

FICHTE'S MODIFICATION OF KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL
IDEALISM IN THE WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE OF 1794
AND INTRODUCTIONS OF 1797

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In this essay I study Fichte's modification of Kant's Transcendental Idealism.¹ Since the Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre of 1794 and two Introductions of 1797 present this modification more explicitly and clearly than do Fichte's later works, and since these earlier works were studied by Hegel in the Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie, I shall confine myself to them.² Fichte is one of the central figures, if not the central figure, in the transition from Kant to Hegel, and thus stands at the centre of "German Idealism." I hope that the following study will suggest, however, that Fichte's thought is of philosophical, as well as historical, interest. I will begin by stating the ways in which Fichte sees himself as modifying Kant's teaching. I will then state the Kantian criticisms of this modification. Having outlined the controversy between Kant and Fichte, I will discuss parts of the GWL, especially the three Grundsätze der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre. I will, in conclusion, make several remarks about the relationship of Fichte to Kant, and of Transcendental Idealism as a whole to Hegel's Absolute Idealism.

Throughout the GWL of 1794, and the two Introductions of 1797, Fichte characterizes his position as the mediation of "dogmatic realism" and "dogmatic idealism." Kant offers an almost identical formulation of his own position.³ The two kinds of dogmatism are based on the fundamental distinction between mind and body, intelligence and matter, or better yet, between subject and object. The dogmatic idealist insists on the primacy of the free activity of the self, intelligence, the subject. The object is merely chimerical. The dogmatic realist insists on the primacy of the body, matter, the object. The self is merely chimerical. Kant and Fichte take the "middle way" in this "gigantomachia."

Fichte's explicit criticism of the dogmatists (one that is implicit in Kant's Refutation of Idealism: CPR B274-5 and context) is that they cannot explain the fact

of self-consciousness, or more accurately, the unity of self-consciousness and consciousness. The dogmatic realist will try either to deny self-consciousness altogether, or to explain it as the effect of the object on intelligence. The former claim leads to the absurd result that if it were true, its advocate could not say that it is his claim or explain why it is true. The latter claim might show how the self has an impression of the object, but not how the self is conscious that it has such an impression (2nd Intro., pp. 74-80). The dogmatic realist stays on the level of consciousness. The dogmatic idealist, on the other hand, also loses self-consciousness but by doing away with consciousness. Yet one essential component of self-consciousness is the object of consciousness. The object cannot be assimilated into the subject without destroying the subject's consciousness of himself. Fichte's mediation between the two dogmatic positions may be summarized as a ". . . complete deduction of all experience from the possibility of self-consciousness" (2nd Intro., p. 37). While self-consciousness is possible only if both self and object are preserved, the deduction from the possibility of self-consciousness, Transcendental Idealism, is still a kind of idealism. The reason for this is that it is impossible to "abstract from the self" (2nd Intro., p. 71; GWL pp. 98, 202, 252). The object is given, but given for us; the dispute between dogmatists exists only for us as self-conscious selves; and so on.

Fichte's actual presentation of Transcendental Idealism is nonetheless very different from that of Kant. Fichte states that he is developing the "spirit" of Kant's philosophy (2nd Intro., p. 52; GWL p. 171, note 3), building on foundations laid by Kant (2nd Intro., p. 51), making explicit what Kant left implicit (GWL p. 100), or simply understanding Kant properly (1st Intro., p. 3; 2nd Intro., p. 43). All of this was vehemently denied by the Kantians of the time (Reinhold, Schulze, Eberhard), and finally by Kant himself.⁴ Fichte's development of Kant's teaching is based on three discrepancies between its "spirit" and its "word." First, Fichte believes that the basic outlines of Kant's "Copernican turn" are correct. Kant sees that we determine appearances through the spontaneous synthesis of thought in the categories, and so that "concepts rest on functions" (CPR B93). But Kant does not deduce those categories from a single principle. Kant merely finds the categories, so to speak. Nor does he deduce the forms of intuition, or successfully state their relation to the categories (2nd Intro., p. 51). Kant does not possess a system; the parts are there, but in a heap.⁵

Second, Fichte believes that Kant correctly sees

that the transcendental unity of apperception, the pure I, must lie at the basis of all consciousness. In Kant's terms, "it must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations" (CPR B131). The "I think" is original apperception, the act of spontaneity, the "transcendental unity of self-consciousness" (CPR B132). This unity is the "highest principle" of all logic and transcendental philosophy (CPR B135; note, B134). Hence Fichte observes that for Kant the possibility of consciousness will be conditioned by the possibility of pure self-consciousness (2nd Intro., p. 50). However, Kant fails to demonstrate this "conditioning" coherently, i.e., he does not give a systematic derivation of all consciousness. To do so, Kant would have had to begin with the "pure I" and derive the categories and the forms of intuition, instead of doing the opposite. This systematic derivation in Fichte has, as we shall see, crucial consequences for the "Ding an sich." In short, for Fichte the "thing in itself" is a concept.

Third, Fichte accuses Kant of omitting a crucial element of the explanation of self-consciousness. Kant does not explain how the 'I' "accompanies" every representation. Had he done so, he would have accepted, rather than rejected, intellectual intuition (intellektuelle Anschauung). This faculty is indispensable, in Fichte's view, in explaining our consciousness of identity through time, as well as our consciousness of the moral law.⁶ Fichte does not mention intellectual intuition in the GWL of 1794, however, but it is hinted at in the preface of 1795 (GWL p. 91) and defended vigorously in the Introductions of 1797.⁷

The major Kantian criticisms of the modification of Transcendental Idealism are twofold. First, and most obviously, Kant had simply rejected intellectual intuition. The reason for this rejection is crucial. Kant argues in the Transcendental Aesthetic (CPR, B edition) and the Paralogisms (CPR) that the subject has no immediate intuition of himself because all self-consciousness is mediated by inner sense, and finally through outer sense as well (Refutation of Idealism, CPR Bx1, B277). Fichte replies that intellectual intuition is always accompanied by concepts and sensory intuition (2nd Intro., pp. 38-9), and that we are not ever conscious of this intellectual intuition. Intellectual intuition cannot be reduced to concepts and so become an object of analysis. In other words, Fichte agrees with Kant that self-consciousness is possible only by the subject's mediation of subject and object. Nevertheless, intellectual intuition must exist if we are to explain certain facts of which we are conscious

--i.e., identity through time and space, and the moral law (2nd Intro., pp. 45-6). To say that we are mediately conscious of this identity is to say that we are not in fact conscious of it.

The second major Kantian objection to Fichte's modifications is that Kant's system requires a "thing in itself." Sensations must be initiated by the "thing in itself" even though that thing is unknowable. There are appearances which we know, so there must be something behind what appears (CPR A251-2). Fichte's reply is that the few passages in the CPR to that effect must be interpreted in the light of the CPR as a whole. The notion of causality, which first gives rise to the view that there are "things in themselves" (the "givenness" being an effect on us) is nothing but a subjective category of the understanding. Hence its use cannot show that there are such things. Fichte agrees with Kant that noumena may be necessary as "limiting concepts" (CPR A255). But the Critique as a whole shows that this necessity is only subjective, i.e., a necessity of thought. In Fichte's terms, the not-I, the pure "givenness" of the "thing in itself," is "posited" (setzen) by the absolute I (the transcendental unity of apperception). For Fichte this thesis is the core of Transcendental Idealism. To insist on an independent "thing in itself" is to regress to dogmatic realism, and so to lose self-consciousness.

Yet this seems to turn Fichte into a dogmatic idealist, because it seems to destroy the "affection" and "receptivity" of the Transcendental Aesthetic (CPR). Kant accused Fichte of trying to deduce existence and affection from a concept, and so of uniting the two "stems of human knowledge" (CPR B29).⁸ Fichte denied this accusation; he too insists on the "facticity" of experience, on the feeling of being necessitated or affected by the object: "The object is not a priori, but is first given to that science (GWL) in experience; objective validity is furnished of everyone by his own consciousness of the object, which consciousness can only be postulated a priori, but not deduced" (GWL p. 224; see also pp. 105-6, 223, 242, 246 ff.). However, Fichte argues that reflection on this experience cannot self-consciously postulate a "thing in itself," though it may have to postulate an ideal "thing in itself." The GWL is, Fichte says, an empirical realism and a transcendental idealism (2nd Intro., p. 61; GWL pp. 147, 174, 246-7). This is equivalent to the teaching of the Transcendental Aesthetic (GWL p. 62). Time and space are transcendently ideal because they do not belong to "things in themselves." They are empirically real because they are "objectively" valid, i.e., necessary

conditions for any object being an appearance for us (CPR B44). Kant errs, however, in trying to demonstrate "the ideality of objects from the presupposed ideality of space and time" (GWL p. 171, note). By beginning with the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant can only assert the ideality of space and time, and so suggest the transcendental reality of "things in themselves." This confusion is avoided if the procedure is reversed; the ideality of objects, and that in turn from the "highest principle" under which anything can be an object of thought for us at all, the Absolute I.⁹

Let me now begin with the GWL itself. The "architectonic" is very different from that of the CPR.¹⁰ All of Kant's rigid distinctions are, so to speak, collapsed and set into motion.¹¹ Perhaps the most important change, for our purposes, is that of method. Fichte's "deductive" method is tripartite--the famous thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.¹² Antithesis is the act of seeking in things equated the respect in which they are opposed. Fichte says that this is what Kant calls "analysis." Synthesis consists of discovering in opposites the respect in which they are alike. Antithesis and synthesis are equivalent to dividing and collecting according to genus and difference. Antithesis shows the difference which separates species from genus, while synthesis shows why the species belongs to the given genus (GWL p. 114). Both procedures are based on the thesis, in which nothing is opposed or conjoined. There is only one thesis in the GWL; the Absolute I, the "I am" as such (2nd Intro., p. 73; GWL p. 114).

What Kant calls "analysis" seems to include both the antithesis and the synthesis of Fichte.¹³ Analysis for Kant is simply conceptual. Kant's "synthesis," however, is not equivalent to that of Fichte. For Kant synthetic judgements are "judgements of experience" (CPR A 154, 158). In these judgements it is necessary to "advance beyond a given concept," i.e., to include sensible intuitions. The a priori synthetic unity of concepts must be exhibited in experience or in a "possible experience." There can be a priori synthetic judgements because "the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience" (CPR A 158, 111). This is hardly reducible to the "discovering in opposites the respect in which they are alike" (Fichte's "synthesis"). The net effect is that in Fichte the criterion of "possible experience" is dropped. Alternatively, the meaning of "experience" has changed. For Kant, "experience" and "knowledge" are almost synonymous terms. For Fichte, while experience is the unity of concepts and intuitions, knowledge of that experience requires only

that concepts of intuitions be joined to concepts of the understanding. "Knowledge" for Fichte seems to be more like what Kant calls the "principles of pure reason" (CPR A 299-302). I shall return to this point below. In sum, Fichte alters the relation between concepts and intuitions which Kant appears to advocate. Whether or not this alteration makes Kant consistent has yet to be decided.

Fichte's first principle is the $I=I$, the Absolute I (absolute Ich), i.e., the transcendental unity of apperception. I have already discussed why Fichte starts with the I , and so with self-consciousness--it is the "highest principle." But how does he get to the $I=I$? Fichte begins with a "fact of consciousness," the principle of identity, $A=A$. This principle is accepted by everyone; but why is it true? The principle says that if A is given, then A must follow; nothing is said about the existence of A . Its truth is that necessary connection, the "=" itself, which Fichte entitles " X ." X is the "form" of $A=A$, while the two A 's are the "content." This form is equivalent to the $I=I$, which Fichte also calls "pure self-reverting activity," "pure spontaneity." The Absolute I posits $A=A$, and only for that reason does $A=A$ seem so certain. The ordo cognoscendi (the principles of speech) images, so to speak, the ordo essendi (the pure "I think").¹⁴

The relationship between these two orders is not, however, symmetrical. The $I=I$ and $A=A$ have the same logical form, but a different meaning. The two statements are thus "wholly different" (GWL p. 96). The I is the perfect unity of form and content, subject and object, positing and existence. Unlike $A=A$, the principle $I=I$ is posited ". . . not conditionally, but absolutely, with the predicate of equivalence to itself" (GWL p. 96). The self-identity of the Absolute, which sustains the logical principle $A=A$ or "posits" the two A 's as identical, is itself ". . . valid not merely in form but also in content" (GWL p. 96). But we can differentiate form and content, positing and existence, in both $I=I$ and $A=A$. Although the terms in each equation are the "same," they are still numerically "different" (in that respect one A or I is not the other A or I). Thus while $I=I$ (which shares the same logical form as $A=A$) might mean "Absolute I," it cannot accurately say it. The Absolute I reveals itself in discourse, but in so doing conceals or alters itself.¹⁵ The source of Activity and the products of Activity are discontinuous: ". . . initially I am neither the reflecting subject nor the reflected object, and neither of the two is conditioned by the other, since I am both in combination; though this union I cannot indeed think; since in the act of doing so I separate the reflected from that which

reflects" (GWL pp. 60-61). The reflecting subject is the Absolute I, the reflected object is the Absolute as articulated in discourse; the articulation is not fully adequate to the articulated and as such is separate from it. This problem, which I will return to below, is fundamental to the GWL. Fichte's attempts to resolve it lead to the "ought" (Sollen) of practice (GWL pp. 102, 229, 230 note), and to the doctrine of intellectual intuition (above). In Fichte's view, the problem is intrinsic to Transcendental Idealism, though it was not recognized as such by Kant.

There is another aspect to the difference between the Absolute I and its articulation in discourse. The Absolute I is "permanently uniform, forever one and the same" (GWL p. 96; also 2nd Intro., pp. 40, 63, 75). Discourse, on the other hand, is in flux. In some sense, the Absolute I is eternal. The same point is implicit in Kant. For Kant, all self-consciousness is in time; but the transcendental unity of apperception does not, presumably, change. Kant insists that this unity is a "logical" condition (cf. the Paralogisms, B edition, CPR), but leaves the exact status of this condition undermined with respect to its permanence. In his effort to deduce Critical Philosophy from the transcendental unity of apperception, Fichte brings to light several problems concerning the relation of that unity to what it unifies. While Fichte denies that the transcendental unity of apperception is transcendent (the I is not a noumenon; GWL pp. 101, 117, 140, 226, 246-47), that unity, now translated as the "Absolute I," looks more and more like God. In the GWL, at least, Fichte would resist the identification of the Absolute I with God.16

Fichte's second principle is another "certain" fact of consciousness, $A \neq \neg A$ ("A is not equal to not A"). This principle is the basis for the principles of excluded middle and contradiction. While it means the same thing as the principle of identity, it introduces a new term; $\neg A$, or negation. Correspondingly, in the ordo essendi $\neg I$ ("not-I") has been introduced. This second principle is based on the first; logically, because $\neg A$ cannot be stated without A, while the reverse is not true; ontologically, because the I is assumed by the $\neg I$, not vice versa, and because in order to explain self-consciousness and so consciousness of the $\neg I$, we must begin with the I (the "highest principle"). This means that the I posits itself as $I = I$, and so posits $A = A$; then the I posits $\neg I$, or $I \neq \neg I$, and $A \neq \neg A$. However, in order to posit $I \neq \neg I$, the I must first posit $\neg I$; but in doing so the I contradicts itself. That contradiction is not visible in the statements " $A = A$ and " $A \neq \neg A$ " since "A" is not an activity which first posits itself and then its opposite.

Let me try to clarify further this transition from the first to the second principle. Fichte says that ". . . even the possibility of counter-positing (i.e., of positing the not-I) itself presupposes the identity of consciousness" (GWL p. 103). Hence we begin with the I and then move to the not-I. In Kant's terms, we begin with original apperception and then move to the object, which is by definition what original apperception is not. In Fichte's terms, we move from reality to negation (note that these are two of Kant's categories), since there is nowhere else to move to if we begin with reality.

But this introduces a decisive problem. The -I or -A, being negations of I and A, are materially conditioned by I and A respectively. The negation itself, i.e., the "form" of the proposition, cannot be derived from the I or A. Reality and negation are formally discontinuous. Thus the -I must have been "absolutely posited" just as the I was. Since only the I can posit, the -I must have been posited by the I; yet this is impossible, since there is no negation in the I to begin with. Hence there is no strict deduction of the principle of negation from that of reality, i.e., no deduction of opposition from identity. As Fichte says over and over again, that the -I should be posited cannot be theoretically determined (above); but it is determinable that if something is to be posited after the I, it must be the not-I (GWL pp. 144, 145, 153, 154, 171; and part I, section 2). Yet this does not explain how there can be any positing of negation after the I. The I is absolute, the totality, reality; how can something be other than the totality? In sum, "factic" experience shows that there is a not-I; but reflection cannot systematically account for it, as it ought to. The discontinuity between the source of synthetic activity (Absolute I) and its product (not-I) means that the Kantian split between the transcendental unity of apperception and the thing in itself cannot be overcome. However, it cannot be affirmed either.

To restate these last few points "theologically," one could say that for Fichte the reasons for God's creation are unknowable. What can be known is that if God creates, He must create the negation of Himself, namely the finite world--His image. But in this creation God contradicts himself, since He is limited by His creation and so is no longer God, i.e., Totality. Moreover, even God's thought of creating before the actual creation contradicts His nature; thinking is self-consciousness, and depends on images and negativity. God contains no negativity, and so cannot be self-conscious.¹⁷ But there is a creation and we are compelled to think of it as created.¹⁸ Yet we cannot conceive of how God could have created

the world, i.e., we cannot deduce the one from the other. This is closely linked to another problem; we cannot accurately articulate God as He is "in Himself." We can recognize ourselves as images of God and so have an intuition of the original (God), but any effort to bespeak the original simply produces more (verbal) images. To translate this back into Fichte's terminology, we can intuit but not discursively analyze the Absolute I, and we can experience the not-I, but we cannot deduce the latter from the former. The third principle of the GWL shows that these two difficulties are really two sides of the same coin.

The third principle supplies the category of limitation as the resolution to the contradiction between reality and negation. I and not-I limit each other; to limit is to negate in part. Something can be limited in part only if it is divisible; limitation turns what is limited into quantities. This means that the limitation of reality by negation has produced a "quantitative" reality which is opposed to a "quantitative" negation. Yet the Absolute I is unconditioned, and thus "qualitatively" real (GWL pp. 109, 110). That is, the third principle lowers us from the level of infinitude to the level of finitude. The I and the not-I which limit each other are finite; neither is equivalent to the Absolute I. Finite I and finite not-I contradict each other, and both contradict the Absolute I. In some sense the finite not-I is posited by the I, and in some sense both finite I and not-I are posited by the Absolute I. The situation, needless to say, has by now become exceedingly complex, and the rest of the GWL is devoted to its analysis.

Roughly put, the theoretical section of the GWL deals with the contradiction between finite I and not-I. The thesis of the theoretical section is that "the I posits itself as limited by the not-I." This corresponds to Kant's Transcendental Analytic (CPR), i.e., to the effort to unite concepts of the understanding (finite I) with intuitions (not-I) within the unity of transcendental apperception (Absolute I). The unity of concepts and intuitions takes place at the level of finitude; intuitions "affect" the self but are also themselves affected by the syntheses of the self. The problem is to see how original apperception, the Absolute I, synthesizes or posits both affections and activities without itself being affected, i.e., how the identity of self-consciousness is preserved alongside the contradictions it produces and retains in itself. Reflection cannot solve this problem because it is unable to effect the "descent" from infinitude to finitude. Nor can it effect the "ascent" from finitude to infinitude. The practical section of the GWL, which corresponds partly

to Kant's Transcendental Dialectic (CPR), but more generally to the Critique of Practical Reason, "solves" this contradiction between infinitude and finitude through the "ought" (Sollen). The thesis of practical philosophy is that "the I posits itself as limiting the not-I." This is the principle of the infinitude of the I, legislating autonomously over nature. It is the principle that nature (the not-I) ought to conform to the Absolute I.

The theoretical section of the GWL attempts to resolve the contradiction between finite I and not-I by the "grounding principle" (Satz des Grundes), a logical version of the principle of sufficient reason. It consists of applying antithesis and synthesis in the manner described above, i.e., of finding the ground of disjunction and conjunction of the I and not-I. But this ground cannot be found precisely because it is impossible to ascend discursively to the grounding Absolute I or to the summum genus (the ascent is accomplished by intellectual intuition and abstraction). Hence reflection cannot terminate itself; it progresses ad infinitum (GWL pp. 106, 113, etc.). For theoretical philosophy, the Absolute I will possess only "regulative validity" (GWL p. 119; see also p. 164). For practical philosophy, the Absolute I will possess constitutive validity; but the constitution of nature by the Absolute I is an "ought." The "ought" is accompanied by "infinite striving;" the desire, never to be fulfilled, to make the "ought" actual. The Absolute I is given in intellectual intuition, but cannot be made actual in practice, just as previously it could not be made actual in theory (concepts and discourse).

As opposed to the Absolute I, the not-I is "absolutely nothing." As opposed to the finite I, the not-I is a negative quantity, insofar as it is opposed to the not-I, the finite I too would seem to be "absolutely nothing" in relation to the Absolute I. We seem to have here a confirmation of Hegel's point that Verstand (understanding, or the finite I) cut off from Being (infinitude) rests on Nothingness (Nichts).¹⁹ From Hegel's point of view, both Kant and Fichte failed to overcome this Nothingness, and so failed to explain the Absolute. Fichte's cure for this Nothing is the "ought" accompanied by intellectual intuition; hence his idealism is "practical" (GWL p. 147). Morality is the antidote for the weakness of the understanding. From Hegel's point of view, however, Fichte's reliance on intellectual intuition is contentless subjective feeling.²⁰ The corresponding subjectivity of the Absolute I prevents Fichte from explaining the externality of the not-I; Fichte is a subjective idealist.²¹ In Fichte, the Absolute becomes an ideal, which ". . . floats as a vision before us, and is

rooted in our innermost nature" (GWL p. 238). The vision cannot be actualized; the finite I cannot be absolute, but it can unceasingly strive to be absolute. Hegel claimed to actualize the vision of the Absolute in discourse; thus it is not surprising that he dispenses with intellectual intuition, and perhaps with the "ought" as well.

In sum, the Absolute I has two aspects. On the one hand, it is needed in order to explain self-consciousness. Self-consciousness must be understood in the light of the fact that it is always I who am self-conscious (the "I think" must accompany all my representations), and that the unity of consciousness is a synthesis spontaneously effected by the I. Even the object of consciousness, while retaining all of its "factic" empirical reality, must be explained as a product of the I. On the other hand, the Absolute I makes morality possible, since it is the source of our legislation over nature. Thus one might say that Fichte's Absolute I combines the transcendental ego of Kant's first Critique with the homo noumenon of the second Critique. In any event, the impossibility of denying the actuality of the -I, and finally combined with the demands of theory and practice that the -I be determined by the I, define the contradictoriness of human existence. "This fact, that the finite spirit must necessarily posit something absolute outside itself (a thing in itself), and yet must recognize, from the other side, that the latter exists only for it (as a necessary noumenon); is that circle which it is able to extend into infinity, but can never escape (GWL p. 247).

The result is that for Fichte the not-I, or what Kant calls the "thing in itself," cannot be proved or denied. Every effort to prove that it exists either loses self-consciousness, or shows only that we must think "as if" it exists. Every effort to prove that it does not exist must do so by deriving it from the Absolute I. Yet that is impossible, because the Absolute I and the not-I are formally discontinuous, and the Absolute I cannot in any case be articulated as it is in itself, (i.e., as undifferentiated pure activity). The "thing in itself," as Fichte strikingly puts it, is "nowhere and everywhere at once." Any attempt to change this status of the "thing in itself" . . . would entail the elimination of all consciousness, and with it of all existence" (GWL p. 249). Thus in the final analysis, Fichte's position on the "thing in itself" is very close to that of Kant, or at least to one of Kant's characterizations of it as a "problematic" concept (CPR B310).

Fichte, like Kant, insists on human finitude. On

the one hand, it is impossible to articulate the Absolute I, the first principle of all knowledge. On the other hand it is equally impossible to define the not-I as it ought to be defined, i.e., as a product of the Absolute I. But Fichte's demonstration of this finitude seems to be superior to that of Kant's in exactly the ways which Fichte indicates; it is more coherent, systematic, and presents the real thrust of Transcendental Idealism more consistently. At the same time, Fichte's presentation of Transcendental Idealism clarifies some of the problems of that doctrine--in particular, the problem of discursively uniting reality and negation in the activity of the Absolute I. Fichte achieves this clarification in great part because of his main modification of Transcendental Idealism; the demand that everything be deduced from the Absolute I. Hegel, in turn, complements Fichte for attempting to carry out this modification, but criticizes him for failing to complete the deduction.²²

Fichte seems also to be superior to Kant in that he is more self-conscious than Kant about the status of philosophical reflection in the "Science of Knowledge." As noted above, Kant seems to equate knowledge and experience; both are the result of the work of understanding (Verstand) together with intuitions. Pure reason (Vernunft) seems to have a solely "dialectical," and so negative, function. And yet the Critique of Pure Reason is both a critique about pure reason (as Fichte notes; GWL p. 216) and a critique carried out by pure reason (cf. CPR Axi-xii). Hence the definition of "knowledge" in the CPR does not seem to include the definition itself. The faculty of producing the definition (reason) seems to be inferior to the faculty it defines (understanding). This split between meta-level (or critical and transcendental level) and object-level considerably weakens Kant's "criticism" as a whole, and seems to betray a loss of self-consciousness about the meaning of "criticism." Unless the conditions for the possibility of knowledge are themselves objects of knowledge, it is impossible to defend those conditions as the true ones. Hegel criticizes Kant on these grounds; in effect, Kant lost self-consciousness about his own project.²³

Fichte avoids this criticism of Kant, at least in part. In short, Fichte unites Kant's Transcendental Analytic with his Transcendental Dialectic in a continuous deduction by pure reason from the Absolute I, i.e., from pure reason itself (GWL p. 216). While Fichte still distinguishes understanding from reason (GWL pp. 207, 214-16), as well as "natural" reflection from philosophical reflection (2nd Intro., pp. 30, 47; GWL pp. 196-220, 208,

216-17), he insists that reason's investigation of itself produces knowledge (hence the title "Wissenschaftslehre"). Fichte is very much aware of the "circle" involved in this self-investigation: but he is equally aware of the impossibility of avoiding it without losing self-consciousness and so an accurate account of "the possibility of self-consciousness" (2nd Intro., p. 37). For the self to try to abstract from itself ". . . is a contradiction, since it is impossible that what does the abstracting should abstract from itself" (2nd Intro., p. 71; GWL pp. 98, 202, 252). By beginning with itself, the "highest principle" or the "Absolute thesis" (2nd Intro., p. 73; GWL pp. 114-15), pure reason can deduce everything "lower" while not losing itself in the process. A consequence of this procedure is that Fichte seems to deduce both the a priori and the a posteriori; they are ". . . merely two points of view, to be distinguished solely by the mode of our approach" (1st Intro., p. 26). Most importantly, intuitions seem to be deduced, i.e., equivalent to concepts of intuitions. Yet that is not entirely possible; the "thing in itself" behind intuitions is finally a "problematic concept." If this signifies a failure in Fichte's deduction, however, at least it is a fully self-conscious failure.

In conclusion, Fichte's modifications of, and advance over, Kant can be restated as follows. Kant's Transcendental Analytic (CPR) ends with a chapter entitled "The Ground of the Distinction of all Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena," a chapter which serves as the transition to the Transcendental Dialectic. This of course is no accident; the distinction between phenomena and noumena, first suggested in the Transcendental Aesthetic, and then established by the Transcendental Analytic, also serves to define the dialectical use of reason. From Fichte's point of view, however, the distinction is not only a transition to dialectic, it is dialectical, insofar as it is a distinction of pure reason. The distinction cannot be established in the Transcendental Analytic, let alone in the Transcendental Aesthetic, before it is deduced from reason by reason itself. Fichte in effect deduces it in the three Grundsätze, i.e., in part I of the GWL, before the sections on theory and practice. In Kant's Transcendental Dialectic, the distinction between phenomena and noumena is invoked in order to resolve an antinomy between freedom and nature. At the end of part II of the GWL, Fichte analyzes this antinomy as a contradiction between infinitude and finitude. In Fichte's terms, the ground of the third antinomy (and so of the Categorical Imperative) lies in the I's reflection on itself. If on the one hand the I reflects upon itself and so determines itself, the not-I (nature) is infinite and unbounded (the realist position). If on the other hand the I reflects on the not-I

and so determines it, the I (freedom) is infinite (the ideality position). Kant stopped at this point, and "solved" the conflict through the distinction between phenomena and noumena.

However, Fichte points out that there is still a higher reflection to be accomplished, namely the reflection that the antinomy is itself a product of reason (GWL p. 217). The same is true for the distinction between phenomena and noumena. To perform this higher reflection is to become fully self-conscious, and so to go beyond the antinomy, though it does not so much remove the antinomy as to place it on a more complex level. For Fichte, this more complex level must in turn be transposed by reflection onto still another level, and so on ad infinitum. Hegel's task is to close the circle of reflection and so to transform self-consciousness into complete, and discursive, self-knowledge.

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NOTES

¹This essay was presented, on October 23, 1976, to the American Graduate Student Conference in Philosophy, at the American University. In an expanded form, it was submitted to the Department of Philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University in completion of the Master of Arts degree. I am indebted to Dr. Thomas Seebom for his helpful comments and criticisms. The present essay is intended solely as an introduction to Fichte and not as a thorough study of his thought.

²J. G. Fichte, Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre (1794) and Erste und Zweite Einleitungen in die Wissenschaftslehre, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs (New York: Appleton, 1970). All references to the Wissenschaftslehre (abbreviated GWL) and to the Introductions advert to this translation and are included directly in the text. Concerning the title "GWL," W. G. Jacobs notes in his introduction to the Meiner edition (Hamburg: 1970), p. viii: "Fichte schrieb hier, wie der Titel sagt, kein Werk der ersten Philosophie, sondern sozusagen Meditationes de prima philosophia: er überlegt nicht metaphysische Probleme, sondern wie überhaupt Probleme der Metaphysik zu begründen sind." It is also worth noting that Hegel's criticisms of Fichte in the "Differenzschrift" remain substantially unchanged in Hegel's later works; thus Fichte's Jena period is the most important for our purposes. Cf. H. Girndt, Differenz des Fichteschen und Hegelschen Systems (Bonn: Bouvier u. Co., 1965), p. x: "Hegel hat seine in der "Differenzschrift" dargelegte Auffassung von der Philosophie Fichtes später nie revidiert. . . ."

³I. Kant, "The History of Pure Reason," Kritik der Reinen Vernunft, trans. N. K. Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965). See also B 274 ff. All references to the Critique of Pure Reason (abbreviated CPR) advert to this translation and are included directly in the text. Cf. M. Guerolt, "L'Antidogmatisme de Kant et de Fichte," in Etudes sur Fichte (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974), II, p. 17: "L'antidogmatisme de Kant et celui de Fichte se révèlent bien identiques dans leur esprit: ce qu'ils affirment tous les deux, en face du dogmatisme, c'est l'absoluité de l'acte du sujet, auquel ils subordonnent l'objet."

⁴Kant, "Erklärung in Beziehung auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre," Ak. Bd. XII, p. 370, cited by A. Philonenko,

La Liberté dans la Philosophie de Fichte (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1966), pp. 105-6. It should be noted that Fichte distinguished the Kantians from Kant; the Kantians misinterpreted Kant, in Fichte's view. For Fichte's reply to Kant's disclaimer, see 2nd Intro., p. 43, n. 4.

⁵Fichte cites several passages in which Kant himself seems to say that the CPR is merely propadeutical: 2nd Intro., p. 51, n. 7.

⁶Intellectual intuition and the moral law are closely related; the moral law warrants belief in the reality of the object of intellectual intuition. See 2nd Intro., pp. 40-41. One might also say that since intellectual intuition cannot be reduced to concepts, there is for Fichte a "givenness" for consciousness analogous to the "givenness" in Kant's sensible intuitions.

⁷For a full discussion of intellectual intuition in Fichte, see A. Philonenko, *ibid.*, part I, ch. 5. Philonenko opposes Hegel's interpretation of intellectual intuition in Fichte, and finds the GWL and the two Introductions reconcilable. I believe that the correct solution lies between the positions of Philonenko and Hegel. In some sense the Absolute I is reached by "abstraction" as well as by intellectual intuition (cf. GWL pp. 215-16).

⁸See note # 4 above.

⁹Fichte barely mentions space and time as deduced categories in the GWL. See p. 171, n. 3; pp. 194, 201, 275.

¹⁰The GWL is divided into three parts; the "Fundamental Principles. . .," the "Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge," and the "Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical." The first part is neither theoretical nor practical, but rather the basis for both theory and practice. Part II corresponds roughly to the Transcendental Analytic (CPR); part III combines elements of the Transcendental Dialectic (CPR), Transcendental Doctrine of Method, and the Critique of Practical Reason. The Transcendental Aesthetic (CPR) is hardly present at all, and morality is barely mentioned (see pp. 230, 259, 285). Fichte does not distinguish "analytic" from "dialectic;" the latter term is not used at all in the GWL.

¹¹Cf. A. Philonenko, *ibid.*, pp. 164, 307-9, 334. Philonenko tries to interpret the course of the GWL as the opposite of that of the CPR. There is some truth to this, but part II of the GWL also follows the order

of the Transcendental Deduction (CPR, B edition). It should be noted also that part III of the GWL includes a discussion of feelings and drives, which explains the "facticity" of experience. Fichte attempts to produce a holistic analysis of man (GWL pp. 259, 266, 280.)

¹²In a sense Fichte's method is reminiscent of Leibniz, insofar as it runs together concepts and intuitions. In another sense, Fichte's "deduction" is reminiscent of Spinoza's method, although the similarity between the two is not very deep. For a discussion of Fichte's method and its relation to Spinoza, Leibniz, and others, see M. Guerolt, L'Evolution et la Structure de la Doctrine de la Science chez Fichte, (Paris: Societe D'Edition: Les Belles Lettres, 1930), I, pp. 18-51; and R. Adamson, Fichte (New York: 1903), p. 134.

¹³For Kant, analysis splits up two concepts, one of which is "contained in" the other. Relations of species to genus, as well as tautologies, fall within the range of analytic judgements (CPR, Intro., iv). Analysis is the explication of a concept according to the principle of contradiction, and thus is the work of Verstand (CPR B 191-92). Kant also allows for negative and positive judgements in analysis (CPR A 154), but Fichte associates negative judgements with antithesis, and positive judgements with synthesis.

¹⁴One could object that in beginning with a logical principle, Fichte assumes a special organon of logic. But Fichte is only assuming the principles of any discourse whatever; he assumes what he must if he is going to speak, and then shows how such principles, and so speech in general, are the result of the activity of the Absolute I. The principles of discourse are the same as, or at least modeled on, the principles of self-consciousness (GWL pp. 26-28). Hegel criticizes Fichte's "beginning" in the Wissenschaft der Logik, trans. W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers (New York: Humanities Press, 1966), I, pp. 87-89. For Hegel, Fichte's starting point is arbitrary and subjective, since it is not derived adequately. An adequate derivation must begin from "ordinary consciousness" and proceed through its "inner necessity."

¹⁵This formulation of the issue is taken from S. Rosen's discussion of the GWL in G. W. F. Hegel: an Introduction to the Science of Wisdom, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 104.

¹⁶Cf. W. G. Jacobs, *ibid.*, p. xi: "Näher liegt es, das absolute Ich mit Gott gleichzusetzen; aber wenn auch Fichte in der GWL nicht vom Unterschied zwischen Gott

und absolutem Ich redet, ist deren Gleichsetzung ein Missverständnis." Jacobs correctly notes that "setzen" is not equivalent to "schaffen." The Absolute I becomes God in some of Fichte's later works, such as Die Bestimmung des Menschen, part III. In that work, however, God is the moral order of the world. Note also that Fichte separates the personal I from the Absolute I; e.g., in the 2nd Intro., pp. 73-75, 83-84.

¹⁷Fichte makes this explicit in the GWL p. 242. This, together with Fichte's teaching about the immanence of God (as the moral order of the world), led to charges of atheism against him. For Fichte's two references to atheism, see GWL pp. 220, n. 1, and 245, n. 4. Kant implies several times that the divine understanding, consisting solely of intellectual intuition, cannot be self-conscious (CPR, B 71-72, 148 ff.).

¹⁸For Fichte, to assert that the finite does not depend on the infinite, is to assert "absolute finitude" (GWL p. 169), a self-contradictory concept. To think the concept is to transcend it; to become self-conscious about a thought is to go beyond that thought. In thinking "absolute finitude" one proves that it is not absolute (GWL pp. 192-93). Note that the I is "infinite" in Fichte in the sense that it is limited by itself only; the same is true in Hegel (Phänomenologie des Geistes [Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1952], ch. VI, pp. 313-16).

¹⁹Hegel, Differenz des Fichteschen und Schelling-schen Systems der Philosophie, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 26.

²⁰Hegel, Science of Logic, ibid., pp. 88-89. Intellectual intuition in Fichte does seem to be more like a feeling than a thought, since what one "sees," i.e., the Absolute I, is pure activity, and so has no form or determination.

²¹Hegel, Differenz. . ., ibid., p. 56: "Das Wesen des Ich und sein Setzen fallen nicht zusammen: Ich wird sich nicht objectiv"; and p. 65. See also the Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), III, p. 494; and part I of the Enzyklopädie, trans. W. Wallace (London: Oxford University Press, rpt. 1904), pp. 90, 120: Kant is a subjective idealist, and Fichte does not go beyond Kant in this respect.

²²Hegel, Differenz. . ., ibid., p. 67: "das System, das vom Sich-selbst-Setzen ausgeht, führt die Intelligenz zu einer bedingten Bedingung in ein Endloses von Endlich-

keiten fort, ohne sie in ihnen und aus ihnen wiederherzustellen"; Vorlesungen. . ., ibid., pp. 494-95; Enzyklopädie, ibid., p. 87.

²³Hegel, "Einleitung," Phänomenologie. . ., ibid.; Enzyklopädie, ibid., pp. 84-85, 116-17; Science of Logic, ibid., pp. 73-75. For a discussion of Hegel's criticisms of Kant and Kant's failure to be self-reflexive, see J. Smith, "Hegel's Critique of Kant," Review of Metaphysics, 26, No. 3 (1973), 438-60; and R. Pippin, "Hegel's Phenomenological Criticism," Man and World, 8, No. 3 (1975), 296-314.

CORRECTION

AUSLEGUNG IV, 1, p. 35 ("Transcendental Arguments: Verificationism or Parasitism?" by Douglas Ehring): The sentence, "On the other hand, the correct₂ use of "inner experience" concepts requires the use₂ of "physical object" concepts" should read as follows:

On the other hand, the correct₂ use of an expression would imply its correct₁ use. The "parasitism" argument might show that the correct₂ use of "inner experience" concepts requires the use of "physical object" concepts.