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REPRESENTATION, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND MIND IN GERMAN IDEALISM

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1. Introduction

The German Idealist tradition after Kant has much of interest to say on key questions in the philosophy of mind, though this is not always easy to draw out, given their dense prose and often unelaborated or even merely implicit allusions to their predecessors or to one another. Here I aim to highlight and clarify an important line of thought that emerges in the wake of Kant's 'critique' of our powers of 'cognition' (*Erkenntnis*).

As I will show below (§2), Kant takes cognition to be built up out of several 'steps' (*Stufen*), involving different 'acts' of 'representation' (*Vorstellung*) by our 'mind' (*Gemüt*) and eventually involving 'consciousness' (*Bewußtsein*). Yet, as Kant's successors were quick to point out, Kant seemed to presuppose, problematically, that representation and consciousness themselves were already well understood. They also complained that Kant had said very little about the nature of mental activity in general.

These perceived shortcomings led later Idealists to rethink Kant's analysis of mind from the ground up. As we will see, Reinhold (§3), Fichte (§4), Schelling (§5), and Hegel (§6) can all be viewed as attempting to identify and articulate deeper, philosophically more satisfactory – and when necessary, revisionary – foundations for a distinctively post-Kantian cognitive psychology, by relentlessly insisting on the need for philosophical investigation into the conditions for the possibility of consciousness, representation, and even the mind itself – all of which they felt Kant had left shrouded in darkness.¹

2. Kant

As Kant's 'Critical' project provides the most significant impetus for the Idealist contributions to philosophy of mind, let me begin by setting out some of the aspects most relevant to subsequent developments. One of the main conclusions

of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is that, with respect to key propositions of traditional metaphysics, concerning the existence of God, our own freedom, and our immortality, we have to 'deny *knowledge* [das Wissen aufheben] in order to make room for *faith* [Glaube]' (Bxxx). Kant understands *knowledge* to consist in the 'holding-true' (*Fürwahrhalten*) of a true proposition or 'judgment' (*Urteil*) for objectively sufficient grounds or reasons (cf. B848f). To establish this epistemological conclusion, Kant's method is to look first to our cognitive *psychology*, i.e., to examine the more primitive mental acts responsible for forming *judgments* about such objects in the first place, by looking at the more familiar process by which we judge about everyday real objects in our 'cognition' of objects in the mental activity he calls 'experience' (*Erfahrung*).

In preparation for the examination of knowledge in its concluding part, the bulk of Kant's *Critique* is thereby devoted to presenting the 'Doctrine of the Elements' of our cognition. Kant famously claims that these elements arise from two distinct 'stems of human cognition', the mental capacities for *representation* he calls 'sensibility' and 'understanding', respectively (B29). Sensibility is 'the *receptivity* of our mind to acquire representations insofar as it is affected in some way', whereas understanding is 'the capacity for bringing forth representations itself', and thus a kind of '*spontaneity*' (B75). The initial representations that our mind receives through sensibility are '*sensations*' (*Empfindungen*) (B34). Our mind then places sensations in an order or a 'form' so as to yield an '*intuition*' (*Anschauung*) which contains an 'appearance' (*Erscheinung*) of the object (B34). Once in possession of an appearance via intuition, our mind can then become 'conscious' of this intuition – and thereby turn it into something '*for me*' rather than merely being something '*in me*' – by using our capacity for apperception (cf. B131–132), and achieve what Kant calls '*perception*' (*Wahrnehmung*) or 'empirical *consciousness*' of the appearance (cf. B160; B207). After our mind is aware of enough appearances, it is then able to use our understanding to form judgments about the objects of these appearances, through acts of 'synthesis' which bring these appearances under a 'concept' (*Begriff*) of the further object to which they are related (B137). This allows us to '*cognize an object by means of these representations*' when the *object* is '*thought in relation to*' its appearances (B74; my ital.). This 'empirical *cognition*' of objects 'through perceptions' is what Kant calls 'experience' (cf. B218; 4:298f).²

Kant's Critical project concerning *knowledge* therefore takes its 'elementary' starting point a rich picture of our mind, its capacities, acts, products (representations), and consciousness, and how all of these contribute to the more primitive act of *cognition*.³ What is much less clear from the *Critique* itself, however, is what Kant thinks the mind itself actually is. One important hint can be found tucked away in remarks Kant wrote up as an afterword for S. T. Sömmerring's 1796 *On the organ of the soul*, a work which discusses the anatomy of the human brain:

By *mind* [Gemüt] one means only the *capacity* (*animus*) of combining the given representations and effecting the unity of empirical apperception,

not yet the *substance* (*anima*) according to its nature which is entirely distinct from matter and from which one is abstracting here.

(12:32)

Here the human mind is identified with a set of *capacities* (especially our capacity for ‘combining’ what we apperceive, i.e., our understanding), and is distinguished from whatever *substance* (i.e., *soul*) might be responsible for bearing these capacities. This distinction is important, in light of Kant’s ultimate prohibition on knowledge, or even cognition, of our own *soul* as to the features that it has ‘in itself’ (e.g., immortality), limiting knowledge only to how the soul ‘appears’ in inner intuition and inner experience. Otherwise Kant’s own exposition in the *Critique* would rest on uncertain ground, since it seems to presuppose a considerable amount of cognition and knowledge concerning our own *mind itself* (its capacities, activities), and not merely of its appearances.⁴

One way in which self-cognition of the mind might transpire is through what Kant calls *pure* ‘apperception’ or ‘*self-consciousness*’, in which ‘I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only *that* I am’ (B157). Kant hesitates about calling this not especially informative type of self-awareness ‘cognition’, especially since it does not involve any *intuition* of my mind (it is pure ‘thinking’; B157). Nevertheless, Kant does think that through such consciousness I am able to at least ‘represent the spontaneity of my thought’ (B158n).

In any case, Kant thinks that we also can use our mind to cognize itself as to how it appears, since ‘I am *also* given to myself in intuition’ (B155; my ital.). This occurs through what Kant calls ‘inner sense’, which is ‘that by means of which the mind intuits *itself*, or its inner state’, and so is given ‘inner appearances’ of itself and its own activity (B37; my ital.). The substance (subject, soul) which possesses the mind, by contrast, can never itself be ‘given’: inner sense ‘gives, to be sure, no intuition of the *soul* itself, as an object’ (B37)). Nevertheless, Kant does think that inner sense is sufficient for us to arrive at cognition and knowledge of our minds – and even our souls – by way of its appearances; we can, for example, ‘prove the persistence of our soul during life’ (4:335).

As the connection between soul and ‘life’ (*Leben*) is echoed elsewhere in Kant’s writings (cf. B403), the question arises as to whether, for Kant, everything living is ensouled, and, furthermore, whether everything living or ensouled has a mind in particular. Kant does think that being able to *represent*, and being able to ‘act’ and ‘cause’ things on the basis of such representing, is a condition for life (cf. 28:762, 28:247). Kant also associates this ‘inner principle in a substance for changing its state’ with ‘*desiring*’ (*Begehren*) (4:544). This implies that all animals and (seemingly) even *plants* have representations and desires, since Kant counts both among the living (cf. 7:135; 28:205). Only animals, however, are explicitly described as also being *conscious* of their representations. This comes about through their ‘perception’ and ‘apprehension’ (*Auffassung*) of their representations (cf. 11:345;

7:134; 9:64–65), which allows them to be ‘acquainted with’ (*kennen*) sensible appearances (9:65).

Only humans, though, can become conscious not just of their *representations*, but of *objects (things)* through these representations. In the inner case, this allows humans to be conscious not just of their inner appearances, but of *themselves* as existent objects, in ‘apperception’; this capacity for self-consciousness indicates we possess not just a *soul* but ‘*intelligence*’ (cf. 29:878–879; cf. B158). Animals lack not only this inner *self*-consciousness but are also (perhaps surprisingly) not able to genuinely *cognize* the objects of *outer* intuition either (even though they are ‘acquainted’ with (and conscious of) sensible representations or appearances of these objects (cf. 9:65)). The reason Kant gives for this is once again animals’ lack of the capacity for *understanding*, since this enables ‘consciousness of an action whereby the representations *relate to a given object* and this relation may be *thought*’ (7:397; my ital.).

Kant thereby orders *souls* into a kind of progression (from plants to animals to humans), according to the kind of representations the kind of soul is capable of: whether unconscious representation, conscious representation, or, finally, self-conscious, intelligent representation or cognition. Strikingly, this same threefold progression of representations (unconscious, conscious, cognitive) is something Kant also sees as duplicated *within* the human soul itself, as we saw above, which suggestively echoes the Aristotelian idea that our own mental life depends on partially vegetative and animal activity.⁵

3. Reinhold

Though it set about a revolution in German-language philosophy, even Kant’s more sympathetic readers conceded that the *Critique* did not make clear its own presuppositions about the mind and its acts as directly as one might hope. One of the most influential early critics of Kant on this point was Karl Reinhold. Reinhold’s main concern was that Kant’s analysis of the concept of *cognition* assumes, without any argument, that we understand what *representation* itself is, both because cognition is classified as a *species* of representation, and because cognition involves other representations (intuitions, concepts) as its *constituents*. Reinhold concludes: ‘whatever concept of cognition one accepts, it presupposes a concept of representation’ (Reinhold 1789 §V 189–190). In fact, Reinhold thought the problem was much worse, since in fact our understanding of *all* of the other things that Kant had identified as ‘elements’ of cognition presupposes an understanding of representation, since ‘representation encompasses . . . sensation, thought, intuition, concept, idea, in a word everything which occurs in our consciousness as an immediate effect of sensing, thinking, intuiting, comprehending’ (Reinhold 1789 §IX 210). From this Reinhold concludes that Kant’s overall position must remain problematically opaque until we get clear on what is meant by ‘representation’ and ‘representational capacity’ (Reinhold 1789 §V 188–189; cf. 62f).

To remedy this, the *Critique*'s own analysis must be preceded by an *even more* 'elementary' science, which would *truly* 'establish its foundation [Fundament]' – namely, 'the science of the entire capacity of *representation* as such' (Reinhold 1791 71–72; my ital.). Reinhold himself attempts to provide this more elementary philosophy in his (aptly named) 1789 *Attempt at a New Theory of Human Representation*. Reinhold there gives both an extensional specification of what he means by 'representation' (cf. the list above), as well as the following quasi-intensional one: 'everything which occurs in consciousness as an immediate effect of mental activity' (Reinhold 1789 §IX 210). Reinhold hopes that characterizations like these (compare: 'that to which everything that is and can be object of consciousness must relate') will be sufficient to point us to his subject-matter, which he also claims is 'the most familiar' in our consciousness, even claiming (strikingly) that representation 'is neither capable of or *in need of* an explanation' (Reinhold 1789 §XIII 223–224; my ital.). In fact, Reinhold is so confident that ostensive appeal to what is immediately given to consciousness is sufficient both to convey what representation in general consists in (its nature and structure) as well as to inform us about its basic kinds, that he stakes his whole theory upon it: 'the basis [Grund] on which the new theory could and had to be developed consists solely of *consciousness* as it functions in all people according to basic laws, and what follows immediately from that and will be actually conceded by all thinkers' (Reinhold 1789 66); the 'foundation [Grundlage] of my theory' is something 'necessitated by consciousness' (Reinhold 1789 §§VI–VII 200–201).⁶

Consciousness itself is sufficient, Reinhold thinks, to 'give' us those 'properties' of representation 'through which it is conceived and which belong among the *inner* conditions of representation, insofar as representation is *not conceivable* without these properties' (Reinhold 1789 §XIV 227; my ital.). The first such 'inner condition' on something's being conceivable as a representation is that it is at once related to, but yet itself distinct from, both a subject and an object:

There is agreement, necessitated by consciousness, that there belongs to representation a representing subject and a represented object, which both must be distinguished from the representation to which they belong.
(Reinhold 1789 §VII 200)

Because of the distinguishability of the representation from the representing subject and represented object, Reinhold argues that subject and object *themselves* cannot be thought to function as '*inner* constituents' or 'components' of the representation considered 'merely' by itself; rather, the subject and the object 'pertain simply to the *external* conditions of representation' (Reinhold 1789 §XIII 220–221; my ital.). In explaining what he means by 'inner' vs. 'external', Reinhold in effect anticipates something of Husserl's phenomenological method, according to which what is immediately given *in* consciousness can be analyzed without

making use of any presuppositions about the existence of anything *outside* of this givenness – including the represented object or even the representing subject:

It is not being claimed here either that or how *objects* are present *outside* the mind, but only that they must be distinguished from mere representations.

(Reinhold 1789 201; my ital.)

In all experiences which are possible to our mind, only representations can occur, and never the representing entity [das Vorstellende] itself, always only the *effects* of the representing subject, never the *subject* itself.

(Reinhold 1789 161–162; my ital.)

Reinhold insists, therefore, that the ‘inner conditions’ of representation simply cannot be ‘derived’ from either reflection on the subject or the object, but only from attending to representation itself, in its primitive givenness to consciousness (Reinhold 1789 §XIII 220–221).

Even so, when Reinhold turns to the positive task of characterizing the ‘inner conditions’ (constituents) of mere representation, these essential components turn out to ‘*correspond*’ to the represented object and the representing subject, respectively – even while not being identical with them. The correlate of the *object* is what Reinhold calls the ‘*material*’ of the representation (Reinhold 1789 §XV 230). That in the representation which correlates with the *subject* is what Reinhold calls the ‘*form*’ of the representation, and which is singled out both as that ‘through which the pure material *becomes* a representation’ in the first place (Reinhold 1789 §XVI 235), and also ‘that *by means of which* the representation belongs to the mind’ (Reinhold 1789 §XVI 237; my ital.). As the correlate of the representing subject, the form of a representation is ‘that *in* the representation which *belongs to the mind*’ in a special way, in the sense that ‘the material could only acquire the form of representation *in* the mind and only *by means of* the capacity for representation’ (ibid.; my ital.). The form of a representation, therefore, is the distinctive result of the subject’s own exercise of its representational capacity and is what transforms the material into something representational in the first place. The material, by contrast, is ‘that by means of which the representation *belongs to the represented (object)*’ (Reinhold 1789 §XVI 237; my ital.), in the sense that certain sense-impressions ‘belong to’ an object in virtue of their causal connectedness to it as its effects (Reinhold 1789 §XVI 242).

In this way, Reinhold takes great pains both to distinguish these internal conditions (constituents) of representations from their external conditions (subject, object), and also to prioritize the former methodologically, due to their immediate occurrence or presence in consciousness. Nevertheless, Reinhold’s account of representation ultimately seems to bottom out in something which is itself *external* to any representation and hence *cannot occur* in any consciousness. This

comes out most clearly in the Appendix to his *Attempt*, where Reinhold ends up following Kant in positing a necessary real (causally efficacious) relation between our representations and our ‘capacities’ (*Vermögen*) – namely, the former being effects of the latter’s realization in ‘powers or forces’ (*Kräfte*), which serve as grounds for any actual representing to occur (Reinhold 1789 560). Moreover, what is responsible for initiating the movement from possible representing to actual representing – i.e., the realization of these powers and the ‘production’ (*Erzeugung*) of actual representations – is a deeper ‘drive’ (*Trieb*), and ultimately a ‘desire’ (*Begehren*), for representations (Reinhold 1789 561).

Now, the exercise of this originary drive and desire to represent cannot itself be dependent upon any actually existent representation, on pain of circularity (unless Reinhold were to accept innately actual representations, which he does not; cf. Reinhold 1789 §XXXII 312). What is more, because neither the drive, nor the desire, nor the capacities they actualize in forces, are *themselves* representations, none of these can be immediately present ‘in’ consciousness itself. Hence, by Reinhold’s own lights, the appeal to these items as at all explanatory of representation would seem to directly conflict with Reinhold’s methodological ‘principle of consciousness’ – unless Reinhold concedes that there is something ‘in’ consciousness itself after all (an ‘inner condition’ of representations themselves) which entails that, to *conceive* of representations at all, we must think of them as related to something beyond themselves.⁷ But then Reinhold’s own lights seem to have led him to admit (albeit begrudgingly and perhaps belatedly) the ultimate insufficiency of the mere ‘facts’ contained within consciousness to provide a sufficient ground or foundation for the philosophical account of representation itself – let alone Kant’s original topics of cognition and knowledge.

4. Fichte

In this partial concession that the external conditions of representation might not ultimately be so external after all, those who were closely following Reinhold’s exposition and development of the Kantian philosophy, such as Fichte, saw Reinhold pointing the way toward deeper, hitherto largely uncharted questions. In his own 1794 work on the ‘foundation [Grundlage] for the entire doctrine of science [Wissenschaftslehre]’, Fichte pressed directly on just this issue, charging Reinhold with a lack of a truly ‘foundational’ account of representation and hence ‘what can occur in consciousness’. The echoes of Reinhold’s own critique of Kant are thus clear enough: whereas Reinhold had complained that Kant had simply presupposed that the genus of representation was understood in order to account for one of its species (cognition), Fichte now complained that Reinhold himself makes similarly unsatisfactory presuppositions about the primitive intelligibility of representation itself:

Reinhold put forward the principle of representation, and in Cartesian form his basic proposition would run: *repraesento, ergo sum*, or more

properly: *repraesentans sum, ergo sum*.[. . .] But representing is not the essence of being, but a specific determination thereof; and our being has still other determinations besides this, *even if they must pass through the medium of representation in order to reach empirical consciousness*.
(Fichte 1794 I.100)

Representation cannot be a primitive term, thinks Fichte, because it is a species of a still higher genus – namely, *being* in general. Moreover, even with respect to specifically *human being*, Reinhold himself was forced to accept that the activity of representing is only one among many ‘determinations’ of our being, as is witnessed by his own postulation of a ground for representation in activities (drives, desires) which were not themselves further acts of representing.

In his own 1794 *Grundlage*, Fichte can be seen as trying to systematically account for just those activities which function as pre-conditions for representation and consciousness, and thereby provide a more adequate account of the true ‘foundation’ for cognition, science, and knowledge itself. Against Reinhold, Fichte argues that the most fundamental characterization of the kind of being which is ultimately capable of representation – what Fichte calls ‘the I’ (*Ich*) – should not be in terms of representing or consciousness, but rather in terms of something even more basic. This is because (as was already acknowledged by Kant) the I is capable of activity which includes ‘no consciousness’ and which is such that ‘no consciousness *comes about* through this mere act’ (Fichte 1797 §4 I.459; my ital.). Rather, there is a layer of activity that ‘lies at the *basis* [Grund] of all consciousness and alone makes it possible’ (Fichte 1794 §1 I.91; my ital.).

What is this activity like? Fichte accepts Reinhold’s thesis that representation (and, hence, the occurrence of consciousness) requires a relation to both the object (what Fichte calls ‘the not-I’) and to the subject (‘the I’). In Fichte’s terms, the I’s consciousness (and representations) ‘only comes about *by contrast with* a not-I, and through the determination of the I within this *opposition*’ (Fichte 1797 §4 I.459; my ital.). One thing that Fichte is insisting on, then, is that not every activity by the I already has this particular structure – i.e., that there is pre-conscious, pre-representational activity, in which the I and the not-I are not yet ‘contrasted’, ‘determined’, or ‘opposed’. But what kind of activity will this be?

In its most basic form, Fichte’s proposal would seem to be simply – activity per se; ‘The I is originally a *doing* [Tun]’ (Fichte 1797 §7 I.496; my ital.), perhaps on the model of Reinhold’s mysterious ‘drive’. It is hard to see how any *simple* activity, however, could ever function as a genuinely explanatory ground of the *relational* structure present in representation and consciousness. In order to succeed where Reinhold fails, then, Fichte holds that this originary activity must itself contain a *difference* within itself which can serve as the ground for the possibility of the structural components eventually manifest in representation and consciousness. That is, it must somehow already ‘contain’ some sort of twofold relationality – even if not the specific subject-object relatedness that furnishes the inner constituents of representationality in particular. Fichte’s more fleshed-out

proposal, therefore, is that the originary activity of the I is itself twofold, consisting, on the *one* hand, of an initial and entirely indeterminate ‘going out’ (*hinausgehen*) or ‘positing’ (*setzen*) of itself; and on the *other*, an equally indeterminate ‘reverting back’ (*zurückkehren*) into itself due to an equally basic ‘op-positing’ or ‘counter-positing’ (*gegensetzen*) (cf. Fichte 1794 1.96–98), in the form of a ‘check’ (*Anstoss*) which ‘reflects’ the positing, such that it is ‘driven inwards (*nach innen getrieben*); it takes exactly the reverse direction’ (Fichte 1794 1.228; cf. 1.272, 1.275).

What this means, concretely, is far from clear, especially as we are now to be looking below the context of representationality and consciousness, and we are hence prohibited at this stage from interpreting ‘positing’ (‘going-forth’) and ‘counter-positing’ (‘returning back’) as *representing something* to the I, or even having a representation ‘in’ the I. Rather, this originary twofold activity itself is intended to function as a pre-condition for even any determinate ‘positing in the I’, let alone any instance of consciousness of a representation of an object (‘not-I’). As Fichte sees it, ‘it is a *ground of explanation* of all the facts of empirical consciousness, that prior to all positing *in* the I, the I itself is posited’; that is, there is simply the I’s going-out (Fichte 1794 1.95; my ital.). Ultimately, ‘consciousness is itself a *product* of the I’s original act, its own positing of itself’ (Fichte 1794 1.107; my ital.). Similarly, opposing or counter-positing (‘reverting back’) stands as a pre-condition for representing something to oneself, rather than being itself an instance of it: ‘If I am to represent anything at all, I must counter-posit *it* to the one representing’ (Fichte 1794 1.105). The idea of the primitive though indeterminate ‘check’ is ‘prerequisite for explaining representation’ (Fichte 1794 1.218), but only in that it prefigures the relation to a not-I, since ‘representation in general’ is ‘indisputably the effect’ of ‘the not-I’ in particular being counter-positing (Fichte 1794 1.251).

In fact, neither the originary (absolute, infinite) positing (‘going forth’), nor even the originary counter-positing (‘reverting back’), *has any ‘object’* (*Gegenstand*). This is because such a relatedness would make these acts ‘finite’ and conditioned by something outside of themselves, something ‘standing over and against’ (*gegenstehende*) the activity; rather, there is only a ‘pure’ and free act of ‘reverting back [*zurückgehende*] *to itself*’ without any external ‘resistance’ (*Widerstand*) (Fichte 1794 1.256–257; my ital.). In the originary ‘reverting back’, the I’s activity is not ‘directed at any object’, not even the not-I or the ‘check’; this only happens once it finally ‘*represents*’ what it itself counter-positing ‘to itself’; only then does it take up an object (Fichte 1794 1.134; cf. 1.159). It is only ‘*non-objective*’ activity of the prior sort which can be ‘pure’ and ‘absolute’ in the required sense (Fichte 1794 1.237; my ital.).

All of this helps to explain why it is only much later in Fichte’s *Grundlage*, many pages after the introduction of these originary activities, and after many intermediate ‘steps’ beyond them, that he thinks we have enough on the table to achieve that necessary task which Reinhold was prohibited from even attempting – namely, a true ‘deduction of *representation*’ as such (Fichte 1794 1.228), and

a more general reconstruction of the developmental ‘history’ of ‘human spirit [Geist]’ (Fichte 1794 1.222). Strikingly, this takes the form of the derivation of a progression of the species of representations that very closely echoes Kant’s original progression noted above (cf. §2), beginning with sensory representation and imagination (Fichte 1794 1.229f), and then on to the ‘higher’, specifically cognitive, capacities of understanding (Fichte 1794 1.233f) and reason (Fichte 1794 1.244f). Unlike Kant, however, Fichte suggests that it is only once we reach the level of *reason* that we finally arrive at ‘the source of all *self-consciousness*’ (Fichte 1794 1.244), rather than this being possible through mere *thinking* (Kantian apperception).

If this captures the core of Fichte’s attempt to find a better ground for Reinhold’s account of the mind, we might wonder (as Fichte did of Reinhold) whether there might be any *further* possible explanation of the nature of this originary activity itself, in particular of why the originary activity is twofold in the first place. That such deeper twofold activity *does* occur is something Fichte takes to be demonstrated (a posteriori) by the sheer *existence* of consciousness and representation, suggesting he is also confident that it must be in place ‘*if* actual consciousness is to be *possible*’ at all (Fichte 1794 1.275; my ital). Nevertheless, Fichte concedes: ‘*that* this occurs, as a fact, is *absolutely incapable of derivation from the I* – which he takes to imply, furthermore, that the I itself ‘is *not* to exhaust the infinite’ (ibid.; my ital.), i.e., the indeterminacy out of which the originary activity itself emerges, since there must be some other ground or reason outside of these acts, conditioning the I in some way so as to elicit or actualize just this activity in the first place.

Ultimately, Fichte thinks that this question about the grounds for actualizing the I’s originary activity simply can’t be answered within the context of ‘theoretical’ philosophy *at all* (cf. Fichte 1794 1.218). It is only once we introduce the ‘practical’ part of philosophy later in the *Grundlage* that Fichte thinks we can begin to provide an answer to the question as to *why* the I ever comes *actually* to act (‘go out’ and ‘come back’) in the first place. In this, the shape of this ‘practical’ answer sounds surprisingly similar to Reinhold’s, since Fichte, too, takes the actualization of the I’s originary activity to require something in the I *prior to* the act itself, something that Fichte himself (like Reinhold) calls a ‘*drive*’, and which he understands to be a kind of ‘*striving*’ (*Streben*) on the part of the I (Fichte 1794 1.288).⁸ Fichte even likewise concedes that ‘the action should admit of being regarded as *brought about* [hervorgebraucht] by the drive’ (Fichte 1794 1.327).

The problem with all of this, however, is that, as per Fichte’s own original criticism of Reinhold, this even more originary drive now seems to function as a precondition on the hitherto allegedly foundational activity. To avoid this conclusion, Fichte tries to argue that, conversely, ‘the drive should admit of being posited as *determined* [bestimmt] by the action’ – even though it is the drive that ‘brings about’ the action (Fichte 1794 1.328; my ital.). It seems that the activation of the capacity is somehow ‘determined’ by the originary activity in the sense that this activity is the *end* to be achieved by the striving, as that for the sake of which the drive strives. In this way, Fichte shifts the ultimate ground of the explanation of

mind away from something self-standing in immediate consciousness, or even pre-conscious activity, and toward a deeper *teleology*,⁹ a pre-active layer of end-oriented drives and strivings.¹⁰

5. Schelling

For these reasons, Schelling, and Hegel after him, concluded that what Fichte had officially identified as absolute – namely, the originary activity of the I – turned out not to be so absolute after all. Fichte’s ‘practical’ turn to ‘strivings’ toward ‘ends’ acknowledged that there was in fact a deeper reason or ground for why the putatively absolute activity itself occurred and had the structure that it did. This acknowledgement, however, simply again pointed up the need for further philosophical investigation to clarify what it was that served as the condition for Fichtean activity. As we will see, in his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* and in his subsequent ‘System’-writings (1801 *Darstellung meines Systems*; 1802 *Ferner Darstellung meines Systems*), Schelling follows out Fichte’s gesture toward teleology to attempt to show how these acts of the I arise out of *living nature*.

This turn toward organicism, however, was also motivated by a second failing Schelling identified in Fichte’s system, this time with consequences upstream, concerning how Fichte’s originary derivation of representation and consciousness would ever allow for genuine *knowledge*. Like Kant and Reinhold before him, Fichte had only shown how the development or progression from activity to consciousness took place from the ‘*subjective*’ side of things, only from ‘within’ the I. Yet, no approach of this sort, thought Schelling, could possibly provide a satisfactory analysis of the ‘not-I’ or *object* in that ‘subject-object’ relation which turns out to be constitutive of consciousness and representationality. For Fichte left open the possibility that when the object-term was considered in *itself*, it would turn out to have an *infinitely different kind of being* than the originally active subject which constituted the relation to it. Not only would this in turn leave uncertain the very possibility of the higher unity of I with the not-I that Fichte poses as a practical ‘task’, Schelling argues that it leaves the door open to a vicious skepticism about the possibility of knowing this object.

This is because, like Kant before him, Schelling takes knowledge to depend on *truth* – since ‘one knows only the truth’ – yet (also like Kant) Schelling notes that truth itself consists in the ‘harmony or *agreement*’ (*Uebereinstimmung*) of something ‘subjective’ (namely: our representations) with something ‘objective’ (their ‘objects’) (Schelling 1800 I.3:339). For such agreement itself to be possible, Schelling thinks, there must ‘exist a point at which both representation and object are originally *one* . . . at which they are in the most perfect *identity*’ (Schelling 1800 3:363–364; my ital.). For this ultimate identity in knowledge to be possible, however, Schelling thinks there must *always already be* an ‘*originary identity*’ between the kind of being that the object represented has, and the kind of being that the representation itself has. But then, since Schelling agrees with Fichte,

Reinhold, and Kant that representationality, or the ‘subjective’ side of this agreement, is something which is an expression of ‘activity’ (*Tätigkeit*), he concludes that the ‘agreement’ required for knowledge ‘is itself unthinkable unless the activity, whereby the *objective world* is produced, is at bottom *identical* with that activity which expresses itself in [*representation* and] volition, and vice versa’ (Schelling 1800 3:348; my ital.).

What this ‘at bottom identity’ amounts to, thinks Schelling, is in one respect like Fichte’s originary I, in that it must come before the emergence of the *relation* between representation and object that eventually comes to constitute the conscious perspective of the I. Yet, it is even more like Fichte’s pre-active striving beneath the I and its originary activity, in that this identity is to come before anything that is specifically assignable to the I, anything distinctively subjective. Rather, the originary identity is a ‘point of *indifference*’ which is *neither* subjective *nor* objective. Only in this way can it thereby serve as the ground *both* for the distinctively subjective activity that Fichte had charted out in his *Grundlage*, but *also* for the ultimate, parallel constitution of what is objective – and do so in such a way that leaves open the possibility of harmony and ultimately knowledge itself.

This originary grounding point of indifference is what Schelling calls ‘*absolute reason*’ (*Vernunft*), though Schelling takes care to sharply distinguish this from whatever ‘reason’ Kant and others might take to be possessed by individual persons, since what is in question here is the ground for all subjectivity whatsoever, including individualized versions. ‘Reason’ here means instead: ‘reason insofar as it is thought of as the total indifference of the subjective and objective’ (Schelling 1801 §1), as the entirely impersonal ultimate ground of the very difference between subjective and objective in the first place.

Schelling then poses the following two tasks for post-Fichtean philosophy of mind, if it is to avoid extreme skepticism: *first*, to show how this originary indifference-point could give rise to the specific progression of activities which Fichte had shown to constitute the subjective (the I), and thereby allow for a derivation of representationality and consciousness; and *second*, to show that and how it also gives rise to the very same sort of progression of activity (positing, opposing, etc.) on the side of the object as well, on the side of the not-I, or what Schelling describes as ‘nature’.

In the 1800 *System* itself Schelling traces the ‘history’ of the I’s own progression through a broadly Fichtean ‘step-wise series’ (*Stufenfolge*) of ‘epochs’ (Schelling 1800 3:331).¹¹ Schelling, too, insists that we must first go below Descartes’ ‘I think’ and Reinhold’s ‘I represent’ to an even deeper ‘era’ of the I, if we are ‘to become originally conscious’ of the ground for representing and thinking itself: we must ‘free ourselves of all representing’, in order to allow the proposition ‘I am’ to arise for us, because this ‘is without doubt a higher proposition’ (Schelling 1800 3:367). What is then revealed is Fichte’s truth that, originally, ‘the I is pure *act*, pure *doing*’ (Schelling 1800 3:368; my ital.).

Yet, while Schelling agrees with the general shape of Fichte’s developmental-historical analysis of the I, he aims to go beyond Fichte by attempting to remove

the sense that the progression in question (from originary act, through positing, opposing, etc.) is the *unique* property of the I, or what is subjective. He aims to do this by showing how the stages ('epochs') in the I's development can be viewed as closely correlated with the stages in the development of *nature* itself, in the exercise of its various 'potencies' (*Potenzen*) for activity. The first potency is that which is responsible for *matter* as the originary filling of space with gravitational force of attraction and repulsion, manifest, e.g., in magnetism; this then develops into a second 'reflective' potency manifest in *light* and ultimately, electrical and chemical relations as well, and which again include unities of polarity (cf. Schelling 1800 3:433–454); '*organized nature*' or '*life*' forms a third potency, which brings about self-maintaining and self-monitoring activity structured as sensibility, irritability, and 'formative drive' (*Bildungstrieb*) (Schelling 1800 3:495f).

Schelling argues that we can see this 'objective' progression as exactly parallel to the three-step series of 'epochs' that we find in subjective history of the I's activity: the first involves bare '*sensing*' (*empfinden*), as like a 'pulse' that runs out and returns to itself, filling the I, though '*without consciousness*' (Schelling 1800 4:462); the second includes the development into an *intelligence*, which allows for sensing '*with consciousness*' (Schelling 1800 4:462), and hence with the further 'reflective' intuition of the I's activity of sensing itself (Schelling 1800 3:454); the third stage involves the self-intuition of the I as being *alive*, i.e., the intelligence '*appearing to itself*' as '*an organic individual*', whose (Schelling 1800 3:495; my ital.). In this, the I shows itself to be constituted by a progression of activity precisely of a piece with that which generates the nature which it ultimately relates to as 'object'.

What is less clear in the *System*, however, is, first, how both parallel (subjective and objective) progressions can be seen as arising *from one and the same* single originary point of indifference, and second, what exactly it means, once representation is possible on the subjective side, for what is being represented by such representations (the objective) to be *identical with* what is doing the representing (the subjective). It might appear that Schelling does not think he has, or even can have, completed the latter task in the *System* itself, since in the Foreword to his *System*, Schelling claims only to be able to show that 'the same potencies of intuition which are in the I can also be indicated in nature *up to a certain limit*' (Schelling 1800 3:332; my ital.). This alludes to Schelling's further thesis that the progression of the I actually has a further, *fourth* 'epoch', corresponding to the step from I's self-intuition as a living organism to the self-determination of its activity through free *willing* and the '*cognition of itself as intelligence*' in *self-consciousness* (Schelling 1800 3:524–525; my ital.).

Now, if there could be no corresponding fourth 'potency' charted out within nature itself, this would imply that, though there are important parallels between the progression in the I and that in nature, these parallels ultimately run out. This in turn would show the I's potencies (and the mind more generally) to be ultimately of a different kind than nature per se, and Schelling's position would succumb to skepticism as much as Fichte's. Schelling, however, tries to avoid such bifurcation

by arguing that we can observe, already in the early stages of nature's potencies, that these phenomena are *themselves* products of the activity of 'an immature [unreife] intelligence' which is merely 'conscious-less' (*bewußtlos*) (Schelling 1800 3:341). For example, a ray of light is described as 'the original seeing' (*das ursprüngliche Sehen*), as 'intuiting itself' (*das Anschauen selbst*) (Schelling 1800 3:430). In other words, recognizing the correlation in progressions is not merely meant to point up ultimately limited parallels but rather really to uncover a deeper identity.

In fact, when the fourth epoch of self-consciousness is finally achieved by the I, Schelling claims that precisely here 'it becomes evident that *nature* is *originally identical* with that which is cognized in us as something intelligent and conscious' (Schelling 1800 3:341), and that it is *nature itself* which thereby reveals itself to be 'an *absolute*, the absolute identity of the subjective and objective, and that which in its highest potency is nothing other than self-consciousness' (Schelling 1800 3:356). In this way, the fourth epoch of the I is at one and the same time *nature's* fourth potency as well; it is absolute reason coming (finally) to know itself.¹²

6. Hegel

Early on a colleague and collaborator of Schelling, Hegel continues to hold onto core features of both Schelling's philosophy of nature and philosophy of mind (or 'spirit', i.e., *Geist*) in his own mature 1817–1830 *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*. In particular, Hegel accepts Schelling's criticism of Fichte's merely 'subjective' articulation of the activity which gives rise to 'subject-object' relations, and takes over the general shape of Schelling's account of the parallel progression in 'objective' potencies responsible for the correlative relations found in nature itself.

What Hegel takes to follow from the demonstrability of this parallelism, however, is that there must be *more* than just an original identity-*point* which is neither subjective nor objective but which gives rise to both – the point that Schelling had called 'reason'. Rather, the parallel progressions themselves should be viewed as both dual manifestations of a single original identity-*progression* – the *whole sequence of* which is indifferent both to the I (spirit) and to nature, and only the whole sequence of which, Hegel thinks, should merit the name of absolute '*reason*'. Any philosophy of mind must therefore be preceded by a philosophical science of reason itself, one which provides the neutral account of what is common across the progressions in mind and those in nature – i.e., the series of 'determinations' of '*pure reason*', or what Hegel also calls '*thinking*' (*Denken*) and '*the idea*' (both understood, *à la Schelling*, in a fairly revisionary, non-subjective sense). This, thinks Hegel, is the science of *logic*: 'what is logical' (*das Logische*), for Hegel, is the '*system of thought-determinations in general, for which the opposition between subjective and objective (in its common meaning) falls away*' (Hegel 1830a §24 8:81). This is equally '*the system of pure reason*', whose pure '*content*' Hegel strikingly identifies with '*the presentation of God as he is in his eternal*

essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit (Hegel 1816 5:44; my ital.). Logic must first present ‘the foundation [Grundlage] and the inner simple scaffold [Gerüst]’, or pure abstract structure, of the ‘forms’ and ‘steps’ (*Stufen*) of ‘the idea’ – which then will be shown to be ‘concretized’ in both Nature and Spirit (Hegel 1816 6:257).

Hegel also goes beyond Schelling, however, in holding that not just Logic, but also the Philosophy of *Nature* must come *before* the Philosophy of Spirit. As Hegel sees it, reason as a whole first ‘resolves to *release* [entlassen] itself, freely from itself, as *nature*’ *first of all*, because ‘nature’ is ‘the moment of . . . its *first* determining and being-other [Anders-sein]’ (Hegel 1830a §244, 8:393; my ital.). In this initial ‘self-releasing’, reason (the idea) becomes ‘other’ to itself, it ‘*posits* forth from itself [herauszusetzen] this other’ as nature (Hegel 1830b §244 Z, 9:24; my ital.). Only subsequently (in the Philosophy of Spirit) does reason ‘then *take it back* into itself [zurückzunehmen]’, as ultimately not radically other than itself, since it has been seen (in the philosophy of nature) to be constituted concretely by the very same progression that is manifest in pure reason by itself, as considered in logic (ibid.). With such reconciliation, reason (the idea) finally ‘*comes to be* subjectivity and spirit’ (ibid.; my ital.). For Hegel, then, mind can only be properly understood after and in light of nature (and logic); consequently, Hegel introduces a more explicit ordering than Schelling’s: ‘actual spirit . . . has external nature as its *most proximate* presupposition, as it has the logical idea as its *first*’ (Hegel 1830c §381 Z, 10:18; my ital.).

Even so, the ultimate goal of passing through the Philosophy of Nature remains broadly Schellingian: to make it possible for us (as subjects) to understand how to ‘overcome [aufheben] the *division* of nature and spirit, and grant to spirit the *cognition* of its essence in nature’ (Hegel 1830b §247 Z; my ital.). Also like Schelling, Hegel thinks spirit is best led to see its own essence ‘in nature’ by having the Philosophy of Nature lead up to an account of specifically ‘*organic*’ or ‘*living*’ nature, thereby seeing spirit’s prefigurings already in the movements and structures present in mechanics, dynamics, and chemical processes. Here Hegel includes under ‘organism’ not just animal as well as vegetative life, but going even farther than Kant in also including the *earth*, as the systematic ‘totality of unliving, existing, mechanical and physical nature’, under the heading of a ‘*geological* organism’ (cf. Hegel 1830b §337). In the details, Hegel’s account highlights the extent to which the dimensions of Fichtean originary activity (going forth, returning, and (aiming for) unifying) are continuously manifest throughout the ‘natural’ progression from earth, to plant, to animals, which thereby shows itself as a progression in ‘*being self-like*’ (*Selbstischkeit*), and in this way sets the stage for the treatment of specifically mental self and its acts of consciousness and representation in the *Philosophy of Spirit*.

Not only does ‘nature’ thereby stand as a fundamental ‘presupposition’ for spirit itself (Hegel 1830c §38, 10:17), it also continues to be present ‘in’ spirit, which leads Hegel to cover a broad range of ‘natural’ (biological-developmental) phenomena within the first sections of the *Philosophy of Spirit* itself. In this way,

Hegel perhaps strikes the most directly ‘Aristotelian’ notes among the Idealists (cf. Hegel 1830c §378). These occur in what Hegel calls ‘the *soul*’ (*Seele*), and more specifically, in what Hegel calls the ‘*natural* [natürliche] soul’. The natural soul’s activity is not much more than a ‘simple pulsing’ (Hegel 1830c §390 Z, 10:49; cf. Schelling’s first ‘epoch’), which merely ‘lives a life of nature’ (*Naturleben*), as something which essentially ‘lives along with the universal planetary life, the difference in climates, the changes of seasons and times of day, and so on’ (Hegel 1830c §392, 10:52). As with Schelling (and Fichte and Kant), Hegel takes this initial psychological activity to remain entirely ‘without consciousness [bewußtlos] and without understanding [verständnislos]’ (Hegel 1830c §400, 10:97), features which can only be achieved once the mental acts of ‘reflection’ and abstraction (‘exclusion’) are on the scene, and which lead to the achievement of ‘the I’ properly speaking (Hegel 1830c §412, 10:197).

Once we reach the stage of consciousness, Hegel’s account mirrors Kant’s own ‘progression’ within consciousness (cf. §2 above) in key ways (cf. Hegel 1830c §418, §420), moving from simple ‘*sensory* [sinnliche] consciousness’, which has as its object something ‘immediate’ and ‘individual’; to a ‘*perceiving* [wahrnehmende] consciousness’ of the ‘essence’ of this initial object, by relating what is immediate and individual to something ‘universal’; to finally an ‘*intellectual* [verständige] consciousness’, which distinguishes between the immediate object of sensory consciousness and its universal features as ‘appearance’, and a further ‘interior’ to the object beyond its appearance, or a way of its being ‘in itself’ (Hegel 1830c §418 Z, 10:206–207; cf. §422).

As with Fichte, Hegel departs from Kant, however, in holding that it is only much later – after the development of both *self*-consciousness (cf. Hegel 1830c §423) and consciousness of the universal perspective given by *reason* (Hegel 1830c §437) – that enough has developed in the mental life of consciousness in order to introduce the signature theoretical-cognitive mental acts or processes that Kant had originally made the focus of the *Critique*: the specifically *subjective* acts of intuition, attention, imagination, thinking, judgment, and so on (cf. Hegel 1830c §445 Z, 10:245). In fact, it is also only here, well after the introduction of consciousness and self-consciousness, that Hegel himself finally thinks we can find ‘*representation*’ (*Vorstellung*) itself, something which Hegel claims requires not just a mental relation to an object, but *also* ‘that I make the reflection that it is I who have’ this relation (Hegel 1830c §449 Z, 10:254).¹³

7. Conclusion

We have seen that Reinhold set the course for the later Idealists by insisting that Kant’s analysis of *cognition* (cf. §2) must be preceded by an analysis of *representation* and the contents of *consciousness* (cf. §3). Fichte pushed further, insisting that this itself must be preceded by an account of the pre-representational, pre-conscious ‘originary’ *activity* required for representations and consciousness themselves to come about (cf. §4). Schelling then sought to further ground this

originary activity in ‘potencies’ equally present in ‘unconscious’ nature (cf. §5). Finally, Hegel radicalized Schelling by first tracing out an even more originary ‘logical’ progression, of which the development of mind and of nature could both be viewed as manifestations, and then by deepening the account of how the mental (spirit) develops out of, presupposes, and is prefigured in the natural (cf. §6).

These developments in German Idealist philosophy of mind proved to make influential and lasting contributions to an intellectual context which also gave rise, first, to the empirical-experimental psychology of Fries, Herbart, Helmholtz, Mueller, and Brentano (with their varying agendas), and, eventually, led to both the scientific investigation of the unconscious (Freudian psychoanalysis) and the scientific analysis of consciousness itself (Husserlian phenomenology).¹⁴ Tracing out these lines in Idealism therefore perhaps gives clues as to what prospects and problems might face contemporary attempts to unify and systematize logic and the philosophy of nature within a more holistic philosophy of mind. At the very least, it hopefully brings some additional light to the motivations, contents, and context of views developed in a series of notoriously difficult texts.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 For treatments of this period covering similar themes, see Förster (2012) and Gabriel (2013).
- 2 Kant presents this ‘progression’ (*Stufenleiter*; step-ladder) of our representations explicitly at several points in his writings and lectures (cf. B376f; 9:64–65), and it is also a main theme of the *Critique* itself, especially in the Transcendental Deduction as well as in the subsequent Principles, whose very titles indicate the crucial significance of the transitions from intuition, to perception, to experience (cf. B199f).
- 3 Cognition is more primitive since it need not involve any epistemic attitude toward the truth or falsity of the judgment in question, let alone require that the judgment in question be true (cf. B83).
- 4 Kant describes logic, for example – which he understands as the science of understanding, and hence a key component of the *Critique*’s Doctrine of Elements – as a science in which our understanding achieves ‘self-cognition’ (*Selbsterkenntniß*) (9:14).
- 5 For more discussion of Kant’s philosophy of mind, see Ameriks (2000a); Brook (1994); Kitcher (1990 and 2011); and Longuenesse (1998). See also Brook’s contribution to Volume Four of the present series.
- 6 The foundational role of consciousness is something Reinhold emphasizes even more directly in his next major work; cf. Reinhold (1791 77f). This is complicated, however, by Reinhold’s (Kantian) insistence at times that representation itself somehow actually ‘precedes all consciousness’, and that consciousness *itself* ‘is only possible because of it’ (Reinhold 1789 §XIII 223–224; my ital.) – which would seem to limit the explanatory usefulness (or non-circularity) of the appeal to consciousness.
- 7 For more on Reinhold’s account of representationality, see Ameriks (2000b, Chapter 2) and Beiser (1987, Chapter 8).
- 8 In an even more Reinholdian vein, Fichte also sees this as true not only of the *originary* activity, but of *representational* activity in particular, which likewise only comes about through actualizing a specifically representational ‘drive’ (cf. Fichte 1794 1.294).
- 9 Elsewhere Fichte describes teleological-causal activity of this sort in terms of ‘striving’ and ‘tendency’ (cf. Fichte 1794 1.261). This would fit nicely with Fichte’s related thesis that the genuinely ‘absolute’ *unifying* of positing and opposing in the I (and the

- unifying of the I and the not-I) remains an essentially moral ‘task’ (*Aufgabe*) set for the I by itself, rather than a ‘resolution’ (*Lösung*) already present (Fichte 1794 1.105–106).
- 10 For further discussion of Fichte’s account of the foundations of representation and consciousness, see Ameriks (2000b, Chapters 3–5); Breazeale (1995); Martin (1997); and Reid (2003).
 - 11 Schelling even explicitly and approvingly cites Fichte in this regard (Schelling 1800 3:370).
 - 12 For further discussion of Schelling’s account of this progression, as well as other themes in his philosophy of mind, see Förster (2012); Nassar (2013); and Redding (1999).
 - 13 For more on Hegel’s philosophy of mind with special emphasis on his Aristotelian naturalism, see Ferrarin (2001); and Pinkard (2012). For alternative views on Hegel’s Kantianism, see Pippin (1989) and Sedgwick (2012). For complementary treatments of Hegel’s philosophy of mind, see also de Vries (1988); Findlay (1970); Gabriel (2013); and Malabou (2005).
 - 14 For more on these, see the later contributions to this volume.
 - 15 I would like to thank audiences at University of Chicago, McMaster University, McGill University, and Universität Bonn, as well as participants in my graduate seminar on German Idealism at UCSD, along with Lydia Patton and Sandra Lapointe, for very helpful discussion and feedback on previous versions of this material.

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