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From being to acting: Kant and Fichte on intellectual intuition

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ABSTRACT

Fichte assigns ‘intellectual intuition’ a new meaning after Kant. But in 1799, his doctrine of intellectual intuition is publicly deemed indefensible by Kant and nihilistic by Jacobi. I propose to defend Fichte’s doctrine against these charges, leaving aside whether it captures what he calls the ‘spirit’ of transcendental idealism. I do so by articulating three problems that motivate Fichte’s redirection of intellectual intuition from being to acting: (1) the regress problem, which states that reflecting on empirical facts of consciousness leads only to further facts and so cannot yield a first principle; (2) the rhapsody problem, which states that the categories form a haphazard set and so lack necessity unless they derive from a first principle; and (3) the nihilism problem, which states that a first principle cannot lie outside our cognition of it, lest it be the cause of our cognition and, being first, the cause of all our actions, reducing us to machines. Crucially, Fichte’s three motivating problems are in fact aspects of a single problem. Leaving any aspect unsolved spoils putative solutions to the other two. Consequently, Fichte requires a single unified solution to all three, which his doctrine of intellectual intuition provides.

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One of J.G. Fichte’s signature philosophical contributions is his doctrine of intellectual intuition, the act of cognizing reason or the I as the first principle of transcendental idealism.¹ It is a doctrine that two of his heroes publicly denounce in 1799. Immanuel Kant’s “Declaration Concerning Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*” asserts that Fichte’s is a “totally indefensible system” because it rests on the “*pure logic*” of the I. Since, for Kant, the I is the form of the unity of consciousness, it cannot yield “any material knowledge” of a “real object”. He thus cites an Italian proverb to distance his idealism from

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¹See Fichte, “Announcement”: “if philosophy is henceforth to solely signify *the cognition of reason itself by means of itself*, then philosophy can never be cognition based on concepts, but cognition based on intuition” (88).

its Fichtean successor: “May God protect us especially from our friends, for we shall manage to watch out for our enemies ourselves” (Kant, “Declaration”, 12:370-1). F.H. Jacobi’s “Open Letter” depicts Fichte’s system as an “inverted Spinozism” that reduces objects to modes of the “pure and empty consciousness” of the I. Since, for Jacobi, true objects have intrinsic properties, they cannot be reduced to extrinsic causal relations in a mechanism whose unifying form is the I. He thus coins “nihilism” to name a system that makes “form alone into substance [...] outside which there is *nothing*” (Jacobi, “Open Letter”, 502-4, 519; cf. *Hume*, 317-8). These attacks target a conception of the I that Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition apparently entails, viz., a pure, empty space whose absoluteness excludes real, material objects.

How should we understand Fichte’s maligned doctrine? How can he discern the same “spirit” in transcendental idealism and the *Wissenschaftslehre* (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:479) if the latter’s central doctrine renders it indefensible or nihilistic? Indeed, how can Fichte ground this spirit in a doctrine that, as Otto Liebmann quips, is “picked out of Kant’s dirty laundry”? (Liebmann, *Kant*, 94).

In the Second Introduction to *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797/98), Fichte claims that while his system “proceeds from an intellectual intuition [...] of the absolute self-activity of the I”, it is not the “deplorable and absurd system” that Kant dismisses in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87) and “On A Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy” (1796), for its central doctrine neither “scorns all labour” nor produces “enthusiasm” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:471). First, intellectual intuition offers no royal road to science. It “depends upon [one’s] own self-activity”, i.e. upon “performing the act by means of which the I originates” in this intuition (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:462-3). And it only initiates scientific labour, which subsequently requires a deduction of the categories from the I.² Second, intellectual intuition involves no delusion. Being non-sensory, it does not make the error of confusing “inner” and “external appearances” that Kant diagnoses in *Anthropology from A Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) (Kant, *Anthropology*, 7:161). Being non-conceptual, it does not profess the “insight” into “a being” that consists “solely of pure concepts of the understanding” that Kant rejects in “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (1786) (Kant, “Orient”, 8:143n). Arguing negatively, then, Fichte claims that intellectual intuition is neither facile nor fantastical.

Arguing positively, Fichte claims that he and Kant use the disputed term to “express two very different concepts”. Since, for Kant, “every intuition is directed at some being”, i.e. “something fixed and enduring”, intellectual intuition must be directed at “a non-sensible being”, viz., “the thing in itself”. But since Fichte regards the concept of the thing in itself as “utterly

²See Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:179; *Right*, SW III:2, 9.

unreasonable”, it follows for him that “all being is necessarily *sensible* being” and therefore that intellectual intuition “is not directed toward any sort of being whatsoever; instead, it is directed at an acting”. Fichte concludes that he has “just as much right to use this term to designate this type of consciousness as Kant has to use it to designate something else, something that is actually nothing at all” insofar as the concept of the being at which Kant regards intellectual intuition as directed is “a complete perversion of reason” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:471-2).³ Fichte thus assigns intellectual intuition a new meaning. However, his dispute with Kant is not simply terminological, for he regards his doctrine of intellectual intuition as drawing out a position to which transcendental idealism ought to be committed if it is to solve three philosophical problems.

My goal is to articulate the three problems that motivate Fichte’s redirection of intellectual intuition from being to acting. Each concerns the first principle of transcendental idealism.⁴ The regress problem states that reflecting on empirical facts of consciousness leads only to further facts and so cannot yield a first principle for consciousness. As Fichte says in the “Review of *Aenesidemus*” (1794), “such a principle does not have to express a *fact*; it can also express an *act*”. This act is the I, which “is not given by empirical intuition; it is, instead, posited by intellectual intuition” (Fichte, “Review” SW I:8, 10; cf. *Presentation*, SW I:461). The rhapsody problem states that the categories form a haphazard set and so lack necessity unless they are derived from a first principle. As Fichte says in the First Introduction to the *New Presentation*, “a complete transcendental idealism” must “derive the entire system of our necessary representations” from a “*first principle*”, viz., the I that “originates” in intellectual intuition (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:445-6). The nihilism problem states that a first principle cannot lie outside our cognition of it, lest it be the cause of our cognition and, being first, the cause of all our actions, thereby reducing us to machines. As Fichte says in the Second Introduction, “[e]very person who ascribes an activity to himself appeals to [intellectual] intuition. It contains within itself the source of life, and apart from it there is nothing but death” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:463). I argue that, by solving these problems, Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition avoids the indefensibility and nihilism charges that Kant and Jacobi, respectively, level against him. I leave aside whether the doctrine captures the spirit of transcendental idealism.

Previous readings of Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition overlook that its three motivating problems are actually aspects of a single problem.

³Cf.: “From the standpoint of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, therefore, ‘intellectual intuition’ in the Kantian sense is something impossible, something that slips between our fingers whenever we try to think of it and does not even merit a name” (472).

⁴I restrict my discussion to Fichte’s Jena period. For an account of intellectual intuition in his 1804 Berlin lectures, see Bruno, “Facticity”.

Leaving any aspect unsolved spoils putative solutions to the others. Fichte accordingly requires a single unified solution to all three. First, deriving categories from an individual self is consistent with regress, since an individual could be the accident of further accidents. Hence Fichte says in the Second Introduction that whereas the I qua first principle is necessary, individuality is “merely accidental” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:505).⁵ Second, intuiting the I as a free activity is consistent with rhapsody, since the I’s freedom does not automatically prove the categories’ necessity. Hence Fichte says in the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo* (1796/99) that his system has “two parts”, viz., intuiting the I and deriving the categories from the I (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:179).⁶ Third, deriving the categories from a first principle is consistent with nihilism, since the categories are theoretically derivable from Spinozistic substance. Hence Fichte says in the First Introduction that conceding the first principle of nihilistic systems like Spinozism “refute[s] the first principle” of idealism (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:429). Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition must therefore jointly solve its three motivating problems. My reading of Fichte’s doctrine differs from previous readings by demonstrating this requirement.⁷

In what follows, I present Kant’s critical theory of intuition (§1) in order to review his proscription of intellectual intuition (§2). I then present Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition (§3) in order to reconstruct his joint solution to its motivating problems (§4).

§1 Kant’s critical theory of intuition

Kant’s critical theory of intuition appears in the first *Critique*. The Transcendental Aesthetic defines intuition as a representation that relates “immediately” to an object and the “end” at which “all thought as a means is directed”. Thought “must ultimately be related to intuitions”, since “there is no other way in which objects can be given to us”. Intuition occurs only insofar as an object “affects the mind”. The capacity for affection is sensibility, while the capacity for thought is understanding. An intuition is “empirical” if it relates to an object through sensation. The object of an empirical intuition is an “appearance”, whose “matter” is given *a posteriori* and whose “form” lies in the mind *a priori*, which allows its matter “to be intuited as ordered in certain relations”. The science of the *a priori* forms of sensibility is the transcendental aesthetic, while the science of the *a priori* forms of thinking is transcendental logic (Kant, *KrV*, A19-21/B33-6; cf. A239/B298, A719/B747).

⁵Cf. Fichte’s distinction between the I and the self (SW I:530n; cf. *Nova*, GA IV/2:220).

⁶Cf. *Right*, SW III:2, 9; *Ethics*, SW IV:14-5; *Science*, GA II/8:84-5.

⁷Neuhouser, *Subjectivity*, Förster, *Twenty-Five*, and Breazeale, *Thinking* associate Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition with solutions to the regress and rhapsody problems without drawing explicit attention to the nihilism problem. Beiser, *Idealism* associates it with solutions to the regress and nihilism problems without drawing explicit attention to the rhapsody problem. Hohler, “Beginning” implies its association with a solution to the nihilism problem without drawing explicit attention to the regress and rhapsody problems.

The Transcendental Logic defines cognition as arising from the “unification” of two “elements”, viz., an intuition through which “an object is **given**” and a concept through which “it is **thought**”. Thus, it arises from the cooperation of sensibility and understanding, which exhibit the mind’s “**receptivity**” and “**spontaneity**”, respectively. Whereas an intuition is empirical if it contains sensation, it is pure if it contains “the form under which something is intuited”. For us, space and time are pure intuitions. Furthermore, it “comes along with our nature” that intuition is sensible, i.e. a way of being “affected by objects”. Without receptivity, no objects are given and thoughts are “empty”. However, without spontaneity, no objects are thought and intuitions are “blind”. Our faculties “cannot exchange their functions”, moreover, since understanding cannot intuit and the senses cannot think. Transcendental aesthetic and transcendental logic are accordingly irreducible sciences (Kant, *KrV*, A50-2/B73-6; cf. B146-7).

The Analytic of Concepts describes intuitions as resting on “affections”, hence on the “receptivity of impressions”, and concepts as resting on “functions” or actions of “ordering different representations under a common one”, hence on the “spontaneity of thinking”. Whereas an intuition is a representation that relates to an object “immediately”, a concept is “always related to some other representation”, whether an intuition or another concept. Since the understanding makes “no other use” of concepts than through judgement, Kant calls judgement the “mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it” (Kant, *KrV*, A68/B93).

The Transcendental Dialectic provides a “progression [*Stufenleiter*]” of the species of representation. While the Logic defines cognition narrowly as the result of unifying intuitions and concepts, the Dialectic defines it more broadly as an “objective perception” of which intuitions and concepts are distinct species. An intuition is “immediately related to the object and is singular”, whereas a concept is “mediate”, i.e. related to an object “by means of a mark, which can be common to several things” (Kant, *KrV*, A320/B376-7).⁸

The two-faculty view that underlies Kant’s critical theory of intuition raises the question of whether intuitions require concepts to represent objects. Non-conceptualist readings answer negatively, emphasizing intuition’s singularity and immediacy, which no concept affords.⁹ On these readings, intuitions are objective representations¹⁰ that differ from mere sensations¹¹ and

⁸Cf. the degrees of cognition in the Jäsche logic (1800) (9:64-5). On discrepancies between the *Stufenleiter* and the Jäsche logic and on Kant’s distinction between cognition and knowledge, see Willaschek and Watkins, “Cognition”. On intuition’s immediacy and singularity criteria, see Hintikka, “Intuition”, Thompson, “Singular”, Parsons, “Aesthetic”. On intuition’s intuitive marks, see Smit, “Marks”; cf. Kant, *Notes*, R2286 (1780s) 16:299-300.

⁹See Allais, *Manifest*, 147; cf. Kant, *KrV*, A89-91/B122-3.

¹⁰See Allais, *Manifest*, Tolley, “Non-Conceptuality”, McLear, “Unity”.

¹¹See Jankowiak, “Sensations”; cf. Kant, *KU*, 5:189, 4:481.

belong to a capacity that all animals share.¹² Conceptualist readings answer the question affirmatively, emphasizing the categories' necessity for synthesizing a manifold of intuition into complex objects that the I can recognize.¹³ On these readings, intuitions have objective purport¹⁴ only in light of rules or norms¹⁵ our facility with which is primitive.¹⁶ Transformativism radicalizes the conceptualist response, arguing that sensibility is not a factor that is common to all animals, to which understanding is simply added in our case, but rather is transformed by our rationality and thus differs in kind from non-human sensibility.¹⁷

By Kant's lights, Fichte's motivating problems do not undermine the two-faculty view. First, that there are "two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root" (Kant, *KrV*, A15/B29), threatens no regress. Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy regards sensibility and understanding as providing cognitions that differ in "distinctness and indistinctness", i.e. in degree, as though "subtle speculation" could "evolve" a manifold of intuition from concepts and, ultimately, from an infinite understanding. This makes the "entirely unjust" assumption that a concept's distinctness is not "merely logical", i.e. that a concept could be sensible. Kant instead regards sensibility and understanding as differing in "origin and content", i.e. in kind, treating their distinction as "transcendental" insofar as it concerns two irreducible factors of "our subjective constitution" (Kant, *KrV*, A43-4/B60-2). Second, the "peculiarity" that our understanding synthesizes the manifold of intuition by means of categories, for whose "kind and number" a "further ground" is metaphysically deducible "as little as" one is for the functions of judgement and the forms of sensibility, threatens no rhapsody (Kant, *KrV*, B145-6). Kant calls metaphysics "the **inventory** of all we possess through **pure reason**", from which nothing is "hidden" insofar as reason derives this inventory "entirely out of itself". Reason's spade may well turn, as when it discovers brute facts about the forms of our cognitive faculties, without thereby sacrificing the "unconditioned completeness" of its science (Kant, *KrV*, Axx). Third, that objects are necessarily subject to external causal relations, such that conceiving of the "absolutely internal in matter" is "mere fancy" (Kant, *KrV*, A277/B333), threatens no nihilism. Kant resolves the third antinomy by conceiving of "that in an object" which is "**intelligible**", viz., faculties through which it is the free cause of appearances and which "cannot at all be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility", viz., understanding and reason. While this resolution establishes

¹²See Hanna, "Non-Conceptualism"; cf. Kant, "Jäsche", 9:65.

¹³See Longuenesse, *Judge*, 213; cf. Kant, *KrV*, B161n.

¹⁴See Land, "Deduction".

¹⁵See Ginsborg, "Non-Conceptualist", McDowell, *Mind and World*.

¹⁶See Grüne, *Blinde*.

¹⁷See Conant, "Kantian", Boyle, "Additive".

neither freedom's "**reality**" nor its "**possibility**" as a "real ground", it preserves freedom's thinkability as a "transcendental idea" to whose practical use reason is entitled (Kant, *KrV*, A538/B566, A547/B575, A558/B586).

Nevertheless, the challenges that Fichte's motivating problems pose come into sharper focus when we turn to Kant's proscription of intellectual intuition.

§2 Kant's proscription of intellectual intuition

Kant's inaugural dissertation, "On the Form and Principle of the Sensible and the Intelligible World" (1770), distinguishes between "human intuition", which is "*passive*" because it must be given objects, and "[d]ivine intuition", which is "intellectual" because it is "the principle of objects" (Kant, "Form", 2:396-7). This distinction informs Kant's General Remarks on the Aesthetic, in which he says that while "we cannot decide" whether "intuition in space and time" is limited to human sensibility, this intuition is "derived (*intuitus derivativus*)", i.e. dependent on objects' existence insofar as the subject must be "affected" by them. It differs in kind from intuition that is "original (*intuitus originarius*)", through which objects' existence "is itself given" insofar as the subject is "the original being". Kant calls this "intellectual intuition", which he says is impossible for us (Kant, *KrV*, B72).

The Analytic of Principles introduces the distinction between "*phaenomena*" and "*noumena*" by describing the former as appearances *qua* objects of sensible intuition that are thought "in accordance with the unity of the categories" and the latter as things in themselves *qua* objects of the understanding that are given "*coram intuitu intellectuali* [by means of intellectual intuition]" (Kant, *KrV*, A248-9). A noumenon "in the **negative** sense" is a thing that is "**not an object of our sensible intuition**", whereas "in a **positive** sense" it is "**an object of a non-sensible intuition**", viz., intellectual intuition. The positive concept of a noumenon is "problematic", i.e. non-contradictory yet extending beyond sensible intuition (Kant, *KrV*, B307, A254-5/B310).

The B-edition transcendental deduction argues that whereas a manifold of intuition is given through receptivity, the "representation of the **synthetic** unity of the manifold", i.e. its "**combination**", is "an act of the spontaneity" of the understanding. All combination of a manifold, whether the latter is "sensible or non-sensible", is an act of "self-activity" (Kant, *KrV*, B129-31). Human understanding combines a manifold using concepts. Hence Kant describes human understanding as "not intuitive, but discursive", i.e. "a cognition through concepts" (Kant, *KrV*, A68/B93; cf. *Prolegomena*, 4:333; "Jäsche", 9:58, 91). By contrast, non-human understanding "cogniz[es] its object not discursively through categories, but intuitively in a non-sensible intuition" (Kant, *KrV*, A256/B311). Hence Kant says that, for a "divine

understanding”, which “itself intuit[s]”, the pure concepts or categories “have no significance at all” (Kant, *KrV*, B145; cf. A286/B342; *Notes*, R4677 (1773-75) 17:658).

§§76-7 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) describe discursive understanding (*intellectus ectypus*) as moving “from the **analytical universal** (of concepts) to the particular”, which must be “given” to it in “empirical intuition”, and intuitive understanding (*intellectus archetypus*) as moving “from the **synthetically universal** (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular”, which it gives to itself because, as “a faculty of a **complete spontaneity of intuition**” that is “completely independent from sensibility”, it is “an understanding in the most general sense of the term” (Kant, *KU*, 5:406-8). Hence Kant tells Markus Herz in a letter (21 February 1772) that an *intellectus archetypus* is “an intellect whose intuition is itself the ground of things” (Kant, *Correspondence*, 10:130).

The distinctions between intellectual and sensible intuition and discursive and intuitive understanding are closely related. In marginal notes in the first *Critique*, Kant says that intellectual intuition is “nothing” for non-intuitive understanding, which implies that it is exclusively for intuitive understanding, while the “objects of an intuition of the understanding” are “problematical” in the sense of “*noumena*” (Kant, *KrV*, A248/B305; “*Marginalia*”, 23:36). “On A Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason is to be Made Superfluous by an Older One” (1790) implies that an understanding that intellectually intuits has “absolutely no use” for the categories and is thus “intuitive” (Kant, “*Discovery*”, 8:216; cf. 8:389). And whereas the difference between possibility and actuality is “absolutely necessary” for human understanding, since our two-faculty standpoint is such that “two entirely heterogeneous elements”, viz., concepts and sensible intuitions, represent objects’ “possibility” and “give[ness]”, respectively, there is “no such distinction” between possibility and actuality for intuitive understanding, for which concepts and sensible intuitions “would both disappear”. All objects that this understanding cognizes “would **be** (exist)” (Kant, *KU*, 5:401-3). Such cognition, involving neither concepts nor sensible intuitions, would require intellectual intuition.¹⁸

¹⁸“What Real Progress has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?” (1793) describes understanding that is “free” from sensibility and concepts as knowing objects “in mere (intellectual) intuition” (20:267). *Metaphysik L₁* (mid-1770s) implies that intuitive understanding cognizes through intellectual intuition (28:241). R6050 (1780s?) ascribes intellectual intuition to “original understanding” (18:434). *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (1782/83) ascribes intellectual intuition to God (29:800) and *Metaphysik K₃ Vigilantius* (1794/95) ascribes intuitive understanding to God (29:978). Förster claims that Kant regards intellectual intuition and intuitive understanding as “two alternative cognitive capacities” (*Twenty-Five*, 203). However, just as sensible intuition is a representation belonging to our faculty of sensibility, intellectual intuition may be regarded as a representation belonging to intuitive understanding’s faculty of complete spontaneity of intuition. Contra Förster, see Leech, “*Modal*”, *Stang, Modal*, 301n11.

The sensible nature of human intuition and the ascription of intellectual intuition to non-human understanding both explain Kant's proscription of intellectual intuition. From a Fichtean perspective, this proscription is particularly significant as it concerns apperception.

The A-edition transcendental deduction claims that consciousness of "forever variable" determinations of one's state, i.e. "**inner sense** or **empirical apperception**", provides "no standing or abiding self" and thus cannot make possible the "unity of consciousness" in the synthesis of the manifold of intuition through concepts. The condition of this possibility is instead "**transcendental apperception**", i.e. "pure, original, unchanging consciousness" of the "identity" of the "action" whereby the manifold is "combined" (Kant, *KrV*, A106-8). Since combinatory action is spontaneous, transcendental apperception is consciousness of the subject's self-activity. The B-edition transcendental deduction similarly claims that "**pure**" as opposed to "**empirical**" apperception "produces the representation **I think**, which must be able to accompany all others" in order for them to be "**my** representations". Pure apperception alone provides the "original combination" of representations "**in one consciousness**", i.e. the "**synthetic**" unity of apperception, such that I can thereby represent the "**identity of the consciousness in these representations**", i.e. the "**analytical**" unity of apperception (Kant, *KrV*, B132-3).

Kant argues that "through the I, as a simple representation, nothing manifold is given", for whereas an understanding "in which through self-consciousness all of the manifold would at the same time be given, would **intuit**", our understanding "can only **think** and must seek the intuition in the senses". The "supreme principle" of intuition in relation to the understanding, viz., that the manifold of intuition stands under the synthetic unity of apperception, is only a principle for an understanding "through whose pure apperception in the representation **I am** nothing manifold is given at all", since, for an understanding through whose apperception a manifold is "given" and objects thereby "exist", no such synthesis is required. The "supreme principle" is accordingly the "first principle" of specifically human understanding (Kant, *KrV*, B135, 136, 138-9).

Kant concludes that, in apperception, "I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor **as** I am in myself, but only **that** I am. This **representation** is a **thinking**, not an **intuiting**", which disqualifies it as a "**cognition** of ourselves". While the I think "expresses" an act of thinking, I have no intuition of this act. Lacking "self-intuition", "I cannot determine my existence as that of a self-active being, rather I merely represent the spontaneity of my thought".¹⁹ Hence the General Remarks state that, through "inner sense",

¹⁹Kant, *KrV*, B157, 158n; cf. A278/B334, B429. R3921 (1769) claims that whereas sensibility reveals "only the relations of things", "we can represent the absolute or the subject only from our selves" (17:346).

the subject is represented “as appearance, not as it would judge of itself if its intuition were mere self-activity, i.e. intellectual”. Whereas “inner sense would be intellectual” if the manifold were “given **self-actively**” through apperception, apperception for us requires a manifold that is “antecedently given” through sensibility (Kant, *KrV*, B67-8). Hence, too, the Refutation of Idealism states: “consciousness of myself in the representation **I** is no intuition at all, but a merely **intellectual** representation of the self-activity of a thinking subject” (Kant, *KrV*, B278; cf. Bxxxviii-n). Hence, finally, the Paralogisms charge rational psychology with mistaking apperception, which is a “unity of **thinking**, through which no object is given”, for “an intuition of the subject as an object” (Kant, *KrV*, B421-2; cf. B407).

As Fichte observes, Kant regards intellectual intuition as directed at a being. In the case of apperception, it is directed at the subject construed as “a self-active being”.²⁰ It is the manifold of this “object” that, through intellectual intuition, intuitive understanding would give to itself. But, in general, why suppose that intuition exclusively represents beings, whether sensible and cognizable or intellectual and uncognizable? And, in particular, why not suppose that we can intuit the subject, not as a being, but rather as pure self-activity?

These questions become pressing when we consider the position in which Kant’s proscription of intellectual intuition concerning apperception leaves his deflections of Fichte’s motivating problems. First, we might doubt that apperception is a first principle that affords a “merely **intellectual** representation” of our self-activity if a representation is a fact of consciousness that, alongside other facts, produces a regress. Hence Fichte says that the first *Critique* “begins with representations”, but “leaves unanswered the question, ‘Why do I have any representations of anything at all? How do I obtain a representation?’”, which the *Wissenschaftslehre* answers: “because I discover myself *as acting*” (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:61). Second, we might doubt that apperception is a first principle that guarantees the categories’ necessity if their metaphysical deduction from traditionally observed and thus brute or groundless functions of judgement is rhapsodic. Hence Fichte asks how the “Critical idealist” who “does not derive” the categories from the “nature of the intellect” knows that they are “nothing but immanent laws of the intellect” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:442). Third, we might doubt that apperception is a first principle if, by affording no “**cognition** of ourselves”, it leaves open

R4674 (1773-75) claims that an object “can only be represented in accordance with its relations”, whereas “I am the original of all objects” (17:646). Laywine explains these reflections by saying that the only knowably relation-independent subject is the I, i.e., that “self-knowledge”, which “does not come from outer sense”, is “primitive” (“Self”, 8). McLear explains them by saying that, in the 1770s, Kant adopts a Leibnizian view of the I as the source of the concept of substance, maintaining this view in the critical period by characterizing the subject as a substance that brings subject-inhering thoughts into existence (“Apperception”, 7, 23).

²⁰Cf. Kant, “Progress”, 20:270.

the nihilistic possibility that we are modes of mechanistic nature. Hence Fichte says that those who lack “a full feeling of their own freedom and absolute self-sufficiency—discover themselves only in the act of representing things” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:433).²¹ These doubts yield the three problems that motivate Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition, according to which we cognize the I as a first principle, i.e. as the absolutely free activity that grounds consciousness and from which the categories are derivable.

§3 Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition

For Kant, human intuition is derivative because it depends on the existence of an object that is given to sensibility. Since, from our two-faculty standpoint, sensibility and understanding cannot exchange functions, human intuition is exclusively sensible. By contrast, divine intuition, i.e. the intuition of an understanding that spontaneously intuits, is original because it generates an object’s existence itself. Such an intuition is intellectual and thus impossible for us. Crucially, Kant conceives of intuition generically as relating immediately to an object, i.e. to a being. Fichte modifies this generic conception by retaining immediacy while differentiating between a species of intuition that is sensible and directed at a being and a species that is intellectual and directed at an acting. The latter species therefore differs from the species that Kant proscribes.

Following Fichte’s initial use of the disputed term in the early Jena period,²² the “Review of *Aenesidemus*” asserts that the I is “posited by intellectual intuition” and “not given by empirical intuition” of a “mental state”, thereby distinguishing the I from the object of empirical apperception. Intellectual intuition is the “*I simply am, because I am*” that “realize[s]” the I. This implies the spontaneity of an original intuition as opposed to the receptivity of a derivative intuition. Furthermore, in intellectual intuition, the I is “*self-positing, absolutely independent, and autonomous*”. This implies that this intuition is directed at an acting.²³ Although *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95) does not mention the term, it employs the concept behind the term in formulations that it takes from the “Review”.²⁴

²¹Cf.: “Kant would certainly maintain that we are conscious of the categorical imperative, would he not? [...] Our consciousness of the categorical imperative is undoubtedly immediate, but it is not a form of sensory consciousness. In other words, it is precisely what I call ‘intellectual intuition’” (472). In my immediate consciousness, i.e., my non-sensible and therefore intellectual intuition, of the categorical imperative, I grasp a law that, by legislating it to myself, exhibits my ability to act on a principle independently of inclination and thereby actualize my self-sufficiency.

²²See “Personal Meditations on Elementary Philosophy” (1793/94) (GA II/3:24-5, 141) and the 1794 Zurich lectures (GA IV/3:34).

²³Fichte, “Review”, SW I:10, 16, 22. On the pre-Kantian and Kantian background of self-positing, see Franks, “Position”.

²⁴See Fichte, *Foundations*, SW I:91, 98. See Tilliette, “Études”; contrast Philonenko, “Anschauung”.

Fichte's more detailed account of intellectual intuition, however, appears in texts from the later Jena period.

The Second Introduction states that the "gist of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" is that "[r]eason is absolutely self-sufficient" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:474). For Fichte, reason is equivalent to the I. Hence the *Nova Methodo* claims that the I is "to be understood as reason as such or in general" (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:220). Given this identity, intellectual intuition must be directed at the I's absolute self-sufficiency, i.e. its self-activity. Hence, too, *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796) both characterizes "reason in general" as "I-hood" and claims that "[r]eason (the I) is by no means passive in intuition, but absolutely active" (Fichte, *Right*, SW III:1, 58).²⁵ But why is intellectual intuition not directed at a being?

"Kant is correct", Fichte says, that where intuition is of what is "fixed, passive, and ordinarily in space", we cannot intuit the I except "as a thing". If "outer and inner intuition are merely sensible", they must present the I as an "object". But a thing or object, i.e. a being, cannot unify our consciousness of beings, as the apperceptive I must.²⁶ Intellectual intuition thus cannot represent a being, but rather must represent "an acting".²⁷ This intuition apprehends the "self-activity" of the apperceptive I, whereby the I unifies consciousness. This is an activity in which "the act of thinking" and "what is thought" are "the same" and thus "turn[s] back upon or revert[s] into itself". Hence Fichte says "I" and "self-reverting acting" are "completely identical concepts" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:462; cf. 522–3, 530; *Nova*, GA IV/2:29). It is because intellectual intuition represents the apperceptive I's self-activity that he describes it as "the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I do when I act" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:463). As we might say, intellectual intuition apprehends the **I do** that accompanies all my representations.²⁸ What, then, is the relation between acting and being?

Insofar as the I's self-activity unifies our consciousness of beings, acting must condition the possibility of being. Hence Fichte says that "the essence of transcendental idealism as presented in the *Wissenschaftslehre*" is that while the concept of activity is "*original*", that of being is "*derivative*". Idealism is "consistent with itself" only if it grounds itself on activity, since otherwise consciousness of beings lacks unity. Dogmatism thus errs by grounding

²⁵Cf.: "the *Wissenschaftslehre* proceeds from [...] an intellectual intuition of the absolute self-activity of the I" (*Presentation*, SW I:471).

²⁶See Fichte: "The I is not a component part of the representation; instead, all representation proceeds from the I" (*Nova*, GA IV/2:31).

²⁷Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:32, 41; cf. 23; "Announcement", 89. Thus, whereas Kant holds that "all intuition that is possible for us is sensible" (*KrV*, B146), Fichte holds that "all being is necessarily *sensible* being" (*Presentation*, SW I:472), for he denies that all intuition represents a being and, consequently, denies that all intuition is sensible.

²⁸Fichte says that intellectual and sensible intuition are "always conjoined. [...] I cannot discover myself to be acting without also discovering some object upon which I act" (*Presentation*, SW I:464).

itself on being, whether an “original being” or “formless matter” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:499).²⁹ Fichte clarifies that the I has “no *real being*, no *subsistence or continued existence*”, for whereas being is “the result of a process of interaction”, the I’s activity is “primary and highest” and thus interacts only with itself. Indeed, insofar as the I is “absolutely nothing more” than “a kind of *doing*”, we “should not even call it an *active subject*”, which would dogmatically imply an original being “that continues to exist and in which an activity inheres” (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:440).³⁰ How, then, do we intellectually intuit the I’s self-activity?

Idealism posits the I as a first principle. Fichte claims that this is to begin, not from a “*fact*” that is “already given” and “analyzed subsequently”, but rather from an “*act*” the “laws” of whose expression are derived through a “progressing synthesis”. Were the I given as a fact, i.e. as a being, it could not unify consciousness of beings. Rather, it “construct[s] a world” by self-actively combining the manifold of sensible intuition. But then the I’s self-activity cannot be given to one who intellectually intuits it. One must instead posit oneself as an instance of the I’s self-activity, i.e. one must posit oneself as self-active. Two things follow from this.

First, to posit the I is to “*postulate*” it, i.e. to “perform” an action and “observe what one is doing”. Hence Fichte explains that “[j]ust as geometrical instruction begins with the postulate that one describes space, so too must the reader or student of philosophy begin by doing something”, viz., determine themselves to act (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:27-8). Indeed, when Fichte invites me to think of the I, to think of myself as I do this, and to notice that here “the thinker and the thought” are “the same”, I am to engage, not in a thought experiment, but rather in an act experiment (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:29; cf. *Foundations*, SW I:96). As he says, “if one wants to communicate [the *Wissenschaftslehre*] to someone else, one has to ask the other person to perform the action in question” (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:28).³¹

Second, one is not really distinct from the self-positing I that one intellectually intuits. As we saw, one “perform[s] the act by means of which the I originates”. Hence Fichte says that the “original intuition of the I” is genitive in “the subjective and the objective sense” (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:34; cf. *Presentation*, SW I:529). We intellectually intuit the I’s self-activity, then, by exhibiting

²⁹Cf.: “adopt[ing] the standpoint of transcendental idealism” requires grasping that it is “absurd” to regard the apperceptive I as a “thing, independent of consciousness” (529).

³⁰Cf.: “I do not even want to call the I an *acting something*. —Some have raised the objection (among others) that the *Wissenschaftslehre* grounds philosophy in an I, conceived of as a substratum that exists independently of the I’s activity (an I as a thing-in-itself). [...] Their substratum has its source elsewhere —in the old thing-in-itself, outside the I” (*Right*, SW III:1n1).

³¹Cf. Fichte’s letter to Reinhold, 2 July 1795: “What I am trying to communicate is something which can be neither *said* nor *grasped conceptually*; it can only be *intuited*. My words are only supposed to guide the reader in such a way that the desired intuition is formed within him” (*Early*, 398). Contrast Kant: “If one assumes intellectual intuitions, this yields no cognition of the understanding through concepts and thus no thought and also no communicable cognition” (*Notes*, R5637 (1780–83?) 18:275).

it. Moreover, it is because intellectual intuition is both directed at an acting and exhibits this very acting that the cognition of the I that it affords qualifies as self-cognition.

Fichte thus gives 'intellectual intuition' new meaning after Kant.³² A summer 1797 lecture transcript claims that although Kant uses the term to signify the "creation of the thing in itself", we "cannot think" such a thing and so "cannot think of what Kant describes". "For us", the term signifies "the immediate consciousness of acting", on which Kant's "entire philosophy contains nothing" (Fichte, *Early*, 432n15). Similarly, the Second Introduction claims that Kant "does not even mention" intellectual intuition directed at an acting "except, perhaps, under the name 'pure apperception'" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:472). This name lacks its true idealist meaning, however, if it reduces apperception from a self-cognition to "a **thinking**", i.e. to "a merely **intellectual** representation".

I turn now to the three problems that motivate Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition. Recalling that these are aspects of a single problem that demands a single unified solution, we will see that the doctrine aims jointly to avoid the regress that K.L. Reinhold's first principle fails to stop, the rhapsody that spoils Kant's metaphysical deduction, and the nihilism that Jacobi thinks all philosophy entails.

§4 Fichte's joint solution to his motivating problems

In *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge* (1791), Reinhold posits the principle of consciousness, viz., "in consciousness representation is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both", and he claims that it expresses an "actual fact" (Reinhold, *Foundation*, 70). This provokes Fichte's charge in a letter to Heinrich Stephani (mid-December 1793) that, by restricting the mind's activity to representation, Reinhold "know[s] nothing of freedom and the practical imperative" and, "[i]f he is consistent", "must become an empirical fatalist" (Fichte, *Early*, 371). Fichte partially clarifies his charge in letters to Reinhold. After praising Kant and Reinhold for discovering that philosophy must begin with "the subject" and with a "first principle", respectively (March/April 1795) (Fichte, *Early*, 384), Fichte "combine[s]" these two discoveries so as to mitigate their respective limitations. On the one hand, Kant "coordinate[s]" our cognitive faculties insofar as they all presuppose the formal subject of apperception, but fails to "subordinate" them to, i.e.

³²Gram claims that whereas Fichte defines intellectual intuition as self-awareness, Kant defines it as cognition of things in themselves, as intuition of the sum of phenomena, and as cognition whose acts and objects are identical ("Continuity"). However, Kant would reject the second definition that Gram attributes to him, for intuitive understanding does not represent phenomena. Moreover, the third definition closely resembles Fichte's doctrine. Contra Gram, see Leech, "Modal", Winegar, "Kant", Estes, "Reconsidering". Although Fichte says that "there is but one intellectual intuition" (*Nova*, GA IV/2:136), Breazeale distinguishes four meanings for the term (*Thinking*, 197-229).

to derive them from, “a higher principle”. On the other hand, Reinhold’s principle is not the “highest” because it subordinates only the “theoretical faculty” of representation and so itself remains “subordinate”. Diverging from both, Fichte subordinates the faculties to “the principle of subjectivity”, thereby satisfying philosophy’s demand for a science that derives the faculties from a truly first principle (28 April 1795) (Fichte, *Early*, 389–90).³³ Hence Fichte writes to J.F. Flatt that G.E. Schulze’s “Aenesidemus” (1792) “convinced” him of what he had “suspected”, viz., that “even after the labours of Kant and Reinhold, philosophy is not a science” (November or December 1793) (Fichte, *Early*, 366). But why does Reinhold’s principle court empirical fatalism and thereby lack subjectivity?

The “Review” agrees with Reinhold that transcendental idealism’s first principle must be “material and not merely formal” if we are to derive the faculties from it, but argues that he “incorrect[ly] presuppos[es]” that philosophy begins with “a fact”. Reinhold’s principle states that consciousness consists of representation, which is an “empirical determination of the mind”, i.e. a fact of consciousness. Yet he regards this principle as itself another fact. This entails that representation and “all of its conditions”, including its putatively highest condition, are “empirically given” (Fichte, “Review”, SW I:8–9). If Reinhold’s principle is empirical, a regress threatens.³⁴ Just as empirical apperception affords no abiding I to ground a regress of inner states, so too an empirical fact affords no first principle to ground a regress of facts of consciousness. Insofar as a factual regress yields an endless causal series, “empirical fatalis[m]” results and we “know nothing” of freedom and morality. For Fichte, then, Schulze “appropriately] object[s]” to Reinhold’s principle insofar as it is posited as “first” and yet as “a mere fact” (Fichte, “Review”, SW I:10).³⁵

To avoid a regress, a first principle must differ from what it grounds.³⁶ Hence Fichte says that it expresses, not merely a “fact”, but “also” an “act”.³⁷ Intellectual intuition alone secures immediate access to an act, viz.,

³³Whereas, for Kant, consciousness is “merely conditioned” by the I, i.e., its contents are not “generated” by and “must simply not contradict” the I, for Fichte, consciousness is “determined” by the I, i.e., it is “produced” by and “possesses no foundation” outside the I (*Presentation*, SW I:477).

³⁴The “Review” charges Reinhold, not with committing a regress, but with failing to avoid one, while suggesting that he “might well be reserving discussion” of “the representing subject which would not be represented” for “some future time” (SW I:10). “A Comparison Between Prof. Schmid’s System and the *Wissenschaftslehre*” (1796) warns that Reinhold’s attempt to “ascend” from “facts” to their “foundation”, since “this series is endless”, is impossible and the “reverse” procedure of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (Fichte, *Early*, 333–4). Cf. *Nova*, GA IV/2:28, 30; *Presentation*, SW I:526–7.

³⁵Neuhouser, *Subjectivity*, 71–2 and Martin, *Idealism*, 88 read Schulze himself as making a regress argument against Reinhold; Franks, *All*, 219–36 and Messina, “Answering” reject this reading.

³⁶On this heterogeneity requirement, see Franks, *All*, 225–8. Cf. Henrich’s account of Fichte’s insight that the reflection theory of self-consciousness, by treating the subject as one object among others, neglects “the distinct sense of subjectivity that belongs to self-consciousness” (“Insight”, 21).

³⁷In the Second Introduction, Fichte similarly claims that philosophy cannot “begin” with “a fact [*That-sache*]”, for this would place us in “a world of being and finitude” with no “path leading from this world to an infinite and supersensible one”. Instead it must begin with “an act [*Thatandlung*]” (i.e., with a pure activity that presupposes no object, but, instead, produces its own object, and therefore with

the I's self-activity, whereas conceptual and sensible representation afford only mediated access to facts.³⁸ Since we must exhibit the I that we intellectually intuit, it is actual rather than merely formal. Fichte's "principle of subjectivity" thus transforms Kant's formal subject such that it can play the grounding role that Reinhold's allegedly first principle cannot.

As we saw, "a complete transcendental idealism" not only posits a "first principle", but also derives from it the "system of our necessary representations", i.e. the forms of our cognitive faculties.³⁹ Hence Fichte divides the *Wissenschaftslehre* into "two parts", which intellectually intuit the "foundation" of consciousness and identify "by means of a deduction" the "conditions" from which consciousness is "constructed", respectively. While positing the I is a cognition of one's freedom, deduction derives the conditions for exercising one's freedom. Fichte broadly defines such conditions as "categories", i.e. "ways in which the I goes beyond simply thinking of itself and thinks of something else" (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:8, 179, 198). On the one hand, only if the categories are "completely exhausted" by deduction is the I "fully intelligible". On the other hand, only if the categories originate in "a single, fundamental law" do they "constitute a single system" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:441, 446).

For Kant, reason's spade turns when the forms of our cognitive faculties, by resisting derivation from a first principle, display their "peculiarity", i.e. their bruteness or groundlessness. This undermines the "gist" of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, since if reason is "absolutely self-sufficient", then the categories must be derivable from it, not brutally imposed on it, and therefore absolutely necessary rather than groundless. Fichte's complaint about Kant thus echoes Kant's complaint about Aristotle that the categories' metaphysical deduction is rhapsodic if their kind and number are ultimately brute (Kant, *KrV*, A81/B106-7). By presenting the categories without deriving them from a first principle, the letter of transcendental idealism provides the right conclusions without the right premises. It "entertain[s] the *thought*" of a system that is "by no means actually constructed", for its "construction materials—though already well prepared—are

an *acting* [*Handeln*] that immediately becomes a *deed* [*That*]", for such an act reveals "the precise point where these two worlds are connected with each other and from which they can both be surveyed in a single glance" (*Presentation*, SW I:468). Cf.: "The I is at the same time the acting subject and the product of this action, what is active and what is brought about by means of this activity. Action and deed are [here] one and the same, and this is why [the proposition] 'I am' expresses an act [*Thathandlung*], though this is also the only possible act, as must be shown by the entire *Wissenschaftslehre*" (*Foundations*, SW I:96).

³⁸See Fichte: "[Reinhold] does not go far enough, for even representing is not the essence of the being [of the I], but only a particular determination of the same, in addition to which there are still other determinations of our being, even if they must pass through the medium of representation in order to attain to empirical consciousness" (*Foundations*, SW I:100). Cf. "Personal", GA II/3:25; *Nova*, GA IV/2:31.

³⁹G.B. Jäsche's Preface to his manual on logic (1800), which is prepared at Kant's request, claims that the possibility of a "deduction" of general logical principles raises the "highly significant question" of "an absolutely first principle of all cognition and science" and cites Fichte's and F.W.J. Schelling's claims to this principle's discovery (Kant, "Jäsche", 9:7).

jumbled together in a most haphazard manner" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:478, 479n).

Fichte clarifies Kant's deductive failure when he says that "it is not our vocation to be satisfied" that "our doubts are resolved" regarding our rightful use of the categories, for we are "destined" for "systematic cognizance" of our a priori possession of the categories, i.e. "we want science". A transcendental deduction answers the question *quid juris* by proving our rightful use of the categories. A metaphysical deduction answers the question *quid facti* by demonstrating our a priori possession of the categories.⁴⁰ But Kant's metaphysical deduction traces this possession to brute or groundless functions of judgement instead of deriving them from the I.⁴¹ Hence Fichte says that while the *Wissenschaftslehre's* "conclusions" are "the same" as Kant's, it "establish[es]" them "different[ly]" by "deriv[ing]" them in "a rigorously scientific manner" (Fichte, *Nova*, GA IV/2:7). Fichte's successor deduction accordingly simultaneously fulfils the genealogical task of deriving the categories from a first principle and the jurisprudential task of establishing our entitlement to them as necessary conditions of experience, thereby avoiding the rhapsody of Kant's metaphysical deduction.⁴²

Finally, we saw that a first principle must afford knowledge that we are not modes of a dead mechanism lacking intrinsic properties, i.e. not the "*non-entia*" to which Jacobi thinks nihilism reduces us (Jacobi, *Spinoza*, 220). Although Jacobi coins this term at the end of Fichte's Jena period, the concept behind it informs his description of annihilation in *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (1789).⁴³ Despite Jacobi's characterization of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as nihilistic, Fichte intends intellectual intuition to exhibit the "full feeling" of our "absolute self-sufficiency" and thereby to refute the nihilism of the "dogmatist", for whom "everything that occurs within consciousness", including "our opinion that we are free", is "a product of a thing in itself" and who thus "rejects the self-sufficiency of the I".⁴⁴ Intellectual intuition affords the "immediate consciousness" that I am not "purely passive, a quiet stage upon which certain representations are succeeded by other ones", but rather the "active principle" that apperceptively unifies my representations, i.e. the consciousness that I am "something living" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:465). Hence Fichte says in "From A Private Letter" (1800): "something stable, at rest, and dead can by no means enter the domain of what I call

⁴⁰See Kant, *KrV*, A84-7/B116-9, B159.

⁴¹Contrast Reich, "Completeness".

⁴²On Fichte's deduction, see Bruno, "Genealogy".

⁴³See Jacobi, *Spinoza*, 362, 374, 376.

⁴⁴Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:431. For a Fichtean response to a contemporary guise of nihilism, see Bruno, "Leap".

philosophy, within which all is act, movement, and life" (Fichte, "Letter", SW V:381; cf. *Foundations*, SW I:274).

Fichte observes that the dogmatism-idealism dispute is theoretically insoluble, for each system rests on a first principle that is underivable, supports a systematic explanation of experience, and renders its contrary incoherent.⁴⁵ This stalemate is only practically soluble, viz., through intellectual intuition. Whereas a dogmatist has "mediated belief in his own dispersed self, which is conveyed to him only by objects", an idealist's belief in her apperceptive I is "immediate", i.e. intuitional (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:433-4). But it is self-refuting for a dogmatist to deny the priority of apperception by abstracting from the I and positing an absolute object or thing in itself, for he thereby "also thinks, without noticing it, of the *absolute subject*", on pain of the disunity of consciousness (Fichte, *Foundations*, SW I:97). Since a dogmatist's nihilism refutes itself, the "only type of philosophy that remains possible is idealism" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:438).

Fichte claims that we confirm our "belief in the reality of this intellectual intuition" by "exhibiting the ethical law within us", i.e. by exhibiting our ability to act on a principle independently of inclination. By legislating this law to myself, "I am given to myself, by myself, as 'active in an overall sense' or 'as such'. I possess life within myself and draw it from myself".⁴⁶ Not only, then, does the dogmatism-idealism dispute reveal that "I am only active" and "cannot be driven from this position". It also reveals "transcendental idealism" as the only philosophy that "accords with duty" insofar as idealism demands that I "begin my thinking" with the thought of the I as "absolutely self-active—not as determined by things, but rather as determining them" (Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:467-8).

Fichte rebuts the 1799 denunciations of his system in 1800. "Public Announcement of a New Presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" rejects Kant's indefensibility charge, arguing that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is "not at all a logic" because it "assume[s] something that is higher than all concepts" in order to explain how we "possess" concepts and to "extend, criticize, and justify" cognition on their basis, viz., intuition, which is "the tribunal for both the concept itself and its representative, the word". As we saw, Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition anti-

⁴⁵See Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:429, 499, 509n.

⁴⁶Fichte, *Presentation*, SW I:466. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant claims that while consciousness of the moral law is a "fact of reason" that confronts us as "a synthetic *a priori* proposition that is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical", it "would be analytic if the freedom of the will were presupposed", which would require "intellectual intuition" of the dependence of the "appearances" of our actions on "the spontaneity of the subject as a thing in itself" (5:31, 99). (But contrast *Notes*, R4228 (1769-70?) 17:467, R4336 (1770-71?) 17:509-10.) As we have seen, Fichte regards our consciousness of the moral law as immediate, hence intuitional, and non-sensible, hence intellectual, and regards this consciousness as directed, not at a being, but rather at a acting, viz., that acting which I exhibit by legislating a law to myself independently of inclination. For a Fichtean interpretation of Kant's deduction of freedom, see Franks, *All*, 276-98.

rhapsodically grounds a deduction of our a priori possession and rightful use of the categories. While deduction is a logical procedure, it is the secondary task of a science whose “primary” task is that reason “cognize *itself*” in “its own immediate *intuition*, and not in anything derived or that does not ground itself, which is the case for the concept”. Insofar as the *Wissenschaftslehre* is “*cognition of reason itself through itself—based on intuition*”, it diverges from Kant’s definition of philosophy as rational cognition from concepts and is therefore “a completely new science” (Fichte, “Announcement”, 87–90; see Kant, *KrV*, A713/B741).

The Vocation of Man rejects Jacobi’s nihilism charge, arguing that nature is not a “dead mechanism” because I am “living and self-active”. According to Fichte, “I am a member of two orders”. In the “spiritual” order, my “will” acts “through itself” in accordance with the “law of reason”, i.e. the moral law. In the “sensible” order, the “efficacy” of my “act” is “determined” by “natural laws”. However, both my will and my act are “alive” insofar as I will a “decision” in the “world of reason” that “breaks out in a material act” in the “world of sense”. In this way, “I stand at the midpoint” of these worlds as one of many “original powers” that “embraces both” (Fichte, *Vocation*, 94–5, 99, 122).⁴⁷

If Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition is neither indefensible nor nihilistic, we may still wonder whether it captures the spirit of transcendental idealism. The letter of transcendental idealism finds us beset by unanswerable questions of metaphysics, mysterious origins of faculties, and unavoidable illusions of reason. The *Wissenschaftslehre* reorients us toward a cognitive act that is meant to rule out such questions, mysteries, and illusions. In such an act, we might no longer recognize Kant’s philosophy, although we might instead come to recognize our own.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷For an account of anti-nihilism in the *Vocation*, see Bruno, “Immortalism”.

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