Reinhold's "Philosophy of Elements" & Its Critics

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In this week's notes we look at Reinhold's "principle of consciousness" and the "Philosophy of Elements" he derives from it, criticisms of Reinhold by Schulze, and Fichte's qualified defense of Reinhold.[1]

Contents

1 Who is Reinhold?

Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823) was an Austrian philosopher and first occupant of the chair on "Critical Philosophy" (i.e. Kant's mature philosophical theory) established at the University of Jena in 1787. Reinhold initially achieved notoriety as a proponent of popular Enlightenment (a "Popularphilosoph") and as a defender, and very effective popularizer, of the Kantian philosophy (see especially his *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*). During his period at the University of Jena (1787–94), Reinhold advocated the need for a more "scientific" and systematic presentation of the

[1] For further reading see (Henrich 1966, 2003; Beiser 1987, chaps. 8-9, 2002; Dudley 2007, chaps. 3-4; Breazeale 2013; Frketich 2021).

Critical philosophy, one based upon a single, self-evident first principle. He contended that this was satisfied only in his own "Elementary Philosophy" (or alternatively "Philosophy of Elements") (*Elementarphilosophie*), which he articulated in a series of influential works between 1789 and 1791. Though Reinhold's Elementary Philosophy was much criticized (for example, by Schulze), his call for a more coherent and systematic exposition of transcendental idealism—i.e. a critical philosophy more critical than Kant's own—exercised a profound influence upon the subsequent development of post-Kantian idealism and spurred others (perhaps especially Fichte and Schelling) to seek a philosophical first principle even more "fundamental" than Reinhold's own "Principle of Consciousness." After moving to the University of Kiel, Reinhold became an adherent, first of Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre and then of C. G. Bardili's "rational realism," before finally proposing a novel "linguistic" approach to philosophical problems. For more on Reinhold see his SEP entry.

2 Reinhold on the Incompleteness of Kant's Critical philosophy

Though Kant was a defender and popularizer of Kant's philosophical views, he also argued that Kant's position was insufficiently systematic, and thus that the critical philosophy was incomplete until it had articulated a "first principle" from which the entire system could be "derived".

Reinhold takes his criticism of Kant to be a straightforward development of Kant's own position. Kant himself often emphasizes the importance of the systematic nature of the Critical philosophy, and the sense in which it develops as a single unitary whole.

> pure reason is such an isolated domain, within itself so thoroughly connected, that no part of it can be encroached upon without disturbing all the rest, nor adjusted without having previously determined for each part its place and its influence on the others; for, since there is nothing outside of it that could correct our judgment within it, the validity and use of each part depends on the relation in which it stands to the others within reason itself, and, as with the structure of an organized body, the purpose of any member can be derived only from the complete concept of the whole. That is why it can be said of such a critique, that it is never trustworthy unless it is entirely complete down to the least elements of pure reason, and that in the domain of this faculty one must determine and settle either all or nothing. (Prolegomena, 4:263)

In Kant's own terms, reason's critique is "all or nothing", with each part of the rational system deriving its purpose from the whole. Reinhold takes the notion of such a derivation, as well as the "all or nothing" nature of critique, in a very specific way. He argues that

> Whenever Kant speaks of philosophy as science, he demands *systematic form*, i.e., the thoroughgoing unity of a manifold of cognitions under one principle. And wherever he outlines the plan for a science, e.g., the *metaphysics of sensible nature*, he does this by the exact specification of its systematic groundwork. How could he have overlooked this condition of science then, which he stipulates and abides by, if he had really intended in the *Critique* to deliver the science that leads to metaphysics—nay, even to the whole of philosophy, whether theoretical or practical—and not just a preparatory work for some such *future* science which the *Critique* itself, of course, cannot and may not be? (Reinhold 2000, 87)

Reinhold's contention is that Kant's Critical philosophy does not respect its own standards for *scientific* philosophy, because it does not give a complete account of the possibility and unity of the parts of the system, an account that Reinhold argues is possible only if we can show how the system develops (or derives) from a single ultimate principle. Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie* aims to provide exactly that principle and to show how from a single fundamental and self-evident proposition, one can derive all the central concepts of Kant's Critical philosophy. This includes his distinction between the two "stems" of the mind, as sensibility and intellect (or understanding), the categories, the faculty of reason, the unknowability of things in themselves, and so on.

> This science [viz. the Critical philosophy] of the faculty of cognition would have to be preceded by another that establishes its foundation. This other science too would be a science of sensibility, understanding and reason-not, however, inasmuch as these are identical with the faculty of cognition, but inasmuch as they stand in common at its foundation (and indeed, at the foundation of the faculty of desire as well). It would be the science of the a priori form of REPRESENTING through sensibility, understanding and reason; on this form depends the form of knowledge, as well as that of desire. In a word, it would be the science of the entire faculty of representation as such. For this science, which I name general Philosophy of the Elements [*Elementarphilosophie*] because it serves as the common foundation [72] to both theoretical and practical philosophy, the *Critique of Reason* has indeed provided materials, but never the idea, let alone the actual foundation. And if it is ever to be realized, philosophical reason must press forward yet another step in its analysis past the point attained in the *Critique of Reason*. This is the final step that philosophical reason can take, proceeding analytically, on its way to higher principles; through it, and it alone, is the ultimate and proper foundation of PHILOSOPHY discovered. (Reinhold 2000, 67–68)

Reinhold seeks a first principle from which all of philosophy can be derived scientifically. This first principle has four features. It is:

1. Self-evident
2. A priori
3. Prior to all other a priori aspects of first philosophy
4. Universally accepted

The principle must be self-evident so that it does not depend on any other forms of philosophical reasoning or assumption. Second, the principle must express a "fact" that is "evident to all people at all times under any condition" (Beiträge 143). This means it cannot depend on any particular sense experience of inner or outer sense. But if a fact is known that does not depend on any particular experience it must be, Reinhold contends, a priori. Third, the principle is meant to the be the fundamental principle from which all the rest of the philosophical system is derived. Hence it must be prior to all other a priori cognition or knowledge. Finally, Reinhold contends that the fundamental principle must be universally accepted. This is of course controversial, since it seems easy to find someone who might reject any principle which one might suggest. One way to avoid such an objection is to take Reinhold as arguing that anyone who correctly uses their natural capacities cannot deny the principle in question (Beiträge, 131, 150). To deny it would be to contradict reason. This would mean that, instead of requiring that all thinkers actually *accept* the principle, this criterion merely asserts that all human knowers *should* accept it.[2]

3 The Principle of Consciousness & Reinholdian Representationalism

The fundamental principle from which Reinhold argues a properly scientific philosophy must be derived is one that describes the basic structure of consciousness.

> What has to stand at the head of the Philosophy of the Elements—and hence of all philosophical explanations and proofs-cannot itself be established through a proof drawn from any part of philosophy whatever, nor for that matter can any philosophy, past or future, prove it. In respect to its essential characteristics the concept of representation cannot be demonstrated, therefore, by the science of the faculty of representation. Those characteristics can, and must, be identified by it by means of an exhaustive analysis, but they cannot be produced by it. … the concept of representation can only be drawn from the CONSCIOUSNESS of an actual fact [*Tatsache*]. This fact alone, qua fact, must ground the foundation of the Philosophy of the Elements—for otherwise the foundation cannot rest, without circularity, on any philosophically demonstrable proposition. It is not through any inference of

[2] See (Frketich 2021, 62–63) for further discussion and defense.

> reason that we know that in consciousness representation is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both, but through simple reflection upon the actual fact of consciousness, that is, by ordering together [*Vergleichung*] what is present in it. (Reinhold 2000, 70)

Reinhold thus contends that a properly critical or scientific philosophy is one that starts from a fact whose status is self-evident, which has ontological priority, and the description of which forms the epistemic basis for the articulation of all other concepts within the philosophical system. This is Reinhold's "Principle of Caonsciousness" (*Satz des Bewusstseins*]

The Principle of Consciousness: in consciousness representation is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both

The Principle of Consciousness, by being the putative basis of the Critical philosophy, is supposed to be the fundamental principle of philosophy and thus of science generally. It describes a *fourfold* distinction between (mere) representation, object, subject, and the distinguishing of this 'mere' representation from subject and object.

"Mere" Representation: that which *can* be related in consciousness to the object and subject and is distinguished from both (Reinhold, "New Exposition," 1:172. Cited by Schulze, Aenesidemus, 79)

"Mere" representation is distinct from representation in the sense that the former is *possibly* related to a subject and object, not that it is *actually* so related. It is not entirely clear how Reinhold sees this distinction, but it seems that he means it to be one according to which mere representation, by virtue of its nature, is such as to be able to stand in relation to a subject and an object. Representation *sans phrase* is mere representation being true to its nature, or being fully actualized. Importantly, *mere* representation is both cognitively and ontologically prior to the subject and object from which it is distinguished.

> [Subject and object] occur in consciousness only through the representation, only through the fact that the representation is related to them; this, however, is only possible through the fact that the mere representation, that is, that which can be related to both of them, is present [*vorhanden*] (Reinhold, "New Exposition," 1:173. Cited by Schulze, Aenesidemus, 80)
>
> That which is related in consciousness to the object and subject must be present—indeed not according to time but according to nature—before the acts of being related [*Bezogenwerden*], insofar as nothing can be related, if nothing is present [*vorhanden*] that is able to be related. (Reinhold, "New Exposition," 1:173. Cited by Schulze, Aenesidemus, 80)

As Reinhold describes it here, the mere representation is prior "according to nature", and thus present in the mind mind as an ontologically prior entity to that of the subject or object. And since mere representation is that through which subject and object are epistemically distinguished from one another, it is also priori epistemically.

The entire picture of consciousness can be termed "Reinholdian Representationalism", which can be stated as consisting of two parts:

Reinholdian Representationalism: (1) all our conscious states are representations; (2) all representations have a four-fold structure, consisting of a subject, an object, a distinguishing of the mere representation from the subject and object, and a relating of the mere representation to the subject and object.

What about *self*-consciousness? According to Reinhold, self-consciousness is a special case of being conscious of the subject, and conforms to the Principle of Consciousness.

> even with that kind of consciousness that is called self-consciousness . . . the representing thing [*das Vorstellende*] as subject and as object, as the representing thing that thinks and as the representing thing that is thought, are distinguished. In the first respect, it behaves as the thing that distinguishes through the representation; in the second, as the thing distinguished through the representation—as representing and as represented. As the thing that distinguishes it cannot simultaneously be the thing that is distinguished (just as little as the eye can see itself) (Reinhold, "New Exposition," 1:197. Cited by Schulze, Aenesidemus, 312)

Reinhold thus contends that the *Elementarphilosophie* is, first and foremost, the science of *mere* representation and its "inner" or essential conditions—viz. the intrinsic properties that allow a mere representation to be related to, and distinguished from, the subject and object. In contrast, the subject and object belong to only the "outer" conditions of mere representation. They occur in consciousness only mediately, *via* mere representation, and moreover can only be *understood* mediately, via the concept of mere representation and the principles that apply to it. From the concept of mere representation the subject and object can be understood in two ways: (i) insofar as they can be *related* to mere representation, in which case the subject is thought in its capacity as the representing thing and the object in its capacity as the represented thing; or (ii) insofar as they can be *distinguished* from mere representation, in which case the subject is thought apart from its capacity as representing thing, as a subject in itself, and the object apart from its capacity as represented thing, as an object in itself. From these points it follows that we cannot know the subject and object as they are "in themselves" because such knowledge would require being able to represent them apart from all representation, which is clearly impossible.

4 Who is Schulze?

Gottlob Ernst Schulze (23 August 1761 – 14 January 1833) was a German philosopher and professor at Wittenberg, Helmstedt, and Göttingen. His most influential work was *Aenesidemus* (1792), a skeptical (broadly Humean) polemic against both Kant's Critique of Pure *Reason* and Karl Leonhard Reinhold's *Philosophy of Elements*. Schulze's essay presents a fictional correspondence between two characters, Hermias and Aenesidemus, in the course of which one of them (Aenesidemus) tries to dissuade the other from endorsing the Critical philosophy. Aenesidemus's primary criticisms of the Critical philosophy comes in his second letter (the third in the overall series). In it he quotes thirty-six propositions from Reinhold's "neue Darstellung" ["new exposition"], which is in Reinhold's *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Misverständnisse der Philosophen* (Jena, 1790), and which was Reinhold's most recent systematic presentation of his position. Schulze then proceeds to argue against the claims made in these quoted passages. Schulze also devotes part of his discussion to Kant's position, which Aenesidemus distinguishes from Reinhold's. In a final letter (which we won't discuss), Aenesidemus also attacks Kant's moral philosophy.

5 Schulze's Criticisms

5.A Against the existence of a faculty of representation

Sculze argues in four ways against the existence of a faculty of representation.

1. There is no secure inference from how we have to think to how things in fact are
2. Inference from the existence of a representation to the existence of a faculty of representation is inconsistent with the Critical philosophy
3. There is no secure inference from properties of representation to the properties of any faculty
4. The appeal to powers explains nothing

Let's take these in turn.

The first points seems fairly obvious, especially given Kant's distinction between logical and real (metaphysical) possibility. The second point, about a faculty of representation, is simply an extension of this first argument. Schulze contends that while we might have to conceive of a faculty of representation that is responsible for any actual representation, there is no secure inference from our conception to the existence of such a faculty. The same point holds then for (3) as well.

Both Kant and Reinhold can reply, however, that Schulze assumes here that the existence of a representation is an event that stands in need of no explanation, or at least to the extent that it does require explanation, we need not advert to anything more than the existence of some other event (e.g. some other representation). However, Kant rejects an event-event causal model.[3] Kant's

[3] See (Watkins 2004).

alternative picture of causal explanation and existence is that a being either merely exists or it subsists. If it merely exists (as a representation does) then there must be a being in which that existence "inheres" as its explanation or cause.

> Where there is action, consequently activity and power, there is also substance, and in this alone must the seat of this fruitful source of appearances be sought. (A204/B250)

The final argument made by Schulze, that appeal to powers explains nothing, is an application of the by then standard worry (mocked by Moliere) that appeal to powers is explanatorily inert.[4]

Is this a convincing objection? Schulze certainly is correct that merely positing a capacity, power, or faculty (if we're using these interchangeably) does not add or illuminate very much concerning why an outcome or manifestation occurs. But, importantly, capacities are distinct from their exercises. Hence, statements or explanations involving them are counterfactually or circumstantially sensitive in a manner that their specific exercises are not. A capacity is individuated by what it is a capacity for, or to do—i.e. by the state of affairs that is the outcome of its successful exercise. Explanations adverting to a capacity must be able to state the conditions under which the capacity is exercised, what circumstances prompt or allow realizations or acts of the capacity, and what circumstances hinder or mask such actualizations.[5] This may be difficult, but it does not seem in principle impossible, and appeal to capacities forms a central part of our current empirical science. Hence the objection Schulze makes here seems either question begging or otherwise unsuccessful.

5.B Against the Principle of Consciousness

Schulze also argues in four ways against the Principle of Consciousness (PC) as the most basic principle of a scientific philosophy.

1. The PC is not the highest principle since it is subject to the principle of contradiction
2. Some conscious representations are representations that fail to conform to the PC
3. Reinhold's own views require that mere representation is derivative rather than fundamental
4. Reinhold's conception of self-consciousness itself is problematic

Let's take these in turn.

Schulze's argument for (1) is straightforward. Since the PC is supposed to be the most fundamental principle of philosophy it cannot itself be subject to or "conditioned by" any other principle. But, Schulze argues, even the fact of consciousness articulated by PC is itself subject to the principle of

[4] For a useful overview of this kind of objection see (Nadler 1998).

[5] For discussion of capacities see (Kern 2017; Vetter and Jaster 2017; Schellenberg 2018; Schafer 2019; O'Callaghan 2020).

(non-)contradiction. But if that is correct then PC cannot be the highest principle, for it must be understood in terms of an even more fundamental principle whose condition it must respect.

Concerning (2), Schulze contends that some conscious representations are representations that fail to conform to the PC. If this is correct then Reinhold has failed to state, in the PC, the basic fact of consciousness. Schulze provides three examples:

1. deep reflection
2. primitive mental states (e.g. sensation in small children)
3. intuition

In each case there is a putative lack of the fourfold structure that the PC holds to be present in every case of consciousness. Schulze basic idea in all these cases is that in various conscious mental states one might lack consciousness of oneself or of the object of one's representation (as opposed to the representation itself). In the case of intuition itself Schulze says,

> In the intuition of a really present object outside me I indeed notice [*bemerke*] my "I," which intuits, and a representation, which constitutes the content of the intuition; however, in this intuition and during it, there is no perception [*Gewahrnehmung*] of an object that is distinct from my "I" and the representation that is present in it (Schulze, Aenesidemus, 72)

The argument here seems to be that in sensory consciousness, absent any theory applied by the subject to describe their experience, there is no distinguishing of representation from that which it represents, but rather simply the subject's consciousness of that representation itself. Schulze thus distinguishes *intuition*, in which there is no distinction by the subject of its representation from the object of that representation, and *perception*, in which the subject does make such a distinction between representation and object.

> For if a representation is made up only of something that is distinguished by the subject from the object and subject, and is related to both; if it is certain, moreover, that only something that has been perceived [*was gewahrgenommen worden ist*] can be distinguished from, and related to, something else by the mind (for the operation of distinguishing and relating can occur only if there is something there that can be related to, and distinguished from, something else; and where there is nothing present [*vorhanden*] that can be distinguished, "distinguishing" cannot be thought of at all), then it follows that "intuition" is not a species of the genus "representation" because the concept of the genus is not applicable to it at all. During the intuiting no distinction of an object from a representation occurs, because for as along as the intuition lasts, no object at all different from it is noted [*bemerkt*] (Schulze, Aenesidemus, 84–85)

Schulze thus thinks that only in *perception* do we get the kind of structure required by the PC, which shows that the PC does not pick out a fundamental fact about the mind.

Schulze's third criticism is that Reinhold's own views require that mere representation is derivative rather than fundamental. Schulze proceeds to argue for this point by taking advantage of Reinhold's own reasoning. Reinhold contends that nothing can be related, if nothing is present [*vorhanden*] that is able to be related. Reinhold concludes from this that "mere" representation is the fundamental (or "prior") part of the fourfold structure of Reinholdian representation. But Schulze stands this reasoning on its head.

> From what has already been said, it is already sufficiently clear what is to be thought of the concept of mere representation formulated in §5.8 … All one needs to recall is that what is said [by Reinhold] about mere representation and its relation to the possibility of the object and subject in consciousness must also be said of the subject and object with regard to the existence of the *actual* representation in consciousness. … namely, if nothing can be related to another when nothing is present [*vorhanden*] that can be related to another, then the actual representation cannot be related in consciousness to the subject and object, if these are not already there as a mere subject and as a mere object. Therefore, both precede the representation in consciousness; both contain the ground of possibility for the fact that the representation can occur in consciousness (Schulze, Aenesidemus, 89-90)

Since mere representation cannot be distinguished from, and related to, the object and subject in consciousness, unless these are already available in consciousness to be distinguished and related (as Schulze puts it, "mere" subject and "mere" object), Schulze concludes that the object and subject must be "present" to the mind before actual representation in Reinhold's sense. Moreover, since Schulze considers the conscious distinguishing of subject and object as perception, he can contend that the perception of the subject and object precedes that of mere representation, and makes it possible, *contra* Reinhold's PC.

Finally, Schulze criticizes the PC for what it entails about self-consciousness. There are two main issues here. First, Reinholdian self-representation is not obviously possible. According to PC, if one is to become conscious of oneself, then that consciousness must obey the fourfold structure of PC. This means that there is a mere representation, a subject, and object (in this case, the object is also the subject), and a relation between them. Reinhold's position seems to commit him to a subject and object that are distinct, but then it is unclear how self-consciousness could ever be accounted for (i.e. how does the subject distinguish itself from itself?).

Second, there seems to be a dilemma in the offing for Reinhold. Either the subject is related to all representations in virtue of its being represented or it is not. If the former, then the subject is not a special object of self-consciousness, but rather is represented whenever there is a representation

satisfying Reinhold's PC. If the latter, then there are things in consciousness that are not representations. But this conflicts with Reinholdian Representationalism, which holds that all consciousness consists solely of representations.[6]

More generally, Schulze thinks that Reinhold's fundamental mistake is that of construing all forms of consciousness in terms of object consciousness. This leads to him being committed to either the implausible position that we are always self-conscious if we are conscious, or to construing self-consciousness as elusive – as an eye that cannot see itself.

6 Who is Fichte?

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) developed during the final decade of the eighteenth century a radically revised and rigorously systematic version of transcendental idealism, which he called *Wissenschaftslehre* or "Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge." Perhaps the most characteristic, as well as most controversial, feature of the Wissenschaftslehre (at least in its earlier and most influential version) is Fichte's effort to ground his entire system upon the bare concept of subjectivity, or, as Fichte expressed it, the "pure I." During his career at the University of Jena (1794–1799) Fichte erected upon this foundation an elaborate transcendental system that embraced the philosophy of science, ethics, philosophy of law or "right." and philosophy of religion.

7 Fichte's Aenesidemus Review

Against Schulze Fichte accepts Reinhold's Principle of Consciousness, and attemtps to defend Reinhold against a number of Schulze's criticisms. However, with Schulze, Fichte denies that the PC can be the highest principle of philosophy

> all the objections of Aenesidemus are groundless in so far as they are to be taken as directed against the truth of the principle of consciousness as such, but they are relevant to it as first principle of all philosophy and as a mere fact; thus the objections make a new justification necessary. (Fichte, BKH 142)

With Reinhold, Fichte claims that (1) "all that is discovered in the mind is a representing," and (2) representation "is undeniably an empirical determination of the mind." (BKH 140). But against Reinhold Fichte claims that there are pre-representational acts of the mind that make representation possible

[6] See (Messina 2011, 360). I am simplifying his discussion somewhat here. For some alternative readings of Schulze's argument see (Neuhouser 1990; Martin 1997; Franks 2005).

> The first wrong presupposition which led to its [i.e. the Principle of Consciousness] being posited as the principle of all philosophy is that one must start from an actual fact. To be sure, we must have a real principle, and not a merely formal one; but – if I may venture a claim which can be neither explained nor proven here – such a principle does not have to express a fact just as *content* [*eine Tatsache*, actual fact]; it can also express a fact as Act [*eine Tathandlung*, a fact-act]. Now, inasmuch as Aenesidemus must hold this proposition to be empirical, one must of course go along with him in allowing experiences which supposedly contradict it. But if the same proposition is demonstrated from undeniable principles, and if the opposite is shown to be a contradiction, then all the supposed experiences which are alleged not to agree with it must be dismissed as unthinkable. (Fichte, BKH 141; translation modified)

Here Fichte presents, in broad outline, a central feature of his position. He argues that the first principle need not, as Reinhold assumes, express some fact about the mind. Instead it can express an *activity* of the mind. This might seem an odd way to make his point. But what Fichte seems to be getting at is that representation and its relation to subject and object (i.e. the fact of consciousness) is not basic, for it presupposes an activity through which the representation occurs, and it is this activity that should be understood as the basic or highest principle.

It is worth noting here that in the course of his work Fichte occasionally coins entirely new terms. Arguably the most important of these is the one we see above – the "Tathandlung". This is a term he invented to designate that original, self-constitutive activity by means of which the I "posits itself." Fichte's term for this self-creative act is "*Tathandlung*", which is a neologism obtained by combining two ordinary words: "Tatsache", which means "fact," and "Handlung", which means "act." Fichte's intention here seems to be to designate something that is not a (shall we say) *mere* fact. A "Tathandlung" is, accordingly, a "fact" that is at the same time an "act." As Fichte himself explains: it is "an activity which presupposes no object, but itself produces it, and in which, accordingly, the acting (*Handlung*) immediately becomes the deed or fact (*Tat*)" (SW I: 468). Since there is no easy way to render Fichte's neologism into English, "Tathandlung" is typically translated throughout as "act" (and sometimes clumsily, as "fact-act"), but it is important to keep in mind Fichte's intentions here.

One might worry here that Fichte's talk of a "fact" as opposed to an "act" is misleading, since surely it is also a fact that activity is more fundamental than its product (in this case the kind of representation of which Reinhold's PC speaks). Fichte's point thus seems to either (i) be somewhat misleading in its expression; or (ii) more than simply a point about the priority of activity to its product. If the latter is the case, then what is the further point that Fichte intends?

There are several further positions that are indicated by Fichte here, though not fleshed out. They do, however, see much more extensive development by Fichte over the ensuing decade or so, as

part of his "doctrine of science" ("*Wissenschaftslehre*"). There are three important features of Fichte's view that are mooted here. First, that the activity of the subject is the most fundamental basis of philosophy and that all philosophy is developed out of the nature of this subject's activity (thus is Fichte's philosophy thoroughly "idealist"). Second, that this self-activity is a kind of "positing", namely, self-positing. Third, that self-positing is, or is possible through, intellectual intuition. Fichte ties these three together initially in one dense paragraph:

> The absolute subject, the *ego* [*das Ich*], is not given in an empirical intuition, but is posited through an intellectual one; and the absolute object, the non-ego [*das Nicht-Ich*], is what is posited in opposition to it. In empirical consciousness,both occur in no other way than by a representation being referred to them. They are in it only mediately, qua representing, and qua represented. But the absolute subject, that which represents but is not represented; and the absolute object, a thing-in-itself independent of all representation - of these one will never become conscious as something empirically given. (Fichte, BKH 142)

The appeal to intellectual intuition here is obscure, but at least this much seems clear. Fichte is rejecting the position that the subject is ultimately or fundamentally aware of itself by being *given* to itself, in the manner that empirical intuition requires. Instead, the subject's awareness of itself is based entirely in its own activity. This position is a bit clearer in something Fichte says subsequently.

> if, to present the stages of the inference in their most abstract form, the *ego* in intellectual intuition *is because* it is, and *is what* it is, it follows that to this extent it is *self-positing*, absolutely self-subsistent and independent In empirical consciousness, however, the *ego*, as intelligence, is only with reference to something intelligible, and to this extent it has dependent existence. (Fichte, BKH 151-2)

Fichte here rejects the idea that the subject is fundamentally aware of itself in anything like an empirical way. Indeed, insofar as it is aware of itself empirically (or non-fundamentally) it is as a "dependent existence". However, the position is obscure at least in the sense that it does not make clear whether consciousness of oneself as a particular being is what is made possible through intellectual intuition, or whether this is in fact *prior* (either epistemically, metaphysically, or both) to one's consciousness of oneself as a particular being.

The "positing" [*Setzung*] of self and object in intellectual intuition seems to be a deliberate reference to a term used by Kant. Here is one clear statement of the notion of positing by Kant:

> The concept of positing [*Position*] or setting [*Setzung*] is perfectly simple: it is identical with the concept of being in general. Now something can be thought as posited merely relatively, or to express the matter better, it can be thought merely

> as the relation (*respectus logicus*) of something as a characteristic mark of a thing. In this case, being, that is to say, the positing of this relation, is nothing other than the copula in a judgment. If what is considered is not merely the relation but the thing posited in and for itself, then this being is the same as existence. (OPG, 2:73)

Kant considers the positing of a being "in and for itself" as "absolute positing", construes this as a statement of existence. So in the statement "I am" one posits the subject (the referent of "I") as existing. Fichte's position thus seems to be that the subject, in intellectual intuition, posits itself, i.e. determines its own existence. This does not seem to be a merely epistemic point. If the concept of positing (as Kant takes it) is identical with the concept of being or existing, then the act of positing is identical with the act of being or existing. If that is right then for Fichte, self-positing is a kind of existence in and through it self, perhaps rather in the way that Spinoza conceives of the one substance as existing in and through it self, and being conceived to so exist. For Fichte, the intellectual activity of positing, and the being that is so posited, are one and the same.

> The self's own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity. he self posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-positing it is; and conversely, the self is and posits its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action and deed are one and the same, and hence the "I am" expresses an Act [*Thathandlung*], and the only one possible, as will inevitably appear from the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a whole. (FW 1:96)

We'll discuss Fichte's conception of intellectual intuition, self-positing, and the absolute subject in relation to Kant and Spinoza in greater detail in the next couple of weeks.

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