

Fichte II:

Derivation of Not-I and Intersubjectivity in the *Wissenschaftslehre*

Main reading

– J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right, according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. F. Neuhouser, Introduction (pp. 3-17), and 'First main division: deduction of the concept of right', §§4-5 (pp. 29-52). (For a brief account of Fichte's argument, see F. Neuhouser's Introduction, esp. pp. xii-xvi.)

Further reading – primary texts

– J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (1794-95), pp. 93-119 (pt. I), pp. 192-217 (the concluding sections of pt. II), and pp. 232-51 (from pt. III), in *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs. Gives the detail of Fichte's argument, but extremely hard-going.

– J. G. Fichte, 'Some lectures concerning the scholar's vocation', Second Lecture (pp. 153-61), in D. Brezeale ed., *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*. Regarding others and morality.

– Kant, 'Open Letter on Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre', August 7 1799, in I. Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-99*, ed. and trans. A. Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

Further reading – commentary

– W. Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity*, chs. 4-6.

– F. Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity*, chs. 3-4.

– G. Zöllner, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy*, chs. 3-8.

– A. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, pp. 77-83. On Fichte and the concept of recognition.

– L. Ferry, *Rights – The New Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns*, ch. 4. On Fichte's deduction of intersubjectivity and right.

– P. Franks, 'The discovery of the other: Fichte and Cavell', *Common Knowledge* 5, 1996, 72-105.

– R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, pp. 31-9. On Fichte and recognition in relation to Kant.

– P. Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, pp. 99-104.

Essay questions

– How can Fichte hope, by starting from the absolute 'I', to establish anything other than its own existence? Does he succeed?

– What is Fichte's view of the primacy of the practical, and is it coherent?

– Does Fichte succeed in deducing the necessity of intersubjectivity?

The derivation of Not-I in the *Wissenschaftslehre*:

1)	absolute self or 'I'	
	<i>posits</i>	<i>posits</i>
2) self	[in <i>opposition</i> to]	not-self
	<i>the 'I' posits</i>	

3) self [a finite quantity]	quantity <i>the 'I' posits</i>	not-self [a finite quantity]
4) self [a finite quantity]	interaction <i>the 'I' posits</i>	not-self [substance with accidents]
5) self [spatio-temporal]	space & time	not-self [spatio-temporal]

The I must stand in two relations to the not-I: 1. as *positing* it, 2. as *opposed to* it. Thus we need to consider the I in two different respects: 1. as that *in which* the not-I is posited (the absolute I), 2. as *that which* is posited in opposition to the not-I. The second I is supposed to be equivalent to the not-I, in the sense that: (i) both are posited in the absolute I, (ii) the second I is supposed to be opposed to the not-I. This equivalence (of I and not-I) is possible only if there is 'some third element in terms of which' the I and not-I can be equivalent. This third element is *quantity*. The positing (at level 3) of the I and not-I in terms of quantity allows for two possibilities: (i) that the I is determined by the not-I in respect of its quantity: the I is something *dependent* = the 'I' as intellect/representing (Theoretical Part of the WL); (ii) that the not-I is determined by the I in respect of its quantity, = an I that does not represent, but has absolute causality. This absolute causality threatens to cancel out the not-I; it must be represented, therefore, as a *striving* – an approximation to infinity.

There are three absolutes in Fichte's system: 1. An absolute I which is governed by laws which it gives itself. 2. An absolute not-I which is free and independent of all of our laws. 3. An absolute capacity within ourselves to determine ourselves according to the effects of both the I and the not-I.

Three important concepts in the account of the relation of self and not-self in the *Foundations*:

i) *Imagination*: 'This interplay of the self, in and with itself, whereby it posits itself at once as finite and infinite – an interplay that consists, as it were, in self-conflict, and is self-reproducing, in that the self endeavours to unite the irreconcilable ... – this is the power of *imagination* ... The imagination posits no sort of fixed boundary; for it has no fixed standpoint of its own; reason alone posits anything fixed, in that it first gives fixity to the imagination itself. Imagination is a faculty that wavers [Schweben] in the middle between determination and nondetermination, between finite and infinite ...' (*Grundlage* 215-17); 'this wavering of imagination between irreconcilables ... extends the condition of the self therein to the moment of *time* (For reason pure and simple, everything is simultaneous; only for imagination is there such a thing as time).'

ii) *Check* [Ansto?]: 'it needs to be explained how [something to be excluded from the sphere of the self, as objective] comes to be present in the self ... The objective to be excluded has no need at all to be present; all that is required – if I may so put it – is the presence of a check [Ansto?] on the self, that is, for some reason that lies merely outside the self's activity, the subjective must be extensible no further.'

iii) *Directions of activity* of the self: 'The self posits itself absolutely, and to that extent its activity is self-reverting. The direction thereof is *centripetal* ... th[is] picture of the self ... is that of a self-constituting mathematical point ... [I]nsofar as [the self] is that upon which reflection takes place ... to that extent the direction of its activity is centrifugal, and centrifugal out to infinity ... The self is posited as a reality ... as an infinite quantum, a quantum exhaustive of infinity.'

The Practical Part of the Wissenschaftslehre

(See Fichte's review of Schulze, the Aenesidemus review.) Practical reason pertains not to *action* (i.e. 'what we really should make actual for sensation in the world of appearances') but to 'a supra-physical power of desire or endeavour', or *striving*. The striving is grounded on the distinction between the absolute ego and the ego as intelligence: (1) The absolute ego *is* because it is, is self-positing, absolutely self-subsistent and independent. (2) The ego as intelligence in empirical consciousness *is* only with reference to something else and thus has dependent existence. Thus: (3) The ego, though it is only one, is posited in opposition to itself, and embodies a contradiction

(it is both independent and dependent). (4) Since the ego cannot relinquish its absolute self-subsistence, a striving thus arises: (a) to make the non-ego dependent on itself, (b) to bring to unity the ego which is self-positing and the ego as intelligence.

'And this is the meaning of the expression, *reason is practical*. In the pure ego, reason is not practical; neither is it practical in the ego as intelligence; it is practical only in so far as it strives to unite the two.'

Morality and religion: The 'representation of this striving (which is in itself supra-natural)' generates a practical philosophy, where the ground of morality is demonstrated: 'man's highest drive is the drive toward identity, toward complete harmony with himself, and – as a means for staying constantly in harmony with himself – towards the harmony of all external things with his own necessary concepts of them. It is not enough that his concepts *not* be *contradicted* ... rather there really ought to be something which corresponds to these concepts ... He necessarily wills ... to see them realised outside of him'.

The final object of striving is an ego which would determine every non-ego, and this is the idea of Deity, and it is the object of *endless* striving. With respect to this idea (God), only *faith* is possible.

Fichte's derivation of intersubjectivity

What rational grounds have we for assuming the existence of others? What is the ground for there being, for me, other rational beings?

(1) '[T]he rational being cannot posit (perceive and comprehend) an object without simultaneously ascribing an efficacy to itself': 'self-consciousness is possible if[f] the rational being can – in one and the same moment – ascribe an efficacy to itself and posit something in opposition to that efficacy'.

(2) This contains a contradiction: this synthesis is supposed to yield an object that *constrains* the subject's efficacy, yet the subject's efficacy is to be *absolutely free* ('the natures of both subject and object are supposed to be preserved without either being lost. How might this be possible?').

(3) The contradiction is solved if we think of the subject's being-determined as '*its being-determined to be self-determining*'.

(4) This is possible if the ground of its being-determined is a 'summons [demand; eine Aufforderung] to the subject, calling upon it to resolve to exercise its free efficacy'.

(5) Thus: 'the cause of the summons must itself necessarily possess the concept of reason and freedom; thus it must itself be a being capable of having concepts; it must be an intelligence ... it must also be a free, and thus a rational, being, and must be posited as such'.

(6) '[T]here is only one thing whose possibility can be thought only through cognition – rather than through some merely natural force – and that is cognition itself': thus the 'cause of the influence upon us has ... as its end that we should cognize it as such', i.e. I am summoned by the other to *know (recognise)* the Other.

The 'rational being cannot posit itself as a rational being with self-consciousness without positing itself as an *individual*, as one among several rational beings that it assumes to exist outside itself, just as it takes itself to exist ... I posit myself as free. In the same undivided action, I simultaneously posit other free beings.'

Fichte's derivation of right

The *principle of right*: 'limit your freedom through the freedom of others', or 'limit your freedom through the concept of the freedom of all other persons with whom you come into contact'.

Fichte's argument:

(1) '*The subject must distinguish itself, through opposition, from the rational being that it has assumed to exist outside itself*'.

(2) '*the subject acts in such a way that the concept of itself as a free being and the concept of the rational being outside me (as a free being like itself) are mutually determined and conditioned*'.

(3) 'Thus the relation of free beings to one another is a relation of reciprocal interaction through intelligence and freedom. One cannot recognise the other if both do not mutually recognise each other; and one cannot treat the other as a free being, if both do not mutually treat each other as free.'

Thus 'the concept of individuality is a *reciprocal concept*, i.e. a concept that can be thought only in relation to another [identical] thought'. The concept can exist in me 'only if it is posited as *completed* by another rational being'. 'Thus this concept is never *mine*; rather, it is ... *mine and his, his and mine*; it is a shared concept within which two consciousnesses are unified into one.'

As a practical syllogism: 1. 'I can expect a particular rational being to recognise me as a rational being, only if I myself treat him as one.' 2. 'I must expect that all rational beings outside me recognise me as a rational being.' 3. I must treat him as a rational being, = limit my freedom.

'[If] the effects of rational beings are to belong within the same world, and thus be capable of influencing, mutually disturbing, and impeding one another, then freedom ... would be possible for persons who stand with one another in this state of mutual influence only on the condition that all their efficacy be contained within certain limits, and the world, as the sphere of their freedom, be, as it were, divided among them'.

Kant's Open Letter on Fichte (1799)

'I hereby declare that I regard Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a totally indefensible system. For the pure theory of science is nothing more or less than mere logic, and the principles of logic cannot lead to any material knowledge. Since logic, that is to say, *pure logic*, abstracts from the content of knowledge, the effort to cull a real object out of logic is a vain effort and therefore a thing that no one has ever done. If the transcendental philosophy is correct, such a task would involve metaphysics rather than logic. But I am so opposed to metaphysics, as defined according to Fichtean principles, that I have advised him to turn his fine literary gifts to the problem of applying the *Critique of Pure Reason* rather than squander them in cultivating fruitless sophistries ... the question whether I take the Fichtean philosophy to be a genuinely critical philosophy is already answered by Fichte himself, and it is unnecessary for me to express my opinion of its value or lack of value ... I must remark here that the assumption that I have intended to publish only a *propaedeutic* to transcendental philosophy is incomprehensible to me. Such an intention could never have occurred to me ... There is an Italian proverb: May God protect us from our friends, and we shall watch out for our enemies ourselves ... the system of the *Critique* rests on a fully secured foundation, established forever; it will be indispensable too for the noblest ends of mankind in all future ages.'

For next week, if you wish to read ahead:

– F. Hölderlin, 'Judgement and being' (1795), in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. T. Pfau.

– 'The oldest system-program of German idealism' (1796), in F. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. T. Pfau; also in *European Journal of Philosophy* 3, 1995, 199-200, trans. E. Förster.

– F. W. J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797, 2nd & revised edn. 1803), Prefaces, Introduction, and Supplement to the Introduction.

– F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Foreword, Introduction, and Part One. See also the concluding 'General Observation on the Whole System', pp. 233-6.