasted with mediate knowing which occurs in concepts (in which the identity of an object is judged by virtue of a particular feature common to all. See C. Parsons, “The Transcendental Aesthetic”, in The Cambridge Companion to Kant, (ed. P. Guyer) (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 66.

[I]ntuition takes place only in so far as the object is given to us. This again is only possible in so far as the mind is affected in some way.³¹

Thus presented, it is quite clear that Kant vindicates the empiricist notion that we get knowledge through the senses in virtue of the object which impacts the mind insofar as it is present and proximal. Indeed, Frederick Beiser has suggested that in comparison with the dogmatic idealism that preceded Kant, Kant does not deny the independent existence of the object of cognition, even if our intuiting of it should actually prove to be conditioned by the mind.³² Yet Henry Allison, for one, argues that Kant's account of intuition is not marked by a crude empiricism. That we are affected by objects in modes (or “in certain ways”) underscores this point, for modes of affection are always subjective, that is, determined by the “nature of our sensibility” and not objective (determined by the object).³³

To draw this out in terms of Kant’s own account, this means that intuitions require a contribution from the mind in order to arise. In the first place they require the capacity for being affected by sensations. This faculty Kant terms “sensibility” (Sinnlichkeit);

The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects, is called sensibility.³⁴

Sensibility is the passive activity of the senses through which we receive information from the world around. Without this faculty, Kant writes, “no object would be given to us”, and if no object can impact the mind then intuitions (as ‘sensation-filled’ representations) cannot occur and therefore do not function as a condition of our knowledge of such objects.

Yet Kant’s point is not simply that the capacity for sense perception is a source of knowledge of objects, but that this capacity conditions the possibility of our experience of objects. Consider it this way. Space and time are necessary and

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³¹ A19 / B33.
³³ Kemp Smith likewise contends that sensibility conditions the possibility of both intuitions and objects, as while objects effect intuitions and intuitions themselves are the means by which we consciously apprehend objects, both the reception of objects and the creation of intuitions depend on sensibility. N. Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd, 1930), 81.
³⁴ A19 / B33.
universal to our experience of all objects that we directly view in empirical intuitions. Yet we cannot represent space and time to ourselves in a single, particular intuition and nor can it be deduced from our experience of a given set of objects and supposed to apply to all on that basis. So how then is it that we experience objects in space and time? Kant’s answer is that space and time are basic forms of sensibility. These ‘pure intuitions’ are not derived from experience but lie a priori in the mind and function as the necessary conditions of our empirical intuition of any object which is given to the mind. Without the pure intuitions of space and time which shape our experience of all objects, there is no possibility of empirical intuitions, and no data for cognition.

But if the mind conditions the experience of objects with those pure intuitions such that an object can only be known if it does conform to them, then it is quite clear that we only have knowledge of objects as they appear to the mind and not as they are in themselves – a fact which would seem to subvert the principle aim of the First Critique. However, Allison’s rejoinder to this accusation is that in existing independently of the mind, objects as they are in themselves impress their real presence on us in affectivity.35 Nevertheless, the question persists as to whether one must give up the possibility of objective knowledge given that we are limited to experiencing the object under the “subjective conditions” of sensibility, i.e., in its appearance in perception. However, Allison argues that “such cognition is fully objective, since it is governed by a priori epistemic conditions”.36 Although these “epistemic conditions” are “subjective” in that they “reflect the structure and operations of the human mind”, they have what Allison calls an “objectivating” function because they condition the objectivity of our representations.37

To sum up, empirical intuition is the representational data that is given to thought by sensibility for processing into knowledge (in the form of concepts). They are characterised by receptivity, in that they are direct representations of an object that

36 An epistemic condition is a condition by which something can be represented and therefore count as an object for us. Such conditions are not ontological; Kant is not saying that only what is known exists, and that what transcends the subjective possibility of cognition does not exist. See H. Allison, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, 12.
37 H. Allison, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, 11. Patricia Kitcher discusses whether Kant can consistently maintain the claim that such subjective conditions are objectively valid. See P. Kitcher, “Kant’s Epistemological Problem and its Coherent Solution”, Noûs 13 (Supplement 3: Epistemology) (1999), 415-441 (esp. 415-18).
are generated passively by sense and sensibility. One can therefore deduce that intuition has an *image*-sense, for Kant, as a sensory representation of particular property of an object, and an *act*-sense, since the mind receives representations. Yet whilst receptivity is evidently presuppositional to knowledge, sensible intuitions are not the images in which we know objects. They merely provide “the data for such cognition”.38 It is the spontaneous act of the understanding that results in knowledge.

3.3.2 Conceiving

We earlier noted that as Kant understands it, empirical intuition provides us with representations of particular properties of objects which are received by sensibility. But how from the mass of sense data can one identify and know what the object is as a whole? Kant contends that identity and knowledge are established by the “spontaneity” (*die Spontaneität*) of thought: by the self-initiated action of the mind which enables us to know an object by generating a composite or unitary conception of it from the “manifold” (*Mannigfaltige*) of distinct intuitions related to it.39 As Kant defines it, thought is “knowledge by means of concepts”, which is to say that human knowledge consists in thinking objects in “concepts” (*Begriffe*). The faculty for thinking objects of sensible intuition in concepts is called the “understanding” (*Verstand*).40

One way of getting at the process by which empirical concepts are produced – a process that can be labelled conceiving (*denken*) or comprehending (*begreifen*) – is to ask of Kant how, if I am to know an object by recognising it in a concept, does the understanding enable me to think it (represent it in and by thought) *in its unity*? Kant’s answer is that the mind must first *synthesize* the unity of identity from a multiplicity of intuitions;

If this manifold [of intuitions] is to be known, the spontaneity of our thought requires that it be gone through in a certain way, taken up, and connected. This act I name *synthesis*. By *synthesis*...I understand the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping what is manifold in them as one [act of] knowledge...Synthesis of a manifold (be it given empirically or *a priori*) is what first gives rise to knowledge.41

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39 B103.
40 B75 / A51 and B94.
41 B103.
Kant’s discussion of synthesis is complex, and he posits three main types.\(^{42}\) For our purposes, however, all we need note is that it is central to the process of generating conceptual images. The *synthesis of sensible intuitions* is conducted by what Kant calls the “imagination” (*Einbildungskraft*), whose role vis-à-vis the understanding is disputed by scholars, but which Kant himself says apprehends the manifold of intuitions and reproduces them for the understanding in a synthesis.\(^{43}\) The understanding gives unity to this synthesis by synthesising it with “pure concepts” of the understanding. These “pure concepts” (otherwise known as “categories of the understanding”), like pure intuitions, form the necessary rules that govern the possibility and shape of experience and its objects; they determine the form of representations (a condition which itself is grounded in the unity of consciousness\(^{44}\)) and are the means by which separate representations are ordered and connected together (and thus assignable to and thinkable by a single mind in their unity).\(^{45}\) Such concepts can be considered rules of conceptual organisation because they guide the ordering and connecting of separate empirical intuitions that needs to take place for knowledge to arise.\(^{46}\)

The role of the understanding is to judge the identity of the synthetic manifold of intuitions. To do this, it uses an existing “empirical concept” – that is, a concept generated by the mind from the data of sense-experience – to judge (*Urteil*) the identity of the object which is represented in the separate intuitions that have been synthesised into a whole. Judgement is understood as the act by which identity of the object is ascertained and knowledge established.\(^{47}\) Where no such empirical concept

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\(^{42}\) Kant discusses these in the (A) Deduction – the first proof of the pure categories of the understanding (see particularly A98 – A111).

\(^{43}\) For more on the role of the imagination in cognition, consult A100-3.

\(^{44}\) B103-5.

\(^{45}\) B126, A124-8.

\(^{46}\) B126, A124-8.

\(^{47}\) As important as the concept of judgement (*Urteil*) is to grasping Kant's account of conceptualisation, it need not detain us for long here. How are we able to judge what is presented to us by sensibility such that true knowledge (true identity) of an object can be established? According to Kant, judgement is a knack or talent that one may have, but truth “consists in the agreement of knowledge with its object”. Something is thus judged true if the concept (in which an object's identity is judged) corresponds with the object as presented to the mind in appearance. Judgement is that faculty of thought by which we distinguish objects from one other. (A58 / B83)
exists for categorising the objects in question, one is generated by the understanding which abstracts from the common feature of a diverse set of particulars.

Empirical concepts are important for Kant because they are the unitary representations in which we think and therefore know an object. It is in concepts that objects “belong” to me, that is, become thinkable by a single mind, i.e. ascribable to my consciousness. But if I am to know by these complex representations then it is evident they must conform to the object in some way for otherwise they would be without content and cognitive value. In contrast with the direct relation enjoyed by intuitions, empirical concepts relate to objects through the direct representations of the object (intuitions) of which they are made up. Concepts thus relate to objects medially, by “means of a feature which several things may have in common”. They are not then singular representations of a particular property of one object, but common representations that can hold of several objects if those objects possess that distinguishing feature that entitles them to be ordered and so thought under that concept.

On this basis empirical concepts function as the rules for judging identity in two distinct senses, according to Henry Allison. They first “serve as rules of sensible synthesis”. Each empirical concept comprises a 'toolkit' of intuitions, so to speak, that any object must share of necessity to be correctly classified under it; as such, empirical concepts offer a “schema” for ordering and making sense of received sensible data (thought it is the imagination that performs the sensible synthesis). For example, I might only see the back of a car, but the concept of a car I hold acts as a rule or measure by which I can project the sides and front of the object. Secondly, concepts are the rules of discursive cognition, rules which the mind actively and consciously applies to other possible or actual objects and by which it judges their identity. For example, the concept of 'sports equipment' acts as a rule that when

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48 A125.
49 A68 / B93.
50 A320 / B377.
52 Discursive cognition presupposes that we are conscious of and think objects in their unity because we ourselves are self-conscious. This self-consciousness is pure, not reflected from experience, and is termed by Kant the transcendental unity of apperception. “There can be in us no modes of knowledge [representations] no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which
applied to several objects, say, a football, javelin, and cricket ball, marks that which is common to all of them. It allows me to judge their identity and so know them. It also allows me to judge a new object – a rugby ball, for instance – by virtue of some feature that it has in common with the others. As Kant conceives of it, then, a concept is both the mind's \textit{judgement} (that is, understanding) of an object as well as the means by which objects are judged.

3.3.3 The spontaneity of cognition

As we have seen so far, cognition of objects has two distinct elements for Kant: it requires an awareness of an object as given to us through the senses (intuition) – even if that is only of how the object appears to the mind and not as it is in itself. It also requires the “spontaneity” of thought (the understanding) in generating a concept in which the object (as represented in the synthetic manifold of intuitions) is recognised and so known. In this final section, I want to draw out the idea of “spontaneity” as that which characterises Kant’s account of cognition. This is best done by widening the discussion to consider briefly the historical significance of that account.

According to both Henry Allison and Terry Pinkard, it is the idea of \textit{spontaneity} that marks what is distinctive about Kant's understanding of human knowing. What characterised pre-critical philosophy (e.g. Leibniz and Locke) was the acceptance that objects give themselves to the mind as they are in themselves. The function of the mind was thus merely to “clarify”, “receive”, or “copy” what the senses...
In short, our knowing was said to be determined by the action of the object on the mind. Yet David Hume pointed to the problem of this approach: since knowledge is derived from observation there is no way of proving that the basic principles of that knowledge obtain necessarily and universally to all objects, for although I can observe that some object of a particular class is of such a nature, experience does not offer grounds for concluding that this is true of all objects.

As I mentioned at the outset of this section, Kant’s response to this was to demonstrate the existence of those forms a priori, and so to argue that the conditions of experience are constituted by the mind’s spontaneous application of those forms to objects. By making cognition depend on the spontaneous contribution of the observing mind, and not on the independent object, Kant broke with the preceding tradition in a manner that he himself described in terms of the Copernican revolution.

Terry Pinkard sums up well the basic thrust of Kant’s position on spontaneity;

We spontaneously (that is, not as a causal effect of anything else) bring certain features of our conscious experience to experience rather than deriving them from experience. A crucial feature of our experience of ourselves and the world is therefore not a “mirror” or a “reflection” of any feature of a pre-existing part of the universe, but is spontaneously supplied by us.

Central to the idea of spontaneity is the notion that it is the self-initiated action of the mind on the object that brings knowledge about. Our knowledge of objects is not then caused by the affecting object, but is decisively an act of the mind. Consequently, the human subject is autonomous or free with respect to the object of cognition. Henry Allison locates the spontaneity of cognition more precisely in the free, undetermined act of the understanding;

The [cognition of an objective order of intuitions] requires that the understanding subject the given representations to an ordering principle or rule (pure concept of the understanding), by means of which the order is determined as objective. Kant characterises this as an act of spontaneity of the subject, since it is not determined by the sensible data, and it constitutes the epistemic analogue of incorporation or concurrence.

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The mind is spontaneous in cognition in the sense that the mind is not determined by the data it receives from the affecting object in intuition. Knowledge does not arise from the impact of the object on the mind, but only comes about when the mind of itself – that is, without being causally necessitated by the object – acts upon or determines the data it has received from sensibility and organises it into concepts.

In relation to the preceding discussion, we can identify the three-fold spontaneous contribution the mind makes to cognition of objects: (1) it applies pure concepts to objects, thereby making experience of them possible, (2) it synthesises identity in empirical concepts out of the manifold of intuitions, and (3) uses empirical concepts as discursive rules for judging possible and actual objects. In brief, it is the spontaneous (i.e. self-willed, self-initiated) action of the mind which in applying itself to objects (by judging in concepts) which makes the decisive contribution to cognition.

It should not be concluded from this that knowledge-generation is wholly reducible to the spontaneity of the understanding, for Kant. This would position Kant too close to the idea that the mind creates the objects of cognition – a form of idealism Kant rejected (but which neo-Kantians, such as Cohen, affirmed). Moreover, it would be to overlook Kant’s understanding of “sensibility” which affirms the givenness and affectivity of the object. In essence, then, knowledge requires the “joint contribution” of sensibility and the understanding. Knowledge is therefore necessarily an undivided two-fold act of intuition and conceiving, with priority accorded to the latter in virtue of its constitutive role in knowledge-acquisition;

If the receptivity of our mind, its power of receiving representations in so far as it is in any wise affected, is to be entitled sensibility, then the mind's power of producing representations from itself, the spontaneity of knowledge, should be called the understanding...To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind...These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions...Only through their union can knowledge arise.56

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56 A51 / B75.
3.4 Barth’s account of the structure of cognition in CD II/1

If there is any validity to the claim that Barth’s two bare-bones descriptions of the architecture of knowing are modelled in broad outline on Kant’s account of cognition as set out above, then clear parallels must be shown to exist in its constituent concepts. At the very least, one would expect Barth’s assumptions about knowing to be image-based and tied to talk of capacities, powers and faculties. In particular, I judge that Barth’s descriptions should exhibit the following key characteristics of Kant’s account. At the very least it must reflect Kant’s intuition/concept split. That is, 1) the act of knowing must involve the reception of images in sense-perception, and 2) the activity of the mind in organising the data of experience under concepts in which the object is known. Barth is therefore demonstrably committed to epistemic spontaneity if he affirms that knowledge is decisively constituted by the mind’s acting on the object, or rather, on the data of experience.

It is Graham Ward’s contention that Barth affirms the spontaneity of knowing along Kantian lines in CD II/1. In this section I therefore examine Barth’s assumptions about cognition in that volume – this is the first of two skeleton descriptions offered by Barth. To be sure, it is scattered throughout paragraph 27 and is lightly touched on within the broader discussion of how the hiddenness of God impacts cognition positively and negatively.57

My strategy is to use Ward’s account as the basis for the analysis, for he introduces the basic concepts that we will have to provide conceptual warrant for in order to validate the thesis that Barth endorses epistemic spontaneity in CD II/1. The analysis itself involves establishing that Barth uses Kantian language to describe human knowing. I then showcase the evidence that suggests that the content of those concepts has strong affinities with Kant’s notions of “empirical intuition” and “conceiving”. In sum, it will come to view that, in CD II/1, Barth’s assumptions about knowing are Kantian insofar as he conceives of it as involving both intuition and concepts. It involves a receptive act of sense-perception and a spontaneous act of thought by which data is organised into concepts. It is the latter element that makes the decisive contribution to cognition, for Barth.

57 There is no need to explore that context here, since questions about the limits and role of human knowing within Barth’s broader theological epistemology are discussed in chapter 6.
3.4.1 Graham Ward on Barth’s “Analysis of Cognition”

It is only Graham Ward who has acknowledged and described the influence of Kant’s theoretical philosophy on Barth’s conception of human cognition as presented in CD II/1. In his book, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* Ward attempts to get at the philosophical problematic he sees as implicit in Barth’s conception of language, namely, what conditions the possibility of language, and of speaking about God in particular. As part of that broader aim, he turns in chapter 1 to consider the linkage in Barth’s thought between human cognition and language as expressed in the Basler’s doctrine of revelation. Revelation, he writes summarising Barth’s position, necessarily involves a two-fold “telling”: we first tell God’s Word to ourselves via the process of human knowing and subsequently tell it to others in language. Language’s *subsequence* to knowing is a point not lost on Ward. Indeed, what he calls Barth’s “analysis of cognition” becomes the very site from which he extracts crucial information about how language functions in Barth’s theology. It is that site I now intend to excavate with the aim of laying the ground for the comparative analysis to come in the next section.

Ward has it that in *CD II/1* Barth offers a coarse-grain account of human cognition. This amounts to a “general theory of knowledge”, insofar as it reveals how Barth thinks “natural man” (as distinct from “real man”) comes to know things in his fallen state. Moreover, he insists that Barth’s rough epistemology of the human subject is a thoroughly modern option, hewn as it is from the edifice of Kant’s transcendental idealism. He writes;

> Barth’s account of the ‘general theory of knowledge’, as detailed in chapter 5, is Kantian to the extent that it endorses the constitutive nature of the subjective consciousness.

As far as Ward is concerned, it would seem that it is the subjective consciousness or the spontaneity of mind that plays a key role in establishing or constituting knowledge of objects, for Barth. Now although Ward does not cite those places

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60 I set aside questions of language on the grounds that Ward reads Barth as saying that although human knowing and language are interconnected, they are, to quote, “separate activities”. Ward’s analysis of cognition therefore admits of independent treatment.
where such an idea is evident in Barth’s account, he moves swiftly to clarify the
constitutive role Barth thinks the mind plays. He says;

> Our knowledge of ourselves and our world is conditioned by transcendental
> a priori which govern and constitute what we perceive and how we
> understand that perception. Our knowledge is mediated. Barth’s
> *natürlich*er *Mensch* is founded upon a Kantian anthropology.  

In talking of “transcendental a priori” Ward is suggesting that Barth endorses an idea
central to Kantian epistemology: that our experience and knowledge of objects is
determined by the mind (which possesses and applies pure intuitions and concepts).
According to Ward, Barth’s epistemology is thus “transcendental” in the sense that
the possibility of experience lies not in the independently existing object, but in a
priori mental conditions to which objects must conform in order to be known.  

Ward goes on to contend that the corollary of Barth’s subscription to a Kantian
transcendental epistemology of the creature is that human knowledge is necessarily
mediated to us by images – by “views” (*Anschauungen*) and “concepts” (*Begriffe*).
Human knowing is *representational* or image-based in virtue of the fact we know the
object only as it appears by means of those conditions. Moreover, those images tell
us something about the structure of knowing Barth supposedly presupposes: these
images are generated for Barth by the successive acts of “perception” (*Anschauen*)
and “conception” (*Begreifen*) that make up human cognition – though again he offers
little textual support for this point.  

Nevertheless, he avers that it is the structure of
human cognition as Barth envisages it that makes knowledge mediatorial on account
of the fact it supposedly “operates with and upon” images.  

If correct, this would
position Barth close to Kant on the a priori structure of cognition.

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63 Kant defined transcendental as follows, “I entitle transcendental all knowledge which is occupied
not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of
knowledge is possible a priori”. (A 12)
65 Ward, *Derrida and the Language of Theology*, 16, 29. It should, however, be noted that the
language of *mediate knowing* here employed by Ward differs from the theological meaning Barth
imputes it with. Ward simply uses it in a Kantian manner to signify that, for Barth, the mind has no
direct access to the object – or properly, that direct access to the object in sense-perception does not
amount to knowledge). Barth also deploys the term *mediate* to describe the self-authenticating and
sovereign character of God’s self-revelation: knowledge of God does not arise by virtue of some
direct epistemological access human enjoy to a static, given object called God, but is given in
encounter with God who actively gives himself to be known in creaturely form (i.e. through a
creaturely medium of his choosing) without ever being reducible to that form or wholly mastered
and comprehended in it.
Now, as Ward sees it, the upshot of Barth’s holding to a Kantian model of cognition as outlined above is that Barth is beholden to Kant’s famous split between the object as it is “in itself” and as it “appears” to the human subject.66 This is the inevitable consequence of the fact that if the object of cognition is constituted by the mind, then there is no way to know what the object is in itself apart from how it appears to us in sensory and conceptual representations. In essence, this is to say that for Barth, just as for Kant, there exists an epistemic cleft between the object and the knowing subject. Representations are designed to bridge this gap. However, the gap is unbridgeable in Ward’s view because there is an additional gap latent in the structure of human cognition, between the acts of “perception” and “conception”;

"There is always a temporal gap between perception and conception. So our knowledge is never complete knowledge of what is, of the ‘thing in itself’, only of what is constituted in recollection."67

Humans therefore remain divorced from the object of cognition in virtue of the divided structure of knowing. In consequence, knowledge of what the object is “in itself” (i.e., apart from how it is represented to the mind in concepts) is impossible. This is to say that human cognition is impacted by sin such that it does not grasp the object as is it really is, according to Ward.

In this section I have described the salient features of Barth’s ‘account’ of human cognition as outlined by Ward. If correct, then Barth affirms the spontaneity of human cognition insofar as it is the mind that constitutes knowledge of objects. Curiously enough, however, Ward does not clearly show how his claims can be traced back to chapter 5 of CD II/1 from which he says they derive. Even if this is because he simply supposes Barth’s Kantianism on this point to be self-evident, this leaves open the question as to whether the passages under discussion legitimate such a reading. Is this what Barth really has to say about the architecture of cognition? Does he really endorse a model of knowing in which the mind conditions and establishes knowledge of objects? That is what the following analysis shall uncover – and in doing so it will provide the textual warrant for Ward’s reading of Barth. I shall return to reappraise Ward’s reading of the architecture of human knowing as Barth thinks of it in the conclusion to this chapter.

67 Ward, Derrida and the Language of Theology, 23.
3.4.2 Barth’s use of Kantian language in CD II/1

My aim in this section is simply to provide warrant for the assertion that Barth’s assumptions about knowing are Kantian in character. I point to the fact that Barth uses Kantian language to describe the architecture of cognition. In subsequent sections, I compare the content of those concepts with their counterparts in Kant’s account of knowing and highlight the parallels between them.

The particular language Barth uses to describe the architecture of cognition betrays the influence of Kant. This is most evident from his claim that the act of knowing is one of “perceptible-conceptual cognition” (“anschaulich-begriffliches Erkennen”). 68 Granted that “perceptible” appears to be an error in translation, with “perceptual” being the most likely word intended, it is clear that Barth thinks the act of knowing has two elements or moments. As we shall shortly see, knowing for Barth is first an act of Anschauen, which has been translated as “perception” or “viewing”. The second act is one of Begreifen, which is rendered as “conception” or “conceiving”.

On occasion, Barth uses “wahrnehmen und denken” as an equivalent phrase for “anschauen und begreifen”. 69 In the broadest of terms, and as should be clear from foregoing discussion, Kant similarly envisages knowing to involve Anschauen (which can be understood as the ‘act of intuiting’, of representing a particular) and Begreifen (“conceiving” or “thinking”, the ‘act of comprehending an object in a concept’).

Be that as it may, these conjoined acts produce “knowledge” (die Erkenntnis) in the form of images (die Bilder) of which there are two distinct species, for Barth: “views” (die Anschauungen, which are produced by the act of Anschauen or Wahrnehmen) and “concepts” (die Begriffe, which are produced by the act of Begreifen). 70 Moreover, he claims that it is in such views and concepts that our knowledge of objects is fulfilled, that is to say, is made real. 71 Without those

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68 CD II/1, 201 = 226.
69 There is an occasional lack of consistency in the terms used to describe the composite acts in English. In CD II/1, page 26 (= 27), for instance, “considering and conceiving” is read for “anschauen und begreifen” when in most other places it is translated as “viewing and conceiving” or “viewing and conception”.
70 CD II/1, 208 = 234; 211 = 237; 224 = 252; 227 = 256; 243 = 275.
71 “But human cognition is fulfilled in views and concepts...If men can speak of God in human words – and this is the presupposition we have to examine – it is obvious that they can first view and conceive (i.e. perceive and think) God. If this is not so, they do not know Him.” (CD II/1 181 = 203)
representations knowledge would not occur. This again has parallels with Kant, who uses the terms *Anschauung* and *Begriff* to specify the outputs of the acts of knowing. Such “intuitions” and “concepts” are likewise representations for Kant and are the necessary conditions of knowledge of an object, as we have seen.

3.4.3 The two-fold cognitive act

The following analysis shall demonstrate that the parallels between Barth and Kant extend beyond a formal linguistic approximation of terms that may or may not be incidental. My contention is that this parallelism holds between the content of the concepts, too, insofar as the thought-forms in which Barth *thinks* the structure of human knowing are Kantian in character. I begin by comparing what Barth has to say about *Anschauen* with Kant’s conception of “empirical intuition”, before considering whether there are parallels in their respective ‘accounts’ of how knowledge comes about in concepts.

3.4.3.1 Barth on “viewing”

Views are the images in which we perceive objects as such.\(^\text{72}\)

> Anschauungen sind die Bilder, in denen wir Gegenstände als solche wahrnehmen.

Perception (*Wahrnehmung*) appears to be the first act involved in knowledge-generation insofar as he contrasts it with the conception in which these views are appropriated. To get a handle on what Barth assumes about this first act, let us break this clause down into its component parts. Barth here uses the verb *wahrnehmen* for “perception”, which immediately suggests that this act utilises the sense organs.

Barth affirms that viewing is an act of sense-perception in writing;

> We are not capable of conceiving God...this means, with a backward reference so to speak, in respect of the views to which our concepts must be related, that no man has ever *seen* God.\(^\text{73}\) (italics mine)

An object is therefore “perceived” or “viewed” through the senses. This rudimentary acknowledgement does not exhaust Barth’s understanding of perception, however. Indeed, he goes on to say that;

\(^{\text{72}} CD\ II/1 181 = 203.\)

\(^{\text{73}} CD\ II/1, 190.\) This is also affirmed in Barth’s second skeleton account of cognition. See section 3.5 below.
In the act of the knowledge of God, as in any other cognitive act, we are definitely active as receivers of images...\textsuperscript{74}

Understood thus, perception appears to be a \textit{passive} act in which we become aware of objects through the work of the senses: perception involves the \textit{reception} of images. That such reception does take place and continues to take place presupposes that such objects impact or give themselves to the mind through the senses. That is to say, in order for the creature to receive an image of an object, the object must be given, i.e. proximally present to the mind.

Just because perception involves reception does not make it a passive affair, for Barth. That Barth should describe humans as \textit{active} as receivers (italics mine) conversely suggests that he thinks the mind is \textit{capable} of receiving images of objects. Nevertheless, he makes no guess at what such a capacity might look like. Be that as it may, the important point is that Barth assumes perception to be an \textit{act} of the human subject in that it makes use of some capacity to receive images of an object of which we are aware through the senses.

Another key assumption of Barth’s evident from the above quotation is that \textit{images} (\textit{die Bilder}) are generated through sensory encounter with objects. Their translation into English as “views” suggests that Barth wants us to think of them as the broad perspective one may have of an object, much in the same way that one can have a broad view of an issue without acquaintance with the details. This, however, is an inaccurate rendering because it belies the technical sense in which Barth explicitly deploys the term \textit{Anschauung} in this context. Barth imputes to “views” or “images of perception” the function of being the particular images \textit{in which} we “perceive” objects – and in doing so comes close to Kant, as we shall later see. Perception of an object must therefore occur in those images. Consequently, the data of cognition is necessarily \textit{representational}. \textit{Anschauungen} are thus the images in which the creature has direct acquaintance with the object through sense-awareness – they offer unmediated access to the object. In Barth’s use of it then, perception (\textit{Anschauen}) can refer to the act of perceiving or the images in which such perception results.

\textbf{3.4.3.2 Points of agreement with Kant}

Now the foregoing analysis shows that there are points at which the little Barth has to say about “viewing” dovetails with Kant’s account of perception. In the first place,

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{CD} II/1, 182.
Barth’s conception of an *Anschauung* as a representation models Kant’s understanding of the term. And at the most basic level intuitions are, for both Barth and Kant, the images in which we perceive objects – both thinkers regard them as the means by which we represent and have access to objects.

That images are actively received, for Barth, indicates a similarity of deep structure insofar as it presupposes that such images are not simply generated by the mind, but arise through encounter with an object. This suggests two further points of concurrence. Firstly, it presupposes that for both thinkers there exists a *capacity* for such active reception; Kant sources this act to the operation of sensibility, whereas Barth leaves it undeveloped. Secondly, it assumes – indeed requires – that the object is given to the mind and that it affects the mind in some way. The reception of images in which we view an object supposes the activity of the object on the mind. It stands to reason that there can be no reception or mental representation of something that has no objective presence to the mind or of which we are not conscious.

At bottom, then, it appears that Barth’s assumptions about perception broadly accords with empirical intuition. Nevertheless, there are major points of disparity that should not be overlooked in any study that wishes to show that Barth was critical in his appropriation of Kant. Barth makes no mention of the pure forms of sensibility which is fundamental to understanding how empirical intuition – and experience of objects – occurs, for Kant. Nor is there evidence to show that he even presupposes it, at least from the analysis so far. Despite this, the act of *Anschauen* would have been better translated “intuition” rather than “viewing”, as this would have more accurately reflected Barth’s understanding of the concept. Likewise, *Anschauungen*, as the outputs of that act, would have been better translated as “intuitions” rather than “views”. From here on, I will not refer to “viewing” or “views”, but to “the act of intuition” and to “intuitions” or “images of perception”.

### 3.4.3.3 Barth on “conceiving”

Concepts are the counter-images with which we make these images of perception our own by thinking them, i.e. arranging them.\(^{75}\)

Begriffe sind die Gegenbilder, mit denen wir uns jene Wahrnehmungsbilder zu eigen machen, indem wir sie denken, d. h. indem wir sie ordnen.

\(^{75}\) *CD* II/1, 183 = 203.
From the above we might derive the basic elements of a doctrine of conceptualisation that closely models Kant’s. Indeed, the formation of concepts appears for Barth to be the second moment in the act of cognition which is made possible by the initial act of intuition insofar as it yields images of perception to the mind. Barth alludes to the necessary relation between intuitions and concepts in writing that;

We are not capable of conceiving God...this means, with a backward reference so to speak, in respect of the [intuitions] to which our concepts must be related, that no man has ever seen God. (italics mine)

Whilst intuitions do not appear to constitute knowledge for Barth, they seem to be indispensable to the production of concepts to the extent that concepts, as “counter-images”, seem to incorporate or make use of intuitions – “the intuitions to which our concepts must be related.” Moreover, this apparent subsumption in which we make “these images of perception our own” (zu eigen machen, to make one’s own) appears to be necessary insofar as it echoes Kant’s idea of self-ascription as described by Henry Allison: the process by which representations of an object must, in order to be known, be appropriated in their unity and attributable to a single thinking subject.

Now, in contrast to intuitions which are characterised by receptivity, “we are creators of counter-images”, Barth insists. Conception is thus a creative act of knowledge generation, it involves activity. More particularly, knowledge in the form of concepts seems to arise from the action of thought (der Gedank) which in some unspecified way “arranges” (ordnen) those intuitions into concepts. It is in thought that we think the object of our intuitions in a concept, and so make it our own, i.e. come to know it. Thus described, it appears that it is ultimately the activity of thought which is responsible for knowledge generation – the activity of the mind which arranges intuitions into concepts – rather than the sole action of the object on the mind which affects representations.

In broad overview, it looks as if conceptualisation, in contrast to perception which relied on a faculty of passive reception, relies on the activity of thought to generate concepts and thus knowledge of objects. Moreover, whilst intuitions do not appear to constitute knowledge for Barth, they seem to be indispensable to the production of

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76 CD II/1, 190.
78 CD II/1, 182.
concepts. This ‘second moment’ of cognition thus looks as though it is founded on the first insofar as it presupposes the prior availability of intuitions.

3.4.3.4 Points of agreement with Kant

Barth’s assumptions about the second element of the act of knowing bear interesting parallels with Kant’s understanding of conceiving.

Barth said that “concepts are the counter-images with which we make these images of perception our own by thinking them, i.e. arranging them”. From this we can now see that empirical concepts for both thinkers are composed of intuitions and that conceptualisation relies upon a prior act of perception, whose task is to make intuitions available for compiling into concepts. If such a position is really ascribable to Barth, then it is hard to see how he might escape the idea that knowledge is mediatorial in that knowing occurs in conceptual images.

Though Barth does not explicitly mention the existence of empirical intuition, his statement that concepts are composed of intuitions (Anschauungen) equates with that idea as Kant describes it. Moreover, like Kant, Barth seems to accept the primacy of thought as that faculty which gives rise to knowledge of objects in concepts. Both agree that the function of thought is to think the object in a concept (which is composed of intuitions or “images of perception”). Therefore, it is by the activity of thought that the object becomes known. The act of conceiving presupposes the availability of intuitions and the capacity for receiving them. Without images of perception there would be nothing for thought to think in concepts.

Whatever the parallels, one must also point out that Barth’s understanding of the second moment of perception, like the first, does not reflect a thorough-going commitment to Kant’s epistemology of the subject. It only models conceiving in broad outline, with many points of departure. Indeed, in contrast to Kant's elaboration of a very complex process of knowledge generation by a synthesis of representations according to pure concepts, Barth does not engage with the process by which intuitions are turned into concepts apart from to say they are arranged by thought. Moreover, no explicit reference is made to the work of the pure concepts of the understanding which condition all experience. Neither does Barth suppose Kant’s model of the cognitive subject: the doctrine of transcendental apperception which is the condition for thinking the object in its unity, for Kant, is nowhere alluded to.
3.4.4 Epistemic Spontaneity in CD II/1

These important points of divergence do not entail that Barth does not follow Kant in the chief aspects though, or that he does not affirm the spontaneity of knowing. Barth asserts that thought “arranges” (ordnen) intuitions, and the question is whether this should be taken as a direct allusion to the work of the pure concepts (which give shape to sensible experience) or empirical concepts (by which the identity of an object (as represented in its unity) is judged) in the process of cognition. However that be determined, Barth's attributing to thought an arranging function invariably positions him close to Kant, who argued that the spontaneity of cognition resides in the function of the understanding.79 The understanding is the faculty by which the mind acts to arrange sense-data into concepts in which the object can be thought. This has clear parallels with Barth’s notion of “thought”, which likewise acts to arrange sensory representations into concepts.

Yet in what sense is the organisational activity of thought spontaneous, for Barth? The key to an answer appears in recalling that we have knowledge of objects in concepts. Whilst the receptivity of intuitions is certainly presupposed by Barth as an important ingredient of the cognitive process, it only offers up the data for thought to act on, and therefore intuitions do not themselves constitute knowledge. The act of the object on the mind is not what constitutes knowledge, for Barth; in order to “belong to me” both thinkers accept that an object (as presented in those intuitions) must be thought in a concept. The knower must therefore have a degree of autonomy in relation to the object of cognition. What grants it this is in Barth and Kant’s eyes is the fact that knowledge arises from the self-initiated activity of thought which organises the data of experience into concepts. Such activity is self-initiated or ‘undetermined’ in the sense that, for Barth, just as for Kant, it occurs independently of the causality of the object on the mind.

In setting Barth's comments on the structure of human knowing in CD II/1 alongside Kant's account of intuition and conceiving, it is evident that there are clear and strong linguistic and conceptual parallels between them, as well as important points of divergence. What we have learned so far is that Barth assumes some of the key features of Kant’s account. Indeed for Barth, just as for Kant, human cognition involves intuitions and concepts. The act of knowing has two inseparable moments or processes: (a) sensible intuition – the reception of representations (intuitions) from

79 See section 3.3.3 above.
given object, and (b) the ‘undetermined’ activity of the mind in thinking the object in its unity in concepts. As such, Barth’s comments on the architecture of knowing in this volume indicate that he accepts the spontaneity of the mind as that which conditions knowledge of objects.

3.5 Testing the resilience of the ‘spontaneity thesis’: cognition in CD III/2

I now want to test whether Barth’s broad endorsement of epistemic spontaneity along Kantian lines is his characteristic position in the *Church Dogmatics*. Pointers toward an affirmative answer appear in attending to the second of Barth’s skeleton descriptions of the architecture of cognition. Barth turns to discuss the act of knowing in a little discussed passage in his theological anthropology. Whilst we had occasion to touch on this in the previous chapter in connection with the exposition of the significance of human cognition as a component of human creaturehood, a fuller examination of the objective structure of human knowing as Barth there presents it is warranted for the purpose of validating the claim that Barth characteristically endorses epistemic spontaneity when attending to the architecture of cognition.

The key difference between the two ‘accounts’ is that whereas in *CD II/1* Barth approached the subject within a discussion of the limits of human knowing as established by the hiddenness of God, Barth now attends to it as part of his exposition of how “perception” (i.e. knowing, cognition; *Vernehmen*) and “activity” are presuppositions of the creature’s encounter with God. As such, Barth is here describing the structure of knowing that is proper to “real man”, that is, man in covenant with God. He therefore describes the act of knowing as God created it, and not in its distortion by sin.

Examination of that structure will reveal that although Barth here disposes with the philosophical language of intuition and concept, he retains the distinction it represents. Just as in *CD II/1*, Barth affirms that knowing is a compound act in this passage. It involves both sense-perception or awareness, and an act of thought. It is by awareness that “real man” becomes aware of entities to which he is proximally related, and it is by an act of thought that what is given to awareness becomes known. A description of these elements will show that they model the account of *CD*

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80 The language used in this passage was discussed in section 2.3.1.1 above.
II/1 and so corroborate its main outcomes – as such it appears to be his characteristic position on the subject.

3.5.1 “Awareness”

Without having some command and making some use of them [my corporeal senses], I cannot be aware of objects different from myself. And without being aware of objects different from myself, I cannot distinguish myself from others as the object identical with myself, and cannot therefore recognise myself as a subject. 81

Sense perception is a crucial ingredient in the knowing of self and others. The act of “awareness” is important because without it, Barth comments, we would have no way of knowing other entities to which we are proximally related. It is through the senses that such entities “approach” the creature. Perception, here in the narrow meaning of sense-perception, is the means by which entities are “received” and “accepted”. Barth puts it this way;

In this act, the other which I perceive comes to me in order that it may then and on this basis come into me. The soul has awareness, but this is possible only in so far as it has in the body its outer form and is thus open to the other of which it is aware. Body is the openness of soul. Body is the capacity in man in virtue of which another can come to him and be for him.82

Yet however important sense-perception is, it does not result in knowledge of entities. In order for the object to be known, Barth deems that the act of sense-perception be supplemented with an act of thought;

Neither is it [“perception”] a pure act of awareness, for when I am merely aware of something and do not think it, it remains external to me and is not received into my self-consciousness. 83

3.5.2 “Thought”

Thought, Barth writes, is the “inward act” of perception. It is what takes place after the act of sense-perception in which the creature becomes aware of objects in its purview. Barth describes the role of thought in relation to awareness in the following terms;

When I think, the other which I perceive [vernehmen] comes into me, after it has come to me.84

81 CD III/2, 375 = 451.
82 CD III/2, 401 = 481.
83 CD III/2, 400 = 479.
And again;

In thought he [man] brings it about that what comes into his consciousness is received there as his self-consciousness, is posited [gesetzt] by this as real, is recognised by another, and is understood in its relation to him.\(^{85}\)

Evidently, for the creature to know another it must use the capacity of thought to think what is received in awareness. In thinking it the object is “posited…as real”. Indeed, Barth goes on to say that without the act of thought, knowing (Vernehmen) could not take place, for if knowing were a pure act of sense perception, i.e. if the creature were not to “think” the object, that object would “remain external to me” and to my self-consciousness. Evidently, the significance of the act of thought is that it gives the creature a way of ascribing to itself as subject the object with which it is acquainted through sense perception. Such epistemic ‘self-ascription’ involves “making another his own”. For Barth, this takes the form of “rationalising” and “recognising” the object given in awareness by means of thought.\(^{86}\) Barth does not elaborate in this passage on what such rationalisation entails. Nevertheless, he writes that “rationalising” is “decisive” (entscheidend) insofar as it rationalises what it receives of the object through the senses in a way such that the object becomes known.\(^{87}\)

3.5.3 Epistemic spontaneity in CD III/2

We can pinpoint the spontaneity Barth attributes to the knowing of “real man” by considering both moments of cognition in their connection. From the above description it is quite clear that thought and awareness are mutually necessitating acts in the same way intuition and conceiving are. Both must co-operate if knowing is to take place; without one or the other cognition would not occur and knowledge of objects would not be possible. Knowing therefore occurs as a unified act.\(^{88}\) Without the capacity of awareness there could be no cognitive encounter with other objects;

\(^{84}\) CD III/2, 401 = 481.
\(^{85}\) CD III/2, 401 = 480-1.
\(^{86}\) CD III/2, 404 = 484-5.
\(^{87}\) CD III/2, 404 = 484. Given that knowledge seems to be constituted by the activity of thought, one cannot help but wonder whether the English rendering of aufnehmen as “receive” is ill-fitted to the point Barth is trying to make. In contrast, “incorporate” or “assimilate” would have better conveyed the sense that knowing is not passive but an act of the human subject, an act of thought.

\(^{88}\) “Neither aspect [awareness and thought] may be lacking. In neither by itself would he [man] be a rational nature [vernünftige Natur]. Neither permits replacement by the other. Neither can be interchanged with the other, though each takes place with the other as a single differentiated but not dissociated act.” (CD III/2, 404 = 484)
they would be unknown, for one cannot know what one is unaware of.\(^9\) This presupposes that for perception to take place objects must first be given to the mind, i.e. we must be conscious of their presence. But as we have just seen, perception requires more than mere awareness of objects, for to be aware is not yet to know. In order to know what is given in awareness, we must – in language reminiscent of CD II/1 – use the capacity of thought to think the object. Perception (Vernehmen) necessarily involves both awareness and thought, then, but it is the activity of thought by which knowledge is generated.

This insight echoes Barth’s insistence in CD II/1 that knowing results from the contribution of the mind which thinks the object in a concept. Knowledge is not then brought about by the object which encounters us in awareness, but results from the activity of thought which is capable of acting on what is given in experience by rationalising it – a process which is suggestive of the arranging function of thought – in a way such that the object becomes known. The spontaneity of cognition in CD III/2, just as in CD II/1, therefore lies in the active and decisive contribution thought makes to our knowledge of objects.

It is extremely important to note at this stage that although the grounds of such spontaneity lie within the structure of creaturely knowing, Barth insists that such spontaneity is rooted in the fact that the human person always acts as soul of its body. The possession of soul means that the creature is able to act independently of causes external to itself in its environment.\(^9\) In relation to cognition, thinking is an act of the soul. As such, thinking (which produces knowledge) occurs as an independent act, an act that is undetermined by the objects that are given in awareness. Knowing therefore, as decisively an act of soul, occurs as an independent act of an active subject. Barth writes that:

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\text{The soul is man’s self-consciousness taking place in the body. The soul is the capacity in virtue of which he can make another his own, in virtue of which the other can be not only for him but in him.}^9\]

Now, if we consider more carefully what Barth has to say about the structure of cognition in CD II/1 and III/2 we see that although he uses different terms to describe

\(^9\) "Without this ability [of perception, percipience], every appeal would obviously be without object,; and the meeting between God and man, as it took place in the history of the covenant, would obviously be impossible.” (CD III/2, 399).

\(^9\) CD III/2, 374.

\(^9\) CD III/2, 401-2 = 481.
the compound act – “intuition and conception” in the former, “awareness and thought” in the latter – there is no essential change in his conceptualisation of cognition from one account to the other. For in both instances Barth assumes Kant’s intuition/concept split. This is to say that in a clear echo of Kant's dictum that “thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”, he conceives in necessary terms the relationship between an ostensibly receptive faculty of awareness and an active faculty of thought by which objects are known.

Barth thus subscribes to the two necessary conditions of knowledge posited by Kant: intuitions and concepts. More importantly for this study, both descriptions have shown that Barth affirms the spontaneity of thought, and this would therefore seem to typically characterise his understanding of the architecture of knowing. To reiterate, the idea here is that the mind's ability to act undetermined by the object which affects us in awareness. The mind does this when it acts on – i.e. arranges or rationalises – what is given in awareness such that the object is thought and so known. It is the spontaneity of thought which conditions our knowledge of objects, rather than being caused by the affecting object.

3.6 Critical appraisal of Ward’s account

I now turn to reappraise Graham Ward’s reading in light of the findings of this analysis. Ward assumes that Barth operates with a Kantian epistemology of the subject and that he endorses the idea that knowledge is the result of the spontaneous activity of the mind which constitutes knowledge of objects by virtue of the transcendental a priori that condition experience. However, I could not assume the validity of Ward’s reading because he fails to supply adequate warrant from the *Church Dogmatics* in support of it. But now that the analysis has repaired that particular lacuna, where does this leave Ward’s account?

In the first place, the analysis shows that Ward correctly detects the influence of Kant on Barth’s understanding of the contours of cognition in *CD II/1*. He successfully identifies how knowing involves successive acts of “perception” (*Anschauen*) and “conception” (*Begreifen*) and that these acts produce images or representations. We further saw from the analysis that these images mediate knowledge for both Barth and Kant such that Ward is justified in asserting that, in consequence, knowledge for Barth must always be of the object as it appears to the mind. Most importantly, the analysis corroborates his contention that the spontaneity of mind establishes
knowledge of objects. For although Ward’s claim that Barth’s epistemology operates with transcendental a priori perhaps overstates the Basler’s commitment to Kant on this point, it is nonetheless true that Barth ascribes to thought an arranging function; cognition is not determined by the action of the affecting object on the mind. This again finds expression in Ward’s account: the mind “operates with and upon” images.

Ward has clearly captured the distinctively Kantian thought-forms that suffuse Barth’s light description of the architecture of cognition in CD II/1 – and also in CD III/2, for that matter! And to that extent, my analysis provides justification for what is in fact a highly instructive and erudite exposition of Barth’s thinking on this point. Crucially, however, the analysis also throws up major points of disparity between Ward’s description and Barth’s own understanding that cannot be ignored. The problem lies in Ward’s presentation of Barth as a theologian who is basically indebted to Kant and thus philosophy for the substructure of his theological epistemology. This is to say that he fails to attend to the background theological concerns and commitments (that were assumed as the context for this chapter) which condition Barth’s construal of cognition along Kantian lines. This creates problems for Ward’s reading that I outline in the remainder of this section.

Ward suggests that Barth thinks the Kantian model of cognition is appropriate to natürlicher Mensch, by which he means the human creature as affected by sin. His rationale for this assertion rests in his evaluation of its structure, which he says contains a temporal gap between the act of perceiving and conception such that under sin the creature can never have knowledge of objects as they are in themselves. Human knowing is thus divided on account of sin. Only the analogia fidei liberates the creature from the limits of knowing, he claims. It does the work human cognition cannot do. It ensures certain and true knowing of God by bringing our representational images into correspondence or analogy with what God reveals of himself such that the two moments of knowing are brought into alignment and the external gap is bridged between the knowing subject and God.

Yet, problems emerge for this reading in light of the preceding analysis. Firstly, in restricting his focus to CD II/1, Ward fails to appreciate that the Kantian model of knowing Barth affirms is actually proper to “real man”, i.e. the creature as created by God – as analysis of the account in CD III/2 revealed (section 3.5 above). An act of awareness and then – temporal gap presupposed – an act of thought is assumed by
God in his encounter with the creature. Work done in the previous chapter showed
that thus construed, the structure of knowing is established as necessary by God. In
consequence, the inability to know objects as they are in themselves but as they
appear to mind is not, as Ward would have it, the result of the impact of sin; it would
appear to be a limitation built into the divinely ordained structure of knowing, and
thus a limitation proper to human creaturehood.

Moreover, on account of Ward’s inattentiveness to how the structure of knowing is
established as necessary in view of its purpose, he misconstrues the epistemological
impact of sin. For Barth, sin does not destroy or damage the actual structure of
knowing such that it creates the general problem that we cannot know objects in
themselves, and therefore God in particular. The effects of sin are noetic and not
ontic: it causes us to think of our knowing apart from its original purpose such that
we distort our view of the act and so of the objects it apprehends. In other words, we
do not properly know objects in general because we evade knowing God in
particular. In the event of faith what happens is that God overcomes the barrier of sin
by redirecting our cognition to him as its proper object. God also overcomes the
creaturely limitation to our knowing by the mode of this redirection: by effecting a
correspondence between our intuitions, concepts (and words) such that true and
certain knowledge of God is possible.

In sum, Ward’s inattentiveness to these points is what leads him to mistakenly assert
that the problem Barth’s epistemology tries to overcome is the structural limitation
inherent in our knowing on account of sin – a limitation which prevents the creature
from knowing objects as they are “in themselves”. In considering the structure of
knowing apart from the theological commitments that condition it, the result is that
Barth’s Kantian conception of the architecture of cognition and its problems is forced
into the foreground as the basic issue the Basler’s theological epistemology
addresses. As such, Barth’s theological epistemology appears to be determined by
anthropological presuppositions insofar as Ward presents it as a construct shaped by
an awareness of the limits of human knowing – how is knowledge of objects in
themselves possible given the representational nature of our knowing? – and
anxieties about how these can be overcome by a God who wills to be known by the
creature.

The net effect of this is that Ward’s reading of Barth on cognition, however correct
in essentials, is ultimately problematised by his failure to appreciate the distinctively
theological considerations that qualify Barth’s understanding of the structure of cognition vis-à-vis his theological epistemology.

3.7 Conclusion: the significance of epistemic spontaneity in Barth’s theology

Over against the idea that Barth had little to say about the structure of cognition, my research has shown that Barth was more interested and engaged with that subject that has been supposed. His engagement with human knowing is not simply restricted to the broad aspect of its significance; his understanding of the architecture of cognition is also a definite and distinctive contour of human knowing in his theology.

I have showcased evidence that suggests Barth endorses a Kantian model of human knowing, and that insofar as he does that, affirms knowing to be a spontaneous act. To establish this, I set Barth's two skeleton descriptions of the architecture of cognition (in CD II/1 and III/2) alongside Kant's account as presented in the Critique of Pure Reason. This revealed that Barth follows the broad outlines of Kant’s account insofar as the generation of knowledge requires the reception of objects in sense-perception and a spontaneous act of the mind in thinking the object in a concept. Whatever the language used, it is the spontaneous activity of the mind that makes the decisive contribution to our cognition of objects, for both thinkers. This appears to be Barth’s typical position on the topic in the Church Dogmatics since it characterises his understanding of the architecture of knowing in both places where it comes clearly into view. This is reinforced by the fact that Barth thinks the structure of knowing persists intact despite sin, something that came to light in section 2.3.1.4 above.

Moreover, the comparative analysis clearly corroborated aspects of Ward’s reading of Barth on the subject. Indeed, it places his account on a sounder footing by further developing the grounds on which his claims rest. It also offered grounds of critique: Ward’s account suffers from his failure to note the distinctly theological elements that condition Barth’s description of the act of cognition, and therefore his acceptance of Kantian thought-forms – a failure that is perhaps entailed by his wider attempt to show that Barth’s theology is at bottom an attempt to resolve philosophical problematics of language and cognition.\(^\text{92}\) As I noted in the

\(^{92}\) See Thesis Introduction, n.36.
This theological condition is that cognition is determined to be a bi-partite and spontaneous act by God, who wills the creature to not merely sense him, but to know him in an act of thought. This is crucial to note in articulating Barth’s conception of the architecture of cognition.

Far from being an obscure point of little relevance to the broader flow of his theology, however, this contour of creaturely cognition is actually highly-significant. Indeed, Barth’s endorsement of the idea that the creature is autonomous with respect to the objects of cognition – on account of the fact knowing requires a self-initiated act of thought – raises questions about the place knowing receives in other aspects of his theology. In particular, the affirmation of epistemic spontaneity will cause us to reassess the role of knowing in (1) Barth’s theological epistemology, and (2) in his account of human selfhood. By way of conclusion, I outline some of the questions that fall under each of these areas.

(1) If epistemic spontaneity is characteristic of Barth’s understanding of the act of knowing as created by God, then it follows that the creature is created in a way such that it determines and controls its experience of objects in virtue of the spontaneous activity of the mind on the object. How does this cohere with Barth’s understanding of God as an object that cannot be controlled in the event of knowing? Does Barth have to deny the creaturely integrity of knowing as a spontaneous act in the event of the knowledge of God, or does he find a way to maintain the two assertions without contradiction? Moreover, can knowledge of God really involve “perception” in the sense described above as intuition of an object through the senses? How appropriate is such language given Barth’s insistence that God is invisible and hidden? Questions of whether Barth carries through his broad commitment to a Kantian model of knowing to his theological epistemology – and also to his understanding of ‘intra-worldly’ knowing – are discussed in chapter 5 and 6.

(2) An additional set of question arises around the issue of how epistemic spontaneity links up with his wider conception of human selfhood. Barth has shown how knowing is spontaneous in virtue of its structure – that the creature enjoys a degree of autonomy with respect to the objects of cognition – but is epistemic spontaneity consistent with Barth’s broader view of the self? Does he restrict spontaneity to the act of knowing, or is this type of autonomy sourced somewhere deeper in his understanding of human subjectivity and freedom? These questions are discussed in the following chapter.
4. Knowing and selfhood in Barth and Kant: epistemic spontaneity as a modulation of human freedom

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I established that human knowing is spontaneous for Barth on theological grounds in virtue of its divinely-ordained architecture. The purpose of the current chapter is to highlight the seriousness and extent of Barth’s commitment to knowing as a spontaneous act by showing how his understanding of that act is integrated within and predicated upon his broader theological conception of human subjectivity and freedom. Reduced to essentials, my argument is that Barth’s affirmation of epistemic spontaneity – the idea that the creature actively and autonomously determines the object of cognition – is rooted in his theological conviction that spontaneity itself is intrinsic to the type of freedom the creature is created for, insofar as he explicitly states that its calling to act in line with the command of God includes the ability to act independently of the causality of nature. Thus understood, human knowing (and willing, for that matter) functions as a modulation of human freedom in virtue of its spontaneity.\(^1\) The purpose of such spontaneity is to allow the creature to act autonomously of the objects of cognition and volition so that it can know and serve God.

\(^1\) In conceiving of epistemic spontaneity as a modulation of freedom, I am not reducing Barth’s concept of human freedom to spontaneity. Human freedom is a rich and nuanced concept for Barth, and a full account of it would require, at the very least, attention to (1) the complexities of how divine freedom conditions and determines the creature to be a ‘self-determining’ subject, (2) how genuine freedom as God’s covenant partner is not a potentiality of human being, but is grounded and actualised in the obedient response to God’s grace in willing the good, (3) freedom in limitation, and (4) how freedom is freedom from sin. On these topics consult, for instance, A. Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action: Towards an Ethical Ontology in the Early Theology of Karl Barth*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), ch.5 (esp. 275ff), J. Webster, “Freedom in Limitation: Human Freedom and False Necessity in Barth” in *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 99-125).

Nevertheless, spontaneity for Barth amounts to an ‘Independence Condition’ of sorts, and the question is whether he thinks such independence from natural necessity is a creaturely condition that makes possible the freedom of obedience (as its external basis), or whether it is a condition that is intrinsic to that concept. The latter option best fits Barth’s position. Spontaneity is not an independent necessary condition of human freedom; as if Barth’s account of human subjectivity and freedom pivots on a modern philosophical notion of independence. Rather, spontaneity is proper to human being in virtue of the creature’s calling to realise the divine gift of freedom in its life. As I shall describe in section 4.3.2 below, independence from natural necessity (spontaneity) is a function of human freedom narrowly defined by Barth as the call to service in obedient action. Within that frame of reference, epistemic spontaneity, which amounts to the freedom of the human subject from the object of cognition, comes to view as a mode of the human freedom from nature, and so of its freedom for obediential service.
In essence, the exposition of this contour of creaturely cognition amounts to a
description of the position knowing receives within Barth’s conception of selfhood,
i.e. in terms of his notions of subjectivity and freedom.

I harness passages from *CD* III/2, III/3, IV/1 and IV/2 to make the point that Barth’s
endorsement of knowing as a spontaneous act stems from his theological conceptions
of human subjectivity and freedom. I first consider his contention that creaturely
subjectivity involves the ability to act independently of natural necessity because it
possesses soul. According to Barth, such spontaneity operates as a function of human
freedom in enabling the creature to determine its actions in accordance with the
command of God. Yet his commitment to spontaneity as the creature’s freedom for
independent action over against the causality of nature is not rhetorical; for as we
shall see, it marks his understanding of the rational order of the human constitution
and is clearly inflected in his understanding of both its components: knowing and
willing are analogous to one another because in both cases the mind is not causally
determined by but acts independently of the object which affects it in desires and
intuitions. The presence of this analogy shows that epistemic spontaneity is rooted in
and is a modulation of the freedom that to which the creature is called by God.

Yet Barth’s use of Kant’s notion of spontaneity not just to characterise knowing, but
as part of his conception of freedom, suggests that human freedom is itself shot-
through with modern, philosophical thought-forms – even if it is by no means
reducible to them (see note 1 above). A supplementary task of the chapter is to show
that despite clear differences between their projects, Barth’s conception of epistemic
spontaneity as a modulation of human freedom has demonstrable parallels with Kant.
Both thinkers construe spontaneity as the freedom for self-initiated action over
against natural necessity and argue that such spontaneity is inflected in the act of
knowing and willing, thereby rendering knowing a modulation of that freedom. To
draw out these parallels, I open the chapter with an outline of Kant’s understanding
of spontaneity and its modulations, and then discuss points of convergence and
divergence in the course of the analysis of Barth’s position.

Nevertheless, the idea that Barth follows Kant in conceiving of epistemic spontaneity
as a modulation of human freedom is highly controversial, not least because it sits
uneasily with aspects of John Webster’s pioneering account of human freedom in
Barth’s theology. Webster argues that freedom is remarkably “unmodern”, for Barth,
insofar as it does not consist in the creature’s self-sufficient independence from
external causality. His reading outright excludes the modernistic notion of spontaneity and so challenges my contention that spontaneity is native to Barth’s concept of freedom. To round off discussion, I will describe and assess Webster’s position, and argue that he overlooks the spontaneity in Barth’s understanding of human freedom because the broad concept of ‘modern freedom’ supposed in his analysis is unsuited to bringing out what Barth rejects and accepts in that concept. In addition, Webster’s account leads me to reiterate the point that although Barth may follow Kant in conceiving of knowing as a modulation of human freedom, he does so on theological grounds: Barth uses Kant’s notion of spontaneity because it helps him establish the creature as a free subject over against the causality of nature, and thus prevents it from being robbed of the free agency it is commanded to use in the service God on grounds internal to creation.

4.2 Kant on spontaneity and freedom

The complexities of Immanuel Kant’s understanding of human freedom in the critical period of his work cannot be encapsulated in a study of this brevity. I therefore narrow my focus to explicate the one concept in particular that Henry Allison, amongst others, believes is largely definitive of freedom for Kant – the concept of spontaneity. As Allison understands it, “spontaneity” is the general type of freedom Kant ascribes to the human subject insofar as it is capable of acting “of itself” independently of the causality of nature. This can be seen, he argues, in both domains of activity Kant deems constitutive of human selfhood: the theoretical domain, which concerns the use of reason in the knowledge of possible and actual objects (cognition), and the practical domain, which concerns the use of reason for ascertaining how one should act in relation to existing objects (willing). Indeed, spontaneity – as “the necessary idea of freedom” – is essential to our status as knowers and actors;

[The “critical”] Kant...insists, however, on both the possibility and necessity of thinking our freedom, understood as an absolute spontaneity. Freedom, so conceived, is a transcendental idea (a necessary idea of freedom), which is required for the thought of ourselves as cognizers and as agents.  

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My aim in what follows is to describe both forms of spontaneity in Kant’s thought and show how they are analogous to each other, in order to make the point that epistemic spontaneity is simply one inflection of the type “absolute spontaneity” or freedom the human subject possesses as a rational being.

4.2.1 Free will and rational agency in Kant
In Chapter 9 of his book, *Idealism and Freedom*, Henry Allison argues that spontaneity is the necessitating condition of our status as “rational agents” in Kant’s thought. He thinks it is the general type of freedom Kant ascribes to the will of rational beings, and as such, he deems it the basis for understanding what Kant has to say about the specific type of freedom that applies to moral action, “autonomy”. Leaving that issue to one side, what is essential to grasping Kant’s conception of freedom as spontaneity in its practical iteration, is Kant’s concept of rational agency and the attenuating notion of free will. A description of both these ideas forms the necessary background to the discussion of where Allison locates the act of spontaneity in the practical domain.

According to Kant’s classic account of rational agency as set out in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, “rational agents” are beings who will to act on the basis of rational norms they set for themselves and on a “reflective evaluation” of their given situation; they are thus able to act from duty as opposed to being determined by the object which affects us in desires, and can provide reasons for their actions.4 Intrinsic to this notion is the idea that the will of such agents is free. Kant’s negative definition of freedom runs thus;

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\text{Will is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and freedom would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes determining it, just as natural necessity is the property of the causality of all nonrational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes.} \]

As Kant defines it, the will is the “causality” – the ability to effect action – humans enjoy with respect to other objects.6 He contrasts it with the will of non-rational beings which is not free but is determined by natural necessity. The freedom of the

4 *Groundwork*, 4:412, 437; see also, 129, 133.
5 *Groundwork*, 4:446.
human will is important because it is essential to grasping Kant’s idea of practical spontaneity, so it also worth citing Henry Allison’s description of free will;

[T]his idea is that of an uncaused cause, that is, an agency capable of making an “absolute beginning,” by which is understood the capacity to initiate a causal series that is not itself determined by any antecedent condition. In its application to the human will and its practical freedom, this means that we are rationally constrained to regard ourselves as spontaneous initiators of causal series through our choices.7

Now, since the idea of causality always includes that of laws in accordance with which an effect is produced, for Kant, the will of rational beings cannot be considered free in the sense of being “lawless”, as if I were able “to do what I want, any old time” on account of the fact my will is undetermined by the laws of nature.8 In Kant’s view, the “moral law” is the “formal supreme determining ground of the will” of all rational agents.9 This universal law is represented in a priori principles of (pure) reason that are “objective” on account of their validity as imperatives for every person. From these laws derive subjective rules of action (“maxims”10) that direct the will of the individual in specific scenarios.11

Understood thus, a rational agent is a being that possesses free will insofar as it has the ability to determine itself (i.e. the will) by deriving its actions from the moral law which it gives to itself independently of the causality of nature, that is to say, without being wholly determined by the object as experienced in desire.12 Humans are thus capable of making something other than impulses and desires the basis of action: we

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8 Groundwork, 4:412.
9 Practical Reason, 5:32.
12 Groundwork, 4:448. Kant’s talk of the causality of natural laws may lead one to wrongly suppose that nature is simply that which is external to the human subject. Natural laws can also determine a person from within. Consider the following: “[1]t does not matter whether the causality determined in accordance with a natural law is necessary through determining grounds lying within the subject or outside him…they…leave no transcendental freedom, which must be thought as independence from everything empirical and so from nature generally, whether it is regarded as an object of inner sense in time only or also of outer sense in both space and time…” (Practical Reason, 5:96-7) It is worth noting that only for rational beings does the possibility of morally accountable action arise, according to Kant. For only they have the capacity of will to act from duty in accordance with the universal moral law, and thus give reasons for their action.
are capable of willing the good by acting from duty in accordance with the universal moral law which we impose on ourselves. As such, we can set “ends” for ourselves – a willed for state of affairs resulting from our action – and formulate “means” (“hypothetical imperatives”) by which to bring them about.\(^\text{13}\) According to Allen Wood, the main thrust of Kant’s account of rational agency as presented in the *Groundwork* is therefore that;

Kant’s theory takes us to be agents who are self-directing in the sense that we have the capacity to step back from our natural desires, reflect on them, and consider whether and how we should satisfy them, and be moved by them only on the basis of such reflections.\(^\text{14}\)

### 4.2.2 Practical spontaneity

As Allison understands it, reason’s determination of the will – that is, reason in its practical dimension – is an act of spontaneity. Evidence for this claim, he avers, is to be found in Kant’s espousal of the so-called “Incorporation Thesis” which appears in many of his major works, but which is most clearly formulated in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793). Allison thinks this thesis is embodied in the following statement, which I quote here in full;

> [F]reedom of the power of choice has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim (has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself); only in this way can an incentive, whatever it may be, coexist with the absolute spontaneity of the power of choice (of freedom).\(^\text{15}\)

To grasp the point Allison feels Kant is making above, one must grasp Kant’s distinction between subjects who possess an “*arbitrium brutum*” (a restricted will, such as animals have) and an “*arbitrium liberum*” (a free will, such as humans have).\(^\text{16}\) The former is properly termed a “patient” rather than an “agent” because it is acted upon or mastered by its desires and inclinations, and reacts to the strongest stimuli. Its reason is determined and directed by its impulses, in other words. In

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\(^{13}\) “Setting an end thus subjects me to a normative principle commanding me to perform the action required as a means to the end. Kant calls this a “hypothetical imperative”. It is called an “imperative” because it is a command of reason requiring the agent to do something; it is “hypothetical” because the command governs our action only on the condition that we will the end in question. By contrast, an imperative that has no such condition would be called a “categorical imperative”.\)” (A. Wood, “The supreme principle of morality”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, (ed. P. Guyer) (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 348).


contrast – and as the Thesis quoted above conveys – the human will (the “arbitrium liberum”) is free; for although it is “affected” by desires and inclinations which could potentially function as motives, it is not determined to act by these. Rather, it is a spontaneous act of the will (practical reason) which decides upon and elevates one of these desires to the status of a “sufficient reason” to act. This occurs when practical reason acts of itself (i.e. when reason spontaneously determines the will) to incorporate the desire into a rule that governs action (a maxim). Allison gives the following useful example of how such incorporation works, for Kant:

[I] may have a strong desire to indulge myself in an ice cream cone, but the mere presence of the desire or craving does not provide me with a sufficient reason for doing so. It can only become such in light of a rule permitting such indulgence under certain conditions. Consequently, in acting on the desire, I am also committing myself to that rule, and such a commitment must be viewed as an act of spontaneity on my part (of self-determination, if you will), which is not reducible to the mere having of the desire.

In the practical domain, then, spontaneity takes the form of incorporation – and incorporation is constitutive of rational agency insofar as it amounts to reason’s determination of the will independently of the “causality of nature”. The object which affects us in desires does not determine the will, and therefore affect human action; the will is rather the capacity to choose whether to make those desires reasons for acting. Allen Wood puts this point well in writing:

Our desires, then, do not simply push us around like the levers and pulleys of a machine, but rather provide inputs into a rational process of self-direction involving our adoption and recognition of rational norms and the decision to follow or not follow the norms we recognise.

Evidently, incorporation requires more than a Leibnizian comparative freedom or “relative spontaneity”; or as Allison expresses it, it does not depend “upon a prior determination by an external force”. Genuinely free agency for Kant requires that the act of incorporation be wholly undetermined by natural necessity.

In rounding off, it is worth making the tangential point that it would seem that in Kant’s view the human will is infallibly determined by reason such that desires and inclinations (“subjective conditions” of action) are not necessitating; in this case the will cannot do other than act in accordance with “objective principles”

20 *Practical Reason*, 5:97.
(representations of the moral law), i.e. it can only choose to do “that which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good”. However, Kant is adamant that although we, as rational agents, are capable of genuinely free agency in virtue of the absolute spontaneity of the will, we are not absolutely determined by reason to act in accordance with the moral law. Our rule over ourselves (subjective conditions, i.e. desires) is imperfect. The following quote makes this clear;

However, if reason solely by itself does not adequately determine the will; if the will is exposed also to subjective conditions (certain incentives) that are not always in accord with the objective ones; in a word, if the will is not in itself completely in conformity with reason (as is actually the case with human beings), then actions that are cognized as objectively necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will in conformity with objective laws is necessitation: that is to say, the relation of objective laws to a will that is not thoroughly good is represented as the determination of the will of a rational being through grounds of reason, indeed, but grounds to which this will is not by its nature necessarily obedient.

4.2.2 Epistemic spontaneity

The idea of spontaneity exists in the theoretical or cognitive sphere, too, but it is one that requires less detailed explication chiefly because we have already explored the structure of cognition and touched upon the idea of spontaneity as Kant thinks of it there. In consequence, I shall simply offer a capsule summary of how knowing is thought to be spontaneous for Kant, but direct the reader to my more extensive discussion of this theme in the previous chapter (see section 3.3.3 above).

For Kant, cognition of a given object requires the ability to passively receive representations of objects. These representations are the images in which we are immediately and sensibly aware of particular properties of objects. Yet these intuitions do not constitute knowledge of an object. Indeed, I noted in the previous chapter that if one is to know the object, then there must exist a way of piecing together these distinct representations such that the object can be known in its unity. According to Kant, it is the faculty of thought called the “understanding” that performs this task. In crude terms, its job – if we bypass the complex debate as to the role of the “imagination” – is to order and organise the data of intuitions using a priori categories of thought such that an objective judgement can be made about the

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21 *Groundwork*, 4:412.
22 *Groundwork*, 4:412-3.
23 A19 / B33.
identity of the object to which they correspond.\textsuperscript{24} Only when an object is thought or recognised in an (empirical) concept is it known.\textsuperscript{25}

As Allison and others have read Kant, the locus of spontaneity in the theoretical domain is the act of the understanding. To clarify, this is to say that knowledge of an object is not simply the result of the action of the object on the mind as it was in the view of much of the empiricist philosophy preceding Kant – intuitions do not constitute knowledge. Knowledge is rather the result of the mind’s ordering and judging of the object as presented to it in the manifold of intuitions.\textsuperscript{26} Understood thus, epistemic spontaneity consists in a free, undetermined act of the understanding, for Kant. To cite Allison;

The understanding is…spontaneous in the sense that it “constitutes” objectivity or objective reference in and through the act of judgement, and it does this by synthesising the manifold of sensible intuition in accordance with its own inherent rules (the pure concepts of the understanding).\textsuperscript{27}

Allison argues that epistemic spontaneity is “self-certifying” much in the same way the Cartesian cogito is. Every act of thinking is spontaneous in the sense that it involves synthesis according to \textit{a priori} rules (pure concepts) and judgement (using empirical concepts as rules) – spontaneity is therefore a “necessary condition of thinking”. And since;

I cannot think of myself as thinking without attributing such spontaneity to my mind…I cannot coherently doubt that I am a thinker because such doubt is itself an act of thinking.\textsuperscript{28}

\subsection*{4.2.3 Summary of findings}

Having now outlined the practical and epistemic varieties of spontaneity in the philosophy of Kant, we can summarise our findings using the words of Henry Allison;

In both domains, then, we might say that the mind is “undetermined by the data,” and that complete determination requires a contribution on the part of the subject. In the cognitive domain, this contribution (the act of spontaneity)

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} B126 / A124-8.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} B75 / A51, A104.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} H. Allison, “Kant on freedom of the will”, in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy}, (ed. P. Guyer) (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 389.
\end{itemize}
amounts to a determination of the object, whereas in the practical domain it is a matter of self-determination.\textsuperscript{29} Allison reads Kant as saying that epistemic spontaneity is the \textit{analogue} of its practical counterpart. Allison’s contention is that just as our action is free insofar as it is not determined by the data (desires and inclinations) but is dependent on the spontaneous action of the mind in incorporation, so it goes for Kant that our \textit{cognition of objects} is not determined by the sense-data we receive (of those “affecting” objects), but is ultimately dependent on the spontaneous action of the mind in \textit{ordering} that sense-data in a way such that the object becomes known.\textsuperscript{30} This is to say that, for Kant, spontaneity is not isolated to the act of knowing, but is characteristic of both domains of selfhood. Spontaneity amounts to the freedom of the understanding and the will for self-initiated action independent of external causalities. Human action, then, whether as regards knowing or willing, is not mechanistically predetermined by the state of the world. The body does not rule over the mind: just as desires and inclinations are not sufficient reasons for action, neither is sense-data sufficient for cognition. It is rather the human subject through the spontaneous application of practical and theoretical reason to the data served up to it by the body on which knowing and willing ultimately depends. Spontaneity is not then isolated to knowing, for Kant: it appears as a modulation or variety of the freedom the human subject possesses as a rational being.

\textbf{4.3 Barth on epistemic spontaneity as a modulation of human freedom}

My aim in the following is to establish that Barth regards epistemic spontaneity as a modulation of human freedom, and that in so doing he follows the contours of Kant’s account as set out above. To be sure, Barth does not make an explicit reasoned argument for this in the \textit{Church Dogmatics}. Nevertheless, attention to passages from \textit{CD} III/2, III/3, IV/1 and IV/2 will show not only that Barth, like Kant, sees spontaneity as the creature’s freedom from natural necessity, but that he regards such spontaneity as inflected in the acts of knowing (“percipience”) and willing (“activity”) that are constitutive of the creature as a being in action. Both acts will therefore prove analogous in virtue of the spontaneity that characterises them. In consequence, Barth’s understanding of human knowing as a spontaneous act will be

\textsuperscript{29} H. Allison, \textit{Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant’s Theoretical and Practical Philosophy}, (Cambridge, CUP, 1996), 133.
shown to fit well with his wider understanding of human selfhood insofar it functions as a modulation of human freedom.

I make this point in four steps. The first involves clarifying that Barth attributes spontaneity to the creature in virtue of its possession of soul, and that it consists in freedom from the causality of nature. The second step clarifies how spontaneity operates as a function of human freedom (as the freedom for obedience), since Barth clearly cannot allow it to characterise the creature as a self-sufficient subject over against God. The third step is to show that Barth’s commitment to spontaneity is not merely rhetorical but is reflected in his actualistic conception of the human constitution. The fourth explicates how such spontaneity is inflected in the act of knowing and willing and shows both to be analogous acts.

4.3.1 Soul and subjectivity: spontaneity as freedom from nature

Barth’s affirmation of epistemic spontaneity rests in his theological view of human subjectivity. Leaving aside how human subjectivity is sourced back to divine subjectivity, the idea that the creature is a subject consists, for Barth, in the fact it possesses soul and so can act independently of nature. A good departure point for this discussion is Barth’s definition of soul in CD III/2. He writes;

Soul is life, self-contained life, the independent life of a corporeal being. Life in general means capacity for action, self-movement, self-activity, self-determination. Independent life is present when this self-movement, self-activity, and self-determination are not only the continuation of a general life-process, but where there is a specific living subject.  

The soul is the life – the animating and quickening principle – of the body. Without the soul the body would not be alive, Barth writes, but without the body we would not exist. Humans, in consequence, have their being in the unity of soul and body, and they exist as soul of their body. The human soul is what grants the human person its self-containedness and its self-determinability. Leaving until the next

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31 CD III/2, 374.
32 CD III/2, 376-7. That soul and body co-inhere, and in the words of Price, are “necessarily connected”, means that the body is given a value that it has often been deprived in Christian history. Certain forms of asceticism saw the body as something to be suppressed and overcome. A “dynamic” anthropology such as what Barth proposes counteracts the devaluing of the body on several different levels. In general, “neglect of the importance of the human body”, Price writes paraphrasing Barth, “has often resulted in a compensating materialism that makes the opposite mistake of denying the soul. For example, Marxism, among other things, illustrates the vengeance history exacts from the church when it overlooks the material conditions that rob the worker of his or her soul”. (D. Price, Karl Barth’s Anthropology in Light of Modern Thought, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2002), 251).
section how body and soul are rationally ordered, it is important to note for Barth that it is soul that gives humans independent life, that is to say, it renders us more than lifeless objects but as subjects or doers of our own acts.

Soul is therefore the capacity for independent action; it is what makes us “specific living subjects”. Human subjectivity (as soul) is defined by Barth as the capacity for independent action; it gives us the freedom of self-determination. But what is the creature capable of acting independently of? Consider the following:

Independent life, the life of a specific subject, does not emerge except where the capacity for action of a corporeal being is not bound to a specific point in space.

The condition of human subjectivity (construed as free, independent action) is that it is capable of acting independently from what Barth calls a “general life-process”; creaturely action is not tied to a “specific point in space”. Such language clearly indicates that the creature enjoys what we might call a ‘local’ freedom from natural necessity (Barth never construes it more broadly as an independence from the divine determination of creaturely being). Certainly, Barth regards the creature as a component part of the cosmos and recognises that it is dependent for its existence on things in the world outside of itself. Nevertheless, even if the creature is in fact the “continuation and partial appearance of a general life-process”, its status as an independent subject is not compromised. That is to say, the creature’s knowing and willing (perception and activity) is not the predetermined outcome of some such process or the result of some element in nature on which the creature may depend. Indeed, the creature is not mechanistically and wholly “moved by another” but is capable of free movement in relation to other entities with which it is acquainted through “perception”. Evidently, human subjectivity (as soul) does not simply consist in the ability to act independently of any causality whatsoever. Barth narrows such independence to freedom from nature.

What has been described so far could in itself be taken as the basis for a negative argument for freedom as spontaneity in Barth, insofar as it is possible to deduce from

33 *CD III/2*, 374.
34 *CD III/2*, 374.
35 “[M]an is only a component part, very inconsiderable in some important ways and deeply dependent on creaturely elements and factors which are greatly superior to him.” (*CD III/2*, 3-4)
36 *CD III/2*, 406-7.
37 This ability is predicated on the possession of soul (and the possession of soul is itself predicated on the divine freedom to determine the constitution of human creaturehood, as we saw in chapter 2.
it a Kantian-style concept of spontaneity. The argument would build on Barth’s assertion that the creature’s independence from nature makes it a “subject”, which he defines as a being capable of “self-movement, self-activity, and self-determination”. One would then conjecture that, as subject, the creature is capable of freely determining its own action, for if it is not caused to act by external conditions but acts independently from itself, then it follows that its action originates in itself, i.e. is self-caused and self-initiated. Constrained thus, human action appears to be spontaneous in the sense it is for Kant.

However, the stark deficiency of this argument is that there is no concrete evidence to justify the leap from Barth’s characterisation of the creature as an ‘independent subject’ to the positive contention that the action undertaken by this subject is self-caused – a requirement of spontaneity as positively defined by Kant. Though Barth’s talk of “self-activity” and “self-determination” might well amount to that, lack of definition in this passage leaves room only for conjecture.

Having said that, a more convincing argument for freedom as spontaneity is forthcoming if one begins from the contrast Barth draws between human and divine freedom in *The Gift of Freedom*. In that essay, he writes as follows;

> Measured against the act of divine freedom, the act of human freedom has its own beginning, its own course, and its own preliminary and relative ends.\(^\text{38}\)

For Barth, human freedom is not annulled by the divine freedom. Neither is it simply a function or extension of God’s sovereign freedom. Rather it is conditioned and defined by God as having its own, i.e. creaturely, “beginning” and trajectory. In *CD* III/4, Barth clarifies the nature of that beginning in writing that the Word of God in addressing the creature presupposes it to be a “free subject”;

> The Word of God, demanding hearing and obedience, presupposes a *productive subject*, a being capable of *making for himself a new beginning with his being*, conduct and action (irrespective of his co-existence and connection with other beings), of *planning something new* and his very own, corresponding to what he has heard from God…The Word of God as it is spoken to man thus constitutes his knowledge of himself as such a *free subject of his life*.\(^\text{39}\) (italics mine)

Whilst this “new beginning” Barth talks of refers to the act of repentance within this doctrinal environment, the *capacity to make* a new beginning nevertheless supposes that the creature is able to generate or initiate fresh causal sequences from itself, and

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\(^\text{38}\) K. Barth, “Gift”, 74.

\(^\text{39}\) *CD* III/4, 330.
therefore ties back in with Barth’s use of such terms as “self-activity”. Barth himself states that the creature is not an active being if it is not capable of “self-initiated” action. More than that, his contention in the quote above that the Word of God assumes that the creature can cause its own action and so set ends for itself is not posited in a vacuum. Barth attributes independence to the creature narrowly as the possibility of acting independently of nature, of acting “irrespective of his co-existence and connection with other beings”. The important point to note is that Barth is willing to characterise such self-initiated action as freedom from natural necessity – a freedom he explicitly identifies in CD III/4 as “spontaneity”;

The Word of God is not spoken merely to a psycho-physical individual in time which is simply the functioning organ of another author or element in his movement, but to a subject who is himself at all points the author, accomplishing this movement [of his own being and act in time] freely, independently and spontaneously.

From the foregoing discussion it is quite clear that Barth, like Kant, endorses spontaneity as the creature’s ability to act contra-causally. But Barth does not attribute to the creature an absolute spontaneity: the creature’s capacity for independent action is not to be understood in broad terms as a freedom from every kind of causality, natural and divine. As Barth understands it, spontaneity is nothing other than the freedom from nature.

4.3.2 Spontaneity as a function of the human freedom for God

In connection with this point it must be asked whether Barth’s endorsement of spontaneity along Kantian lines is definitive of his concept of freedom. If freedom is simply freedom from nature, then is this not to attribute to the creature a raw, unsituated, unimpeded self-determinism, as if it were simply created to act as it pleases in accordance with norms and purposes it sets for itself? Barth argues that it does not, and that any such construal cannot be the basic motif of creaturely freedom. He makes this plain when he says that creaturely freedom is not simply the power of “self-determination” in the face of possibilities as much of modern philosophy has conveyed it. He wrote of freedom in his essay, The Gift of Freedom, that;

The gift of freedom...involves more than being offered one option among several. It involves more than being asked a question, being presented with an opportunity, and having a possibility opened up...God does not put man into the situation of a Hercules at the crossroads. The opposite is true. God

40 CD III/2, 406 = 487.
41 CD III/4, 329-330.
frees man from this false situation. He lifts him from appearance to reality. It is true that man’s God-given freedom is choice, decision, act. But it is genuine choice; it is genuine decision and act in the right direction. The human person is not “Hercules at the cross-roads”. The illusion is that we think that all possibilities are open to us, that it matters little what we choose to do. But freedom is by no means reduced to choosing between a set of morally neutral possibilities. For Barth, human freedom is originally and properly freedom for God. The creature makes use of this freedom only as it obeys God in love and faith. It is only really free in the ‘freedom of obedience’, when it recognises the pro me of God in Christ in its actions. Freedom is not then freedom to choose, but the freedom to act in the right way, i.e. according to the divine command. John Webster describes it thus:

[F]reedom is consent to a given order of reality which encloses human history, an order which is at one and the same time a loving summons to joyful action in accordance with itself, and a judgement against our attempts to be ourselves by somehow escaping from or suspending its givenness. Freedom is the real possibility given to me by necessity.

Granted that Barth also affirms spontaneity as proper to human subjectivity – as became clear in the last section – what purpose does it have? Put another way, assuming Barth does not endorse spontaneity (freedom from nature) to bolster a conception of the human creature as a self-sufficient subject that is released from dependency on God, what function does it serve vis-à-vis the summons to self-determination in accordance with the command of God?

Barth writes that our freedom for God is determinative of and includes our freedom from nature. Spontaneity is an aspect of this ‘real’ freedom, in other words. This means that although human freedom cannot be reduced to freedom from nature such that we can choose whichever path suits us, it can and must be understood as supposing the freedom to choose. That is to say;

[F]reedom is exercised in the fulfilment of responsibility before God…It is certainly freedom of choice. But as freedom given by God, as freedom in action, it is the freedom of a right choice. The choice is right when it corresponds to the free choice of God…[Man] chooses himself to fulfil this responsibility.

42 K. Barth, “Gift”, 76.
Human freedom is the freedom to act in the right way, and for this purpose the creature is made able to exercise its will independently of external, natural forces, such as urges and desires. Thus, spontaneity must be understood as a function of the freedom *for* God. Choosing, deciding and acting in the “right direction” is supposed in God’s call and command to the creature to serve him in obedience.

If it were to be denied that Barth affirms spontaneity as a vital ingredient of human freedom, several problems would result. If the creature were not capable of such independent action then it would not be in possession of soul, since soul is defined by the capacity for such action. In consequence, the creature would have no way of choosing whether or not to act on the basis of desires (will). It would have no autonomy from the object of cognition either, which would deny the creature knowledge (since knowledge requires a self-initiated (or independent) act of thought). Any denial of spontaneity would rob the creature of its free agency on grounds internal to creation. In consequence, it would have no real power to act in line with the divine intention and command as revealed in the Word of God. Without God-given spontaneity, then, the creature is not a moral, rational, or responsible agent. As such it would not be fit to fulfil its *telos* as God’s active covenant partner in the world.

Quite clearly this suggests that – irrespective of the parallels between them – there are major differences in the way both Barth and Kant link spontaneity and freedom in their respective conceptions of human selfhood. I round off this discussion by broadly contrasting their accounts as a way of further highlighting what is unique in Barth’s linkage of those two concepts.

For Kant our freedom *for* moral action (acting from duty in accordance with the moral law) is predicated on his conception of the self. And central to his conception of the self is the idea of spontaneity – our freedom *from* external dependencies and causalities. Our freedom *for*, in other words, is conditioned by our freedom *from*.

Conversely, Barth’s conception of the self as spontaneous subject is predicated on the call and command of God. Indeed, the creature’s “constitution” follows and reflects its “calling”. This is to say that Barth does not understand human freedom primarily in terms of human capabilities, as Kant does. He strictly defines freedom on the basis of the purpose for which God created the creature free. Since the

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45 K. Barth, “Gift”, 77.
creature is created to serve and obey God as his covenant partner, human freedom is thus primarily a freedom “for” God, as Barth wrote in *The Gift of Freedom*, and as we saw above. Since spontaneity is the means the creature is given for fulfilling this purpose, human freedom is only thus secondarily a matter of freedom “from” external determinations and limitations, that is, a matter of spontaneity.

Although spontaneity is not definitive of human freedom, Barth does nothing to negate the weighty role it receives as that which facilitates the creature’s participation in covenant history as a rational being capable of moral and epistemic agency. Indeed, our freedom from is a predicate of our freedom for. For although the creature can only be free from insofar as it is created and ordained to be free for, it is only in being free from – in having this relative autonomy from objects of volition and cognition – that the creature can be free for. Only by the gift of spontaneity can the creature know God and determine its will to act in accordance – in obedience – with God.

Freedom is the joy whereby man acknowledges and confesses the divine election by willing, deciding, and determining himself to be the echo and mirror of the divine act.

4.3.3 The human constitution as rationally ordered for spontaneous action

Spontaneity is evidently central to Barth’s theological-ontological characterisation of the self as an active, independent subject – and it serves an important theological purpose as such. Yet, his equation of spontaneity and subjectivity is not rhetorical or hypothetical, the force of Barth’s theological commitment to the concept becomes clear in examining how it is reflected in the rational order of the human constitution and expressed in his description of knowing and activity. In highlighting both these elements we will further validate the contention of this chapter that Barth’s conception of knowing sits comfortably within his broader conception of selfhood in virtue of the fact that epistemic spontaneity is a modulation of human freedom. In this section I discuss how the human constitution is rationally ordered by God for spontaneous action, and in the next I show how such spontaneity maps on to both constituent components.

This rational order of human being is Christologically determined, for Barth, in the sense that he looks to the humanity of Jesus as the source and norm of all knowledge.

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46 K. Barth, “Gift”, 77-78.
47 K. Barth, “Gift”, 78.
48 K. Barth, “Gift”, 79.
about the human person in its concrete existence. As such, this rationality is not one discernible autonomously of the Word of God. As ordained and established by God, human being has a rational or “meaningful order” in the sense that it is structured – and its components ordered and prioritised – so that it can know God and consequently function as his covenant partner in the world. 49 Barth defines that order thus: the soul (as the capacity for spontaneous action) rules over the body and the body serves the soul. 50 The body serves up awareness and desires to the soul, which the soul then rules over. This rationality is what distinguishes humans from animals and other entities, about whom Barth thinks we know very little. It is what makes the creature a subject of its own act and a “rational being”. The order is so determined by the fact that the creature lives and acts as soul of its body.

As he is grounded, constituted and maintained by God as soul of his body, and thus receives and has the Spirit, there occurs the rule of the soul and the service of the body. And in this occurrence man is a rational being. 51 God determines and addresses the creature as a being that is rational on account of being able to rule and serve itself. It is created to be a free subject in the service of God. Logically, it cannot be this if one of these elements – body or soul – is missing. If the creature lacked soul it would lack the capacity for spontaneous action, and therefore for free self-determination over against nature. If, on the other hand, the body were absent then the soul would be impotent. 52 Both elements are necessary if the creature is to exist in the rational order ordained by God, who intends it to operate as his covenant partner. Spontaneity (soul) is therefore a crucial, divinely instantiated condition and ingredient of the creature’s status as a rational being.

However, it would be a gross error to attribute rationality to human being and not to its acts, as if the two marked separate spheres for Barth. The creature is not a static essence, but is conceived by Barth in dynamic terms as a being-in-act. Since the creature exists, and only exists, in its acts, it must always act rationally if it is true that it is a “rational being”. As such, it exists as a rational agent, one might say. That is to say, knowing (“percipience”) and willing (“activity”) which are constitutive of human creaturehood must be stamped with, or rather be instances of, this distinctive rationality. Barth endorses precisely this fact in the following statement;

49 CD III/2, 402.
50 CD III/2, 424, 427.
51 CD III/2, 419.
52 CD III/2, 373, 424-6.
Man lives as man in a meaningful order. He recognises it and subjects himself to it. He himself establishes and observes it. He is man as it [this order] is valid, and he makes use of its validity in human perception and activity. As this happens, i.e. as he himself brings it about, he is a rational being.\textsuperscript{53}

Both “percipience” and “activity” are in Barth’s view instances of that rational order. The significance of this is that the capacity for independent, spontaneous action (the soul) is what must make the decisive contribution to knowing and activity; whereas the body must make the lesser contribution by serving up the data – the “subjective representations” of awareness and desires – to be worked on.\textsuperscript{54} Barth expresses the precedence and priority of the soul thus;

The soul is the freedom of man, not only to sense and desire, but in thinking and willing to be able to stand at a distance from himself and to live his life as his own.\textsuperscript{55}

Both knowing and activity must be considered acts that occur freely of natural necessity such that they can be considered analogous to one another in virtue of their characteristic spontaneity, that they are undertaken by the person who acts as soul of its body. But to what extent is this borne out in Barth’s understanding of both acts?

4.3.4 Practical and epistemic spontaneity in \textit{CD III/2}

So far, so good: Barth asserts that the capacity for independent action over against nature is constitutive of human subjectivity as determined by God, and that this is reflected in the priority of soul over body. Spontaneity thus has clear roots in Barth’s theological conception of human subjectivity and freedom. But if there is validity to the claim that spontaneity is not restricted to Barth’s understanding of knowing, but that knowing itself is one modulation of human freedom (insofar as that notion of freedom includes the idea of freedom from nature), then we cannot rest content with those findings. We will have to prove that knowing is analogous to willing on account of their spontaneity, and that as such it is one mode of human freedom (the other being willing). To establish this I compare both acts and assess where the locus of agency lies for Barth in each.

4.3.4.1 Practical spontaneity: “activity”

As I mentioned in chapter 2, the human creature is not simply summoned and created to know God; it is, on that basis, also summoned to serve God in its action.\textsuperscript{56} It is to

\textsuperscript{53} CD III/2, 419.
\textsuperscript{54} CD III/2, 417.
\textsuperscript{55} CD III/2, 418.
act in “self-reflective responsibility” before God as an active and independent subject, as a rational being that is able to direct its action such that it can participate in the freedom of obedience. The creature is created capable of deciding how to act;

And…if it is really possible and not impossible for him to make decisions, to do this or that, and thus to be obedient to the summons which he meets and hears, this means God has made him an active being.\(^{57}\)

Evidently, the creature possesses the power of free agency: it is a being capable of “free” movement in relation to other entities with which it is acquainted through “perception”.\(^{58}\) It is able to decide for itself whether and how to act, and so it is not simply causally necessitated to act by its bodily desires or by natural processes in the world. The will is the locus of decision-making for Barth, and it has a special relation to the soul. To be sure, Barth acknowledges that the creature’s will is partly determined by outside influences; nevertheless, the point he wants to press home is that it is the seat of contra-causal action.

The case of willing is as follows. It is a matter of the soul that I allow another to be not merely the object of my desiring (or shunning), but go beyond this to make it an object of my will; that I have a certain intention and come to a resolution with respect to it or to my relation to it; that I set it before me and put myself into the corresponding movement in relation to it. My desiring…is naturally presupposed. Where I have no desire, I cannot will.\(^{59}\)

Evidently, the locus of free human agency resides for Barth in the spontaneity of the will. Such spontaneity is assumed because, as Barth himself says, we do not will everything we desire. In fact we are not caused to act by the desires and urges we have of objects, but are capable of deciding whether to act on them.\(^{60}\) The idea here is that the creature is capable of “self-reflection” and so subjects the material of desiring to rational critique in order to “decide and determine” whether to act or not on the basis of it. The human person is able to choose (i.e. determine its will) whether to make these desires reasons for action. Barth puts this point as follows;

When I will, I make up my mind. I myself, as soul, make up my own mind as the physico-psychical being provisionally united in like or dislike… I choose, i.e. I determine myself and my activity for the execution or non-execution of my desiring. I prescribe for myself a specific attitude to the

\(^{56}\) CD III/2, 406ff.

\(^{57}\) CD III/2, 406.

\(^{58}\) CD III/2, 406-7.

\(^{59}\) CD III/2, 408.

\(^{60}\) CD III/2, 408ff.
desired object. My desiring alone cannot do this…The body itself does not
decide or determine, though it offers for me the material of my desiring in
the form of an urge. It is I who decide and determine in relation to my
desiring…in such a way that I elevate myself above myself, above my
physico-psychical desiring and therefore above my body, so that I am my
own master and master of my body. 61

Clearly, for Barth, the will is not bound to act by desire, but is capable of
determining itself independently of such influences. Indeed, the will enables the
creature “to stand at a distance” from itself, to pass itself “under review” so that it
can decide whether to act. 62 It enjoys a relative autonomy from the object of volition.

Whilst Barth’s understanding of the spontaneity of the will suggests parallels with
Kant’s account of practical spontaneity, there is a serious point of disanalogy. This
emerges in Barth’s unwillingness to specify in any detail what the act of spontaneity
looks like: he does not say how the will is freely determined or make clear the
grounds on which the decision to act is made. In Kant, we had incorporation; but are
the traces of something akin to it in Barth? The primacy Barth accords to soul (as the
capacity for independent action) would suggest that desires such as greed, lust, like
or dislike, are not in themselves sufficient to determine the outcome of the “review”.
There is thus reasonable warrant for surmising from Barth’s language of “standing at
a distance”, “conducting a review” and “prescription”, that he thinks the decision-
making process involves rational deliberation as to whether one should acquiesce to
the desire. Whilst this hardly amounts to an open and unabashed endorsement of the
Incorporation Thesis, the point is that there are grounds for supposing that practical
spontaneity necessarily involves the free use of reason in deriving actions from
principles, for Barth, just as it does for Kant.

**4.3.4.2 Rational agency and freedom in Barth and Kant**

An important question is whether Barth sees practical spontaneity as feeding into a
broader picture of the creature as a being capable of living by and imposing rational
norms on itself, of acting from duty and setting its own ends? Whilst Barth offers no
substantive account of rational agency along these lines, he does come close to
something like Kant’s conception of it in claiming that the creature is addressed by
God as a “proper subject” who is capable of “giving himself guidance and direction

61 CD III/2, 408-9.
62 CD III/2, 417-8.
as his own lord and ruler”. Hints of such an idea also appeared in the discussion of spontaneity and subjectivity.

Indeed, as was evident from 4.3.1 above, Barth envisages the creature to be a free subject on account of its ability to act independently of the causality of nature. As such a being, the creature is capable of setting ends for itself, i.e. “planning something new” from itself. Moreover, just as Kant averred that the human subject, as a rational agent, is free to will to act in accordance with the moral law, so the creature in Barth’s reckoning is not simply created free so that it can exercise this ‘freedom’ in any way it chooses. Its independence in this regard is conditioned by and presupposed in the summons to serve God and its neighbour – and thus to realise the freedom of obedience which is proper to creaturely being. This is to say that just as freedom from natural necessity is not a freedom from any law whatsoever but a freedom to act from duty in accordance with the moral law, for Kant, so for Barth the creature is created free from nature (spontaneity) for the purpose of acting in accordance with the command of God. In connection with that parallel use of spontaneity, both suppose the same ability to make something other than bodily desires the basis of its actions.

Nevertheless, there are obviously key points of divergence in their accounts of rational agency that prevents any easy identification of the two. These have been discussed in outline in section 4.3.2 above. Despite these, there are interesting parallels deserving of further investigation between Barthian and Kantian ethics, not least Barth’s appropriation of the Categorical Imperative. Commentators are increasingly recognising this, with recent studies explicitly identifying Kant as a persistent influence on Barth’s ethical thought from The Epistle to Romans II (1922) onwards.

63 CD III/2, 424.
64 Colin Gunton recognises that Barth can be read as “Kantianising” ethics on account of the analogy between freedom in obedience (Barth) and obedience to the categorical imperative (Kant). He thinks that Barth did not intend to be read that way owing to the theological grounding of the concept of freedom. See C. Gunton, “The Triune God and the Freedom of the Creature”, in Karl Barth: Centenary Essays, (ed. S. W. Sykes), (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 46-68 (esp. 52).
65 CD III/2, 422-423.
4.3.4.3 Epistemic spontaneity

The creature is capable of acting autonomously of the object of volition, but it is also, in Barth’s view, capable of knowing autonomously of the object of cognition. Given that I have already shown in the preceding chapter how Barth views human knowing to be spontaneous on account of its structure, it need not detain us here for long. I shall simply highlight the main characteristics of epistemic spontaneity to draw out how it is analogous with the practical variety in Barth’s thought.

As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, Barth considers knowing to be a two-fold process. It involves an act of sense-perception in which the creature becomes aware of the object before it in “images of perception”. Yet those images do not amount to knowledge, for in them, Barth maintains, the creature is only aware of the object, but that object has not yet “entered into” the creature’s self-consciousness. The creature appropriates the object to itself by transforming those perceptual images into concepts. The act of thought is responsible for undertaking this task. Concepts are important because they constitute knowledge of objects: they are the images in which the mind thinks the object, and thereby appropriates it to itself.

The locus of spontaneity therefore lies for Barth in the act of thought in which the object is known. This is to say that knowledge does not arise from the object as it impacts the mind and creates “images of perception”. Rather, knowledge-generation occurs as a result of the mind’s ordering and judging of the object as presented to it in those images. For Barth, like Kant, epistemic spontaneity is thus the idea that the mind is not determined by the object as given in the data, but makes the decisive contribution to knowing by a free, undetermined act of the mind in which the object is thought.

4.3.5 Summary of findings

The foregoing analysis shows that Barth insists on the capacity for spontaneous action which is characteristic of the creature as a rational being is inflected in both cognitive and practical spheres insofar as the acts of knowing and willing are not causally determined by the body, but are self-initiated acts undertaken by a subject capable of acting independently of natural necessity. Both acts exhibit a clear analogy with one another in virtue of that fact. Barth himself points to this analogy;

He [man] expressed himself as such [as an independent subject] as he goes beyond the outward and thinks and wills, taking up a position in relation to his own awareness and desire, and treating them as his own business and activity. He is not capable of this as body, though for it he stands in need of
his bodily life. He does not think without sensing, nor will without desiring. But when he thinks and wills, he stands at a distance from his sensing and desiring. He passes himself under review. He becomes an object to himself. In his freedom to stand at a distance, pass under review and become object he conducts himself as soul of his body. The body lacks this freedom. It can only participate in it. In and by itself, it does not possess it. But the soul does.\textsuperscript{57}

Having proved that those acts are analogous in virtue of their spontaneity it is quite clear that there is solid warrant for the thesis of this chapter, namely, that epistemic spontaneity is an inflection of human freedom for Barth. This is so because spontaneity itself (the freedom from nature) has been shown to be intrinsic to Barth’s base-line conception of creatuely freedom (as freedom of obedience). Barth’s conception of knowing is firmly and coherently integrated within his understanding of human freedom and subjectivity – his notion of human selfhood as such. Indeed, Barth’s commitment to epistemic spontaneity is not rhetorical, as is clear from the fact that he gives it its creaturally basis in the rational order of human being (in which the soul rules and the body serves) and then maps spontaneity on to both knowing and willing.

Yet, freedom is so inflected in those acts ultimately on theological grounds. Evidence presented above suggests that Barth endorses the contours of Kant’s concept of spontaneity (section 4.2). And both thinkers consider spontaneity to be the human subject’s freedom to rule and determine itself \textit{independently} of external causes in the natural world. Be that as it may, in Barth’s view the human creature is spontaneous because God has summoned it from the beginning to be his covenant partner and so to partake in the joy of its election by serving God in the freedom of obedience. In other words, God establishes the creature as a spontaneous knower and doer on account of the freedom to which it has been called.

\textbf{4.4 The problem of independence: Webster on human freedom in Barth}

These conceptual parallels give rise to important questions about how Barth handles and deploys modernistic thought-forms in his theology. Can such a modern, philosophical concept of independence really be compatible with Barth’s specific theological definition of freedom?

\textsuperscript{57} CD III/2, 417-8.
In a recent essay John Webster has sought to advance a negative answer to this question. In “Freedom in Limitation: Human Freedom and False Necessity in Barth” Webster’s intention is to establish how Barth thinks human freedom is posited and determined by God’s own freedom in which it has its source. As part of that discussion, he argues that Barth’s distinctively theological handling of the concept stands in stark contrast to, and is incompatible with, the definition and role human freedom has received in “modernity”, as independence from nature and God. Human freedom, he writes, is remarkably “unmodern”, for Barth, in that it does not consist in a “principle of independence”.

If Webster’s reading is correct then it poses serious challenges to the work done in this chapter; it would entail that epistemic spontaneity is not a modulation of human freedom. It would place a question mark over the extent and seriousness of Barth’s commitment to human knowing as a spontaneous act by calling into doubt its integration and expression in Barth’s understanding of human selfhood, in human subjectivity and freedom. It is thus necessary to engage Webster’s point. To do that, I describe his contention, and then, in light of the findings of this chapter, argue that Webster overlooks the role Barth gives to spontaneity as part of his conception of human subjectivity owing to the broad concept of ‘modern independence’ that he uses as a foil against Barth’s position. This will lead me to reiterate how Barth’s affirmation of spontaneity along Kantian lines is qualified and conditioned by theological concerns.

4.4.1 Webster’s account

Above all, freedom [for Barth] is not some inner recess of subjectivity over against ‘nature’…freedom is described by describing the conditions of freedom, by understanding the place and meaning and inner structure of this sphere of ours.

To grasp Webster’s argument it is essential to first describe what he thinks is chiefly distinctive about human freedom in Barth’s thought. The person who knows itself as...

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69 This comes within the context of an exploration in section 4 of how Barth’s understanding of God as triune, and particularly the enabling role of the Holy Spirit, establishes the reality of human freedom. That section attempts to dissolve the criticism of Barth advanced by Colin Gunton, amongst others, that Barth’s theology is one that leaves little space for human freedom. See section 1.4.2.1 above.
created and summoned for cognitive and active fellowship with God, knows that he exists as a “self-determining subject”. Such “active self-determination” is not therefore a conclusion reached by independent analysis of the architecture of human subjectivity, but is founded on the free act of God. The creature is determined to be self-determining by God. Since human freedom (as self-determination) has its “beginning and basis” in God’s prior determination, one cannot make sense of that freedom out with the context which establishes its basic shape and direction;

What Barth offers is an account of human freedom as ‘situated’ by the history of the covenant. That history simply is, anterior to all human choosing; it is a condition in which we find ourselves, and not something we bring about through an act of the will.\(^{71}\)

A proper understanding of human freedom therefore requires an account of it from God’s side. Within this context self-determination comes to view as having the very specific character of “acknowledgement” (*Anerkennung*), for Barth. Proper self-determination involves seeing our actions as “referred to another reality” outside of ourselves which gives them meaning. It consists in submitting to God’s authority, of consenting to God in our actions.\(^{72}\) Described in this way, Webster reads Barth as saying that human freedom is a specific occurrence that is realized in acting in line with the command of God.\(^{73}\) As such, Webster asserts that this conception stands over against the idea common to modernistic takes on human subjectivity that the person is free from any sort of determination, including divine determination. Webster clarifies the essential contrast thus;

> Freedom is not a principle of independence which transcends and precedes all concrete directions of the self through our acts, but rather a way of describing certain acts as acts in which we are truly ourselves as we correspond to what we have been made in Christ. Freedom is specific, therefore, in that it occurs ‘in the history of the covenant of grace instituted and executed by God.’\(^{74}\)

Barth’s target here is the modern concept of absolute spontaneity, according to Webster. Such independence was used to “characterize and validate the unique dignity of the human person” insofar as it presents the human person as “occupying a neutral space“, so to speak, such that it can act as it chooses on the basis of

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\(^{71}\) Webster, “Freedom in Limitation”, 123.

\(^{72}\) Webster, “Freedom in Limitation”, 112.

\(^{73}\) This is reflected in Barth’s choice of vocabulary to explain the phenomena. (Webster, “Freedom in Limitation”, 112-4).

\(^{74}\) Webster, “Freedom in Limitation”, 114.
judgements it makes about what is good. 75 Webster defines the notion of independence to which Barth objects more specifically as an independence from “nature” and from God – in short from any external limitation that might causally determine our action. Webster puts it this way;

Barth is suspicious of such accounts of humanity, in part because they seem to apply some ‘independent teleology of the creature’, but above all because they are bound up with the belief that human subjectivity is a kind of safe haven, a refuge against any determination from outside, even the determining activity of God. 76

In essence, Webster holds that freedom for Barth is not an unconditioned possibility or the “a-topic independence” of the human subject from God and nature, as this would grant to human subjectivity a degree of autonomy from God that it does not actually enjoy. Human freedom stands under and is determined by the divine determination.

4.4.2 Critical appraisal

For Webster, the modern idea of spontaneity is incompatible with Barth’s conception of human freedom so construed. But how far can this be maintained given the finding of this chapter, that Barth’s understanding of subjectivity and freedom explicitly supposes and includes the Kantian notion of spontaneity understood as freedom from nature?

An answer emerges in considering Webster’s handling of the concept of independence he thinks Barth rejects. At one instance it is construed as independence from the “order of nature” whereas later it becomes “a refuge against any determination from outside, even from God”, with the latter appearing to be definitive of the modern notion as Webster understands it. In the first place, the problem with such a general characterisation is that it is easily disputed. For instance, whilst Kant attributes absolute spontaneity to the subject he recognises that our actions are in practice often determined by “subjective conditions”. Given the possibility of such nuances, it must be asked whether such a general characterization can really function as a useful guide to what Barth rejects, even if this is how he himself characterizes what he rejects. Is Barth to be read as rejecting absolute spontaneity or relative spontaneity, independence from natural necessity and/or

75 Webster, “Freedom in Limitation”, 114.
76 Webster, “Freedom in Limitation”, 116.
divine necessity? Both options might be said to characterise modern notions of freedom.

More importantly, the problem with the utilisation of this broad concept of independence is that it blunts our awareness of the elements of that very concept that prove compatible with Barth’s account. As expressed above the concept can be broken down into a) ‘independence from God’, and b) ‘independence from everything else (creaturely)’. Consideration of a) can be excluded because it is clearly incompatible with Barth’s theology, as Webster has shown, as it assumes the person to be an “absolute” subject that is self-sufficient and self-based over against God – something Barth clearly rejects. Yet, in thinking a) and b) together in the same concept, the implicit suggestion is that independence in any form is incompatible with Barth’s theology insofar as it would allow the creature to slip free from its ontological dependence on God and to posit itself as a self-sufficient, absolute subject. But is this necessarily so?

In truth, Barth would only have to reject b) (spontaneity on the creaturely plane) if it were likewise incompatible with his theology in some way. And for that to be concluded one would have to show that it entails or presupposes independence from God. But Webster gives no grounds for assuming that it does, or for assuming that Barth thought that freedom from nature gives the creature absolute independence and turns it into an absolute subject. In fact, evidence from Barth’s theology suggests precisely the opposite. Human independence from the natural order does not stand on a par with, nor can it short-circuit, the divine determination of the creature. There is no equivalence here because, as Webster rightly points out, God determines the creature to be self-determining. There are thus no grounds internal to Barth’s theology for rejecting the modern concept of freedom, when strictly understood as independence from the natural order. And as I have tried to show, Barth recognises this: he conceives of the creature as being created with the capacity for independent action. And such spontaneity consists for Barth in the freedom from the causality of nature, just as it does for Kant.

In sum, then, it would appear that Webster is too hasty to position Barth’s account of freedom over against modernity – something that stems from his bracketing both independence from God and independence from nature under one general concept that Barth is understood to have rejected. In consequence, he misses the distinctively modern philosophical element that is intrinsic to Barth’s concept of freedom. Having
said that, it is necessary to reiterate in conclusion that Barth’s understanding of freedom is not to be directly equated with such independence, as if that whole concept pivoted on a decidedly philosophical axiom.\textsuperscript{77

What I have suggested as part of my argument is that Barth takes up and integrates spontaneity into his theological account of freedom. As such, Barth’s appropriation of Kant on this point is once again thoroughly critical and predicated on prior theological commitments. Barth’s attribution to the creature of a relative spontaneity with respect to its knowing and willing is not intended to uphold the integrity of the creature over against the determining activity of God. Evidence has conversely suggested that Barth uses spontaneity to mitigate against the idea that the creature might be determined by the \textit{causality of nature}, and so be robbed of the free agency it is commanded to use in the knowledge and service God on grounds internal to creation (see section 4.3.2 above).

As I have read Barth, then, human freedom does not arise or take its bearings from a philosophical model of rational agency founded on a principle of the independence of the will from antecedent causes, but arises and takes its bearings from the actuality that God has created the human creature to be just such a rational agent, a self-determining subject, in accordance with his purpose that it be his free and active covenant partner in the world.

\textbf{4.5 Conclusion}

The aim of this chapter was to highlight the extent and seriousness of Barth’s commitment to the creature as an epistemic agent by showing how his understanding of that act is firmly integrated within, and is an expression of, his theological notions of human subjectivity and freedom. I have thus traced the contour that runs from human cognition to the heart of Barth’s conception of human selfhood. This conception confirms and safeguards knowing as a spontaneous act, because such spontaneity is in fact native to human selfhood. Epistemic spontaneity is not then an irrelevant affirmation unconnected to the broader flow of Barth’s theology; the creature is established by God as a spontaneous knower and doer in virtue of the very freedom to which it has been called.

In practical terms, what I have established is that epistemic spontaneity is rooted in and is a modulation of human freedom, to the extent that spontaneity (the freedom

\textsuperscript{77 See again section 4.3.2.}
from nature) is an intrinsic function of the freedom for God. This was borne out in considering how such spontaneity characterises human subjectivity, operates as a function of the freedom of obedience, and is reflected generally in the rational order of the human constitution, as well as in the particular acts of knowing and willing.

At the same time, Barth’s understanding of spontaneity was seen to model Kant’s in some key respects. Both thinkers consider spontaneity to be the human subject’s freedom to rule and determine itself independently of external causes in the natural world – though in fairness this is only one aspect of human freedom as determined by God, for Barth. Moreover, both believe that such spontaneity is outworked in the two areas that constitute human selfhood – knowing and willing – insofar as the former is conceived of as involving a spontaneous act of the will undetermined by bodily desires and inclination; and the latter a spontaneous act of the mind undetermined by the object as presented in bodily sense-data. Nevertheless, these points of convergence aside, clear disanalogies between their accounts appeared in outlining the vastly different approaches they take.

Moreover, Barth’s affirmation of Kant’s concept of spontaneity raised questions about his appropriation of philosophical thought-forms. I considered Webster’s contention that modern notions of independence from nature and God are incompatible with Barth’s notion of human freedom, which has a distinctively theological shape and specific content. This led me to appraise the difficulties of this position, and to clarify that whilst philosophical notions of spontaneity are by no means foundational to or definitive of human freedom for Barth, they are clearly present. Nevertheless, Barth’s theological commitments condition their integration and determine the function they receive therein.

Having shown in this chapter how epistemic spontaneity is grounded in Barth’s understanding of freedom and subjectivity, the emergent question is whether Barth is willing and able to validate the creature as an epistemic agent in his descriptions of the environments in which he says the act of knowing is operational. Is Barth’s commitment to the creature as a spontaneous knower merely rhetorical, or is it threaded into the fabric of his understanding of the event of the knowledge of God and of the knowing of worldly objects? Does the creature remain free in the very act of knowing, or do the “christomonistic” tendencies scholars have detected in Barth’s theology surface at this point, and so annul the significance and reality of the creature as a knower?
5. The significance and success of “intra-worldly” knowing as a spontaneous act

5.1 Introduction

Barth has established the human creature as an epistemic agent on theological grounds, that is, in virtue of the divinely-ordained structure of knowing and the specific type of freedom the creature has been created for as an active subject. The aim of the final two chapters is to test whether Barth validates the creature as an epistemic agent in his descriptions of the environments in which the act of knowing is operational. This testing will show that Barth’s commitment to epistemic agency is not merely rhetorical, but is carried through to his understanding of the knowing of worldly objects and the event of faith. Analysis of both these contours of creaturely cognition – in chapters 5 and 6 respectively – shall cast significant new light on the creature as an epistemic agent.

Whilst there has been much scholarly debate over the position and role of human cognition in the event of revelation, by contrast there has been little interest in what Barth has to say about the creature as a knower of created objects. This chapter addresses this lacuna insofar as its aim is to signal the extent of Barth’s commitment to the creature as an epistemic agent – a spontaneous knower – by shedding light on the theological significance and active character he accords to ‘intra-worldly’ knowing, that is, to the act of cognising worldly objects. Though it must be conceded at once that Barth does not advance a philosophically sophisticated account of intra-worldly knowing in the *Church Dogmatics*, neither does he shy away from it, as if it were a topic that concerns only philosophers. Indeed, far from leaving that act stripped of any theological significance or value, examination of little discussed passages within *CD* II/1 and III/2 will reveal that the integrity and success of intra-worldly knowing as a distinctly spontaneous act is bound up with and predicated upon the purpose it is created to fulfil.¹

The following discussion falls into four parts. The first defines the basic shape and scope of intra-worldly knowing as the type of cognition that is proper to the creature as a being created by God. In the second, I discuss how the integrity and success of intra-worldly knowing is established by the purpose it is designed to serve: it

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¹ *CD* II/1, 188-190 = 210-12, and *CD* III/2, 402-4 = 481-4.
operates as a function of the call to know God. Part three shows that in light of its purpose Barth assumes this act to be spontaneous, and that this is reflected in the motifs of “mastery”, “encompassing” and “precedence” he uses to characterise it. Since the knowing of created objects must be ordained by God for success if it is to facilitate encounter with God, I outline in part four the theological-ontological grounds within the human creature and creation generally that guarantee its successful operation. These conditions are: “self-consciousness”, “resemblance”, and a “unity of being” underlying the apprehension of created entities.

Whilst clearly a subject of interest in its own right, the discussion of intra-worldly knowing also prepares the ground for chapter 6 insofar as it will cast up useful points of contrast and convergence in the way Barth handles and characterises the act of knowing in the environments in which it is said to be operational.

5.2 Defining intra-worldly knowing vis-à-vis the knowing of God

In chapter 2, I noted that although the creature’s cognition is intrinsically suited to the purpose of knowing God, it does not possess the intrinsic power or range to make God an object of knowledge. The cognition that is proper to the creature is therefore that which is limited to the apprehension of created, worldly objects. Before moving to assess the function and character of that act vis-à-vis the knowing of God, it is necessary to clarify what constitutes adequate language to describe this act.

For Barth, God is the “original” and “proper” object of human cognition; cognition is “normal” when it takes God as its object. That affirmation suggests that it is inappropriate to describe creaturely entities as “normal” and “ordinary” objects of human cognition, as it wrongly connotes that human cognition is oriented to them in the first instance. To avoid these connotations, I adopt instead Hans Urs von Balthasar’s term “intra-worldly” to describe the human act of knowing objects that are in the world and of the world, i.e. which are creaturely. Barth distinguishes this act from the knowing of God. My aim in this opening section is therefore to articulate what that distinction does and does not consist in as a way of delimiting the

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2 See section 2.3.1.1 above.

scope of the subjects to be treated in this chapter and the next, and of orientating the reader to the discussion of the theological significance intra-worldly knowing plays in Barth’s theology.

In distinguishing between the knowing of ordinary, worldly objects and the knowing of God I am not in the first place suggesting that Barth distinguishes between two types of cognition, as if the processes by which we acquire knowledge of ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’ objects are of a different order to the cognition that takes place in the event of faith. Such a distinction would be improper to Barth’s theology: Barth is quite clear that whatever else the event of the knowledge of God might involve human knowledge of him involves the same means used to know other objects (i.e. by an act of cognition) insofar as God meets us as an object in faith.

Although the knowledge of God is not reducible to that act, the event of the knowledge of God does not thus require;

[T]he abrogation, abolition or alteration of human cognition as such, and therefore of the formal and technical characteristics [Art und Technik] of human cognition [menschlichen Erkennens].

In fact, it is an event which;

[F]ormally and technically cannot be distinguished from what we call knowledge in other connexions, from human cognition.

Whatever these quotations might suggest about how Barth positions knowing in the event of the knowledge of God, the point of current import is that if indeed the act of knowing God utilises the same cognitive processes by which knowledge of God is received in the divinely-effected event of faith, then Barth’s understanding of the cognitive act cannot be the point of departure for grasping the differences between intra-worldly knowing and the knowing of God.

A more plausible way of envisaging the distinction between them is given in Barth’s insistence that in each instance a different type of object is cognised. The act of intra-worldly knowing specifies the knowing of a class of object which are given and so

\[ CD \text{II/1, 21 = 21. Interestingly, this suggests a point of disparity between Barth and John Calvin. Calvin implies that although faith is certainly human knowledge, it nevertheless involves the side-stepping or alteration of the human cognitive capacities. He asserts “When we call faith “knowledge” we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man’s mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it.” (Institutes., III.2.7, 559).} \]

\[ CD \text{II/1, 181.} \]

\[ CD \text{II/1, 181.} \]
readily available to cognition on account of the fact they are, like the knower, creaturely. Created entities are not the “normal” or “primary” objects of human cognition, however, as cognition is oriented to God as its first and proper object.

Be that as it may, in Barth’s view, such knowing must out of theological necessity be contrasted with the knowing of God. For God is not like these other general objects; God is “unique” and “particular” as God, and is not given but rather in a free-act of self-giving becomes an object of knowledge in faith. Thus our cognition – as we shall see in section 5.3 below – does not have the same ‘claim’ over him that it has over objects in the world. The distinction between intra-worldly knowing and the knowing of God is therefore established by and consists in the fact that God is not an object “in general” that falls within the ‘normal’ range of our cognition under sin – but is known only as he reveals himself.

For Barth, the scope and power of creaturely knowing is thus defined by the limitation placed on it by the hiddenness of God: it is restricted to taking only given, created objects, and cannot on that basis take God as an object of cognition. Barth puts that point thus;

The assertion of God’s hiddenness (which includes God’s invisibility, incomprehensibility, and ineffability) tells us that God does not belong to the objects which we can always subjugate to the process of our [intuiting],

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7 This point is discussed in more depth in 6.2.1 below. Nevertheless, Bruce McCormack argues that Barth’s conception of God’s revelation as a “giving” rather than a “given” is central to his whole theological program, and is a fact that raises interesting points of convergence and divergence from Schleiermacher. See B. McCormack, “What Has Basel to Do with Berlin?: Continuities in the Thought of Barth and Schleiermacher”, *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23:2 (2002), 146-173 (esp. 165f).

8 *CD* II/1, 14.

9 This limit is not one that the creature can discover and acknowledge through a diagnostic analysis of its own cognitive capacities. The hiddenness of God is not simply a predicate of the limit any philosophical epistemology might set to human knowing, and so it cannot be encapsulated in the language of the ‘Absolute’ or the ‘Unintuitable’. (*CD* II/1, 183) Neil MacDonald reads Barth as saying that such philosophical language is properly used only as a metaphor which bears witness to a theological reality.

That aside, the hiddenness of God is a revealed fact – it is a property of God, and is disclosed in the revelation of himself: “God’s hiddenness is the hiddenness of God. It is one of his properties. It is indeed that property of God with which his knowledge as such undoubtedly has its formal beginning. It is not reflections about space and time and about the categories of our thought, nor the aporia in which we can entangle ourselves with these reflections, thus setting ourselves a more negative or perhaps a very positive limit, but simply the great positions of the biblical attestation and of the Church’s confession of the being and activity of God, which move us to assert God’s hiddenness.” (*CD* II/1, 184). See also N. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New Word within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Meta-dilemmas of the Enlightenment*, (Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs) (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 53).
conceiving and expressing and therefore our spiritual oversight and control.
In contrast to that of all other objects, his nature is not one which in this
sense lies in the sphere of our power.\(^\text{10}\)

In contrast to intra-worldly knowing, then, the knowing of the hidden God becomes
possible only as God gives himself to be known – it is an event that is controlled,
effected and initiated by God. This is discussed at more length in chapter 6.

In sum, then, I use intra-worldly knowing to designate the sphere of objects that is
proper to the creature as a being created by God. It is creature-creature cognition. It
does not envelope the creature-God encounter which takes place in faith.

Nevertheless, there is one final qualification to be made. Although God is not
creaturely, Barth affirms that he reveals himself in the world by taking creaturely
form in Jesus Christ. It is in his “secondary” (creaturely and mediated) objectivity
that God is known by the creature.\(^\text{11}\) An act of intra-worldly knowing is therefore
necessarily ordained and presupposed by God in his meeting with the creature in
Barth’s view, as the next section will clearly establish. To be sure, Barth does not
allow the knowing of God to collapse into an act of intra-worldly knowing such that
it might be considered to be always an outcome of that act. Barth maintains that God
is not identical with the creaturely medium in which he is known, but uses it to
unveil and veil himself. That Barth keeps the hiddenness of God in force in the event
entails that the creature’s cognitive acquaintance with the medium in which God
reveals himself is not identical with, not the guarantor of, its knowledge of God. As
distinct from a limited act of intra-worldly knowing, then, the efficiency of the
knowing of God is determined in shape and in content by the divine act of self-
revealing.

Having made the distinction between intra-worldly knowing and the knowing of
God, we can now on that basis proceed to examine what purpose the knowing of
created objects serves vis-à-vis the knowing of God. After that, I will address how
that purpose is reflected in Barth’s description of its active character in *CD II/1*.

5.3 The purpose and integrity of intra-worldly knowing

Since the creature as it stands before God is not created with a cognition of a range
and power such that it can put God at its disposal, human cognition is clearly limited

\(^\text{10}\) *CD II/1*, 187.

\(^\text{11}\) *CD II/1*, 16f.
to apprehending the creaturely. Yet Barth insists that the creature is created cognisant for the purpose of knowing God, and that God is therefore the primary and proper object of human cognition. Evidently, Barth must attribute to intra-worldly knowing a function and significance vis-à-vis the knowing of God if it is to be established that God is known, and that encounter with him is cognitive and not non-cognitive. My aim in this section is therefore to highlight the place of intra-worldly knowing in Barth’s theological epistemology, and to consider how the integrity of that act is safeguarded by the purpose it plays therein.

Barth’s anthropology pictures the human person as an epistemic agent in virtue of the call which is determinative of its being. Yet if the original and proper use of the cognitive capacity which the human person has been gifted is to know God in particular, the question immediately arises as to the relative status of the act in which we know ordinary, worldly objects. Indeed, if it is the case that all the significance is placed on the act of knowing God which, to be sure, occurs in the divinely effected act of faith, then is intra-worldly knowing inconsequential – is the cognition proper to the creature a second class or diminished cognition?

The beginnings of an answer to this question emerge in considering Barth’s assertion, buried deep within a little discussed passage in \textit{CD} III/2, that Scripture assumes the human person possesses a “general capacity” to know ordinary objects. He claims it is clear from the Bible that the human person can cognise other things aside from God, including “the action and inaction of his fellow-men”, “the relations and events of nature and history” and the “outward and the inward sides of the created world”. Barth’s affirmation runs thus;

\begin{quote}
As he [man] is ordained and as it is given to him to perceive God, he is ordained and it is given to him to perceive generally, to be percipient.  
\end{quote}

Now, it is important to note that Barth sharply distinguishes between the “general capacity” to know objects other than God, and the “particular capacity” to know God. Barth does not identify this “general capacity” as the basic type of knowing that characterises us, as if the human creature were primarily oriented to ordinary, worldly objects in general. Barth holds that the human person is not first created to perceive objects in general and then, on that basis – or in virtue of that capacity or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{CD} III/2, 402 = 482f; \textit{CD} II/1, 228-9. \phantom{f}
\item \textit{CD} III/2, 402 = 482. \phantom{f}
\item \textit{CD} III/2, 399 = 478-9. \phantom{f}
\end{itemize}
the knowledge it yields – able to reify God as one object amongst others in the world. Indeed, Barth outright rejects the idea of a static analogy of attribution between creation and creator which marks classical natural theology.\textsuperscript{15} Intra-worldly knowing is not therefore the original and primary function of cognition in virtue of the invalid order of knowing it implies.

This does not signify that Barth regards intra-worldly knowing as redundant vis-à-vis the “particular capacity” of knowing God. Barth’s point concerns how the relation between the two capacities is to be envisaged, and of that relation he writes;

\begin{quote}
The general capacity does not come first, so that, among other things, he [man] can make God and the witness to God his own. On the contrary, the general is contained in the particular. The general capacity is given for the sake of the particular, and always first and last in connexion with the particular.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

From this, intra-worldly knowing comes to view as a function of the original capacity, or, expressed differently, as existing in the service of that capacity.

Evidently, Barth does not regard the knowing of ordinary objects as a separate sphere of activity unrelated to covenant history, and neither does he think it has meaning or purpose independently of the original reason the creature was created cognisant. Rather, the general capacity exists “for the sake” of the particular. The integrity and significance of intra-worldly knowing appears to lie in the very contribution it makes to the human person’s knowing of God.\textsuperscript{17} And as such, it is integral to the person’s active, cognitive participation in covenant history.

Yet what exactly is the service intra-worldly knowing renders? To again cite Barth; the “general capacity” \textquoteleft[Is] important and necessary for man only because God does not usually meet him immediately but mediately in His works, deeds and ordinances, and because the history of God’s traffic with man takes place in the sphere of the created world and of the world of objects distinct from God.\textsuperscript{18}

Barth’s assertion is that intra-worldly cognition is indispensable for the creature’s realisation of its telos as covenant partner since, in virtue of sin, the human person does not have the luxury of immediate knowledge of God. Rather, God mediates

\textsuperscript{15} See section 1.2.3 above.
\textsuperscript{16} CD III/2, 403 = 482.
\textsuperscript{17} CD III/2, 402-3 = 482-3.
\textsuperscript{18} CD III/2, 402 = 482.
knowledge of himself through worldly objects which bear witness to God – a witness the creature comes to know of in perceiving those objects.\(^{19}\) To be sure, not any or all objects bear witness to God. Witness is not a property of the *givenness* of worldly objects as such, but is conferred on them by God when God in his own sovereign freedom gives himself to be known through them. And in particular, God’s self-attestation in the world begins with his revelation in Jesus Christ.\(^{20}\) Moreover, God raises witnesses to his activity in Jesus Christ and in the prophets and apostles, and he continues to do so through the confession and witness of the church to the Word of God as attested to in Scripture.\(^{21}\) Ecclesial witness is the necessary cognitive starting point of the person’s encounter with God – and it is a witness observable by act an of intra-worldly knowing – of seeing and hearing that witness – even if the event is by no means reducible to or initiated by that act.\(^{22}\)

Understood thus, intra-worldly knowing is, as Barth says, “important and necessary” to the cognition of God (which occurs through the mediatorial ministry of the church). Yet this assertion carries a crucial qualification which must be noted. For Barth, intra-worldly knowing is not *necessary* in the sense of constituting an independent basis on which to know God. A successful act of intra-worldly knowing is not the necessarily precondition of knowledge of God, as if knowledge of God were guaranteed purely by one’s knowing of some created object.\(^{23}\)

Be that as it may, in *CD IV/3.1* Barth imputes a limited theological significance to created objects.\(^{24}\) Whilst the human condition, the findings of the arts and sciences, or the “constancies” of nature (such as natural laws) do not reveal the one true Light, Jesus Christ, they may nevertheless function as “little lights” that are visible to people in and beyond the Christian community, despite the impact of sin. These “little lights” and “free communications” of God through such objects should not be

\(^{19}\) *CD III/2*, 402-3 = 482. The event of the knowledge of God takes place in the world – *CD II/1*, 17f, 207.

\(^{20}\) *CD II/1*, 58f.


\(^{22}\) Ecclesial witness is discussed in 2.3.2.3 above and 6.3.3.3 below.

\(^{23}\) This possible construal is excluded because it wrongly presupposes the human person is a self-sufficient entity and so able to know God independently of God’s self-revelation because it can know objects in general. See section 2.2.1 above.

\(^{24}\) *CD IV/3.1*, 86-165. A good exposition of this theme is given by Gabriel Fackre in his essay, “Revelation”, in *Karl Barth and Evangelical theology: Convergences and Divergences*, (ed. S. W. Chung), (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press, 2006), 1-25, (esp. 5-8, 23-5).
unexpected, given that God is Lord over all creation. Nevertheless, their function is to illumine the creature in its environment and they do not thus carry “real threat” or “real promise” because “they speak neither of real judgement….nor of real grace and salvation”. Moreover, not all objects are used by God as “true words”. Indeed, such occurrences must be critically tested by the Church in light of its knowledge of Jesus Christ to see whether they bear witness to the Word of God.

In sum, Barth does not leave intra-worldly knowing to the philosophers, but integrates it into the fabric of his theological conception of the human creature as a being created for cognitive and active encounter with God. It is not simply downplayed as an inferior or sin-ridden type of knowing but has its dignity granted and its integrity safeguarded vis-à-vis the knowing of God: in particular, it appears to be a function of the call to know God which is determinative of the creature’s status as an active knower.

5.4 The spontaneity of intra-worldly knowing: “mastery” and “precedence”

The purpose of intra-worldly knowing evidently establishes the integrity of the act in which worldly objects are known. Barth turns to discuss the character of intra-worldly knowing over three pages in CD II/1. He touches on it within the context of discussing how God’s hiddenness sets a definite limit upon what human knowing can and cannot do. He writes that our cognition is suited for and able to successfully cognise objects on the creaturely plane. He regards intra-worldly knowing as successful on account of its character: it involves “mastery” and “precedence” over worldly objects.

In line with the main aim of this chapter, I consider whether Barth’s handling of those motifs suggests that he carries his commitment to the human creature as a spontaneous knower into his understanding of intra-worldly knowing. What I will argue is that whilst Barth does not explicitly affirm spontaneity in the passage under question, examination of these two designations in their connection show that he

25 CD IV/3.1, 155, 156.
assumes intra-worldly knowing to be a spontaneous act insofar as they prescribe for the creature a determinative priority over created objects. I begin with the concept of “mastery”, about which Barth writes;

We are masters \[mächtig\] of what we can apprehend \[erfassen\]. Intuition \[Anschauen\] and conceiving \[Begreifen\] certainly mean encompassing \[begrenzen\], and we are superior to, and spiritually masters of, what we can encompass. In this sense we are masters of the world and everything in it, in spite of the enigmatic quality and superior power which we apparently encounter in them.\(^{27}\)

Barth contends that we are “masters” \[(mächtig)\] of what we apprehend, that is to say, we have a degree of power over the object of cognition in virtue of the very act in which we intuit and conceive it. But why would Barth want to insist on our “mastery” or control over the object of cognition, and how is such power to be understood? In the first place, there is little evidence to support the idea that “mastery” is an ontological designation for Barth, as if he regards humans as those beings most able in virtue of their cognition to enquire into knowledge of other entities. Far from suggesting that animals are incapable of knowing or that they exhibit an inferior cognition consisting of only awareness and thus receptivity – a cognition controlled by the determining object, in other words – Barth admits that we are not given insight by God into how they know.\(^{28}\) Evidently, the language of mastery does not carry implicit within it a value judgement about human cognition vis-à-vis that of animals or other created beings.

What Barth means by the power we exercise over objects in the act of intra-worldly knowing can be brought out by attending to the related concept of “precedence” \[(Vorher)\], which is also an attribute of such knowing, according to Barth;

There cannot be allowed here any precedence \[Vorher\] of man which can entitle his subsequence – in which God has become the aim of his direction, the object of his knowledge – to ascribe to itself a right of disposal \[Verfügungsgewalt über\] over the object, to make use of a power of disposal over it – as man does continually and obviously in regard to all other objects, whatever the theory of knowledge that he may hold.\(^{29}\) (italics mine)

\(^{27}\) CD II/1, 188 = 211.

\(^{28}\) CD III/2, 401f. That humans have no right to attribute to themselves a superior being to animals seems to be Barth’s typical position. See E. Busch, The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology, (ed. D & J Guder), (trans. Geoffrey Bromiley), (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 191f.

\(^{29}\) CD II/1, 21-2 = 22.
The concept of “precedence” is not meant to be understood temporally or ontologically in the first instance for Barth. And whilst it cannot be applied to the human person in the act of knowing of God – for in that event we are not subjects who claim and determine God as object, but are posited and claimed as subjects by that object – it rightly characterizes its knowing of created objects. Understood in its specific application to intra-worldly knowing, then, this “precedence” consists in the idea that in the act of knowing we exercise a “right of disposal” (Verfügungsgewalt über etw.) over something readily available. This is to say that the creature has some measure of cognitive control over worldly objects.

We have all other objects as determinations of the pre-arranged disposition [Aneignung] and pre-arranged mode of our own existence. And this is so because we first of all have ourselves.  

Evidently, the creature’s precedence gives it a determinative priority over the object of cognition. We know created objects by virtue of a potentiality existing within ourselves, i.e. a “predisposition”. The given object does not condition and shape the subject, but is determined and conditioned by the human creature in the act of intra-worldly knowing. This is expressed in the phrase “we are masters…of what we can encompass [begrenzen]”. For although the language of “encompassing” might lead one to conclude that Barth is simply making the general statement that an object is known when it falls within the range of our cognitive operations, begrenzen can take the more definite meaning of ‘delimiting’ or ‘defining’, and this would sit comfortably with Barth’s notion of precedence, which amounts to the determination of the object by the prior activity of the subject. Taken as a whole, Barth’s understanding of “precedence” – as specifically applied to the creature’s knowing of worldly objects – denotes that the creature actively conditions and controls the given object by virtue of the potentiality of its cognition, and in so doing, brings knowledge of that object about.

Thus described, Barth’s understanding of the character of intra-worldly cognition as “mastery” and “precedence” reflects his assumptions about the structure of cognition as described in chapter 3. There, we saw that knowing is decisively an act of the human subject insofar as it does not result from the action of the external, independently existing (given) object on the mind, but requires the contribution of
the mind in a spontaneous (self-initiated, independent) act of thought (in synthesizing, judging, thinking) in which it determines the object and brings knowledge about. On this view, our epistemic apparatus becomes the controlling measure, source and norm of our knowledge of creaturely objects. Although there is in truth no explicit affirmation of epistemic spontaneity in this doctrinal environment, it is implicitly acknowledged in the concepts of mastery and precedence insofar as they give a central place to the determinative activity of the creature in the knowing process.

Nevertheless, it is worth concluding by highlighting the theological limits of such human cognitive mastery, and the important question it raises. According to Barth, God is the one object who is not subject to, controlled or determined by the creature in the event of knowing. As we saw in section 5.2 above, it is the consequence of God’s hiddenness that we cannot subjugate him by the power of our cognition. Now, if human knowing of ordinary objects always involves mastery – or cognitive control – but God is not an object that can be mastered, then the question arises as to how human knowledge of God is possible, or rather, how is God known without at the same time being “mastered” or determined? Does it require Barth to step back from his commitment to the creature as an active knower? And what then of his claim that God is known by the means the creature knows other objects? Barth’s answer to this question is discussed in the following chapter.

5.5 The success of intra-worldly knowing: three ontological conditions

It is clear from the foregoing that the creature is purposively ordained an active knower of created objects. Undoubtedly, then, the knowing of such objects must be successful if God gives himself to be known through them. The success of intra-worldly knowing ultimately stems from God’s sovereignly free decision to make himself known and to create and elect the creature as such a knower (i.e. with a structure suited to its purpose). But as we shall see in this final section, there are also detectible within Barth’s theology three implicit ontological conditions within human being and within creation generally that contribute to the integrity and success of the act. These conditions are: (1) self-consciousness, (2) a “resemblance”

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31 Barth, PT, 306.
32 See section 2.2 above.
between subject and object, and (3) the “mystery of unity underlying…our apprehensions”. I exposit these three creaturely grounds below.

5.2.1 Self-consciousness

In *CD* III/2, Barth argues that self-consciousness is indispensable to, and is inextricably involved in, the creature’s capacity for intra-worldly knowing. This contention derives from his claim that soul is the life, the animating and quickening principle, of the body. As we saw in the previous chapter, the soul renders us “specific living subjects”, as “rational beings” capable of independent action. It now has to be stated that it is the soul that grants the creature consciousness of itself as such. 33

According to Barth, the creature becomes conscious of itself as a self-conscious being when it acts. This is because when it acts it does so as an independent subject and so becomes conscious of itself as such. Barth writes thus;

> I myself say to myself that I am engaged in this self-knowledge [of myself as a self-conscious, independent being] and therefore capable of it. All the acts of my life consist...in the fact that I say this to myself. 34

Whilst this affirmation hardly amounts to the doctrine of the transcendental unity of apperception espoused by Kant, wherein the “I think” accompanies all thoughts and actions, the soul – or rather the creature’s consciousness of itself as such – is evidently the hallmark of its perdurance as an independent subject that is capable of knowing objects distinct from itself, for Barth.

A relationship of mutual necessity appears to pertain between the creature’s consciousness of self and its consciousness of other entities. The quote above suggests that in order to know itself as soul the creature needs to be able to distinguish itself from other entities in its purview; in knowing others (as distinct from itself) it reaches awareness of itself. In other words, self-consciousness is integral to and presupposed in the consciousness of other objects external to myself that I relate to in acts. 35

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33 *CD* III/2, 374-5.
34 *CD* III/2, 375.
35 This can be also be inferred from Barth’s statement that “Man can not only posit himself. In so doing, he can also posit another, and therefore himself in relation to this other and this other in relation to himself.” Moreover, such self-consciousness is also essential to any consciousness of God, “[M]an is capable of perceiving the God who meets him and reveals Himself to him...he is
As I live and am therefore soul I find myself able to become conscious that I am a soul. And as I make use of this ability, my life itself and therefore my soul executes a return movement to itself...It belongs to my capacity for action that I continually do this, that I am continually engaged in the act of becoming self-conscious and therefore in this return movement.\(^{36}\)

That we are continually able to recognise ourselves as ourselves (as souls) means that self-consciousness (and the consciousness of our (ability to be) self-consciousness) accompanies and is involved in all other acts of life. However, self-consciousness does not hinge on an act of inner reflection – it is not simply an act of soul but, in arising in connection with awareness of other objects, is also and no less an act of the body. That the body is important to self-consciousness and to our knowledge of other things comes through clearly in the following quote;

> Without having some command and making some use of them [my corporeal senses], I cannot be aware of objects different from myself. And without being aware of objects different from myself, I cannot distinguish myself from as others as the object identical with myself, and cannot therefore recognise myself as a subject. \(^{37}\)

Whether by means of inner reflection or the senses, one can and does in a corporeal act become conscious “of objects different from myself”. This is indubitably so, for Barth, for although I am more than my body, “I live in my body” and because I exist in being body as well as soul – and cannot and do not exist in the here and now without or apart from my body – the act of self-consciousness, as with all acts, must be a “common act” of body and soul. Thus construed, self-consciousness presupposes and is grounded in the unity of body and soul.

The role of the Holy Spirit is important to establish in all this. It is God's action in the Holy Spirit which grounds and sustains human being in its unity. “Man”, according to Barth, “has Spirit, and through the Spirit is the soul of his body”.

To summarise, the unity of the ontological constitution of human being (body and soul) as established by the Holy Spirit is the indispensable ground of self-consciousness which itself, whether pure or reflected from experience of objects,

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\(^{36}\) CD III/2, 375.

\(^{37}\) CD III/2, 375.
conditions all acts in which we consciously relate to and know objects distinct from ourselves.\(^{38}\)

### 5.2.2 Resemblance

Turning back to *CD II/1*, Barth suggests that our knowledge of created objects also depends upon a “resemblance” between us and them.\(^{39}\) This is to say that for successful cognition to take place, we must in some way be similar to, or share a likeness with, what we apprehend. For this to be true, Barth must suppose that the identity of an object, \(x\), which is distinct from us, is established as \(x\) by means of *self-reflection*, i.e. on the basis of our self-consciousness of our own identity. We are able to *recognise* the object in virtue of its being comparable to us and therefore measurable. On the other hand, though, if this similarity is adjudged to be absent from the object so that it is totally dissimilar and incomparable to us, that is, shares no common attributes or features – as in the case of our knowing of God – then knowledge of that object is impossible by comparative means. This is because we can only take the measure of an object to which we are in some way and to some extent similar, i.e. “resemble” (*gleichen*).

What Barth has here said merely suffices as a very general and well-worn response to the question asked throughout the history of philosophy as to how subject knows object, or how the human subject is able to identify \(x\) as \(x\).\(^{40}\) It is thus not the positing of a likeness between created beings that attracts our interest, but what Barth believes that likeness consists in. And here, we receive a decidedly theological answer;

> [W]e certainly resemble [*gleichen*] the world and everything in it. For with the world we are created by God. And for this reason we can form [intuitions] and concepts of the world and what is in it.\(^{41}\)

The similarity of identity between all worldly objects can at bottom be understood as the participation of all such objects in *creaturehood*. What is determinative of objects that share in this categorisation is that they are *created by God*. They are comparable insofar as they all fall under the same classification of object. On that basis, it is

\(^{38}\) *CD III/2*, 393, 395.

\(^{39}\) *CD II/1*, 188.


\(^{41}\) *CD II/1*, 188.
possible to know and establish the identity of created entities through comparison and reflection. This likeness is not then to be conceived abstractly as some common physical property, but is a genuine likeness of being with attendant cognitive possibilities. Our recognition of objects is, for Barth, made possible because we are ontologically alike and on the same ontological plane in being creatures and creations of God.

However, there is no such analogy between created being and its creator. There is no aspect of creaturely being that when considered in itself is comparable to any element of the divine being, and so there is no way of arriving at knowledge of God by reflection and comparison on the constitution of human being.

5.3.3 The unity of created being

That created entities share certain things in common presupposes, for Barth, that there exists an “mystery of unity underlying all our...apprehensions” of such objects. This is to say that there is an underlying unity of being between created objects that is the condition of union between subject and object;

We are originally and properly one with what we can apprehend. To apprehend certainly means to possess. But there is no possession without original and proper unity [Einheit] between the possessor and the possessed. Upon this unity rests the secret [Geheimnis] of our capacity [Fähigkeit] to apprehend in this or that way the world and what is in it.

Resemblance and the possibility of self-consciousness (on the basis of the unity of soul and body) bear testimony to this unity. But what does Barth mean in talking of a “unity” of “possessor and possessed”? Most superficially, Barth might be read as simply drawing attention to the fact that knowing involves a union – the coming together of knower and known in an epistemic encounter made possible by resemblance.

At a slightly deeper level, Barth might be suggesting that cognitive union is made possible because creation is itself a unity. Creation holds together, it is one, despite the vast array of contrasts that comprise it and that seem to undercut its integrity.

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42 *CD* II/1, 188.
43 "...allem unserem sonstigen Erfassen zugrunde liegende Geheimnis der Einheit..." (*CD* II/1, 189 = 212)
44 *CD* II/1, 189 = 212.
45 *CD* II/1, 189.
creation were not held together in a unity, if its ontological integrity were shattered, then apprehension would not be possible. The unity of apprehension rests then upon the unity of created being. But the unity of creation hinges for Barth not on some intrinsic factor, but on God, who “in relation to all unities…is the original and proper One, unique and simple”.\(^{46}\) God himself is a unity; and as he precedes, maintains and accompanies creation, is the source of the unity of created being and thus also of the cognitive union we enjoy with other entities.

In rounding off this section, it may with some justice be asked whether Barth has gone too far in stressing the comparability of created being (as testified to in resemblance and unity) as the condition of intra-worldly knowing. Might it not be the case that our knowing of worldly entities requires not simply union but a degree of separation? Paul Tillich has come closest to appreciating this point in identifying the foundational role he thinks the concept “cognitive distance” plays in our cognition of objects. Like Barth, Tillich too would contend that our knowing involves union, but the condition of that union, he would otherwise argue, is not in the first place an underlying unity of (created) being, but separation. He writes:

> Knowing is a form of union. In every act of knowledge the knower and that which is known are united; the gap between subject and object is overcome. The subject “grasps” the object, adapts it to itself, and, at the same time, adapts itself to the object. But the union of knowledge is a peculiar one; it is a union through separation. Detachment is the condition of cognitive union. In order to know, one must “look” at a thing, and, in order to look at a thing, one must be “at a distance.” Cognitive distance is the presupposition of cognitive union.\(^{47}\)

Union and separation are thus for Tillich the two “polar elements” at play in all cognitive relations, whereas Barth stresses identity (of created beings with one another) in unity.

In this section I have endeavoured to describe the various creaturely conditions Barth outlines for the successful operation of intra-worldly knowing. Viewed from the standpoint of the human creature, these theological conditions might be described as consisting in a set of retrogressive unities: intra-worldly knowing relies on a) self-consciousness (as predicated on the unity of soul and body as effected by the Holy Spirit), b) “resemblance” (as a unity of subject and object made possible by

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\(^{46}\) CD II/1, 619-620.

similarity), and c) the unity of created being (which itself is established by God is who is the original and proper unity, and ground of all other unities). These creaturely and therefore relative conditions guarantee the success of the purposive, spontaneous act of intra-worldly knowing in Barth’s theology.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to begin the process of testing whether Barth carries through his commitment to the creature as a spontaneous knower to his understanding of the act of knowing of created objects. To get an answer to this question, I took the broad approach of showing that far from conceiving of intra-worldly knowing as having no theological value, Barth affirms the integrity and success of intra-worldly knowing as a spontaneous act on the basis of the purpose it is created to fulfil. Intra-worldly knowing thus can be viewed as a significant, if deeply hidden, contour of Barth’s understanding of creaturely cognition in its own right.

I began this chapter by differentiating intra-worldly knowing from the knowing of God on grounds internal to Barth’s theology. I then attended to how the knowing of created entities is significant for Barth insofar as he thinks it is a function of the call to know God. Against that background, it was possible to get an answer to the main question by showing that the purpose of intra-worldly knowing is reflected in the character of the act as described by Barth in CD II/1: whilst Barth does not explicitly affirm the spontaneity of knowing in the passage under discussion, his use of the concepts of “mastery” and “precedence” suggests that he assumes the creature to have a determinative priority over created objects in virtue of the character of its cognition. This finding indicates that Barth creates space for, and offers a nuanced account of, the creature as an active knower within the first testing environment. Finally, I broadened the discussion to consider the creaturely grounds on which the integrity and success of intra-worldly knowing is guaranteed.

During the course of the analysis it became clear that Barth places tight limits on what human knowing can and cannot do. He claims that the creature does not have cognitive “mastery” over God because of his hiddenness and unique objectivity. But does this claim not in fact diminish or do away with human cognition in the event of the knowledge of God? And what then of his claim that our knowledge of God utilises the same processes involved in intra-worldly knowing?
The purpose of the final chapter will be to test the reading advanced in this thesis in one further doctrinal environment: in Barth’s description of the event of faith. As presented in the field, it would appear that Barth’s conception of the creature as a spontaneous knower does not necessarily cohere well with his theological epistemology. Indeed, Torrance, Jüngel, McCormack and others have found it difficult to position Barth’s insistence on the role of human knowing in the event of the knowledge of God in relation to the primacy he attaches to God’s act of self-revealing. There is thus little sense of how Barth affirms the creature as an epistemic agent in the event of faith. Nonetheless, this is the issue to which I will now turn.
6. From cognition to the Christian life: arguing for epistemic spontaneity in the event of faith

6.1 Introduction

[God] is not this true God if His knowledge does not involve a real human [intuiting] and conceiving founded and ordered of course by Him alone, and not therefore cancelling His own hiddenness.¹

The previous chapter began the process of testing whether Barth validates the creature as an epistemic agent in his descriptions of the environments in which he says the act of knowing is operational. On the back of the positive result it yielded with respect to intra-worldly knowing, it is time to bring a close to this study by assessing whether that same commitment is reflected in his handling of human knowing in the event of the knowledge of God. This subject is an important dimension of Barth’s account of the creature as an epistemic agent; it constitutes the final contour of creaturely cognition that we have to examine.

My argument is that Barth advances two accounts of the creature’s cognitive involvement in the event of faith in the Church Dogmatics, each with different nuances and emphases – each positioning the human knower slightly differently in that event. The first comes in CD II/1 amidst Barth’s exposition of the “knowability” of God over against natural theology.² There, Barth’s commitment to the creature as an active, spontaneous knower is present but inadequately protected on account of his failure to resolve how cognition is meant to be simultaneously “active” and an “instrument” in the event of faith. Without any retraction or modification of his commitment to God as subject of the event, Barth in CD IV/1 goes on to give a full account of faith as a spontaneous cognitive act that is an integral aspect of the self-involving dynamic of the Christian life.³ There, the knowing that takes place in faith is not simply pictured as ‘active’, but as social, practical and transformative as well.

My contention is therefore that in both accounts Barth is keen to position the creature as an epistemic agent in the event of faith, and does so with varying degrees of success. Irrespective of the complications that dog his first account, however, there is

¹ CD II/1, 194.
² CD II/1, 3-31, 179-257.
³ CD IV/1, 757-779.
no doubt that he takes seriously the need to endorse epistemic spontaneity in the event of faith.

To make this point, I begin with *CD II/1*. I first show how Barth establishes the human creature as a knower of God on account of his assertion that “God is known”. I then expand the discussion to consider how God posits the creature as *subject* in the event of faith, and how and why God conditions that event to be *cognitive* in character, rather than non-cognitive. However, I argue that creaturely epistemic agency in the event is problematised by the introduction of the concept of “instrument” to describe the creature’s role. I describe that concept and explain that although it helps Barth safeguard the primacy of the divine act in revelation – something he thinks is obscured in natural theology – it unfortunately eclipses the creature’s derived subjectivity. In conclusion, I examine briefly how the doctrine of *concursus* may allow Barth to hold together the creature’s status as subject and instrument without contradiction. In sum, I make the case that Barth takes seriously the need to endorse creaturely epistemic agency in *CD II/1*, but that pressing doctrinal commitments and concerns make his affirmation of it inconsistent.

Any lacuna in this first account is visibly addressed in the second, however, where Barth develops the theme of the creature’s cognitive response to faith in some detail. I discuss his contention that far from being a mere “instrument” in the event of faith, the creature’s knowing and action is spontaneous and free. I then analyse the creature’s holistically conceived response to God in the three cognitive moments that comprise the “dynamic of faith”. Faith is a dynamic response in which knowing effects service and service effects knowing; as such, it is the basic act of the Christian life. I do not isolate cognition for treatment in that analysis, but explicate it in its intrinsic connection with serving. But unlike in chapter 2 where this was approached on the ontological level of the human constitution i.e. in terms of the capacities of “percipience” and “activity”, I now exposit that link-up on the practical level, in terms of the Christian life.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to note that Barth’s endorsement of epistemic spontaneity in faith corroborates the findings of previous chapters. If substantiated, this fact would further challenge two ideas commonly held in the field, namely, that Barth does not give the creaturely knower enough weight in the event of faith such
that the subjective realisation of knowledge of God is jeopardised. Secondly it would undercut the idea that Barth’s “christomonism” – in revelation as elsewhere – crushes creaturely action, or at best undermines its integrity. Nevertheless, I consider this a secondary objective, however much it is implicated in the main aim of the chapter. Therefore, I do not re-engage with the critique of monism here, except to hint at ways in which it might be rebutted. Instead, I refer the reader to my discussion of its main contours in chapter 1.

6.2 Faith and epistemic agency in CD II/1

In this section I examine the role Barth gives to human knowing in the event of the knowledge of God as presented in CD II/1. The analysis divides into two parts. The first describes how the divine subject miraculously posits the creature as subject of the act of knowing God, and how Barth thinks God conditions the event of faith to be cognitive in character, that is, involving a divinely-effected correspondence to God in his reality as object. Despite initial promise, however, the second part shows how Barth’s introduction of the concept of instrument problematises his understanding of the place of epistemic agency in the event of faith, creating the impression of divine monism. A proposed solution is outlined in conclusion: I consider how Barth relates the concepts of activity and instrument in CD III/3.

6.2.1 Barth on the creature as a knower of God

Barth has argued that the creature is created for knowing God, and that the active character of its cognition necessarily reflects that purpose – even if its intrinsic range and power cannot make God an object of knowledge. Quite clearly, the knowing of God that takes place in faith is a creaturely cognitive event, and would therefore seem to involve the activity of intuiting and conceiving. But does Barth work out his assumptions about the creature as knower as far as his theological epistemology as set out in CD II/1? That is to say, does Barth give enough weight to creaturely cognitive activity in the event of faith, or does his commitment to the sovereignty of the divine act of self-revealing eclipse it?

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4 See section 1.3 above.
5 See section 1.4 above.
Certainly, in that volume Barth comes to the topic of the cognition involved in faith within his discussion of the doctrine of God and, in particular, his treatment of the knowledge and “knowability” of God. He exposit the role and weight of human cognition in terms of the divine act of self-revealing that occasions it, and what he has to say about it is conditioned by those prior considerations. Given that, we do not expect from Barth a detailed account of how human cognition functions in the event of faith. The question is rather that of ascertaining whether Barth leaves adequate space for the creature as knower within his theological epistemology.

The aim of the opening section of part one is to show that Barth does establish the human creature as a knower of God. I demonstrate this through an exposition of his contention that “God is known” by the creature – a necessary condition if it is really the creature that is to know him. This raises the issue of how Barth will relate the idea that God is known without being “mastered” to his contention that human knowledge of God is totally the work of God. I consider how Barth attempts to answer both questions by insisting that the creature is *posited* by God as an epistemic agent in this event, and that God *conditions* this event to be cognitive in character.

### 6.2.1.1 The actuality of the knowledge of God: “God is known”

Barth contends that the indispensable presupposition of Church life is the fact that “God is known”.

He writes;

> All speaking and hearing in the Church of Jesus Christ entirely rests upon and is connected with the fact that God is known in the Church of Jesus Christ;...If it were not so...if God were not the object of his perception, [of his intuition] and conception, and if he did not know God – whatever we understand by “know” – then he could not speak and hear about Him. Then everything declared and heard in the Church would have no Subject, and would be left in the air like an empty sound.

But to know God is not simply to be acquainted with a set of abstract truths, as if we were passive observers. The knowledge of God is an *event*; it is the event of God’s free act of self-revelation in which he makes himself known to the creature. The actuality of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ is the basis of any thinking and speaking about God, and this statement is the lynch-pin of his theological

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6 *CD* I/1, 187-8; *CD* II/1, 1-2, 10, 14, 15, 31, 182, 194.

7 *CD* II/1, 3-4f, 63-4f.
epistemology as set out in CD II/1. Indeed, only after establishing the actuality of knowledge of God does Barth go on to consider how God can be known, i.e. his “knowability”. This ordering reveals an elemental facet of Barth’s handling of human knowing in this volume: Barth does not first consider whether and how God becomes known on the basis of some potentiality of our cognition because creaturely cognition is not equipped with the range and power to know God – whatever the Schattenmensch of “natural theology” might assume in virtue of his supposed ontological and epistemological self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, the point stands that “God is known” in the Church, and that such knowledge, if it is to be really human knowledge, necessarily supposes the spontaneous type of knowing the creature is created with, i.e. the ability to intuit and conceive;

If God becomes the object of man’s knowledge, this necessarily means that He becomes the object of his [intuition] and conception. On the strength of this it becomes possible and necessary to speak and hear about God.  

Quite clearly, the creature can and does intuit and conceive God. But this happens mediatelly on account of the ‘dialectic of veiling and unveiling’. God is not directly apprehensible by the creature. As the sovereign and hidden Lord and God, he becomes objective to us by bearing witness to himself in a creaturely object he appoints to represent him, the humanity of Jesus Christ. We therefore stand directly before that object (and before others that he uses to attest to himself as revealed in Jesus Christ) in which he is represented, but stand indirectly before him.  

Bruce McCormack argues that the concept of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling gave Barth a way of responding to the following question, a question that the theological epistemology advanced in Romans II sought to answer: “If God is to be known by humans, God must somehow make Himself to be ‘objective’ to the human knower; He must place Himself within the range of “objects” which can be intuited by human beings. But how could God become an “object” of human intuition without making Himself subject to the control (the disposition, the management) of the human knowing apparatus?”. See B. McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936, (paperback) (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 207f.  

For a detailed account of the concept of mediation in Barth’s theology, see G. Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology, (New York, NY, OUP, 1991), 79-81, 84-89 and 92-95.  

CD II/1, 16-17.
the fact God is not identical with the creaturely medium, we genuinely intuit and conceive that creaturely object in the analogy of faith.\textsuperscript{12}

God then gives himself in a form suitable for the creature to know – he becomes a creaturely object (\textit{Gegenstand}). This is why Barth can say that God is known “by the measure of our cognition” if he is to be known at all.\textsuperscript{13} God does not require the “abrogation, abolition or alteration of human cognition”, but rather supposes its activity in generating intuitions and concepts in which human knowledge of him is fulfilled.\textsuperscript{14} There is no need to ‘top up’ cognition’s intrinsic power and range. For God is known through an act of intra-worldly knowing whilst not being reduced to an intra-worldly object. The knowing of God has its ground and efficiency in God’s self-giving of himself as object. As Barth would put it “God is known \textit{by} God”.\textsuperscript{15} God is the “real and primary acting Subject of all knowledge of God”.\textsuperscript{16}

Two questions arise from this. Firstly, how can Barth really maintain the presence of human cognitive activity, which he says is necessary to the event, without either turning it into a human potentiality, or making the event one of co-operation between God and the creature? In other words, how can the creature know God without “mastering” him, i.e. without God becoming subject to the determining activity of human cognition such that his hiddenness is cancelled? But at the same time, how can Barth maintain that the human knowing of God is totally the work of God – that revelation is \textit{self-authenticating} – without annihilating the force of his contention that it is the creature who must intuit and conceive God if such knowledge is to be \textit{human} knowledge?

In other words, how does Barth safeguard creaturely cognitive participation in the event whilst side-stepping the danger of natural theology?\textsuperscript{17} To grasp the answer Barth has to give in this volume, I turn to explicate the two corollaries of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[G. Ward] explores in good depth the set of correspondences that constitute the \textit{analogia fidei} – a subject that cannot be dealt with in any detail here. See G. Ward, \textit{Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology}, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 26ff.
\item[CD II/1, 61.]
\item[CD II/1, 181.]
\item[For more on this idea see section 1.2.2 above.]
\item[CD II/1, 10.]
\item[The place of cognition in natural theology was discussed in section 1.2 above as the first aspect of Barth’s account of creaturely cognition.]
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
statement that “God is known”. I first examine how Barth thinks God posits the creature as subject of the act of knowing, before considering his claim that God prescribes the form of human knowing in this event to be cognitive by the mode of his own self-disclosure. Both these points will indicate that Barth makes good headway in securing the creature as subject of the act of knowing without any compromise to God’s hiddenness or subjectivity.

6.2.1.2 God’s self-objectification and mediated subjectivity

The possibility of the knowledge of God springs from God, in that He is Himself the truth and He gives Himself to man in His Word by the Holy Spirit to be known as the truth.\(^\text{18}\)

A characteristic claim of Barth’s in CD II/1 is that “God is known by God”. This statement testifies to the limit or incapacity of human cognition to take God as its object. But the evaluation of that intrinsic limit is not the basis on which Barth contends that God makes the knowing of Godself possible. This fact is not founded on an appraisal of human cognition. Rather, the limit is included and established by the fact that the triune God gives himself to be known by positing himself as an object, and in so doing, positing the human creature as a knower of him. But what does such positing involve, and what does it tell us about the status of the human knower in the event?

In the first place, God’s positing of himself as an object for the creature is a self-positing. This self-positing does not refer to an act in which God generates himself, but to the fact that his becoming an object is a miracle of his ‘good pleasure’, and is therefore an outworking of his free decision to be “ready” for the creature.\(^\text{19}\) As such,

\(^{18}\) CD II/1, 63.

\(^{19}\) Sung Wook Chung lucidly brings this point home in saying that “Barth grounds the possibility of the knowledge of God upon the principle of God’s sovereign freedom”. But here a crucial qualification is needed. Barth would not want God’s sovereign freedom to be conceived of as a mere “principle”, whether one means an a priori or a posteriori concept that acts as a basis on which a further understanding of something can be reached, or a dogmatic principle that is simply posited at the start of theological reflection for methodological convenience. God’s sovereign freedom is not a human concept. For Barth, it cannot be deduced from a consideration of his properties in abstraction from his act. Only in the act of self-revelation in which God remains sovereignly free towards the creature, does the possibility and actuality of human knowledge of God show itself as founded on God’s sovereign freedom. See S. W. Chung, Admiration and Challenge: Karl Barth’s Theological Relationship with John Calvin, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2002), 138-41; and CD II/1, 67ff, 206f.
it is predicated on his creation and election of the creature to participate as partner in
the covenant of grace – a partnership that involves the knowing and service of God.
God’s self- positing therefore means that he is subject of the act of his own self-
disclosure.

Yet God’s free act of self-giving is no general historical or creaturely occurrence.20
Barth’s understanding of divine self-revelation is Christologically oriented.21 God’s
triune self-revelation occurs in the unique and particular event of the Incarnation,
life, death and resurrection of the Word of God, Jesus Christ.22 God becomes
objective to the creature in “the man Jesus”. And he continually becomes objective to
the hearer in what Graham Ward terms “the phonic/graphic flesh of discourse”, that
is, when he draws what is written and spoken about him by the Christian community
in Scripture and proclamation to bear true witness to his reality which he has
revealed in Jesus.23

The “object” of faith, the objective res subjectivised in faith, is Jesus Christ,
in whom God has accomplished the reconciliation of the world, of all men
with Himself – the living Jesus Christ Himself, in whom this occurrence, this
fulfillment, this restoration of the broken covenant between God and man, is
not an event of the past, not a theoretical truth and doctrine, but for all
humanity and all men (irrespective of their attitude to Him) a personal
present, no, a present person.24

Nevertheless, Barth’s assertion that the knowability of God is grounded in God’s
decision to reveal himself in Jesus Christ is designed to defeat the competing claim
of natural theology that knowledge of God is grounded in the creature’s epistemic
capacity such that he can be known on the basis of our knowing of created objects.
God’s unique objectivity over against other objects consists in the fact he gives

21 On revelation as a Trinitarian event in Barth, see A. Torrance, “The Trinity”, in The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, (ed. J. Webster), (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 72-91 (esp. 73ff); T. Hart,
“§27 “The Limits of the Knowledge of God”: Theses on the Theological Epistemology of Karl Barth”, ZDT 15 (1999), 75-94 (esp., 75f).
22 CD II/1, 150.
24 CD IV/3, 742-3.
himself as object.\textsuperscript{25} The hidden God cannot be unveiled in the way that creaturely objects are.\textsuperscript{26}

Knowledge of God is…not the relationship of an already existing subject to an object that enters his sphere and is therefore obedient to the laws of this sphere. On the contrary, this knowledge first of all creates the subject of its knowledge by coming into the picture.\textsuperscript{27}

Evidently, the creature’s status as a cognitive subject in the event of faith does not precede God’s self-objectification.\textsuperscript{28} God’s self-revelation rather precedes, evokes and includes the positing of the creature as subject. This is to say that the freedom in which God is ready and reveals himself to the creature in Jesus includes and establishes the creature’s freedom and readiness for God.\textsuperscript{29} In other words, faith, as the responsive human act of knowing in which God is apprehended as an object – is a miraculous event. Barth puts it this way;

Man is the subject of faith. Man believes, not God. But the fact that man is this subject in faith is bracketed as a predicate of the subject God, bracketed by the way the Creator encloses the creature and the merciful God sinful man, i.e. in such a way that man remains subject, and yet man’s I as such derives only from the Thou of the subject God.\textsuperscript{30}

Despite posited and therefore derivative, the creature’s subjectivity in the event is necessary to safeguard: for as Barth admits if it is not my act of knowing by which God is known then it is not \emph{my} knowledge of God – I do not therefore know God. Only as I am created subject of this act can my knowing of God take place.

But there are several qualifications to the creature’s “being-as-subject” that need to be borne in mind in order to understand the place of human activity in \textit{CD II/1}. Eberhard Jüngel makes the point that the “eventful” or \textit{actualistic} character of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{CD II/1, 22}.
\item \textsuperscript{26} According to Jüngel, God reveals himself as the hidden God and therefore as “being-as-subject”. “The fact that this subject of revelation is the God who cannot be unveiled to man, sharpens and safeguards the concept of revelation as God’s \emph{self}-unveiling. In his self-unveiling God unveils himself as he who cannot be unveiled…Thus revelation remains God’s revelation. In this way, the event of revelation is protected from becoming an occurrence in which God loses himself.” (E. Jüngel, \textit{God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth. A Paraphrase}, (trans. J. Webster) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 31).
\item \textsuperscript{27} \textit{CD II/1, 22}.
\item \textsuperscript{28} \textit{CD II/1, 21}.
\item \textsuperscript{29} \textit{CD II/1, 129}.
\item \textsuperscript{30} \textit{CD I/1, 245}.
\end{itemize}
knowledge of God must be respected in any discussion of how the creature becomes subject and how God becomes object. This is to say that the creature is to be considered subject of this particular act of knowing only in the event in which God gives himself as object, and not apart from it. God is not an object that is static and given, and nor does he become and remain static in the act of his self-revelation.


32 CD II/1, 181. Barth’s revelatory actualism is an innovation in the handling of the knowledge of God that has its roots in the theology of Calvin, according to Sung Wook Chung. For both Barth and Calvin, faith is a matter of knowledge. What distinguishes their accounts, Chung argues, is that in Barth’s the strain of actualism is characteristic; in Calvin’s, by contrast, knowledge is less “event-oriented” and more “conceptual”, i.e. resembles a set of abstract principles or ideas. Chung has it that Barth’s unique approach stems from his acceptance of the Enlightenment critique of knowledge of God as a set of such abstract ideas.

However that point stands, there is much to commend Chung’s reading of Barth as an innovator of Calvin on this point, not least the fact – which Chung admittedly fails to draw on – that Barth chides Calvin for holding apart notitia (acknowledgement of God) and assensus (the obedient acceptance of this knowledge) as the first two moments of faith. As Barth sees it, the upshot of Calvin’s beginning with notitia is that it implies that knowledge of God is “abstract knowledge”, the “sort of knowledge which a man may amass and enjoy without its having any further relevance to him”. (CD IV/1, 765) Barth links notitia and assensus in one act because this better reflects the fact that one cannot encounter the living God with a “basic neutrality”: intrinsic to the creature’s acquaintance with the reality of God as Lord is a “decision of obedience”. (ibid.)

There exist, however, some minor, but salient, difficulties with Chung’s basic conceptualisation of Barth’s model of knowledge. On the one hand he rightly deems it to be characterised by the motif of actualism. At the same time, he contrasts and opposes this to the notion of a “conceptual” knowledge of God, which he says is not applicable to Barth’s account. He sums this up in the statement that Barth emphasises the “divine intention” to “reveal Himself to humanity actually…rather than conceptually.” (134) Now, this adequately encapsulates Barth’s stance if Chung is using the word “conceptually” euphemistically to refer to positions in which knowledge of God is reduced to an “abstract idea”, or in which God himself is viewed as reducible to or deductible from a human principle. Even in supposing this to be his reading, one cannot help but wonder whether Chung’s unqualified deployment of the term “conceptual” in this context needlessly creates more problems for him than it solves. Firstly, the assertion that God does not reveal himself “conceptually” easily gives rise to the unintended but serious misreading that God does not give himself to be known by the measure of human knowledge. This runs counter to Barth’s characteristic claim that knowing God is always a matter of knowledge – human knowledge at that – and this cannot be other than conceptual, since it is in concepts that an object is represented and thereby known. Moreover, if knowledge of God is not conceptual in the sense of involving concepts, then one is to take the false step of assuming that it is non-conceptual and non-cognitive in character? The scope for such mis-readings would have been easily averted had Chung further qualified what he means in describing Barth’s model of knowledge as not involving conceptual knowledge or “cognitive ideas”. See S. W. Chung, Admiration and Challenge: Karl Barth’s Theological Relationship with John Calvin, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2002).
Thus described, God’s self-positing, and positing of the creature as subject, means that the “position of the knowing man in relation to this object” is one of subsequence.\textsuperscript{33} The knower stands in the position of grace. However much its activity may be necessary in this event, its knowing is a dependent knowing that has its centre, origin and goal in God’s action.\textsuperscript{34} In consequence, the human knowing of God is responsive – an obedient following after the object as an act of gratitude for something done on its behalf.\textsuperscript{35} Our intuitions and conceiving therefore do not establish God as an object of knowledge as if he were given in the way that other objects are. This explicitly means that when the creature knows God it does so without mastering him and cancelling his hiddenness. The creature certainly masters the medium: it spontaneously cognises the creaturely medium by an act intuition and conception. But it only knows God when God brings that medium to correspond to himself in the event of his self-giving. This means that when this correspondence takes place, God is known by the determining activity of human cognition (on the medium) without any compromise to his hiddenness and sovereignty, i.e. his divine subjectivity – and in a way such that accords with the proper scope of creaturely cognition. Neither is the truth of the human knowledge of God established by the creature; it is facilitated by the Holy Spirit, who brings the creature to “participate” in the divine self-knowledge by making its representations correspond with God.\textsuperscript{36}

Viewed this way, God is certainly known by the creature by the means God has prescribed for the event, i.e. human cognition. But its status as subject of that act is predicated on God’s becoming object.

\textsuperscript{33} CD II/1, 21.
\textsuperscript{34} “[I]t must definitely be contested that our conceiving and creating owes its truth to any capacity of our own to be truly recipients and creators in relation to God. It is indeed our [intuiting] and conceiving. But we ourselves have no capacity for fellowship with God...At this very point, in faith itself, we know God in utter dependence, in pure discipleship and gratitude.” (CD II/1, 182-3)
\textsuperscript{35} CD II/1, 66.
6.2.1.3 Faith as ‘cognitive’ event

I have established how the creature is posited as a knower in the event faith by God, for Barth. It is now necessary to discuss the grounds on which Barth establishes that event to involve cognition, and the activity of anschauen and begreifen – as opposed to any other type of relation to God. My basic argument here is that it is God who prescribes the form of human knowing to be cognitive by the mode of his own self-disclosure, for Barth. That is to say, God’s becoming an object is what conditions the responsive act to be cognitive on account of the fact that God wills to be (truly) known in his reality. I establish this point by examining Barth’s triangulation of the concepts of faith, objectivity and cognition.

In CD II/1 Barth describes faith as the “total positive relationship of man to God”. It is the creature’s “turning” to God which is effected by God’s turning to the creature. Faith comprises knowledge of God, trust and obedience, with each being characteristic of the phenomenon of faith as a whole. Now, faith involves knowledge in the sense that it is “the orientation of man to God as an object”. Moreover, the character of faith as knowledge is established by God’s free self-giving as object in and despite the uniqueness and particularity of his objectivity vis-à-vis all other objects. And it is because God becomes an object that Barth can say he is known by the means other objects are known, i.e. by an act of intuition and conception.

Clearly the ideas of faith, objectivity and cognition are linked for Barth: faith is a matter of knowledge, which in turn supposes the creaturely act of intuiting and conceiving by which knowledge is brought about. But this is predicated on God’s becoming an object. Eberhard Busch describes the necessary connection between objectivity and knowledge thus;

37 CD II/1, 12.
38 CD II/1, 12.
39 CD II/1, 14.
40 It is commonly assumed that the unique character of God’s objectivity is reflected in Barth’s choice of vocabulary. Busch notes how Barth does not use the term Objectivität to refer to God’s objectivity, but instead employs Gegenstandlichkeit because it carries the special sense of an object that ‘stands over against’ us, and thus helpfully contrasts and demarcates the “wholly other” God from finite, creaturely objects. In other words, as applied to God, the latter term allows us to keep in view his objectivity and transcendence, and so frees conceptions of him from the subjectivising, anthropologising tendencies of modern liberal Protestant Theology. However, closer scrutiny casts doubt on this linguistic assumption, for however much Barth consciously affirms in CD II/1 that
[T]he reason the term “object” is indispensable [for Barth] is that God in his revelation would not be known as he intends if he did not enter the field of our human perception and comprehension and thereby encounter us, if he did not in that sense become “one object amongst others”.41

God’s becoming an object means that there cannot be non-cognitive and non-objective knowledge of God; God is not to be identified in and as conscience, a principle derived from reason, or an intuition of absolute dependence.42 Barth rules out non-cognitive modes of apprehension because God wills that we know him in the form of representations that can be critically tested for their veracity against reality. He wills that we know him as an object distinct and totally other from ourselves – something these other options cannot guarantee. He calls us to stand in correspondence to the reality of his self-giving as object. To be sure, God is not obliged to give himself to human cognition, as if he were bound out of necessity to conform to the strict knowledge requirements of an independently existing being.43 Faith is rather prescribed as a cognitive event on account of the mode of God’s own self-disclosure: God reveals himself in Jesus Christ – he becomes a definite object in the world that can, as he allows, be experienced and so known;

God, who is an object of our cognition, and an object of our cognition which is God – this is certainly a reality within our world. For our knowledge must be knowledge of world-reality if it is really going to be our knowledge. And it is because He makes world-reality into His witness that God becomes objective to us in His revelation…44

God is sui generis and so distinct in nature from all created objects, Barth in actual fact frequently uses Gegenständ(e) – and not Objekt(e) – to refer to worldly objects as well as to God.

Even if it should be proven that Barth holds to the Gegenstand/Objekt distinction, it is likely that he learned of it from his one-time-teacher at Marburg, Hermann Cohen. According to Simon Fisher, Cohen likewise distinguished Gegenstand from Objekt. Similar to Barth, he did this because of the misleading “subjectivising” connotations the latter term possessed. Cohen used Gegenstand to keep the objectivity of objects in view. He wanted to ensure that no recourse to founding knowledge on empirical sense-data could take place. The reason for this is ultimately grounded in his idealist conception of the way humans come to know things: cognition concerns not the relation of some external object which makes its imprint on the mind from without, rather, objects themselves are generated by thought in accordance with logical laws. See S. Fisher, Revelatory Positivism?, (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 45; E. Busch, The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology, (ed. D. & J. Guder) (trans. G. Bromiley) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 72 n.30).

42 CD II/1, 16.
43 CD II/1, 206f.
44 CD II/1, 207.
Whilst Barth’s contention that faith is a cognitive event is not then founded on pre-held philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge, it does reflect his *theologically grounded* assumptions about human knowing as expounded in chapters 2 and 3. From the creature’s perspective, faith must be cognitive in character, *since knowledge of an object always requires an act of cognition*. This does not constitute a rival interpretation because it only suggests that God has created the creature as a being for whom knowledge is possible by prescribed means.

### 6.2.2 The eclipse of epistemic agency in *CD II/1*

The foregoing discussion has established that Barth thinks the creature is posited as an epistemic agent in the event of faith, and that faith involves human *cognition* rather than any other way of apprehending God, because God has called us to stand in correspondence to the reality of his self-giving as object. So far, so good, then; Barth seems to endorse the creature’s status as an active and spontaneous knower without ever allowing the processes of intuition and conception to become determinative of the event in which God becomes object. God remains God in the event in which he claims us for cognitive encounter with him.

Nevertheless, the picture muddies significantly in considering Barth’s comments in paragraph 27, “The Limits of the Knowledge of God”. There, Barth introduces the concept of instrument to describe the creature’s status in the event of faith, a move which appears to jeopardise the creature’s status as (derived) cognitive subject. Creaturely epistemic agency in the event, though not altogether denied in the passage to be studied, is seriously compromised because Barth gives us no way of coordinating without contradiction the creature’s role as a subject and an instrument. This places a question mark over how consistently he is willing to affirm creaturely epistemic agency in the event of faith, for how is God known by me if I am not the subject of the act of cognition?

In the first sub-section I outline how Barth thinks cognition functions as an instrument, detail his reasons behind this designation, and consider whether this problematises the creature’s status as a divinely-determined active knower in the event of faith. The second section shows that a potential solution to the problem lies in the way Barth relates the categories of instrument and activity in *CD III/3*. 
6.2.2.1 Cognition as “instrument”: the problem of human activity

If we keep to the fact that God is only known by God, then whatever may be
the function of our [intuiting] and conceiving, and however necessary this
function may be, it is fixed that we certainly do not know Him by these
views and concepts of ours: that is to say, not by their inner power; not in
virtue of their own capacity, i.e. of the capacity of human [intuiting] and
conceiving as such; not in virtue of a potentiality of our cognition which has
perhaps been actualised in revelation.45

Creaturely cognition has no intrinsic capacity for knowing God, but is nevertheless
involved in the event because it is necessary if the creature is to think and therefore
know God. How then should one characterise the status of the creature’s epistemic
activity vis-à-vis God’s act of self-revelation? The answer Barth gives in paragraph
27 of the Church Dogmatics is that cognition must function as an “instrument” in the
event of the knowledge of God. He writes;

We definitely cannot deny this [the capacity of intuiting and conceiving] the
character and function of an instrument [Instrumentes] in this event. In the
act of knowledge of God, as in any other cognitive act, we are definitely
active as the receivers of images and creators of counter-images.46

But in what sense is cognition used as an instrument? Consider the following;

Does it follow from the fact that we are capable of [intuiting] and conceiving
objects in general that in certain circumstances, i.e., presupposing the fact
that God reveals Himself to us and therefore makes Himself object to us, we
are also capable of viewing the object on the basis of the same capacity?
Clearly we cannot evade the insight of the whole early church and theology
that this statement must and cannot be ventured in this sense.47

Barth’s assertion is not that our cognition is unsuited either in orientation or structure
for the knowing of God, but that it does not have the intrinsic capacity (Fähigkeit)
for such knowledge, for making true representations of God. Even in the event
of faith it remains incapable because the prescribed range of creaturely cognition is
‘intra-worldly’: we can only become acquainted with the medium of God’s self-
revelation – a fact which in itself is no guarantee of knowledge of God, because God
is not identical with that medium i.e. the humanity of Jesus Christ.

45 CD II/1, 182.
46 CD II/1, 182.
47 CD II/1, 182.
If God is to be known by us, it is evident that he must overcome this inherent limit in creaturely epistemic agency by “adopting” and “using” our intuiting and conceiving. He must make those acts successful by “placing them in his service”; it is settled that as such our images of perception, thoughts and words neither are nor can be images of God. They become this. They become truth. But they do not do so of themselves; they do it wholly and utterly from their object, not by their own capacity but by that of their object. Therefore the hiddenness of God remains. 48

God therefore “takes the part of man” in this event, a part man has no capacity to play. It is by his work that knowledge is brought about, not ours. He uses human cognition to institute, authorise and control the human knowing of himself. But in this act he does not annex something which is at bottom foreign to himself or that does not belong to him. Barth is quick to point out that this ‘making use’ is the exercise of his “lawful claim” over what is originally his, for the creature is his creation and therefore his “property”. 49 Thus construed, the human agent is reduced to a patient and not an agent in the event of the knowledge of God.

The importance of the language of “instrument” becomes clear when one realises what is at stake for Barth in this section. Barth’s aim is to establish that God’s knowability is grounded in God over against the competing view advanced in natural theology, where the human cognitive capacity is assumed to have the intrinsic power to make God an object of knowledge independently of his self-revelation. And he wants to do this by critiquing the limits of the human knowing of God. The language of instrument is useful for Barth because it helps keep in view what natural theology obscures, the priority of the divine Subject in the act of revelation. It is the divine “positing” and “conditioning” that Barth wants to prevent from disappearing at all costs, and which the analogia fidei is designed explicitly to preserve. This way, Barth is able to express in the strongest of terms the fundamental antipathy he sees between both positions: far from being active and foundational, cognition is rendered passive and subsequent in the event. The idea that cognition is also a mere instrument in faith is designed to prevent turning the knowledge of God into a human work, or a work of co-operation at the last moment.

48 CD II/1, 194.
49 CD II/1, 228-9, 243.
But where does this leave creaturely epistemic activity – a necessary condition of the event if God is really to be known by me? In face of the pressing danger of natural theology the use of the word “instrument” seems to embody a trade-off: Barth appears willing to trade emphasis on the creature as free and active subject in the event for a conception of divine subjectivity that not only brackets it, but is in danger of subsuming it. Whilst this is quite understandable given the theological commitments and concerns that operate here, it must be asked just how Barth thinks the creature remains a divinely-determined subject in the event, if it is now in no sense the subject of the act of knowing God, but an instrument? To put this differently: granted that by myself I can only know the medium in which God gives himself, how can I know God if I am not also in some sense – a derived and dependent sense – also subject of the act in which God is known through that medium? The concept of instrument suggests that the divine subject now displaces the creaturely subject it is has posited such that a question mark must now be hung over the subjective realisation of the knowledge of God. On this reading, the creaturely act is robbed of its character: it becomes a mere, undifferentiated extension of the divine act, as von Balthasar and others thought.

From a straight reading of CD II/1 it is hard to dissolve these issues. As I understand it, the problem has its source in the fact that Barth actually gives us no explicit way of understanding how the notions of instrument and subject as applied to the creature as knower are to be co-ordinated without contradiction. How is the creature posited as an active subject but used as a passive instrument by the self-revealing God? Failure to address this question occasions the impression that Barth’s commitment to the creature as an active knower in the event of the knowledge of God is inconsistent in CD II/1.

6.2.2.2 Towards a solution: linking instrument and subject in CD III/3

It may well prove that the creature’s status as subject and instrument in the event is simply a paradox that, as George Hunsinger says, must stand unresolved as a mystery of the divine good pleasure. But even if a definitive ‘explanation’ of the place of human activity in Barth’s theological epistemology is not warranted or necessary even by the logic of his own theology, this fact need not – and should not – bar the path to constructive research.
To be sure, any solution to this particular problem would require that a degree of compatibility be shown to exist between the creature’s role as an instrument and subject in the event of faith. To round off the current analysis, I would like to propose that this very option presents itself within Barth’s theology. Within the context of exploring in CD III/3 how the creature’s service to God is the meaning of “world-occurrence”, the telos of creation, Barth approaches the question of the creature’s status as an instrument and a subject.\textsuperscript{50} I begin with his affirmation that the creature certainly is an instrument as it stands before God;

\begin{quote}
The service of the creature is that of an instrument. We have said already that God uses it. An instrument is also present, and indeed meaningfully and indispensably, when it is used for a particular purpose.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Aside from stating that the concept reflects the indispensability of the creature to God’s work, Barth’s analysis of the concept of “instrument” displays his self-critical side. Rather than taking the opportunity to reinforce its epistemic function vis-à-vis natural theology, he instead highlights the limitations of its applicability to human activity in general (with which the knowing of God, though unique, is one in kind). Indeed, Barth regards the concept of “instrument” as an “imperfect indication” of the “divine rule operative in creaturely occurrence”.\textsuperscript{52} The basic problem with the concept is that it robs the creature of its subjectivity. He writes;

\begin{quote}
There can be no question of it [an instrument] being a subject. It knows nothing of the purpose for which it is used. And it cannot make the slightest use of itself. It is nothing if it is not picked up and used by the one who knows his purpose and the use of the instrument.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Barth’s critique of the concept rests on its failure to secure personalism. Viewed solely under the concept “instrument” the creature becomes a thing with no agency of its own – it is but a “tool”. This opens the door to divine determinism. Clearly enough, Barth thinks that to interpret the creature solely through the lens offered by the concept of “instrument” is to do disservice to the creature as a creation of God. For although the concept has the benefit of highlighting the “the freedom of God in

\textsuperscript{50} CD III/3, 51.
\textsuperscript{51} CD III/3, 46.
\textsuperscript{52} CD III/3, 51.
\textsuperscript{53} CD III/3, 46.
relation to His creature”, the creature is not acknowledged as existing in the freedom and spontaneity it was originally created with.

With a backward glance, so to speak, to CD II/2 it would appear that Barth’s own characterisation of cognition as an instrument certainly does contradict his assertion that the creature is (created) subject of its own act of knowing in the event. But the critique of incompatibilism in CD II/1 – on which the charge of monism rests – may actually be harder to sustain, not least on account of the way the Barth of CD III/3 conceives of the relation of divine and human activity in the doctrine of concursus.54 Indeed, whilst God can use the creature as a passive instrument, this by no means entails that we are purely “non-autonomous agents and instruments”, subject to a despotic ruler.55 God rather establishes the creature in the autonomy he created if for as his free and active covenant partner;

[T]he creature is in God’s hand with the passivity of an instrument but also with its own activity.56

God is capable of working in and through creaturely activity without violating or compromising its character or integrity as creaturely activity. Creaturely activity can itself be used by God as an instrument. Viewed from the vantage point of CD III/3, then, it would appear that Barth regards the creature’s ‘instrumentality’ to be compatible with its status as an “active subject”.

But is this something that is evidenced in CD II/1? Does Barth contend that God uses the creaturely cognitive activity as an instrument in the event of faith, that is, uses it without annulling human activity and subjectivity? There are some indications from that volume that suggest he does. At several point in paragraph 27, Barth insists that humans remain “active as receivers of images and creators of counter-images”, humans are “permitted” and “commanded” to make successful use of their intuition and conceiving in the event of the knowing of God.57 Those instances suggest that, at the very least, Barth is consciously tussling with the issue of how to prevent creaturely activity in the event sliding out of view, and with that, how to safeguard

55 CD III/3, 93.
56 CD III/3, 47.
57 CD II/1, 228-9.
the subjective realisation of knowledge of God in face of the need to preserve the
primacy of God’s act of self-revealing. However, it cannot be concluded from those
instances that Barth takes it for granted that the creature is (cognitively) active in the
event, owing to the fact that he does not stipulate how the relationship between the
two concepts (instrument and activity) is to be understood.

6.2.3 Summary of findings

The aim of this section as a whole was to ascertain the extent to which Barth
establishes the human creature as an epistemic agent in the event of the knowledge of
God, as presented in CD II/1. The analysis was initially promising: Barth works hard
to show that God conditions faith as a cognitive event; he also safeguards the
creature’s status as subject of the act of knowing by describing how the event of
God’s self-objectification in creaturely form posits it as such – a condition he admits
is necessary in order to affirm that God is known by the creature. This also allowed
him to preserve God’s hiddenness and subjectivity in the event. This is to say that the
creature spontaneously cognises the creaturely medium, and knows God through that
medium, but because God reveals himself through it by making it correspond to him,
he is known by the determining activity of human cognition on the medium without
any compromise to his hiddenness.

However, the introduction of the concept of instrument to describe cognition’s role
as determined by God put a question mark over the creature’s status as an active
knower in the event: in what sense do I know God if it is not me who cognises him
through the medium of his self-giving? Barth gave us no explicit way in that volume
of resolving the tension that exists between the creature’s epistemic status as subject
and instrument. This suggests that his commitment to the creature as a being created
and posited for active, cognitive fellowship with God is not thorough-going, or
rather, is not consistently worked out in his exposition of faith in that volume. Yet I
do not believe this commits Barth to divine monism – even if it does give rise to that
impression – for he fully appreciates that it is the creature who must know God for
the subjective realisation of the knowledge of God to occur. His reliance on the
concept of instrument would therefore appear to stem from the keenly felt desire to
safeguard the primacy of the divine act of self-revelation in and by annulling the
elevated position cognition is given by the competition, natural theology.
Given that, a valid question to ask in conclusion is why Barth insists on the concept of instrument to make that point? The idea that the creature is created by God to be the subject of faith in the event of God’s self-giving surely does the same work that concept is designed to do: it establishes the sovereignty of God in his act whilst testifying to the impotence of creaturely cognition. It allows the creature to know him without making him a determination of the human subject. It may simply be that Barth uses instrument as a placeholder for that idea, or as a way of embellishing and reinforcing it. But even if his use of instrument is merely rhetorical in function, it cannot be denied that, at the very least, the introduction of the concept of “instrument” complicates and obscures a crucial aspect of his theological epistemology, namely, that God graciously gives himself to be known by the creature. If it is not rhetorical, then we must turn instead to the sort of solution outlined above.

Having said all this, Barth’s positive understanding of the role of cognition in the event of faith sits comfortably with the findings of previous chapters. Barth acknowledges that intuiting and conceiving are proper to the person, that they are “founded and ordered” by God. As such, the structure of knowing is intrinsically suited to its purpose of knowing God. That said, Barth labours the point brought out in chapter 2 that whilst suited, creaturely cognition does not have the intrinsic range and power to make God an object of knowledge, and therefore requires God to reveal himself.

### 6.3 From cognition to the Christian life: faith and epistemic agency in CD IV/1

If Barth’s discussion of the topic were limited to CD II/1 then it is likely we would have to conclude that, owing to the pressing theological-epistemological aims and concerns at work in that volume, he has not given an adequate account of the creature’s role as an epistemic agent in the event of faith. For in that account, there is little sense of how faith is also a “work of man” and how the knowing of God is determined by God to be a free, spontaneous act – an act for which Barth himself says the creature was specifically created, constituted, and elected.\(^\text{58}\)

\(^{58}\) See CD III/2, 399 = 478, and section 2.3.1 above.
But this is not all Barth had to say on the issue. Indeed, sixteen years after the writing of CD II/1, Barth would turn to describe the act of faith again, this time as part of his exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation. His treatment of it in CD IV/1 constitutes a radical departure from his earlier discussion most notably because of its shift in emphasis: where Barth earlier approached it within the context of the doctrine of God, and so from the perspective of God’s self-revealing, here Barth attempts to describe faith along the lines of “human experience and action” in connection with his wider intention of clarifying the creaturely forms in which the atonement is realised.  

And what is striking about this account is that Barth outlines how faith is a spontaneous creaturely cognitive act from the perspective of the creature. My focus thus rests on how the creature is presented as a cogniser of God in the section entitled “The Act of Faith”.  

But it is important to remark on the way in which Barth handles knowing in this passage. He does not offer a technical account of the cognitive processes that are involved in faith, nor does he isolate human cognition for specific attention, as if it were the sum and extent of the creature’s response to God’s self-revelation. Rather, Barth describes faith as a completely self-involving response to God’s grace, and therefore positions knowing as an integral part of that response. More explicitly, his concern is with how the basic act of knowing of God is determinative of and outworked in all other acts of the Christian life: faith involves action as well as cognition. I therefore describe the role knowing plays as part of the integrated response the creature is called to make to God in faith. This will reveal the creature to be an active knower. Furthermore, it will illustrate how firmly bonded Barth’s

59 This “subjective realisation” takes a corporate form in the Christian community and a localised form in the individual’s act of faith. Throughout I focus only on the individual’s active participation in the divine act of reconciliation. What Barth has to say on this matter should not be treated as an ‘explanation’ of faith, however. He acknowledges that one cannot hope to explain how the Holy Spirit works to bring these faith about – only that they do occur as miracle and mystery. Barth seeks only to describe the subjective forms in which the atonement is realised. (CD IV/3, 648-9) For more on the community as the corporate form of reconciliations’ subjective realisation in Barth’s theology, please see Colm O’Grady’s work, The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth: Volume I, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), esp. ch.14.

60 CD IV/1, 757-779.

61 Barth gives clear indication that revelation is wholly “self-involving” as early as CD I/1, 202-4. See also Trevor Hart’s comments on what this term means. T. Hart, “Revelation”, in The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, (ed. J. Webster) (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 49.
conception of creaturely knowing is with his conception of the purpose for which we
know God. This is because this passage is no less than an exposition of the freedom
into which the creature is called – a freedom in which the creature comes to know
God, and on that basis, comes to serve him in the acts of its life.

My approach in this section is to first establish how Barth explicitly depicts the
creature as a spontaneous knower in the event of faith. I then describe the three
creaturely cognitive “moments” Barth thinks comprise faith when understood as a
“work of man”: acknowledgement, recognition, and confession. In the course of that
discussion, I explain how those cognitive moments become reflected in the acts of
the believer, and therefore how cognition and the Christian life are intimately linked
in Barth’s theology.

6.3.1 The creature as spontaneous cogniser of God in CD IV/1

Faith involves the knowing of God, an act which is determinative of the other acts of
the Christian life. For the Barth of CD II/1, this ‘knowing’ is a cognitive act insofar
as it involves knowledge of an object which posits the creature as a cognitive subject
in the event of faith. Whilst there is no retraction or modification of this assertion in
CD IV/1, Barth now implicitly assumes the primacy of the divine act of self-
revealing and moves to fill out his concept of faith in terms of the creaturely acts it
involves. Consequently, Barth gives a more pronounced place to the human knower
in this account of faith, something which is evident from his basic definition of faith
along creaturely lines as a “taking cognisance”. The apprehension of God in faith is
certainly God’s work, for Barth, but this does not mean that the creature is
determined as passive with regard to its object. In fact, Barth is now quite careful to
dissolve any lingering impression that the creature is a mere instrument in the event.
He writes of the creature that;

[W]e are not dealing with an automatic reflection, with a stone lit up by the
sun, or wood kindled by a fire, or a leaf blown by the wind. We are dealing
with man. It [faith] is, therefore, a spontaneous, a free, an active event.62

Just as Barth refuses to allow the motif of personalism to slip out of view with regard
to God in CD II/1, so in this volume he emphasises it with regard to the creature.
Indeed, as will become clear, Barth does not treat the creature as a mere thing, but as

62 CD IV/1, 758.
a personal agent who is created capable of “active participation” in the event of the knowledge and service of God. He insists that faith involves spontaneous knowing, decision and action; the human activity involved in faith is no less free or spontaneous than any other of its actions. It is not suppressed by a divine determinism such that the creature becomes a mere instrument with no power of agency or self-determination of its own. In line with its calling to self-initiated action in the freedom of obedience, the human creature remains an independent subject, a self-determining being – even in faith;

He [man] does not sink into passive, apathetic contemplation in faith, and even if he did he would still do so as a self-determining man. Whatever his state of soul, at least in thinking, willing and feeling he is himself and lives his own life. Nevertheless, the point is that in faith he must regard this in no sense diminished self-determination, himself in his own activity, in the living of his own life, as determined by the Word of God. In his freedom, in the full use of his freedom as a man, he must see himself as another man that he had no power to become, that he still has no power to become, that he is not free to become or be (though he is free as he becomes and is), in short, that he can be only by being this man.

As a “work of man”, then, faith involves the theoretical and practical dimension of human being: knowing and willing; it involves the entirety of its being in a divinely effected movement towards God. In faith, the creature actively participates in the “divine act of reconciliation”. 64

6.3.2 Faith as self-involving event: its three cognitive moments

Yet faith for Barth is certainly first and foremost a cognitive act, a “taking cognisance”. It can be broken down into three creaturely moments, “acknowledgement”, “recognition” and “confession” which are cognitive in character in so far as each takes God as its object, and results in knowledge of God. Yet, faith, as this three-fold cognitive act, is also the most “inward and central and decisive act of his [man’s] heart”. 65 This statement marks a departure from the ambiguity that surrounded the place of the knower in the event of faith in previous volumes. Barth is now very explicit that the human act of cognition is not simply

63 CD I/1, 245.
64 CD IV/1, 643-4, 742.
65 CD IV/1, 757.
involved in the reception of knowledge of God, but is now conceived by Barth to be the creaturely lynch-pin of the human person’s knowledge of God, and more than that, as the bedrock of Christian life and action.

[Faith is] the Christian act which embraces and controls all individual acts and activities, permeating and determining them like the heaven of Mt. 13:33.  

In Barth’s eyes, faith is “the act of the Christian life” because it is the original act which maps on to all subsequent acts, determining them as Christian in character. This is to say that the cognition of God as outworked in the three distinct but connected moments of acknowledgement, recognition and confession becomes the rule of the Christian life in both its theoretical and practical dimensions. We know God in faith, and on that basis we come to serve him in our acts.

As depicted in CD IV/1 then, faith defies reduction to a dry, intellectual act of comprehension; it is wholly self-involving, for Barth. As we shall shortly see, there is a clear “dynamic” that runs through the three cognitive moments of faith that leads from knowing to doing – from the cognition of God as pro me to the service of God in the acts of the Christian individual and community. The aim of the following subsections is to describe this dynamic by interrogating those three moments in order to gain more purchase on the contours of epistemic agency in this, Barth’s more holistic and creature-focussed account of faith.

The following discussion will therefore describe Barth’s understanding of epistemic agency in the event of faith with an eye to its social, practical and transformative dimensions. It shall become clear that faith, as the cognitive act that is determinative of the Christian life, is social because it occurs through the acts in which the Christian community bears witness to God. It is practical because it determines the shape of our own relations with others. And it is transformative because it brings about dramatic change in our own self-understanding and, in witnessing to God through confessional-acts, brings about the transformation of others.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that current emphasis on the link Barth draws between the knowing of God and the service of God presupposes work done in

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66 CD IV/1, 758.
67 CD IV/1, 776.
chapter 2. Therein, we saw on the ontological level of the human constitution that the creature has been structured for knowing and doing on account of the purpose for which it is called – and that both these elements are mutually entailing. Assuming that context, I now describe how the acts themselves are mutually effecting, and are as such the fabric of the Christian life, for Barth.

6.3.2.1 “Acknowledgement“

The first moment of this “taking cognisance” is “acknowledgement” (Anerkennung) of the object that stands before the individual in faith. It is “acquaintance” (lat. notitia) with God’s reality. Yet, acquaintance does not carry the static connotations for Barth of acquaintance with formalised ‘knowledge of God’ or with the ‘data of revelation’. It is no less here an event, an encounter with the God who has given himself as object in Jesus Christ in which the creature participates by the Holy Spirit. Barth notes how Calvin also understood notitia as “acquaintance with the will of God for us taken from His Word”, and posited it as the first of the three acts that comprise faith. Yet, Barth moves quickly to distance himself from Calvin’s position on the grounds that Calvin keeps apart notitia, as the first act of faith, from “compliance” (assensus), as the second. Barth argues that there can be no act of acknowledgement, no cognition or knowledge of God, that does not contain implicit within it a “a free act of obedience” on the part of the creature.

68 The essence of Barth’s discomfort is what he regards as Calvin’s “abstract” and static conception of knowledge. But is this a fair picturing of Calvin’s position, given that it arose in response to the doctrine of “implicit faith”? (see n.69 below) Granted, Barth makes no acknowledgement of the doctrinal context in which Calvin exposited faith as notitia and assensus. However, the key to understanding Barth’s objection lies in correctly identifying the sense in which he deploys the term “abstract” to describe Calvin’s conception of knowledge.

Calvin writes that “When we call faith “knowledge” we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man’s mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it”. (Institutes III.2.7, 559-60) Now, it is evident from CD IV/1, 765 that Barth envisages Calvin’s depiction of faith as “abstract”. But by this he is not meaning, as his use of the term has come to be understood, that Calvin is adopting a non-realist position, i.e. a position in which knowledge of God is thought to be detached from God’s act of self-revealing in Christ. Obviously, this more serious charge could not be placed at Calvin’s door owing to his insistence that knowledge of God is wedded to the Word of God. Barth’s point is simply that knowledge is “abstract” for Calvin in the sense that in so transcending the creature it is of little practical relevance to how it thinks about its acts and life. He is thus using abstract in the everyday sense of the word.

69 CD IV/1, 758-9.
Acknowledging is a taking cognisance which is obedient and compliant, which yields and subordinates itself. This obedience and compliance is not an incidental and subsequent characteristic of the act of faith, but primary, basic and decisive.\footnote{CD IV/1, 758.}

Yet what does it mean to say that the first cognitive moment consists in surrender and obedience?\footnote{Thomas Torrance describes how the obedience of faith is a cataleptic mode of thought in which we “let our minds fall under the compulsive self-evidence of its [God’s] objective reality and…intrinsic intelligibility”. This obedience consists in faithfulness to the Word of God. And this obedience is the basic and proper mode of “theological science” as a positive discipline concerned with the actuality of God’s self revelation. See T. F. Torrance, “Realism and Openness in Scientific Inquiry”, Zygon 23 (1988), 159-69 (esp.160), and by the same author, Theological Science, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 33.} It means that in the act of faith the individual becomes acquainted with the Lordship of God and so acknowledges and comes under that Lordship. This is directly borne out in the social character of the human cognition of God.

The individual cognises God indirectly, that is, through the “mediatorial ministry of the Christian community” she encounters Jesus Christ as “the law” and Lord of that community – he who is the norm of the church’s thinking and action. She cannot remain indifferent to what she has cognised in faith, for God confronts her “with such compulsion” that she freely chooses to submit herself to him in an act of obedience and submission. Barth describes this moment thus;

> If a man comes to Christian faith, this means that in the encounter with the community of Jesus Christ he encounters Jesus Christ Himself, that in its relative authority and freedom he encounters His absolute authority and freedom, the law to which the community itself is subject, and therefore a law which is superior to him and which binds him.\footnote{CD IV/1, 759.}

But when the individual comes to know God and becomes obedient to him as her “law”, she is not simply choosing to surrender to what the church considers true about God – there is no resurrection here of the medieval doctrine of “implicit faith”.\footnote{Barth sees himself as standing with Calvin against the medieval doctrine of “implicit faith” – “the readiness to subject reason to the teaching of the Church”. (CD IV/1, 761-2) But his interpretation of Calvin as sharply rebutting this doctrine glosses over the nuances of Calvin’s position. Certainly Calvin rejects its negative aspect, but he believes that “implicit faith” might also have a positive role to play in the church as a propaedeutic to faith. The premise of Calvin’s rejection of this doctrine is that faith is knowledge and not ignorance. Faith rests on knowledge of God in which is revealed the benevolence of Christ towards...} Faith involves knowledge of an object, not ignorance. It is not a step into the
closed circle of the irrational. \(^{74}\) But this does not mean that the obedience of faith is thus the acceptance of any particular theology or dogmatics that might be deemed to be more or less an accurate witness. And neither is it the authority of the Bible under which the individual falls in faith, as if she were called to obediently accept the truth of its propositions. \(^{75}\)

The real object of acknowledgement is not statements about God, but that to which those statements point; it is not then the truth of those statements that the individual is called to obediently acknowledge, but the Truth to which they refer. The individual is neither called to believe in the truth of their reference, as if that reference were an object worthy of praise in itself. For in themselves human words and concepts do not refer to God. They function as witnesses and become knowledge of God for the individual when God actually chooses to bring these things into the creature. Apart from Christ there is no knowledge of God (\textit{Institutes}, II.4.2). Calvin asserts this in opposition to the Schoolmen, who teach “implicit faith”. (\textit{Institutes}, III.2.2-5) Calvin describes this as the teaching that we reserve judgement and have our faith implicit in the faith of the wiser in the church. Accordingly, we need understand nothing but only submit our feeling and belief obediently to the church, holding fast to its doctrine and dictats. As Calvin sees it, the problem with construing faith as ignorance in these terms, is that it “draws a veil over Christ”, leaving the door wide open to abuse such that anything and everything must be considered true. Faith is not simply “reverence for the Church”. (\textit{Institutes}, III.2.2)

Despite these problems, this teaching remains of value, according to Calvin. There is such a thing as “implicit faith”, he argues, in the sense that not everything has been made explicit and known. The things of which we remain ignorant in faith constitute the bridle by which God keeps us within our bounds and humble, such that we have to implicitly believe what is not fully comprehended. (\textit{Institutes}, III.2.4) Secondly, “implicit faith” can itself function as a pre-requisite to faith. Many people have believed and accepted Christ as Messiah without knowing the Gospel. These people Calvin described as being “inclined” towards the Gospel, and as having a basic “teachableness”. This willingness to be taught is the “beginning of faith” and is therefore to be distinguished from the ignorance that marks those who hold to “implicit faith” as described in its negative aspect. (\textit{Institutes}, III.2.5)

\(^{74}\) Whilst Barth is not a fideist, many of his detractors have charged him with this, not least on account of the mistaken perception that Barth denies the existence of a creaturely rational counterpart to God’s revelation. This was discussed in chapter 1 above. See R. Holder, “Karl Barth and the Legitimacy of Natural Theology”, \textit{Thel melios} 26 (2001), 22-37; S. Smith, “Karl Barth and Fideism: A Reconsideration”, \textit{Anglican Theological Review} 66 (1984), 64-78; P. Avis, “Karl Barth: The Reluctant Virtuoso”, \textit{Theology} 86 (1983), 164-171; N. Robinson, “The Problem of Natural Theology”, \textit{Religious Studies} 8 (1972), 319-333; T. Indinopulos, “The Critical Weakness of Creation in Barth’s Theology”, \textit{Encounter} 33 (1972), 159-169; and touching upon the same criticism is S. Matczak, \textit{Karl Barth on God: The Knowledge of the Divine Existence}, (London: St. Paul Publications, 1962), 258.

\(^{75}\) \textit{CD} IV/1, 760. Barth rejects what he calls “false orthodoxy”, which conceives faith as the mere acceptance of statements that attest to God.
correspondence with himself such that they function as witnesses.  

“Acknowledgement”, then, signifies the cognitive event in which the individual becomes acquainted with God as Lord and falls under his Lordship.

At its root as this acknowledgement Christian faith is not the subservient acceptance of any reports or propositions, irrespective of whether they are biblical or churchly or modern. At this root it is indeed an obedient acceptance. But the object of it is the One whom the Bible attests and the Church as taught by the Bible proclaims, the living Jesus Christ Himself, and none other.  

6.3.2.2 “Recognition”

Now, the initial act of obedient acknowledgement is accompanied by an act of “recognition” (Erkennung). This act of recognition has for Barth a double referent: (1) it first takes Christ as its object, which consequently effects (2) a self-reflective movement on the part of the creature in which it comes to recognise itself in a new way. I outline both these significations below.

(1) The creaturely act of recognition is the second step of the “taking cognisance” of God that occurs in faith. In coming to know God as Lord, the creature comes to recognise the glory of God as revealed in Christ, it recognises what God is towards it and what he has done for it. Rightly conceived, recognition occurs on the basis of acknowledgement, and just as that initial act is not one of blind obedience but involves the acquaintance with and therefore knowledge of faith’s object, so this second act, as founded on the first, is also cognitive – it too is characterised by knowledge and encounter with God in his witnesses. Indeed, the recognition of God is a concrete and “genuine knowing”.  

Acknowledgement and recognition are thus mutually dependent faith-acts.

But where and how is God recognised?

[T]here is a recognition in the basic act of that obedience, of that acknowledgement...because the living Jesus Christ who is the object of that acknowledgement, to whom man subjects himself in the obedience of faith,

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77 CD IV/1, 760.

78 CD IV/1, 761.

79 CD IV/1, 766.
is Himself not without form, but is the Jesus Christ attested in Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the community.\(^{80}\)

Scripture and proclamation are the creaturely forms in which God chooses to become objective and mediates knowledge of himself to the creature. God is recognised by the creature in these *creaturely forms* because God has chosen to give himself in a form in which we can intuit (in percepts and ‘audits’) and conceive him (in concepts and then in words). Recognition is the cognisance of God that is “nourished” by Scripture and proclamation.\(^{81}\) And insofar as these forms of recognition are normative for all knowledge of God, the creature knows God rightly (*recta cognition*) in them. But this affirmation does not lead to a regimented or uniform recognition of God. For although recognition occurs within strict limits, Barth insists that it is right “the believer” should recognise Christ in a variety of different ways, since the forms of his self-disclosure are “inexhaustibly rich”.\(^{82}\)

Yet what exactly does one recognise, in recognising *Christ*? What is the content of this cognitive act? Barth’s answer is that one recognises that in Christ’s substitutionary work of atonement by which God reconciles man to himself, God is “*pro me*”;

> It is already included in the root of faith as the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ, it is born of that obedience and cognition, that the one in whom I believe and about whom I can know when I believe in Him, that this One…is what He is and does what He does for me, *pro me*…that He is my Lord and therefore my Saviour and Mediator, my Redeemer from sin and death and the devil, my hope of service in righteousness, innocence and felicity, because He died for me and rose again for me. This is just what He is in the form which is determined and limited by the witness of Scripture and the proclamation of the community…This is just what He is as alone He can be perceived and understood in the sphere in which He may be known and is known.\(^{83}\)

In faith one comes to know that God is for the creature; one recognises Christ as being *for it*. But recognition of this fact is not the indifferent knowing of a principle

\(^{80}\) *CD IV/1*, 762.

\(^{81}\) *CD IV/1*, 764.

\(^{82}\) *CD IV/1*, 763.

\(^{83}\) *CD IV/1*, 766.
or the property of an object. The recognition that God is “pro me” is of profound significance for the creature’s own self-understanding.\(^{84}\) How is this so?

(2) The knowing of God is a transformative act because the pro me becomes implicated in its own self-understanding and consequently in the acts of its life.\(^{85}\) Taking the former first, the recognition of the pro me causes the creature to recognise itself differently in light of the recognition that Christ is for it. It sees itself as;

[T]he man for whom Jesus Christ is, for whom, in whose place he acts and rules, in short, with whom He deals as an all-powerful and all-powerful human lord – if there were such a thing – would have to deal with a man who is utterly attached and subject to Him. He knows that he himself is the man who is the possession of this Lord.\(^{86}\)

The recognition of the pro me effects a self-reflective cognitive act on the part of the creature by which it recognises what has been achieved in Christ for it. In so far as it knows and recognises itself in Christ, the creature can see itself as participating in the overcoming and restoration made effective for it in his life, death and resurrection.

But the “active recognition” of the pro me that takes place in faith is not simply self-reflexive on the theoretical level, i.e. in terms of its own self-knowledge. Recognition effects a “comprehensive disturbance and decision”.\(^{87}\) It is a knowledge which becomes implicated in the whole fabric of the creature’s existence as a being created by God to serve him as well as know him.\(^{88}\)

\[\text{But if it is an active recognition – a recognition in the full sense of this important word – then necessarily it reaches out from that knowledge to the}\]

\(^{84}\) The pro me consists in nothing other than Christ’s substitutionary work of atonement, which has two elements of knowledge. The first is that the creature’s “sinful heart”, the Old Adam, has been put to death in Christ. This is the mortificatio, the punishment due the creature for sin, which Christ enacted on behalf of the creature in his sacrificial death. (CD IV/1, 770-2) The second element consists in the recognition that the vivificatio that was lost has been restored to the creature by Christ’s rising again. See CD IV/1, 772-5.

\(^{85}\) Joseph Mangina’s account of the pro me overlooks the theoretical and practical significance Barth thinks it has for the creature. He argues that it its practical import is simply that it applies to the creature. See J. Mangina, Karl Barth on the Christian Life: the Practical Knowledge of God, (Issues in Systematic Theology, vol. 8), (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2001).

\(^{86}\) CD IV/1, 766.

\(^{87}\) CD IV/1, 769.

\(^{88}\) CD IV/1, 766.
awareness, the self-understanding and self-apprehension, of the whole man, thus becoming an action and decision of the whole man.\textsuperscript{89}

“Active recognition” is deeply “affective”, it receives practical expression and realisation in the acts of “penitence” for sin and “confidence” of restoration.\textsuperscript{90} These acts are the practical recognitions of the mortificatio and vivification that have already taken place in Christ. In faith, then, the creature becomes the image of God (the analogia Christi) because in these acts the creature (the analogatum) becomes the likeness of Christ (the analogans) in his death and resurrection. But the creature is not like Christ as the overcoming and restoration have not yet taken place in it; they are rather effective for it in virtue of having already taken place in Christ. Thus described, the event of faith is not, for Barth, synonymous with God’s act of redemption, an act which awaits eschatological fulfilment.\textsuperscript{91}

Thus understood, recognition, as the second cognitive moment in faith, constitutes an understanding that calls the creature to a hopeful waiting for the subjective fulfilment of what has been achieved for it corporately and objectively.\textsuperscript{92} It is both transformative and practical. It is a cognitive movement that begins in and with God, moves through the creature and its own self-understanding, and out into the world in its speech and acts. Indeed, the creature recognises the pro me in the acts of penitence and confidence, but it is also called to realise this recognition in its general acts, to live as the very recognition, the likeness, of Christ. It is permitted and commanded to bring that redeemed self-interpretation to permeate all inward and outward acts;

He [man] is the response to that which has taken place and revealed, not in him, but in Jesus Christ for him. And in this attitude he is a copy, a parallel, a likeness of His being and activity for him. In all his imperfections [he] is a reflection of His perfection, a little light in His great light. He exists, then, in his petty thankfulness for the demonstration of his almighty grace.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{89} CD IV/1, 766.
\textsuperscript{90} Consult CD IV/1, 770-2 and 774-5 respectively.
\textsuperscript{91} CD IV/1, 772, 775. For more on the interesting topic of how knowledge of God is affective, for Barth, refer to Joseph Mangina’s book, Karl Barth on the Christian Life: The Practical Knowledge of God, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2001), 125ff.
\textsuperscript{92} CD IV/1, 776.
\textsuperscript{93} CD IV/1, 775.
6.3.3.3 “Confession”

In the third instance, faith issues in the cognitive moment of “confession” (Bekennung). The outlines of this idea have been discussed in section 2.3.2.3 above, within the context of explaining how the capacities of knowing and acting are mutually entailing. Here, by contrast, I discuss confession to bring out how it functions as a cognitive moment of faith, and so to show the final way in which knowing and service are mutually entailing acts of the Christian life.

This act is necessarily entailed by the previous two. This necessary entailment is not to be conceived of in mechanistic or deterministic terms, it is simply the expression of what Barth calls the “dynamic of faith”: the person who acknowledges and recognises what Christ has done for it cannot help but confess him to others. But the creature is not a blind automaton in this act. Like the other acts of faith, confession is a free, spontaneous and creaturely act, and it is so in the sense that in Christ the creature is made genuinely free to be God’s creaturely covenant-partner, and to bear witness to that fact. To cite Barth;

> The goal of the freedom in which He [Jesus Christ] makes a man genuinely free – free to believe in Him – is the freedom to be His witness. And so the goal of faith as the free act of man is the act of his witness and therefore of his confession.

In confession, the creature takes what it represents to itself of God and represents these to others. It is therefore the “giving” that arises from the creature’s “taking cognisance” of God, when it expresses its concepts using speech and words. By the Holy Spirit these communal utterances become the cognitions through which the other sees and hears God, i.e. comes to acknowledge and recognise him.

But confession also has a broader dimension. Barth says that the “light”, the pro me, that illumines the creature in both its cognition and action does not merely remain buried within the creature. It “breaks through and lights up” the creature, becoming reflected in all its inward and outward acts and constitution. It turns the creature into

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94 CD IV/1, 776.
95 CD IV/1, 776.
96 CD IV/1, 778. How such utterances correspond, and whether it thus matters if we make the right or wrong use of language of God in church life, is described at length by George Hunsinger in his article, “Truth as Self-Involving: Barth and Lindbeck on the Cognitive Aspects of Truth in Theological Discourse”, JAAR 61 (1993), 41-56.
a “little light” that is itself the reflection (and therein the confession, witness) of God’s “great light”.

Because he is a little light reflecting the great light, his action stands out from that of others, he becomes a witness of the great light, without especially willing to do so, and without in any way helping to do so. His task is that he should not cease to be that little light reflecting the great light. His task is that he should not place that little light under a bushel. If he sees to this, he does the act of confessing which is required of him, the confession of faith.97

Such confession is the goal of the divine summons and so the goal of its cognition of God; the creature lives as a Christian when it says and does what is proper to its existence rightly understood.98 And in this way, the cognition of God transforms the individual, leads to the service of God in its action, which in turn, by the work of the Holy Spirit leads to the cognition of God through confession. This is how knowing entails service and service entails (by power of the Spirit) knowing.

6.3.3 Summary of findings

Barth’s account of faith in *CD* IV/1 has given clear indication of his commitment to the creature as an epistemic agent – an active, spontaneous knower – in the event of faith. Whereas Barth’s concern in *CD* II/1 was with how knowing should be positioned within a theological epistemology in which the primacy of the divine act was to be safeguarded at all costs, here he develops more fully just how the creature participates in that act as an active knower and an independent subject.

Yet, as we have seen, Barth does not construe faith in raw epistemological terms; he rather paints a picture of the cognition of God as a social, practical and transformative event that involves the creature in knowing God, and on that basis, serving him. In “acknowledgement” the creature becomes cognisant of God as Lord and so comes under his Lordship. It does so in its encounter with members of the community of Christ who acknowledge God as their Lord. This acknowledgement effects a “recognition” of who God is and what he has done in Christ’s substitutionary work. This recognition of the *pro me* transforms the creature’s self-understanding and becomes implicated practically in all of its acts. The creature is

97 *CD* IV/1, 778.
98 *CD* IV/1, 779.
called to service in obedience: to recognise God in the way it lives its life, to be *causa Dei* in the world. In so recognising Christ cognitively and then practically, the creature confesses God in and to the world around. Through its cognition of God as expressed outwardly in words, others come to cognise God in faith by the Spirit.

From cognition to action and action to cognition – this is the dynamic of faith which characterises the Christian life, for Barth. The knowing and the service of God are not two distinct elements of the Christian life but mutually necessitating and constitutive. Knowing is thus an integral, not to be ignored, aspect of the freedom for which the creature is called and the purpose for which it is created.

6.4 Conclusion: knowing as social, practical and transformative event

In this chapter, I have shown that Barth is committed to upholding the integrity of the creature as an epistemic agent – as an active, spontaneous knower – in the event of faith. In both accounts that were studied, Barth takes seriously the need to endorse epistemic spontaneity: in *CD* II/1 it was regarded as a necessary condition of the subjective realisation of revelation (i.e. if it is to be true that God is really known by the creature), and in *CD* IV/1 the creature’s status as a knower was described as an important strand of its call and response to faith. This is the final strand to his understanding of creaturely cognition that I have endeavoured to elaborate on.

In more detail, my argument was that Barth is keen to position the creature as an epistemic agent in both descriptions of the event of faith, and does so with varying degrees of success. Despite Barth’s insistence on faith’s character as a cognitive event and on how the creature is posited by God therein as subject of the necessary act of knowing, his commitment to epistemic agency was inconsistently worked out in the account of *CD* II/1. His introduction of the concept of “instrument” to describe the role of cognition problematised his claim that the creature is also an active subject in the event of faith – a scenario that left him open to the accusation that in making faith totally the work of God, the corresponding human act either loses its character as a creaturely act (and becomes the mere extension of the divine), or is annulled altogether (in which case the subjective realisation of knowledge of God is jeopardised).

Yet these impressions were dispelled, and the core elements of the creature as a cognitive subject in faith were reiterated and developed, in the account of *CD* IV/1.
Therein, Barth outlined how the knowing of God is a spontaneous and free act that is social, practical and transformative in character. I described the self-involving response of the creature to faith, and specifically analysed how knowing and serving are mutually necessitating acts of the life the creature is called to lead in freedom.

These findings are important because they not only testify to the extent of Barth’s commitment to the creature as an epistemic agent – something this study has argued. They also reinforce and corroborate much of the work done in previous chapters and therefore highlight the essential unity of this project from this one angle.

In chapter 2, for instance, I discussed how the creature was created to know and serve God, and how this is reflected on the level of the creature’s constitution in the tie-up between “percipience” and “activity”. In CD IV/1, Barth showed how the acts of knowing and serving are additionally mutually entailing on the practical level, insofar as they together are constitutive of the freedom of the Christian life. Chapter 3 showed that Barth endorses epistemic spontaneity in virtue of the architecture of knowing, and that architecture was assumed in CD II/1 to be operative in the event of faith. Chapter 4 illustrated how spontaneity was a modulation or function of human freedom, and again Barth assumed in CD IV/1 that faith is a cognitive event in which the creature participates as an independent, active subject on account of its calling to covenant partnership.

These points illustrate how the various aspects of the study cohere and find unity in the fact that Barth is committed to the creature as an epistemic agent in virtue of its telos as God’s covenant partner – a commitment that we have seen extends as far his descriptions of the event of faith.
Conclusion: the human person as an epistemic agent in Barth’s theology

The thesis I have advanced is that in contrast to mistaken perceptions in the field, Barth offers in the *Church Dogmatics* a vibrant and highly significant theological account of human cognition that is inextricably interlinked with his *actualistic* conception of the human person and its *telos* as God’s covenant partner. To make this point, I described the theological contours of Barth’s understanding of creaturely cognition on the basis of the research questions identified in the thesis introduction.

In the conclusion to this project, I describe my research outcomes by summarising the answers we have received to those questions. In the remainder, I consider two new avenues of research that are opened up by study of this largely ignored aspect of Barth’s thought.

**Research outcomes**

1. *Why has Barth’s positive understanding of human knowing received such scant treatment in the field?*

   Granted that Barth’s constructive treatment of the significance and function of human knowing has been overlooked in the field, I cited one possible cause of this lacuna. I suggested that Barth’s rejection of the ‘elevated’ status human cognition receives in “natural theology” has done most to shape the common perception that Barth’s handling of human knowing is largely negative and critical. Attention given to the place Barth accords to cognition in natural theology established the model of the cognitive subject Barth rejects. A review of the literature in which scholars have touched on the issue of human knowing showed that, on the back of that rejection, many assume that Barth was either not willing or simply not interested in clarifying the theological shape and significance of creaturely knowing. I went on to suggest that what may have reinforced this impression is the idea that Barth’s “christomonism” shatters the integrity and reality of human creaturehood and creation.
2. Is a theological description of creaturely cognition possible and legitimate for Barth? And if so, does he ever articulate the significance and purpose of knowing?

I showed that knowledge of human knowing is indeed possible and legitimate for Barth, when pursued within the strict parameters set down by his Christologically grounded theological anthropology, and argued that the significance of the creature as a knower can only be measured against the purpose for which it was created, given Barth’s relational view of the self. Within that context, it transpired that Barth thinks human knowing is actually a highly significant component of human creaturehood in CD III/2. This was borne out in considering how knowing is so shaped as to facilitate cognitive and active fellowship with God. Cognition not only functions as the means by which God encounters the creature, it also functions as a necessary condition of the creature’s ability to serve God in the freedom of obedience.

3. Does Barth pass comment on the architecture of human cognition? If so, where do its conceptual foundations lie, and what are its chief characteristics?

Barth’s engagement with human knowing is not confined to the broad aspect of its significance; he displays a clear readiness to touch on the finer details of the cognitive process itself. This was evidenced by the two light descriptions of cognition he offers in CD II/1 and III/2. Analysis of those ‘accounts’ revealed that Barth endorses the broad outlines of Kant’s conception of cognition as presented in the Critique of Pure Reason – an account which we know Barth was intimately familiar with. Importantly, this analysis revealed that Barth considers knowing to be a “spontaneous” act: he thinks it is the activity of the mind that makes the distinctive contribution to knowledge-generation – something he accepts on theological and not philosophical grounds. Barth’s endorsement of ‘epistemic spontaneity’ proved a significant finding because of the questions it raised about whether Barth situates the creature as an ‘active knower’ in the event of revelation, and whether such a model of knowing is consonant with his broader view of human subjectivity and freedom.

4. Is Barth’s conception of the knowing process left ‘free-standing’, or is it part of his understanding of creaturely selfhood?

Epistemic spontaneity is not a side-issue that is unconnected to the wider flow of Barth’s theology, but is properly integrated into his broader conception of human
selfhood. The extent and seriousness of Barth’s commitment to epistemic spontaneity is reflected in the fact that it was shown to function as a modulation of human freedom. This became clear in considering how Barth thinks such spontaneity – as independence from natural necessity – characterises human subjectivity, is reflected in the rational order of the human constitution, and decisively, is inflected in the particular acts of knowing and willing. Despite serious points of divergence, Barth’s conception of spontaneity clearly models Kant’s, and this raised the question of whether such modern, philosophical notions of independence are really compatible with Barth’s base-line theological conception of human freedom as the freedom for obedience. In contrast to Webster, I argued that they are compatible in Barth’s view on account of the fact that the creature’s freedom for God explicitly includes and supposes such spontaneity (freedom from nature).

5. Does Barth carry through his commitment to the creature as an ‘active’ knower to his description of the knowing of worldly objects? And what is the theological significance and function of “intra-worldly” cognition?

Barth’s commitment to the creature as an ‘active’, spontaneous knower is not merely rhetorical; it is reflected in his descriptions of the environments in which he says the act of knowing is operational. In the first place, far from conceiving of intra-worldly knowing as having no theological value, Barth deems it to play a highly-significant role in the creature’s knowing of God on account of God’s good pleasure to reveal himself in creaturely form. Evidence suggested that Barth is clearly willing to affirm “intra-worldly” knowing as a spontaneous act insofar as his use of the terms “mastery” and “precedence” to characterise this type of knowing suggested that he assumes the creature has a ‘determinative priority’ over created objects.

6. Does the creature remain an epistemic agent in the event of faith? Or is human cognitive activity eclipsed by Barth’s emphasis on the primacy of the divine act of self-revealing?

In his two descriptions of the event of faith (CD II/1 and IV/1) Barth clearly recognises the need to safeguard and establish the creature’s status as an epistemic agent, if there is any validity to the claim that “God is known” by the creature. Yet his attempt to do this meets with limited success in the former account. The pressing need to contrast his view of the knowability of God over against the ‘false’ alternative offered by natural theology leads Barth to introduce the concept of
instrument to describe human cognition in the event of faith. This complicates and jeopardises the creature’s status as a derived subject in the event, and unnecessarily creates the impression of “christomonism”. Yet doubts over the role of the human knower in the event of faith are assuaged in the latter account, where Barth describes faith as a spontaneous cognitive act that is an integral aspect of the dynamic of the Christian life. There, the knowing that takes place in faith is not simply free and active, but is described by Barth in its social, practical and transformative dimensions.

The answers to these six questions support my thesis that Barth offers a positive and nuanced account of creaturely cognition in the Church Dogmatics as part of his understanding of the human creature and its telos. These findings make several important contributions to Barth studies. These were explored in the introduction.

**Avenues of future research**

To round off, I shall sketch the possibilities for future research which arise from this study. I begin with some brief, general comments before making two specific suggestions.

The findings of this research project effect a reassessment of the dominant way Barth has been typically read on the subject of human knowing. However, it also begs us to consider how theologically innovative Barth’s handling of the subject is when compared with other major figures in Protestant and Catholic theology, past and present. That Barth developed an account of human cognition and its telos under strictly theological conditions, whilst making use of philosophical apparatus in the process, casts fresh light on Barth as a distinctly philosophical theologian. This opens him up to fresh conversations with Karl Rahner on the subject of the creature’s status of hearer of God’s Word, and with Martin Heidegger on the inter-relationship of philosophical and theological hermeneutics. But the exposition of my thesis also raises the peculiar possibility that Barth was perhaps further along – further than even he may have realised! – in the execution of what he called in 1961 the ‘second task’ of theology: the description of creation in its movement towards its creator.¹ Has Barth laid the ground for a Christologically-based theological phenomenology of human creaturehood?

¹ K. Barth, “Philosophy”, 86f, 93
I now make two specific suggestions.

(1) Barth’s engagement with Kant

This study has contributed to our understanding of the relationship between Barth and Kant. But this contribution generates critical and constructive tasks. In the first place, there was no time to investigate whether Barth’s critical appropriation of Kant’s model of cognition commits him to the problems traditionally associated with that model. For instance, does that commitment entail that Barth is trapped into accepting the split between the object as it appears to the mind and as it is in itself? Does this mean, as Graham Ward has suggested, that there is now a question over whether one really knows God in revelation as he is in himself? On a different note, one might also query current readings of the extent of Kant’s influence on Barth. How ought one reconcile Bruce McCormack’s claim that Barth always presupposed as valid the limits Kant set to knowing (and formulated the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in response to them), with his more recent assertion that Barth actually dropped from service Kant’s understanding of those limits as early as 1924?

Secondly, it would be valuable to further investigate Kant’s influence on Barth’s theological understanding of moral action. This work is already underway, as I indicated in section 4.3.4.2 above. Nevertheless, parallels that deserve deeper analysis include their seemingly analogous notions of spontaneity and rational agency, and Barth’s innovative appropriation of the Categorical Imperative – something which has by and large escaped attention in Barth studies. What study of these things can teach us, at the very least, is that Barth’s theology was highly interactionist in its description of reality, if not in its presuppositions or commitments.

Engaging Barth on these points would shed further light on how he handles and deploys philosophical thought-forms. Admittedly, I have assumed one reading as standard here, namely, that Barth appropriates such concepts only on theological grounds, i.e. only when they help him make a theological point. It should not be supposed that his commitment to them is necessarily constant or guaranteed. But one question is whether this really was Barth’s standard approach throughout the *Church Dogmatics*, or if it was subject to revision at different junctures? Is his handling of such thought-forms at any given point dictated by contextual-historical factors, or by his understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology? From the
1920s onwards, do we see an increasing level of sophistication and criticism not only in Barth’s choice of philosophical machinery, but in how he integrates those into his theology?

(2) Epistemology and Ethics

This study has shown that Barth’s theological anthropology creates space for and posits the creature as an epistemic agent, as well as an ethical agent. Whilst commentators on Barth have tended to isolate the latter ‘side’ of human creaturehood for treatment, this study has restricted its attention to its other, less appreciated, dimension. Although both are valid sides of human creaturehood as Barth thought of it, the apparent ‘compartmentalisation’ of the creature that takes place on account of viewing it solely in terms of one or other aspect threatens to radically distort Barth’s unified conception of human creaturehood and disrupt understanding of the telos for which its constitution was conceived. A new approach to the exposition of that concept therefore stands as a pressing concern.

To accurately describe Barth’s concept of creaturehood, we are challenged to think knowing and doing together in their differentiated unity, as Barth himself did. Barth did not allow a strict separation between knowing and doing, or any reduction of creaturehood to one or the other. He saw them as mutually necessitating capacities and acts, because both are necessary in view of the creature’s purpose to know and serve God. Only once one has grasped the telos of human creaturehood, can one really hope to understand its form and content – its “constitution” – in its created unity. Whilst I have only been able to point to that unity in a very preliminary way here, one can formalise the basic character of the task ahead using Heidegger’s language of the ‘ontological’ and ‘ontic’: against the background of the divine call to covenant partnership, one must detail how Barth links creaturely epistemology and ethics on the level of the human constitution, i.e. the capacities of “perception” and “activity”, and then show how this unity is reflected outwardly in the mutually entailing acts of knowing and serving. Only in mapping these connections between ontology, epistemology and ethics can one begin to perceive the fine lines in Barth’s description of the human person, and the depth to which he attempted to convey its beauty and blessedness in the sight of God.
Indeed, it is now clear – clearer than ever before – that, in Barth’s view, human being has been created and elected not only for the pleasure of serving, but in and with that for the joy of cognitive and conscious fellowship with God. The creature is an ethical agent, for Barth, but no less importantly and essentially, it is firstly an epistemic agent. That is what I have tried to establish in this study.
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