

Revista de Estud(i)os sobre Fichte

16 | 2018

Inv(i)erno 2018

Tom Rockmore (dir.)



Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/ref/793>

DOI : 10.4000/ref.793

ISSN : 2258-014X

Éditeur

Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo

Référence électronique

Tom Rockmore (dir.), *Revista de Estud(i)os sobre Fichte*, 16 | 2018, «Inv(i)erno 2018» [En línea], Publicado el 22 diciembre 2018, consultado el 11 diciembre 2025. URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ref/793>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ref.793>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 11 décembre 2025.

Salvo indicación contraria, el texto y otros elementos (ilustraciones, archivos adicionales importados) son "Todos los derechos reservados".

NOTE DE LA RÉDACTION

Fichte and Kant (I)

Both volumes of REsF corresponding to 2018 are dedicated to the discussion on the relationship between Kant and Fichte. The articles that are being published in these volumes are further elaborations of the papers presented at a meeting of the North American Fichte Society in Seoul, South Korea in June 2017. The purpose of the Seoul meeting was to fill a gap in Fichte research. The increased attention to German idealism in recent years is a by-product of factors in the discussion, including the change in the debate as Heidegger recedes, the Frankfurt School and Marxism in general, but not Marx, attract increasingly less attention, and phenomenology matures. These and other changes create “space” so to speak for a qualified return to German idealism, including Fichte.

Though it is well known that Fichte is a Kantian, what that means, what that means to Kant, what that means to Fichte and what that means to the different themes that both bring them together and keep them apart is only rarely studied in depth, rarely discussed beyond reference to Fichte’s claim, perhaps less extreme than it seems, to understand the critical philosophy better than its author.

Fichte belongs chronologically and conceptually to German idealism, one of the two great moments in the history of Western philosophy. Though German idealism is slowly now in the process of coming back into fashion, we cannot say that idealism in all its forms, including German idealism, is at present either well or widely known. There are few philosophers active today who are willing to describe themselves as idealists. German idealism begins with Leibniz, if he is an idealist, or at least no later than Kant. This tendency includes Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. When Hegel died a light went out on one of the most interesting, richest but also most difficult philosophical tendencies. Few philosophers active today are knowledgeable about, much less able to discuss in detail either German idealism or idealism.

We live in a time when Fichte is an extremely influential author, according to some observers even the most influential thinker in the last two centuries. He is, to begin with, influential in the early reception of the critical philosophy. When the *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared, Kant’s early readers were confronted with a massive and very difficult text that numerous observers implausibly each claimed to be the only person to understand. Jacobi, Kant’s contemporary, famously thought that Kant’s position was inconsistent, notably with respect to the key notion of the thing in itself. It should not be overlooked that the young Schelling and the young Hegel read Kant through

Fichte's eyes. According to Hegel, Kant, who rejects dogmatism, is himself as dogmatist since he merely asserts but fails to deduce the categories initially deduced by Fichte. Though Reinhold is the first contemporary to attempt to reconstruct the critical philosophy, Hegel describes him as the leading non-philosopher of the age.

In "Revisiting Kant's and Fichte's Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism, Emiliano Acosta explores aspects of the only rarely studied relation between Fichte's and Kant's conceptions of cosmopolitanism that mainly differ about their conceptions of nature and attitudes toward secularization and immanence/transcendence. Aaron Wells studies "Freedom and Matter: From Kant to Fichte," with special attention to the so-called pivotal period (1791-1793). Steven Hoeltzel examines "Fichte and Kant on Reason's Final Ends and Highest Ideas" with an aim of determining the nature and limits of Fichte's position with respect to Kant's. Michael Vater's account of "Reason and Agency in Kant and Fichte" centers on Fichte's response to two central Kantian themes. Matthew Altman considers "Fichte's Practical Response to the Problem of Other Minds," an issue at the intersection of epistemology and ethics. In different ways the papers you are about to read all throw light, in different ways, on Fichte's relation to Kant, hence on both thinkers as well as German idealism and some of the basic problems of philosophy itself.

Tom Rockmore
Peking University

SOMMAIRE

Artículos/Artigos

Revisiting Kant and Fichte's Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism

Emiliano Acosta

Freedom and Matter: From Kant to Fichte

Aaron Wells

Fichte and Kant on Reason's Final Ends and Highest Ideas

Steven Hoeltzel

Reason and Agency in Kant and Fichte

Michael Vater

Fichte's Practical Response to the Problem of Other Minds

Matthew C. Altman

Artículos/Artigos

Revisiting Kant and Fichte's Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism

Emiliano Acosta

- 1 In this paper, I present some preliminary considerations on relevant, but, as far as I know, still unexplored, aspects of the Kantian and Fichtean conceptions of cosmopolitanism. These aspects can be grouped in three thematic axes: the ontologico-political (not legal) side of the cosmopolitan conceptions of both philosophers, the existence of a diversity of forms of cosmopolitanism in Fichte's philosophy, and the idea and role of nature, economy and history in Kant and Fichte's cosmopolitanism. ¹
- 2 Recent Kant-studies have shown that contrary to the traditional approach exclusively focused on Kant's theory of international order (legal cosmopolitanism), Kant also offers an economic, religious, epistemological and moral account on cosmopolitanism. ² Nevertheless, these new interpretations leave the Kantian ontologico-political version of cosmopolitanism aside. The reason of this systematic omission seems to be the little attention these studies have given to what I consider the conceptual core of Kant's article of 1784 *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, namely Kant's postulate of an ontological continuity from nature to reason aiming at legitimating a political praxis of cultural, political and moral progress and emancipation. ³
- 3 Concerning Fichte's theory of cosmopolitanism, research has always been focused on the tensions between nationalism and/or patriotism and cosmopolitanism in Fichte's political and legal philosophy, leaving the question aside whether Fichte, like Kant, does not conceive of cosmopolitanism in very different perspectives. ⁴ The recent published *Cambridge Companion to Fichte* shows that Fichte's cosmopolitanism has been displaced in the last years from the set of main problems concerning the study of the work of this philosopher. ⁵
- 4 The paper is structured as follows. I will begin with an analysis of Kant's epistemological cosmopolitanism and show that Cavallar's reconstruction of

this form of cosmopolitanism needs to be improved. This will lead me to the explanation of the ontologico-political side of the Kantian cosmopolitanism. I will mainly focus on the mentioned article *Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim* (from now on IaG). I will argue that at the background of Kant's cosmopolitanism there is a grand narrative about nature, historicity and destination (*Bestimmung*) of the individuals and Humanity. This grand narrative, which can be understood as the ideological moment in Kant's cosmopolitanism, consists, on the one hand, of the postulate of the existence of a cosmopolitan germ and a cosmopolitan natural disposition in man, on the other of the postulate of the existence of a plan of nature guiding the history of progress of Humanity. In the second part of the present paper, I will examine the way Fichte deals with the ontological and political question of cosmopolitanism in his *Philosophy of Right* (1796/97), *The Closed Commercial State* (1800) and his *Letters to Konstant* (1802/03). I will begin with the question whether and to what extent we could talk about different forms of cosmopolitanism in Fichte's philosophy and show to what extent this is possible. I will argue that Fichte considers cosmopolitanism an issue that exceeds the domain of philosophy of right, since his idea of cosmopolitanism encompasses a political economy, a philosophy of education and culture as well as a political ontology of the cosmopolitan, since she is essentially or *stricto sensu* the one who has no or has lost his/her citizenship. In the third section I will advance some conclusions that can serve for outlining the tasks a new research on Kant and Fichte's cosmopolitanisms should undertake.

On Kant's cosmopolitanisms

- 5 No doubt, Kleingeld and Cavallar's studies on Kant's cosmopolitanism represent the most important recent contribution to the Kant-scholarship on this topic. Kleingeld's historiographic research on Kant's Cosmopolitanism has shown that besides the well-known Kantian legal cosmopolitanism, Kant has also developed a religious, moral, cultural and economic notion of cosmopolitanism. One of the most important contributions of Cavallar to Kleingeld's research has been the identification of a Kantian epistemological cosmopolitanism.⁶ Nevertheless, on the one hand in his article of 2012 Cavallar only mentions the existence of this form of cosmopolitanism and gives a brief description of it, leaving it aside from the scope of his paper⁷ and, on the other, in his book, published in 2015, *Kant's Embedded Cosmopolitanism* he does not discuss the epistemological cosmopolitanism one can find in Kant's IaG. Instead, Cavallar's analysis of Kant's epistemological cosmopolitanism refers to other Kantian writings such as *Anthropology*, the first and third critiques, Kant's lectures on the philosophical doctrine of

religion and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant's article from 1784 is certainly mentioned, but a few pages below and merely as an illustration of the concept Cavallar has already reconstructed out of the above-mentioned writings.⁸ Contrary to Cavallar's reading I do not consider the epistemological cosmopolitanism of Kant's article of 1784 as just an example of what Kant has said in other writings.

- 6 Cavallar's omission of the particularity of the epistemological cosmopolitanism in IaG results to my view in a misreading of Kant's epistemological cosmopolitanism, since it gives the impression that, on the one hand, Kant's epistemological cosmopolitanism is a kind of neutral or objective point of view or skeptical moment that makes possible inter-cultural dialogue, self-criticism⁹ and global thinking in terms of openness towards others.¹⁰ Contrary to Kant's idea that what a cosmopolitan distinguishes from ordinary citizens is his or her active engagement with the world, namely that a real cosmopolitan is not a mere "spectator of world events" (*Weltsbechauer*)¹¹, Cavallar affirms that epistemological cosmopolitans are according to Kant "impartial spectators".¹² Furthermore, Cavallar's consideration of Kant's cosmopolitan perspective as an *unbiased* way of thinking that permits individuals to overcome their own ethnocentrism produces the illusion that Kant is an ally of contemporary humanitarian cosmopolitan theories like Ulrich Beck's view on cosmopolitanism.¹³ On the other hand, this misreading suggests the existence of a kind of natural transit between epistemological and moral cosmopolitanism in Kant's philosophy.¹⁴ This systematic transit becomes impossible, as Cavallar himself once recognized,¹⁵ if we introduce in the notion of epistemological cosmopolitanism the particular no-moral and anti-theological character of the version in IaG. The absence of a moral principle leading his philosophy of history and the strong anti-theological and secularized character of the notion of cosmopolitanism in the article of 1784¹⁶ makes impossible the compatibility of Kant's moral and religious cosmopolitanism with his cosmopolitanism based on his philosophy of history.
- 7 Although Kant's epistemological cosmopolitanism consists indeed of overcoming the egoist or ethnocentric perspective, this overcoming does not lead according to Kant to a *neutral* point of view, but to one engaged with a *particular* view of the nature, the history and the destination of human beings. By elevating herself upon the particularity of the own historical and cultural situation, the Kantian cosmopolitan does not obtain a decontaminated perspective on human affairs, but a *new* view on human history, human nature and human destination. The cosmopolitan is according to the IaG the one who has grasped the real goal of Humanity, the

real mechanism of nature and history and, accordingly, can distinguish between a politics for and a one against the progress of Humanity. ¹⁷ Kant is convinced, and Fichte would agree, that above particular interests there is no uninterested objectivity, but the interest of reason with its own political and moral agenda. ¹⁸

- 8 The particularity and/or partiality of Kant's point of view can be noticed not only in his acknowledgment of the epistemologically fragile status of his own proposal for philosophically interpreting history, which is nothing more than "a thought of what a philosophical head [...] could try from a different point of view" ¹⁹, but also in the fact that his discourse does not attempt at representing the *totality* of human beings. His discourse *in the name of Humanity* is articulated in open confrontation against conservative, i.e. anti-Enlightenment, discourses about the human nature, its history and destination. ²⁰
- 9 Kant speaks in the name of a Humanity that for constituting itself as totality *needs to exclude* a part of itself. The opposition "us and them" is not an accidental collateral effect. This opposition is inherent to every totalizing discourse. The totality Kant refers to with his discourse in the name of Humanity cannot be objectively or logically achieved, but only rhetorically. Put in Laclau's terms: Kant's cosmopolitan discourse of 1784 is an attempt at creating a new universality in terms of hegemony. ²¹ Concerning epistemological cosmopolitanism, Kant is in his 1784 article neither neutral nor affirms that his cosmopolitan idea is objectively true and universal valid. The same philosophical modesty can be found in his *Perpetual Peace*, where Kant acknowledges that the advice of jurists is for the political authorities more important than the advice of philosophers and so he rejects Plato's idea of the *philosopher king*. ²² Cavallar's interpretation becomes more problematic when we realize that Kant's epistemological cosmopolitanism has nothing to do with humanism or humanitarianism nor with inter-cultural dialogue or openness to diversity, since it is based on both a philosophy of history that considers Humanity and not the individual as the real subject of history ²³ and a notion of culture that could not tolerate contemporary pleas for cultural and religious diversity. ²⁴
- 10 We can now discuss to what extent Kant's *Idea for a Universal History* is relevant for a reconstruction of Kant's cosmopolitanism. Kleingeld offers a consistent argument for leaving this article aside: in his *Towards Perpetual Peace* Kant has changed his mind about the definitive form and the coercive power of the federation of nations. ²⁵ No doubt this is correct. But Kleingeld did not say anything about the things that have not changed in Kant's notion of cosmopolitanism since 1784, namely that the main ideas of Kant's philosophy of history in 1784 and 1795/96 are actually the same. In both

writings we read that nature is a kind of secularized providence and that the motor of history is the social unsociability of man conceived essentially as a natural process, namely, as a process planned and ordered by nature, unwittingly executed by human beings and striving at the realization of the goals of nature in the human race. ²⁶ By the way: the same idea we find at the end of Kant's *Anthropology*, published in 1798. ²⁷

- 11 The neglected particularity of Kant's 1784 version of epistemological cosmopolitanism consists of being based on an *ontologization* of the cosmopolitan point of view. This ontology is essentially political, since it is related to a very specific political program: the establishment of a cosmopolitan legal order by means of making republicanism the universal form of government. Kant's attempt consists of demonstrating that this political program corresponds to the natural development of human beings. The cosmopolitan, the historiographer who discovers the real dynamics of history, human reason, moral feelings, political institutions are all, like Newton, Kepler and their discoveries, products of nature. ²⁸
- 12 Kant's 1784 cosmopolitanism encompasses the development of a grand narrative about human nature, destination and history aiming at mobilizing people to actively participate in the progress of Humanity. According to Kant, this progress is however a natural progress and, since natural and necessary are within the Kantian universe two sides of same coin, something that soon or later will happen. Why then? Kant's answer reads as follows: because Nature is wise, she knows what she wants and she knows how she can get it and she has the power and the means (the human creatures) for achieving it. ²⁹ But, if this is so, why should we try to convince people to actively take part on something that *necessarily* and *without* people's own consent will become one day a reality? This is the point where Kant sounds a little bit Hegelian and Marxist, since on the one hand the history of human progress has the character of necessity and on the other the future is already written. The cunning of nature we can discover in history, when we observe human actions from a cosmopolitan point of view, ³⁰ guarantees that nature will work on the same way in the future. By the way: the guarantee of perpetual peace is, according to Kant, not human rationality nor human freedom, but, as we read in his *Perpetual Peace*, the wisdom and manipulative power of nature connected of course with social antagonism, which is a means of nature for accomplishing *her* (not our) last goal. ³¹
- 13 So, at this point it is difficult to see why subjectivities should be persuaded and mobilized for consciously working on the progress of the human race and consequently of nature understood as the totality of living species on earth. Kant would agree with this. But the point is that Kant suggests that, as soon as we decipher the internal mechanism and goal of nature, we can *accelerate*

the dynamics of the necessity-structure of history. ³²

- 14 One of the reasons Kant gives for legitimating his idea of universal history is that his grand narrative can convince people for actively contributing to the progress of humanity and so the *tempo* of history will be faster and we will sooner bring humanity to her goal. So, it is not the point whether his proposal is objectively true, but whether it can mobilize people. Kant thinks that for this purpose he has to develop a kind of political ontology, namely a description of human nature where the political is an essential part of the human nature. This is why he considers necessary to detach the human being from the idea of metaphysical freedom and transcendence, namely from all that can lead individuals to relativize this life, this earth, and, consequently, make cosmopolitan activism unattractive. So, in IaG he proposes to conceive the human, its history and destination within a framework of secularization and absolute immanence in order to make consistent and desirable his idea of ontologico-political cosmopolitanism.
- 15 Kant's philosophy of history can be seen as an example of Enlightenment secularization of the Christian history of salvation. But Kant thinks that his proposal is even in the context of the Enlightenment original. This is the reason why he thinks he has to explain what Johann Schultz had mentioned in the *Gotha Learned Papers*, namely that "favorite idea of professor Kant that the final end of humankind is the attainment of the most perfect political constitution" and that Kant "wishes that a philosophical historiographer would undertake to provide us in this respect a history of humanity, and to show how far humanity has approached this final end in different ages, or how far removed it has been from it, and what is still to be done for this attainment." ³³
- 16 I think that Kant's originality resides in the fact that Kant secularizes the history of salvation without cancelling its teleological character and consequently without abandoning the idea of a plan and a task for humanity nor cancelling the function of providence in this history. But Kant translates providence: we have to say "nature" ³⁴ ; and instead of "divine intention" ("göttliche Absicht"), a term from eighteenth-century German theology for "intentio divina", ³⁵ we have now to say "cosmopolitan intention or aim" ("weltbürgerliche Absicht"). This notion of cosmopolitanism is, to my view, what Kant thinks it has to be explained, since this is the point Schultz did not mention. Furthermore, for Kant the opposition in the cultural struggle for the progress of humanity is not the theological opposition between the children of Heaven and the sons of the Earth, but the secularized antagonism between the last ones and the cosmopolitan, as we read it in his *Reflections on the Anthropology* . ³⁶

- 17 In this manuscript, we find Kant's consideration of cosmopolitanism as a standpoint opposed to the egoist way of being in the world. But Kant considers this perspective as necessarily connected with interest and action as well: the cosmopolitan is, as mentioned above, not a "world-spectator" nor a strange or sojourner in the world, she considers the world as *her own place for living*. There is thus no another world for the cosmopolitan. As Kant says at the end of IaG: it is all about convincing people to stop looking for the solutions beyond earthly existence. ³⁷ Kant notes that the idea of the immortality of the soul is actually an obstacle for Enlightenment conceived as cosmopolitan activism. In this point Kant's secularization of the history of salvation differs from Herder's account on it. As Kant notices in his review of Herder's *Ideas for a philosophy of history of the humankind*, one of the main problems of Herder's philosophy of history is the extension and projection of human moral development *beyond* the limits of this life and this earth. ³⁸
- 18 Kant's epistemological cosmopolitanism is something more than what Cavallar tells us about this concept, since it encompasses a political ontology. The political idea of a cosmopolitan order or of a praxis towards perpetual peace are essentially a result of the historical development of a natural disposition in the human being. In defining the oscillating nature of human beings at the beginning of IaG Kant does not situate individuals between animals guided by instincts and moral free beings, but between the former and the cosmopolitan as the individual who has grasped that the human is a nature creature destined to achieve a specific goal of nature: the establishment of international legal order as the basis for the total development of the potentialities of humankind. Again: this life, this earth, are the limits.
- 19 For creating a horizon of absolute immanence Kant advances an apagogical argument by means of which he, on the one hand, demonstrates that metaphysical freedom cannot be the principle or guiding idea for entering in the historicity of the human being, on the other, Kant postulates a history of humanity as guided by nature as the only consistent way for writing a non-chaotic, teleological, history of human kind. ³⁹ In this regard, the philosophical historiographer is a cosmopolitan who, like Newton and Kepler, incarnates a moment of self-reflection and self-knowledge of nature.
- 20 The cosmopolitan is the incarnation of an idea nature has put as potentiality in the human nature. Kant talks in IaG about a cosmopolitan germ and a cosmopolitan disposition. ⁴⁰ An idea translated in biologist terms. Kant is, nevertheless, not a materialist. We can say that his ontologization of cosmopolitanism naturalizes cosmopolitanism and politics, but we also have to say that the nature of this naturalization is not the nature of the first

critique nor the nature of the third one. As already said: nature is providence.

41

- 21 For nature, we are nothing but an instrument. The real subject of history is the humankind. 42 It is quite interesting to pay attention to Kant's argument in this regard, because it has the same structure of the argument of the second critique for postulating the immortality of soul. 43 In both cases, something impossible to be accomplished within the limits of individual earthly existence is categorically ordered. In the second critique this impossibility leads us to the postulate of immortality: we infinitely strive to the accomplishment of the task. In the article of 1784 the conclusion reads: because the realization of the whole task exceeds the limits and capacities of individual earthly existence, the individual cannot be the addressee of the summons. Nature orders this task to the species. The species is immortal, we die. Our goal is not happiness, but self-sacrifice for the next generations.

* * *

- 22 Now, if the destination of the human being absolutely considered as a historical being consists of following the goal of nature and that this goal is pursued by means of the unsociable sociability, war, revolution, etc., can every act for the progress of humanity be considered as a moral action? Another question: if the progress of humanity ordered by nature implies the cultivation of reason and the creation of institutions that guarantee freedom: is Enlightenment really an emancipation from nature or a free resolution to politically intervene in history in order to accelerate the hidden plan of nature?
- 23 Before we leave Kant for entering in the Fichtean universe, we have to admit that this consideration of cosmopolitanism in IaG is incompatible with the other versions of Kant's cosmopolitanism, which agree with the main concepts, principles and lines of his philosophical program. We have mentioned two main problems: the first one concerns the method: Kant works genetically and the whole argument is apagogical, a kind of demonstration Kant actually rejects in the theory of method of his first critique. 44 The second one concerns the postulate of immortality of the soul: morals and politics clash with each other, but whereas in *Perpetual Peace* Kant seems to pose morals above politics, 45 in his article of 1784 we see Kant inverting this hierarchy as a solution.

Fichte

- 24 No doubt, Fichte's cosmopolitanism lacks the diversity of perspectives, nuances and the historical awareness of the Kantian account. Although this is correct, this does not mean that we cannot find or reconstruct different forms of cosmopolitanism in Fichte's philosophy. Hence, before I analyze the Fichtean version of the epistemological and ontologico-political cosmopolitanism, I would like to very briefly show to what extent Fichte's philosophy offers a religious, a moral, an educational and economic cosmopolitanism as well.
- 25 The core of Fichte's *religious cosmopolitanism* is to be found in his conviction that there is a universal religion above all particular ones. Fichte follows the Enlightenment credo that there is a religion in which all men agree. This universal religion, which constitutes the essence of every historically determined religion, is based on the premise that all rational individuals possess the same moral capacity and can understand the necessity and validity of universal moral principles. Unlike particular religions, conditioned through the *Zeitgeist*, history and culture, universal religion refers to a natural disposition of man to transcend the limits of given experience. ⁴⁶ Sharing the same natural disposition and moral faculties makes all individuals member of the same invisible church, of which each existing religion is the manifestation. ⁴⁷
- 26 Fichte's *moral cosmopolitanism* arises every time he deals with the unity of humanity in terms of a moral community of the idea of such a universal communion of moral individuals. ⁴⁸ But the moral formation of individuals needs culture and culture basically consists of education and, concerning the social aspect of subjectivities, *education in cosmopolitan values*. ⁴⁹
- 27 What about *economic cosmopolitanism*? In the Kantian account, free world trade or free market economy is crucial for the development of the real conditions of possibility for legal cosmopolitanism. Kant understands free world trade as a manifestation of the antagonism that characterizes human beings and States. ⁵⁰ On the contrary, according to Fichte perpetual peace, which is "the only rightful relation among States", ⁵¹ can be reached, only if we actually proceed in the opposite way, namely: obstructing and impeding free market. This is the conclusion of his protectionist treatise on *Political Economy Closed Commercial State*. ⁵² Fichte seems to have no confidence in the cunning of nature Kant thought to have discovered. Fichte's proposal for a political praxis towards perpetual peace is precisely an anti-natural move: neutralization or sublimation of desire. However, there is passage in Fichte's

Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters where Fichte seems to agree with Kant about the advantages for the progress of Humanity human antagonism brings about *when it is guided through nature*.⁵³ But these pages can be considered as the exception that confirms the rule. In this passage, Fichte talks about a cosmopolitan sense (*Weltbürgersinne*) for considering human history.⁵⁴ Hence, there is for Fichte a kind of cosmopolitan point of view and consequently an epistemological cosmopolitanism as well. Like Kant, Fichte defends the idea of a cosmopolitan consideration of human history and destiny in teleological terms: there is a plan, there is a goal, there is providence. But Fichte is not as radical as Kant in secularizing the history and the destiny of humanity. Nature is for Fichte not the real name for *providence*. Human destiny goes beyond the limits of this life and this earth.

- 28 In his *Letters to Konstant*, published in 1802 in the journal *Eleusinien des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts oder Resultate vereinigter Denker über Philosophie und Geschichte der Freimaurerei*, we find an attempt at explaining epistemological cosmopolitanism. According to Fichte the goal of Freemasonry is the same goal of humanity as historically situated: the “common cultivation of the pure human being”.⁵⁵ For achieving this goal there are according to Fichte three steps man has to accomplish: firstly, the creation of a pure moral and religious community, secondly the establishment of an absolute state of law on domestic and international levels, and, thirdly, the total dominance of nature under the authority of rational will.⁵⁶ The cultivation of a cosmopolitan sense concerns the second step.
- 29 In all three tasks Freemasonry can contribute to elevate citizens above individual and social egoism so they develop a perspective on moral, religious, political, cultural and scientific issues that coincides with the point of view of the human being as such, namely the individual absolutely emancipated from historical and cultural biases.⁵⁷ Like Kant, this elevation does not mean that individuals arrive at a neutral point of view. But unlike Kant, Fichte conceives cultivation, culture and work for the progress of humanity within a horizon of *transcendence*, since the main principle in his lectures on Freemasonry reads: “the final goal of the human existence is absolutely not to be found in this present world. *This first life is only preparation and germ of a higher existence*”.⁵⁸ *This world is not the only one nor the higher one. This world is teleologically subordinated to a higher existence. The relativization of this world can be seen in Fichte’s conviction that cosmopolitanism, as Kant understands it, is inconsistent, since “there is no world other than the moral world”.*⁵⁹ The human being is a goal in itself and the cultivation of its potentialities is a component of the absolute or, better, of the real goal in itself.

- 30 According to Fichte, what we need for the political progress of humanity are cosmopolitan minded citizens. Because the cosmopolitan point of view let people critically consider their own nation-state, laws and customs. ⁶⁰ So, only a cosmopolitan minded national citizen can positively contribute to the political progress of his or her own state. This progress implies of course establishment of rational (rightful) international relations. But the international order Fichte proposes, is only possible if the representatives of each nation-state are cosmopolitan minded, because Fichte thinks of this solution not as result of social antagonism, but as a result of mutual renounce to imperialist pretensions. Again: Kant's nature as (sadistic) providence has disappeared in Fichte's account. Instead, Fichte appeals to individual freedom and altruism as the motor of history.
- 31 Peace on earth is according to Fichte only possible through an unconditional and universal renounce to imperialism. For this purpose, the progress of Humanity needs authorities educated in cosmopolitan values and capable of considering political affairs from a cosmopolitan point of view. Although the establishment of a rational international state of law needs cosmopolitan minded politicians, law of nations and cosmopolitan law are two very different things in the Fichtean philosophy of right. Neither international order nor the principles for a confederation of nations is according to Fichte a matter of cosmopolitan law. Fichte considers that cosmopolitan law concerns the relation between states and individuals *without* state or belonging to a state that is not recognized by the state the individual wants to enter. ⁶¹
- 32 Cosmopolitan right is for Fichte "the right to go about freely on the earth and offer to establish rightful connections with others". ⁶² This right is, according to Fichte "the original human right which precedes all rightful contracts and which alone makes them possible", namely "the right to every other human being's expectation to be able to enter into a rightful relation with him through contracts". ⁶³
- 33 Hence, cosmopolitan right is the only human right that belongs to the human being as such: the right to be able to acquire rights. The original character of cosmopolitan right refers to the fact that it is a right that does not depend on conventions or contracts, it is right based on human nature. Cosmopolitan right is inherent to the *being* of the human being. In dealing with a law problem Fichte brings us back to ontology. The cosmopolitan understood as individual without citizenship coincides with the individual as the political basis for the creation of a state of law: both are situated outside of the scope of any state, both have the right and capacity for entering in rightful relations with other individuals and states. The pre-contractual

subject of the beginning of the deduction of right in Fichte's *Foundation of Natural Right* and the cosmopolitan deduced at the end of the same work are situated in the domain of moral consciousness depicted in the schema of hierarchic structures of all level of political intersubjectivity in Fichte's writing on the French Revolution. ⁶⁴ So, cosmopolitan law and the concept of the cosmopolitan close the circle of Fichte's political ontology.

- 34 The cosmopolitan is the individual without positive rights and because of this is the only one capable of creating new rightful relations. Essentially it is the same subjectivity that is involved in the social contract, in the right of revolution and in the political and cultural cultivation and education of humanity.

Conclusions

- 35 As a conclusion I would like to sum up some points of the present paper that can help for outlining further research in the cosmopolitan theories of Kant and Fichte:
- 36 i) A close reading of Kant's IaG does not only show that epistemological cosmopolitanism is related to the idea of an ontological continuity where reason appears as a *product* of nature, nature is redefined as a *secularized* version of providence and the *political* idea of cosmopolitanism is deduced as a result of a natural process, but also sheds light in internal conceptual and methodological tensions within the Kantian philosophy. Tensions that make every attempt at bringing a harmonious image of the Kantian universe appear a little bit suspicious. Integrating in the very-well known variations of Kant's cosmopolitanism its ontologico-political version serves for abandoning the research hypothesis of a compatibility in Kant's cosmopolitanisms or at least for reconsidering the limits and usefulness of such an hypothesis.
- 37 ii) Fichte's philosophy offers like the Kantian a diversity of forms of cosmopolitanism. Unlike the Kantian cosmopolitanisms, there are no methodological or conceptual short-circuits, since in dealing with cosmopolitanism, Fichte does not abandon his metaphysical presuppositions. But his decision for transcendence and metaphysical freedom does not let him to consider human historicity in its own complexity. Contrary to Kant's proposal, Fichte's cosmopolitan remains a *sojourner* in this world. Nevertheless, according to Fichte this way of living on earth is a true or authentic way of dwelling in the world because it follows the last goal of rational beings. It is quite interesting to observe how the issue of epistemological, cultural and educational cosmopolitanism makes Fichte a little bit aware of historicity. It is also true that the issue of Freemasonry

contributes also for the development of a kind of historical awareness in Fichte's philosophy. Fichte had to justify the necessity of secret societies, of groups working (conspiring) outside of the scope of the State. But Fichte's awareness of the inherence of historicity to the rational being has its limits. He cannot admit that positive side Kant saw in war and social antagonism. For Fichte cosmopolitanism or better peacefully international order is only possible by means of the renouncement of all states to any kind of imperialism. The principle seems to read: the fewer the contacts among states are, the better this is for peace on earth and moral progress of humanity.

- 38 iii) Kant and Fichte's cosmopolitan theories encompass a cosmopolitan political ontology. By both philosophers, the cosmopolitan component is inherent to human ontology. In this regard, the word 'cosmopolitan' ceases to be a predicate and becomes a noun, the subject of an enunciation. By both philosophers, cosmopolitan ontology serves for the legitimation of a cosmopolitan view of politics. By each philosopher, these terms acquire a different content, the discourse has a different epistemological status, the nature of the postulated necessity differs as well. In dealing with cosmopolitanism, both philosophers offer original insights. Kant develops a philosophy of history wherein nature and reason are communicated in an ontological continuity that clashes with some main points of his critical philosophical program. It is a secularized history of salvation that can be considered as a theologico-political reading of human nature. In the legal treatment of cosmopolitanism, Fichte gives the term cosmopolitan a new meaning: she is the human being as such in three different views: in its immediacy as pre-contractual existing free or moral being, secondly, as citizen artificially stripped off of all legal-institutional mediations, and, thirdly, as lacking any citizenship at all.
- 39 iv) In Fichte's philosophy, like in the Kantian account, the cosmopolitan becomes flesh, but she does not have primarily to be identified with the merchants and intellectuals in Königsberg, the Dutch in Japan or the British in India. Fichte seems to be more interested in the other extreme of capitalism: the individual without any citizenship at all or without any right, the illegal migrant, the refugee. In her lacking of citizenship and rights, the cosmopolitan incarnates a summons for creating the needed legal framework that can positively integrate this outside of legality. From a Fichtean point of view we could say that today refugee crisis is a call to reinventing international and cosmopolitan law as well as rethinking Europe and nation-states.
- 40 v) The main point of divergence between both philosophers concerning cosmopolitanism seems to be their conceptions of nature and their attitude

toward secularization and immanence/transcendence. Other differences, for instance their philosophies of history, their view on economy and human progress, their expectations about and hope in what human consciously can bring about for the progress of humanity, can be grouped as deduced from the opposition in their conceptions on nature and the limits of human existence.

NOTES

1. I cited Kant's writings from KANT, I., *Gesammelte Schriften* (AA), ed. Vol. 1-22 Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 23 Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, ab vol. 24 Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1900ff., following the list of Sigla proposed by the Kant-Studien https://www.degruyter.com/view/supplement/s16131134_Instructions_for_Authors_en.pdf (seen on 12/09/2017). I cited Fichte's writings from FICHTE, J. G., *Gesamtausgabe* (GA), ed. by LAUTH, R. et al., Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1964ff..
2. The most representative studies are KLEINGELD, P., *Kant and Cosmopolitanism . The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; CAVALLAR, G., *Kant's Embedded Cosmopolitanism. History, Philosophy and Education for World Citizens*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.
3. IaG, AA 08:18 and 30. See also the papers on this Kantian writing collected in Oksenberg Rorty, A. & Schmidt, J., *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim. A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
4. See for instance JAMES, D., *Fichte's Republic: Idealism, History and Nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015; GODDARD, J-Chr. et al., *Fichte et la politique*, Milano: Polimetrica, 2009 and RADRIZZANI, I., "Ist Fichtes Modell des Kosmopolitismus pluralistisch", in: *Fichte-Studien* 2 (1990), pp. 7-19.
5. Zöller, G. & JAMES, D. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
6. CAVALLAR, G., "Cosmopolitanisms in Kant's Philosophy", in: *Ethics and Global Policy* 5/2 (2012), pp. 95-118 and *Kant's Embedded Cosmopolitanism*.
7. CAVALLAR, G., "Cosmopolitanisms in Kant's Philosophy", pp. 99-100 and 113-114, fn. 19.
8. CAVALLAR, G., *Kant's Embedded Cosmopolitanism*, p. 28.
9. *Ib.* pp. 23-27 and 86-87.
10. *Ib.* p. 5.
11. *Reflexionen zur Anthropologie*, AA 15: 518.

12. *ib.* p. 24.
13. *ib.* p. 5.
14. *ib.* p. 25-26.
15. CAVALLAR, G., “Cosmopolitanisms in Kant’s Philosophy”, pp. 102.
16. IaG 08:17-18 and 29-30. See also RAULET, G. “La téléologie critique et ses paradigmes scientifiques”, in: *Con-textos kantianos* 1 (2015), p. 34 and WOOD, A. W., “Kant’s Philosophy of History”, in: KLEINGELD, P. (ed.), *Toward Perpetual Peace and other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*, New York: Yale University Press, 2006, pp. 245.
17. IaG, AA 08: 17 and 28.
18. See for instance KrV B 490-504 and GA I/3, 75-90 (*Über Belebung und Erhöhung des reinen Interesse für Wahrheit*, 1795).
19. IaG, AA 08:30.
20. IaG, AA 08:28. See also WA, AA 08:39.
21. LACLAU, E., *On Populist Reason*, London: Verso, 2005, pp. 67-72.
22. ZeF, AA 08:369.
23. IaG, AA 08:20.
24. ZeF, AA 08:367 fn..
25. KLEINGELD, P. “Kant’s Changing Cosmopolitanism”, in RORTY, A. O. & SCHMIDT, J. (eds.) *Kant’s Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 179.
26. IaG, AA 08:20-22, 24-26 and 30; ZeF, AA 08:360-368.
27. Anth, AA 09:330-333.
28. IaG, AA 08: 18, 20-22 and 24.
29. IaG, AA 08:17, 20-21 and 27.
30. IaG, AA 08:17 and 30.
31. ZeF, AA 08:363 and 368.
32. IaG, AA 08:27.
33. IaG, AA 08:468.
34. IaG AA 08:30.
35. See for instance MENTZEL, H., *Gründliche Anleitung, billig und recht nach göttlicher Absicht von der Freyheit des Menschen zu urtheilen*, Leipzig/Bresslau, 1739; BENGEL, J. A., *Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis oder vielmehr Jesu Christi*, Stuttgart, 1740, p. 345 and CHRISTLIEB, W. B., *Gründliche Beurtheilung des Zeit-Punkts darinnen wir nach der Offenbarung Jesu Christi gegenwertig [sic] leben*, Frankfurt a.M./Leipzig, 1758, p. 30.
36. AA 15:517.
37. IaG, AA 08:30.
38. RezHerder, AA 08:52-55.
39. IaG AA 08:17-18.
40. IaG AA 08:20 and 30. See also WA, AA 08:41.
41. For a more exhaustive analysis of Kant’s concept of nature in IaG see my “Racionalização da Natureza: Cosmopolitismo kantiano como uma predisposição natural?”, in: *Studia Kantiana* v. 14 n. 21 (2016) pp. 55-76.

42. IaG, AA 08:19-20.
43. KpV, AA 05:122-124.
44. KrV B 817-822.
45. ZeF, AA 08:380.
46. See for instance GA II/1, 287-291 (*Einige Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus*, 1790); GA I/1, 19-21 (*Versuch einer Critik aller Offenbarung*, 1792/93); GA I/5, 348 (*Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung*, 1798); GA I/8, 446-447 (*Philosophie der Maurerei. Briefe an Konstant*, 1802) GA II/5, 136 (*Rückerinnerungen, Antworten und Fragen*, 1799); GA I/9, 68-69 (*Die Anweisung zum seeligen Leben*, 1806); GA II/12, 333 (*Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, 1811).
47. See for instance GA I/1, 371 (*Beitrag zur Berichtigung des Publikums über die französische Revolution*, 1793); GA I/5, 213 and 303-304 (*Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*, 1798).
48. See for instance GA I/2, 89 (*Über die Würde des Menschen*, 1794); GA I/8, 197-202 (*Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, 1806).
49. See for instance GA II/7, 12-13 (*Aphorismen über Erziehung*, 1804) GA II/9, 366 (*Ideen für die innere Organisation der Universität Erlangen* (1806) and GA I/10, 189 (*Reden an die deutsche Nation*, 1808).
50. IaG, AA 08:27, see also ZeF AA 08:367.
51. GA I/4, 162 (*Grundlage des Naturrechts nach den Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*, 1796/97).
52. GA I/7, 119, 138 and 141 (*Der geschlossene Handelsstaat*, 1800).
53. GA I/8, 361-363 (*Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, 1806).
54. GA I/8, 363.
55. GA I/8, 431 (*Philosophie der Maurerei. Briefe an Konstant*, 1802).
56. GA I/8, 440.
57. GA I/8, 426.
58. GA I/8, 439.
59. GA II/12, 118 (*Die Tatsachen des Bewusstseyns*, 1810/11)
60. GA I/8, 450 (*Philosophie der Maurerei*).
61. GA I/4, 163 (*Grundlage des Naturrechts*).
62. GA I/4, 164.
63. GA I/4, 163.
64. GA I/1, 279 (*Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution*, 1793/94)

ABSTRACTS

In this paper, I present some preliminary considerations on relevant, but, as far as I know, still unexplored, aspects of the Kantian and Fichtean conceptions of cosmopolitanism. These aspects can be grouped in three thematic axes: the ontologico-political (not legal) side of the cosmopolitan conceptions of both philosophers, the existence of a diversity of forms of cosmopolitanism in Fichte's philosophy, and the idea and role of nature, economy and history in Kant and Fichte's cosmopolitanism.

INDEX

Keywords: Kant, Fichte, cosmopolitanism

AUTHOR

EMILIANO ACOSTA

Vrije Universiteit Brussel/Ghent University

Freedom and Matter: From Kant to Fichte

Aaron Wells

- 1 Fichte's mature conception of transcendental freedom is the subject of some controversy. ¹ This paper hopes to shed light on Fichte's later conception by examining his earliest thoughts on the matter. The focus is on three pivotal years of Fichte's development, 1791-93.
- 2 During these years, Fichte had a number of interlocutors. But Kant was of central importance. Thus I begin with a discussion of Fichte's reflections on how a broadly Kantian conception of transcendental freedom can be manifest in the empirical world. However, Fichte's moves at this point are broadly unsatisfactory, even dogmatic, from a Kantian perspective.
- 3 However, in several short works from 1792, Fichte's views become significantly more sophisticated. Fichte confronts the worry that neither a metaphysical account of the natural world, nor a *mere* appeal to 'facts of consciousness,' can be sufficient to establish autonomy in the positive sense.
- 4 Fichte responds to these worries in two ways. One, relatively well known, is his attempt to prove the existence of practical reason from features of self-consciousness. I focus instead on Fichte's account of moral motivation added to the 1793 second edition of the *Attempt at a Critique of all Revelation*. There, Fichte sketches an account of pure practical motivation that does not depend on direct appeal to features of self-consciousness, but is more in line with Kant's own appeal to the moral law.

A. 1791: Fichte's Earliest Account of Freedom

- 5 Kant's first conception of freedom in the 1760s was compatibilist. He argues in the *New Elucidation* free human actions are spontaneous just because they issue from "an inner principle" (*New Elucidation* 1:402). They are "called forth by...motives of the understanding applied to the will, whereas in the case of brute animals or physico-mechanical actions everything is necessitated in

conformity with external stimuli and impulses...” (NE 1:401). For the early Kant, then, to show that I am free it would suffice to show that my series of representations is causally self-contained – not in interaction with anything “outside.” Under the influence of Crusius, Kant quickly came to doubt this hypothesis: for even a lonely monad could be entirely determined in a lawlike way.

- 6 Additionally, by the early 1770s, especially in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant came to worry about any account of the causal interaction between the inner properties and those of spatial experience. That is: if inner properties are really not spatial in any sense, how could they have physical effects? How could my desires, for instance, lead to me raising my arm? Kant does not think efficient causality *as such* is a deep mystery. The success of Newtonian physics, by his lights, outweighs skeptical doubts about determinism. Yet the example of physics makes the problem of inner properties apparent. The law of gravitation, for instance, makes essential reference to distance. Therefore it presupposes some account of space. The same is true of other kinds of interaction among bodies, such as collision. We have no determinate idea of what non-spatial efficient causality would be like.
- 7 As is well known, while Kant’s transcendental idealism is a theoretical account, its practical import is of central importance. It is intended to make metaphysical room for undetermined agents, which would be transcendently free. For Kant, lack of external determination is a necessary but not sufficient condition for autonomy.
- 8 Fichte was a careful if idiosyncratic reader of Kant. Developmentally, Fichte seems to have become concerned with the first question around the time he first read Kant. His sketch of a response in the 1791 *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* appeals to the *matter* [*Materie*] of the world of experience – though as I suggest below, Fichte’s argument is vulnerable to Kantian objections.
- 9 He keenly appreciates the connection between revelation (and other divine action) and a Kantian metaphysics of transcendental freedom. Both involve the causal influence of a spontaneous, non-physical being on the deterministic natural order. ² For as Fichte defines the concept, revelation would be “an effect produced by God in the sensuous world by means of supernatural causality” (ACR 144; passage omitted in second edition).
- 10 Yet following Kant, Fichte notes that free finite beings could also “through freedom become a cause in the sensuous world” (ACR 146; passage omitted in second edition). This makes empirical identification of revelation virtually impossible even if one could be *certain* that it is not due to the laws of spatiotemporal nature. For, to put it simply, one cannot ever be sure that a given experience originates in God, and not in finite freedom. Fichte makes

an apparent exception for the pure feeling of respect for the moral law, but this evidently does not conform to typical doctrinal conceptions of revelation.

11 Some of Fichte's remarks seem to suggest a picture on which the laws of nature are up to our own constructive activity. However, while laws do depend on categories and forms of intuition, they are necessary and not freely constructed (ACR 15 / SW V:23; added in second edition). Fichte in fact claims that no object is determinable by absolute spontaneity except the form of our own faculty of desire, which can be freely determined in actual volitions, as "empirical determination[s]" (ACR 16 / SW V:25; added in second edition).

12 So, even if one grants transcendental freedom to finite agents, the question is then how it can have effects in the natural world. There is only one solution, Fichte suggests:

Their effects in the world of sense...do meet and must not contradict each other, unless either natural cognition [*Naturerkenntnis*], on the one hand, or the causality of freedom required by practical reason in the world of sense, on the other, is to be impossible. Now the possibility of this agreement of two legislations entirely independent of each other can be conceived in no other way than by their common dependence on a higher legislation that underlies both but which is completely inaccessible to us. If we were able to take its principle as a basis for a world view, then...one and the same effect...appears to us in relation to the world of sense as free according to the moral law, and when attributed to the causality of reason, appears in nature as *contingent*. But...we are not able to do so... (ACR 88 / SW V:108).

13 Fichte's appeal to a conceivable divine standpoint at this stage departs in a subtle but important way from Kant. For Kant, one need not appeal to any higher legislation to safeguard the theoretical possibility that freedom and spatiotemporal law are not in conflict. The resolution of the Third Antinomy, that is, requires no appeal to a divine or supersensible perspective. Such a perspective instead enters into Kant's projects of moral theology in the third *Critique* and beyond.

14 By contrast, Fichte appeals to a divine worldview regarding the mere theoretical possibility of effects of freedom in the natural world.

15 Yet Fichte denies that we can take up the higher standpoint. We can only conceive such a standpoint. That is, we could never occupy a position from which nature and freedom are part of a single legislation. Therefore, Fichte suggests, we must assume

that not all appearances in the world of sense are necessary according to natural laws alone, but rather that many of them are only contingent; and that accordingly we must not explain them all *from* the laws of nature, but

some rather merely *according to* natural laws. To *explain something according to natural laws*, however, means to assume the causality of the matter of the effect to be outside nature, but the causality of the form of the effect to be within nature. All appearances in the world of sense must be capable of explanation according to the laws of nature, for otherwise they could never become an object of knowledge. (ACR 88-9; SW V:108)

- 16 Fichte's suggestion is that scientific laws are formal, leaving some matter undetermined.
- 17 One way to interpret this is traditional and metaphysical. One can interpret the matter in question as part of the actual material world. In particular, this matter might be thought of as the 'initial conditions' of the actual world (supposing there are any). The same set of natural laws will have very different effects across time depending on the initial conditions.
- 18 The Fichte of the *Attempt* certainly seems interested in this sort of picture. He suggests that we can conceive – but not occupy – a God's-eye point of view, from which
nothing is natural and nothing supernatural, nothing...necessary and nothing contingent, nothing is possible and nothing actual. Negatively we can assert this much for certain, obliged by the laws of *our* thought; but if we wanted to determine the modality of his understanding positively, we would become transcendent. So there can be no question at all concerning how *God* could conceive of a supernatural effect in the world of sense as possible and how he could actually do it; but rather how *we* are able to conceive of an appearance as effected by a supernatural causality of God. (ACR 89).
- 19 There are a number of Kantian worries about such an approach. First, Fichte might seem to skip over more 'modest' responses to the issue. That is, he takes it that only the idea of something radically beyond a number of theoretically essential concepts can make even the possibility of freedom coherent. Despite Kant's own dabblings with the intuitive intellect late in the third *Critique*, he does not take any such speculation to be required for conceiving the *mere* possibility of freedom.
- 20 Second, for all the ambition of his claims, Fichte gives us little help in using this idea to foster our *own* speculative perspective on nature and freedom. That is, he confidently claims we can know "how God could conceive" the solution to the relevant problems: but do we know this? And if so, what use is it to us?
- 21 Third, Fichte ends up seeming committed to many appearances being "only contingent" and not falling under the laws of nature whatsoever. That is, his attempt to vindicate transcendental freedom seems to undermine the explanatory autonomy of science. And I tend to doubt Fichte would let science fall this way (even if it is of far less philosophical interest for him

than for Kant or Schelling).

- 22 Finally, and most importantly, Fichte at most provides what Kant would consider necessary conditions for genuine autonomy. For Kant, autonomy involves a legislative ability to grasp and apply the moral law, as well as an executive capacity to initiate acts in accordance with the moral law.³ Yet this seems to involve at least the possibility of self-conscious purposiveness, which a mere metaphysical account of negative freedom cannot provide.

B. 1792: Two Reviews and Fichte's Doubts

- 23 In two important reviews published in 1792 – of 'Aenesidemus' and F. H. Gebhard – Fichte registers significant doubts with his earliest published account of freedom.
- 24 With Schulze's publication of the 'Aenesidemus' essay in 1792 Fichte became highly concerned with the effects of the matter [*Stoff*] of intuition (i.e., sensation) on our theoretical spontaneity, as seen in his review. This became a central preoccupation in the development of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. As such, it will be helpful to briefly examine both Schulze's claims and
- 25 Schulze's 'Aenesidemus' was very influential in renewing interest in theoretical skepticism among the German Idealists, raising the problem of 'givenness' and the unknown causes of our representations. However, Schulze himself never formulates the problem in the terms adopted by Fichte, and it seems fair to say that the questions the review provoked in Fichte far outrun Schulze's actual philosophical claims.
- 26 Fichte asserts in his review that practical and theoretical philosophy take the "same steps" in different directions; a critical, transcendental philosophy will avoid the pitfalls both of popular philosophical theoretical realism and popular philosophical action theory (*EPW* 75-6). Still, until its final pages, Fichte's review largely focuses on theoretical issues.
- 27 Let's begin with the problem as Schulze sees it. In Reinhold, and by extension Kantian philosophy in general, Schulze finds an uncritical acceptance of a "something" which is "the cause and condition of the actuality of representations" (*FKtH* 108). Here Schulze seems to run together various Kantian concepts, such as the unknown ground of the fact of representation in Reinhold and the unknown affecting cause(s) of sensation in Kant. For Schulze, there is merely a classical skeptical problem here. As Schulze correctly notes, the 'somethings' in question cannot be determinately known. How, Schultze then asks, can we be sure that they exist (*FKtH* 108)?
- 28 Fichte has a different reading of the problem. He worries that causal affection by an unknown objective ground threatens to make reference and

intelligibility more generally depend on an unintelligible brute given. If this really is what Reinhold and Beck think, Fichte reasons, their philosophical projects would be seriously undermined. Where Schulze was basically an empirical skeptic, Fichte's worries concern deep structural features of Kantian philosophy.

- 29 Fichte's frequent references to *matter* in this regard draw on some of Kant's technical terminology. Kant claimed that sensation is the matter of intuition. Sensation can mostly be characterized negatively. Form and matter are relative terms. Sensation is the matter of intuition.
- 30 What of sensation itself? In Kant's technical sense, sensation as such is not 'for' conscious subjects. It is sub-personal, like the models involved in the course of our visual processing. So its laws are not reflectively accessible to us. One positive point Kant does make clear is that sensation is the result of causal affection which is not up to us. ⁴
- 31 'Matter' in fact translates two terms in Fichte's German. When Fichte speaks of the subject-matter of physics and the sciences, or the relative correlate of form, he often uses *Materie*. With respect to the Kantian sense, where matter is prior to all synthesis, even of space and time, Fichte often uses *Stoff*. This is the term that usually appears in his technical philosophical works, such as the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. ⁵
- 32 Kant himself does not explicitly appeal to matter in his account of transcendental freedom. ⁶
- 33 The 'matter' of *experience*, through which we cognize effects, is intuition. Intuitions are temporal, and subject to causality. So this cannot be construed as a 'gap' in Kantian nature, where freedom finds a way in. In the third *Critique* and beyond, Kant does develop accounts of matter that may go beyond space and time, for instance in his discussion of genius. The beauty of products of genius can be grounded not in rules, or determinate concepts, but only "that which is merely nature in the subject...namely, the supersensible substrate" (*CJ* 5:344). Kant maintains that genius is still rooted in what is natural, agential, and even rational – though the nature of this grounding is unknown to us. Still, Kant seems open to the possibility that the grounds of sensation, which are basically unknowable from the empirical perspective, could be effects of supersensible activity.
- 34 Fichte is aware of relative uses of 'matter' and 'form' in Kant (*ACR* 15 / *SW* V:23). He generally uses *Materie* in this relative sense, and *Stoff* to refer to what is prior to all synthesis – feeling or sensation – in abstraction from all normative contributions of the understanding. Thus what he has in mind is not the subject-matter of physics, defined in terms of laws. The term simply picks out what we causally ground in abstraction from nomological

specification. ⁷

- 35 Let us return to Fichte's 'Aenesidemus' review. He clearly thinks Schulze never appreciated the depth of the problems touched on in his own essay. Epistemologically, Schulze assumes it would make sense for the normativity of the forms of judgment to simply result from a causal process as such, absent any further lawlike specification (*EPW* 68-9). Now, Fichte need not deny causal affection entirely. But a mere causal, informational, or sense-datum account leaves propositional normativity inexplicable. Fichte's difficult example from the review concerns the reason why perceptual experiences *must* be regarded as actual. Schulze suggested such reasons could simply be given *in* perceptual experience itself. The idea that the phenomenology of perception involves a distinctive immediacy has enjoyed considerable popularity since Schulze's time. But the mere immediate quality of perception seems quite insufficient – for surely the bee's perceptions are immediate for it as well.
- 36 Metaphysically, Fichte suggests that a position like Schulze's might as well be Spinozism. For it makes the unknown "not-self" into "the real ground of everything," and we arrive at "Spinoza's fatalism" (*H&L* 146). If Kant had assumed causal affection in the way Schulze accused, Fichte suggests in a 1797 letter to Reinhold, Kant would be "in utter contradiction with himself, and this would be obvious to everyone" (*EPR*, 420). While I can hardly consider Fichte's numerous discussions of this issue here, he usually seems to deny that Kant endorses causal affection in the way Schulze suggests. For example, he explicitly claims in the 'Second Introduction' to the *Wissenschaftslehre* that on "Kant's view" as well as Fichte's own, knowledge does not proceed from "affection by an object" (to the, *H&L* 60).
- 37 However, from this perspective one might worry about Fichte's claims in the first edition of the *Attempt* that we must think the entire world as a supernatural effect of God, and its matter as potentially supernatural effects of freedom – even if this is a matter of faith and not objective certainty. For if the form or *laws* of the world are thought as an effect that is itself lawless or 'supernatural,' some form of Spinozism threatens. Similarly, one might worry that the effects of freedom in the world, even if they are stipulated to be 'ours,' are deeply inscrutable, rather like the "hidden root" of all representation appealed to in Reinhold and J.S. Beck. Yet the 'Aenesidemus' review and the new edition of the *Attempt* already begin to tackle responses to this problem: that sensation or feeling has a strictly circumscribed role in moral psychology and theoretical justification. Moreover, this role can be *transcendentally* specified in a way that abstracts from the 'hidden' causal origins of sensation or feeling.

- 38 I take Fichte himself to allow for an empirical story on which there is causal affection underlying sensation. In the 1794 “Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*” Fichte explicitly contrasts that project with that of the empirical sciences. The question of outer determination of mental acts cannot “occur within the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself” (EPW 120). Nonetheless, this is hardly an unintelligible question. In fact, since it concerns lawlike *determination*, it must be a matter for “the particular sciences” (EPW 120). This causal story is a mere empirical matter of fact. In questions *quid juris*, it plays no role. From the transcendental standpoint, causal affection plays no role in experience. This is what licenses strong (and often misleading) Fichteian claims that even feeling is dependent on the activity of the ‘I’: he means that feeling *for us* requires the activity of the ‘I,’ and from a transcendental perspective one cannot even cogently speaking of feeling apart from its being for us. ⁸
- 39 One might object that Kant seemingly does posit a ‘real ground’ of sensation in certain passages. ⁹ In fact, many interpreters of Fichte from Hegel onwards have taken the Fichteian *Anstoss* to itself be a transcendental real ground – something like the thing in itself, or even a mechanical cause affecting the subject. ¹⁰ More charitable readings of both Kant and Fichte are available, however. On Fichte’s own interpretation of the Critical Kant, reality is an empirical and ‘human’ matter for anthropology; the real in sensation can be ‘anticipated,’ but only by calling attention to features of space and time as such. So the ‘matter’ of sensation plays no substantive role in Kant’s transcendental epistemology. Similarly, Fichte refers to the *Anstoss* in a highly indeterminate way, even though in each actual empirical case it is determinate ‘factive’ consciousness.
- 40 Fichte sometimes casts himself as simply working out and justifying Kant’s insights. as he writes to Niethammer in 1793, “whoever shows us how Kant arrived at this substrate without extending the causal law beyond its limits will have understood Kant” (EPW 369). Up to a point, Kant would be entirely in agreement with Fichte’s claims, given his denial of any substantive transcendental role for the ground of sensory affection. However, it must be stressed that Fichte sharply breaks with Kant regarding ‘empirical’ and ‘transcendental’ questions of freedom. For Fichte, what Kant considered mere empirical spontaneity – whether theoretical or practical – becomes a central question for transcendental philosophy. By contrast, the question of *metaphysical* transcendental freedom as a causal power, which is at the heart of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, in Fichte quickly becomes regarded as a question for the empirical sciences, not philosophy. ¹¹

- 41 However, Kantian doubts about such a program might remain: one could worry that Fichte fails to exclude substantial metaphysical threats to our merely *negative* freedom from external determination. Does this mean Fichte's position is dogmatic, from a Kantian point of view? ¹² It is unclear that Fichte's position need conflict with Kant's; in fact, Fichte may turn away from the metaphysics of transcendental freedom because he took Kant to have said all that was needed on the subject. ¹³ It is very possible – if far from certain – that in his last writings Kant himself aimed to revisit the relation between theoretical spontaneity and causal affection. ¹⁴ Kant's project there can be seen not as an uncritical attempt at a priori physics, but as seeking to specify in greater detail the conditions of cognitive activity under which sensation comes to play a justificatory role.
- 42 But leaving Kant's late work aside, it is worth noting that Fichte addresses such issues – at least to some degree – in his review of Gebhard's *On Ethical Goodness as Disinterested Benevolence*. ¹⁵ Fichte is largely uninterested in the details of this work, rather viewing it as an occasion for reflection on the Kantian theory of freedom and motivation.
- 43 Much of Gebhard's work purports to defend Kant against a theory of morality based on a disinterested or benevolent drive, as defended in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Fichte regards both Smithian moral psychology and Gebhard's responses as crude. However, he takes the discussion to get at a deep threat to the Kantian system.
- 44 We are to consider the hypothesis that our motivation towards what is right is a primitive drive which “cannot be derived from something higher, and indeed, from practical reason” (*RevG* 303). This hypothesis is basically Humean, since it denies pure practical reason any ultimate motivational force. Instead, on this hypothesis our ‘actions’ are ultimately just the product of a contest of force between drives. Yet we are not directly aware of this context – and perhaps cannot be. Thus it is unsurprising that the later Hume turns away from psychological self-analysis, and towards a descriptive program concerning our practices of praise and blame. ¹⁶
- 45 Per Fichte, it is not sufficient to object to this hypothesis that it “provides no ground for assuming the freedom of the will” (i.e., autonomy as a Kantian capacity to grasp the moral law) (*RevG* 304). For as Kant himself remarked in the second *Critique*, the ground or *ratio essendi* of the moral law is precisely autonomy in this sense. That is, if one denies any need for the legislative role of pure practical reason in morality, one “can get along very well without freedom” in the relevant Kantian sense (*RevG* 304).
- 46 More troubling still, such a hypothesis is seemingly compatible with familiar aspects of moral or motivational experience.

Genuine morality would of course be destroyed, and we would once again find ourselves fastened to the chain of natural necessity, but the facts of our consciousness would nevertheless be explained satisfactorily and with the utmost consistency; everything that is incomprehensible within the Kantian system would be eliminated and such [Kantian] morality would be shown to be an illusion. (RevG 304)

- 47 That is, the Humean hypothesis cannot be ruled out by appeal to immediate facts of common moral understanding. For as Fichte stresses, the hypothesis is quite compatible with an irreducible but *non-motivational* role for reason. The facts of consciousness alone cannot decide whether practical reason really exists, or whether the Humean hypothesis is in fact true.
- 48 Indeed, Fichte seems to suggest that Kant's account of theoretical cognition is basically compatible with its having no motivational role.¹⁷ Instead, reason would be constituted so as to anticipate and help bring about "happiness," where this term is understood as picking out the "ultimate goal" of our nature, of which we have no knowledge (RevG 304).
- 49 Interestingly, it need not be the case that on such a picture, agents are entirely determined by external factors. For it seemingly remains the case that our actions are determined by our essence or nature – though without any conscious or rational grasp *that* or *how* this occurs. Here Fichte appears deeply skeptical concerning the apparent spontaneity of theoretical reason (which may even include "the transformation of the feeling of 'must' into the feeling of 'ought'" (RevG 305)). This appearance of empirical spontaneity might simply be the result of ignorance of certain application conditions.
- 50 Fichte concludes by claiming that in a genuinely Kantian system, "it must be proven *that* reason is practical" – that is, that pure reason has motivational force (RevG 305). Here Fichte sketches such a proof, based on an appeal to the unity of self-consciousness. This unity must be in some sense unconditioned; yet only pure practical reason could be unconditioned in this sense – or so Fichte argues. This move foreshadows the arguments of his more famous *Wissenschaftslehre* .¹⁸ However, we will put such proofs aside here, in order to focus on the sections Fichte added to the second edition of the *Attempt* . For there, Kant links the problems discussed in two reviews of 1792, but does not directly tackle the question of proving that reason can determine the will.

C. 1793: Fichte's Revised Account of Freedom

- 51 Fichte's newly added section purports to provide a theory of the will. Fichte defines volition as the power "to determine oneself to produce a representation with the consciousness of one's own activity" (ACR 9 / SW V:16). Volition is the actualization of the faculty of desire. For one can have a

desire that does not determine the will.

- 52 Fichte's definition of volition begins with a distinction between two distinct aspects: "a representation" and "the consciousness of one's own activity." Of course, there is a sense in which the consciousness of one's own activity could be described as a representation. But it is precisely not the sort of representation involved in theoretical belief or cognition.
- 53 Thus Fichte claims that on the one hand, volition must take place with respect to some representational content, as when I imagine the soup I plan to order later. For Fichte, this content need not be cognitive: even sensation can be an 'objective' aspect of volition in this sense. However, Fichte recognizes that mere theoretical representation of this content seemingly cannot move one to act. ¹⁹
- 54 Instead, volition involves an additional, conative aspect, which is not at all manifest in what is representationally given to consciousness. The seeming fact of "consciousness of self-activity," Fichte allows, could simply arise from ignorance of unknown but genuinely determining causes (ACR 14 / SW V:16). That is, consciousness of self-activity in volition may well be deceptive. A plausible way to read the 'deception' is as concerning a gap between the lived experience of choice and spontaneity, and causal facts that would make it possible. While in that case there would be no willing at all, Fichte is so far presupposing that there is a will (ACR 14 / SW V:22).
- 55 However, the representational material or content already raises a number of philosophical issues. For it could be that one "self-actively produces" such material (ACR 9 / SW V:16). The far more common alternative is seemingly one in which represented object of volition is given from elsewhere, as "presupposed from theoretical philosophy" (ACR 9 / SW V:16).
- 56 The system of theoretical philosophy in the background here is, unsurprisingly, that of Kant's first *Critique*. For supposing the object of volition is not spontaneously produced, it will be an empirical object of inner sense. To return to the simple example above, my imagined representation of the soup is not possible from pure concepts and forms of intuition alone. It depends on what has actually been given to one in sensation. ²⁰
- 57 Here, Fichte takes up the basic line of questioning of the Gebhard review. The representation in question stands under logical and transcendental laws. But it is not a product of spontaneous action. For the forms of intuition and the categories, by Kant's lights, are simply not up for our spontaneous determination. Instead, they themselves are spontaneous in the much more minimal sense of synthesizing given manifolds of representation. Yet this empirical synthesis – as Kant would be the first to stress – is "applied to...objects with the feeling of necessity," rather than by way of self-

conscious representation or autonomy (ACR 15 / SW V:23).

- 58 As Fichte now stresses, so-called empirical spontaneity is merely an absence of *representational* determination by sensations or instincts. Yet these non-rational factors might continue to play a crucial role in determining motivation.
- 59 Nor can its standing under theoretical rules really explain its motivational role, which seemingly can only be referred to a primitive natural drive (albeit one that we are not conscious of). Again, consider my anticipation of the soup that will satisfy my hunger. What is motivationally essential is not the theoretical representation but desire and anticipation of future pleasure.
- 60 This need not be a problem for simple natural desires, such as hunger. It does become an issue if the representation in question is that of one's happiest possible life. For however one determines this state of affairs theoretically, its *motivational* role remains unclear. (To take a broadly Wolffian example, the 'perfection' of a state of affairs does not, seemingly, entail anything about its motivational role for me.) Moreover, it therefore seems that one's final end is merely a naturally determined fact, no different from the way in which our palate is tickled by hunger. That is, Fichte seems to be suggesting that apart from the case of spontaneity, inclinations determine the will in virtue of some future pleasure. This hedonistic view of motivation outside of the pure moral case is also frequently attributed to Kant. ²¹
- 61 Fichte adopts a surprising solution to the motivational problem. For he denies that finite beings like us are ever capable of "pure volition" (ACR 23 / SW V:33) That is, to return to his distinction between the representational object of volition and the conative determination towards it, only a divine being could spontaneously produce *both* these aspects.
- 62 Instead, for Fichte, pure practical reason does involve a grasp of the absolutely right. This is what Kant describes as the legislative or objective aspect of autonomy. Indeed, it seems that Fichte here remains deeply Kantian, in that he does not explicate pure practical reason in virtue of features of self-consciousness, but with respect to something like the moral law.
- 63 Yet since we are empirical beings, such a representation cannot automatically determine us to act, but must be combined with an empirical spring of action. That is, for finite beings like us, legislative autonomy involves spontaneous representational determination. A perfectly rational being would likewise be determined to act in accordance with the moral law; for such a being "no choice, no selection among different determinations" takes place (ACR 22 / SW V:32). Finite beings like us, by contrast, are not fully

conatively determined, but are subject to competing impulses, including an impulse of respect for the moral law.

- 64 Notably, Fichte here does not attempt to prove, on the basis of mere features of self-consciousness, the existence of a rich positive conception of autonomy. As such, ²² it is far from clear that Fichte took the problems surrounding autonomy to be easily solved by appealing to the features of a unifying subjectivity.

Primary Works Cited

- 65 (Works by Kant are cited using the standard Akademie and A/B paginations; I have followed the translations in the Cambridge edition.)
- 66 **EPW** | Fichte, J. G. (1988). *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*. Breazeale, D. (ed.). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 67 **GA** | Fichte, J.G. (1962ff.). *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog.
- 68 **H&L** | Fichte, J. G. (1970). *Fichte: Science of Knowledge*. Heath, P. and Lachs, J. (eds.). New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- 69 **RevG** | Fichte, J.G. (2001). "J.G. Fichte: Review of Friedrich Heinrich Gebhard, *On Ethical Goodness as Disinterested Benevolence*." Breazeale, D. (tr.). *Philosophical Forum* 32(4), 297-310.
- 70 **SoE** | Fichte, J.G. (2005). *The System of Ethics*. Breazeale, D. and Zöllner, G. (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 71 **SW** | Fichte, J.G. (1971). *Fichtes Werke*. Fichte, I. H. (ed.). Berlin: De Gruyter.

Secondary Works Cited

- 72 Ameriks, K. (2000). *The Fate of Autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 73 Breazeale, D. (2013). *Thinking through the Wissenschaftslehre: themes from Fichte's early philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 74 Druet, P. P. (1972). L'«Anstoss» fichtéen: essai d'élucidation d'une métaphore. *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 70(7), 384-392.
- 75 Emundts, D. (2004). *Kants Übergangskonzeption im Opus postumum: zur Rolle des Nachlasswerks für die Grundlegung der empirischen Physik*, Berlin: de Gruyter.
- 76 Goh, K. (2012). Between Determinism and Indeterminism: The Freedom of Choice in Fichte's *Das System der Sittenlehre*. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23(3), 439-455.

- 77 Guérault, M. (1920). L'antidogmatisme de Kant et de Fichte. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* , 27(2), 181-224.
- 78 Grüne, S. (2013). Kant and the Spontaneity of the Understanding. In Emundts, D. (ed.) *Self, World, and Art* . Berlin: De Gruyter.
- 79 Hall, B. (2016). Fichte and Kant on the Ground of Experience. *Contemporary Studies in Kantian Philosophy* , 1, 22-43.
- 80 Henrich, D. (1982). "Das Problem der Grundlegung der Ethik bei Kant und im spekulativen Idealismus," in: *Selbstverhältnisse: Gedanken und Auslegungen zu den Grundlagen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* . Stuttgart: Reclam, 6-56.
- 81 Kohl, M. (2015). Kant on Freedom of Empirical Thought. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53(2), 301-326.
- 82 Neuhouser, F. (1990). *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 83 Pippin, R. (2000). Fichte's Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism, in Sedgwick, S. (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 84 Prauss, G. (1983). *Kant über Freiheit als Autonomie* . Frankfurt a.M: Vittorio Klostermann.
- 85 Sellars, W. (1970). "...this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks..." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 44, 5-31.
- 86 Zöller, G. (2007). From Transcendental Philosophy to *Wissenschaftslehre*: Fichte's Modification of Kant's Idealism. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 15(2), 249-269.
-

NOTES

1. For an overview of issues in Fichte's *Doctrine of Ethics*, see Goh (2012). Henrich (1982) is a classic account of the relationship between Kantian autonomy and the texts of Fichte's earlier *Wissenschaftslehre*.
2. See Neuhouser (1990, 20).
3. Engstrom (1988) calls these *objective* and *subjective* autonomy, respectively.
4. Compare Reinhold's claim that the material foundations of his philosophical system is "consciousness as an actual fact" (FKtH 84).
5. Complicating the issue further is Fichte's difficult conception of 'feeling' (*Gefühl*). Fichte takes note of Kant's distinction, in the third *Critique*, between sensation and *mere* feeling. Kant's discussion is itself extremely cryptic, but suggests that sensations

are essentially able to be constitutively involved in the intuitive representation of extramental objects. Feelings have an essential subjectivity that precludes this constitutive role. Fichte's very helpful notes on his 1795 *Grundriss* suggest that a subjective feeling is transformed into an indeterminate quasi-object of sensation through something like synthesis (GA II/4, 360ff.). This synthetic process continues in construing the sensation as having at least minimal determinate properties. Elsewhere Fichte notes that infants have not yet developed their constructive abilities, so they still live in a world of feeling rather than a material world (EPW 202). Elsewhere, Fichte is unfortunately not linguistically consistent regarding feeling/sensation/matter.

6. See CPrR 5:24.

7. See SoE 15ff.

8. See e.g. the opening of Fichte's *System of Ethics* ("reason cannot get outside of itself," SoE 23), and Pippin (2000).

9. See Hall (2016).

10. See Druet (1972) and, for a helpful survey of interpretations, Breazeale (2013).

11. Pippin (2000, 156) has rightly stressed the early Fichte's emphasis on "the *self-sufficiency* or *autonomy* of...*the normative domain itself*." While I am broadly in agreement with Pippin's claim, it must be stressed that in ordinary life, as opposed to transcendental philosophy, the normative domain is definitely not self-sufficient in this way. Though the empirical stance is of course a rational undertaking, its *objects* need not be in anything like the normative domain. Moreover, unlike some of his recent interpreters, Fichte is not committed to anything like the *unintelligibility* or obvious inconsistency of common-sense or popular-philosophical standpoints.

12. See Ameriks (2000).

13. See Guérout (1920) and Zöller (2007).

14. See *Opus Postumum* 22:20-95 and Emundts (2004).

15. See SW VIII:418-26. I follow Breazeale's translation (Fichte (2001)).

16. See e.g. Hume's *Principles of Morals*, IX.6.

17. This could seem too hasty, given Kant's insistence on the *interests* even of theoretical reason. However, Fichte might reply that by Kant's own admission, all interest is practical. Thus, it cannot be due to theoretical reason alone. This leaves open whether it is ultimately grounded in practical reason, or in some Smithian/Humean drive.

18. See Henrich (1982). Like many other interpreters, he views the Kant of the second *Critique* as decisively moving away from any attempt to prove the motivational force of pure reason on the basis of a prior conception of spontaneity (e.g., the spontaneity of theoretical reason). By contrast, Ware (2017) stresses the continuity between the account in the second *Critique* – with its appeal to a 'fact of reason' – and the earlier deduction in the *Groundwork*. For that earlier argument already depends on a notion of pure practical law, just as in Kant's later appeal to the fact of reason.

19. It might be that in logic, one is determined in some sense by theoretical representations – but it does not seem that this involves the direct determination of the *will* (as opposed to, e.g., judgment).

20. Kant writes: “Once sensation is given...then through its manifold many an object can be invented in imagination that has no empirical place outside imagination in space and time” (*CPR* A374; compare B278-9).

21. For a dissenting view, see Reath (2006).

22. *Pace* Henrich (1982).

ABSTRACTS

Fichte's mature conception of transcendental freedom is the subject of some controversy. This paper hopes to shed light on Fichte's later conception by examining his earliest thoughts on the matter. The focus is on three pivotal years of Fichte's development between 1791 and 1793: A. 1791: Fichte's Earliest Account of Freedom; B. 1792: Two Reviews and Fichte's Doubts; C. 1793: Fichte's Revised Account of Freedom. The paper begins with a discussion of Fichte's reflections on how a broadly Kantian conception of transcendental freedom can be manifest in the empirical world. Then the paper examines several short works from 1792 in which Fichte's views become significantly more sophisticated. It will be shown that Fichte confronts in these works the worry that neither a metaphysical account of the natural world, nor a mere appeal to 'facts of consciousness,' can be sufficient to establish autonomy in the positive sense. It will be argued that Fichte responds to these worries in two ways. One, relatively well known, is his attempt to prove the existence of practical reason from features of self-consciousness. The paper will focus instead on Fichte's account of moral motivation added to the 1793 second edition of the *Attempt at a Critique of all Revelation*. There, Fichte sketches an account of pure practical motivation that does not depend on direct appeal to features of self-consciousness, but is more in line with Kant's own appeal to the moral law.

INDEX

Keywords: transcendental freedom, autonomy, determinism

AUTHOR

AARON WELLS

University of Notre Dame

Fichte and Kant on Reason's Final Ends and Highest Ideas

Steven Hoeltzel

- 1 The *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte states in the 1797 *Second Introduction*, is a philosophy that “is in complete accord with Kant’s and is nothing other than the Kantian philosophy properly understood” (IWL, 52; GA I/4, 221). Later in the same essay, he singles out, as a focal point of his own position, “the I as an Idea” (IWL, 100; GA I/4, 265). Not to be confused with the I “as an intellectual intuition,” with which the *Wissenschaftslehre* is said to commence (ibid.), this *Idea* of the I, in which the system is said to culminate, indicates the essence of reason or of the rational being qua rational: “*Das Ich, als Idee, ist das VernunftWesen*” (GA I/4, 266). On Kant’s account, of course, reason’s most basic aims and operations engender not one but three systematically central Ideas, each of which represents an entity that transcends any possible experience, and all of which play a privileged (but not always unproblematic) role in orienting properly rational cognition and volition. These are the Ideas of the soul, the world-whole, and God – and the Fichtean Idea of the I, despite its purportedly pure-rational pedigree and avowedly regulative role, is not in any obvious way a member of that Kantian triad. So the question arises: Concerning the nature of pure reason and the content and status of its supreme self-wrought Idea, what exactly is Fichte’s position, and how might it represent “the Kantian philosophy properly understood”? The issue is by no means merely scholastic, for it is only in Kant’s rendering of reason (not of the understanding or of sensibility) that his transcendental model of mentality provides a foundation for self-appointed approximation to pure, non-arbitrarily self-legislated optima, and thus for proactive autonomy of a properly rational kind. Clearly these are major themes for Fichte also, but it is much less clear whether his treatment of them is Kantian in anything more than its basic inspiration.
- 2 Below I argue that Fichte’s account of pure reason and its supreme self-wrought Idea is, in its transcendental essentials, very much modeled on Kant’s. The key difference between their positions, I suggest, is simply that

Fichte operates with a more abstract understanding of the transcendently basic elements of finite rationality; consequently, he arrives at a conceptually more concentrated understanding of pure reason's preeminent Idea. In section one, I supply some context for that comparison. In section two, I recount Fichte's depiction of "the I as an Idea" and note some importantly related concepts and claims. In section three, I examine a pair of interestingly different approaches taken by Kant to understanding and identifying the Ideas engendered by reason's basic aims and operations. Finally, in section four, I suggest that the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* reflects Fichte's tacit appropriation of the transcendently more fundamental of those two Kantian approaches.

1 Preliminaries

- 3 In Kant's writings the term "reason" has both a generic and a more specialized sense. Generically, reason is a capacity to originate and instate pure, non-arbitrary ordering forms (cf. A11/B24). Such forms, however, are of more than one sort and function in more than one way. The pure concepts of the understanding, aka the categories, informationally enrich and comprehendingly combine the given elements comprised by any possible cognition (B143), including any cognition whereby discrete, putatively mind-independent objects are apprehended (B160–1). An object, on this account, is "that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is *united*" (B137), and the categories are the basic forms of synthesis upon which all such unification depends. Consequently, "all synthesis, through which even perception itself becomes possible, stands under the categories, and since experience is cognition through connected perceptions, the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, and are thus also valid *a priori* of all objects of experience" (B161).
- 4 By contrast, reason, in the specialized sense of "reason" that distinguishes this faculty from the understanding, works in another way and at a higher level. The source of unwavering, recognizably rational demands – the demand, for example, that things be completely explained and the world optimally comprehended (A644–5/B672–3) – reason also authors Ideas of transcendent entities that would have to exist, were reality so configured as to allow for the complete satisfaction of reason's self-wrought requirements. Unlike the categories of the understanding, these Ideas of reason are not constitutive of objects that we can experientially apprehend or verifiably cognize (ibid.). Nevertheless, these Ideas play an indispensable regulative role, orienting the use of the understanding by guiding us in our approximation to optima that reason upholds *a priori* (A672/B700).

- 5 Thus, while both the understanding and reason exhibit intellectual spontaneity, only reason's operations provide for the more complex kind of intellectual autonomy: the power of intelligence to independently author and authorize ends and, in so doing, to determine itself to deploy its powers for the sake of those ends. To be sure, there is a distinct but epistemologically significant sense in which the understanding is autonomous: it functions as a law unto itself in articulating a priori the basic categorial structure of empirically cognizable nature (B163–5). Nevertheless, the basic operations that make that possible (viz., syntheses) do not themselves comprise the setting of ends, and the nonsensory notions deployed in those operations (viz., categories) are descriptive concepts void of prescriptive import. Accordingly, autonomy, understood as fully-fledged and strictly rational self-determination, must be rooted in activities of reason, as opposed to operations of the understanding. ⁱ (Notably, Kant himself does not introduce the term “autonomy” until 1785, in the *Groundwork*, where it principally concerns the determination of the will by reason's self-wrought law.)
- 6 Understanding “reason” and “autonomy” in the senses just supplied, I would argue that the autonomy of reason plays a transcendently more radical role, and thus receives a transcendently more radical vindication, in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* than in Kant's *Critiques*. By “more radical” here, I mean “concerning a more basic kind of cognitive accomplishment” – so that, for example, a transcendental argument premised upon the possibility of truth-apt, object-directed, first-order cognition would be more radical than one premised upon a higher-order propensity to further organize and elaborate upon first-order cognitions in some specified way. In Kant's theoretical philosophy, the autonomy of reason is invoked in order to account for such higher-order propensities, as well as various ideas to which those propensities give rise. It is not, however, invoked as an enabling condition for empirical cognition per se, which (on Kant's account) requires only the categorial synthesis of passively registered appearances. In Fichte, by contrast, the autonomy of reason – specifically, the transcendental subject's authoring and approximating to a recognizably rational ultimate goal: absolutely unrestricted rational activity – is argued for as a necessary condition for the possibility of empirical cognition in the Kantian sense. This is the position summed up in Fichte's claim that “without a striving, no object at all is possible” (SK, 233; GA I/2, 399). In this way, the autonomy of reason is accorded a deeper transcendental foundation in Fichte's philosophy than in Kant's.
- 7 A detailed defense of that contention would be more than this essay can accommodate. Instead I shall support a related, more basic claim: that

Fichte's understanding of reason, especially with respect to its final goal and its highest Idea, is substantially modeled on Kant's – in its transcendental deep-structure, of course, granted that the specifics of their surface-level articulations diverge.

2 Fichte on the I as an Idea

- 8 Fichte states in the *Second Introduction* that the transcendental subject whose activities the foundational portion of the *Wissenschaftslehre* isolates and explicates is a self-positing subject *to or for which* “the I is present as an Idea” (IWL, 100; GA I/4, 266) – that is, not as the object of an intuition or the topic of some discrete cognition, but instead as “the ultimate aim of reason’s striving” (IWL, 101; GA I/4, 266): the end or optimum with and toward which the rational subject, qua rational, orients itself. At no point is either the transcendental subject (the I) or the transcendental philosopher (Fichte) under any illusion that the indicated ideal is or even could be actual. “It will never become anything real,” Fichte says. “Instead, it is only something to which we ought to draw infinitely nearer” (ibid.). Although we can never completely coincide with this ideal, we can always incrementally advance toward it, and pure reason prescribes unceasing endeavor to that end: “The final end of a rational being necessarily lies in infinity; it is certainly not an end that can ever be achieved, but it is one to which a rational being, in consequence of its spiritual [*geistigen*] nature, is supposed to draw ceaselessly nearer and nearer” (SE, 142; GA I/5, 141).
- 9 But what is the content of this irrevocable albeit unreachable ideal? The I as an Idea, Fichte says, is “*das VernunftWesen*” (GA I/4, 266). This locution might be rendered as “the essence of reason” or as “the rational being,” and both notions seem to be blended here: the I as an Idea is *das Vernunftwesen* “insofar as this being has completely succeeded in exhibiting universal reason within itself, has actually become rational through and through, and is nothing but rational. As such, it has ceased to be an individual, which it was only because of the limitations of sensibility” (IWL, 100; GA I/4, 266). What is essential to rational activity, on Fichte’s account, is the self-initiated and self-transparent origination and instatement of pure ordering forms, chief among them a self-wrought but essentially impersonal highest goal: “the self-sufficiency of all reason as such” (SE, 220; GA I/5, 209). Relative to such pure-rational purposiveness, the individual’s own perspective, insofar as it is constituted by adventitious sensory and affective states, is inessential and unimportant. “It is for I-hood [*Ichheit*] as such a contingent fact that *I*, individual A, am precisely A” (ibid.). Thus, insofar as the I as an Idea “has actually become rational through and through,” this being neither identifies with nor

prioritizes any particular persona rooted in rationally-unbidden empirical givens. Our empirically qualified individuality, on Fichte's view, "is something merely accidental. Reason is the end and personality is the means; the latter is merely a particular expression of reason, one that must increasingly be absorbed into the universal form of the same" (IWL, 90; GA I/4, 257–8).

- 10 Still, the adoption of a purely impersonal outlook and ethic cannot be all that it takes to satisfy reason's constitutive commitment to its own absolute self-sufficiency.

The I as an Idea is the rational being insofar as this being has also succeeded in completely realizing reason outside of itself in the world, which thus also remains posited within this Idea. The world remains in this Idea as a world as such, i.e., the substrate along with these particular mechanical and organic laws; but these are here geared completely toward exhibiting the final goal of reason. (IWL, 100–1; GA I/4, 266)

- 11 Such a rational being has not only outgrown its earlier identification with an empirically constricted personal perspective. It has also imposed rationally-mandated order upon all that is of arational origin, by systematically comprehending it and dutifully reconfiguring it. Thus, although this being still relates to a world outside of itself, it has so thoroughly (and, as it were, impersonally) grasped and reworked the latter that "reason and reason alone ... have dominion in the sensible world" (SE, 262; GA I/5, 246). For the I as an Idea, the "entire sensible world," not just the articulated individual body, subsists as the instrument and embodiment of pure reason's purposes (SE, 217; GA I/5, 208).

- 12 Note that Fichte sometimes depicts finite reason's final goal in an even more unqualified and rarefied way: as a mode of existence in which reason's self-wrought purposes are not at odds with the sensible world's "mechanical and organic laws" because pure reason's order-inducing activities are not confronted with and qualified by any sensible states of affairs whatsoever. In the *Second Introduction*, he states that the I as an Idea "can be exhibited only within the practical portion of philosophy, where it is shown to be the ultimate aim of reason's striving" (IWL, 101; GA I/4, 266). And in the practical portion of the 1794/95 *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, he says that "the meaning of the principle, *das Ich setzt sich selbst schlechthin*, first becomes wholly clear" only with reference to an Idea of the "absolute I" or "infinite I" (*absolute Ich*; *unendlichen Ich*) in the light of which the I ought to "encompass all reality and exhaust the infinite" (SK, 244; GA I/2, 409).ⁱⁱ It is "an absolute decree of reason," Fichte says in the same text, that "finitude itself must go; all bounds must fall away, and the infinite I must alone remain, as one and all" (SK, 137–8; GA I/2, 301). I take it that if "all bounds must fall

away,” then reason, as the self-initiated and self-transparent origination and instatement of pure ordering forms, must cease to find its own purity and spontaneity confronted and qualified by the opaque and unchosen givens that are constitutive of sensory or affective awareness and thus productive of finite reason’s characteristic receptivity and reactivity.

13 Because such strong statements predate those quoted above from the 1797 *Second Introduction*, we might suppose that in the intervening time Fichte’s conception of reason’s final end was moderated or more adequately expressed. With respect to the above issue, however, this is not entirely clear. In the 1798 *System of Ethics*, for example, Fichte says that “the complete annihilation of the individual and the fusion of the latter into the absolutely pure form of reason or into God [*in die absolut reine Vernunftform oder in Gott*] is indeed the ultimate goal of finite reason” (SE, 143; GA I/5, 142). And his view at around this time is that God, unlike the I as an Idea, could not be subjectively situated *over against* a *sensible* world – not even as that world’s omnicomprehender and indomitable orderer. Instead, what he calls “God” just is a *supersensible* world order (IWL, 151; GA I/5, 354), where the intended sense of “order” does not principally denote an already-accomplished arrangement (*ordo ordinatus*) but signifies, instead, an ongoing, originative, autonomous ordering (*ordo ordinans*: IWL, 160–1; GA I/6, 373–4). “God,” understood as *die absolut reine Vernunftform*, must be *rational activity* – the self-transparent, self-initiated origination and instatement of ordering form – grounding what there is and doing so in the light of its own (purely rational) decree as to what there ought to be. Accordingly, this must be absolutely pure rational activity, not reactively mastering a rationally-unbidden mass of sensory and affective manifestations, but proactively unfolding into a self-wrought supersensible order: a universe of purposively evolving mental activity, not of nomologically constrained material conditions. ⁱⁱⁱ

14 On the one hand, then, we have the I as an Idea: the supreme knower and reformer of a sensible sphere with which rational being remains in relationship. (As noted above, “the world remains in this Idea as a world as such, i.e., the substrate along with these particular mechanical and organic laws...” (IWL, 100; GA I/4, 266).) And on the other hand, it seems, we have “the absolutely pure form of reason,” un beholden to empirical givens, autonomously articulating itself into a supersensible array of self-transparent, self-initiated activities. Moreover, it seems that any transition from I-as-idea to absolutely pure form would entail not only the aforementioned “annihilation of the individual,” qua empirically-qualified personality, but also an end to experience as we know it: subjective confrontation by adventitious appearances must cease – and, with this, the

sensible world must vanish – when “all bounds fall away” and only the absolutely pure form of reason remains. And on Fichte’s view, as is well known, we “cannot think of personality and consciousness apart from limitation and finitude” (IWL, 152; GA I/5, 355).

- 15 Note, however, that this claim, properly understood, does not entail that the absolutely pure form of reason must be void of any inner or mental life. Granted, rational activity’s total freedom from empirical entanglements would preclude the specific sort of consciousness that requires and arises out of pure activity’s confrontation by adventitious manifestations: empirically circumscribed and perspectively individualized consciousness. But even as he underscores precisely that point, Fichte also argues that “as regards content, divinity [*Gottheit*] is nothing but consciousness; it is intelligence, pure intelligence, spiritual life and activity” – albeit of a sort that eludes exact comprehension owing to its constitutive lack of limitations (AD, 178; GA I/6, 51). Note also his related, roughly contemporaneous rendering of “infinite reason” as an end-directed supersensible *ordo ordinans* (VM, 99; GA I/6, 284). Evidently, just as the Kantian categories, purified of their sensibly-schematized senses, can still articulate a range of thinkable supersensible structures (B304–5), so pure rational acts, free of entanglement with adventitious arational manifestations, could generate and sustain an ideally ordered, indefinitely complex array of extrasensory accomplishments. Of course, such considerations are not supposed to constitute epistemic grounds for affirming the actuality or attainability of the absolutely pure form of reason, thus understood. Instead, they concern only how we might best envision a certain rationally-mandated regulative ideal. ^{iv}
- 16 But do we have just one regulative ideal here, or are there two? The preceding paragraphs stress some interesting differences between the I as an Idea and the absolutely pure form of reason, as Fichte sometimes depicts them. But then again, in the texts each of these is accorded what appears to be the same supreme standing, namely, that of the “ultimate aim of reason’s striving” or “ultimate goal of finite reason.” (I take the two expressions to be equivalent, because for Fichte, reason strives – in other words, autonomously undertakes to overcome impediments to its insight or efficacy – only because and insofar as it finds itself to be finite – that is, confronted by conditions not authored by its own activities.) Thus the question arises whether the above exegesis fabricates or exaggerates differences that Fichte himself would not acknowledge or emphasize. And there seem to be pertinent considerations pointing in both directions.
- 17 For one, the basic criteria in the light of which the two notions appear importantly distinct – roughly: (i) empirically conditioned, thus partly receptive and reactive, versus (ii) absolutely unconditioned, thus perfectly

pure and proactive – are categories that play a fundamental organizing role in Fichte’s philosophy, going all the way back to the innovations of the *Aenesidemus* review (EPW, 75; GA I/2, 65). Thus the separation suggested above, which distinguishes the I as an Idea from reason’s absolutely pure form, reflects a distinction that has major philosophical significance for Fichte. However, there may be reasons for doubting the distinction’s applicability in this instance. In the light of Fichte’s epistemology, it is questionable whether anything like experience (as Fichte understands it) is possible relative to the subjective situation (if it can be called that) of the I as an Idea. And if the I as an Idea should prove to be unsusceptible of experience, then it is unclear why we should not envision it as having already accomplished the striven-for “fusion ... into the absolutely pure form of reason or into God.” In that case, “I as Idea” and “absolutely pure form of reason,” while possibly differing in intension, would actually denote one and the same optimum.

- 18 To sketch the related reasoning: On Fichte’s account of the essential inseparability of thinking and willing, the transcendental subject cannot find itself compelled to cognize an extra-subjective situation unless it finds its pure-rational aspiration to absolute self-sufficiency somehow contested or checked. But can the I as an Idea find itself thus frustrated? This may appear doubtful, insofar as Fichte states that such an I’s self-sufficiency should involve “everything that I will to occur in my entire sensible world occurring purely and simply because I will for it to occur – just as happens in my body” (SE, 217 ; GA I/5, 208). This makes it unclear whether, and if so how, such an I would still be encumbered by “representations accompanied by the feeling of necessity” (IWL, 8 ; GA I/4, 186) – in which case it is unclear why or how the I as Idea should still have anything like experience, as Fichte conceives of the latter.
- 19 Nevertheless, I suggest that the I as an Idea is best understood to be subjectively situated in such a way as still to undergo experience of a sort. This I, it seems, still has a sensible world – underscore “sensible.” In consequence, even though that world, at this ideal limit, is one in which no object or event can elude reason’s comprehension or thwart reason’s aim, still, the very *sensory presence* to consciousness of such a world must be understood, in the light of Fichte’s epistemology, to betoken a persistent limitation of the I’s free activity. This might very well be the very last such limitation, so to say, before that threshold (or “fusion”) at which “ all bounds must fall away, and the infinite I must alone remain, as one and all” (SK, 138; GA I/2, 301). Nonetheless, it remains a limitation, because for Fichte, any sensation of some putatively extra-subjective state of affairs goes back to some sheer “feeling” that is not posited through, and that remains

recalcitrant in relation to, the I's self-initiated rational activities (cf. IWL, 75; GA I/4, 242-3). On Fichte's transcendental epistemology, it is just such recalcitrance which underpins and eventuates in experience.

- 20 I take it, then, that the I as Idea is the rational being that, having "succeeded in completely realizing reason *outside of itself in the world*" (IWL, 100 ; GA I/4, 266 ; my emphasis), nonetheless still finds itself subjectively situated over against an experienced objectivity, as distinct from the freely self-wrought and perfectly self-transparent ideal order that would be the expression of reason's absolutely pure form. Such a rational existence remains empirically conditioned – to the minimum conceivable degree, perhaps, but still sufficiently so to confine it to this side (our side) of the boundary beyond which lies reason's absolutely pure form alone. For Fichte, the absolute self-sufficiency for which the rational being finally strives requires "absolute indeterminability through anything outside" of rational being as such (SE, 61; GA I/5, 70). Accordingly, I take it that "I as an Idea" and "absolutely pure form of reason" stand for intimately related but ultimately distinct ideals.
- 21 Further considerations supporting such a reading issue straightforwardly from Fichte's first principles, insofar as the latter entail that "without a striving, no object at all is possible" (SK, 233 ; GA I/2, 399). On this account, the subject's countenancing of something other than its own states and acts – that is, the I's positing of the not-I – presupposes and subserves a transcendently prior end-directedness. Because the end in question is an end commitment to which precedes and prompts the I's positing of the not-I, that end cannot itself *be* – but nonetheless might *entail*, as a specification or subordinate goal – the complete conquest of the not-I by the I. Accordingly, pure-rational activity as such, the transcendently most basic instance of which is the I's sheer positing of itself, must somehow contain or constitute commitment to an even more radical form of rational self-sufficiency, one that surpasses even such independence as would be achieved upon the completed conquest of the not-I by the I – *or via the rational mastery of the sensible world by the I as an Idea*. And what could that more radical form of rational self-sufficiency consist in, other than pure-rational activity's permanent disengagement from all adventitious empirical manifestation? As Fichte phrases this in 1799, it is "the goal of our entire existence and all of our acting – a goal that is indeed never to be reached but is to be unceasingly promoted – that rational being become absolutely and entirely free, self-sufficient, and *independent of everything that is not itself reason*" (AD, 101; GA I/5, 426; my emphasis). Viewed from this angle, it appears that finite rational being's inherent ultimate goal must be complete coincidence with *the absolutely pure form of reason* – an accomplishment of which even *the I as an Idea*, per the analysis above, falls short.

- 22 But where does all of this leave us? If the I as an Idea and the absolutely pure form of reason are best not conflated, how then are we to understand Fichte's apparent inclination to equate them by according supreme standing to each? And what has any of this got to do with Kant?

3 Kantian routes to Ideas of reason

- 23 The Kantian framework for identifying and interrelating pure reason's Ideas and ends suggests one way in which we might begin to clarify this picture. As I further explain below, in the Kantian context, an Idea of reason always derives from some basic end of reason, as a way of envisioning the satisfaction of some condition on said end's eventual realization. If we approach Fichte's position as this schema suggests, then we may say that for the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, (i) fusion into reason's absolutely pure form is the self-imposed final goal of finite rational activity as such, and (ii) the I as an Idea indicates the optimum of I-hood (*Ichheit*) attainable by the rational being qua finite: the penultimate (not ultimate) rational accomplishment short of the perfectly purified, absolutely unconditioned 'divinity' (*Gottheit*) of *die absolut reine Vernunftform*. If that is correct, then the I as an Idea serves as a kind of avatar for an ideal whose further independence from basic limitations locates it outside of the finite-rational frame of reference altogether. In that case, we can understand Fichte's tendency to identify reason's highest goal with now one and then the other as a result of context-driven decisions to take up different angles on the project proper to pure reason. One angle homes in on the highest goal of finite rational activity qua rational, as said goal is disclosed to higher-order transcendental reflection – namely, as complete coincidence with the absolutely pure form of reason. The other angle, which emphasizes the I as Idea, focuses instead on the first-order perspective of the finite rational being, for whom that goal makes itself manifest via a relatively indeterminate regulative representation of maximal rational self-sufficiency.
- 24 The question now is whether the above appeal to a Kantian prototype is supported by anything other than such schematic considerations. Why suppose that Fichte is consciously taking inspiration from Kant's approach? Why then does he not also discuss syllogistic form, transcendental illusion, and so forth? I address these questions below, but first, a disclaimer: My aim is not to offer any especially exact or comprehensive rendering of Kant's account of reason's ends and Ideas. ^v Instead, my aim is merely to descry in his writings some key ideas and characteristic approaches that we might then see to be importantly implicated in Fichte's philosophy.

- 25 In the first *Critique*, Kant argues that the purest and most authoritative of reason's self-wrought Ideas (i) are three in number, (ii) are importantly affiliated with the three basic syllogistic forms undergirded by the three pure categories of relation, and (iii) tend to engender a type of "transcendental illusion" in which we mistake projected ideals for apprehended actualities. Obviously such claims have no clear echoes in the *Jena Wissenschaftslehre*. Still, we should consider how exactly Kant arrives at this position – and, in particular, how he proposes to identify and understand reason's key Ideas.
- 26 For Kant, "rational being is distinguished from the rest of nature by this, that it sets itself an end" (GMM 86, AK 4:437).^{vi} With respect to "reason's speculative interest" specifically (A676/B704), the end in question is all-encompassing and ideally systematic comprehension, the achievement of which would satisfy the "need of reason" to "bring the highest possible unity of reason into our cognition" (A309/B365). To do so would require, among other things, that reason "find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding" (A307/B364), which discovery would (with respect to the relevant object-domain) effect the systematic closure that reason seeks in its quest for ever more-complete explanations – in particular, by uncovering something that (i) explains the facts for which further grounds are sought and, crucially, (ii) itself stands in no need of explanation, being absolutely basic, all-embracing, or independent in a way that obviates any further inquiry. No object of empirical cognition could ever possess that status, so the rational requirement to "find the unconditioned" refers us beyond the bounds of experience and invites us to envision some transcendent entity or entities that answer to that demand (A327/B384). Enter the Ideas of reason: pure notions, originated a priori, describing entities that transcend possible experience and that, relative to reason's essential ends, ought to exist, for the reason that their actual existence would be a necessary condition for the possible completion of a project that is integral to rationality as such.
- 27 But why "Ideas" in the plural? By what route does Kant arrive at distinct Ideas – not to mention insistent illusions – of God, the world-whole, and the soul, if his starting point is simply reason's aspiration to uncover the unconditioned? One answer, put as briefly as possible, is this: Reason demands ever more-complete explanations, and the logic of explanation is essentially syllogistic. Syllogisms come in three basic forms, underwritten by the three pure categories of relation (A323/B379). Accordingly, explanation comes in three different forms: explanation in terms of ontological inherence, in terms of lawful dependence, and in terms of systematic interconnection (*ibid.*). In consequence, the unconditioned that reason seeks takes three distinct shapes: "a subject that is no longer a predicate ... a presupposition that presupposes nothing further, and ... an aggregate of

members of a division such that nothing further is required” (A323/B379–80). On this basis, Kant claims, we can see how

reason, exclusively through the synthetic use of the same function it employs in the categorical syllogism, must necessarily come to the concept of the absolute unity of the *thinking subject*, how the logical procedure in hypothetical syllogisms [leads to] the ideas of the absolutely unconditioned *in a series* of given conditions, and finally how the mere form of the disjunctive syllogism necessarily carries with it the highest rational concept of a *being of all beings*.... (A335–6/B392–3)

28 Moreover, Kant maintains, because these three Ideas are (on this model) so tightly enmeshed with the basic ways in which we make (properly rational) sense of things, it becomes difficult to resist the resulting, inexplicit intimation that we possess non-sensory surety of the indicated entities’ actuality – especially insofar as we (precipitately) suppose that the world really does totally make sense: something that is indeed assumed, but by no means guaranteed, by reason’s unceasing insistence that we work toward total understanding. Ergo “transcendental illusion,” in which a priori projections reflecting reason’s ideals (A674/B672) are misconstrued as non-sensory apprehensions of objective actualities (A297–8/B353–4).

29 At this point it may seem as if Fichte’s position has faded completely from view. However, the above considerations, although textually preponderant in the *Critique*, are not the only grounds, nor the most enduring ones, on the basis of which Kant identifies the purest and most authoritative of reason’s self-wrought Ideas. He also has a separate and longer-lived line of argument, ^{vii} still deployed in the *Critique*, which does not seek to graft those Ideas onto categorially-circumscribed syllogistic forms and which, because it bypasses that explanatory machinery, lends much less support to his later claims concerning the inevitability and tenacity of transcendental illusion. ^{viii} Below I propose that Fichte appropriates and adapts this approach, which, in Kant’s application of it, derives the triplicity of reason’s transcendental Ideas not from the three categories of relation, and so on, but from the threefold elementary articulation of reason’s unchosen informational environment. Here is the *Critique*’s version of this device:

Now what is universal in every relation that our representations can have is 1) the relation to the subject, 2) the relation to objects, and indeed either as appearances, or as objects of thinking in general.... Now all pure concepts have to do generally with the synthetic unity of representations, but concepts of pure reason (transcendental ideas) have to do with the unconditioned synthetic unity of all conditions in general. Consequently, all transcendental ideas will be brought under *three classes*, of which the *first* contains the absolute (unconditioned) *unity of the thinking subject*, the *second* the absolute *unity of the series of conditions of appearance*, the *third* the absolute *unity of the condition of all objects of thought* in general. (A333–

- 30 As noted above, theoretical reason has as its final goal perfected comprehension: it demands ideally complete explanation and aims to connect all well-founded cognitions within a system whose ideal articulation reflects reason's absolute imperative to effect optimal intelligibility. The design of this system and the accordant direction of our cognitive projects is reason's autonomous accomplishment. But the ensuing pure-rational project can actually unfold only within a given informational environment, and on the model outlined above, this environment has a threefold basic articulation that differentiates and relates (i) the experiencing subject, (ii) things considered as they are experienced by that subject, and (iii) things considered as they are in general. As a result, reason's essentially unitary project – that of systematically accounting for *everything* – is diffracted, as it were, into three lines of inquiry with distinct domains. And in consequence, reason projects three transcendental Ideas, representing transcendent entities each of which would have to exist, were everything in each domain to be optimally comprehensible. These are Ideas of the soul as a unitary enduring substance, of the sensible world as a unitary and comprehensively configured whole, and of a “being of all beings” as the one unconditioned source of all things in their systematic interconnection (A334/B391).
- 31 Below I propose that Fichte tacitly appropriates and adapts this *diffraction model* (as I will call it) in his own treatment of the ends and Ideas of pure reason. First, the better to prepare that comparison, we should also outline the relationship between reason's ends and Ideas in Kant's *practical* philosophy. Here, the end which, “given by reason alone, must hold equally for all rational beings” (GMM 78, AK 4:427), is the goal of optimized autonomy: the ideal arrangement or “highest good” in which (i) each individual autonomously commits to the autonomy of rational beings in general, and (ii) consequently all individuals succeed in self-actualization to the greatest extent possible consistent with the same for all others. ^{ix} In us, however, commitment to this rationally self-legislated end is constantly contested by arational inclinations; thus, reason's intrinsic commitment to optimized autonomy manifests itself to the individual as an authoritative ethical directive, addressed to the inclination-prone will of a being enmeshed in and causally conditioned by an amoral natural order. Reason thereby places us under a demand that can be fully satisfied only if certain basic conditions obtain – namely (on Kant's view) only if one's will is essentially free and one's personality immortal, and only if there exists a guarantor (aka God) that the moral perfection of each would issue in the successful self-actualization of all. Consequently, in this connection also, pure reason upholds Ideas of the soul, the world-whole, and God – not in this case as

projections orienting a theoretical quest for perfect comprehension, but instead as postulates underwriting an ethical project of optimal self-actualization. ^x We can in principle obtain no evidence for (or against) the real being of the entities thus postulated, but we remain under an unconditional rational requirement to assent to their existence: the evidence is, necessarily, silent on that question, and reason *as such* categorically demands our complete commitment to a goal that is attainable only on the supposition that the indicated states of affairs obtain. Thus the Ideas that eventuate accordingly, while they do not add to our stock of warranted cognitions, still crucially contribute to reason's regulation of our conduct, by framing the basic outlook that sustains our essential vocation. Whether that vocation's final goal actually is attainable must remain unknown – but we cannot renounce it without renouncing reason itself, at least on Kant's (and Fichte's) conception of the latter as inherently oriented by requirements that derive from the highest of the ends that it sets for itself.

- 32 In the Kantian context, then – whether theoretical or practical – an Idea of reason is a nonsensory representation, elaborated a priori, of an entity that transcends possible experience and that, relative to pure reason's ultimate ends, ought to exist, in the sense that its actual existence would be a necessary condition for the eventual (not so say assured) completion of a project that is integral to reason as such. An Idea of reason is not itself, immediately, a representation of any final goal of reason, but its descriptive content and regulative function derive from and depend upon reason's constitutive commitment to some ultimate end. Reason's highest aim in the theoretical sphere is perfected comprehension, and in the practical sphere, optimized autonomy – but in each of these two contexts, reason's self-wrought supreme goal undergoes a kind of diffraction or differentiation at the interface with reason's unchosen environment, and Ideas of reason multiply accordingly.

4 The Fichtean route to the I as an Idea

- 33 I suggest that in thinking about pure reason's ends and the associated Ideas, Fichte tacitly takes over Kant's diffraction model – but with the important difference that (i) Fichte feeds into the model a more rarefied and unitary conception of reason's highest goal, and (ii) Fichte fits out the model with a more abstract understanding of the basic character of reason's unchosen environment. In consequence there eventuates, from the interface of reason's highest self-wrought goal with its unbidden empirical impediments, only a single supremely pure and authoritative Idea: the I as an Idea. ^{xi} Nevertheless, the model employed and the refinements applied by Fichte

have solid foundations in Kant's earlier work.

- 34 Consider Fichte's own conception of pure reason's ultimate end. In this connection, he states in the *nova methodo* that Kant

speaks of an interest of speculative reason and an interest of practical reason and opposes these two to each other. From the perspective of Kant's philosophy this is correct, but it is not correct in itself; for reason is always one and has only one interest. The interest of reason lies in confidence in one's own self-sufficiency and freedom, and reason's interest in unity and coherence is a consequence of this prior interest. One could call the latter "the interest of speculative reason" (FTP, 95; GA IV/3, 335)

- 35 As we saw above, on Kant's account reason operates with two interestingly different ultimate goals: perfected comprehension and optimized autonomy. And as we can see in this passage, Fichte retains Kant's basic conception of reason as essentially end-directed, while rejecting his theoretical/practical dualism, instead embracing a conception of reason as essentially unitary and, accordingly, as always oriented by and toward some *single* self-wrought goal: "reason is always one and has only one interest," which is here depicted in terms of "self-sufficiency and freedom." As we saw above, however, it is not the self-sufficiency and freedom of any empirically individuated persona that is ultimately at issue. But then what exactly does Fichte have in mind here, and how does his thinking connect up with Kant's?

- 36 One way to get clearer on this might be to ask ourselves (as Fichte seems to have asked himself): What do perfect comprehension and optimized autonomy have in common, such that *both* could be unconditionally mandated based on *one* final end that is autonomously upheld by an ultimately unitary, essentially nondual power of pure reason? We can approach this question by considering in a general way what it would be, in principle, for each of the two highest goals countenanced by Kant to be achieved.

- 37 Beginning with theoretical reason, then, we might say: Perfect comprehension would consist in reason's having induced an optimal organization of all well-founded cognitions, via the implementation of certain self-legislated directives and the accordant articulation of an array of organizing non-sensory notions. The sort of optimal organization aimed at here is perfect systematicity, such that all given phenomena are rendered fully and finally intelligible in the most comprehensive and illuminating way. The self-legislated directives implemented to that end are the regulative principles of reason's theoretical employment: "to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding" (A307/B364), and so forth. And the organizing non-sensory notions articulated on that basis include the key Ideas of reason – God, the world-whole, and the soul – as regulative

representations: orienting projections (not warranted cognitions) of transcendent beings the (uncertain) existence of which would make possible the world's optimal intelligibility.

- 38 Next, regarding practical reason, we might say: Optimized autonomy would involve reason's having induced an optimal coordination of all particular volitions, via the implementation of certain self-legislated directives and the accordant articulation of an array of organizing non-sensory notions. The sort of optimal organization aimed at here is a systematic maximization of rational self-determination, such that all rational beings act out of unconditional respect for autonomy as such *and*, as a result, enjoy as much success in free self-actualization as is possible consistent with the same for all others. The self-legislated directives implemented to that end are the various versions of the categorical imperative. And the organizing non-sensory notions articulated on that basis include the key Ideas of reason – God, the world-whole, and the soul – as practical postulates: transcendent beings whose existence we can rationally affirm because, although our evidence is and must be silent on that question, such beings must exist if it is to be genuinely possible for us to achieve the in-principle optimum of autonomy to which reason as such unconditionally commits us.
- 39 Understood along something like the above lines, Kant's separate accounts of theoretical and practical reason seem to point toward the existence of a single, ultimate form of rational activity that has a single highest goal. ^{xii} In both the theoretical and the practical spheres, reason gives the rational being the end of inducing an optimal ordering, according to standards of optimality that reason itself authors a priori, and via the application of more specific ordering principles that reason itself articulates. In both spheres, then, reason is as the *origination and application of pure ordering forms, chief among them a self-legislated supreme end of complete (optimal, unqualified, absolute) rational ordering*. This end would be the transcendently purest and normatively highest of reason's self-wrought ordering forms, such that "the goal of our entire existence and all of our acting ... [is] that rational being become absolutely and entirely free, self-sufficient, and independent of everything that is not itself reason" (AD, 101; GA I/5, 426). Rational activity in its absolutely pure form ought, in the end, to be all in all – the final goal, on the path toward which the I as an Idea (per the analysis in section 2) represents the penultimate step.
- 40 But then what accounts for reason's seeming differentiation into distinctly theoretical and practical forms? Kant's diffraction model, imported into this context, supports a straightforward answer: Reason's originally undifferentiated ultimate commitment (to absolute, unqualified, optimal ordering via pure, self-wrought forms) is, at its interface with the empirical,

confronted and qualified by rationally-unbidden givens of two distinct kinds, the concrete qualitative character of which is, in each case (and from the standpoint of transcendental philosophy) absolutely contingent. Some of these arational factors are such that their opacity and recalcitrance vis-à-vis the self-transparency and spontaneity of rational activity confront the active intelligence with a mass of given facts. By contrast, some unbidden givens are such as to subject the rational being's pure power of self-determination to a kind of pressure or prompting not authored by that power itself: adventitious inclination. On this model, then, rational activity takes on a specifically theoretical or ethical cast (categorical articulation or normative evaluation) only in relation to the specific sort of occlusion or interference that contingently comes between reason and its self-legislated supreme end of absolutely unrestricted rational ordering. Thus it is a certain duality in the basic modes of arational manifestation that grounds reason's dual specialization in theoretical explanation and ethical orientation. "All of man's powers," on Fichte's account, "in themselves constitute but one power and are distinguished from each other merely in their application to different objects" (EPW, 149 ; GA I/3, 30).

- 41 As we saw above, Kant's thinking appears to embody separate applications of the diffraction model to each of two foundationally-unintegrated ultimate goals of rational activity: on the theoretical side, perfected comprehension, and on the practical side, optimized autonomy. Each of these ends is then further subjected to a kind of triple specification, as a result of the threefold basic articulation of rational activity's unchosen environment, per Kant's conception thereof. On the theoretical side, the aspiration to complete comprehension finds itself faced with three distinct topics: the subject, the world of appearances, and things in general. And on the practical side, the aspiration to optimized autonomy confronts three key challenges: effacing inclination, escaping full prior causation, and ensuring an optimal final situation. Consequently, reason can clearly envision the demanded completion of its own basic tasks (and in that way help to guide us toward said completion) only by abstractly modeling the indicated range of object-domains a priori – that is, only by elaborating multiple Ideas that serve that very purpose. For Fichte, by contrast, reason engenders its ultimate Idea not so that we might (as in the Kantian case) better model an order of things within which we are pictured as already embedded, but instead, simply so as to sustain our constant (if only tacit) recognition that, as finite rational beings, we are continually called upon to increase reason's freedom and extend reason's reach. "Ideas," for Fichte, "are *problems* or *tasks* for thinking, and they occur in our consciousness only to the extent that we are able to comprehend at least this task" (SE, 67; GA I/5, 75).

42 In the light of this and similar passages, ^{xiii} it appears that for Fichte, Ideas represent principles and possibilities that fundamentally condition but finally surpass the entire finite-rational frame of reference. As such, Ideas are rationally and/or philosophically indispensable, even though their objects are only vaguely comprehensible. In closing, then, a related remark on the topic of illusion, which is a major theme in Kant that has no distinct echo in Fichte. Fichte's silence on this score should not surprise us, given the content of reason's highest Idea on his own account. After all, *the I* as an Idea can fulfill its orienting function only insofar as it is, in a sense (and for each of us), an idea of me – that is, of who, or better yet *how*, *I, as a rational being, am finally called upon to be*. But this Idea simultaneously demands from me a 'me' that, through my own effortful endeavor, has been purified and perfected to such a degree as to appear impossibly remote from my current condition – and indeed from any foreseeable moment in a life like mine, given that I am constantly called upon to manage unbidden sensations and master arational motivations. Thus there is no question of my somehow mistaking my pure-rational orientation via the I-as-an-Idea for an exact extrasensory identification of anything that I could rationally regard as real. On the contrary: this Idea ordinarily fulfills its role precisely via its obscure but insistent indication that “my goal lies in infinity, because my dependence is infinite” (SE, 143; GA I/5, 141). ^{xiv}

ENDNOTES

i. . For further exploration of these issues, see Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Ch. 2.

ii. . Translation modified in all quotations that cite SK.

iii. . In the *System of Ethics* Fichte also says the following:

Everyone becomes God, to the extent that one is permitted to do so – that is, so long as one preserves the freedom of all individuals. It is precisely by means of this disappearance and annihilation of one's entire individuality that everyone becomes a pure presentation of the moral law in the world of sense and thus becomes a 'pure I,' in the proper sense of the term. (SE, 245; GA I/5, 231)

As the context makes clear, however, Fichte is speaking here of an approximation to divinity that is accomplished in every instance of intramundane moral agency. Insofar as one can 'become God' in that sense on any given day, such pseudo-apotheosis

cannot be equated with the envisioned completion of the “fusion ... into the absolutely pure form of reason or into God” referenced above. The latter goal, Fichte holds, “necessarily lies in infinity; it is certainly not an end that can ever be achieved” (SE, 142; GA I/5, 141).

iv. . Elsewhere I argue that the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* , on Fichte’s own understanding of it, also provides good rational grounds (just not specifically *epistemic* grounds) for principled assent to the existence (not to say the ‘being’) of “infinite reason” as *ordo ordinans* of a supersensible moral order or “world of reason” (VM, 94; GA I/6, 280). See Steven Hoeltzel, “Fichte, Transcendental Ontology, and the Ethics of Belief,” in *Transcendental Inquiry* , ed. Halla Kim and Steven Hoeltzel (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 55–82. I address related issues and likely objections in “Transcendental Idealism and Theistic Commitment,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism* , edited by Matthew C. Altman (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 364–85, and in “Nonepistemic Justification and Practical Postulation in Fichte,” in *Fichte and Transcendental Philosophy* , ed. Tom Rockmore and Daniel Breazeale (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 293–313.

v. . To that end, see especially Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

vi. . Cf. Fichte at SE, 59; GA I/5, 68.

vii. . See R 5553, AK 18:226; cf. R 5642, AK 18:280–1.

viii. . For further development of this point, see Michael Rolhf, “Ideas of Pure Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 205–6. For helpful historical and conceptual context, see Paul Guyer, “The Unity of Reason: Pure Reason as Practical Reason in Kant’s Early Conception of the Transcendental Dialectic,” in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* , (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 78–84.

ix. . For a defense of the interpretation behind this claim, see Paul Guyer, “The Possibility of the Categorical Imperative,” in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* , 172–206.

x. . Here I focus mostly on the discussion in the second *Critique* , not on the “Canon of pure reason” in the first. For a more detailed treatment, see Paul Guyer, “From a Practical Point of View: Kant’s Conception of a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason,” in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* , 333–71.

xi. . To be sure, Fichte also countenances various additional, systematically less-significant Ideas. Because space is limited, I cannot survey these here, but see the summary remark in this essay’s closing paragraph.

xii. . For a more detailed presentation and defense of this proposal, see Steven Hoeltzel, “The Unity of Reason in Kant and Fichte,” in *Kant, Fichte, and the Legacy of Transcendental Idealism* , ed. Halla Kim and Steven Hoeltzel (Lexington, 2014), 129–52.

xiii. . See, for example, FTP, 200–1; GA IV/3, 392.

xiv. . Many thanks to my colleagues at the thirteenth biennial meeting of the North American Fichte Society for their valuable feedback on an earlier version of this essay.

ABSTRACTS

In this paper, I argue that Fichte's account of pure reason and its supreme self-wrought Idea is, in its transcendental essentials, very much modeled on Kant's. The key difference between their positions, I suggest, is simply that Fichte operates with a more abstract understanding of the transcendentially basic elements of finite rationality; consequently, he arrives at a conceptually more concentrated understanding of pure reason's preeminent Idea. In section one, I supply some context for that comparison. In section two, I recount Fichte's depiction of "the I as an Idea" and note some importantly related concepts and claims. In section three, I examine a pair of interestingly different approaches taken by Kant to understanding and identifying the Ideas engendered by reason's basic aims and operations. Finally, in section four, I suggest that the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* reflects Fichte's tacit appropriation of the transcendentially more fundamental of those two Kantian approaches.

INDEX

Keywords: I, transcendental ideas, finitude of reason, Kant, Fichte

AUTHOR

STEVEN HOELTZEL

 IDREF : <https://idref.fr/187827834>

 VIAF : <http://viaf.org/viaf/310712850>

James Madison University

Reason and Agency in Kant and Fichte

Michael Vater

- 1 This paper explores the question of the unity of Transcendental Idealism at the end of Eighteenth Century German philosophy, given that it circulated in different versions, Kant's **Critique** [of humans' rational powers] and Fichte's **System of Science** [*Wissenschaftslehre*]. Kant invoked the normative character of reason to address two issues in the manifest image of humanity: the presumed *objectivity* of cognition and the *universality* of behavioral rules. Fichte invokes the spontaneity of agency to sculpt a global account of human existence, one that makes activity fundamental and cognition derivative. ¹ It is difficult to imagine the uproar this caused to the pre-Darwinian mindset of Fichte's readers and students; recall how Goethe has Faust read the Bible's creation story as: "In the beginning was the deed." Yet Fichte's insurgent activism is but a potentiation of Kant's Copernican Revolution—solving the problem of the objectivity of empirical knowing through the intellectual powers of the subject—or 'Copernicus²'. Both thinkers take the transcendental turn. They base conceptual investigations not on facts or empirical evidence, but on the possibility of a situation; they are idealists since they look inward to the spontaneity of the agent/knower for explanation, not the environment, stimulus, or sensory given. Reason can fathom only what it has constructed.
- 2 The differences between Kant's and Fichte's system of critical idealism I consider fall into those explicitly noted by Fichte and those that deal with the form of a philosophical system or its method. Fichte's major criticisms of Kant are:

 - Kant critiqued reason's cognitive and legislative powers, using items borrowed from experience, whereas he (Fichte) constructs a system of human capacities based on the internal evidence of freedom or agency (FTP 80; WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 325).
 - Though Kant says that freedom is the center of Critique and that practical reason is primary, he only explains cognition—or representation, as in Reinhold's Element Philosophy (FTP 162-63; WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 362-63).

- Retaining a substance ontology while advancing a phenomenalist theory of cognition commits Kant to dubious entities like things in themselves, and forces him to separate the sensible from the supersensible (FTP 271-72; Wlnm-K, GA IV/3, 430).
- 3 The context of these criticisms is as important as their substance: Fichte voices them as a confederate of Kant who wishes to correct his flaws and set a higher standard of consistency for transcendental idealism. Accordingly, he tries to fashion the fragment into a system, make reason consistently practical (or practical-theoretical), and banish the traces of Kant's commitment to the 'subjects' and 'objects' of the manifest image—making the empirical world of interacting subjects and objects the *end-point* of a transcendental construction, not its starting point. Fichte's systematization is generally faithful to Kant's views on cognition and morality, but as in Spinoza's reformulation of Cartesian dualism, the clarity and logical rigor that formalization imports produces something at least optically different. Kant's informal rhetoric imports the manifest image, with its quotidian persons and things, into theory even when he wants to explore impersonal cognitive mechanisms or pre-personal sorts of intelligence and agency.
- 4 I see two other points of differences between Kant and Fichte which follow from their decisions about the starting- and end-points of philosophical theory.
- Kant's approach to philosophy is to offer a synoptic description from the third-person stance; it tacitly depends on a conventional view of things and persons. Fichte's construction is genetic, not argumentative; it offers a temporal narrative, really a performance—a product of poesy, not of prose. In Fichte's view, Kant "considers the I only as ordering the manifold, and not as producing the same" (FTP 261-62; Wlnm- K, GA IV/3, 424).
 - Both thinkers claim to use 'synthetic method'. Kant *expounds* the synthetic nature of consciousness in a stepwise or combinatory manner, so his synthetic method is *ascending*. For Fichte, synthesis is present from the start in its most radical form, antinomy or the direct joining of opposites. Conceptual analysis unravels the contradiction, so for him synthetic method is *descending* (FTP 394-96 ; Wlnm-H, GA IV/2, 232-233; Wlnm- K GA IV/3, 486-87).

Transcendental Idealism

- 5 Fichte acknowledged Kant's lead in pointing to the resolution of philosophy's chief problem: the justification of the claim of empirical cognition to objectivity, or in Fichte's terms, establishing the "necessity of our representations." In the struggle to elaborate his position, Kant encountered persistent misunderstanding of his two key arguments, the ideality of space

and time, the formal frameworks of intuition, and the mind-furnished character of the concepts and judgments that supported meaningful predications about the structure of appearance. Goaded by critics' misapprehension of the first *Critique* as a metaphysical idealism akin to Berkeley's,² Kant rewrote sections of the work to show that only through the supposition of integrative work in the knowing subject could sensations be combined into perceptions of properties, and properties be combined into judgments about *objects*. *Mind* furnishes the formal glue that holds together the data furnished by the *world*-- taking 'mind' and 'world' in a weak sense where they indicate only the poles of *spontaneity* and *passivity* inside a representation (or figurative mental event). Kant used reworked portions of the *Analytic* to make clear that synthetic judgments require only potential integration of their contents under a logical subject (an empty "I think") and that such judgments have purchase only when applied to experience. He used the reworked Preface to make the subtler point that his idealism is purely *hypothetical* and *heuristic*: mind can understand only what conforms to its logical intent, or what it has 'constructed'. Just as Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomies rely on similar observations, but reach less or more accurate predictions depending on whether they assume the earth or the sun as the center of the planetary system, so commonsense philosophy and transcendental idealism reach more or less reliable judgments about empirical reality depending on whether they call on logic or on 'self-standing' facts to explain the 'conformity' of objectivity and subjectivity that truth involves. Although everyone starts by supposing subjects depend on objects for truth, no one can find a path from a supposed 'outer' to 'inner' to guarantee the transfer of information, and philosophers are beset by doubts about sensory inputs and concept formation--until a Copernican reversal of frameworks shows that working knowledge is a tango of mind and world, not an immaculate perception delivered by Instagram (KrV, B xvi-xxii).

- 6 Kant did not set out to prove our knowledge is *certain*, for no idea is clear enough, and no impression vivid enough to breach the wall between 'inside' and 'outside.' Subject and object form a categorial dyad, everywhere together because everywhere apart; no single point permits a leap from one *order* to the other, since they occur together or not at all. What is needed to quiet the skeptic and settle the debate between empiricists and rationalists is an argument that knowledge is reliable or affords accurate predictions--one that shows how reports about what happens are not just habitually believed, but operatively true. Understanding authorizes justified beliefs about experience or what goes on in the world. It also authorizes, thought Kant, our moral convictions--the conviction we that should have moral convictions, and even identical convictions about what should and should not be done, and what

can or cannot be permitted.

- 7 So, for Kant reason's business is to warrant what is true and what is obligatory, each of which compels our attention because it involves lawfulness (and so universality and necessity). Kant's Critique comes down to two theses, held to be constitutive of reason and not at all discretionary:
 - I. Reason, in its logical or ordering function, compels our belief in the objectivity of **experience** because it has assembled the elements of cognition (intuitions and concepts) according to the sole conceivable lawful patterns. ³
 - II. Because it is authoritative, reason does not inspect experience for patterns of useful or beneficent conduct, but merely frames a formal standard for whatever patterns might be suggested. It legitimates only such **laws** that can command everyone's obedience.
- 8 In the first case, reason's power is logical, the ability to combine or synthesize representations *a priori* or on its own authority; its most powerful concepts are that of **causality** and causal interaction among substances. In the second, its power to authorize conduct is **freedom** or causality from pure concepts, in a nonsensible order (CPrR 183-84). The reality of freedom is not explicable, but co-extensive with one's perception of the moral law or with one's sense of citizenship in a moral order. A third *Critique* explores cases where reason seems to advise an integration of knowledge or a harmonization of interests wider than what it would compel in the name of truth or duty, and this power is **reflection**.
- 9 As a self-proclaimed discoverer of new lands, Kant had to elaborate the foundations of Criticism gradually, a task that consumed more than twenty years. It was not the task of amplifying, emending, or extending transcendental philosophy that made the task difficult, but its central discovery: while intellect (reason as understanding) can comprehend only what can fit into the explanatory architecture of causal explanation, freedom (causality in another order) is completely incomprehensible to it. And while the moral point of view urges that duty and responsibility presume freedom--the ability to assess or conform conduct to some concept of conduct rather than brute response to sensory stimulus--there is no way of demonstrating that any rational being acts in this way. Reason's chief stumbling block in the theoretical domain, the antinomy that advances contradictory valid arguments for both freedom and determinism, becomes its signal achievement in the practical. Despite the susceptibility of every agent's conduct to analysis in terms of motivation or self-interest, practical reason addresses commands to an agent whose deed is supposed to result in something other than what can appear in the sensible world. Therefore, if reason is to speak in one voice, it must yoke together both logic and freedom (CPrR 215-216).

Kant on the Root of Cognition

- 10 Kant and Fichte assume that human cognition and the moral regulation of behavior both involve mind's activity or the effects of it, not just a passive assimilation of content or rules furnished from elsewhere. Kant tends to subsume action to cognition, figuring both the works of nature and the acts of free beings as specimens of causality, while Fichte offers a more provocative construction of cognition based on original or unconstrained activity. Kant starts with a basic, but ready-at-hand item (the presentation) where activity and product are jointly present, but only as past static factors rather than dynamic tendencies, sidestepping the more basic question of how a mental state can depict or stand for something other than what it is.⁴ By contrast, Fichte tries to describe how a mental state comes into being with its polar features of spontaneity and passivity and the logical capacity to merge them into a determinate state. This happens in a move that is both first act and first acquisition of content: an inchoate agent doubles its features—what it is *and* what it is not—through an unconstrained (or free) choice and makes the logically first choice of deciding to be something rather than nothing, thus moving from indeterminacy to a determinate state. All further content (and knowing of content) evolves through repetition of this basic choice or act. In Fichte's language, Kant's account starts with fact, his with act.
- 11 It will take me effort to flesh out the comparison. As I view it, the two thinkers defend the same formal structure (synthetic *a priori* judgment) at the basis of experiential cognition, but they do it in different philosophical styles. Kant offers an *essentialist* or account inscribed in a *synoptic table* of rational capacities. Fichte offers a functionalist account, embedded in a *Bildungsroman* narrative which pretends to be the *autobiography of reason*. Let us start with Kant.
- 12 Like most contemporary writers, Kant uses the *philosophical treatise* to convey his views. It combines patches of exposition prefaced by definitions with specific arguments; the ensemble functions as one argument. Kant insists that one can assess this philosophy only by looking to the quality or explanation (or coherence) it achieves, for its hypothesis that mental processes are ingredient in the constitution of objects as objective runs contrary to the complex of beliefs about persons and things we call the *manifest image*. A transcendental supposition cannot be supported by specific points of evidence. The *Transcendental Aesthetic* and *Logic* describe the role of sensation and concept in cognition from a formal point of view. It is only in view of their relational properties that these items can be combined or interrelated in judgment; any specific sensation will have idiosyncratic

content, likewise any specific empirical concept. If cognition rests on combination—either of sensations in perceptions or various perceptions and concepts in predication—it must be the mind-furnished elements (relational frameworks) that permit their sorting, classifying, and identifying. The objects of experience present themselves as finished and self-subsisting only through mind-furnished forms of intuition and conceptual judgment. There is no other way of explaining the fit of our senses and our logic to the world experience presents.

- 13 The Analytic of the *Critique* is generally thought to have four stages, with treatments of:
 - the relational continua (space, time) that frame sensory content and allow sensations to be located,
 - the properties of concepts that make perception possible and patterns of judgment that make predication possible,
 - a first pass at unifying intuitions and concepts using schemata or concepts patterned to the durations of various parts of the perceptual process,
 - and a retrospective enunciation of principles for empirical cognition.
- 14 The ensemble makes the argument that we understand a world of objects only by viewing the work of intuition, imagination, and judgment as informing by the synthetic formal (or framing) activity of mind. This is the tool-kit that reason brings to experience, with whose help a reliable world of objective knowledge can be assembled. Since reason is both architect and contractor on this project, the resulting artifice is not only objective but normative. For Kant, knowledge is not aggregation of fact, or a history of trial and error attempts to find regularity and significance in life (myth, ritual, and magic); it has necessity or normative traction because it is founded on patterns of thinking that could not be thought otherwise. I have set out the Analytic's argument as a list not to summarize its contents, but to bring Kant's narrative strategy to light. Although cognition is through and through synthetic—structured by the unifying and concretizing work of *transcendental imagination*—Kant's exposition is a linear narrative, like the conventional examples of viewing a house or a boat coming down river which are offered in the Analogies.
- 15 Fichte has identical beliefs about cognition, but starts from the existing synthesis of deed (or agility) and fact in consciousness, analyzes that synthesis into its opposing factors, and then further widens the contrast into an absolute antithesis or antinomy (FTP 371, K 477; FTP 427-28, K 500).⁵ These expository strategies look different, but each does the only thing that can be done to explain something: display the totality of conditions that allow it to arise as a unique item—Kant's as the anatomist of human cognition, Fichte's as the field biologist.

- 16 But discussing the levels of synthesis or Kant employs says little about the content that is integrated. Each item that is sensed, perceived, conceptualized or judged must have properties which make it amenable to such treatment: logical and epistemic characters that (a) make this intuition or concept a case of knowing, and (b) permit its integration into a more complicated instance form of cognition. All content must be alike; it must have structure, and commensurate structure, to fit into the *imaginative* (or judgmental) *calculus*.
- 17 For Kant, the generic unit of cognition is the *Vorstellung*, a placing of something before the mind or a mental presentation. ⁶ At the generic level, 'mind' means only a joining of something known to a knowing. The unit of cognition is already complex, composed of formal and material elements; the formal element is credited to *spontaneity* (forming, unification), the material element to passivity (raw content, or other presentations taken as content). Even at the basic level, a presentation is a self-enclosed and self-generated little world, with subjective and objective poles or directions, themselves not entities but shadows of the constitutive features of spontaneity and passivity. There is no ultimate or atomic presentation; whatever is at hand as a presentation is a presentation of presentations, already figured or unified into a cellular or self-sufficient cognition-entity. Any more structured cognition will be a dense constellation of representations, and as the description of cognition shifts from sensations to perceptions and from perceptions to concepts and judgments, the more spontaneity comes to the fore and the more form predominates over matter or content.
- 18 Current research in artificial intelligence and neuroscience makes similar assumptions, viewing intelligence as a function of iterated simple cognitive competencies, not a single power of consciousness. To read Kant in this light helps banish the whiff of substantialism or anthropomorphism that lingers around his account of cognition. If Critique takes away the possibility of knowing supersensible objects, it equally removes the possibility of knowing sensible subjects or objects in themselves, outside the continuum of experience and the multiple voices/visions that constitute it. On any idealistic account, Critical or metaphysical, we can with certainty know only *how we know*, not what.
- 19 Kant is generally satisfied to treat a presentation as an entity, to call it an 'appearance' but figure it as a thing, and so to view the relation between it and whatever grounds it as a real relation, not one merely ideal or embedded in the project of cognition. Because he does not plumb the structure of presentation, Kant tends to treat the presentation as a ready-made thing and falls into the idea that there must be a thing behind appearance, a thought-

thing behind an appearing thing--a *transcendental object* behind appearances. In the manifest image, it's a useful mistake to think that what appears in the mirror is an image of me, but complete folly to think there is another person behind the glass.

- 20 Reinhold attempted to think his way to the bottom of Kant's epistemology in his *New Essay on the Human Capacity of Representation*. Inspecting the presentation's elements, he identified two chief features, one whereby it offers some contents (a *given* that is also a *manifold*)) and another that does the depicting (a *spontaneous unification* of that manifold).⁷ These features are functions of the free-standing presentation, quasi-logical or -mathematical functions, not linked to a thing-in-itself or subject-in-itself. This cognitive atom, like the Leibnizian monad, has the powers of signification and combination—signification (depiction) arising from the passive, material element, combination arising from the spontaneous, formal element.⁸ Although Reinhold tries to explain the increase in logical power as one ascends from presentation to intuition, to concept, to judgment (all iterations of the same structure), one can see another route: to isolate the mark of spontaneity and figure it not as just a component feature of a presentation, but as an agency or 'mover' that constructs the presentation.
- 21 Fichte pursues such an agent-centered approach, particularly in the second iteration of his Jena transcendental philosophy. Kant dismissed his first attempt as "mere logic," perhaps misled, as many readers were, by the *Grundlage*'s initial presentation of consciousness's synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity as 'principles'.⁹ Spontaneity was but one of the marks that Kant ascribed to the presentation, but it is predicated of the whole of the monadic thought-entity, taken as finished and self-sufficient. In the *Transcendental Logic*, the conceptual facet of cognition is put in terms of logical properties and processes, not of agents and products. *Imagination*, for instance, is a global feature of cognitive processing, unification of content or distillation of a representative instance from an unspecified multitude.¹⁰ In the A-Deduction, it is parsed into three episodes of functions: perceptual apprehension or synopsis content, reproduction of temporally past content in the current flow of experience, and recognition of the concept in concept-formation. It is not altogether clear whether there is a single feature in the three that makes them 'imagination,' or whether it is only family resemblance that unites these ways of taking what is multiple as one or distilling many cases into a representative instance. It is not even clear that imagination is a specific mental function, or where it finds its place in Kant's general definition of cognition as a unification of intuition and concept. Perhaps it is the 'image' in the English translation's rendering of *Einbildungskraft* that confuses English-speakers; *Einbildung* seems to directly

indicate logical unification—or the ability to simultaneously be on both sides of a significant difference.

- 22 I think the fact that the rewrite of the B-Deduction simply omits reference of imagination and speaks instead of already-unified presentations being accompanied by (or able to be accompanied by) an abstract mark of judgment, the representation “I think” is telling. Kant’s transcendental story need not be anthropomorphic, though it is indeed mentalistic. His use of the phrase: “the I, he, or it in me that thinks” (KrV A364/B404) says plainly enough he is talking about logical functions—and that the minimal language of mental functions is sufficient for transcendental thinking. Impersonal functionalist language seems appropriate for mere thinking: it matters not a whit whether you or I or a logic bot parses a tautology or produces a formal proof of a theorem of the predicate calculus. The logical subject is a pretty boring fellow. The display of *objects for a subject* is just the pinnacle of a stack of logical operations, the projection of a logical, not a Cartesian, theater. It will take a complete account of consciousness such as Fichte crafts to see whether the logical spectator can be attached to agent who has learned responsible behavior. The question may have more than anthropological significance. The normative or law-bound procedures of cognition may carry one form of necessity, and the moral necessity to performing the duty that one can intuit in one’s situation another. Kant presumed that reason is one, its legislation uniform, its decrees equally compelling in logic and life. Fichte set out to prove it.

Fichte’s Account of Agency

- 23 One can appreciate Fichte’s desire to continue Kant’s transcendental philosophy and how he wishes to alter it by considering two criticisms he advances early in the *nova method* lectures:
- Kant’s Critique probed the fitness of finite reason, established its competence in empirical cognition and moral legislation, forbade its extension to the supersensible and stipulated that philosophy’s task was to systematically display of reason’s contents. But Critique could only be prologue to System, whose real task is to present reason’s evolution in its own voice (FTP 80, WLnm-K, GA IV/3, 325).
 - Kant’s asserted the primacy of practical reason, or the strength of reason’s interest in resolving the antinomy of freedom and determinism in favor of freedom (FTP 162-63, WLnm-K, GA IV/3, 371). But in doing so, he only added another sort of reason to theoretical reason, one that took the coin of moral necessity as equal in value to truth or epistemic necessity.

- 24 To overcome these deficiencies, Fichte sees he must abandon the philosopher's armchair and find a stage where reason can display its basic function as an actor or agent and still serve as its own commentator. Spinoza's and Reinhold's efforts to formalize philosophical argument inspire his attention to detail and interconnection, but Fichte's literary friends who played with the walls convention had erected between author, artistic depiction, and audience may also have nurtured the idea of producing reason's autobiography. Only as an agent can reason have a career or appear as actor in a narrative.
- 25 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss Fichte's entire construction. I will cover the basic story of agency's evolution into subject-objectivity and mark the points where Fichte's view agency undergirds objectivity seems to coincide with Kant's transcendental account of cognition. If that can be made clear, it will be clear that Kant spared himself effort in speaking from the armchair and introducing just a few transcendental somersaults into the manifest ontology, while Fichte takes on a huge project in promising a fully scientific account of the functions of finite reason (FTP 83-84). I will discuss only three episodes: (1) agency's first gig, (2) how it paints its habitat, or acquires an array of material qualities, and (3) its split into subject and object.

The First Move

- 26 Fichte rarely speaks of reason as the agent in *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy*, but typically of the I's self-positing, i.e., of action, agent, and agency. Freedom effects its self-substantiation; it is not a property or qualifier of a substance (FTP 83-85, WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 326-328). I use the term *agency* to translate *Agilität*, employed by Fichte to indicate (i) the mover or agent, (ii) its power to change state, from indeterminacy to determinacy, and (iii) to reflect upon or react to that change. At the most basic level, the germ of freedom or rational life *in principio* is a movement that initiates activity, but is reflexive or self-evaluative, and so is responsible for what is done, not just as efficient cause but as chooser. From its bare first moves, Fichte's account of reason integrates freedom and cognition: the agent's first act is to qualify itself, i.e., move from indeterminacy or lacking all quality to determinacy or having the bare quality of having some quality. In the germinal world of agency, the first item of information—the being-something (along with the awareness of that being-something) that will evolve into a cognition of a complexly qualified something—is the first choice. One might think of Fichte's first item as Hamlet the transistor, pondering “to be (charged) or not to be, that is the question.” Others have more artfully

spoken of this situation, at once very simple and very complicated, as “the original duplicity of intelligence and will”.¹¹ A recent critic characterizes Fichte’s ethics as more existentialist than Kantian, but I think Fichte knots together “whether to be?” and “how to be?” from the first twitch of the string.

- 27 The difficulty of Fichte’s first move is not only that it has theoretical and practical directions, it is enunciated in a narrative so thin as to be barely intelligible, but so basic that it undergirds all further predication of properties and powers, or qualities and action: there is an initial movement of *intuition* from lacking any character to having one--from *indeterminacy* to *determinacy*--and a simultaneous awareness of that process--a slide from that lively state of *intuition* to its congealed result, *concept* (FTP 139, WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 359-60). The fixed character or concept that results from this first movement does not exhaust agency, but it constrains further movements and accretion of characters. It’s as if the logical and moral germ of the finite rational being were a self-assembling set of toy blocks. Just as every block can be joined to every other because they are identical in structure, every move or ‘action-block’ that agency deploys will be like the first, a concept-property. Anything it does and any further quality it takes on will have the same logico-practical character: it becomes *x* from being non-*x* because nothing prevents it, but once it has become *x*, it is a fixed character or concept. All marks, character, qualities, properties and psychological/moral items such as striving, feelings, desires, deliberations, choices etc. are compounded of such *self-qualifying choices*. Not until the system reaches complicated levels like personal choice in social or intersubjective contexts does the self-constricting *finitude* of original agency become apparent. Prospectively, choice seems open or unconstrained, but retrospectively one must lie in the bed one has made for oneself.

Feelings and Qualities

- 28 Kant was horrified by initial reviews of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that imputed a sort of ontological idealism to him, with mind in some way responsible not just for logical form, but sensory qualities as well. Idealists are aware that logic is a matter of relations, not of predicates or functions that are so related, and Kant viewed the framework properties of cognition as extensions of logical relations. The *a priori* appears to be a self-sufficient domain. While he could remedy the reviewer’s misunderstanding by underscoring the hypothetical character of the transcendental postulate, he still was left with no account of the ‘thisness’ of sensory qualities other than the logical place-holder of a *variable*, with the predicate or function specified

from elsewhere .

- 29 Fichte was not content to leave idealism a half-theory and so threw himself into the task of deducing qualities, material and formal, on the basis of agency or determination via choice. He found two ways of characterizing qualities or properties that were of philosophical interests. (1) Kant had suggested the first feature-- that perception simultaneously indicates an object's quality and one's awareness of it--by calling the process an intuition (*Anschauung*), a term that connotes the subject's activity, not a passive reception. Two centuries of attempts by physics to discriminate primary and secondary qualities formed a consensus that perception involves changes in both the perceiver's body and mind, or that a 'quality' involved a registering a change of state in both. Fichte underlines the subjective or active element in intuition by using the term *feeling* (*Gefühl*) to indicate what is sensed as well as the change in awareness by which it is registered. Initially, this seems an odd move; as we usually talk in the manifest image, perception mostly captures properties said to be external, so we pay little attention to our awareness of it. This certainly is the case for visual qualities like brightness or color, and for acoustic, gustatory and olfactory qualities which we project onto the object; only in touch, where what is perceived (pressure on the skin or temperature) is displayed in or on the body, do we call those qualities 'feelings'. Or if what we perceived is a quality of mind or indicates a change in mental state, that too is deemed feeling. No matter how we usually speak, a philosophical (*wissenschaftlich*) account must indicate that what is given in the perception is given only in the giving-and-taking of awareness: all sensible qualities are things that affect us, for each one involves a change in mental awareness. Even the properties we impute to things are (mediated by physiological and psychological factors) felt items, modulations in our awareness (FTP 176-77 , WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 377).
- 30 (2) We do not have feelings one by one, or additively, but a perceptual field or *drive* is an orientation to a system of feelings or logico-perceptual options. One can see three (according to Goethe), five (Buddhists), six, or seven (Newton) basic colors or roughly 17 billion in an 8-coded web display. One can hear high or low sounds, for short or long intervals. One can discriminate salty, sweet, sour, bitter and umami on the tongue; hot, cold, soft, or hard on the skin. The nose, I fear, is not so logical. On this physiological-psychological basis, Fichte asserts that having a quality is a case of choosing a quality, or making a determinate choice from an array of determinate possibilities. Bearing a property is an upshot of an evaluation and choice; being aware of a property is a function of paying attention to how one is affected (FTP 178-180 , WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 378-79). Even before consciousness arrives on the scene, is embodied and is placed in space and time through causal efficacy,

there is an interactive aspect to perception and all forms of higher-order cognition. What we see logically depend on what we don't see, or have in some sense decided not to see. The focal or aleatory character of cognition arises from the logic of characters (and predicates): to see *a* is not to see non-*a* (FTP 134, WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 357). It is only at a higher and voluntary level of consciousness where Spinoza's '*all determination is negation*' becomes confining or problematic.

From Subject-Objectivity to Subjects and Objects

- 31 As far back as the 1770 *Dissertation*, Kant offered several piecemeal arguments for the ideal nature of space and time, claiming they are the formal features of the sensible world, independent of the categories of quantity. If abstracted as continua, they provide the content for formal operations (judgments) of mathematics and the constructions of geometry. Neither here nor in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* of the *Critique* does Kant offer a single sustained argument comparable to that of the *Logic*. Treating space and time as ideal allows him to put their purely relational structures in the foreground; they are continua of sorts, but, viewed in abstraction from quantitative concepts, vague ones. In the manifest image, we commonly take space and time as containers of indefinite proportions, 'showrooms' for the display of discrete sensible items. Kant seems to support this 'aquarium' image. These frameworks, even if not compounded from granular lengths or durations, seem to subsist on their own, indifferent to objects 'placed' inside them. No property or operation ties things to spatial-temporal frameworks, though the formality of space and time *connects* to quantitative categories in a way that allows us to quantify and measure the spread of perceived things in judgments. Perhaps this sensible-conceptual connectivity that joins one form of relation to another is the work of imagination, e.g., the *productive* imagination of the A-Deduction, but this does not tell us much, since *Einbildungskraft* is just unification (*Einbildung*).
- 32 In Fichte's version of Transcendental Philosophy, there is no being that is not a seeing, and no seeing that is not an exercise of reflexive agency. The bundle of feelings the agency has constructed to this point is not an amalgam of properties or perceptions, just a direction or striving toward what emerges as the *functions* of intelligence and willing. At a preliminary stage, agency's product must endow itself with the sensible stretch of spatial and temporal properties; only then can it take on the relative independence of being a body (a substance in causal interaction with others) or being a will (an actor in an interactive setting, whose agency is elicited by another). But the closer that agency gets to actualizing its key value of *self-sufficiency*, the more its function

is hemmed in by finitude and its being/willing reduced to modalities of being-alongside-another. Agency's logical program, to move from being nothing to being something, results in determinate modes of being and willing spread over multitudes of individuals. And freedom (or the coin of agency) gets restricted when it is realized, its normative force diluted in that it encounters limitation instead of self-sufficiency. We cannot adequately address the issues we mention here—why reason must be finite, why freedom must be intersubjective, and why self-limitation as a substitute for self-sufficiency lies at the foundation of both law and morality. When it arises, agency seems to be *mine* or my deed, a setting sail on an ocean of freedom, but when it finds appropriate 'somethings' to do and to be, it trades freedom for determinateness, and, like the modern consumer, finds itself smothered in the 'stuff' of finitude.

- 33 On Fichte's reading, agency or subject-objectivity does not merely insert itself into pre-existing temporal or spatial structures. He gives them a four-step derivation, where the contrast between free and reflective activity (or determining and determined agency) drives the deduction. (1) Agency expresses itself as a dance of activity as such, *pure space*, and free activity—figuratively expressed as the act of "*drawing a line in space*." Where no dimension is given and the range of motion is in no way restricted, all dimensions—the three of conventional perception and the higher-order spaces that current physics entertains—are possible. But there is no extension and no direction until a first action and a first dimension are established--inscribing a line in space, or extending activity until it has a dimension. Fichte's reasoning seems arbitrary; perhaps it is a rebuttal of Kant's distinction between figurative synthesis, the unfolding of continuous phenomena, and inner sense, the flow of consciousness (KrV B 154-55). (2) In an intensification of its double activities, agency posits itself as an activity fitted to objectivity (the subject, schematized) and an opposed object. Activity directed to the subject concentrates itself into a point or 'place', and further free acts extend the spatial spread, so matter-space become an infinitely divisible continuum. If that is freedom of willing, a corresponding freedom of intellect collects feelings as properties of the object. Thus, space is filled, or there is matter. (3) A further potentiation puts objects in space. Free activity posits the rational being--"the practically striving being"-- as located in one place or working from a point of view. All objects gain location, but only relative to the striving-and-perceiving subject, and distance between subject and object becomes a function of the activity between them. (4) The activities mentioned, subjective and objective, are translated into two forms of efficacy or force (FTP 238-46, WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 412-416). We previously mentioned the concentration of inner force which is intuited as place, the origin of

location. On the objective side, physical force extends or extrudes the single point into a continuous series, each member determined by its prior—the arrow of time. As so we have space and time as functions of freedom, agency, willing, causality—all forms of activity; quite different from Kant’s formal fishbowl.

- 34 We cannot follow Fichte’s further steps in detail, but we can mention two general directions. In a fourth section of his deduction, Fichte defined space materialized as the condition of body, and body as the sole way that force can be expressed or will actualized. When agency is made plural or fragmented into individual agents, bodies are the sole vehicle that allows agents to interact. Shared or inter-subjectivity becomes a matter of causal interaction among bodies, with an inferential decoding of the bodily gestures and collisions between bodies mediating the *freedom-and-limitation* of living under law and discerning the moral duties of one’s physical and social situation (FTP 302-304, WLnm-K, GA IV/3, 444-45). A concluding section, oriented towards the object-body, outlines the parameters of agency in the body: *articulation*, the delegation of specific functions to specific organs or limbs, and *organic functioning*. The organism is the living embodiment of normativity, and a clue for interpreting the social and moral interactions of individual rational beings (FTP 458-62, WLnm-K, GA IV/3, 514-516). This is truer for us now that we have replaced ideas of top-down coordination for evolutionary or bottom-up design.

Is the I a Mirror or an Eye?

- 35 We have looked at Kant’s and Fichte’s versions of transcendental philosophy in some detail. The first offers a comprehensive investigation of the rational powers from the outside, an objective description one that lends itself to synoptic presentation in a table. Kant thought this way of stating his key moves and results in a table original and quite apt.¹² A later-day Kantian, Michel Foucault, seizes on the table to epitomize the intellectual thrust of the Enlightenment.¹³ In contrast, Fichte offers a ‘genetic deduction’, a construction that threads the conditions of consciousness one by one on the string of agency, and so produce a living image of consciousness in the process of constructing itself. But aside from these differing modes of presentation, the systems are quite similar. Fichte puts the basic difference this way:

The I, as described by previous philosophers, is a mirror. But a mirror does not see, and this is why these philosophers are unable to explain “seeing” or intuition. All they posit is the concept of mirroring. This remark reveals the basis of all the errors of other philosophical systems—the Kantian

system included. The error can be rectified only by means of a correct concept of the I. The I of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not a mirror; it is an eye [...] Everything we see, we see within ourselves. We see only ourselves, and only ourselves as acting, only as passing from what is determinate to what is indeterminate (FTP 151-52, WLnM-K, GA IV/3, 365-66).

- 36 If we view intellect's function as primarily cognitive, we might be satisfied with the regularity and completeness of Kant's tabular view of reason. If we view its function as both cognitive and practical from the very start, Kant's fourfold tables of judgments, categories, schemata, principle and antinomies will not satisfy, for I cannot find the rational subject inside the lists of cognitive concepts and functions, much less the agent who devises and executes a life-plan or acknowledges normative constraints on her behavior.
- 37 There is another difference I can see, it is minor compared to the difference Fichte sees between *fact* and *act*: one will get different views of reason's authority (normativity) if one describes it as the necessity derived from *legislation* or as the constraint imposed by having a goal--or by the ultimate goal, *self-sufficiency* (SE 58-61). In both cases, reason's work is directive or order-imposing, categorical or compelling in domains like logic (formal and transcendental), law and morality, hypothetical or advisory if a matter of imposing a means-to-end order upon one's conduct. Reason is fundamentally housekeeping, an order imposed by effort and requiring effort if it is to be maintained. But there is a vast difference between the outward-directed ordering of *subsuming* judgment and the self-direction of *reflexion* (SE 107, 112). It is the very nature of the I to be self-reverting activity, the seed of both will and cognition (GA I/4: 272-73).
- 38 It is beyond the scope of this paper to compare Kant's and Fichte's moral theories, but I should mention that while both appeal to duty as the prompt for ethical conduct, Kant's version of duty is tied to his concept of positive freedom or conduct authorized by universal law, while Fichte seems to understand the prompt for moral conduct situationally, involving the constraint that another will signifies for mine, or the force of the interpersonal 'summons' that tells one to become what one must become (FTP 351-53, 451-53; WLnM-K GA IV/3, 467-79, 511-512). ¹⁴

After Enlightenment: Metaphysics in a Minor Key

- 39 If skeptics and empiricists were not convinced by the argument of the Transcendental Analytic, Kant's arguments in the Transcendental Dialectic about the unthinkability of God, immortality and freedom did not persuade the rationalists. While we tend to read Critical Idealism as having settled

certain problem, Kant's contemporaries saw him as stirring the pot of current debates. Reinhold's initial appreciation of transcendental philosophy lavishes praise on Kant for having revived religious debates by stirring up genuine discussion, as if the anatomist of pure reason was really the religious provocateur Jacobi always hoped to be. Kant was clear, however, that he had at least cleared away the ruins of past mistakes and thus made a genuine metaphysics possible.

- 40 What Fichte's recasting of transcendental philosophy signaled, however, was the necessity of redoing intra-terrestrial or empirical metaphysics, for though Critique told us we have to reconfigure all our knowledge as sciences of appearances, not of noumena or ultimate items, by foregrounding Aristotelean relational categories an implicit ontology of things was left in place, and the manifest image of a world of self-contained subjects and objects continued to sound, but in a minor or phenomenological key. Fichte found he had to abandon the manifest image and for scientific purposes construct a free-standing account of a world of agency in which discrete rational beings were the precipitates of an ocean of swirling acts and intentions, a world where the most important cognitive act is not the welding together of classes and concepts in the categorical judgment but the "hovering before the mind" or entertaining of goals in imagination that mediates every step of the I's evolution. The perspective of agency softens the contours of the world of appearances and exorcises the ghost of realism that suggests picture theories both for logic and perception.
- 41 If there has been progress in metaphysics since Kant, it had been in revision of the categories of *substance*, *essence*, and *causality* as employed even in empirical contexts, and their replacement with 'less constructed' ideas such as *functions in a field*, *minimal conditions for naming something x*, and clouds of *conditions*, most of them necessary, few sufficient. Evidently, we cannot do without terms for what is happening or tends to happen, for figuring out minimum standard for naming something or consequently treating it a certain way—when the question arises, e.g., whether animal intelligence is an oxymoron or the beginning of a case for vegetarianism, or for discriminating between statistical correspondence and clinical efficacy in testing medical treatments or pharmaceuticals. We can now appreciate exactly what we want to know when we ask about entities, properties, and conditions. The older language of substance, essence, and cause assumed that what played these roles was more unitary, independent, unchanging, identifiable, and predictable than what makes something a discernible entity, or minimally defines its properties, or states the conditions for it to arise. Fichte's revision of transcendental idealism was bold, probably too obscure in its statement to be paradigm-altering, but certainly fertile in its basic suggestion that what

goes on is more fundamental than what we call things and that we close off our own possibilities when we transform a world of lively goals, acts, desires and decisions into a drab market of things and properties.

References

- 42 FTP = Fichte [J. G.]. *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo (1796/99)*. Ed. & tr. Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- 43 CPrR = _____. *Critique of Practical Reason, In Practical Philosophy*. Tr. & ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
-

NOTES

1. I use *agency* to translate Fichte's *Agilität*, although the term is closer to *Handeln*, which suggests some deliberation or intention informs the act, while *agility* connotes speed, flexibility, and immediacy. Strictly speaking, Fichte's account shows how agility transforms itself into agency.

2. "To Jacob Sigismund Beck. December 4, 1772" in: KANT, I., *Correspondence*, tr. & ed. By A. Zweig. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 445.

3. Kant also points to reason's economic function in discussing the subjective principle that counsels the reduction of a multiplicity of rules to a single principle. It prescribes no laws for objects, but just does housekeeping [*Haushaltung*] of the resources [*Vorrathe*] of our intellect [*Verstandes*] (KrV A306/B262).

4. Fichte is the beneficiary of Karl Reinhold's definition of *presentation* as both the unit of cognition and the 'nest' of consciousness, whose qualities include *material* and *formal* elements, the former just *given*, the later *spontaneously* produced, joined in a *synthesis* that imposes *unity* on a *manifold*. See REINHOLD, K. L., *Essay on a New Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation*, transl. by T. Mehigan & B. Empson, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011, pp. 119-137.

5.⁵The second text speaks of the five-fold synthesis as "expanding this original synthesis 'from the inside out'."

The first speaks of it a "synthetic period" or paragraph. This may seem confusing, if one expects synthesis to involve a temporal progression or narrative, but Fichte's procedure is more geometrical or geographical, providing a spatial rendition of the

logical space that conditions and what arises from them inhabit.

6. Throughout four decades of lecturing on logic, Kant consistently described the *Vorstellung* as the minimal unit of cognition, referred either to subject or object, and incapable of definition. All higher capacities involve it: perception, comparison and contrast, conscious acquaintance, understanding, insight and comprehension. See Kant, I. *Lectures on Logic*, transl. & ed. by J. M. Young. Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 103-104, 107; 440; 466; 569-70. The *Critique* reflects this general view (KrV A 333-34, B 390-91), but notes that the spontaneity of representing subject can be represented only passively, as the flow of inner sense (KrV B 67-69).

7. Kant deemed Reinhold's reconstruction of Critical Idealism murky, "weighted down with obscure abstractions," even as he encouraged Beck to undertake a similar endeavor. See "To Jakob Sigismund Beck. November 2, 1791," in *Correspondence*, 394.

8. In the Logic lectures, Kant leaves the matter of the presentation undefined (with formal features providing a gesture or direction toward 'subject' or 'object').

9. See "Declaration concerning Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. August 7, 1799," *Correspondence*, 559-60.

10. See Kant's brief distillation of the whole cognitive process—from representation, to intuition and concept, imagination and the synthetic unity of consciousness in "To Jakob Sigismund Beck. January 20, 1792" in *Correspondence*, 400-401.

11. FICHTE, J. G., *The System of Ethics According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. & tr. By D. Breazeale & G. Zöllner, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 84-85. See also ZÖLLNER, G., *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

12. "To Jakob Sigismund Beck. September 27, 1791," *Correspondence*, 391-92.

13. See FOUCAULT, F., *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, a translation of *Les mots et les choses*, New York: Vintage, 1973, pp. 74-76. Foucault argues that the table was the distillation of the intersection of three forms of ordering: mathesis, taxonomy, and genesis.

14. See Wood, A. W., *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 151-52.

ABSTRACTS

This paper explores the question of the unity of Transcendental Idealism at the end of Eighteenth Century German philosophy, given that it circulated in different versions, Kant's **Critique** [of humans' rational powers] and Fichte's **System of Science**

[*Wissenschaftslehre*]. Both thinkers take the transcendental turn. They base conceptual investigations not on facts or empirical evidence, but on the possibility of a situation; they are idealists since they look inward to the spontaneity of the agent/knower for explanation, not the environment, stimulus, or sensory given. Reason can fathom only what it has constructed.

INDEX


Keywords: Kant, Fichtem, Copernican turn, transcendental philosophy, genetic deduction

AUTHOR

MICHAEL VATER

 **IDREF** : <https://idref.fr/114475938>

 **VIAF** : <http://viaf.org/viaf/37140676>

 **ISNI** : <https://isni.org/isni/0000000081162423>

 **BNF** : <http://data.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb144673992>

Marquette University

Fichte's Practical Response to the Problem of Other Minds

Matthew C. Altman

- 1 In our everyday lives, there is no doubt that we have moral obligations to other people. There are those at the margins of personhood – fetuses and the severely mentally disabled, perhaps even some higher animals – but the typical person with all of his or her faculties is the paradigm case of a morally considerable being. If we pursue this further, however, we find that it is difficult to justify the attribution of mental predicates to anyone but myself. Traditionally, this has been a major issue at the intersection of epistemology and ethics, because whether we should consider someone in our moral deliberations is often thought to depend on their cognitive abilities or their capacity for consciousness.
- 2 According to Fichte, the problem of other minds is one of the most important questions that philosophy can address (EPW 153 [GA I/3:34]).¹ For both Kant and Fichte, we have direct moral duties only to other rational beings. The fact that the other is present to us as a representation (for Kant) or as a Not-I that is posited in opposition to the I (for Fichte) threatens our supposed moral obligations to them and risks a form of metaphysical solipsism and moral egoism. The bindingness of interpersonal obligations depends on overcoming the separation between me and other persons.
- 3 Fichte claims that Kant's neglect of this problem is "the most striking demonstration of the incompleteness of Kant's Critical philosophy" (NM 303 [K 150]). What little response Kant does give is unsatisfactory. For Kant, the reality of my own freedom follows in a practical sense from my immediate sense of moral constraint, but the reality of others' freedom is unavailable to me, both theoretically and practically. Kant is left only with "marks" of rationality that correlate with but do not entail others' personhood.
- 4 By contrast, Fichte contends that the only way out of this problem is to appeal to our practical commitments. Some interpreters of Fichte have drawn upon the summons (*Aufforderung*) as an original, non-derivative basis on

which to establish my moral obligation to others. Although the summons can establish the personhood of the other, and thus addresses one facet of the problem of other minds, Fichte claims that it has no distinctively moral implications.

- 5 In order to establish the other as a morally considerable being, Fichte reverses the direction of implication: I do not derive my moral duties from others' personhood; rather, others' personhood follows from my immediate sense of moral obligation toward them. The way that the problem of other minds is posed presupposes that the only appropriate answer would be a series of propositions that establishes the existence of other morally considerable beings outside of myself. The immediate moral feeling of considerability, however, is not a proposition. Fichte thus provides a radically different alternative to Kant's approach. The problem of other minds is not answered or solved but is rather dispelled in Fichte's philosophy by the feeling of moral obligation and the recognition of others as the object of our obligations.

Kant on Our Ignorance of Others' Humanity

- 6 Kant's transcendental idealism is innovative in its explanation of how personhood is metaphysically possible, but it is all-too-traditional in its account of how the other is epistemically available. Kant defines a person as "a subject whose actions can be *imputed* to him," and moral personality in particular as "the freedom of a rational being under moral laws" (MM 6:223). It follows that we cannot know whether there are other persons (or even whether I am a person) because we can only know things as they appear to us, things appear to us according to the concept of causality, and complete causal necessity entails universal determinism. Considered empirically, human beings are bound by the same natural laws as other things (MM 6:223).
- 7 If our actions were entirely determined, we would have no moral obligations. Not only would we be incapable of moral agency, but nothing and no one would be morally considerable, because only rational beings have absolute, non-instrumental value. When rational end-setters (if there is such a thing) decide to do something, they designate it as worthy of pursuit. Therefore, moral agents ought to promote the capacity to set ends, because it is a condition of things being good for them. This is the reasoning behind Kant's third formulation of the categorical imperative, the formula of humanity, which enjoins us to treat the humanity in a person always as an end in itself and never merely as a means (G 4:429). Kant equates the class of moral

patients, beings to whom one has duties, with the class of moral agents – what Christina Hoff calls the “patient-agent parity thesis.”² So, we must determine whether beings who look and behave like responsible beings are in fact agents in order to determine whether they are morally considerable.

- 8 Famously, Kant says that he “had to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**,” meaning that limiting our knowledge to appearances implies that the reality of human freedom is not logically ruled out (Bxxx; see also A557-58/B586-87; CPrR 5:72, 94). Rational self-determination is possible if we consider ourselves apart from our epistemic conditions. However, here Kant finds himself at an impasse: our epistemic limits make it impossible for me to know whether I or anyone else is a rational agent, since I can know myself and others only as appearances – in inner sense and outer sense, respectively. Yet my moral obligations extend only to those who are rational agents. Other minds thus pose a problem for Kant that is even more radical than the original problem: I cannot even know (theoretically) that *I* am free, so I can’t know if *I* am a morally considerable being. Without knowing if there are any moral agents, I cannot determine the scope of my duties or whether I am able to choose rightly or wrongly.
- 9 In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant shows that freedom is possible, but he concludes that I cannot know whether anyone is in fact free. It is not until the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* that he establishes the practical reality of freedom by appealing to the fact of reason. I cannot help but act with a consideration of what I ought to do, and that immediate sense of moral constraint justifies a practical commitment to my own freedom, even though I cannot know (in a theoretical sense) whether I am free (CPrR 5:32, 48, 55, 56).
- 10 Even if we grant that this appeal to the fact of reason works as an argument, what follows is a limited conclusion. I have a practical basis for thinking that I am a rational being, so I can justify self-regarding duties. However, I cannot know whether what appear to be other persons are conscious of their motives or experience moral constraint. In the words of Jonathan Bennett, Kant’s transcendental idealism amounts to a “methodological solipsism” that “forbid[s] him to take for granted the ways in which we do – or even the fact *that* we do – apply mental predicates to others.”³ I may have obligations to others, but on Kant’s own terms, I have no reason to believe that they are rational beings to whom I owe such things. Kant sets this up as a matter of justification: I must warrant a commitment even to my own freedom, and I justify this commitment on practical grounds. How, then, do I warrant a commitment to others’ freedom, and thus their humanity?

Kant on Empirical Correlates of Free Willing

- 11 Because I only have practical faith in my own freedom from the first-person perspective, I must try to establish the existence of other minds through my knowledge of them as representations. Kant only explicitly addresses this issue in the Transcendental Dialectic and in his work on anthropology, where he claims that apparent “signs [*Zeichen*]” (A359, A546/B574; An 7:192, 285) or “marks [*Merkmale*]” (Ak 25:1156) indicate that a person is rational and spontaneously self-determining. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Carol Van Kirk, and Patrick Frierson have all appealed to these signs to defend Kant against the threat of solipsism and to justify my sense of moral obligation to others, although they have appealed to different signs that indicate different mental capabilities.
- 12 Frierson appeals to signs of cognition. According to Kant, free actions have motives that are based in the understanding rather than stimuli (LM 29:1014-15), so Frierson says that we should consider those beings to be free whose marks indicate the presence of higher cognitive faculties, such as the use of concepts. ⁴ For example, the use of language, by which people express concepts, distinguishes human beings from animals that act purely on instinct: “All language is a signification of thought [*Gedankenbezeichnung*]” (An 7:192-93; see also 7:155). Similarly, Engelhardt argues that “one can infer from observation of the behavior (including verbal behavior) of certain objects that they are associated with phenomena of inner sense.” ⁵ For example, if someone appears to consider others and give reasons for their decisions, I then use “the psychological idea” in a regulative way to unify the phenomena as expressions of the person’s inner sense, much as we use reflective judgment to unify living things as organisms using the idea of natural purposes. This precludes our conceiving of others merely as determined things without consciousness, and it “supplies the further extension of theoretical knowledge integral to the employment of practical reason.” ⁶
- 13 Van Kirk takes a different approach, directly appealing to signs of moral deliberation: personhood is indicated by “the fact that the agent perceives *himself* as faced with a choice. ... The fact that some object gives evidence that its actions are, or could be, performed because they *ought* to be performed is sufficient ground for imputing to that object self-consciousness and reason.” ⁷ For Kant, the immediate sense of moral constraint entails that I must consider myself to be free from the practical perspective; for Van Kirk, the presence of what appears to be moral constraint in a person – weighing reasons (or saying that he is weighing reasons?), struggling with inclinations

(frowning his brow?), and so on – entails that I am justified in attributing humanity to him.

Problems with the Appeal to Signs

- 14 The first response to Frierson's, Engelhardt's, and Van Kirk's interpretations of Kant's strategy is that they are not fully appreciating the problem of other minds. Solipsists readily admit that others *seem* to be choosing on the basis of what is morally required of them or *seem* to do what only rational people can do, but they deny that these signs entail the existence of a rational subject – with consciousness, humanity, higher cognitive faculties, etc. – as their cause. In fact, on Kant's own view, correlating transcendental freedom with marks of moral deliberation or higher cognition establishes nothing of moral significance. If the reality of freedom could be established based on appearances, then the existence of what seem to be free actions would be enough to establish my own moral agency. Yet Kant's theoretical philosophy only makes room for faith in freedom. The reality of freedom must be established practically, from my immediate sense of moral constraint – which is different from merely *appearing* to be morally constrained.
- 15 Kant is struggling here with how to approach the problem of other minds given three central pillars of his philosophy: the distinction between appearances and the thing in itself, the fact that we are transcendently free as noumena, and his claim that the reality of freedom is established only from the first-person, practical perspective. We can say nothing positive about the thing in itself on the basis of appearances. Kant is careful not to say that we infer the reality of others' freedom by the marks of responsibility, because that would violate the epistemic restrictions that he sets out in the first *Kritik*. Van Kirk, Engelhardt, and Frierson accept this, but they try in different ways to overcome the limits of cognition. Van Kirk makes something like a transcendental argument from deliberation to reason: "rationality is not something that is inferred from 'the data' because there are no data regarding the moral realm unless rationality is presupposed." This is true. However, she continues: "Rationality must be assumed at the outset if a particular type of behavior is to be coherent." ⁸ It is precisely the force of this 'must' that the solipsist rejects. The appearance that someone is engaging in moral deliberation or the secondhand claim by someone that they are bound by moral constraints does not have as its transcendental condition that they are in fact rationally self-determining because, again, that would render the fact of reason argument unnecessary. It is also not true. Apparent deliberation is not "coherent" only if one is actually deliberating. If it were, the problem of other minds would be nonsensical; the

mere appearance of rationality would make one rational. On Van Kirk's view, someone who *seems* to be reasoning would already be a counterexample to solipsism. Yet Kant is no behaviorist.

- 16 Frierson and Engelhardt take slightly different approaches from that of Van Kirk. Frierson concedes that the marks of rationality in others cannot justify a belief in others' freedom. However, he says that they can justify our moral judgment of others in a practical sense: "for the practical purposes of determining which objects in the empirical world are agents whose empirical character is grounded in a transcendently free intelligible character bound by the moral law, the markers ... will be both necessary and sufficient." ⁹ That is, all I have is the appearance of others, and on that basis what I have is good enough to make moral judgments. They are not "metaphysically sufficient conditions for moral responsibility," but given the way that I am constituted and the fact that such marks are correlates of higher faculties *in me*, such marks are sufficient – in the world we inhabit, though not in every possible world – to indicate who else is free and who is not. ¹⁰ Engelhardt goes beyond this to claim that use of the regulative idea, applied because of certain apparent behavior, is sufficient to justify a theoretical commitment to others' personhood ("knowledge of other persons"), and that on this basis we can derive our moral obligations to them. ¹¹
- 17 There are two problems with these arguments. First, it is wrong to construe a practical commitment to others simply as a lesser kind of theoretical commitment, or a belief with lower epistemic standards. Practical justification is different from theoretical justification; it is not a theoretical justification that is "good enough." The second, related problem is that these approaches only push the question back. If the marks of higher cognitive functions could establish freedom for practical purposes, then it would be enough to justify a practical commitment to freedom in me as well. Yet Kant's strategy in the second *Kritik* is different. He does not begin with theoretical claims regarding "signs," which are kinds of appearances, and move to practical commitments. Rather, a first-person, practical commitment (the 'ought') warrants a first-person, practical commitment to the reality of my own freedom. There is no doubt that, once I establish the reality of freedom in myself through the fact of reason, then I can identify correlations between my free will and my character. One could say that my behavior expresses my freedom, or even that it confirms (in some sense) freedom's practical reality. However, the empirical character cannot be used to *warrant* a belief in the existence of free will, either in me or in others, practically or theoretically. The problem of other minds remains.

The Practical Starting Point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

- 18 Fichte's idealism diverges from Kant in significant ways, and his philosophical innovations allow him to dispel the problem of other minds rather than unsuccessfully trying to answer it, as Kant and his interpreters do. Fichte identifies a problem with the problem of other minds itself: the assumption about what would be a satisfactory answer – inference from an apparent characteristic – makes it an impossible problem to solve and depends on a conception of persons as things that are contingently related. Attempting to provide a theoretical or cognitive response to the problem already concedes too much. Fichte appeals instead to both our mutual dependence and our moral feelings. Despite persistent characterizations of Fichte's idealism as a form of subjectivism, one of his most significant departures from Kant is his claim that, in having moral obligations, I immediately take on a relation to others. Fichte thus responds to the problem of other minds by analyzing my practical engagement with the other, not by making a theoretical appeal to appearances.
- 19 Both the challenge of and solution to the problem of other minds are established in Fichte's metaphilosophy, where he justifies idealism by appealing to a first-person practical faith in my own freedom. With regard to first principles, Fichte believes that we are faced with a choice between two equally plausible but mutually exclusive explanations of the world: either the subject is primary and posits the object in opposition to its activity ("idealism" or "criticism") or there is nothing but inert matter governed by causal laws, so that even the subject is determined by biological and psychological events ("realism" or "dogmatism"). Fichte says that dogmatism cannot explain the unity of being and seeing, since it cannot account for the consciousness that makes representations possible (IWL 20-23 [GA I/4:195-97]), and that our immediate sense of our own freedom lends support to the idea that we are not merely causally determined things (IWL 49 [GA I/4:219]; SE 55-56 [GA I/5:64-65]). Nonetheless, he concludes that no theoretical argument could justify idealism for the dogmatist, who insists that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of material processes and that the feeling of freedom is an illusion (IWL 15-16 [GA I/4:192]; SE 56 [GA I/5:65]; NM 92-93, 98 [K 15-16, 19]). Apparent signs of free activity – the sort of evidence given by Frierson, Engelhardt, and Van Kirk – only serve as indications of the subject's freedom if we presuppose freedom at the outset.

- 20 Fichte resolves this impasse by saying that people with a strong sense of their own freedom are unable to conceive of themselves as mere things, and thus that they commit themselves to idealism as a kind of assertion of their own freedom: “I will to be self-sufficient, and I therefore take myself to be so. Such a taking-to-be-true, however, is *faith* [*Glaube*]. Our philosophy therefore begins with an item of faith, and it knows that it does this” (SE 31 [GA I/5:43]; see also IWL 18-19 [GA I/4:194-95]). Like Kant, Fichte claims that faith in freedom is grounded in or warranted by the immediate sense of moral constraint (IWL 49 [GA I/4:219]).¹² Unlike Kant, Fichte does not think that he first needs to “make room for faith.” The theoretical account of my existence and the existence of objects is secondary to and derivative from the practical demand that I be self-determining.
- 21 The ethical theory that results from the choice of idealism has autonomy as its moral ideal. The I posits the object in response to a check (*Anstoß*), which means that the object is derived from the I’s activity. As an embodied self, the I confronts a limitation to its activity that is also a condition of its very subjectivity, for without the object there would be no subject. The categorical imperative, then, enjoins us to produce objects of consciousness in accordance with our own self-legislated laws: we strive to achieve “*absolute self-sufficiency* [*Selbständigkeit*]” (SE 61 [GA I/5:70]) or “conformity with the pure self” (SK 230n [GA I/2:396n]) by making the world as it ought to be (see also SK 237, 239 [GA I/2:403, 404-5]; SE 219-20 [GA I/5:209]). If the external world were completely in accordance with the absolute, then there would be no distinction between subject and object, no resistance to the I’s activity. Therefore, the I engages in an endless “striving [*Streben*]” for a moral ideal that, so long as the I is finite, it can never achieve (SK 231 [GA I/2:397]; see also SE 198-99 [GA I/5:191]).

Fichte on Our Ignorance of Others’ Subjectivity

- 22 Fichte’s appeal to the sense of myself as free only establishes *my* freedom, as it does for Kant. I become self-conscious by positing myself as an I through the activity of thinking, and I represent the seemingly mind-independent world by setting it in opposition to self-consciousness, a Not-I distinguished from the I. If the world is the result of my activity, as Fichte claims it is, then it seems to follow that even (what appear to be) other people are posited by me as things for (my) consciousness. In *Clavis Fichtiana*, Jean Paul satirizes Fichte on this point, saying that I distinguish others as representations within consciousness merely to provide me with objects of moral duty: they are nothing but “heraldic figures in the painted Not-I,” or “the dead wax museum of human forms.”¹³

- 23 Fichte acknowledges the risk here and says that, according to his form of idealism, it is true that other people are posited by the I as representations. Thus, from the theoretical standpoint, there is no answer to the problem of other minds:

I am aware of appearances in space to which I transfer the concept of myself; I think of them as beings like myself. Speculative philosophy, taken to its conclusion, has taught me or will teach me that these supposed rational beings outside of me are nothing but products of my own mind, that I just happen to be compelled, according to demonstrable laws of my thought, to present the concept of myself outside of myself and that, by the same laws, this concept can only be transferred to certain determinate intuitions. (VM 76 [GA I/6:262])

- 24 On this view, the appearance of other people is due to the activity of my understanding, with which I posit things according to certain rules. Fichte is conceding that idealism poses a special problem that Kant has failed to answer. He rejects the appeal to “signs which distinguish [*Unterscheidungszeichen*] rational beings from nonrational ones ... derived from experience,” because even the “egoist” recognizes such signs without granting that they are evidence of others’ personhood (EPW 154 [GA I/3:34]). Fichte concludes that theoretical reason has no adequate response to solipsism: “The most that experience can teach us is that there are effects which resemble the effects of rational causes. It cannot, however, teach us that the causes in question actually exist as rational beings in themselves” (EPW 154 [GA I/3:35]). Even if they look or act as I do, no inference can be made from the appearances of others (“signs”) to their self-consciousness or their humanity. If the problem of other minds is to be adequately addressed, it “must be answered on the basis of practical principles” (EPW 154 [GA I/3:35]). There is an apparent parallel here to the dogmatism/idealism divide: there is no theoretical argument that will decide the matter, which gives us a sense of the limits of theoretical reason and the need to call on other resources.

“No Thou, no I”: The *Aufforderung*

- 25 Fichte’s first innovation relevant to the problem of other minds is his doctrine of the summons. He dispels the problem, in part, by establishing my practical engagement with others as necessary for my existence as a person and an individual. However, because of Fichte’s strict distinction between rights and moral obligations, the summons has only limited implications: although the summons establishes the other as a subject, and thus overcomes metaphysical solipsism, it does not establish my moral obligations to them, leaving ethical solipsism – or perhaps ethical egoism, the idea that my moral

obligations are merely self-regarding – intact.

- 26 My relation to the other emerges in the context of my ability to affect the world through my actions. Specifically, my subjectivity depends on another rational being issuing a “summons [*Aufforderung*] to self-activity” (SE 209 [GA I/5:201]). Fichte explains the process in detail in the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (FNR 29-39 [GA I/3:340-48]). He begins by saying that, to be a “person,” I must be free in a formal sense, which he defines as the ability to set ends and to act on my concept of them to cause changes in the world: formal freedom is “absolute spontaneity” in “the *act of forming* the concept of an intended efficacy outside us, or the concept of an end [*Zweck*]” (FNR 9, 20, 53 [GA I/3:319, 331, 361]; see also FNR 48 [GA I/3:357]).¹⁴ In addition, to be an “individual,” I must not only have formal freedom but must be conscious of myself as a discrete source of effective agency, set apart from others (FNR 40 [GA I/3:349-50]).
- 27 The object becomes a representation for me through the activity of judgment (theoretical reason), and it is transformed or affected by my formally free activity (practical reason). As noted earlier, to be self-conscious, I must also separate myself from the object in consciousness, or must posit it as outside of and distinct from me as a subject. Thus the object depends on the theoretical and practical activity of the subject that posits it, but the subject also depends on its relation to the object as an independent thing (FNR 29 [GA I/3:340]). This poses a problem, since the object must be both determined in itself (to make the subject possible) and determinable through the subject (as a posited representation). In the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, Fichte talks about this in terms of the subject’s need for a “goal [or end, *Zweck*]” and the fact that a goal must constrain or demand something of me, yet I must select a specific goal to pursue; I am passive in the former sense and active in the latter (NM 352 [K 177-78]).
- 28 To remove this contradiction, Fichte says that the self must become an object to itself – specifically, it must be the object of self-consciousness – while also being determinable as an object (or body) through its own subjective activity. This is achieved by thinking “of the subject’s being-determined as *its being determined to be self-determining*, i.e., as a summons to the subject, calling upon it to resolve to exercise its efficacy” (FNR 31 [GA I/3:342]). Another rational being, or “a general mass of rational beings as such” (NM 351 [K 177]), imposes a normative “demand [*Anforderung*]” that I exercise my freedom (FNR 33 [GA I/3:343]). For example, if someone asks me to stop hurting him, then I have to decide whether or not to stop. By responding as a self-conscious subject and deciding on a reason to act, I become responsible for what I do. As Allen Wood puts it, the summons provides “a *ground* or

reason for doing something (for doing what we are summoned – asked, invited, required – to do).”¹⁵ Is the fact that he is hurt enough of a reason for me to stop doing what I am doing? No matter how I decide, by weighing the reasons I take on the action as my own. The other’s demand gives me what may be a compelling reason to restrain myself: I should not hurt someone unnecessarily. Thus Fichte claims that the principle of right is deducible from mutual recognition: in calling on me, the summoner takes me to be a responsible agent, and in response to the summons, I “recognize [*anerkennen*]” him as a rational being like me (FNR 42-43 [GA I/3:352-54]). Like Engelhardt, Fichte says that I use reflective judgment to decide whether given effects – actions not governed solely by instinct, an expressive face, and so on – can be explained only with reference to a rational cause (FNR 35-36, 76-78 [GA I/3:345-46, 381-83]).¹⁶ The crucial difference is that, for Fichte, I must recognize another rational being as a condition of my own self-consciousness. Once I see the person this way, I then have a choice whether to limit the exercise of my freedom out of respect for his right not to be harmed.

- 29 Fichte notes that I can either heed or resist the summons (NM 355 [K 179]; GA IV/2:179), but in either case, I actualize my freedom. That is, if I choose to do what is demanded of me, then I limit myself through a free act of self-determination, and thus become free; and if I refuse to limit myself, then that refusal is itself a choice and an act of becoming responsible for myself: “By now proceeding contrary to the demand it is aware of and refraining from acting, it likewise chooses freely between acting and not acting” (FNR 33 [GA I/3:343]; see also NM 351-52 [K 177]). Fichte decenters the primacy of the subject in the sense that the summons of the other is inescapable and it is imposed on me from without. In response to the demand, I must make a choice, and in making a choice I assert my freedom.
- 30 By demanding something of me, the summoner is setting ends and attempting to achieve them – that is, her attempt to affect me through the summons is a purposive act (FNR 36-37, 43 [GA I/3:346, 352]). Because she has formal freedom, and because I become aware that I can affect her through my actions, I realize that I ought to respond with a corresponding limitation and restriction on my own freedom, and I engage her in a relation of right (*Rechtsverhältnis*). I have rights because, in acting as a rational agent, “I ascribe to myself a sphere for my freedom from which I exclude the other”; and, correlatively, I must respect her rights because I “ascribe a sphere to the other from which I exclude myself” (FNR 48 [GA I/3:357]; see also RPP 316 [GA I/3:223]; FNR 53-54 [GA I/3:361-62]). Anticipating Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, Fichte says that, since my I-hood depends on the other as another subject (specifically a summoner), I would be undermining the condition for

the possibility of my freedom if I were to deny her freedom and treat her merely as a thing (SE 210 [GA I/5:201-2]).

- 31 Rather than following Kant in deriving his philosophy of right from the categorical imperative (see, e.g., MM 6:214), ¹⁷ Fichte attempts a transcendental deduction of the principles of right as conditions for the possibility of self-consciousness (EPW 408-9 [GA III/2:387 (no. 305)]). The summons is necessary for self-consciousness, and mutual recognition as self-conscious subjects is necessary for a relation of right. The derivation of rights proceeds as follows. Insofar as I am called upon to exercise my formal freedom and to act (or not act) in a determinate way, I must be a body in relation to other bodies (NM 457, 469 [K 233-34, 241]). The body is the will viewed from a different perspective, as a thing and the means through which I can effect change in the world, since only matter can affect matter (NM 321, 326-27, 458 [K 160, 163-64, 234]). I then posit the other as a thing opposed to consciousness, and it is this thing – the body – that makes it possible for me actually to apply the bare concept of rights in real cases. That is why Fichte begins his “deduction of the applicability of the concept of right” with the claim that “the rational being cannot posit itself as an individual that has efficacy without ascribing to itself, and thereby determining, a material body” (FNR 53 [GA I/3:361]). By apprehending myself as a limited body in relation to another body, I move from what Angelica Nuzzo calls “intellectual internal recognition” of the other to “practical external recognition” of the other in an actual relation of right. ¹⁸ The body of the other is both something that I can affect through my actions and something that I am called upon to respect as the basis of the other’s sphere of freedom (NM 76, 457 [K 233-34]). Fichte thus lists two “*original rights* [*Urrechte*]”: the right over my body and the right to act freely in the world (FNR 87, 107-8 [GA I/3:390, 407-8]). A mutual relation of right follows from the intersubjective engagement that makes individuality possible, and the embodiment that follows from the commitment to myself as a free and effective agent in association with other persons.

Limited Implications of the *Aufforderung* 19

- 32 As I have shown, Fichte establishes two points in his philosophy of right that are relevant to the problem of other minds. First, Fichte says that my existence as a (formally) free agent depends on the summons of the other. I can be a self-conscious subject only in relation to other subjects: “No Thou, no I” (SK 172-73 [GA I/2:337]; see also IWL 61 [GA I/4:229]; SE 209-10 [GA I/5:201]).

1. To be a person, I must be the addressee of a summons, and the summons is only possible if the summoner is both rational and free.
- 33 Because the existence of at least one other subject is a condition for the possibility of my self-consciousness, Fichte believes that he has given a transcendental justification for the existence of other minds. This means that metaphysical solipsism is practically dissolved.
2. In the context of this practical engagement by means of the summons, there is no real problem of other minds.
- 34 Indeed, in the *Sittenlehre*, Fichte says that the summons is the only compelling response to the problem of other minds: it is “the sole sufficient reason for inferring that there is a rational cause outside of us” (SE 210 [GA I/5:201]). Because my self-consciousness depends on the other, the fact that I am a subject already attests to the existence of other subjects. Therefore, the summons introduces a second-person standpoint that challenges the first-person approach to freedom (by means of the fact of reason) that Kant takes.
- 35 Stephen Darwall and Robert Williams claim that this has direct ethical implications.²⁰ They contend that the summons establishes not merely a relation of right, but an intersubjective basis for Fichte’s ethics, and specifically for our moral duties toward others.
3. The summons establishes the summoner’s moral considerability, and on that basis my moral duties are established.
- 36 Darwall challenges Fichte’s distinction between right and morality. He insists that the summons is a kind of reason-giving, and that to comprehend it as such is to acknowledge the authority of the other to make moral demands on me, not merely conditional rights claims.²¹ And Williams compares Fichte to Emmanuel Levinas in his radical disruption of a first-person appeal to reason.²² Levinas claims that the core ethical experience is the encounter with the face of the other, in which the subject finds herself responsible for the other even without having recognized the other as an alter ego.²³ Similarly, for Williams’s Fichte, I am morally obligated to the other simply by virtue of the fact that I am provoked by them, and this is a necessary provocation because my existence as a subject depends on my being summoned by the other.
- 37 The problem with these interpretations is that they run counter to Fichte’s so-called independence or separation thesis. By the time of the *Grundlage des Naturrechts*,²⁴ Fichte insists, unlike Kant, that ethics and legality have distinct foundations: “the philosophical doctrine of right” is “a separate science standing on its own” (FNR 11 [GA I/3:321]). As Daniel Breazeale and Frederick Neuhaus emphasize, the normative constraints that are integral to the relation of right and that are implicit in the *Aufforderung* are not matters of moral duty.²⁵ Mutual recognition does establish the social

character of human beings, but the resulting legal restrictions on my freedom are only binding *if* I commit myself to maximizing external freedom. That is, unlike moral obligations, which are unconditional, legal obligations are conditional on whether I choose to live in a community with others (RPP 314-16 [GA I/3:222-24]; NM 470-71 [K 242]). To be sure, enlightened self-interest motivates me to live with others and to form laws under which our freedom is maximized, but, because this does not follow necessarily from the nature of reason itself, the decision is “arbitrary or optional [*willkürlich*]” (FNR 10 [GA I/3:320]; see also FNR 11-12, 81-83 [GA I/3:321-22, 386-87]). Fichte says that my respect for others as rights-bearers is merely a matter of “theoretical consistency”: knowing that the other person is like me, and knowing that I want to be treated in a certain way – I demand my rights – I am rationally compelled to treat them the same way (FNR 44 [GA I/3:353-54]; see also FNR 11 [GA I/3:321-22]; VM 78 [GA I/6:264]).

- 38 In addition, the relation of right is supposed to preserve each party’s formal freedom – that is, the capacity to orient ourselves according to concepts representing ends – but it does not have any specifically moral end in view. Unlike morality, the law does not universally command or prohibit particular actions; rather, it permits me to act however I want, even immorally, as long as I do so within my private sphere (FNR 50, 179 [GA I/3:359, I/4:17]). I incur properly moral obligations, by contrast, owing to a rationally mandated, not interpersonally solicited, commitment to material freedom, not formal freedom. That is, I am morally constrained to strive for autonomy, to act on the basis of a self-legislated law, so I ought to determine my ends based only on their fitness for furthering the self-sufficiency of reason. The distinctive moral demand is made by my higher self, not by the other.

The Practical Commitment to Others

- 39 Treating the problem of other minds as an epistemic problem inevitably lands us in solipsism, or at least risks it. A theoretical approach is bound to fail, since it begins with the assumption that the other is an object of knowledge, or merely a representation for consciousness. Kant cannot then infer the humanity of someone on the basis of apparent signs. Although Fichte’s practical appeal to the summons in some sense dissolves the threat of solipsism, making the other into a formally free subject, it establishes the other merely as another consciousness, and at best another rights-bearer, rather than an object of moral obligation.
- 40 What both approaches have in common is that they begin with a commitment to others’ humanity and they try to infer our ethical obligations

from that. Kant moves from signs to humanity, which, by means of the formula of humanity, entails that we have other-regarding duties to them. And Darwall and Williams move from the summons to the authority to make the summons, which entails that they are rational beings to whom we have other-regarding duties. This is the typical direction of inference in the history of Western philosophy: once we establish the other's existence as a person, then we can deduce that we have moral obligations to them.

- 41 Fichte's revolutionary approach upends this. Though my comprehension of the summons entails my recognition of another subject in an abstract sense, it does not address the question of how I come to recognize a specific person as someone to whom I have moral obligations. Fichte claims that the distinctively moral relationship follows not from my determination that the other is a subject, but from moral feeling. That is, I know that others are rational beings with dignity because I have duties to them; I do not have duties to them because they are rational beings.
- 42 Earlier I mentioned that the aim of morality is absolute self-sufficiency. Because I am a finite, imperfectly rational being, I cannot apprehend the moral law (as a law of pure reason) directly; instead, the law affects me through what Fichte calls my conscience (*Gewissen*) by means of moral feeling (SE 198 [GA I/5:190-91]; see also SE 101-5, 148, 158-68 [GA I/5:104-9, 146, 155-64]; NM 469 [K 241-42]). Conscience guides us to do what is right: as Fichte puts it, "Feeling decides [*Das Gefühl entscheidet*]" (SE 198 [GA I/5:190]). To be sure, I exist as a self-conscious being ("my first state") because of the summons of the other, and thus my self-consciousness "is not determined through my freedom, but through my connection with another rational being." As a moral agent, though, I am beholden only to reason: "What I become or do not become from this point on, however, depends purely and simply and completely on me alone" (SE 211 [GA I/5:202]). The duties that I have, including other-regarding duties, are the result of the moral drive as it expresses itself in feeling through my conscience. This is a dramatic return to the first-person perspective.
- 43 In the *Sittenlehre*, Fichte reminds us of the relation of right among free beings, and notes that, in response to the summons, I become "merely a rational being in general," and I relate to summoners as possible rather than actual individuals (SE 211-14 [GA I/5:202-4]). Fichte's reasoning here is not especially clear. He seems to be saying that the generality of the summons makes it incapable of establishing a moral relationship. The summons gets us merely to "the fact of I-hood" rather than making me "a *particular* rational being." The former is a "universal" limitation, not a "particular limitation" (SE 214 [GA I/5:204]). The dependence of self-consciousness on the summons may give me grounds for thinking that there is some other

rational being out there, but it does not give me reason to think that *this* is a rational being and *that* is not. It entitles me to use (or offers a deduction of) the concept of “another rational being,” but does not provide me with a criterion (schema) for applying it.

- 44 The problem with this interpretation is that the summons only functions as a summons if we encounter a specific other whom we recognize as a rational being with formal freedom. As noted above, Fichte lists some of the criteria we use to distinguish rational beings from things that are not rational: actions not governed solely by instinct, an expressive face, and so on (see FNR 76-78 [GA I/3:381-83]). Wood claims that Fichte is giving a schematism so that we can apply the concept of a rational cause empirically. ²⁶ Using reflective judgment, I make “the inference [*Schluss*] to a rational cause” and I treat the person as “a particular [*bestimmten*] rational being,” not some undifferentiated mass (FNR 36, 42 [GA I/3:346, 352]).
- 45 Perhaps a better way of understanding Fichte’s notion of particularity in the *Sittenlehre* is in keeping with the independence thesis. What is missing in the account of the summons, which is only given with moral feeling, is genuinely moral concern, as opposed to juridical concern. Instead of merely justifying the existence of the other, which the summons does accomplish, moral feeling transforms the relationship into one of indebtedness and obligation rather than general permissibility regarding the movement of my body. I only need to engage them in a relation of right if I participate in a community and if they also agree to respect my rights. Even if I become a subject through another (*someone* must summon me), I need not consciously accept that fact or acknowledge the dignity of a particular person (I ought to respect *you*), so it need not make any difference to my commitments. Because of the limitation of the summons, Fichte then asks: “Can they, however, be actual *for me* ? I.e., can I perceive them as actual beings, and if so, how can I perceive them?” (SE 212 [GA I/5:203]).
- 46 Fichte seems to be addressing an issue that is a focus of critical race theory. We can establish that others exist as conscious beings, but whether that puts any obligation on me is in some sense ultimately my decision. The notion of a “person” is a very slippery concept. Charles Mills uses the language of “subperson” to get at someone who is recognized as sharing characteristics with whites/the privileged without being recognized as a full person. ²⁷ Fichte seems to be getting at some of that same ambiguity: we think “person” is merely descriptive, something that theoretical reason could establish or that could be transcendently derived. However, really it has normative dimensions that get established in other ways: for Fichte, through personal moral feeling, and for critical race theorists, through contingent, only semi-

cognitive processes of habituation and normalization.

- 47 According to Fichte, the considerability of the other as an actual someone to whom I have distinctly ethical obligations depends on my sense of duty. That is, I feel an obligation to respect the other, and from that feeling I “infer” the existence of an actual being with humanity: “we inwardly feel that our acting is being repulsed. In this case, even our drive toward acting is limited, and from this we infer [*schließen*] that there is *freedom* outside of us” (SE 213 [GA I/5:204]; cf. FNR 36 [GA I/3:346], cited above).²⁸ The appearance of the other as an other is secondary to the immediate, unreflective, and intimate feeling that I owe something to them, in contrast to mere objects:

There are certain points [*Punkte*] beyond which I should not proceed with my freedom, and this *ought-not* [*Nichtsollen*] reveals itself to me immediately. I explain to myself these points [beyond which I ought not to proceed] by appealing to the presence of other free beings and their free effects in the sensible world. (SE 214 [GA I/5:205])

- 48 Conscience is an expression of what is rationally required of me. What I discover in encountering these “points” of resistance is that reason works through both me and others as tools of the moral law to strive for a complete moral system within which we recognize one another as “member[s] of the community of rational beings” – that is, I respect the humanity in them as an end in itself and help to further their purposes (SE 244 [GA I/5:230]; see also SE 217-19 [GA I/5:208-9]).

- 49 As Wood rightly notes, the second-person perspective is not part of the foundation of Fichte’s ethics, but arises only in the application of the moral law.²⁹ What testifies to the existence of others as moral subjects, and what obligates me to further their ends, is not their appearance, which is secondary, but the sense of obligation that I have to them.³⁰ Fichte thus gives a practical (and specifically moral) response to the problem of other minds. Kant says that my immediate sense of moral constraint justifies a practical commitment to my own freedom; Fichte says that my immediate sense of moral obligation justifies a practical commitment to the freedom of others.

- 50 Earlier I quoted a passage from the *Bestimmung des Menschen* in which Fichte claims that speculative philosophy cannot establish the existence of other minds (VM 76 [GA I/6:262]). He follows this passage by giving his alternative, claiming that my sense of myself as a moral agent is necessarily a sense of myself as an individual in relation to other moral agents:

But the voice of my conscience [*Gewissen*] calls to me: whatever these beings may be in and for themselves, you ought to treat them as self-subsistent, free, autonomous beings completely independent of you. ... I will therefore always regard those beings as beings which exist for themselves and are there independently of me, as beings which set

themselves purposes and carry them out. From this standpoint I will not be able to see them any other way, and that speculation [according to which they are mere representations] will disappear before my eyes like an empty dream. (VM 76 [GA I/6:262])

- 51 No theoretical argument, including the appeal to signs, can successfully demonstrate that some of my representations are representations of conscious beings. But the failure of theoretical reasoning here is irrelevant given my sense of obligation to those beings (and not those representations). My conception of others as rational beings follows from my duty to treat them as such. ³¹
- 52 The moral feeling of considerability is not a theoretical proposition. If one asks for a set of propositions that prove that there are other morally considerable people out there, which is presupposed by the problem of other minds, trying to answer that question would already be engaging the problem in the wrong way – thus conceding too much from the beginning. The challenge is badly formulated. It assumes that the question is amenable to theoretical proof – something that Kant himself, in distinguishing appearances from the thing in itself, showed not to be the case. Fichte dispels the problem of other minds, rather than trying to solve it, by rejecting this foundational assumption and providing a separate, practical proof.
- 53 Because of the immediacy of the feeling of obligation, Fichte does not to treat this founding practical assumption as a claim to be justified. I consider other rational beings to be persons because I *must* do so given my ethical commitments, just as I accept idealism over dogmatism because I *must* do so given the kind of person I am (IWL 20 [GA I/4:195]). Retrospectively, Fichte's philosophical account of subjectivity and the summons *explains* or *makes comprehensible* why we have this relation to others (IWL 38n [GA I/4:210-11n]), but it is not meant to *justify* a moral feeling that is immediate and in no need of justification from the first-person, practical perspective.

Conclusion: The Coherence of Fichte's View

- 54 It is now commonly accepted among Fichte scholars that intersubjectivity plays a central role in his philosophy, and that the longstanding charge of subjectivism is misguided. What has been missing is an appreciation of how Fichte responds to the problem of other minds. The summons dispels metaphysical solipsism, to be sure, but establishing others' distinctively moral considerability is a result of conscience, as felt from the first-person perspective. This recapitulates his practical strategy for establishing the truth of idealism, and in that sense it is of a piece with the starting point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. It is also more consistent with the fact of reason

strategy by which Kant establishes my own humanity than the appeal to signs made by Engelhardt, Van Kirk, and Frierson. Although I do not have the space to defend it here, I believe that Fichte's view more accurately captures the phenomenology of moral experience. The metaphysical question of whether someone is in fact morally considerable is secondary to and, in a practical sense, is decided by our immediate ethical relationship with them. ³²

NOTES

1. I reference works by Kant and Fichte parenthetically using the following abbreviations:

A/B = Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Ak = Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., ed. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900-).

An = Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Loudon, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Loudon, 231-429 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007).

CPrR = Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 137-271 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

EPW = Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

FNR = Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, trans. Michael Baur, ed. Frederick Neuhouser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

G = Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 41-108 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

GA = Fichte, *J. G. Fichte - Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 42 vols., ed. Reinhard Lauth et al. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962-).

IWL = Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).

K = Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* ("Krause Nachschrift"), ed. Erich Fuchs (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982).

LM = Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

MM = Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 363-602 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

NM = Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

RPP = Fichte, "Review of Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1795)," trans. Daniel Breazeale, *Philosophical Forum* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 311-21.

SE = Fichte, *System of Ethics*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

SK = Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970).

VM = Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

With Kant's works, I cite the volume and page number(s) of the Royal Prussian Academy edition (Ak), which are included in the margins of the translations. With Fichte references, I cite both the English translation (where applicable) and the original German as collected in GA or K.

2. Christina Hoff, "Kant's Invidious Humanism," *Environmental Ethics* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 63-70, at 69.

3. Jonathan Bennett, "The Simplicity of the Soul," *Journal of Philosophy* 64, no. 20 (Oct. 1967): 648-60, at 655. Regarding what he calls Kant's "methodological solipsism," Bennett's idea is that any knowledge that I have about the world can only be validated by evidence and intuitions that I have. Any knowledge claims are subjective in that sense. This makes the problem of other minds particularly difficult for Kant. See also Jonathan Bennett, *Kant's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 126-30.

4. Patrick R. Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 167-88.

5. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., "Kantian Knowledge of Other Persons - An Exploration," in *Akten des 4. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses Mainz 1974*, ed. Gerhard Funke, vol. 2, no. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 576-81, at 580.

6. *Ibid.*, 579.

7. Carol A. Van Kirk, "Kant and the Problem of Other Minds," *Kant-Studien* 77, no. 1 (1986): 41-58, at 54-55.

8. *Ibid.*, 57.

9. Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology*, 171.

10. *Ibid.*, 172, 185.

11. Engelhardt, "Kantian Knowledge of Other Persons," 579.

12. See Matthew C. Altman, "Idealism Is the Only Possible Philosophy: Systematicity and the Fichtean Fact of Reason," *Idealistic Studies* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 1-30.

13. Jean Paul, *Clavis Fichtiana seu Leibgeberiana* (1799), in *Sämmtliche Werke* (Berlin: Reimer, 1827), 30:44, 47.

14. Fichte's "formal freedom" roughly corresponds to Kant's use of *Willkür* as the capacity for free choice (practical freedom in the negative sense) (G 4:446; CPrR 5:33; MM 6:213-14), coupled with the notion that willing is an uncaused cause (transcendental or cosmological freedom) (A533/B561, A803/B831; CPrR 5:3, 29, 96-97). Fichte's "material freedom" is Kant's *Wille*, or the capacity to act autonomously on

the basis of a law that one gives oneself (practical freedom in the positive sense) (G 4:446-47; CPrR 5:33; MM 6:213-14).

15. Allen W. Wood, "Deduction of the Summons and the Existence of Other Rational Beings," in *Fichte's "Foundations of Natural Right": A Critical Guide*, ed. Gabriel Gottlieb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 72-91, at 83.

16. This is the point at which Fichte comes closest to Kant's approach to the problem of other minds, and specifically Engelhardt's interpretation. The subjectivity of the other is a condition for the possibility of such behavior only if we assume that the behavior could only be explained with reference to reason. This begs the question, or at least seems to.

17. Whether Kant derives the universal principle of right from the categorical imperative, as Fichte claims (RPP 314-15 [GA I/3:220-21]), is a matter of scholarly disagreement. Arguments for their independence are given in, e.g., Allen Wood, "The Final Form of Kant's Practical Philosophy," in *Kant's "Metaphysics of Morals": Interpretive Essays*, ed. Mark Timmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-22; and Marcus Willaschek, "Right and Coercion: Can Kant's Conception of Right Be Derived from His Moral Theory?" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 1 (2009): 49-70. Arguments for their dependence are given in, e.g., Paul Guyer, "Kant's Deductions of the Principles of Right," in *Kant's "Metaphysics of Morals": Interpretive Essays*, ed. Mark Timmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23-64; and Gerhard Seel, "How Does Kant Justify the Universal Objective Validity of the Law of Right?" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 1 (2009): 71-94.

18. Angelica Nuzzo, "The Role of the Human Body in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796-97)," in *Rights, Bodies, and Recognition: New Essays on Fichte's "Foundations of Natural Right"*, ed. Dan Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 71-89, at 74.

19. I am indebted to Steven Hoeltzel for helpful suggestions on how to frame some of the claims discussed in this section.

20. Stephen Darwall, "Fichte and the Second-Person Standpoint," in *Honor, History, and Relationship: Essays in Second-Personal Ethics II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 222-46; Robert R. Williams, "The Question of the Other in Fichte's Thought," in *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1994), 142-57; and Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 31-39.

21. Darwall, "Fichte and the Second-Person Standpoint," 241-45.

22. Williams, "Question of the Other in Fichte's Thought," 155; and Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 38. Other comparisons of Fichte and Levinas on the question of the other include Simon Lumsden, "Absolute Difference and Social Ontology: Levinas Face to Face with Buber and Fichte," *Human Studies* 23, no. 3 (July 2000): 227-41; Scott Scribner, "Levinas Face to Face with Fichte," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 16, no. 1 (Jan. 2000): 151-60; and Ives Radrizzani, "The Self, the Other and the Limit by Fichte and Levinas," *Archives de Philosophie* 73, no. 2 (April-June 2010): 285-95.

23. For example: “This summons [*sommation*] to responsibility destroys the formulas of generality by which my knowledge (*savoir*) or acquaintance (*connaissance*) of the other man re-presents him to me as my fellow man” (Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand [Oxford: Blackwell, 1989], 84).

24. In his 1793 defense of the French Revolution, *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution* (GA I/1:203-404), Fichte argues that individuals need to be free in order to realize their moral autonomy and fulfill their moral duties. The public recognition of natural rights and coercion designed to protect them are necessary to further morality. Thus Fichte derives his nascent political theory from the moral law. He reverses that position by 1796.

25. Daniel Breazeale, “The First-Person Standpoint of Fichte’s Ethics,” *Philosophy Today* 52, nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2008): 270-81; and Frederick Neuhouser, “Fichte’s Separation of Right from Morality,” in *Fichte’s “Foundations of Natural Right”: A Critical Guide*, ed. Gabriel Gottlieb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 32-51. See also Nedim Nomer, “Fichte’s Separation Thesis,” *Philosophical Forum* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 233-54.

26. Wood, *Fichte’s Ethical Thought*, 95-96.

27. Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8-10, 152-66.

28. In a parenthetical comment, Fichte notes a similar thought in Schelling’s *Neue Deduction des Naturrechts* (1796/97): “Where my moral power encounters resistance, there can no longer be nature. I shudder and stop. I hear the warning: here is humanity! I am not permitted to proceed any farther” (SE 213 [GA I/5:204]).

29. Allen W. Wood, “Fichte’s Philosophy of Right and Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, ed. David James and Günter Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 168-98, at 190.

30. This, and not the summons, is much closer to Levinas than Williams realizes. Levinas claims that the immediate encounter with the face of the other imposes obligations prior to any recognition that the other is like me. The other is *not* an alter ego, whose moral status rests on her interchangeability with the self/I. Instead, my indebtedness to the other precedes any judgment as to the kind of thing they are. See especially Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being; or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997), 159.

31. One of the problems masked by Fichte’s appeal to the “voice of conscience” is the contingency of moral feeling. There is little recognition of the social conditions of moral considerability. According to critical race theory, I derive the substance of what my conscience says from the moral models around me, not from pure reason. Fichte does anticipate the spirit of this with his doctrine of the summons: the I is affected by a community before belief in the community is philosophically established.

32. I am indebted to Cynthia D. Coe and Kienhow Goh for reading drafts and suggesting promising directions for this essay.

ABSTRACTS

The present paper examines the problem of attributing mental predicates to anyone but myself. Traditionally, this has been a major issue at the intersection of epistemology and ethics, because whether we should consider someone in our moral deliberations is often thought to depend on their cognitive abilities or their capacity for consciousness. For both Kant and Fichte, we have direct moral duties only to other rational beings. The fact that the other is present to us as a representation (for Kant) or as a Not-I that is posited in opposition to the I (for Fichte) threatens our supposed moral obligations to them and risks a form of metaphysical solipsism and moral egoism. The bindingness of interpersonal obligations depends on overcoming the separation between me and other persons. It will be shown that in order to establish the other as a morally considerable being, Fichte reverses the direction of implication: I do not derive my moral duties from others' personhood; rather, others' personhood follows from my immediate sense of moral obligation toward them. The way that the problem of other minds is posed presupposes that the only appropriate answer would be a series of propositions that establishes the existence of other morally considerable beings outside of myself. The immediate moral feeling of considerability, however, is not a proposition. It will be argued that Fichte thus provides a radically different alternative to Kant's approach. The problem of other minds is not answered or solved but is rather dispelled in Fichte's philosophy by the feeling of moral obligation and the recognition of others as the object of our obligations.

INDEX

Keywords: intersubjectivity, recognition, solipsism, problem of other minds

AUTHOR

MATTHEW C. ALTMAN

Central Washington University