

## FICHTE ON THE SUBJECT & SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

PHIL 4/880

University of Nebraska–Lincoln  
mclear@unl.edu

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### FRAMING QUESTIONS

1. What role does intellectual intuition play in Fichte's account of the *Wissenschaftslehre*?
2. To what extent is Fichtean intellectual intuition in opposition to Kant's account?
3. In what sense does Fichte's account result in the "primacy of the practical" (and what does that phrase mean)?

### 1 *Structure of the Second Introduction*

1. Introduction
2. Method of the WL
3. 'I' as activity
4. The Philosophical Account of the 'I'
5. Intellectual Intuition
6. Relation of the WL to Kant's Philosophy
7. Replies to Objections
8. The Constancy of the 'I'
9. General vs. Particular 'I'
10. Esotericism & the *Wissenschaftslehre*
11. Intuition vs Idea of the 'I'
12. Conclusion

### 2 *Fichte's Absolute Subject*

- Features of the absolute I
  1. Self-positing (I:489)
  2. Exists as an act/activity (*Tathandlung*) not a fact (*Tatsache*) (I:465)
  3. Represented via intellectual intuition (§5)
  4. Presupposed in all representational consciousness (I:462)
  5. Knowable only via the moral law (I:466)

#### 2.1 *The 'I' as Activity*

- If the I is "self-positing" the does this mean that it creates itself? Is this notion related to Kant's?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The concept of positing [*Position*] or setting [*Setzung*] is perfectly simple: it is identical with the concept of being in general. Now something can be thought as posited merely relatively, or to express the matter better, it can be thought merely as the relation (*respectus logicus*) of something as a characteristic mark of a thing. In this case, being, that is to say, the positing of this relation, is nothing other than the copula in a judgment. If what is considered is not merely the relation but the thing posited in and for itself, then this being is the same as existence. (Kant, OPG 2:73)

- Why must the I be understood as an activity rather than a fact?
  - Is there a similarity/affinity here between Fichte's position and Shoemaker's arguments against self-consciousness as a form of inner sense?
    - \* Introspection does not afford object awareness because there is no "in view of" relation which one can enjoy in introspection<sup>2</sup>
    - \* Introspection does not depend, as perception does, on the possession of identifying information about oneself<sup>3</sup>
    - \* Mental states are not really related to as "particulars" in any case; one cannot just "happen upon" them (Shoemaker 1994, 259-60)
- In what sense is the 'absolute' I an activity rather than a being?<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 Intellectual Intuition

- Features of intellectual intuition
  1. No distinction between intuition and its object
  2. Occurrence of intuition is a function of subject's spontaneity
  3. Intuition provides an "immediate awareness" of subject's existence
  4. Intellectual intuition is ubiquitous<sup>5</sup>
  5. Always conjoined with a sensory representation<sup>6</sup>

### QUESTIONS:

- How should we characterize the sort of awareness that intellectual intuition provides?
  - *Reflective*: a higher-order state resulting from the subject's directing its attention to itself and making its subjectivity the object of awareness
  - *Pre-reflective*: a first-order state of object awareness where the subject is nevertheless always in a position to assess the activity fo thought as one's own
- How is the immediacy of this awareness compatible with intellectual intuition not itself being a part of empirical consciousness and instead being a kind of theoretical posit?<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> If we expand condition (3) by saying that perception involves "object-awareness" and that object-awareness of a thing involves having to it a kind of relation such that, first, it is possible for one to have this relation to any of a range of different objects, and, second, having this relation to an object enters into the causal explanation of one's knowing facts of a certain kind about it, then it is clear that introspective awareness of the self does not satisfy it. (Shoemaker 1994, 257)

<sup>3</sup> there is no such role for awareness of oneself as an object to play in explaining my introspective knowledge that I am hungry, angry, or alarmed. This comes out in the fact that there is no possibility here of a misidentification; if I have my usual access to my hunger, there is no room for the thought "Someone is hungry all right, but is it me?"... In general, identification-based first-person knowledge must be grounded in first-person knowledge that is not identification-based; and the making of introspective judgments is one of the main cases in which this occurs (Shoemaker 1994, 258)

<sup>4</sup> What "acting" is is something that can only be intuited; such knowledge cannot be developed from concepts nor can it be communicated thereby. But what is contained within this intuition becomes comprehended through its opposition to mere *being*. "Acting is not being, and being is not acting": this is the only definition of acting one can obtain from its mere concept. In order to understand the true nature of acting, one has to turn to intuition. (Fichte, I:461)

<sup>5</sup> intellectual intuition occurs at every moment of...consciousness. I cannot take a step, move hand or foot, without an intellectual intuition of my self-consciousness in these acts; only so do I know that I do it, only so do I distinguish my action, and myself therein, from the object of action before me. (Fichte, I:463)

<sup>6</sup> intellectual intuition is also constantly conjoined with an intuition of *sense*. (Fichte, I:464)

<sup>7</sup> if it has to be admitted that there is no immediate, isolated consciousness of intellectual intuition, how does the philosopher then arrive at the knowledge and isolated presentation of the same? I answer: ... [by] an inference from the obvious facts of consciousness. (Fichte, I:464-5)

### 3 *Fichte & Kant*

- To what extent is Fichtean intellectual intuition in opposition to Kant's account?
  - Differences from Kant's usage
    1. Intellectual intuition does not create things in themselves (I:472)
    2. Intellectual intuition is not a consciousness of a thing in itself (I:472)
    3. Intellectual intuition is always directed at an activity rather than a being<sup>8</sup>
  - Similarities to Kant's conception of pure apperception
    1. Form of awareness of one's own activity
    2. Always an awareness that entails existence
    3. Explains the ownership of one's representations
    4. Not a form of awareness of one's individuality
    5. Always requires the existence of an empirical intuition

### 4 *The Unity of Reason*

#### 4.1 *Kant on the Unity of Reason*

- Kant speaks of "reason" (*Vernunft*) as a unitary faculty with a "common principle"<sup>9</sup>
- Q<sub>1</sub>: In what sense is the faculty of theoretical reason, which pursues the systematicity of its cognitions, identical with the faculty of practical reason, which binds the causally unconditioned aspect of the rational (human) will by (categorical) laws?<sup>10,11</sup>
  - Is the categorical imperative the supreme or "common" principle of reason?<sup>12</sup>
- Q<sub>2</sub>: In what sense does practical reason have "primacy"?<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.2 *O'Neil's Interpretive Proposal*

- The categorical imperative (or the moral law) is the principle unifying all of reason's activity
  1. The practical use of reason is more fundamental than its theoretical/speculative use
  2. The Categorical Imperative is the supreme principle of practical reason
  3. ∴ The Categorical Imperative is the supreme principle of reason

<sup>8</sup> The intellectual intuition of which the *Wissenschaftslehre* speaks is not directed towards any sort of being whatsoever; instead it is directed at an acting—and this is something Kant does not even mention (except, perhaps, under the name "pure apperception"). (Fichte, I:472)

<sup>9</sup> Nothing here can escape us, because what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason's common principle (*gemeinschaftliches Prinzip*) has been discovered (Axx)

<sup>10</sup> [A critique of pure practical reason] is not of such utmost necessity as [a critique of pure theoretical reason], because in moral matters human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and accomplishment, even in the most common understanding, whereas in its theoretical but pure use it is wholly dialectical [i.e., a source of illusion]...I require that the critique of pure practical reason, if it is to be carried through completely, be able at the same time to present the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle, since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application. (G 4:391)

<sup>11</sup> if pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as the consciousness of the moral law proves it to be, it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles (CPrR 5:121)

<sup>12</sup> To make use of one's own reason means no more than to ask oneself, whenever one is supposed to assume something, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule on which one assumes it into a universal principle for the use of reason. (OT 8:146n)

<sup>13</sup> in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not *contingent* and discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore *necessary*. ... [O]ne cannot require pure practical reason to be subordinate to speculative reason and so reverse the order, since all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone. (CPrR 5:121)

### 4.3 Fichte's Position

- (Wood) The deliberative perspective of the agent is presumed for all activity, including all “theoretical” activity concerning what to believe<sup>14</sup>
- Self-consciousness is a “free act” and cannot be forced on one<sup>15</sup>
- The ‘I’ is a kind of *striving* (or becoming) rather than a being
- The ‘I’ is intelligible solely in and through itself<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> the first person standpoint is distinctive...only because it is not originally and fundamentally a cognitive standpoint at all, but instead the standpoint of an agent, so that what is most distinctive about it is not the way it enables us to know certain things, but rather the fact that it is that unique viewpoint on the world from which things can be done. (Wood 2000, 102)

<sup>15</sup> Such self-consciousness does not impose itself upon anyone, and it does not simply occur without any assistance from us. One must actually act in a free manner, and then one must abstract from the object and attend only to oneself. No one can be forced to do this. ... this type of consciousness cannot be proven to anyone. Everyone must freely generate it within himself. (I:429)

<sup>16</sup> The nature of the intellect consists precisely in this immediate unity of being and seeing. Everything included within the intellect exists for the intellect, and the intellect is for itself everything that it is; only insofar as this is true is the intellect what it is, *qua* intellect. (I:435)

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