

of pure life-less thinking. In the dialectic of enlightenment the appeal to life in popular philosophy regresses into the quackery of the prescriptions misused as medicine, while the sustained distance from life in transcendental philosophy takes on the traits of a speculative macrobiotics.

Identity and Original Duplicity in Fichte's Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* and Schelling's Jena *Naturphilosophie*

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The putting into question of the authority of consciousness is first and always differential.¹

Introduction

The theme of epistemological antifoundationalism has come to be central to much recent Continental and Anglo-American philosophy. Following research conducted by scholars into the treatment of the notion of the Absolute by the German Idealist and Romantic schools of philosophy and literary criticism,² it is also increasingly accepted that the question of the viability of antifoundationalism became pivotal for philosophy's image of

* References are given to the German original first, and then to the English translation, if available. Where no English translation is available, English renderings in the text are my own.

¹ Jacques Derrida, '*Différance*', trans. Alan Bass, in Peggy Kamuf, ed., *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 59-79, at p. 70.

² Some examples of this scholarship are: the work of Manfred Frank, especially *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1975, Andrew Bowie's *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1993, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: the Philosophy of German Literary Theory*, London, Routledge, 1997, Frederick C. Beiser's *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy From Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Harvard University Press, 1987, and contemporary Fichte research, some fine examples of which are collected in Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore eds., *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1994.

itself in the period following the publication of Kant's first *Critique*. Some of the most perspicuous thinkers of the time came to the conclusion that what we now would call antifoundationalism, rather than being simply opposed to the foundationalism of the Enlightenment, might be paradoxically the only way to save the foundationalist project from complete ruin. Rather than seeking to trace the influence of classical German philosophy upon the present, however, I want in this paper to examine this discovery itself, with special reference to the work of J.G. Fichte and F.W.J. Schelling in the closing years of the 18th century.

It may seem strange, given the traditional interpretations of these two thinkers' work, that the term 'antifoundationalism' could be used to indicate a central tendency of their philosophical projects. It is true that both remain committed, like defenders of the Enlightenment such as Kant, to the idea of philosophy as an *arche*-science that is capable of providing unshakeable foundations for human knowledge in general. This is signified by the central epistemological role both accord to the concept of the unconditioned. This concept is, however, used under certain restrictions. This is what traditional interpretations of Fichte and Schelling have sometimes failed to understand.³ These restrictions reflect the direct influence of Kant's critique of the Enlightenment's unconstrained faith in the reach and scope of reason. Nevertheless, the concept of the unconditioned, a transformation of the Kantian Idea of pure reason, is seen by Fichte and Schelling as indispensable. We need first of all to understand why this is, before examining the divergent paths taken by these thinkers. We will then conclude with some comments on the wider significance of their turn towards antifoundationalism.

I

In recent years, much has been made of the critical dialogue between Kant and F.H. Jacobi, following the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴ Jacobi's critique of Kant concerned the very idea of method that

³ On the presence of these restrictions in Fichte's thought, see Gunter Zöllner, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, 1998, p. 28, and Rudolf Makkreel, 'Fichte's Dialectical Imagination', in Breazeale and Rockmore, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-16, at p. 8.

⁴ See Beiser, *op. cit.*, Ch. 2, esp. pp. 81ff, and Manfred Frank, 'Philosophical Foundations of Early Romanticism', in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma, eds., *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 65-86.

lay behind the critical philosophy, the notion that reason was capable of justifying its claim to *a priori* synthetic knowledge by laying out the conditions of its own employment. Reason placed before its own tribunal, or reason as judge and claimant both, presented a commanding image of the meaning of philosophy as an *arche*-science. Philosophy would be an absolute discipline, in the specific sense of being self-justifying. Jacobi objected though to the very notion that knowledge requires *a priori* justification, arguing that this then undermines the very notion of knowledge itself.⁵ He based this conclusion upon his reading of Spinoza's use of the principle of sufficient reason, but applied to Kant's practice of criticism, it remains pivotal. Jacobi perceived a clear duality of faith and reason within human knowledge. Reason's deficiency with respect to faith is precisely its need for every truth-claim to be justified. This is because this sets up an infinite regress, with reason always having to transcend the bounds of its current enquiry in the search for absolute, unquestionable justification. For example, Kant argues that reason must, in order to justify its claim on *a priori* knowledge, examine itself. But then it must undertake a meta-enquiry, and question its own right to examine itself, which had been taken on faith. This step back to higher and higher levels of self-reflexivity can be in principle indefinitely repeated.

Let us pursue this a little further with respect to Kant's philosophy. The self-justification of reason in Kantian terms means the goal of demonstrating that we possess *a priori* knowledge of real objects through our reason alone. Kant argued that this goal could be achieved by showing that the conditions logically necessary for empirical experience of objects to be possible were structural elements of reason itself. Philosophy or metaphysics would thus consist of knowledge of the forms of conscious experience in general.

These conditions of experience were inherent to every rational subject, meaning that each subject was at bottom identical, a transcendental subject for whom the empirical field of experience was a unity ordered by a finite number of forms of experience. The experience whose possibility was to be demonstrated was, however, assumed by Kant to be experience in general, the universal character of any consciousness of an object. This was not the case: it was, at bottom, experience understood as divided into theoretical and practical forms, in conformity on the one side with Newtonian science, and, on the other, with Christian morality. This meant that, although these forms of experience were possible for any rational

⁵ Beiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.

subject, it did not follow that they were universal or necessary forms for every rational subject.

Kant's assumption, which Jacobi's critique of rationalism laid bare, was the notion that reason could know what was essentially characteristic of experience in general. This, in turn, needed justification if Kant's project of justifying reason's *a priori* employment was to be fulfilled – and so on. Each meta-enquiry into reason's capacity for knowledge would itself be conditioned by a further assumption, i.e., that reason is adequate in some specific sense to the task of such an enquiry.

Jacobi's major contribution, then, as far as we are concerned, was to redefine the task facing those who wanted to place philosophy above all other disciplines as the royal science, and thus provide ultimate foundations for knowledge. Both Fichte and Schelling sought to defend Kant's philosophy in response by redefining its methodology and scope. Their respective projects both aim to demonstrate that we have access to a form of rational knowledge that is nevertheless invulnerable to Jacobi's objections to knowledge based on justification.

II

Kant's philosophy, as noted previously, acknowledged certain restrictions on the *a priori* use of reason. Only in this way, Kant thought, could the true entitlements of reason be determined. Genuine philosophy had to be distinguished from false philosophy, which employed reason uncritically. The uncritical or, in Kant's terminology, 'transcendent' employment of reason produced dogmatism. This kind of use of reason, upon which the rationalist tradition rested, assumed above all the unvoiced tenet that reason was capable of directly determining the nature of things in themselves. Once the meaning of philosophy became a self-critique on the part of reason, the distinction between true philosophy and mere dogmatism could not be established with an appeal to the real considered as independent of our empirical experience of it. The key epistemological issue was no longer how to understand the possibility of correspondence between representation and reality as rooted in a divine guarantee of harmony. Instead, Kant held that a distinction could only be established with reference to criteria that lay within reason itself. These would no longer be guarantees of correspondence, but of self-consistency. Once reason had determined what its own structure would have to be like if a reasoning being could have experience of independent objects, then any supposed objective knowledge of a thing-in-itself, that is, of an object

considered as absolutely different from any possible experience of it, would be illusory knowledge. The major concern for defenders of Kantian criticism was thus how to provide guarantees for the distinction between philosophy and dogmatism that were themselves self-consistent. Jacobi's critique of Kant indicated that the idea of a self-consistent examination of reason was self-undermining and therefore itself inconsistent, at least as Kant conceived of it.

By the mid-1790s, Kant's distinction between critical metaphysics and dogmatism had been the subject of much argument and polemic. His claim that the concept of the thing-in-itself could only be considered to possess hypothetical validity, and had thus to play a merely regulative role in human knowledge had been under attack for the best part of a decade. The status of the thing-in-itself, and consequently whether Kant's philosophy was at bottom idealist or realist, was even a point of contention for those, like J. Schultz, who stood as his defenders. The question was whether the possibility of experience could be explained without reference to things-in-themselves, or whether, on the contrary, all of our representations presupposed their existence.⁶ One of the most common charges against Kant at this time was that the inevitable result of his philosophy was solipsism, given that the merely regulative status of the concept of the thing-in-itself meant that the reality of things was reducible to their appearance.⁷ Realism was thus the main option for those opponents of Kant who affirmed the possibility of knowledge of things-in-themselves, whether their stance took on an empiricist or rationalist appearance.

Realism in this sense proposes that our very capacity to present things to ourselves in consciousness requires as its condition the existence of such objects. These objects then somehow directly cause the appearance of these objects in consciousness. Experience is thus grounded in the thing-in-itself. Kant's critical philosophy, on the other hand, proposed that any presentation of an object as such was conditioned by the structure of the subject, with the ultimate cause of our presentations being unknowable. Kant wanted to discover those purely formal structures of rational subjectivity without which any presentation of an object, including the thought of a thing-in-itself, would be impossible. His three

⁶ See J.G. Fichte, 'Erste Einleitung in der *Wissenschaftslehre*', 1797, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. I.H. Fichte, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, Bd. 1, pp. 417-49, at p. 428; trans. 'First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*', in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1994, p. 14 (references to these works are hereafter prefaced by IW1).

⁷ See Beiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-5.

Critiques did not therefore seek to explain the fact of presentation via the subject understood as a metaphysical ground, a substance causing alterations in its accidents. However the realists claimed knowledge of just such an absolute objective ground in order to explain the possibility of experience. The implication of such a claim is that a totality or system of laws of nature and conscious experience could be deduced from the thing-in-itself. The possibility of an all-enclosing, deterministic *a priori* system is thus proposed. This would supposedly have undercut Kant's philosophy by showing how his canon of the forms of experience is part of a larger organon, grounded in an unconditioned term, the thing-in-itself, of which all other modes of being and experience are determinations. As a result, the notion of freedom would be undermined.

Because of such consequences, self-proclaimed Kantians like Reinhold, Fichte and Schelling resolved to defend the critical philosophy against the realists among its enemies and friends alike. Where Kant had set criticism, understood as the *a priori* employment of reason within certain well-defined limits, against the dogmatic, unrestrained *a priori* use of reason, the next generation of Kantians began to counterpose transcendental *idealism* to dogmatic *realism*. The emphasis shifted from the difference between two variant modes of reasoning, separated only by method, to the difference between two theories about what reason has to presuppose as the ultimate or unconditioned condition of the possibility of experience. In their concern with the nature of the unconditioned as the ultimate presupposition of experience, both systems could be seen as responses to Jacobi's critique of Kant. Whereas realism proposed that we had to assume knowledge of the thing-in-itself in order to explain experience, and that therefore we had such knowledge, the new Kantians followed Kant in insisting that we had to base any explanation of experience upon the subject. The crucial innovation in transcendental idealism first proposed by Fichte is that the self-conscious subject is not only the condition of the possibility of experience, but also its producer and ground. The genuinely unconditioned must be conceived of as that which underlies *all* representation, 'the representing subject which would not be represented'.⁸ As things or objects are only determinate for the representing subject, the representing subject itself cannot be a thing. This theory, according to Fichte's well-known distinction, is true to the 'spirit'

⁸ 'Rezension des *Aenesidemus*', 1794, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 1, pp. 3-25, at pp. 9-10; trans. 'Review of *Aenesidemus*', in *Early Philosophical Writings*, Daniel Breazeale, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 59-77, at p. 65 (references hereafter prefaced by RA).

of Kant's philosophy, if not to its 'letter', for it is meant to render Kant's thought entirely self-consistent, basing it on an unconditioned ground which could potentially account for the necessity of the forms of our experience without having to presuppose some obscure mode of access to the thing-in-itself. The Kantian distinction between criticism and dogmatism, true and false claimants to the crown of metaphysics, thus became recast as the distinction between opposed systems, each grounded on different versions of the unconditioned, and each claiming pre-eminence.

III

We now turn to examine in detail the solutions proposed in the final years of the eighteenth century by Fichte and by Schelling to the problem of the distinction between dogmatism and true philosophy. As we have seen, the primary issue which they had to address was that of the nature and epistemological status of the unconditioned. This issue is, therefore, our point of departure.

i) Fichte: the Transcendental Subject as First Principle

But can one not conceive of a presence, and of a presence to itself of the subject before speech or signs, a presence to itself of the subject in a silent and intuitive consciousness?

Such a question therefore presupposes that, prior to the sign and outside it, excluding any trace and any *différance*, something like consciousness is possible.⁹

If experience is to be explained, we must first clarify what it is. Following Kant, Fichte and Schelling both make experience identical with representational consciousness. The fundamental question philosophy must answer is '[h]ow do ideas of external things arise in us?'.¹⁰ That is, how do we become conscious of independent objects? Questions about

⁹ Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, 'Ideen zur einer Philosophie der Natur', 1st edn, 1797, in *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. Karl Friedrich Anton Schelling, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1856-61, Bd. 2, pp. 3-343, at p. 15; trans. *Ideas For a Philosophy of Nature*, Errol E. Harris & Peter Heath, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 12 (references are hereafter prefaced by IPN).

the reality of these objects cannot be answered without reference to the structure of the experiencing subject, and hence the question of their reality in themselves is irrelevant. For the transcendental idealist, if all representational consciousness or experience is conditioned by the subject, then this subject has to be the unconditioned subject-in-itself, outside experience.¹¹

Fichte's system, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, first formulated in 1794 and subsequently revised constantly until 1800, aims to render Kant's philosophy self-consistent by deriving a complete set of the possible forms of experience from this unconditioned subject. The beginning of the system, the proposition that the transcendental subject must be considered as the ultimate ground of experience, is the result of Fichte's distinction between dogmatism and idealism. For Fichte, this distinction derives from the distinction between philosophy and the standpoint of common sense. Empirical realism, based on the notion that objects are somehow the source of our representations of them, is a perspective that we require for the conduct of our everyday lives.¹² This viewpoint is in fact a necessary illusion that only becomes a problem when it claims the rank of first philosophy for itself, modelling the unconditioned on the object of experience as conceived by empirical realism. It is idealism that can cure this illusion, by making the content and form of our experience comprehensible in relation to that which is itself *above* experience.¹³ Idealism allows us to abstract from experience as a whole through reflection and to consider what is logically necessary in order that there should be experience at all.

So for Fichte, whereas empirical realism models the unconditioned upon the object of experience, idealist abstraction, as practised by Kant for example, can genuinely transcend experience. It can hold the whole of experience together as a synthetic unity, by reflecting upon its most general logical conditions, such as the opposition between subject and object as such. The reflective movement that takes us back from the conditioned to its conditions is, for Fichte, a free subjective act, and as such, it requires a subject who has been educated into a belief in freedom. This emphasis on the subject's free act is emphasised in the 1797 'Introductions' to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, where Fichte affirms that the

¹¹ IW1 p. 424-5/9.

¹² IW1 p. 425-6/10-11.

¹³ Fichte, 'Zweite Einleitung in der *Wissenschaftslehre*', in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 1, pp. 451-518, at p. 455; 'Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*', in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, ed./trans. Daniel Breazeale, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1994, pp. 36-105, at p. 38.

back-and-forth debate between realism and idealism can only be resolved by 'a decision determined by *inclination* and *interest*' (emphasis in original).¹⁴ As these opposed systems determine the unconditioned in mutually exclusive ways, and then both claim to be the only true philosophy, there is no possible point of agreement, for their ultimate presuppositions are incommensurable. Given that there is no objective resolution possible, the solution can only be subjective, and more importantly, provisional. One elects to base a philosophical system upon whichever version of the unconditioned is most attractive. But this alone cannot prove that the system is the only true one, and so the chosen first principle cannot *remain* subjective.

So Fichte's conclusion that the transcendental subject has to be posited as the productive ground of experience is a subjective one, intended as an affirmation of the idea of freedom. This is not to say, however, that it is not bolstered by other arguments. We will look at two of these:

a) the transcendental argument from the conditioned to condition, which aims to establish that the unconditioned must be assumed to be the transcendental subject.

b) the notion of intellectual intuition as the mode of knowledge in which we have direct access to the transcendental dimension of subjectivity.

a) *The Transcendental Argument*. Kant's problem, as interpreted by Jacobi, was that our knowledge of the principles that make experience possible will always be situated in relation to our position as subjects. In other words, this knowledge will itself be determinate and conditioned, and so Jacobi's infinite regress looms. Fichte sought to avoid the regress by proposing that, if knowledge of the *a priori* forms of experience is possible, then the condition of such knowledge cannot itself be another such principle that is a determinate structure of the subject, for this principle would then itself be our object, and conditioned by our relation to it, our consciousness *of* it. We would not then have transcended experience *as a whole* towards its condition, as we would simply have cognised another determinate form of experience. This means that the only possible candidate for the role of the unconditioned is, for Fichte, an immediate identity, one that is without determination and difference.¹⁵

¹⁴ IW1 p. 433/18.

¹⁵ Gunter Zöllner, 'Original Duplicity: The Ideal and Real in Fichte's Transcendental Theory of the Subject', in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma, eds., *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 115-130, at pp. 119-20.

And since all experience of objects is only determinate in relation to subjectivity, this identity must be the immediate identity of the subject with itself.

However, Fichte's conclusion is not sufficient to give his first principle more than subjective validity. It suffers due to its being formally conditioned by its relation to experience. If philosophy as knowledge of experience is possible, then its ultimate condition would be the indeterminate, immediate unity of the subject with itself. However, more is needed if this condition is to be more than subjectively valid. Fichte wants to show that the unconditioned condition of experience can be known to be the subject-in-itself. But for this to succeed, we cannot simply assert that the unity that conditions all experience is an unconditioned or absolute subject.¹⁶ This assertion would derive from the aforementioned belief in the primacy of the subject. Hence a transcendental argument alone will not suffice.

The question of the primacy of idealism over realism or vice versa turns on what we have to presuppose as the *sufficient* ground of experience. In other words, the internal and necessary connection between this ground and experience as a whole has to be demonstrated. A transcendental argument from conditioned to condition cannot demonstrate this internal relation. Affirming one or other version of the unconditioned as a first principle of a system is only the first step: we still require the system itself. In other words, the totality of forms of possible experience have to be derived methodically from the first principle. Only this will demonstrate that it actually is the fundamental principle.¹⁷ Fichte had already recognised this in 1794 in his essay 'Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*' where he noted that until the system is complete, its principle can only hypothetically possess objective validity.¹⁸

¹⁶ Jacobi and Hölderlin would later object that the unconditioned could not be determined as a subject at all, given that the very determination of subjectivity is only comprehensible in relation to an object. See Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 17-25.

¹⁷ Daniel Breazeale, 'Circles and Grounds in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*', in Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore eds., *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1994, pp. 43-70, at pp. 44-5.

¹⁸ Fichte, 'Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre, oder der sogenannten Philosophie', 1794, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 1, pp. 29-81, at p. 54; trans. 'Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* or, of So-Called "Philosophy"', in *Early Philosophical Writings*, Daniel Breazeale, Ithaca, London, Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 94-135, at p. 113 (references hereafter are prefaced by CC).

The status of the unconditioned as unconditioned cannot be proven in relation to any other term given prior to it. This would mean that the unconditioned would itself be conditioned. Hence the unconditioned has to prove itself. By abstracting from experience in the manner first established by Kant, reason is examining itself to show that it can determine what all experience must presuppose. Hence the first principle that reason comes up with has to show that it is consistent with itself. The first principle with which the system begins must appear again, as the final *result* of the derivation. In the interim, we can only *assume* that what is deduced from the first principle is objectively valid, and that the principle is indeed fundamental: 'There is thus a circle here from which the human mind can never escape. It is good to concede its presence explicitly, in order to avoid being confused later by its unexpected discovery'.¹⁹

b) *Intellectual Intuition*. Fichte's other way in the Jena versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* of showing that the subject-in-itself is more than a purely subjective posit concerns our relation, as conscious subjects, to the subject-in-itself. The subject-in-itself is not just related to us as an object that we posit; it can be known in its immediacy. This is directly revealed to us, argues Fichte, through the act in which we abstract from experience. This revelation is addressed in the preliminary part of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, and later appears prominently in the 1797 'Introductions'. Fichte first describes it in his 1794 review of G.E. Schulz's *Aenesidemus*, however, where he writes that the productive, transcendental subject is 'a transcendental idea which is distinguished from other transcendental ideas by the fact that it is realised through intellectual intuition, through the *I am*, and indeed, through the *I simply am, because I am*' [*Ich bin schlechthin, weil ich bin*] (emphasis in original).²⁰ That is, the existence of the subject can be brought to consciousness through an intentional act of reflection: the knowledge produced is 'that whereby I know something because I do it'.²¹ This

¹⁹ CC p. 61-2/119.

²⁰ Fichte, 'Rezension des *Aenesidemus*', 1794, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 1, pp. 3-25, at p. 16; trans. 'Review of *Aenesidemus*', in *Early Philosophical Writings*, Daniel Breazeale, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 59-77, at p. 70 (references hereafter are prefaced by RA).

²¹ Fichte, 'Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre', 1794, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 1, s. 86-328, at p. 463; trans. *Science of Knowledge*, Peter Heath & John Lachs, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 38 (references hereafter are prefaced by WL).

consciousness of existence had been remarked upon by Kant in the first *Critique*. In the second edition, Kant notes that the representation 'I think', which can potentially accompany all representations as a mark of self-consciousness, is always itself accompanied by the subject's indeterminate sense of its own existence.²² This inner sense is not an intuition of an object, nor is it an intuition of the subject considered as a thing-in-itself, i.e., something like an intuition of a soul. Fichte's version of this inner intuition is the subject's awareness of the act by which it brings its own existence before itself. His claim is thus that intellectual intuition is direct knowledge of the transcendental subject as a productive activity rather than as a being or a thing.²³ This intuition is thus meant to provide us with an immediate certainty from which the system can begin. However, once again the status of this certainty is not that of an objectively established fact. The proposition 'I am' is, as Fichte puts it, 'valid only for the I itself', rather than being 'valid in itself' (emphasis in original).²⁴ The intuition thus merely provides a subjective form of certainty. As a first principle, it must still prove itself. The fact that 'I am' may be an immediate certainty, then, but that the subject is the ground of this existence and our consciousness of it is still a matter of faith,²⁵ which only a complete system could prove.

So we have seen that to enter the transcendental idealist system, one must already be convinced that we can know that the subject is in fact the source of all possible forms of experience, including the thought of the thing-in-itself. Fichte has acknowledged that, in order to proceed towards the foundationalist goal of justifying philosophy's claim to be an *arche-science*, one must begin without objective foundations for one's method.²⁶ The next question that arises is: can the system be completed, and this goal achieved? The possibility of completing the system is, it turns out, threatened by the fact that the unconditioned is only reached by

²² Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781, 1787, *Werke*, hrsg. Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974, Bd. 3; trans. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith, London, Macmillan, 1929; B 422-3n (references hereafter are prefaced by CPuR).

²³ IW2 p. 461/44.

²⁴ RA p. 16/71.

²⁵ IW2 p. 466/49.

²⁶ On Fichte's antifoundationalism, see Tom Rockmore, 'Antifoundationalism, Circularity and the Spirit of Fichte', in Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore eds., *Fichte: Historical Contexts/ Contemporary Controversies*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1994, pp. 96-112, esp. p. 105.

abstracting from experience as a whole. Fichte faces two crucial problems, which he explicitly acknowledges.

a) *The Infinite Progress*. Actual consciousness is, for Fichte as for Kant, always determined under a form of synthesis. In Fichte's terms, this means that the subject is always aware of itself as opposed to an object, or vice versa. But this means that consciousness is always finite, limited by the form of synthesis under which it is determined. It is always conditioned by a specific difference between subject and object. The transcendental subject on the other hand is postulated as an immediate, self-producing unity, which has all possible determinations of experience within it. Whether considered as a unity or a totality, the subject-in-itself, the subject as grounding activity, cannot be present to consciousness, for it necessarily transcends the form of experience as such. The subject-in-itself is thus without consciousness as such. This is a necessary inference, running from experience to its conditions.²⁷

To complete the system, the philosopher must return from the derived conditioned forms of experience to the unconditioned subject itself. However, this subject appears at the end of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a practical Idea, the object of infinite moral striving (*Streben*). The end of the system is a *Sollen*, the demand that nature be forced to exist in conformity to the moral law.²⁸ Given the persistent difference between consciousness and that which the idealist has to postulate as its ground, it is impossible that the system can be complete for a finite consciousness. The validity of the system must, viewed from within, be relative: 'transcendental philosophy possesses no validity in itself, but only in relationship to reason'.²⁹

b) *Original Duplicity*. The unbridgeable gap between actual consciousness and the unconditioned subject is in fact reflected at the beginning of the system as well as at the end. If the subject-in-itself is a pure unity, then the question of why it is ever determinate at all must be answered if the relation between it and consciousness is to be understood. Somehow the indeterminate has to be made determinable. In the later

²⁷ IW2 p. 459/43. We may also ask (as did Jacobi, Hölderlin, Novalis and Schelling) in what sense the unconditioned is therefore a subject at all.

²⁸ WL p. 410/245.

²⁹ Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*, 1796-99, in *Samtliche Werke*, Bd., p. 167; trans. *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: (Wissenschaftslehre) Nova Methodo*, 1796-9, ed./trans. Daniel Breazeale, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 332 (references hereafter are prefaced by WLnm).

versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1796-99, this function belongs to feeling (*Gefühl*). Fichte's stress in these later versions of his system is no longer upon the ideal of a deduction based on an unconditioned first principle. Instead he is concerned to infer from experience the structures of the transcendental subject that enable it to limit *itself*. Foremost among these is an 'original duplicity [*Duplizität*]' of opposed activities within the I, as the ground of all its self-determination.³⁰ This emergence of difference within the I is referred back to feeling, which Fichte analyses as follows.

When one thinks 'I am', 'one feels one's consciousness to be determined in a particular manner'.³¹ This inner sense only arises against the background of a feeling of repose or indetermination, however.³² In the feeling of being-determined the subject's intuition of itself wavers between the repose that precedes the feeling, which is represented for consciousness by the concept of the indeterminate, and the feeling itself, represented by the opposed concept of the determinate.

The subject's becoming-determinate must, for the idealist, happen through its own activity, and yet there has to be some stimulus 'from outside', as it were, given that the subject-in-itself is postulated to be a self-abiding identity. Feeling, as a faculty of the transcendental subject, can fulfil this role, as it is purely subjective and yet is in the last instance not produced by the subject. It is a mixture of activity and passivity that is irreducible or unanalysable. Feeling is dependent upon freedom, as for a feeling to occur, 'I must surrender myself to the feeling, for otherwise I do not feel it'.³³ And yet '[i]n factual terms, feeling is what comes first and is original'.³⁴ Feeling is thus postulated 'as a condition for the possibility of consciousness'.³⁵ This means though that '[r]eason has here arrived at its outermost limit'.³⁶ So the condition of determinability is the duplicity of activity and passivity that is postulated as the content of feeling. This difference is necessary in order for there to be determination within the subject and actual consciousness. The subject, in becoming

³⁰ WLnM p. 185/365. See also Zöller, *op. cit.*, pp. 116, 123, and Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 78.

³¹ WLnM p. 28/110.

³² WLnM p. 32/116.

³³ WLnM p. 99/220-1.

³⁴ WLnM p. 63/176.

³⁵ WLnM p. 165/330.

³⁶ WLnM p. 166/330.

determinate, 'is not the sole author of its own being'.³⁷ Reason cannot go beyond the postulate of feeling, for to posit external causes for the limitation of the subject would lead to realism and dogmatism.³⁸ But if there is something required within the system that cannot be fully explained through the subject's own positing, then the system cannot succeed as foundationalist philosophy from the very beginning.

ii) Schelling: Nature as Primordial Activity

Schelling's Jena *Naturphilosophie* takes an entirely different approach to the question of the distinction between dogmatism and genuine philosophy, and, like Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, was subject to constant reformulation. Schelling proposes that, although idealism may explain the conditions behind the common sense view of the world, it does not exhaust the philosophically valid perspectives on the relation between unconditioned and conditioned. This is because transcendental idealism sets out to explain how determinate experience of objects as such is possible without proposing that the subject itself *creates* objects absolutely. This means that we can also ask how interactions between objects themselves are possible, given that the subject does not posit them *ex nihilo*.

Dogmatic realism tries to explain the possibility of motion and determination in nature with reference to mechanical models of causation. But such mechanistic systems, argues Schelling, actually *presuppose* the reality of movement itself, and so cannot deduce its possibility.³⁹ The goal of *Naturphilosophie* as distinct from transcendental idealism is thus to construct movement itself on the basis of an unconditioned, i.e., nature-in-itself. 'Speculative realism' is Schelling's other name for his enterprise. Whereas empirical realism and dogmatic forms of idealism try to account for experience without first carrying out a critique of the powers of reason, the Fichtean and Schellingian approaches, having taken

³⁷ Daniel Breazeale, 'Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self', in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma, eds., *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 87-114, at p. 88.

³⁸ WLnM p. 165/330.

³⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, 'Einleitung zu seinem Entwurf eines System der Naturphilosophie', 1799, in *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. Karl Friedrich Anton Schelling, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1856-61, Bd. 3, pp. 271-326, at p. 274 (references hereafter are prefaced by EE).

Kant's conclusions on board, account for experience with the aid of a postulated first principle.

Schelling claims that the only way to resolve the realism/idealism debate is to show how realism can be made fully consistent with Kant. His project thus reflects Kant's arguments in the Third Antinomy regarding the concept of the unity of nature. This concept can be determined in one of two opposed ways, either as the mechanical unity of nature, or as the spontaneous, purposive unity of nature. In either case, though, when we consider the relation between this *a priori* Idea of reason and the conditions of experience, it is apparent that it can only be hypothetically valid, and can only prescribe regulative ideals for theoretical and practical reason in their actual employment.⁴⁰ While Fichte's transcendental philosophy deals with the regulative ideal of practical reason, i.e., the realisation of the subject-in-itself, speculative realism will work with the ideal of theoretical reason, i.e., nature-in-itself.

For Schelling, then, idealism and realism cannot refute each other because they are equipollent. They work with different assumptions about the unconditioned because they reflect opposed viewpoints upon the world of phenomena. Taken together, they constitute a complete philosophical system. The critical canon of principles established by Kant is actually a common point of contact for these two perspectives,⁴¹ and both require a complete system of principles based on a postulate.⁴²

Where Fichte abstracts from experience in general, postulating the subject-in-itself as the condition of experience in general, Schelling abstracts from determinate nature as a whole, postulating the organic unity of nature in general as the condition of determination and movement within nature.⁴³ This unity is itself beyond experience.⁴⁴ Schelling goes further, however. He anticipates later developments in his own philosophy by insisting that, while the two systems represent different viewpoints on the relation between unconditioned and conditioned, they are themselves conditioned by each other, and so there is a still higher perspective. This truly philosophical perspective is, as he wrote in 1797, that which assumes 'the fact that the absolute-ideal is the

⁴⁰ CPuR A508/B536-A510/B538, A569/B597.

⁴¹ Schelling, 'Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus', in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 1, pp. 284-341, at p. 293 (references hereafter are prefaced by PB).

⁴² PB, pp. 294-5.

⁴³ Schelling, 'Von der Weltseele', in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 1, pp. 413-651, at p. 347; EE p. 271.

⁴⁴ EE, p. 291.

absolute-real', the fact that there is in the last instance no difference between the activity of the transcendental subject and the primordial activity of Nature.⁴⁵ The truly unconditioned, then, is the absolute indifference of these two modes of activity, each of which is relatively unconditioned in its specific sphere. After 1800, this notion of absolute indifference would be transformed into that of absolute identity, becoming the first principle of the various systems gathered under the rubric of *Identitätsphilosophie*.⁴⁶

The criterion of completeness for *Naturphilosophie* is again the circularity of the system. The deduction begins from the idea of nature-in-itself, and traces what is in effect a natural history of human consciousness, moving from the forces at work in inorganic nature through organic nature to the natural conditions of human subjectivity. The end of the system is thus the deduction of the idea of nature-in-itself as it arises for the human subject. Again, the system is valid only in relation to experience, or to the rational subject. Schelling proposes that because we must assume that there is finally no difference between the activity of nature and the activity of the subject, we can intuit the determinations that follow from the very nature of productive natural activity. These intuitions are only valid for the intuiting subject, however. The system can thus only provide natural science with a regulative goal, is once again grounded in a specific 'interest of reason', and adopts a method whose results are ultimately only hypothetically valid.

We now turn to briefly examine Schelling's answer to the question of under what conditions the unconditioned can become determinate. Like Fichte, Schelling is forced to think the unconditioned he postulates as simultaneously a transcendent unity and somehow always already differentiated.⁴⁷ This unity is not a thing, a determinate being, for then its existence would be conditioned by other things. Instead, Schelling titles it Being (*Sein*) as such, or productive activity (*Tätigkeit*) understood in its primordial unrestrictedness (*Uneingeschränktheit*).⁴⁸ That this indeterminate unity should become determinate, and produce actual natural phenomena, is only thinkable if there is an absolute split (*Entzweiung*) within primordial nature, and this can only occur through a

⁴⁵ IPN, p. 59/44.

⁴⁶ After 1800, Fichte would explicitly adopt the idea of a 'higher' but unknowable Absolute. With both Fichte and Schelling, this move should be understood in the light of Jacobi's and Hölderlin's philosophies of absolute Being.

⁴⁷ EE, p. 274.

⁴⁸ EE, p. 283.

tendency internal to the primordial activity, otherwise it would itself be conditioned by an external determinate something.⁴⁹

This, argues Schelling, means that productive activity, whilst being a unity, must contain within it a duplicity (*Duplizität*) of dormant tendencies that make the indeterminate activity determinable.⁵⁰ Otherwise the emergence of determination would be inconceivable. The two tendencies of the primordial productivity are an activity of expansion and one of resistance to expansion. Actual phenomena arise from the limitation of the expansive activity by that of resistance, a relation in which each negates the other. Schelling proposes that this means that our consciousness of phenomena is based on the conflict of primordial forces, of which our intuition of objects is a highly complex case. We do not intuit the object itself as a stable entity, but the object in so far as it is being constantly reproduced as a phenomenon by its constituent forces.⁵¹

Importantly, Schelling notes that the original duplicity of primordial nature cannot itself be explained.⁵² It is a postulate that has to be posited in addition to unified productive activity if we are to explain our experience of determination and interaction in nature. In his later *Identitätsphilosophie*, he would attempt to go beyond this limit, by showing why this duplicity would exist within pure unity in the first place. However, this project turned out to be a failure, for reasons that we cannot examine here.⁵³ The point is, however, that the need to begin in the *Identitätsphilosophie* from absolute indifference rather than from the idea of nature-in-itself arises from a basic problem with the philosophy of nature. The hypothetical nature of its content does not take it beyond the viewpoint of transcendental idealism, as Fichte would later point out. Having no grounding other than a regulative theoretical ideal, its constructions are nothing more than fictions that serve reason but do not tell us anything about nature in itself.⁵⁴ The very concept of nature-in-itself is a production of reason, which gains meaning only in relation to experience.

⁴⁹ EE, pp. 301, 287.

⁵⁰ EE, pp. 287-8.

⁵¹ EE, pp. 288-9.

⁵² EE, p. 290.

⁵³ On this issue, see my 'Ecstasy of Reason, Crisis of Reason: Schelling and Absolute Difference', in *PLI-The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 8, June 1999, pp. 25-45.

⁵⁴ See Michael G. Vater, 'The *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1801-2', in Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore eds., *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1994, pp. 191-210, at p. 201.

IV Conclusion

The philosophies of Fichte and Schelling represent, as we have seen, attempts to remedy problems in Kant's thought brought to light by Jacobi. Their solutions used the notion of an unconditioned condition of experience in order to show that reason could have *a priori* synthetic knowledge. The irony of this foundationalist intention, as we have shown, was that methodological requirements imposed by Kant's critique of reason resulted in wholly antifoundationalist conclusions.

Speculative realism and transcendental idealism, even if they succeed in a limited sense as hypothetical accounts of the conditions of determinate experience, thus fail as responses to the kind of critique advanced by Jacobi. The Kantian project, to determine how to carry out a fully self-consistent critique of reason and thus establish philosophy as an *arche-science*, remains incomplete. What is most interesting about this failure is perhaps what it shows about the inherent limits of a foundationalist conception of philosophy. That is, the Kantian project begins from the conviction that there is a difference between philosophy and other fields of knowledge, and that this difference ultimately derives from the self-consistency of philosophy. The difference between genuine knowledge and ungrounded belief is assumed to be a real one. But actually this assumption itself turns out to be just that, an assumption that characterises a particular way of thinking about experience. The difference between idealism and realism for Schelling, or that between dogmatism and criticism for Fichte, is shown in their respective philosophies to be a difference that we cannot go beyond, and which is itself dependent upon other conditions, as Fichte's comments on the place of subjective conviction in philosophy demonstrate. This 'original difference' at the level of the interests of reason is reflected within speculative realism and transcendental idealism themselves, as the original, irreducible difference between primordial nature and its opposed tendencies, or that between unity of the transcendental subject and feeling. A subjective conviction in the overall unity of reason is, whether at the level of interest or within the system proper, inseparable from a difference that persists within the system as both its necessary condition, and an obstacle to its completion. If antifoundationalism is thus somehow an inherent tendency of foundationalism itself, then philosophy's conception of itself must change: these philosophies of the unconditioned thus reveal themselves as radical questionings of the possibility of philosophy itself.