

The Impact of *Aenesidemus* upon Fichte and Schopenhauer

RICHARD FINCHAM

Fichte's reconfiguration of Kantian transcendental idealism is motivated by an engagement with *two* specific 'commentaries' upon it. Firstly, Fichte was clearly convinced by Reinhold's complaint that the *Critique's* principles can only "become universally binding"¹ by being grounded upon a universally valid and indubitable "self-explanatory"² foundation, something which Kant himself did not provide.³ Reinhold considered that the *fact* of consciousness *itself* provided such a foundation. He expressed this within his 'Principle of Consciousness' (*Satz des Bewusstseins*), that states that "*in consciousness representation is distinguished through the*

subject from both object and subject and is referred to both".⁴ Fichte shows that although this may suffice as the first principle of theoretical knowledge, it cannot be the first principle of *all* philosophy.⁵ Therefore, for Fichte, principles of theoretical knowledge can only be satisfactorily grounded upon the self *qua* reflective consciousness of Kantian and Reinholdian transcendental idealism once the existence of such reflective consciousness is itself grounded upon an absolute foundation. It is of course in response to this perceived requirement that Fichte constructs a system of transcendental idealism which asserts that the self itself - conceived of as primordially an absolute self-reverting activity - should be the absolute foundation of *all* philosophy.

This article will show *why* it is that for Fichte, 'reflective consciousness', which for Kant was the ground of all explanation, becomes conceived of as itself requiring explanation. It will be argued that this is due to an engagement with a sceptical attack upon the transcendental idealism of Kant and Reinhold named after (and supposedly expounded by) the neo-Pyrrhonian sceptic *Aenesidemus*, which was published anonymously in 1792, but was later revealed to be the work of G. E. Schulze.⁶ The enormous influence of this work upon

¹ K. Reinhold, *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge*, excerpt in G. Giovanni & S. Harris (ed.), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post Kantian Idealism*, (SUNY, 1985), p.67.

² *Ibid.*, p.70.

³ Kant himself famously tells us that his *Critique* serves merely "as the *propaedeutic* to the system of pure reason" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (Macmillan, 1929), A11 / B25, hereafter *CPR*) and does not itself provide such a system - which "might be entitled transcendental philosophy" (*CPR*, A12 / B25) - even though "such a system is possible." (*CPR*, A12 / B26) According to Reinhold and Fichte, if philosophy is truly to be "scientific" such a system is required. But, such a system would obviously necessitate systematic form, and such systematicity would only be possible if all the principles of philosophy were derived and grounded upon an absolutely indubitable and self-evident first principle or foundation (which Kant does not provide). Therefore, the foundationalist obsession of the first wave of post-Kantian philosophy is clearly inspired by an endeavour to partake in the enterprise that Kant seemed to have left to his followers and contemporaries: The construction of that system of transcendental philosophy of which he had spoken.

⁴ K. Reinhold, *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge*, excerpt in G. Giovanni & S. Harris (ed.), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post Kantian Idealism*, (SUNY, 1985), p.70.

⁵ Thus, Fichte tells us in his *Recension des Aenesidemus* that: "This reviewer ... is convinced that the Principle of Consciousness is a theorem which is based upon another first principle, from which, however, the Principle of Consciousness can be strictly derived" (Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), p.64). Following the publication of this review, Fichte continued to express the same sentiment within a series of letters to Reinhold. In a letter dated March 1st, 1794, Fichte writes that: "I am unable to grant that your Principle of Consciousness possesses those distinctive features which, as we both entirely agree, characterise any first principle. In my view the Principle of Consciousness is a theorem which is proven and determined by higher principles." (*Ibid.*, p.376) On April 28th, 1795, he says: "In my view, your Elementary Philosophy is only a philosophy of the theoretical faculty. Such an Elementary Philosophy can and should be a *propaedeutic* to all philosophy, but by no means its *foundation*." (*Ibid.*, p.389) Finally, on July 2nd, 1795, he writes: "I would never have found myself at odds with you if you had not presented your first principle as the first principle of *all* philosophy. I ... find it to be the first principle of *theoretical* philosophy." (*Ibid.*, p.401)

⁶ The full title of the work is: *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie. Nebst einer Vertheidigung des Skepticismus gegen die Anmassungen der Vernunftkritik* (*Aenesidemus*, or Concerning the Foundation of the Elementary Philosophy issued by

Fichte is adduced by certain biographical facts. Upon its appearance, Fichte enthusiastically set out to debunk *Aenesidemus* in a review for the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. Through studying it, however, he found it harder to debunk than anticipated. His review, which took him almost a year to complete⁷, asserts that to resist *Aenesidemus*'s attack, transcendental idealism must be reconfigured.⁸ The "hints that it contains"⁹ concerning how this should occur provide Fichte's very first outline of his *Wissenschaftslehre*.¹⁰ Clearly, Fichte's study of Schulze's work was responsible for shaping this system. For as Fichte wrote in 1793:

Aenesidemus [is] one of the most remarkable products of our decade [...]. [It] has shaken my own system to its very foundation, and, since one cannot very well live under the open sky, I have been forced to construct a new system.¹¹

Aside from these biographical considerations, however, it is upon turning to Schulze's text at first unclear as to why this work should have had such a huge impact upon Fichte's thinking. For, far from being "remarkable", Schulze's text is based upon a total misinterpretation of the central tenets of transcendental idealism. This article will outline Schulze's attack on Kantian transcendental philosophy and show how, despite the fact that so much of it is the product of a misinterpretation, it nevertheless succeeds in exposing an important ambiguity or lacuna within Kant's philosophy

Professor Reinhold in Jena: Together with a Defence of Scepticism against the Pretensions of the Critique of Reason).

⁷ See: D Breazeale, 'Fichte's *Aenesidemus* Review and the Transformation of German Idealism' in *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (March 1981), p.546n.

⁸ See: Fichte, 'Review of *Aenesidemus*' in *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), pp.53-56.

⁹ Fichte, 'Letter to Reinhold, January 15th 1794' in *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), p.372.

¹⁰ As Martial Guérout observes: "the *Wissenschaftslehre* begins with the *Aenesidemus* review. Fichte here is already in possession of his own point of view and announces the principle which characterises his idealism." (*L'Evolution et la Structure de la Doctrine de la Science chez Fichte*, vol.1 (Paris, 1930), p.144. Cited and translated within: D Breazeale, 'Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold's "Elementary Philosophy"' in *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (June 1982), p.807)

¹¹ Fichte 'Draft of a Letter to Flatt, November or December 1793' in *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), p.366. Similar sentiments are also expressed within Fichte's letter to Stephani of December 1793 (see: Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, p.371).

concerning the concept of 'affection'. It will then show how this inspires Fichte to reconfigure transcendental idealism, so that rather than 'beginning' from the *fact* that consciousness stands in a passive relation to an alien *determination* that it refers to an objective *determinant*, Fichte believes that transcendental idealism must first explain how such 'reflective consciousness' is generated. Finally, we shall see how Schopenhauer's reconfiguration of Kantian transcendental idealism possesses certain parallels with that of Fichte, which are also the product of wrestling with the same ambiguity highlighted by *Aenesidemus*.

* * *

Schulze's attack upon Kant is largely based around what he perceives to be illegitimate uses of the category of causality. He complains that whilst Kant attempts to prove that the category of causality can only be employed to attain knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) within experience, he nevertheless utilises it beyond these boundaries in accounting for the possibility of experience.

Firstly, Schulze argues that the claim to know that experience is conditioned by the 'mind' (*Gemüt*)¹² implies knowledge of causal interaction transgressing the limitations of experience. For Schulze interprets Kant's claim that the mind conditions the formal structures of experience as attributing to the mind "the predicate 'cause of certain areas of our knowledge'".¹³ As that which conditions experience itself *transcends* experience, Schulze complains that Kant's claim to *know* that experience is conditioned by the mind *contradicts* his claim that we can only possess knowledge of causal relations *within* experience. He thus tells us that:

this derivation of the necessary synthetic judgements [...] contradicts the whole spirit of critical philosophy. It presupposes a knowledge which, according to it, should be totally impossible to man. For its most important principle and its most important result is that the [category of] *cause* [...] can only be applied to empirical intuition if [its] application is to have any sense or reference. Since

¹² Here and hereafter, the word 'mind' is specifically used both to translate and to connote Kant's use of *Gemüt*.

¹³ G Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Meiner, 1996), p.113. Excerpt translated within: D Giovanni & S Harris (ed.), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post Kantian Idealism*, (SUNY, 1985), p.122.

we cannot intuit, however, the alleged subject of representations [...] it follows that this subject cannot belong to the domain of objects knowable by us. In other words, according to the critical philosophy's own claims, we cannot attribute [...] to it [...] knowable and real causality.¹⁴

Secondly, Schulze argues that asserting that the content of representation is the product of the affection of mind-independent things in themselves again illegitimately employs the category of causality. He thus complains that the opening statement of the 1787 edition of the first *Critique* that "our faculty of knowledge [is] awakened into action [by] objects affecting our senses"¹⁵ is also at odds with the limitation of knowledge of causality to experience. As he says:

The object outside our representations (the thing in itself) that, according to the Critique of Reason, is supposed to have provided the material of intuitions through influence upon our sensibility, is however not itself an intuition or sensible representation, but is supposed to be something really independent and distinct from the latter. Therefore, Critique of Reason's own results [...] the concept *cause* [...] may [not] be applied to it. Therefore, if the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories provided by the Critique of Reason is correct, so also is one of the most excellent of the Critique of Reason's first principles - that all knowledge begins with the objects affecting our mind - incorrect and false.¹⁶

Schulze's first objection, concerning the *supposedly causal* interaction between mind and experience, is unfounded and rests upon a misinterpretation. His second objection, concerning the illegitimacy of explaining the material content of representation in terms of affection from something mind-independent, does however highlight a serious problem.

¹⁴ G Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Meiner, 1996), pp.113-4. Translated within: D Giovanni & S Harris (ed.), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post Kantian Idealism*, (SUNY, 1985), pp.122-3.

¹⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B1.

¹⁶ G Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Meiner, 1996), p.184. My translation.

To turn to and dismiss the first objection first of all: Schulze's assertion that the mind acts *causally* in conditioning experience is the product of *two* mistakes. *Firstly*, it is based upon an illegitimate conflation of the hypothetical form of judgement, if *p* then *q*, with the category of causality. The law of *logical dependency* is never specifically characterised in terms of transcendental ideality by Kant (who thus, in this regard, differs significantly from both Fichte and Schopenhauer¹⁷). It is therefore not contradictory for Kant to claim "transcendental knowledge"¹⁸ through the application of this law. To say that for experience to be possible *q* must be the case, even if *q* cannot itself be experienced, *contra* Schulze, is not to employ the category of causality *at all*, and does not *transcend* limitations laid down by the critical philosophy.

If we turn to Schulze's *second* mistake, we see why he makes this first mistake. In the 'Transcendental Aesthetic', Kant distinguishes between his use of the terms mind (*Gemüt*) and soul (*Seele*).¹⁹ This distinction can be reformulated as a distinction between 'consciousness' and 'that which is conscious'. Whereas the mind is employed as a concept embracing the conditioning faculties contained within consciousness, the concept 'soul' designates what is for Kant, the mere thought of a problematically

¹⁷ Unlike Kant, Fichte, within his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, describes even the most basic logical laws (such as the principle of identity and the law of non-contradiction) as "facts of *empirical* consciousness" - a description which at first seems unusual, insofar as we generally believe there to be nothing so obviously known *prior* to experience than these laws. Nevertheless, by describing them as "facts of empirical consciousness", Fichte succeeds in capturing their, for him at least, transcendental ideality. For, in being supplied by the self, they only have significance for *that of which the self is conscious* and outside of this sphere are *nothing*. For, as he says, in being "derived from the proposition 'I am I' [...] all of the content to which the proposition 'A=A' is supposed to be applicable must be contained within the I" (Fichte, 'Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*' of 1794, §6 in *Early Philosophical Writings*, p.125). Similarly, for Schopenhauer, logical laws are conditioned by consciousness - and outside of these phenomenological limits they have no significance. For, as he says: "Generally a great similarity and connection between transcendental and metalogical truths is noticeable, which shows that both have a common root [...] in our intellect" (A Schopenhauer, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (Open Court, 1974), p.162). It therefore follows that the Schopenhauerian thing in itself - the *will* - does not itself conform to logical laws.

¹⁸ Kant's claims that, in accounting for the possibility of experience, he is in possession of 'transcendental *Erkenntnis*', are to be found in the *CPR* at A11 / B25 and A56 / B80.

¹⁹ See: *CPR*, A22 / B37.

existing substratum in which consciousness inheres. Schulze fails to notice this distinction. For he views 'mind' and 'soul' as synonymous terms, resulting in a misinterpretation of that which conditions experience as a substantial thing. Therefore, just as Descartes in his 'Second Meditation' makes an 'uncritical leap' in assuming that the existence of a thinking *thing* necessarily follows from the indubitable existence of *thinking* itself, and just as Berkeley concludes that ideas or perceptions necessarily inhere within a substantial perceiver *transcending* experience²⁰, Schulze similarly conceives of that which, for Kant, conditions experience as 'something' substantial in which representations inhere. This misinterpretation is made apparent by his assertion that "by *mind* (*Gemüte*) we are to understand either a thing-in-itself, or a *noumenon*, or a *transcendental idea*."²¹ Therefore, Schulze misinterprets Kant's claim that experience is only possible as a result of transcendental conditions within consciousness as positing the necessary existence of a transcendent "suprasensible object"²², which he calls "the mind (*Gemüt*), *qua* thing-in-itself."²³ He thus mistakenly conceives of that consciousness upon which everything we experience is *logically* dependent as a hypostatized 'conscious thing'. It is because he conceives of the mind in this way, that he interprets it as acting *causally* in conditioning experience, like one object acting upon another. However, the mind should not be understood as a conscious *thing*, but as that *consciousness*, the conditioning of which is responsible for the form of experience, insofar as anything we experience is logically dependent upon it. Kant certainly says that reason is led to hypostatise our thought of ourselves, producing the concept of a transcendent substrate or soul in which consciousness inheres. However, as this soul is merely a problematically existing thought-entity, it is not something to which Kant appeals in accounting for the possibility of experience or something of which he claims "transcendental knowledge". Rather, it is merely a concept arrived at by employing categories beyond experience. After the Copernican Revolution, therefore, we should not appeal to the concept of a hypostatized 'conscious thing' to explain the possibility of consciousness, but rather must appeal to consciousness to explain how we arrive at such

²⁰ See: G Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, §135.

²¹ G Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Meiner, 1996), p.113. Translated in: G Giovanni & S Harris (ed.), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post Kantian Idealism*, (SUNY, 1985), p.122.

²² *Ibid.*, p.80. G Giovanni & S Harris (ed.), p. 110.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.113. G Giovanni & S Harris (ed.), p.122.

a concept. Therefore, it is not the transcendental idealist who, in claiming to possess "transcendental knowledge" of the conditions of possibility of experience, employs the category of causality beyond the boundaries of its legitimate application. Rather, it is Schulze who illegitimately employs the category of substantiality to hypostatise that which, by definition, cannot be hypostatized, insofar as it itself is responsible for all hypostatization.

Schulze's objection that the critical philosophy illegitimately employs the category of causality in conceiving the material content of representation as the *effect* of a *causality* transcending the boundaries of possible experience is however more perceptive. Indeed, it is this objection that decisively influenced the work of both Fichte and Schopenhauer.²⁴

In accounting for the possibility of experience, Kant presupposes the inscrutability of three 'facts of consciousness'. We are, according to Kant deprived of *any* knowledge of the foundations of these three facts. The *first* is that we receive representations within spatio-temporal forms of intuition. The *second* is that we *must think* in terms of the twelve 'forms of judgement'.²⁵ Kant does indeed claim that the mind's spatio-temporal forms of intuition and its capacity to *think* are potentialities activated by the 'impressions' of the senses.²⁶ However, as these impressions which

²⁴ The influence of this specific objection upon Fichte is demonstrated by his letter to Niethammer of December 6th 1793, during the period when he was both composing his *Recension des Aenesidemus* and formulating the system that would first be outlined within his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. Here, Fichte writes that: "Kant demonstrates that the causal principle is applicable merely to appearances, and nevertheless he assumes that there is a substrate underlying all appearances - an assumption undoubtedly based upon the law of causality (at least this is the way Kant's followers argue)." (Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), p.369) We thus find Fichte passing off Schulze's objection concerning Kant's conception of the 'givenness' of the material content of representations as his own (together, however, with the qualification, that the 'full-force' of this objection only applies to the way that Kant has been interpreted by his immediate followers - thereby, demonstrating that Fichte himself had a better understanding of Kant than the vast majority of his contemporaries). The influence of this objection upon Schopenhauer, can be seen by the way that he refers to it (whilst meriting Schulze with its discovery) within his 'Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy' appended within his *World as Will and Representation* (see: A Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (Dover, 1969) vol.1, p.436).

²⁵ This cannot be explained, insofar as, as far as Kant is concerned, any attempt to provide an explanation necessarily presupposes what is to be explained (see: I Kant, *Prolegomena* (The Liberal Arts Press, 1950), p.65).

²⁶ See: CPR, A86 / B118 and H Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Blackwell, 1995), p.266.

engender the material content of the representations constitute the *third* inscrutable 'fact of consciousness', these claims do not make the aforementioned capacities less inscrutable. These claims fulfil *two* purposes. *Firstly*, they assure us that our *a priori* knowledge is, although it is *a priori*, only knowledge for us insofar as we are 'experiencing beings'.²⁷ *Secondly*, they assert that, despite their inscrutability, sensible impressions are presented to consciousness as elements *immediately alien* to it. And as these impressions are regarded as that which occasions consciousness, it thereby follows that, for Kant, the conscious self (the *determining* self) is *always* 'other-related'. That is, it always stands in a relation with 'something' *alien* to it. As we saw, Kant shows that although we cannot claim "transcendental knowledge" of the foundation of the fundamental elements of consciousness, reason nevertheless arrives at the concept of their foundation by problematically employing forms of thought (that are themselves in need of explanation) beyond experience, to produce the concept of the soul. In the same way, he explains how reason is led to transcend the limitations of consciousness to postulate the problematic existence of something that serving as an explanatory foundation for the material content of representation, to arrive at the concept of the things in themselves. Therefore, although Schulze was incorrect in interpreting Kant's tenet that the mind conditions experience as the claim that the mind is a transcendent *thing* acting efficaciously, he is correct in interpreting Kant's things in themselves to be transcendent things acting efficaciously to produce impressions occasioning the activity of the mind's conditioning faculties. This is implicit in Kant's descriptions of the content of empirical representations as the product of "sensory impressions" engendered by "objects affecting our senses."²⁸ Therefore, Schulze is in many ways justified in complaining that Kant claims that the category of causality can only legitimately be applied to relationships between empirical phenomena whilst nevertheless employing this category to explain the origin of the material content of empirical representations. Of course, one can still defend Kant against this charge of inconsistency. For Kant talks about the content of empirical representations as "impressions" and the product of "affection" only insofar as this is the way that reason *must think* about this content. Kant does not claim to *know* that this content is *actually* the product of

²⁷ Thus, Kant can presumably maintain that if we were, after death, awarded a capacity for intellectual intuition, the truths of geometry would no longer be true for us, insofar as our intuition was no longer constrained by a spatial form of intuition.

²⁸ CPR, B1. My italics.

affection. Such a defence, however, although freeing Kant from the charge of inconsistency, nevertheless highlights a lacuna within Kantian transcendental idealism. For, if Kant resorts to explaining the presence and status of the content of empirical representations in terms of the mere *hypothesis* that they are the product of an affection by merely problematically existing transcendent thought-entities, he has in no way explained either how this content stands in opposition to the mind, or why it is not its own product or why it should be referred to an object. It is, as we shall see, through highlighting this lacuna that Schulze's critique of Kant inspires Fichte to produce a reconfiguration of transcendental idealism capable of accounting for how the self understands itself as affected by something that it refers to an object purely *immanently*, in terms of the activities of our own fundamental being without any reference to something transcendent.

A cursory glance at Schulze's text reveals, however, that he does not interpret Kant's things in themselves as problematically existing thought-entities.²⁹ This fact, especially when coupled to the fact that he conceives of consciousness as necessarily inhering within a hypostatized self-in-itself (as opposed to seeing consciousness as the producer of hypostatisation) demonstrates that he criticises 'post-Copernican revolution philosophy' without himself enacting this revolution in his thinking. He thus reads transcendental idealist philosophy in terms of transcendental realist and empirical idealist thinking. Therefore, just as he believes that there cannot be consciousness without 'something that is conscious', he likewise believes that any knowledge claim we make about objects is only *true* in virtue of a *correspondence* between that claim and something existing independently of consciousness. Thus, whilst he recognises that Kant's claim that things in themselves are totally unknowable implies that they may not *actually* exist, he does not interpret Kant as having recognised this. Indeed, as far as Schulze is concerned, it is only in virtue of referring empirical representations to things in themselves that Kant can claim that our knowledge of the world is not illusory. Thus, whereas Kant claims that we determine *representations as representations of an object* by unifying them so that

²⁹ Schulze thus interprets the Kantian things in themselves as roughly equivalent to the Reinholdian things in themselves. For, Reinhold, whilst agreeing with Kant concerning the unknowability of the things in themselves, nevertheless believed that the things in themselves necessarily exist. He also believed that their necessary existence can be proven, as following from the passivity of the representing subject (see: D Breazeale, 'Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold's "Elementary Philosophy"', *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (June 1982), p.801).

they become related to the concept of the *transcendental* object, Schulze interprets Kant as claiming that this determination relates representations back to a *transcendent* object whose affection has produced them. As Schulze believes Kant is still operating with a conception of truth which asserts that *x* is *known* only insofar as *x corresponds* to something existing independent of consciousness, he therefore believes that Kant depends upon things in themselves to explain the difference between objectivity and illusion. He thus believes that it is only the reference to a thing in itself that enables the assertion that our objective knowledge is not an illusion.³⁰ Thus, for Schulze, the empirical representations that we determine as representations of objects would simply be merely subjective illusions for Kant, if it was not for the fact that he believes them to be "appearances", that is, the way that a transcendent reality *appears* for us. Therefore, according to Schulze, if Kant believes that he has proved anything about the possibility of knowledge he *must* take for granted the existence of the things in themselves. Schulze's reading thus fails to understand the full force of the Copernican revolution. For Kant, the assertion that the *Critique* proceeds from the assumption that "objects ... conform to our knowledge"³¹ means that *objectivity* is conditioned purely by consciousness and does not depend upon a reference to transcendent objects. Therefore, for Kant, we have knowledge of empirically real objects because we ourselves have provided the conditions of possibility for their objectivity by subjecting our representations to the *a priori* forms of possible experience. A sensible representation is illusory, for Kant, insofar as it does not conform to this unity of experience prescribed by the mind. An oasis in the desert that vanishes before my eyes is an illusion as opposed to an empirically real object *because* 'to vanish out of existence' is to violate the unity of objective experience, *not because* its sensory content in no way relates to some transcendent object. After all, as Schulze points out, it would be absurd to assert that a relation between representations and transcendent objects grounds the differentiation between an object of knowledge and an illusion, since if a transcendent object is completely unknowable, so too is its relation to the representation. Thus, if Kant is properly understood, the concept of things in themselves plays no role in accounting for the objectivity of knowledge and experience. Although Schulze is correct in asserting that Kant explains the status of the material

³⁰ See: D Breazeale, 'Fichte's *Aenesidemus* Review and the Transformation of German Idealism' in *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (March 1981), p.556.

³¹ *CPR*, Bxvi.

content of representations as an alien determination within consciousness by employing the category of causality beyond the sphere of its legitimate cognition-producing application, he is incorrect in asserting that this is contradictory insofar as Kant does not actually claim to possess knowledge of a causal affection through which this material content is produced.

However, even in the face of this defence of Kant, Schulze has another more devastating objection. Granting the unknowability of the things in themselves, he questions how Kant can claim to know "which determinations can be produced in the mind because of their influence on it, and which cannot."³² The question thus arises as to how Kant can definitely maintain that elements of our representations are engendered by the conditioning of consciousness whereas other elements, although contained in consciousness, are not engendered by consciousness, whilst assuring us that the concept of the things in themselves merely denotes a problematically existing thought-entity to which nothing may actually refer. Our inability to decisively answer this question provides convincing evidence that the doctrines expounded by the *Critique* do not rest upon a secure foundation, insofar as Kant is unable to provide any convincing proof as to how certain determinations of a representation are proper to the conditioning of consciousness and how other determinations, whilst being within consciousness, are nonetheless alien to it. Kant provides, in short, no justification as to how consciousness itself is able to differentiate between consciousness of itself and consciousness of empirical perception³³, and thereby no reason why consciousness refers certain of its determinations to empirically real objects existing opposed to it, and not others. One obvious Kantian reply to this would be to say that those determinations which *necessarily and universally* belong to empirical representations or objects of experience are grounded upon the conditioning of consciousness, whereas those which arise contingently

³² G Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Meiner, 1996), p.107. Translated within: G Giovanni & S Harris (ed.), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post Kantian Idealism*, (SUNY, 1985), p.118.

³³ Reinhold was perhaps the first person to recognise this problem within Kantian transcendental idealism. Within his own philosophical system he attempted to provide a solution to it. He thus stated that the representing subject can always differentiate between consciousness of itself and consciousness of empirical sensation because the *given* material content of representation is always manifold, whereas the form imposed upon it by the conditioning of the representing subject is always unified (see: D Breazeale, 'Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold's "Elementary Philosophy"' in *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (June 1982), p.800).

are, whilst located within consciousness, not grounded upon it. However, as Schulze points out, it is not true to say that the *Critique* grounds all necessity upon consciousness, for, that sensible content that I represent at any given instant, is *necessarily* represented by me. Indeed, it is the very fact that this material content is related to consciousness so that it must be necessarily represented, that leads us to *believe* it to be the product of things in themselves affecting us. The grounds that would justify the distinction in consciousness between that which is proper to consciousness and an alien element to which consciousness stands opposed within the Kantian system are thus highly ambiguous. It seems that, on one level, Kant requires the concept of the things in themselves, *firstly*, to explain why the material content of our representation does not arise as a result of the self's activity and why it is thereby referred to objects external to it and *secondly*, to explain the necessity accompanying our reception of sensible content, which induces the belief that it arises from the affection of external objects. Yet on another level, Kant maintains that the concept of the things in themselves is a transcendent concept of a merely problematically existing thought-entity. Thereby the concept of the things in themselves is incapable of proving anything.

* * *

We can therefore see that Schulze is completely mistaken in interpreting Kant as saying that the things in themselves are *actually* existing things, which are required in order to account for our experience of an objectively real world and for the objectivity of our knowledge. We can also see that it is this misinterpretation of Kantian transcendental idealism that leads Schulze to the conclusion that Kant is contradicting himself in both claiming that the material content of representation is the product of an affection by something *outside of* all consciousness and claiming that the category of causality can only have a legitimate cognition-producing application within the phenomenological sphere. For Kant merely talks of the things in themselves in terms of something of which we must *think* but that we can never *know*, so that we can never be certain as to whether they do *actually* exist. Furthermore, we arrive at the concept of the things in themselves in the first place, by employing categories beyond the phenomenological sphere. There is no contradiction here, just as long as we recognise that once we transgress this sphere, the categories can have no cognition-producing application. So that any concepts generated in this way (such as the concepts of the things in themselves or the self-in-itself) may not possess an *actually* existing referent. Thus, when Kant

claims that the material content of representation is the product of the affection of things in themselves, he is merely saying that this is the way that reason is led to *think* about this content and is not claiming to *know* that this is the way that this content is actually produced. Schulze is, however, correct in criticising Kant for not explaining how it is that, within consciousness, we can distinguish between determinations of a representation that are proper to the conditioning of consciousness and determinations which are *alien*. The lacuna or ambiguity within Kantian transcendental idealism that Schulze's criticisms thus inadvertently highlight concerns therefore the fact that Kant provides no way of explaining how it is that the conscious self can recognise something within its consciousness as neither proper to its conditioning nor its self-consciousness, but as something *alien*. Kant thus simply proceeds from the assumption that the conscious self always finds itself in a relation with something *alien* to it (the material content of representation) without in any way explaining *why* this is the case. He thus simply proceeds *as if* this material content was the product of an affection by things in themselves. We may indeed *think* of this alien element *as alien*, insofar as it is the product of an impingement by things in themselves, but this in no way explains *why* it is that the conscious self *always finds itself* related to 'something' *alien* in the first place. Thus, for Kant, the "given" is immediately conceived of as 'something' *alien*, without any account being provided as to *how* this is possible.

* * *

It is this ambiguity concerning the principles at the very foundation of Kant's transcendental idealism that Schulze inadvertently brought to the attention of Fichte, which inspires Fichte to reconfigure transcendental idealism. We have seen that the problem with the Kantian version is that, whilst imposing phenomenological limits upon causal explanation, it would nevertheless be required to breach these limits if it were to account for how the material content of representation is distinguished from consciousness and conceived of as the product of necessary affection, whilst at the same time claiming that the things in themselves are unknowable. Whilst we may indeed *think* of this *alien* element *as alien* insofar as it is the product of an impingement by things in themselves, this in no way explains why it is that the conscious self *always finds itself* related to 'something' *alien* in the first place. Thus, any transcendental idealist (whether he be Kant or Reinhold) who simply *begins* from the *fact* of 'reflective consciousness' - that is, the fact that the conscious self

always finds itself related to an *alien* element within it - in no way *begins* from a "transparent" or "self-explanatory" foundation, insofar as the question as to how this *alien* element itself becomes conceived of *as alien*, remains for it unanswerable. Fichte is thus inspired by Schulze to provide a satisfactory account of affection - whereby the *alien* status of the determinations of consciousness can be explained - purely *immanently*, stripping the concept of a transcendent thing in itself away from transcendental philosophy altogether. Indeed, it is within his *Recension des Aenesidemus* that this intention first manifests itself. For Fichte asserts there that not only are we incapable of *knowing* things in themselves, we are also incapable of *thinking* them:

it is by no means engrained in human nature to think of a thing independent of *any* faculty of representation *at all*; on the contrary, it is downright impossible to do so. [...] no matter how often one pretends to the contrary, no person has ever had or can have [the thought of a thing which has reality [...] independent not merely of the human faculty of representation, but of any and every intellect.³⁴

Fichte's own version of transcendental idealism will thus endeavour to account for the distinction between the consciousness of self and the material content of representation and the feeling of being necessarily affected by objects, solely from processes occurring within the self, without presupposing or invoking the spectre of a transcendent 'something'. He thus radicalises the doctrine of transcendental idealism so that it encompasses more than the Kantian version. Kant only ascribes transcendental ideality to forms of intuition, but does not characterise the categories in terms of transcendental ideality, so that, as we have seen, they are thought of as possessing significance beyond the confines of consciousness.³⁵ To be sure, not to be able to *know* that which exists beyond these confines, but certainly in order to *think* it. Thus, Kant can only account for the fact that the content of empirical representation is conceived of as an element within consciousness fundamentally *alien* to it by *conceiving* of it as the product of a fundamentally causal "affection" by things in themselves transcending *all* consciousness. However,

³⁴ Fichte, 'Review of *Aenesidemus*' in *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), p.73.

³⁵ See: G Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.13-4.

because the things in themselves are merely problematically existing thought-entities, the concept of which may possess no *actually* existing referent, any account employing them will merely provide a mere 'hypothesis', incapable of *really* explaining or proving anything. Thus, as far as Fichte is concerned, the absolute elimination of the things in themselves from transcendental philosophy is no great loss. Fichte thus ascribes the predicate of transcendental ideality to the categories as well as the forms of intuition to conclude therefore that as the category of causality and substance are generated by consciousness itself their application beyond the sphere of objects of consciousness is not *merely* uncertain but is also contradictory. For Fichte, therefore, not only is the concept of an affection by 'something' transcendent totally contradictory, but so is the concept of 'anything' transcendent "self-contradictory."³⁶

A striking feature of Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* is that whilst a great many philosophers go to great lengths to highlight the originality of their thought from that of their predecessors, even though analysis often reveals that their alleged 'great strides' are in actual fact merely 'tiny steps', Fichte does indeed make 'great strides' away from Kant, but disingenuously endeavours to maintain that his own thought hardly differs from that of his predecessor. An exception, however, occurs within the 'Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge' chapter, where Fichte outlines his own concept of affection. Before doing so, however, as if to demonstrate how seriously he was concerned with the ambiguities brought to his attention by Schulze concerning "affection" within Kant's writings, Fichte provides a passage outlining the flaws in the position regarding affection held by both the transcendental realist, referred to by Fichte as the "qualitative realist", and Kant himself, who is referred to as a "quantitative realist".

Fichte says that the qualitative realist posits that "a not-self, having reality in itself independently of the self, gives rise to an impression on the self, whereby the latter's activity is to some extent repressed".³⁷ Thus, he simply restates the transcendental realist concept of "affection", according to which affection is understood to be a process whereby consciousness is reflected towards the representation of a "determinant" whose existence is in no way dependent upon it. His later assertion that "quantitative realism eliminates the qualitative form thereof as

³⁶ Fichte, 'Review of *Aenesidemus*' in *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), p.74.

³⁷ Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Translated within: *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p.170.

ungrounded and superfluous"³⁸ justifies this interpretation, insofar as it is clearly a restatement of how Kant's transcendental idealist position usurps the position of the transcendental realist³⁹, insofar as he is unable to satisfactorily *prove* the reality, independent of the self, of that "determinant", which he believes to have produced his representations. As Fichte's interpretation of Kant is therefore correct in asserting that Kant does not profess to *know* that it is the affection of a *determinant* independent of the self or thing in itself that produces the material content of representations, why does he describe Kantian transcendental idealism as a species of "realism"? An answer is given within the following passage, where Fichte tells that although:

the merely quantitative realist confesses his ignorance about [a not-self, having reality in itself independently of the self], and acknowledges that the positing of reality in the not-self first takes place for the self [...] he [nevertheless] insists on *the real presence of a limitation of the self*, without any contribution on the part of the self as such [...]. [Whereas] the qualitative realist proclaims the reality, independent of the self, of a *determinant*, the quantitative [proclaims] the reality, independent of the self, of a mere *determination*. There is a determination present in the self, whose ground is not to be posited in the self; that, for him, is a fact (*Faktum*): as to its ground *as such*, he is cut off from inquiring into it, that is, it is absolutely and ungroundedly present for him.⁴⁰

Fichte therefore tells us that, even if the *Critique* suspends judgement regarding the actual existence of transcendent things in themselves affecting us, in *beginning* from a position whereby the self *always* stands in relation to reflected an *alien determination within* it, to which its own activities are opposed, it nevertheless seems to proceed *as if* these *determinations* were the product of an affection by transcendent things in themselves. The *Critique* thus asserts that consciousness is always opposed by the material content of representation *within* it, which it distinguishes from its self-consciousness and attributes to something external to it, whilst at the same time being unable to explain why this material content possesses such a status. In 1795, in a letter to Reinhold,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 171.

³⁹ See: CPR, A369-70.

⁴⁰ Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Translated within: *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p. 170.

Fichte succinctly outlines this problem, which bedevils both Kant's, as well as Reinhold's own, versions of transcendental idealism.⁴¹ As he says:

Kant seeks to discover the basis for the unity of the manifold in the not-I. How do you combine A, B, C, etc. - *which are already given* - to form the unity of consciousness? You too seem to me to commence philosophising at just this point. [...] This question presupposes a higher one: "How do you first arrive at A and B and C?" [You reply:] They are *given*. In plain language this means, does it not, that *you do not know*?⁴²

For Fichte, therefore, Kant's assertions concerning the "givenness" of the material content of representations merely serve to hide his inability to explain how and why it is that consciousness *always finds itself* standing in a passive relation to something alien to it. The problem with Kant's position, therefore, for Fichte, is that although he states that all our capacities of knowledge and explanation are derived from consciousness, the *Critique's* "founding principle" that all consciousness is opposed by a material content *within* it that is "given" *from without* and which it distinguishes from itself, is itself in need of proof, and without proof it asserts merely a contingent fact that is in no position to ground the edifice he erects upon it. However, any explanation as to how the conscious self *always* stands related to a *real determination* would have to employ the category of causality beyond consciousness and so would only produce a mere hypothesis incapable of explaining anything, and would, as far as Fichte is concerned, be a meaningless and contradictory enterprise.

The only way out of the problem, therefore, as far as Fichte is concerned, is to explain "affection" or the limitation of consciousness, not in terms of a *real determination*, but *immanently* in terms of processes occurring within the self itself. Fichte thus tells us that:

It is clear [...] how this must be conceived of, in order for it to be conceived of as possible; *being* and *being posited*, ideal and real

⁴¹ In many ways, however, this criticism seems to have much more force against Kant than it does against Reinhold, insofar as Reinhold claims to have both proven the existence of things in themselves, and to have shown how it is that the representing subject distinguishes the consciousness of itself from the material content of representations.

⁴² Fichte, 'Letter to Reinhold, July 2, 1795' in *Early Philosophical Writings* (Cornell, 1988), pp. 399-400.

relationship, opposing and being opposed, must be one and the same. It is also clear, moreover, under what condition this is possible: namely, if what posits and what is correlatively posited are one and the same, that is, if what is posited in relation is the self. - The self has to stand to some X, which must necessarily to that extent be a not-self, in a relationship such that it can only be posited through the non-positing of the other, and *vice versa*. Now the self, as surely as it is such, stands in a certain relationship only to the extent that it posits itself as standing in this relation. Thus in application to the self, it is all one, whether we say that it is *posited* in this relation, or that it *posits itself* therein.⁴³

Thus, Fichte says that, what he calls the self *qua* intelligence, that is, the 'reflective consciousness' of theoretical philosophy, which formed the starting point of Kantian transcendental philosophy, is only possible insofar as the self *itself* posits *itself* as standing in opposition to something. It is not the case, therefore, that the self simply *finds itself* related to 'something' that is *immediately* conceived of as *alien* to it. Rather, it is the case that, as far as Fichte is concerned, the self must *posit itself* as standing in opposition to 'something'. Thus, for Fichte, it is not the case that transcendental philosophy should *begin* with the assumption that the conscious self *always finds itself* in a relation to something *alien* - 'something' that is *immediately alien* for the self. Rather, as far as Fichte is concerned, transcendental philosophy should firstly explain *how* it is that the self conceives of the material content of representation (empirical perception) as something *alien* opposed to the self. Thus, for Fichte, the "given" is never *immediately alien*, but rather *mediately alien*, insofar as he believes that the transcendental philosopher must account for how it *comes to be* opposed to the self.

In this way, Fichte explains the "limitation" of consciousness, whereby it always conceives of itself as 'affected' or standing in a passive relation to something opposed to it, purely *immanently* from the laws of the activities present within the self itself. For, as the unconditioned ground of all reality, the absolute self is 'originally' nothing but a self-reverting activity, so reflective consciousness can emerge only insofar as this self-reverting activity limits *itself*. Upon limiting itself, a portion of the absolute self's reality is carried over beyond the sphere of the limited self *qua* intelligence, into an opposing not-self. Therefore, in positing

⁴³ Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Translated in: *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p.172.

itself as limited, the self carries over a determinate portion of reality or activity into the not-self, and 'negates' an equal portion of reality or activity in itself. Insofar as the self undergoes a diminution of reality and activity, it stands in a passive relation to the not-self and is "affected"; and insofar as a portion of reality or activity is transferred to the not-self, the not-self possesses reality and is conceived of as acting efficaciously to produce the affection. Therefore, in Fichte's system, in contrast to the thought of the qualitative or quantitative realist, the not-self, either *qua determinant* or *qua determination*, "has no reality of its own; but, ... has reality insofar as the self is passive." Thus, "the not-self has reality for the self only to the extent that the self is affected, and in the absence of such affection, it has none whatever."⁴⁴ For Fichte, therefore, we can conceive of the material content of representation as the product of affection only in virtue of an act of the mind whereby we transfer activity to them, the consequent diminution of the activity in us being conceived of as the mind's passivity. Any attempt to conceive of this material content of representations as the product of an affection by transcendent things in themselves, for Fichte, therefore becomes as unnecessary as it is incoherent. Fichte thus totally overcomes the ambiguity within Kantian philosophy concerning this issue, which his engagement with Schulze brought to his attention. As Fichte says:

we have no need in the first place of that influence of the not-self, which the qualitative realist postulates, to account for the passivity present in the self; - nor do we even need this passivity (affection, determination), which the quantitative realist postulates for the purpose of his explanation.⁴⁵

However, in order to satisfactorily ground Fichte's account of affection, we still require an explanation as to how the unconditioned self-reverting activity of the absolute self comes to limit itself, in order that the reflective consciousness of theoretical philosophy (that consciousness that *always finds itself* related to 'something' *alien*) can emerge. As any answer to this question of the possibility of the reflective consciousness of theoretical philosophy must involve activities within the self lying 'behind the back' of consciousness, so these activities cannot themselves be objects of the consciousness of theoretical philosophy. The

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.130.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.173.

explanation is thus given in the 'Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical' section.

Fichte says that as well as absolutely positing itself, the absolute self also "must *reflect* about itself" in order to investigate as to "whether it really includes all reality within itself."⁴⁶ As Fichte says:

The self posits itself absolutely, and is therefore complete in itself and closed to any impression from without. But if it is to be a self, it must also posit itself as self-positing; and by this new positing, relative to an original positing, it opens itself [...] to external influences, simply by this reiteration of positing, it concedes the possibility that there might also be something within it that is not actually posited by itself.⁴⁷

In so doing, it discovers *within* itself the *alien* element, in the shape of empirical data, which *will* constitute the material content of representation, and its absolutely self-reverting activity is thus sundered. However, it is not the *discovery* of this alien data that *causes* this sundering of activity, even though this *discovery* always accompanies this sundering. It is rather the fact that this sundering is a product of the absolute self's act of *reflecting* about itself; it therefore being the activity of *discovering* as opposed to the *discovery* that produces this sundering.⁴⁸ The original self-reverting activity of the absolute self is thus split into two opposed activities or "drives", one of which is "objective" and "centripetal", "curbed" by the reflection and the other which is "pure" and "centrifugal" and which is an activity whose tendency is in no way curbed by reflection and which therefore "strives" (*strebt*) to once again "restore" the original identity of the absolute self, but which fails, insofar as it is now opposed to the contrary tendency of the objective and centripetal activity. Thus, insofar as the absolute self was to become an object of reflection for a reflective tendency emerging from itself, the self becomes limited. It is limited insofar as to be reflective is to be limited. That which it *discovers* as an alien element *within* the self *qua* absolute self, the limited self thus posits as standing in opposition to itself and posits itself as limited by it. Thus, insofar as the self is limited and it

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.244.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.243.

⁴⁸ See: Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Translated in *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), pp.239-40 & p.246.

posits itself as opposed to and limited by something alien to it, the self is "checked".

It is, according to Fichte, this interplay between the two opposed tendencies of the pure and centrifugal and the objective and centripetal activities of the self that produces for us our pre-cognitive "feeling" (*Gefühl*) of being in a world of externally existing objects that affect us. For as the pure centrifugal activity continues to "strive" unsuccessfully to realise the absolute identity of the absolute self, so it "feels" an "inability" or "resistance", the source of which it posits as lying beyond the limitation of the limited self, that is, beyond the check. It therefore posits the source of this feeling of resistance to its own absolute activity as lying *behind* that alien element to which the reflective consciousness of the self *qua* intelligence is directed. Thus, Fichte explains here, what Kant simply took for granted, that is, why it is that the material content of representations are 'experienced' by us as arising with necessity within consciousness and why this fact invariably leads us to *think* that this sensory content is both produced by the affection of things existing totally independently of us and should thus be distinguished from our own self-consciousness and referred to empirically real objects. However, Fichte's explanation in no way invokes the spectre of transcendent things in themselves, but explains all this *immanently* from primordial activities and drives within the self and which can never themselves be 'objects' of cognitive awareness.⁴⁹ Therefore, as Fichte says:

we do not become aware (*bewußt*) of our own action [in feeling ourselves affected by objects existing externally to us], and are [therefore] necessarily bound to assume that we have received from without what we have in fact ourselves produced by our own forces (*Kraft*), and according to our own laws (*Gesetzen*).⁵⁰

Thus, in experiencing empirically real objects, although we conceive of ourselves as feeling the reality *of the object*, in actual fact we are merely feeling a resistance occurring for the activity of our own self.⁵¹ Basically, therefore, for Fichte, 'objectivity' is the product of nothing else but the self's own limitation of its absolute activity. As Fichte says, "the

⁴⁹ See: Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Translated in *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p.260.

⁵⁰ Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Translated in *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p.255.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, p.264.

expressions to posit a not-self and to restrict the self are completely equivalent".⁵²

We can therefore see, that whilst the 'Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge' demonstrates *immanently* from the laws of consciousness itself how consciousness comes to conceive of itself as affected, insofar as the self *qua* intelligence or reflective consciousness can only be what it is in virtue of the fact that it stands in opposition to an opposing *determination*, it is only within the 'Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical' section that Fichte explains how the self *must* both feel and conceive of this *determination* as the product of the affection of a *determinant*, that is an 'object' (in the strong sense) opposed to it. It occurs within this section precisely because Fichte endeavours to show that we can only feel ourselves as free beings, insofar as we also feel something resisting us. Thus, whilst our 'relative freedom', produced by the "striving" (*Streben*) or "longing" of the pure centrifugal activity or drive possesses the capacity to alter *determinations*, it has no power over the *determinant*. That is, although we are free to shape the *determinations* of an object, we have no power to produce or destroy *matter*⁵³, or that "which remains over when abstraction is made from all demonstrable forms of presentation (*Vorstellung*)."⁵⁴

* * *

We can therefore see that Schulze's criticisms highlight an important lacuna within Kantian transcendental idealism. For *firstly*, Kant can offer no explanation as to why, despite being *within* the self, the material content of representations is distinguished from the self's own consciousness of itself, and posited as something that is not its own product. *Secondly*, Kant can give no explanation as to why the necessity with which this material content emerges for the self induces it to refer it to empirically real objects distinct from it. We can also see how Fichte is able to provide a solution to these problems, by no longer *just* conceiving of the self as a 'reflective activity', but by conceiving of it as ultimately a non-objective activity, neither inhering in 'anything', nor reflected towards 'anything' (a status captured through the neologism

⁵² Ibid., p.223.

⁵³ See *ibid.*, p.269.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.222.

*Tathandlung*⁵⁵). Thus, Fichte can *firstly* explain how the self can distinguish the material content of representations *within* consciousness from its own self-consciousness, insofar as, to be *conscious*, the absolute activity of the self must be limited, and that in being limited, it must posit itself as limited by something 'opposed' to it. The material content of representation is thus posited by the self, as an 'opposing' *real* determination. *Secondly*, Fichte can account for how the necessity with which the content of representations arises, induces us to posit an objective *determinant* that is their producer, by showing how, as the self is primordially an absolute activity, in positing itself as limited by a *determination*, its free activity nevertheless extends beyond the limitation, and in finding that it has no absolute power over the *determinations*, it "feels" its freedom "resisted", and therefore conceives of the *determinations* as the product of an objective *determinant*.

* * *

⁵⁵ Fichte describes the 'absolute self' as a *Tathandlung* to express his *radically de-reified* conception of the ultimate nature of selfhood. For the original self-reverting activity of the absolute self must not be conceived of as directed to any reified thing or object, but must be conceived of as *returning in upon itself* (see *ibid.*, pp.129-30). Neither must the activity of the absolute self be conceived of as invested within a substratum, in a manner akin to the way that Kant *thought* of the 'faculties' as *Erkenntniskräfte* invested within the 'soul' *qua* self-in-itself (see: Fichte, 'First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge' of 1797. Translated in *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p.21). For, whereas the use of *Handlung* (as well as the noun *Handeln* and verb *handeln*) express an action or activity produced by 'something' and the use of *Tätigkeit* expresses an activity *as such*, divorced from an agent, in the neologism *Tathandlung*, Fichte captures the idea of an action the activity of which is thus the agent of this action, as well as being that to which the action is directed. The 'absolute self' is thus a *Tathandlung*, insofar as it is the product of its own self-positing, through which the sheer activity of pre-reflective consciousness posits itself within itself, so as to produce the self *as such*. As Fichte says: "The self *posits itself*, and it *is*, by virtue of this mere positing by itself; and conversely: The self *is*, and it *posits* its being, in virtue of its mere being. - It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and that which is brought about by the activity; action and deed are one and the same; and hence: *I am* expresses a *Tathandlung*" (Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Translated in *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p.97. Translation modified). The absolute and unconditioned being of the self is thus based upon nothing other than this recursive sheer activity of pre-reflective consciousness itself.

If we now turn to consider Schopenhauer's reconfiguration of transcendental idealism, we shall find striking parallels between his own account of "affection" and 'objectivity' and that of Fichte's. Considering Schopenhauer's infamous hostility towards Fichte⁵⁶ and his own assertions that his departure from Kant is in no way influenced by post-Kantian Idealism⁵⁷, it seems much more credible to account for these parallels in terms of the fact that his reading of Kant was also influenced by Schulze's criticisms, rather than seeing them as emerging through a sustained study of Fichte's work.⁵⁸ Biographical information again makes this a likely proposition, insofar as, as a student in Göttingen, it was Schulze's lectures that inspired Schopenhauer to dedicate himself to the study of philosophy and he who famously advised Schopenhauer to master the work of Plato and Kant before looking at the work of anyone else.⁵⁹ As it was Schulze who inspired Schopenhauer to read Kant in the first place, it is therefore highly likely that he was influenced by the criticisms of Kantian transcendental idealism contained within *Aenesidemus*.

Schopenhauer seems to have taken considerable inspiration from Schulze's claims that, even after Kant, it remains "undecided as to whether in the future the more mature and courageous intellect (*Denkkraft*) will or will not find the solution to the problems which reason raises about the existence and the constitution of things in

⁵⁶ For example, Schopenhauer tells us that: "I protest against all association with this man Fichte just as Kant did [...]. Hegelians and like ignoramuses may continue to talk of a Kant-Fichtean philosophy; there is Kantian philosophy, and there is Fichtean humbug; and this will always be the true state of affairs, in spite of all who extol the bad and belittle the good" (A Schopenhauer, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (Open Court, 1974), p.120).

⁵⁷ Schopenhauer thus tells us that: "Real and serious philosophy still stands where Kant left it ... , I cannot see that anything has been done ... between him and me; I therefore take my departure direct from him" (A Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (Dover, 1969), vol.1, p.416).

⁵⁸ Nevertheless, whilst he was a student in Berlin, Schopenhauer attended Fichte's lectures and read many of Fichte's works. Schopenhauer's comments upon both Fichte's lectures and his writings are published within: A Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains*, trans. E. Payne (Berg, 1988), vol.2. Whilst it is indeed highly possible that Schopenhauer's philosophical thinking was (contrary to his own assertions) influenced by Fichte, it seems more likely that Schulze would have had a far greater impact, insofar as Schopenhauer does indeed openly admit that his own version of transcendental idealism aims to overcome the inconsistencies *Aenesidemus* highlighted within Kant's version.

⁵⁹ See: R Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*, trans. E Osers (Harvard, 1989), p.105.

themselves."⁶⁰ Like Reinhold, therefore, Schopenhauer believes that the thing in itself exists. However, unlike Reinhold, Schopenhauer does not believe it to be unknowable. He thus famously claims to 'know', through a pre-cognitive awareness, the thing in itself as the will. Yet, significantly, this thing in itself is no longer conceived of as a transcendent object, but is conceived of as an originally undifferentiated non-objective activity, in terms much more akin to Fichte's 'absolute self' than to Kant's conception of transcendent suprasensible objects. For, whereas Fichte describes the 'absolute self' as "not ... a material, static existent, but [a] sheer activity, not static but dynamic"⁶¹ and as "a pure activity which presupposes no object"⁶², Schopenhauer describes the will as "an endless striving (*Streben*)"⁶³ lacking "an ultimate purpose or object."⁶⁴ Schopenhauer's conception of the thing in itself seems to also owe something to Reinhold, inasmuch as he conceived of a thing in itself as the absolutely formless material content of representation, considered in abstraction from the form of representation conditioned by consciousness. For, unlike Kant, Schopenhauer does not conceive of a thing in itself as that the *affection* of which *produces* a content upon which we impose form, but rather conceives of it as that *content itself* prior to all form.⁶⁵ Unlike Reinhold, however, Schopenhauer believes that

⁶⁰ G Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Meiner, 1996), p.26. My translation.

⁶¹ Fichte, 'Second Introduction to the Science of Knowledge' of 1797. Translated within: *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Heath & Lachs (Cambridge, 1982), p.40.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁶³ A Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (Dover, 1969), vol.1, p.164.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.149.

⁶⁵ Reinhold says that whilst a representation consists of both matter and form, the concept of a thing in itself arises through considering an object *only* in relation to the material content of a representation in abstraction from the form provided by consciousness. Reinhold therefore believes that he has *proven* that things in themselves are unknowable because they, *qua* things abstracted from the forms of representation conditioned by consciousness, cannot, by definition, themselves be represented. As he says: "That thing to which the matter in a representation corresponds or can correspond is a *thing in itself*. The representation corresponding to such a thing in itself is dependent upon it as regards its material content, whereas no feature of the thing in itself depends upon the representation. The thing becomes an *object* insofar as the material content of some representation corresponds to it, and it becomes *something represented* insofar as this matter is related to it under the form of representation. Thus it occurs in consciousness as a thing in itself only to the extent

conceiving of the thing in itself as that which is (to use Schopenhauer's terminology) objectified as the material content of representation means that it is no longer the case that we must conceive of this material content of representation as the product of an affection by something transcendent. In other words, consciousness of empirical representation, for Schopenhauer, in no way requires that the thing in itself is in any way causally acting upon us. That Schopenhauer arrives at this position in a conscious attempt to overcome the problematic conception of "affection" within Kantian and Reinholdian transcendental idealism, highlighted by Schulze, is strongly suggested by the following passage, in which Schopenhauer contrasts Kant's conception of "affection" with his own:

[Kant] introduced inconsistencies into his work, without being able to remedy its main defect. It is well known that this defect is the introduction of the *thing-in-itself* in the way he chose, whose inadmissibility was demonstrated in detail by G.E.Schulze in *Aenesidemus*, and which was soon recognized as the untenable point of his system. The matter can be made clear in a very few words. Kant bases the assumption of the thing-in-itself, although concealed under many turns of expression, on a conclusion according to the law of causality, namely that empirical perception, or more correctly *sensation* in our organs of sense from which it proceeds, must have an external cause. Now, according to his own correct discovery, the law of causality is known to us *a priori*, and consequently is a function of our intellect, and so is of *subjective* origin. Moreover, sensation itself, to which we here apply the law of causality, is undeniably *subjective*; [...]. Therefore the whole of empirical perception remains throughout on a *subjective* foundation, as a mere occurrence in us, and nothing entirely different from and independent of it can be brought in as a *thing-in-itself*, or shown to be a necessary assumption. Empirical perception actually is and remains our mere representation; it is the world as representation.⁶⁶

that what is represented is *distinguished* from it and can be conceived only to the extent that no representation is referred to it, i.e., only to the degree that it is *not represented*." (K. Reinhold, *Beyträge zur Berichtigung der bisherigen Missverständnisse der Philosophen*. Cited and translated in D. Breazeale, "Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold's 'Elementary Philosophy'" in *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (June 1982), pp.799-800.)

⁶⁶ Ibid., vol.1, p.436.

We can see from this, therefore, how Schopenhauer (following Schulze) believed Kant to be incorrect in maintaining that we are "affected" - or, in Schopenhauer's terminology, possess "empirical perception" - as a result of an 'impingement' by transcendent things in themselves. We have already discussed how Schopenhauer overcomes this difficulty, by claiming that this thing in itself *is* that which is "objectified" as the material content of representations (by our own conditioning or *determining*), as opposed to claiming that this material content is *produced* by *transcendent* things in themselves. What is unclear at this stage, however, is how it is that we come to understand that which we have determined as *our determination*. In other words: How is it that we come to understand or experience ourselves as "affected"? And, what does Schopenhauer mean by claiming that "affection" - or empirical perception - *remains throughout on a subjective foundation and remains our mere representation*? We shall now proceed to answer these questions.

As well as denying that the material content of representations is the product of an affection by something transcendent, Schopenhauer is also unlike both Kant and Reinhold insofar as he does not conceive of this material content as something to which consciousness is primordially opposed. Thus, just as Fichte explains how 'reflective consciousness', which always understands itself as affected by this content, emerges from the 'absolute self' as a result of its 'reflection' upon itself, Schopenhauer similarly asserts that the 'reflective consciousness' of the 'pure subject of knowledge' is "conditioned, and ... produced"⁶⁷ by the thing in itself *qua* will.⁶⁸ Once this *production* has occurred, however, "the *world as representation* ... stands out at one stroke with all its forms, object and subject, time, space, plurality, and causality."⁶⁹ Thus, the Schopenhauerian transcendental subject or "pure subject of knowledge", once it has emerged, will condition and objectify the will, so that we will represent ourselves to ourselves as embodied 'subjects' existing alongside objects in space, which, insofar as they are located in space, we conceive of as outside us and as "affecting" us to explain our awareness of them. Thus, Schopenhauer conceives of "affection" as a purely physiological event, which is only possible insofar as the conditioning of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., vol.2, p.215.

⁶⁸ This doctrine seems to contradict Schopenhauer's claims (derived from *Aenesidemus*) that no causal efficacy can legitimately be ascribed to the thing in itself. For, if the will conditions and produces the subject of knowledge, Schopenhauer is clearly ascribing to it at least a limited degree of causal efficacy.

⁶⁹ Ibid., vol.1, p.150.

transcendental subject or "pure subject of knowledge" objectifies the will, so that we ourselves conceive of ourselves as embodied subjects alongside other objects. For, as he says:

The necessary condition [...] for the immediate presence of a representation of this class [i.e. an empirical representation] is its causal action on our senses and thus on our body, which itself belongs to the objects of this class.⁷⁰

Our 'experience' of being affected by representational data is therefore, for Schopenhauer, in no way to be accounted for in terms of the transcendental conditions of experience (i.e. in terms of an "affection" upon that which is conditioning experience). Rather, it can only be accounted for in terms of physiological conditions that are themselves the product of transcendental conditioning:

It is [...] only when the understanding applies its sole form, *the law of causality*, that a powerful transformation takes place whereby subjective sensation becomes objective intuitive perception. Thus by virtue of its own peculiar form and so a priori, in other words, *prior* to all experience (since till then experience was not yet possible), the understanding grasps the given sensation of the body as an *effect* (a word comprehended only by the understanding), and this effect as such must necessarily have a *cause*. Simultaneously the understanding summons to its assistance *space*, the form of the *outer* sense also lying predisposed in the intellect, i.e., in the brain. This it does in order to place that cause *outside* the organism.⁷¹

However, this argument seems to only establish how we represent an object, as opposed to how we conceive of this representation as a representation of an 'object' (in the strong sense). In Fichtean terms, therefore, the argument only establishes how we are *affected* by a *determination* and not how we 'feel' this *determination* as the product of a *determinant*. Schopenhauer himself tells us that if "this world is nothing more than representation [...]" it would inevitably pass by us like an

⁷⁰ A. Schopenhauer, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (Open Court, 1974) p.49.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.77-8.

empty dream or ghostly vision not worth our consideration."⁷² Schopenhauer subsequently makes clear, however, that it does not do so, precisely because, as well as being *knowers* we are also *willing* beings. Thus, despite the "cursory" nature of these remarks at least one commentator has tentatively suggested that Schopenhauer is claiming here that "if we were not [...] aware of ourselves in our aspect as affective or volitional beings" we could not possess a "concept of objective *reality*."⁷³ If we accept this interpretation, however, then there is a striking correspondence between the way that both Fichte and Schopenhauer account for the way that we conceive of our representations as representations of an 'object' (in the strong sense), or the way that we *feel* our *determinations* as produced by a *determinant*. For, just as Fichte accounted for our conception of 'real objectivity' as rooted within a *felt* resistance to the volitional striving (*Streben*) of the self's pure 'centrifugal' activity, Schopenhauer would be accounting for our conception of 'real objectivity' in terms of a resistance to the libidinal striving (*Streben*) of the activity that constitutes the being-in-itself of the individual's body. Thus, Schopenhauer would be saying that it is because our continual endeavour, demanded by the will, to modify our determinations or sensory impressions so that they shall be 'pleasurable' for us, is continually being thwarted, that we arrive at the concept of real objectivity.

* * *

We can therefore see that there are striking parallels between both Fichte and Schopenhauer's reconfigurations of Kantian transcendental idealism; specifically between their agreement that the 'experience' of 'affection' cannot be accounted for in terms of an impingement by 'something' primordially opposed to consciousness, the grounds for our conception of 'objective reality' and their assertions that 'reflective consciousness' cannot provide the 'foundation' or 'starting point' of transcendental philosophy, but must itself be conceived of as having arisen from a dynamic non-objective unconditioned foundation, of which we can attain pre-cognitive awareness. We have also seen how it is extremely likely that they both realised the need to reconfigure transcendental philosophy in such a way, due to the influence of Schulze's *Aenesidemus* upon their

⁷² A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (Dover, 1969), vol.1, pp.98-9.

⁷³ P. Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* (Clarendon, 1995), pp.99-100.

thinking. There are also of course many differences. Schopenhauer's assertions that reflective consciousness emerges from the thing in itself and his claims that our 'experience' of affection can only be accounted for in physiological terms would presumably have horrified Fichte, and seem in many ways to undermine and subvert *from within* the very spirit of transcendental philosophy.

Positing/Hovering: The Early Romantic Reading of Fichte

HECTOR KOLLIAS

Being cannot *be*. Were it to be, it would no longer remain being but would become a being, an entity.¹

In most versions of the history of philosophy, including the one implicit in Heidegger's writings, there is little or no space for the fragmented and unsystematic expositions of the group of writers commonly given the collective name of *Frühromantiker*, that is, the writers associated with the short-lived experiment that was the *Athenaeum*, chiefly Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. In most versions of the history of philosophy there is little space for Fichte. Moreover, this space is, in a very precise way, delimited: Fichte is seen as a curious appendix to the grandeur of the Kantian system, or, at best, as the connective bridge between Kant and the next momentous event in the narrative, Hegel. Perhaps one of the issues at stake in what follows is a reappraisal of these somewhat neglected figures, especially if considered under the spotlight of a history of philosophy which would be, according to Heidegger, a history of Being. Admittedly, neither Fichte's nor, particularly, the Jena Romantics' philosophies, are thought of especially as ontology. But maybe it is precisely when Being is not in the foreground of immediate concern that it is best disclosed. Perhaps the significance of Fichte, and that of Schlegel and Novalis² lies with their covert ontological theses precisely

¹ Martin Heidegger, 'Kant's Thesis about Being', in *Pathmarks*, ed. W. McNeill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.362.

² The grouping together of these two names should not appear as uncritical blanketing of two distinct thoughts under one rubric. It is beyond doubt that Schlegel and Novalis worked closely together and shared many philosophical and literary affinities.