

*Aenesidemus, or on the Foundations of the Elementary Philosophy Issued by
Professor Reinhold in Jena, Along with a Defence of Scepticism Against the
Pretensions of the Critique of Reason*

[Gottlob Ernst Schulze]

Nos et refellere sine pertinacia, et refelli sine
iracundia parati sumus*

Cicero

1792

* “We will refute without obstinacy, and are ready to be refuted without anger” (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* Book 2: 5).

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PREFACE

It would be superfluous to say something about the content of this work because it is provided clearly enough in the first two letters. Accordingly, I only want to provide some introduction to the author of the examination of the principles of the critical philosophy that is contained in this work, whom some readers might desire to get know rather better.

There have always been two main parties in the philosophical world. One of these *believes itself* to be *alone in possession of the truth*, and as such not only *unimprovably correct*, but also to have determined the truth and indicated it in a *manner that is really valid for all future times*. For this very reason this party is also of the opinion that it is entitled to make the most just claim to sole rulership in the field of philosophy, and hence regards every effort to demolish this sole rulership as a consequence of the *deficiency of reason*. One can rightly call it the *deciding* party, since its main characteristic consists in the fact that it decides what is to be uniquely, solely, and forever valid as philosophy and should be held to be so. To the second party belong those philosophers who never recognise the sole rulership of any visible leader, but rather, in matters of philosophy, want only to submit to the pronouncements of reason, invisible indeed, but effective in all people practised in reflective thinking. Characteristic of this party is the belief in the never ceasing *perfectibility of philosophising reason*, as one of the noblest and most unmistakeable virtues of the human spirit. To distinguish this party from the previous one, one can call it the *protesting* party; its adherents protest partly against the infallibility and unimprovable correctness of one of the dogmatic systems in philosophy that have existed up until the present day, partly against the idea that philosophising reason should ever cease to be [further] perfectible. The relation of these two main philosophical parties to one another exhibits a great similarity with the relations in which the two main parties which have always been here in the Christian world stand to one another, one of which also always protested against the infallibility of any visible leader when it comes to matters of the Christian religion (for, although it is only those adherents of Christianity who, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, lodged a protest crowned with joyous success against such infallibility who are exclusively called *Protestants*, yet the matter itself existed already in the first centuries of Christianity). However, whether the existence of those two main parties in philosophy has affected the destinies of those two main parties in Christianity, as the latter have undeniably affect the destinies of the former, is not something I want to further investigate now.

The *Sceptics* make up the most *ardent* and the most *explicit* adherents of the *protesting party* in the philosophical world. And the main error that one can reproach them for consists in the fact that they defend a good cause too heatedly and have therefore often made themselves guilty of unfairness and overhastiness in their quarrels against that dogmatism that is so proud of its *infallible* and *unimprovable knowledge*.

Aenesidemus, or whoever the author of the illumination of the principles of the critical philosophy contained in this work might be, belongs also to the most ardent adherents of *Protestantism in philosophy*. Whether he likewise has also gone too far in the defence of the good cause of his party is something that impartial and competent readers of this work can easily discover and judge for themselves. It is by these readers that he now wishes to be judged, and to be instructed concerning his doubts. For, as a genuine member of his party, he does not hold his own insights in philosophy to be unimprovably correct, still less infallible. Much more he believes so unshakeably firmly in the noblest virtue of the human spirit, namely in the consistently enduring perfectibility of those insights, that he consistently maintains a strong mistrust against the *unimprovable* correctness of his insights, and always strives for that even

more perfect knowledge in philosophy. Should he be granted this wish – I can assure the reader that only this hope has moved him to give his consent to the release of this work, which was originally not at all intended for printing – should someone prove to him that he did not take into account certain points in his judgement of the principles of the critical philosophy, as well as in his quarrels against other systems of philosophy; then he will himself publicly retract what he has said in this work in support of the continuing legitimacy of the demands of scepticism, and against the unimprovable correctness of the principles of the critical system; and he has expressly instructed me to make this promise in his name. But it goes without saying that no rebuttal of his doubts about the critical philosophy and no lectures on matters of philosophy will move him to provide this public retraction if they are based merely on the pronouncements of power.

***, in April 1792

The Editor