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Proposal to the Neubauer Collegium for a Large Scale Collaborative Project

The Concept of Form in German Idealism and Beyond: Historical Roots and Contemporary Relevance

I. Overview of the Various Dimensions of this Proposal

A. Brief Statement of the Overall Aim of the Proposed Project

It is clear that there is a sense of crisis and a loss of orientation in the Humanities today. This proposal is designed to address that crisis, that is: to provide *a* conceptual foundation for humanistic research (note the indefinite article). It is, therefore, a theoretical project, aiming at the clarification and systematic articulation of concepts. In doing so, we draw on what we consider a unique strength of the University of Chicago, as well as on international collaborations that have been developed over the last decade. The crisis of the Humanities will, of course, elicit diverse reactions. One form of constructive and substantive intervention, in our opinion, would be responsive to the canon of literary/philosophical work that has historically constituted the core focus of the Humanities and would exhibit sufficient particularity to be identifiable as *one* path leading out from the present situation.

Our strategy in this regard is to place the tradition of German idealist thought at the center of our investigations. This tradition seems to us an appropriate choice for the following two reasons: a) Idealism itself emerged as perhaps the most thoughtful and profound response to the crisis in the Enlightenment's understanding of man's place in the natural world and hence of the very possibility of genuine human self-knowledge; b) arguably; this gave rise to the conception of the modern university in its present form, carving out for the first time a coherent conception of humanistic inquiry as an independent sphere of knowledge. The first model of the modern research university, founded by Wilhelm von Humboldt in Berlin in 1810, was based on an essentially Kantian argument regarding the mutual autonomy of the two main spheres of academic inquiry from one another — the normative and interpretive sciences, on the one hand, and the natural sciences, on the other. Within this model, the Humanities were allotted a central position in the organization of knowledge in the modern university. In the broadest possible terms, our project raises the question: How can we inherit the idealist tradition in a manner that allows it to continue to speak to the central concerns of humanistic inquiry as they now arise within the contemporary university? The reasons for this theoretical choice are articulated below. We are convinced not only that the proposed project will generate significant contributions to current theoretical debates in the Humanities, but also that it will elicit alternative proposals. Our aim is not to develop a monolithic research program, but rather to open a space for conversation in which a variety of competing conceptions may be forged and debated.

B. The Subject Matter of our Investigation

Briefly put, we propose to reconstruct the *notion of form* developed in German Idealism. As will become clear in what follows, we use the term German Idealism in a broad sense that, in the first instance, encompasses not only philosophers (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), but also writers, critics, and theorists of the arts (Goethe, Novalis, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt). This capacious understanding of the Idealist tradition is essential to our project. For the mutual interanimation of these thinkers and writers resulted not only in a period of enviably intense intellectual and artistic collaborative activity, but also in the emergence of the very possibility of literature and art as serious objects of academic disciplinary study. Moreover, we employ the term in a manner that is capacious in yet a second respect, in as much as it seeks to incorporate crucial moments in the reception and further inheritance of this development among both philosophers (e.g., Marx, Nietzsche, Cassirer, Wittgenstein, McDowell) and writers, critics, and theorists of the arts (e.g., Benjamin, Cavell, Greenberg, Fried). Our project is thus not merely historical or interpretative, although both these aspects are certainly important to it. Rather, we hope to disclose the contemporary relevance and power of the relevant concept of form in its full generality.

As noted above, Idealism may be conceived as a radical re-thinking of the nature of humanistic knowledge. Excavating the conceptual foundations of that re-thinking and re-conceiving them in the light of the contemporary crisis will, in our view, bring out the intellectual fecundity of the original idealist intervention. Centering our investigation on the concept of form (discussed below) not only guarantees the thematic focus of the project, but also cuts to the conceptual nexus at the nerve of idealist thought. Our project therefore has the following historical and systematic dimensions — where, in our view, the successful prosecution of each depends upon the other: (1) to reinvigorate interdisciplinary study of a crucial moment in the history of the Humanities' own self-understanding of themselves, and (2) to bring the intellectual resources developed at that critical moment to bear on an understanding of the crossroads at which the Humanities presently stand.

C. History of the Project

Our proposal to the Neubauer Collegium has emerged out of a history of productive collaborations involving the three applicants, but also including other colleagues (intra- and extramural). We mention, in particular, the Mellon-sponsored Sawyer Seminar conducted by Conant and Wellbery in 2006-07. Also noteworthy is a series of jointly taught seminars (Pippin and Wellbery: *The Modern Regime in Art*; Conant and Wellbery: *Stanley Cavell. Epistemology and Aesthetics*; Conant and Pippin: *McDowell on Action and Perception*; and *The Philosophy of Visual Modernism in Greenberg, Cavell, and Fried*) as well as international conferences held at the University of Chicago (e.g., *Aristotle and Kant on Form and Matter*, 2011; *Stanley Cavell's Aesthetics*, 2013; *Walter Benjamin as Philosopher*, 2014; *Sellars and Kant*, 2014). These were all significant steps toward the formulation of the present project. (The bibliography includes relevant publications by the applicants.) The experience gained in these enterprises has convinced us of two things: 1) *that it is possible for philosophers and literary scholars to work together productively while remaining faithful to the norms of their respective disciplines*; 2) *that thought in the tradition of German Idealism is eminently relevant to contemporary lines of inquiry in philosophy and literary studies*. In addition, it has become clear to us over the course of these seminars and conferences that research on our proposed topic requires a collaborative approach.

D. International Partnerships

A major purpose of this project is to enhance the standing of the University of Chicago as *the* international center for the study not only of German Idealism in the capacious sense noted above, but also of contemporary currents in literary study and aesthetic theory that are responsive to the subsequent German tradition of thought. That means building on intellectual and institutional partnerships that have emerged out of prior joint endeavors as well as from the individual intellectual itineraries of the three applicants. Within the international network we envision, the most important intellectual and institutional alliance will be with the University of Leipzig, and, in particular, with the colleagues Andrea Kern (Philosophy), Dirk Oschmann (Literary Studies), and Sebastian Rödl (Philosophy). Our assumption is that the intellectual and professional standing of these colleagues, who have made Leipzig into one of the centers of interdisciplinary inquiry into philosophy and the arts, will be familiar to readers of this application. The point to emphasize is that the collaboration with Leipzig has a *uniquely important institutional dimension* as well. For one thing, the University of Leipzig is the home of the

Center for the Analytic Study of German Idealism, on the board of which the undersigned serve. Secondly, Leipzig is currently advancing an application to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for an International Graduate Program designed in parallel to the present application: a program that will be centered on the study of the idealist concept of form in its various ramifications and that will include the participation of University of Chicago graduate students and faculty. (See “educational component” below.)

Moreover, the University of Chicago entertains active exchange programs in Philosophy and in Germanic Studies with five other German universities: Bonn, Potsdam Frankfurt, Konstanz and Berlin. In addition to the aforementioned colleagues from Leipzig, we therefore additionally anticipate extensive cooperation built around our contacts with the following scholars in Germany: Michael Forster (Bonn), Johannes Haag (Potsdam), Christoph König (Osnabrück), Albrecht Koschorke (Konstanz), Joachim Küpper (FU Berlin), Christoph Menke (Frankfurt), and Marcus Willaschek (Frankfurt). The aforementioned are among the leading professors in Philosophy and Literary Studies in Germany. We are, however, equally interested in pursuing an ongoing collaboration with the generation of younger scholars in Germany whose own research fits particularly well into the framework of our project. We are thinking here of especially the following four individuals: Wolfram Gobsch (Leipzig), Matthias Haase (Leipzig), Till Hoepfner (Potsdam), and Thomas Khurana (Frankfurt).

E. National and Local Partnerships

Our proposal is built on the expectation of extensive collaboration with a network of colleagues from the United States — scholars with whom, in this connection, we have had significant (in some cases very far-reaching) exchanges. Those at other universities whose participation in various degrees we especially anticipate include the following: Michael Fried, Eckart Förster, Leonardo Lisi (all Johns Hopkins), Hannah Ginsborg (UC Berkeley), Karen Gorodeisky (Auburn), John McDowell (Pittsburgh), Toril Moi (Duke), Christoph Menke (Frankfurt a.M.), Sally Sedgwick (UIC), and Rachel Zuckert (Northwestern). These are among the individuals whom we would bring to the University of Chicago for conferences, workshops, and compact seminars related to our project.

Finally, we are interested through our project in strengthening pre-existing interdisciplinary ties between the Departments of Germanic Studies and Philosophy and the Committee on Social Thought and in forging ties between these three entities and the Departments of Art History and Cinema and Media Studies. In these five entities, we particularly anticipate collaborative work in our envisioned seminars, workshops and conferences with the following faculty at the U of C: David Finkelstein (Philosophy), Irad Kimhi (Social Thought), Michael Kremer (Philosophy), Gabriel Lear (Social Thought and Philosophy) Daniel Morgan (CMS), Richard Neer (Art History), and Florian Klinger (Germanic Studies).

F. Educational Component

We believe that this project can only constitute an effective response to the contemporary crisis of the Humanities if it includes an educational component. Our ongoing cooperation with the above-mentioned universities, especially Leipzig, will bring students to the University of Chicago and afford our students a unique opportunity to study abroad. There is every reason to believe that this project will also have a significant impact on the recruitment of graduate students in Philosophy, Germanic Studies, the Committee on Social Thought, and, to some degree, other fields. *In this sense, our project constitutes an institutional initiative that will strengthen the University's competitive position nationally and its standing internationally.* But there are also long-term effects for humanistic study generally that we anticipate will emerge from this project by virtue of the fact that we will be training a group of young scholars who, from the beginning of their graduate studies on, have been *deeply engaged in an interdisciplinary project to elaborate foundational concepts of humanistic inquiry.*

We envision three primary educational components (detailed below) to the project: (1) a co-taught seminar each winter on the main topics of the project, (2) a summer mini-summer conducted jointly with the Departments of Philosophy and Germanic Studies at the University of Leipzig, and (3) two seminars taught by visiting faculty centrally involved in the overall prosecution of the project.

II. A Diagnosis of the Present Crisis of the Humanities

Our project is premised on some assumptions about the Humanities (about what they were and where they presently are) that are by no means universally shared today, but are worth making fully explicit at the outset. Not least among these is the following: Insofar as there is an autonomous humanistic sphere of learning and knowledge, its content revolves around problems of meaning and value. The tradition of thought we are interested in recovering and renewing had as its focus the question of the conditions for the possibility of such forms of meaning and value. This embraces the meaning and evaluation of texts, historical events, actions, and art objects. Our initial governing assumption is simple and straightforward: that to claim to understand something or to know something is to have understood or to have known it within some framework of generality that the object or event exemplifies. Such a structure of generality is a form, in the broadest sense. The Humanities, on this understanding, not only include the achievement of concrete forms of understanding or knowledge about particular issues within this domain, but also involve an understanding of the grounds of the very possibility of these forms. This task requires not only the elucidation of the various ways of rendering such forms of meaning and value intelligible, but also the articulation of the conceptual resources needed for their constructive criticism in the first place. This, in turn, can be achieved only by bringing to reflective self-consciousness the values already inherent in the existing possibilities for the criticism of the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of our shared social lives, and by creating the concepts needed for an understanding of the past flourishing of such forms, their ruptures and crises, and their possible inheritance.

We take it that such forms of understanding, if they are to be understood as objects of a distinct, viable form of academic inquiry — the Humanities — cannot be understood merely as one among many other empirical or scientific objects of study. This is not to deny that one can provide economic, or evolutionary biological or neurophysiological accounts of the enabling conditions of their possibility. But there is also such a thing as understanding the nature of such forms of meaning and value in their distinctiveness within aesthetic experience itself or as objects of philosophic and hermeneutical reflection in their own right. In various pockets of the Humanities, confidence that this claim of distinctiveness can be established and defended has collapsed. We wish to better understand the sources of this collapse and question its grounds. It is this aspect of the task that is of special concern to us here and that we wish to single out as an essential obligation not incumbent on each and every individual humanist, but certainly on the contemporary university viewed as a whole. Such a foundational inquiry into the nature of the Humanities is at best only awkwardly housed solely within individual departments. It is our conviction that such questions as the foregoing can only be adequately addressed within a focused interdisciplinary nexus of reflection and research. As indicated above, we have begun to establish such a nexus both within and without the university.

To elaborate: the core assumption upon which our investigations will rest is that the various modes of understanding and knowledge that constitute the Humanities require, if they are to count as successful interpretation or knowledge, the acknowledgement of an implicit universal — one that constitutes a distinctive kind of understanding or knowledge. This kind is at work in the type of knowing to be found in the comprehension of, e.g. an intentional action, a piece of sculpture, a musical composition, a literary text, a philosophical claim, and so forth. A first corollary of our core assumption is that, with the proliferation ever more local forms of humanistic inquiry, what is genuinely *sui generis* in this kind has been lost from view. A second corollary is that its recovery requires an attention to a distinctive category of form — distinctive because the kind of form or generality appropriate to meaning and value is not the kind appropriate to empirical or scientific knowledge of natural phenomena.

Of course, the aforementioned assumptions have themselves become matters of considerable and heated debate within the academy. Within this debate, it is worth distinguishing two strands of reaction that contrast starkly with the one represented in and through this project. First, it is broadly held, often even within the Humanities themselves, that such forms of understanding, insofar as they exist at all, are merely invented or imposed, that they are at bottom utterly contingent and arbitrary — at the least, that the very idea that they might constitute an autonomous sphere of understanding is at best an illusion. Yet others, though no less skeptical about the autonomy of the Humanities, are more sanguine about the possibility of so-called humanistic knowledge. This tends to result in a second strand of reaction, which comes at the cost of conceding that the only respectable form of knowledge is of the kind appropriate to the understanding of nature — that of scientific law. On this view, the disciplines that previously understood themselves to be concerned with meaning and val-

we must model ourselves on the more successful forms of non-humanistic inquiry, reinventing themselves as, e.g., evolutionary ethics, neuro-aesthetics, cognitive literary studies, experimental philosophy, and so forth. If one were to sum up the point of this paragraph in a slogan, one might say that there are two ways that the original form of understanding distinctive to the Humanities can be lost from view: culturalism or scientism. The premise of our project is that much is to be gained from recovering a reflective understanding of the possibility of a third alternative here.

It is one thing to call for such a reflective self-understanding on the part of the Humanities. It is quite another thing to actually propose a fruitful and compelling account of what it involves. We seek below to formulate one possible proposal for how to go about doing so. This is the role of the concept of endogenous form (see below) in our undertaking.

III. An Outline of the Intellectual Aim and Focus of the Project

A. Overview of the Content of the Project

Our proposed research project will examine the concept of form as it was developed in German Idealism, especially, but not exclusively, in the work of Goethe, Schelling, and Hegel. As will become clear in what follows, we are also interested in studying historical phases of the reception of that notion and related issues in contemporary philosophy and literary theory. Indeed, it is our contention that this notion, which we refer to with the term *endogenous form*, is of pressing relevance for contemporary work in aesthetics, literary theory, art history and criticism, and epistemology. We thus anticipate that the project will create a forum in which philosophers and literary scholars, but also representatives of other fields (e.g., art history) can assess the significance of the idealist notion of form for their respective fields of inquiry.

Our general approach will be to examine the concept of form systematically in writings of major authors of German Idealism and the critics and artists they inspired, especially as it bears on the following areas of thought: (1) philosophy of nature; (2) aesthetics; (3) philosophy of mind. In addition to writings by the above-mentioned authors, we shall consider important historical antecedents, especially Aristotle's hylomorphism and Kant's account of the place of form in cognition generally. Our focus, however, will by no means be exclusively historical. There has been a notable recent resurgence of the form concept in a variety of theoretical contexts in contemporary philosophy, literary theory, and art criticism. The aim of our project is not merely to highlight these, but to bring them under critical scrutiny and explore how the concept of form invoked across these contexts is best to be understood. Is the term 'form' as it is employed across such contexts — e.g., by logicians ('forms of inference'), philosophers of mind ('forms' or 'categories' of thought), grammarians ('forms' or 'parts of speech'), aestheticians ('forms' or 'media' of artistic expression), and literary theorists ('forms' or 'genres' of writing) — merely a homonym? Or is there a common category of object of inquiry across these very different disciplines?

It is a major hypothesis of the seminar that a reconstruction of the idealist notion of endogenous form will therefore not only afford insight into the *historical unity of idealist thought*, but also provide conceptual resources for productive reflection on the contemporary *foundations of humanistic inquiry*. In fact, the major goal of this proposal is to create at the University of Chicago an intellectual and institutional framework within which such foundational questions of humanistic study can be productively (and non-defensively) addressed.

B. The Concept of Endogenous Form

We have coined the term *endogenous form* in order to bring into focus the central concept of the project, which is to say: the concept of form developed in German Idealism. Where form of this sort, endogenous form, is operative or has achieved itself, there is no exteriority of form and content to one another, as, for example, in cases of (what Hegel calls) mechanical imposition, but rather an interpenetration of the two. Endogenous form embraces and, in fact, is the source and reality of what from an extraneous perspective are distinguished as form and content. Such a point of view is no less opposed to what is usually called "formalism" (be it in the philosophy of logic or language or in the theory of art and literature) than it is to what is usually called "materi-

alism?”. To give just one example of the implications of such a concept of form, say, for the theory of art: negatively, what this means is that there is no identifying the medium (or genre) of a work as if it were a standard object of empirical and scientific enquiry through a specification of either its merely (so-called) “material” or its merely (so-called) “formal” properties; positively, what it means is that it is only through an examination of our lived experience of individual works of art that such a distinction between form and matter is to be drawn in the first place. An appropriate development of this concept thus holds out the *promise* of illuminating the particular character of the nexus between criticism and theory — between a detailed attention to individual achievements of the human spirit and a general account of their nature — which has long been a hallmark of humanistic understanding. We use the term ‘promise’ advisedly in the previous sentence. *The fact is that there does not yet exist a systematic articulation of the concept of endogenous form equal to the task of illuminating the full scope of its ramifications.* In our view, one way of conceiving the underlying aim of the entire project of German Idealism is to understand it to be in search of just such a concept. That project has subsequently often been proclaimed to be outdated (allegedly because of some specific development in logic, or epistemology, or modernism and its aftermath in the arts). We aim to show otherwise.

As indicated above, a proximate task of the project is to gain an understanding of the epochal significance of the concept of endogenous form and therewith of the unity of idealist thought broadly conceived. In order to profile this historical dimension of our topic, it is useful to frame it in terms of a large-scale narrative. Thus, it may be said, albeit in nearly intolerable abbreviation, that the emergence of the concept of endogenous form brings about the dissolution of a concept of form that was first articulated in antiquity and that remained continuously available, and at decisive points normative, well into the eighteenth century. (See Cassirer, *Eidos und Eidolon*; Panofsky, *Idea*.) We call this the *eidetic concept of form*. Cutting things at this joint, of course, stylizes Idealism as a major shift in the conceptual tectonics of European culture, as a decisive break with an entire cluster of old European vocabularies. At the same time, we want to mark a post-Idealist limit by adding a third concept of form to the two already mentioned, a specifically modernist concept that we see as emergent around 1900. This we refer to as the *constructivist concept of form*. Taken together, the three concepts yield an ideal-typical classification that looks like this:

- (a) *Eidetic Form.* Form is thought of as the shape or outline guaranteeing object identity. It is typically sublimated to the status of an eternal essence or purely conceptual configuration. A starkly accentuated feature of the concept is the opposition to the domains of materiality and temporality, which are regarded as ontologically deficient. The reproduction of forms is conceived according to the model of imitation (prototype/copy), with a corresponding schema of evaluation.
- (b) *Endogenous Form.* Form is conceived as a process of self-formation or self-explication in a field of interplay defined by both invariance and variation. The relationship between form and matter/content is conceived not as opposition, but as interpenetration. Reproduction is variously conceived as self-formation, procreation, growth, and transformation.
- (c) *Constructivist Form.* Form is conceived as the drawing of a border or distinction. Emphasis falls on the act of formal positing, hence on the contingency and arbitrariness of the formal cut. Form is viewed differentially, as setting itself off from environment, background, or noise. The reproduction of form is thought of as iteration.

One way of briefly putting a crucial background of our project would be as follows: that much research in the Humanities implicitly operates with a supposed disjunction between the first and the third concepts of form, either taking the unacceptability of the first to entail the necessity of the third, or despairing of any adequate concept in this neighborhood on the grounds that both are equally inadequate. This leapfrogs the middle of the three options above, whose viability has largely gone unexplored (with some notable exceptions) since the original demise of the popularity of Idealist thought in the latter third of the 19th century.

C. Genealogical Paths to the Concept of Endogenous Form

To grasp the centrality of the concept of endogenous form to Idealism and therewith to acquire an appreciation of the unity of idealist thought across its multiple variants, we propose to examine several of the concept’s

intertwined genealogies. As indicated above, careful study of Aristotelian hylomorphism and its reception will undoubtedly prove indispensable in this regard. Of equal importance is the rehabilitation of the concept of form (the form/content distinction) as it is deployed across Kant's philosophy. (See Pippin 1982 and Engstrom 2014 for the seminal discussions of this topic in Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy respectively.) The seminar will consider each of these crucial conceptual moments, focusing on selected primary texts along with relevant recent scholarship. Thus collaboration between scholars of ancient and early modern philosophy with the relevant interests will be essential to the historical component of our project.

Another strand in the development of the concept of endogenous form that will constitute a major thematic focus of the project runs through Goethe's writings on natural science (his "morphology") and aesthetics. In his important study *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, Eckart Förster has highlighted Goethe's contribution to the development of idealist thought from Kant to Hegel and one of the aims of the project is to expand and deepen Förster's account, starting with a careful examination of Idealism's roots in Goethe's thought. Morphological science seeks an invariant form or type, which, as Goethe is wont to phrase it, remains identical across all its instantiations: an *Urpflanze*, an animal *Typus* or prototype, a geological *Urgestaltung*. The concept that embraces all these invariant forms is that of *Idea*. The Idea is the *Urform*. The characteristic feature of Goethe's thinking here is the plasticity of the concepts he employs. On the one hand, he wants the level of invariance to have the status of a law or rule such that it makes sense to say that the host of individual variants is formed "according to" or "in the pattern of" or simply "after" the invariant type. To conceive of a form of life – an Idea in Goethe's sense – is to have in mind a normative concept to which particular instantiations conform. At the same time, however, the Idea is not an iron-tracks sort of rule that fixes, once and for all, all of its instantiations, and in fact its lawfulness allows for a broad range of deviation.

In the two previous paragraphs, we have traced two important genealogical sources — one in Aristotle and one in Kant and Goethe — of the concept of form that we wish to develop and explore. The historical component of our project would be to develop further such genealogies (in thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche) and to trace their subsequent receptions (e.g., in Cassirer, Wittgenstein, and Benjamin) and their contemporary resurgence in Anglo-American thought (e.g., in Cavell, Fried, and McDowell).

D. Levels of the Conceptualization of Form

If endogenous form is a principle of self-determination, that claim implies that form is something organic, holistic, and teleological. It is therefore no accident that the advent of the conception of form as self-determination was accompanied by a penetrating and highly innovative reflection on the idea of the organism. However, these concepts – the concepts of organism and of self-determining form -- owe their determinacy to their *systematic differentiation from one another*. In non-human life, form is indeed something that governs a creature's development into itself (growth) as well as its teleologically structured activity (e.g., metabolism). Thus the whole of the organism determines its parts (holism). This form itself, however, is a *given* reality; it is not a self-conscious act of self-determination of the living being. So it isn't the case that the creature itself *is* its form; it merely exhibits it, as an *exemplar*. An understanding of form as organic, teleological, and holistic is insufficient to capture the notion of form as self-determining potentiality not because (as many contemporary cultural theorists hold) it fails adequately to reflect the contingency, historicity, and materiality of human activity, but because such a form – one that is *merely* organic, *merely* teleological, *merely* holistic – is *too contingent*: it is not itself the ground of the material conditions of its actuality and, accordingly, its changes in time cannot be understood through that form itself. Self-conscious forms of self-development – that is, endogenous form considered as potentiality -- is not (*precisely not*) the execution of a predetermined program. For that would raise the question: what determines this program? And the answer to that question would not (could not) be: the form itself. Form as potentiality does not follow a given law of development, but is *radically* open to development precisely insofar as it makes itself the ground of the necessity of its alterations. It is not a capacity to realize this or that preset possibility; rather, it is self-conscious capacity *as such*. This means that the latter concept — the concept of the sort of capacity that is self-consciously exercised through the activity of human agency — is itself essential to our project.

This consideration brings us to the final level on which the Idealists originally sought to conceptualize form. It is our working historical hypothesis that the idealist philosophy of mind and of knowledge, as it unfolds from Kant to Hegel, can be understood as a theory of thought as endogenous, self-determining form. This is the

thought of spontaneity, of mindedness, of the capacity (power) to know. In this sense, endogenous form is not one topic or theme among many that the Idealists addressed; the concept of endogenous form does not emerge for the Idealists as the topic of kangaroos might for a traveler to Australia. Rather, the concept of endogenous form sponsors the unity of Idealist thought, in the philosophy of nature, aesthetics, and the philosophy of mind. It is a lens that enables us to see the unity -- the form -- of Idealism in its original theoretical constellation.

E. The Reemergence of the Concept of Endogenous Form Today

The thought of endogenous form is central to the work of a number of authors, whose research is shaping discussions in certain quarters of the Humanities today. It is our contention that the impact of this work will become yet more forceful if its connection to and grounding within the tradition of thought outlined above becomes clearer. It is a major task of the proposed project to bring out and thus make fecund the intellectual coherence of these endeavors. This is the sense in which, as we claimed at the outset, the concept of endogenous form can focus reflection on *the foundations of humanistic inquiry*.

Michael Thompson's groundbreaking book *Life and Action* introduced into the contemporary discussion the concept of a life-form as the principle of a unity of vital operations that sustain themselves precisely through their unity. So the unity, here, is the ultimate explanatory ground of the elements that it unites. Such a form cannot be conceived as imposed from the outside; it is internal to its matter. Thus the matter of the living being, its organs and members, have no principle of activity that is other than the very form of life that holds them together. This holds true even for the elements of the living body characterized in chemical terms. For the laws according to which they interact are not exhausted by what is known within chemistry. Rather, they are subject to laws insofar as they are, in a broad sense, organs of the living being, laws studied by the biology of the cell, for example.

The idea of a form of life as the principle of a teleological, self-determining unity implies a conception of reason that is opposed to a widespread understanding of the anthropological difference (i.e., of the difference between humans and non-human animals). According to this understanding, the power of reason characteristic of the human is conceived as a power *added to* those powers we share with mere animals, leaving the nature and form of these latter powers unaltered. Against this additive conception, it has been suggested, we must propound a transformative conception (see Boyle 2014; McDowell 1994) that holds our animal powers – perception, sensory desire, the feeling of pleasure – to be essentially different from these same powers in animals because, in their human expression, they are informed by reason. This thesis, in fact, has its roots in German Idealism, where it was forcefully articulated by Herder (e.g., *Treatise on the Origin of Language*) and then taken up by Fichte and – especially important for our purposes – by Hegel (see the notes on language in the Jena *Systementwürfen*). It is in this domain of contemporary discussion that the concept of endogenous form proves to be central to an adequate understanding of the notion of the human.

In Kantian as well as in Hegelian epistemology, the possibility of knowledge is understood through the concept of a power of knowledge. The idea of a power of knowledge has been all but absent from contemporary epistemology. However, there are three major recent trends in epistemology that, without being aware of the roots of this idea, appeal to the idea of a power of knowledge, without yet giving this notion its full weight: the so-called „knowledge-first account of knowledge” (Williamson 2000); the “disjunctivist” account of knowledge (e.g., Snowdon, Martin, Haddock), and so-called “virtue epistemology” (e.g. Zagzebski, Sosa, Greco). Developing the concept of a power of knowledge as endogenous form, i.e. as a concept of self-constitution, as it is explicitly reflected in Kant and Hegel, will help us to see the unity of these three major trends. Tracing these trends in epistemology and philosophy of mind to the idea of form, as it is developed in German Idealism, will help us to see that the irreducibly disjunctivist character of knowledge is not a „brute fact“, as it is sometimes conceived, but a necessary feature of the concept of knowledge (see e.g. McDowell 1994; Pippin 1997, Boyle 2014).

The idea of a form of life as endogenous form explains why reflections on education, *Bildung*, pedagogy, the formation of powers and habits, etc., are central to German Idealism (cf., Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schiller, Goethe, Moritz, Wilhelm von Humboldt). An important implication of the idea of form as potentiality is a certain conception of human development. It entails that the form of the human being bears a twofold relation to the

individual. As the principle of its unity, the form has to be actual in the individual from the beginning; yet it cannot be fully actual without a development of a specific kind, development according to a principle of self-determination. The term “Bildung” designates this kind of development. In recent epistemology and moral theory appeal to the idea of “education” has been introduced in order to understand the unity of mind and nature, or, in other terms, of the space of norms and the space of laws of nature (see e.g. McDowell 1994; Lovibond 2004; Pinkard 2012). However, not any appeal to the term “Bildung” will do. If “Bildung” means: formation of something which does not yet have a form, i.e. construction, then the term “Bildung” is not able to provide an account of the human being according to which it is *part of its nature* to follow norms. Bringing together contemporary reflections on the role of “Bildung” in an account of the human being, as they are prominent in recent epistemology and moral theory, with the concept of endogenous form will help us to see clearly the meaning and significance of both.

Turning to recent work in literary studies and art history, a trend emerges into view that can be characterized – in stark abbreviation – as follows. On the one hand, a certain exhaustion of paradigms is perceptible. The limitless expansion of the field of objects attended to in literary- and art-historical inquiry that was initiated by the so-called “cultural turn” has led to a sense of arbitrariness and pointlessness. At the same time, conceptual deficiencies in the theoretical models predominant since the 1970s (deconstruction, discourse analysis, media theory) have depleted their capacity to compel conviction. On the other hand -- and doubtless in response to this twofold exhaustion -- a renewed interest in the concept of form is clearly emergent on several fronts. This interest is often motivated by or grounded in the form/medium distinction as promulgated by Niklas Luhmann and his students. (See Luhmann, 2008; Baecker, 1993.), a variant of what we referred to above as the notion of “constructivist form.” Another tendency in current discussions of form is what might be termed the emphasis on formal contingency: the multiplication of forms in varying historical-cultural contexts. (An example of this direction is the program of the Cologne Research Center *Morphomata*.) Finally, one can observe, especially with in certain quarters of English literary scholarship, a recent “neo-formalist” turn. However interesting their particular results may be, it can be fairly said of these research directions that they: a) lack a solid grounding in the history of the concept of form, and b) develop their own conceptual instruments independently of any engagement with current philosophical developments. Our project is intended to remedy the lack of both of these desiderata.

IV. Envisioned Activities and Formats for Collaboration

We envision the project as one that will shape both the pedagogical and research activities of the three applicants over a three-year period.

A. Jointly Conducted Winter Quarter Seminars

We are therefore proposing a three-year project, beginning in the Fall of 2015 and extending through the Spring of 2018. On the pedagogical front, during each of those years in the winter quarter there will be a co-taught seminar — co-taught once by Conant and Wellbery, once by Conant and Pippin, and once by Pippin and Wellbery, and other responsibilities permitting also attended by the third member of the trio. Doctoral students from both the participating programs in the University of Chicago and independently funded doctoral students from Germany (in particular, in cooperation with the related program with Leipzig), along with faculty from the University of Chicago and our cooperating German universities, will be the primary participants in those seminars. The seminar in question will meet weekly over the entire winter quarter for each of the three years and will be listed as a regular graduate seminar. Graduate-student participation will be contingent upon documented interest and background in related topics as well as participation in the previous conferences. Although it is unrealistic to assume that all of the University of Chicago faculty whom we would like to involve will be able to participate in all the meetings of the seminar, we anticipate that the subject matter will elicit broad interest and fairly regular attendance from some. With the possibility of the addition of a few doctoral students each year, we expect this group to remain fairly stable across the three-year period, although there will undoubtedly be some fluctuation in faculty attendance.

The seminar meetings themselves will be of two types. During odd-numbered weeks, the local participants will meet for preparatory sessions, the purpose of which is to establish the framework for the visitor-centered discussions, which will take place during the even-numbered weeks. This latter type of session will pair a local

scholar from the University of Chicago or its immediate academic environs and a distinguished visitor from further away, both of whom have expertise on a particular aspect or theme of the project as a whole. This core component of the project will be framed each year by a pair of conferences: a preliminary conference that will take place during the fall quarter prior to the series of weekly meetings and a concluding conference to be scheduled during the spring quarter thereafter. The aim of this unusual structure is to allow for an initial joint conversation between all of the participants (at the preliminary conference) in which the central questions of the project for the academic year in question are first identified and broached, followed by a careful discussion of each participant's considered contribution to some aspect of the topic (during the winter quarter seminar), and ending with a synthetic discussion (at the annual concluding conference) of the findings of the year. Since the participants in these two conferences will be just those scholars who will serially co-teach the bi-weekly guest-centered discussions, this overall structure should guarantee a maximum degree of thematic continuity and dialogue.

Clearly, the logistical arrangements involved with such a structure will be sufficiently complex that the success of the project as a whole will hinge on adequate preparation: not merely securing the commitment of a range of major scholars to come to Chicago three times per year (to participate in the two conferences and one weekly session of the Seminar), but also scheduling the bi-weekly meetings with visiting scholars during the seminar (which will be quite complex in itself), preparing a bibliography, gathering and scanning reading materials, and formulating a "working paper" that provides a detailed outline of the conceptual issues. Moreover, because of the overlap in personnel, it will only be possible to organize even the first conference, once the entire schedule of the entire project in all its phases is fixed.

The co-leaders of the seminar (in each year, some two of Conant, Pippin and Wellbery) will together moderate the preparatory sessions held during the odd-numbered weeks of the seminar, often with the assistance of local faculty with the corresponding expertise. The preparatory sessions will be devoted to detailed discussions of assigned readings by major figures in the Idealist tradition as well as related contemporary authors, in particular writings by our invited visitors. All readings will be scanned and made available to members of the Seminar through the University of Chicago's Chalk system. As indicated above, the visitor-centered discussion sessions held during even-numbered weeks of the winter will be jointly conducted by a distinguished visiting scholar, whose research interests bear on an important aspect of the general theme, and a local scholar (that is, from the University of Chicago or the greater Chicago academic environs), whose work and interests intersect with that of the visitor. Each such session will be followed by an informal reception, which, in turn, will be followed by a dinner, during all of which discussion of the topics will continue. There will be a system for signing up for dinner that permits those faculty and graduate students most interested in a given topic to participate in the evening discussion.

This three-year ongoing seminar/conference structure will provide a unique forum for graduate students and young scholars to engage in a focused interdisciplinary discussion that will both benefit their individual projects and involve them in debates on the fundamental issues in the Humanities. Indeed, the idea for the project was partly arrived at by noticing the remarkable convergence of current graduate dissertations at the University of Chicago, across a variety of disciplines (Philosophy, German, Art History, Cinema and Media Studies, and Committee on Social Thought), all of which bear on topics related to the historical and systematic agendas of the project.

B. Summer Mini-Seminars

In addition, we would like to organize an intensive annual week-long mini-seminar, to be co-organized with our aforementioned colleagues in Leipzig, bringing together leading scholars and interested graduate students working on the continuing relevance of German Idealism for contemporary humanistic inquiry and reflection. These would take place in June, shortly after the end of the U of C academic year, with the first taking place in Chicago, the second in Leipzig, and the third back in Chicago. These are scheduled at this time of year, because this is the one point in the year in which everyone whom we would like to involve is able to participate. These seminars would involve three faculty and seven graduate students from each of the two universities for a total of twenty participants per mini-seminar. We would arrange for the visiting graduate students to stay with graduate students of the home institution.

C. Spring Seminars taught by an Invited Visitor

Ideally, we would like in the second and third years of the project to have a seminar taught by a visiting professor who is one of our primary collaborators. These seminars would take place in the spring quarter and the prior winter quarter seminar would, in part, serve as a forum for preparing for the outside visit. We would like to have one of these seminars taught by one of our two primary North American collaborators, that is, either Matthew Boyle (Harvard) or John McDowell (Pittsburgh). We would like to have the other of these seminars taught by one of our two primary German collaborators, that is, either Andrea Kern (Leipzig) or Sebastian Rödl (Leipzig). This component represents our single greatest expense: It will require an additional \$35,000 for each of the spring quarters of the second and third years. We have not included this in our budget for the first year, but only for the second and third years, since we would like to build up our collaborative framework before inviting someone to campus in this capacity. But if we really want the project to strengthen the institutional ties between the University of Chicago and the other leading centers of research on German Idealism, and thereby to furnish a whole new axis of approach to rethinking the foundations of the Humanities, then we view this as an essential component of the overall plan.

D. Personal Research Component and Jointly Edited Volumes

On the research front, our aim is to produce both individually authored articles/monographs on topics closely related to the project, as well as a series of jointly edited volumes bringing together the work of our various collaborators both in and outside of the University of Chicago.

The three applicants plan to use the seminar not only to deepen their own individual research projects but also to bring them into dialogue with each other. James Conant envisions two projects, both within the ambit of the collaboration: one titled *Wittgenstein's Inheritance of Philosophy* on Wittgenstein's concept of grammar, understood as a philosophical project of uncovering the fundamental forms of human thought, speech, and experience; and one titled *The Ontology of the Cinematic Image* on the concept of a cinematic aesthetic medium, understood as one very particular specification of such a form. Robert Pippin plans to complete a study, titled *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: On Logic as Metaphysics*, on Hegel's main work in logical theory, *The Science of Logic*, in which the central concept of our entire project is laid bare, emerging not only as critical to an understanding of Hegel's philosophy, but also as of continuing relevance for contemporary philosophical reflection on the nature of human mindedness. David Wellbery plans to write a monograph tentatively entitled *Literary Theory: a Neo-Idealist Foundation*, whose focus will be to bring the central ideas of the project to bear on the leading issues in contemporary literary theory. These individual projects have been conceived from the beginning to be in dialogue with one another, each seeking to complement and draw upon both historical and systematic aspects of the others. One aim of this project is to allow a deepening of this dialogue.

We also plan a series of four co-edited volumes — two of which would be co-edited with each of our two visiting faculty. Their contributions are to emerge from our envisioned seminars and conferences. Based on conversations with our prospective collaborators (especially at Harvard, Pittsburgh, and Leipzig), we presently anticipate the following four volumes: one on the relation between essentially first-personal and essentially second-personal forms of thought, one on the difference between theoretical and practical forms of reason, one on conceptions of the formality of logic from Aristotle to Hegel, and one on the concept of an aesthetic medium and its cousins (art-form, genre, etc.). Our hope is that some of the most outstanding samples of work produced by our graduate students for the winter seminars could also be included in each of these volumes, along with that of leading scholars working on each of these topics.

V. Tentative Budget

The budget below gives an overview of the funds required to conduct the project. We are requesting a very small amount of money for logistical support, because it is our understanding that most of our logistical needs (in terms of website, invitations, conference planning, etc.) can be handled by the Neubauer Collegium staff. The budget for the second and third years differs from that of the first because, as explained above, we wish to have a visiting faculty member with us here at Chicago during the spring quarters of each of those years.

A. Budget for the First Year

- a) Travel Expenses for Bi-Weekly Visitors: \$600 each (on average) for five visitors who need to travel to Chicago for a total of \$3,000 per year.
- b) Honoraria for Bi-Weekly Visitors: \$1000 each for 5 visitors for a total of \$5,000 per year.
- c) Accommodations for Bi-Weekly Visitors for two nights each at \$150 per night for a total of \$1,500 per year.
- d) Post-seminar meal with outside visitors, with no more than five interested faculty and an equal number of graduate students at \$320 per meal for a total of \$1,600 per year.
- e) Conferences:
 - (i) Travel Expenses for Visiting Conference Speakers: \$600 each (on average) for 9 speakers who need to travel to Chicago for the first conference for a total of \$ 5,400; and \$600 each for 9 speakers who need to travel to Chicago for the second conference for a total of \$5,400; for a two-conference total of \$10,800.
 - (ii) Honoraria for Visiting Conference Speakers: \$0
 - (iii) Accommodation for Visiting Conference Speakers: \$150 per night for 9 visitors per conference for a total of 18 visitors for five nights each for a total cost of \$13,500.
 - (iv) Lunch for 20 primary conference participants: 4 meals per conference at \$20 per person for two conferences for a total of \$3,200.
 - (v) Dinner for 20 primary conference participants: 4 meals per conference at \$40 per person for two conferences for a total of \$6,400.
 - (vi) \$50 for posters for each conference for a total of \$100Total expenses for two conferences per year: \$34,000
- f) Mini-Seminars:
 - (i) Travel expenses for three Leipzig or Chicago faculty at \$1,200 each (on average) for a total of \$3,600
 - (ii) Travel subsidy for participating Leipzig or Chicago graduate students at \$600 each (on average) for a total of \$4,200
 - (iii) Accommodation for three traveling faculty: \$150 per night for eight nights each for a total cost of \$3,600.Total expenses for each mini-seminar: \$11,400, with Leipzig covering half the expenses, making the cost of our contribution: \$5,200
- g) Total clerical expenses for running the entire project: \$2,000 per year.
- h) **Overview of First-Year Budget**

Travel Expenses for Bi-Weekly Vistors:	\$ 3,000
Honoraria for Bi-Weekly Visitors:	\$ 5,000

Accommodations for Bi-Weekly Visitors	\$ 1,500
Post-Seminar Meals:	\$ 1,600
Mini-Seminar	\$ 5,200
Conference Budget:	\$34,000
Clerical Support:	\$ 2,000
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Total Budget for the First Year:	\$55,000

B. Budget for the Second and Third Years

Same as in the Budget for the First Year:	\$55,000
Additional Expense — Visiting Faculty:	\$35,000
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Total Budget for each of the Second and Third Years:	\$90,000

VI. Proximate and Ultimate Goals and their Criteria of Success

Our project has a proximate and an ultimate goal. Its proximate goal is to open up channels of communication within the Humanities that are badly needed and currently hardly exist — channels of communications, first of all, between the disciplines of Philosophy, Literary Theory and Interpretation, and the Theory of Art and Art Criticism, and second, between scholars involved in these activities throughout the Anglophone and German-speaking worlds. The crisis in the Humanities is not an American phenomenon alone, nor should be our response to it.

At the University of Chicago itself, a realization of our proximate goal would, as we envision it, require the fostering of a marked rise in the degree of intellectual cooperation and exchange between especially the Departments of Art History, Cinema and Media Studies, Germanic Studies, and Philosophy, along with the Committee on Social Thought. On the international front, it will involve a whole new level of sustained academic cooperation and exchange with leading scholars in Germany, especially at the University of Leipzig.

Our ultimate goal is nothing less than to contribute to a transformation of the Humanities — one which would allow practitioners of different disciplines and scholars in a number of leading departments to arrive at a shared understanding of what holds the entire project of humanistic inquiry together and confers upon it its own distinctive forms of intellectual value and importance. It is our view that the loss of such a common understanding of the scholarly autonomy and methodological rigor of the Humanities is a substantial source of the crisis in which they presently find themselves. Needless to say, we neither expect nor would desire for all future humanistic research simply to adopt the model we hope to elaborate through this project. Nevertheless, we do believe that the systematic articulation of one clear model of the unity of humanistic inquiry can have a salutary effect on the seemingly endless contemporary debates about “the future of the Humanities”. We feel that re-forging a connection to the original theoretical impulses that first gave rise to our contemporary understanding of the Humanities is an essential step in this process.

How should one measure the success of such an undertaking? With regard to our proximate goal — the fostering of new forms of interdisciplinary and transatlantic cooperation built around the central topics of our project — these are not difficult to state:

- (1) the flourishing of the forms of interdisciplinary institutional cooperation at the University of Chicago that would allow us to develop and sustain the envisioned conversation;
- (2) the development of close institutional ties and regular forms of academic exchange between the University of Chicago and key institutional centers of theoretical inquiry in the Humanities, not only in the United States, but also in Europe;
- (3) the formation of an identifiable intellectual program for renewing the Humanities, distributed across a number of centers of learning in Europe and the United States, but with the University of Chicago as the central node in this institution matrix.

With regard to our ultimate aim — contributing to a transformation of the contemporary self-understanding of the Humanities — it should be acknowledged that this is a risky proposal. Its possibilities for failure come with its level of ambition. Moreover, it faces special obstacles in so far as it goes — quite self-consciously — directly against the grain of a number of contemporary intellectual tendencies. It thus faces the very particular risk of falling on deaf ears.

The criteria of success for measuring the achievement of our ultimate goal are correspondingly more ephemeral. Nevertheless, progress towards it ought to be reflected by at least an uptick in the following indirect indicators:

- (1) among departments committed to this line of inquiry, the emergence of a pool of excellent graduate applicants identifying its presence here as a central reason for their applying to the University of Chicago;
- (2) a palpable increase in the number of such excellent applicants from outside of North America;
- (3) a correlative degree of success in recruiting the best of those applicants;
- (4) a perceptible impact on the dissertation topics in the aforementioned departments;
- (5) a serious response in the scholarly literature both in the United States and Europe (especially in Germany) to the publications of the faculty and graduate students participating in this project.