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Erkenntnis and *Interesse*: Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* and Fichte's *Vocation of Man*

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Rarely have notable workers in philosophy and in literary theory interacted so intensely as in the period of German letters that spanned the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The case of Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling is especially interesting, since each of them imagined they were working to solidify a common position that was the systematic fruit of all of Kant's labors on transcendental idealism, and yet they struggled, in almost Oedipal fashion, for leadership of the movement. One can look to the *Fichte-Schelling Correspondence* for the personal details of the fraught relationship, but to answer the serious philosophical question of the "one difference" that separates the two thinkers, one had best look to the texts the two thinkers published or penned in the years 1800–02: Fichte's *Vocation of Man* along with new versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* attempted in 1800 and 1801–02 and Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* along with two pieces published in his *Zeitschrift für speculative Physik*, the *General Deduction of the Dynamic Process* and the *Presentation of My System*. This chapter will focus on the *System of Transcendental Idealism*[1] and the *Vocation of*

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Man,[2] with occasional reference to the points of conflict that emerge between the two thinkers in the *Correspondence*.[3] As the title indicates, the works contrast broadly as essays in systematic philosophy based in theory of knowledge (or the Kantian theoretical philosophy) and in practical philosophy (or Kantian "metaphysics of morals").

We shall argue that Fichte's project of illuminating the stance of human agency and his frank appeal to the immediacy of individual self-hood is *currently* philosophically more compelling than the systematization of human cognition that Schelling achieves in abstraction from the lived subjectivity of the individual human agent, partly in casting purposes ahead of herself, partly in obedience to the moral "summons" symbolized by the presence of other embodied agents.

Fichte's departure from Jena in June 1799 in the wake of the "Atheism Controversy" disrupted the forces of transcendental idealism which for a decade had been concentrated in that small university town,[4] and after Jacobi publicly denounced the *Wissenschaftslehre* as nihilism[5] and Kant publicly disavowed its connection with transcendental idealism,[6] plans with various publishers that involved both the idealist philosophers and the thinker-critics of the romantic circle were quickly hatched. Critical philosophy needed to show a united face and catch the edge of the cultural currents swirling in the times just before the turn of the century. A bewildering variety of these plans are documented in the letters that passed between Fichte in Berlin and Schelling in Jena in 1800, as well as political schemes (and personal affronts) over who was to lead the new institute and who was to review new developments in the sciences and the arts.

But the *Fichte-Schelling Correspondence* broaches difficult philosophical tensions as well, hidden under the courtesies of exchanging copies of publications and asking for opinions of newly published works. Schelling ordered his publisher to send Fichte a vellum copy of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* when it was published in the spring of 1800, but it did not arrive until November 15 (FSB, 105). Four days later, Schelling received a copy of *The Vocation*

of Man (FSB, 113). Fichte made a few pages of notes on Schelling's system[7] and began to get quite actively engaged in a debate with its author on the place of a philosophy of nature within idealism. Schelling does not explicitly refer to the *Vocation* for a nearly a year, and then his sole remark on the essay is to disparage the way it ultimately relocated the ground of consciousness beyond the reach of philosophy, in the realm of *faith*: there is simply no room for faith in philosophy (FSB, 135). The polite exchange of copies, otherwise the sign of friendship, really was the drawing of battle lines: one version of idealism could not see there was much for idealism to do with nature—except to move away from it; another found no sense in locating the topic of discussion far beyond what theoretical intellect could make of the deliverances of the sense.

Faith, Interest, and the "Intellectual World"

Because Fichte's disavows any systematic or "scientific" intent for *The Vocation of Man* and hopes to work from the standpoint of natural consciousness in a personal and rhetorical way, it is difficult to discern the three-part structure of the argument before it unfolds and to precisely locate the new terminology of "faith," "interest," and the "supernatural" (*überirdische*) or "intellectual" world.

Let us first consider the terminology of the third book. Fichte's argument moves within a broad context of phenomena that we can together call *interest*. In the most basic cases, biologically embedded human needs such as hunger, hydration, human company, shelter against the elements, and security against predators (animal or human) are best met, not dismissed skeptically. Hunger commands, and the same can be said for social needs such as the rearing of children and the protection of the infirm and aged. Fichte's argument moves freely among these affectively announced imperatives, and the fluidity of such reference reminds the reader that human action has the structure of *bidding* or command.

Confronted with the problem of skepticism's challenge to the validity of the "natural urge" to take one's presentations as caused by external objects to which they refer, Fichte argues that it is not an arbitrary decision whether to treat one's feeling and presentations as

merely one's states of consciousness or whether to accord them a reality—even if theoretical philosophy (epistemology) is totally unable to provide a satisfactory account of the presumed causal link between "outside" and "inside." Because one is primarily an actor or an agent embedded in a situation, the standpoint of ordinary consciousness inclines toward a "practical realism": "If we all have the ability and urge to go beyond our first natural view, then why do so few go beyond it...? It is not reasons, for there are none that can do it. Rather it is their *interest* in a reality they want to produce—the good person simply to produce it; the common sensuous person to enjoy it" (*VM*, 73; *BM*, 258–59).

The standpoint of activity is native to human consciousness—and my word *native* implies that in one sense it is found, or comes along with the situated or intentional aspect of consciousness, and in another sense that, once consciousness has been socially developed or educated, it is voluntarily adopted and exercised both for its own sake and for the consequences that action brings. Natural—by which Fichte means practical, not theoretical—consciousness is *interested* or inclined. It is driven by natural urges and finds itself confronted with concepts that are not mere pictures, but which prompt an independent activity that realizes them. Interest begets purposes and human consciousness is naturally purposive, thinks Fichte. This urge to realize one's purposes through action points to an ultimate situation where consciousness becomes independent, self-active and self-realizing. This urge, which is felt or experienced, not conceived, connects *me* to a represented situation which is the aim or goal of my activity. "I think this real power to act, but I do not *think it up*. The immediate feeling of my drive to independent activity is behind this thought. Thought does nothing more than represent this feeling and take it up into its own form, the form of thought" (*VM*, 69; *BM*, 255).

The familiar stance of deontological ethics: *Ought* implies *can*, points to the wider situation of human agency. That I am impelled by a natural drive, inclined by a personal or social goal, and inspired or commanded by an ideal somehow beyond my immediate well-being implies there is a natural bridge between *interest*, *faith*, and the mobilization of specific activity or *will*. "No one who is alive can part with this interest nor with the faith which this interest brings with it.

We are all born in faith. Whoever is blind in this regard will blindly follow its secret and irresistible prompting. Whoever can see will follow with open eyes, and will believe because he wants to believe" (*VM*, 73; *BM*, 259).

The third book of the discussion introduces *faith* as the antithesis of the disheartenment and doubt produced by the skeptical probing of first realistic, then idealistic constructs of epistemology.[8] So a first sense of "faith" is the renewed sense of self and the validity of action that the switch from the theoretical to the practical stance effects. "[I]t is not these [empty images of things supposedly existing outside ourselves] but the necessary belief in our freedom and strength, in the reality of our acting. . . that justifies all consciousness of a reality existing outside of us—a consciousness which itself is only a faith since it is based on faith, but a faith that necessarily follows from consciousness" (*VM*, 79; *BM*, 264). A second sense of 'faith' is belief in the efficacy of rational action creating not only a better, but a utopian world: "[T]hat purpose has got to be achieved. Oh, it is achievable *in life* and *through life*, for reason commands me *to live*. It is achievable, for—I am" (*VM*, 91; *BM*, 276).

Only in the third and fourth sections of the third book does "faith" take on any connotation of a belief that is not *directly* supported by reason. The third part deploys a transcendental argument, based on the Kantian presupposition that purposive behavior or agency is not the mere production of worldly consequences, but aims at efficacy in a purely rational order—or the cultivation of will for sake of will. Impulse, interest, and purpose are all gradations of rational activity that culminate in *morality*, or obedience to the command of reason. On this point, we note that the Kantian cannot refute a utilitarian or neo-Darwinian understanding of morality; the parties can only disagree. But if the Kantian presupposition is granted, then Fichte can argue

1. that obedient (lawful) willing is commanded of me for its own sake,
2. that this demand is the source of everything rational in me, in particular my freedom, and

3. therefore, it is reasonable to believe in a supersensible, eternal world, where the impulse to improve and perfect my existence is realized, rather than frustrated (*VM*, 101; *BM*, 286–97).

Belief in the efficacy of my will is "faith," but hardly a Jacobian *salto mortale*—or an invitation to believe twenty-three incredible things before breakfast, as one Anglican divine famously said. It is a natural belief based on arguable premises.

The fourth part of the discussion, however, moves beyond the Kantian religion of morality Fichte previously espoused in his 1798 *On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World*, where he argued from the premise: "I myself, along with my necessary goal, constitute what is supersensible" (*SW* V, 181; *IWL*, 147), to a terminological, and effectively nontheistic, if not atheistic, identification of God with the moral order: "The living and efficaciously acting moral order is itself God. We require no other God, nor can we grasp another" (*SW* V, 186; *IWL*, 131). In 1800, evidently another God is required, even if that principle is not quite conceivable. Fichte now speaks of an "infinite will' that is the union and mediation of all finite wills, that perceives each finite will, and of a "God" that is "the union and direct interaction of a number of autonomous independent wills with each other" (*VM*, 107–109; *BM*, 293). This union of wills is an open secret that lies before us in this present life, asserts Fichte; it does lie before us, unnoticed as Fichte claims, if what is meant is the interaction of diverse agents or the making-way for one another that is demanded by morality (and to some extent fulfilled in the social and legal realms). The involvement of a divine agency is not so plainly discernible.

Fichte goes on to ascribe the conventional predicate of "creator" to this infinite will, but this deity creates monadologically, "in the only way it can be and in which alone a creation is required: *in finite* reason" (*VM*, 110; *BM*, 296). This remark is cryptic as it stands; in the *Correspondence*, Fichte speaks more technically of the principle of *the intellectual world* as

> an inconceivable real ground of the separation of individuals and the ideal link of all of them = God. (This is what I call the intelligible world.) This final synthesis is the highest. If you wish

> to give the name "being," indeed absolute being, to whatever still remains impenetrable to this view, then God is pure being. Notwithstanding, in itself this being is not some kind of compression, but it is absolute agility, pure transparency, light, but not the light that reflects from bodies. It is only the latter for finite reason: it is accordingly only a being for finite reason, not in itself (*FSB*, 129).[9]

Fichte works out this line of speculation at some length in the 1801–02 *Wissenschaftslehre*.[10] It is, however, only of such speculations as are found in the fourth section of the final book of *Vocation* that Schelling's complaint, voiced late in the *Correspondence*, could apply, to wit, that it relocates the ground of knowing beyond knowing (which ought to be an embarrassment for *Wissenschaftslehre* or "Science of Knowing"), that there is as little place for "faith" in philosophy as there is in geometry, and that this whole line of speculation considerably alters Fichte's whole philosophy, which previously had simply identified "God" and the moral order (*FSB*, 135).

We are now in a position to approach the question of the overall structure of *The Vocation of Man*. I have approached the work backward, starting with the resolution of the dialectical perplexities in Book Three in order to avoid unnecessary entanglement in the discouraging and/or skeptical epistemological investigations of the first two books—a strategy that parallels informed attempts to read Fichte's *Grundlage des gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*.

At some distance from the text, it is possible to identify Fichte's interlocutors or "targets" in the first two sections.

It is fairly easy to see that the target of Book One, with its realistic account of knowledge that highlights the principle of causality and which ends by undermining any authentic sense of freedom, is an idealized Spinoza. When the analysis of sensation, thought, and action ends in an overwhelming causal determinism coming from the outside, as it were, the writer laments: "I don't act at all, but nature acts in me. I cannot will the intention of making something of myself other than what I am determined to be by nature, for I don't make myself at all, but nature makes me and whatever I become" (*VM*, 19; *BM*, 207). This is perhaps a reprise of the crushing sarcasm of the Earth Spirit's

reply to Faust's *übermenschlich* pretensions in the opening scene of Goethe's *Faust, Part I*.[11] Or perhaps it is a reflection of Fichte's worries about the direction of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* that get expressed repeatedly in the *Correspondence*.

A second attempt is made in the first book to overcome the paralysis of determinism by hypothetically elaborating a "system of freedom," where the wishes of the heart—"I want to love. I want to lose myself in taking an interest [*Theilname*], I want to be glad and be sad. For me the highest object of this interest [*Theilname*] is myself" (*VM*, 24; *BM*, 212)—are skeptically undercut again by the suspicion that this love and "interest" (or self-absorption), so vividly experienced, is but itself a product of the forces of nature. Unless affect, urge, and drive are connected to a standpoint where genuine independence and self-activity are achieved (the moral stance of Book Three), passion and interest itself is subject to Spinozistic causal dissection as the "miserable worm's" self-deception.

The target of Book Two is more mysterious. Fichte clearly presents a transcendental analysis of cognition, but lacking the anchor of "the primacy of the practical" that Kant added to *his* Transcendental Idealism, idealistic epistemology transform the contents of consciousness into the stuff of dreams—the line of argument deployed against idealism by later anti-Kantians such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein, but used in different form in Fichte's lifetime against *Wissenschaftslehre* by Reinhold, Schelling, and Hegel: the charge that *Wisenschaftslehre* is mere logic, not philosophy.[12]

There are three phases of the idealistic analysis of cognition presented in Book Two. In the first phase, an inspection of consciousness is seen to reveal an essential togetherness of self-consciousness and the object of consciousness, but since there is no sensation or object of consciousness without self-consciousness, the latter is judged to be condition of the former. The object is given in self-consciousness, but there is no consciousness of the production of the object (*VM*, 40–41; *BM*, 228–29). Secondly, in the natural stance of theoretical consciousness, the object of consciousness is imputed to the workings of an external object upon consciousness, with the connection between the two furnished by the principle of causality.

But external objects can never be observed in their "externality," nor is causality directly experienced. Both the supposedly external object and the linking causal relation are *thought*, and what one is conscious of is not the so-called external object, but the positing of an object according to an inner law of thought (*VM*, 45; *BM*, 233). The mere theoretical idealist concludes, then, that all knowledge is knowledge of oneself alone. Finally, the externality of the imputed objected is explained through intuition—a projection of an internal state outward or an out-seeing that is accompanied by self-consciousness or in-seeing (*VM*, 51; *BM*, 238). The object is produced in consciousness unconsciously or without consciousness of its production through a threefold process of *intuition*, which places the object in one's consciousness as outside of consciousness, *thought*, which imputes a causal relationship between "outside" and "inside," and a third stage of *synthesis*, which hides the above-mentioned two mechanisms (*VM*, 56–57; *BM*, 244–45). That this march of thought is summarized as: *the consciousness of the thing outside of us is absolutely nothing more than the product of our own presentative capacity* (*VM*, 59; *BM*, 236), leads me to conclude that Reinhold is object of Fichte's concern in this second book. But closer to our concerns here is the similarity of this analysis to the dialectic of hidden or unconscious production, projection, and eventual entry-into-consciousness that is the motor of Schelling's genetic deduction in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. It lends weight to Fichte's charge, repeated often to Schelling in the *Correspondence* (and to others outside of the presumed perimeter of confidentiality that the letters adopted) that Schelling never understood transcendental idealism.[13]

The Odyssey of Consciousness

When Schelling turned from his explorations of the possibility of an idealistic philosophy of nature in the years 1797 to 1799 and attempted a grand work of consolidation, he actually believed that philosophy had two independent parts, transcendental philosophy and natural philosophy, each of which functioned adequately on its own, but together calling for the unification of a "grand theory." The first thing Fichte notices when he reads the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, arguably Schelling's most polished piece of reasoning, is that its two major parts do not fit together or, much worse, that unification

of nature and consciousness is achieved solely on naturalistic grounds: "His classification of philosophy into two *fundamental sciences*.—I assert: nature as object is only *thought* by you: it only exists to the extent that you *think* it."[14] Fichte has good reason to be worried, for the public perceived the two philosophers to hold a roughly common position, and the frankly abstractive, conceptual methodology of the system, articulated with little reference to the I's standpoint of agility, self-activity or self-constitution—now cryptically referred to by Fichte as a *Grundreflex*—ignored the most fundamental aspect of *Wissenschaftslehre*, that I know when I know, and thus tended to perpetuate the fundamental misreading of transcendental idealism that the provisional 1794–95 *Grundlage des gesamtem Wissenschaftslhre* seemed to invite, namely, that it was all about some ghostly disembodied absolute I that subsisted outside personal consciousness. Argues Fichte (in his personal notes): "If we only *knew* (about objects) without *knowing* in turn that we *know* them, then transcendental idealism would not be possible at all. And (knowingly) this standpoint is the standpoint of the philosophy of nature; *unknowingly*, it is the standpoint of dogmatism."[15]

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully explore the *System of Transcendental Idealism*; our discussion will be limited to: (1) its starting point and methodology; (2) the way it embeds the genetic account of intelligence in the stages of nature's development; and (3) the way its only approach to an account of "spirit" or embodied consciousness is an objectified one, painted on the large canvases of social philosophy, philosophy of history, and aesthetic creation—rather than the miniature frames Fichte preferred of personal morality, life in the historically given state, and religion.[16]

(1) The most striking feature of Schelling's method in the *System* is its abstract and Reinholdean cast. Schelling's knowledge of *Wissenschaftslehre* was limited to its first, quasi-foundational presentation in the 1794–95 *Grundlage*, and to the rather wooden analysis of presentation or the basic item of consciousness as a synthesis of opposite, a subjective and an objective element. That I know when I know, that I am given to myself in self-consciousness, and the presentation is originated in my consciousness are features that are absent in Schelling's analysis, or at best underappreciated.

While for Fichte in the second Jena system, "intellectual intuition" means that the I can at least symbolically access the constitutive or active I in reverting upon itself, "intellectual intuition" is for Schelling from the very start a mysterious process of abstracting from lived subjectivity and only thereby gaining access to the I on its productive or constitutive level.

At the natural level, self-consciousness is analogous to the eye: "Self-consciousness is the lamp of the whole system of knowledge, but it casts its light ahead only, not behind" (*SI*, 47; *Tr.*, 18). Unable to see itself unless it alters the natural situation, the philosopher arbitrarily contrives to get self-consciousness to produce itself, in laboratory conditions as it were, and in this experiment the I becomes an object for itself in the act of producing itself. This implies that.

1. the I is originally an object only for itself, and
2. in becoming an object for us, it become what it originally is not, viz., something objective, and
3. therefore, its self-production in transcendental philosophy essentially involves a self-limitation (*SI*, 70–71; *Tr.*, 36).

To limit itself, the I must oppose something to itself, and this opens up a series of dialectical moves whereby the I appears to itself (and the philosopher-experimenters in attendance) as finite in its infinitude, objective in its subjectivity, limited in its limitlessness, and so forth. Having induced that which is absolutely nonobjective to become objective, self-consciousness enters into a permanent duality of acting and intuiting, or producing and reflecting. "Through this constant double activity of producing and intuiting, something is to become an object, which is *otherwise not reflected by anything at all*" (*SI*, 41; *Tr.*, 13). In its limited and genetically exhibited form, the I seems to be in perpetual duplicity, first a producing, then a subsequent intuiting; this is the price one must pay for having the essentially nonobjective projected onto the objective, or that which is essentially self-intuition (or intellectual intuition) become visible to finite subjects. But the in-itself character of the I, that it is free and self-originating, is that it *is* intellectual intuition (*SI*, 58–59; *Tr.*, 27); only the whole series of finite forms of consciousness, produced in the incessant shuffling from production to intuition in a specific form, then

back to production again, approximates the I in itself. The I is essentially not a thing, but philosophy performs the trick of turning it into a thing by generating the series of all possible kinds of things, all possible forms of objectivity.

(2) The elaboration of the philosophy of nature is the *System's* most ingenious and most technical feature, for the lopsided dialectical back and forth between productivity and product (intuition) enables Schelling to parallel the deduction of the phases of intelligence with the articulation of the successive levels (*Potenzen*) of nature. Schelling's most illuminating comments about the relationship between transcendental idealism and the philosophy of nature can be found in the latter half of the 1800 *General Deduction of the Dynamic Process*. A basic point that needs to be appreciated by post-Darwinian readers is that nature traverses the ladder of its successive stages *speculatively*, or in philosophical reflection, not actually or historically, and the same holds for the corresponding phases of intelligence. All phases of nature coexist simultaneously, as do all moments of intelligence—sensation or qualities, intuition, and the various forms of understanding.[17] Both the major parts of transcendental idealism, philosophy of nature and transcendental philosopher proper, are exercises in Platonic *anamnesis*, as it were—philosophical recoveries or "recollections" of the *ideas* of nature and intelligence. The one philosophizing finds his or her self-consciousness already existing in the highest potency, but a flatfooted idealism that straightaway makes reason the sole intention of nature is mistaken in this anthropomorphic line of thought, for it is only in putting aside subjectivity and learning to think objectively or purely theoretically that the philosopher can effect this philosophical recovery—just as in done in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (*DP*, § 63, 164). In this process, however, the so-called dead nature of Newtonian physics disappears, and nature's observed qualities are seen to be sensations, its "matters" or corporeal bodies intuitions, and organic nature as itself intelligence (*DP*, § 63, 164–65).

There are three general phases or epochs in the *System's* construction of nature-or-intelligence: (1) from original sensation to productive intuition, (2) from productive intuition to reflection, and (3) from reflection to the act of will. The first epoch is emblematic of the

whole deduction. The I limits itself or objectifies itself in order to appear in consciousness; its self-construction is, *for the observer*, a transition to duality, from pure subject to subject-and-object (*SI*, 93; *Tr.*, 51). This happens by means of the I's positing a limitation, which limitation, however, since it is a spontaneous act of the I, is the establishment of a boundary that is not a boundary, or an activity on both sides of the boundary. The I appears to itself as limited or determined in sensation, which in reality is nothing but the sensing itself. "Now if the I always senses only its own suspended activity, the sensed is nothing distinct from the I, a fact to which ordinary philosophical parlance has already given expression, in that it speaks of the sensed as something purely subjective" (*SI*, 98; *Tr.*, 56).[18] The I does not just have sensations, however, but has sensations *of* bodies or things. This occurs because its intuition (sensation) is accompanied by an intuition of intuition; the sensation becomes the matter of "productive intuition," and the I's object becomes matter (*SI*, 121; *Tr.*, 72). This productive activity, in turn, appears to the I as two activities, one imaging and one producing; their union or synthesis, that which appears to consciousness, is the awareness of matter and mind: "In the first epoch of self-consciousness we could distinguish three acts, and these seem to reappear in the three forces of matter and in the three stages of its construction. These…give us three dimensions of matter, and these latter, three levels in the dynamic process [gravity, magnetism, and electricity]" (*SI*, 146; *Tr.*, 90). The two subsequent epochs of theoretical philosophy have a more idealistic cast, the second being the elaboration of the forms of thought (Kant's categories), and the third the forms of relation (schematism) and judgment. Theoretical philosophy culminates in the uncovering of "transcendental abstraction," the activity whereby space, time, the putative relations of substance and causality that link discrete bodies, and so forth, are all separated out in experience and become capable of philosophical (transcendental) analysis for the philosopher who observes the process of evolution that empirical abstraction has facilitated (*SI*, 223; *Tr.*, 149–50). By the same token, the freedom of transcendental abstraction allows those observing consciousness to transit to the order of practical reason or will, where the active character of the original I first becomes apparent to itself.

(3) Because Schelling believed that intellectual intuition, both in the original I and in the philosopher-observer recovering its activity in philosophical reflection, involves surrender of subjectivity or moving to an impersonal point of view, the *System's* practical philosophy takes an objective (or collective) approach to the life of the mind and largely leaves the individual agent behind. In this, it prefigures Schelling's so-called system of identity and Hegel's "objective idealism." The author warns the reader at the start that what is at issue in this section is not a peculiar moral philosophy commended to any singular agent, but a transcendental reflection on the thinkability of moral concepts as such, conducted at the highest level of generality (*SI*, 230; *Tr*., 155).

The practical point of view entails an "absolute abstraction" from the previous series of acts and the phenomena they produced, for while theoretical consciousness is always involved with objectivity and necessarily takes the shape of subject-objectivity, practical consciousness or will demands pure self-determination—activity that is only involved with objectivity to the extent that future or not-yet-existent states are conceived which the will strives to realize. That I can act at all (here Schelling is quite in concurrence with Fichte) means that I am not necessitated to act in any specific way by any worldly state or situation, or that, to some extent, I am free to act as I choose or will. In theoretical philosophy, the I's productivity remained hidden from itself; it could intuit itself as *produced*, as an organic body, for instance, but the I could never there achieve self-intuition. Only in *willing* is the I raised to a higher power and enabled to intuit its essential activity (*SI*, 231–32; *Tr*., 156). Thus, the autonomy that Kant places at the summit of *moral* philosophy is seen to be the principle of all transcendental idealism (*SI*, 233; *Tr*., 157).

From these, its opening moves, it is easy to see how the practical part of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* unfolds, namely, along familiar Kantian and Fichtean lines that prize the autonomy of the individual inside a context of plural agents mutually respecting one another's freedom, the drift of history to replace hegemony and the tyranny of traditionally favored individuals, genders, and ethnicities with egalitarian or cosmopolitan societies, and the fostering of intellectual disciplines where teleological ideas or

forecasts lead the progress of science, not just masses of contingencies and discrete observations. Schelling introduces a novel point in making the exercise of will the I's entry into time, the moment of absolute abstraction, or the separation of inner sense from outer; only when the I acts is it for itself, and only when it is for itself in a situation of ever-changing and lapsing actuality is it called upon to act concretely (*SI*, 231; *Tr*., 155–56). He follows Fichte's social and legal philosophy of the late Jena years in making the confrontation of my will with the wills of other embodied subjects in a social-legal setting the real factical "check" that individualizes my consciousness and concretely locates a sphere of activity for me here and now. The Other is the limit of my freedom not only in a general or moral sense; the pressure of other wills determines my situation and in fact individualizes my activity; unless I were hemmed in by other wills, my sphere of activity would be infinite and embrace all possibility. Only the specific situation of other agents acting against my will gives my will a specific object (*SI*, 244–45; *Tr*., 166).

The real novelty of the 1800 *System* comes in its final section, where the absolute self-activity of the practical stance is merged with the blind productivity of the theoretical in a consideration of aesthetic creativity and the way the produced work of art displays an infinity of meaning. Presumably, Schelling benefited from discussions with the Jena romantics in this regard, although the general outline of his treatment is inherited from Kant. What is new and surprising in Schelling's treatment is the emphasis on the *work*, not the creator's intent or state of mind. If one considers the artist's freedom, then every work of art is the one absolute work, for the work indefinitely conveys endless meanings and thus succeeds in doing what nature cannot do—displaying the infinite activity of the I (*SI*, 327; *Tr*., 231). This is a fruitful, almost contemporary approach to aesthetics, since it frees artistic creativity from any fetters of conventional or traditional forms, makes utterly no judgments about how nature and its stuff is imbued with human meaning in a particular work or form of art, and points to an essential feature that differentiates the aesthetic work from the utilitarian or "craft" object—a surplus of meaning due to an overdetermination of the determinate (in Schelling's language, a display of the infinite within the finite). In the work of art, the absolute activity of the practical perspective is merged with the

productive-but-hidden character of theoretical or object-producing consciousness, and the whole aspect of productivity is concretized for intuition—a necessarily polyvalent intuition wherein many subjects will sense and understand many different things. Art is the display of nature's I:

> What we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script. Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which, marvelously deluded, seeks itself and in seeking flies from itself; for through the world of sense there glimmers—as if through words, the meaning—as if through dissolving mists the land of phantasy for which we search. (*SI*, 328; *Tr.*, 232)[19]

The Difference—If Not the Primacy—of the Practical

The exchange of texts—our major texts—between Schelling and Fichte in November 1800 did not settle matters between the two. The *Correspondence* goes on for another fourteen months with neither author quite able to pin-point the "one difference" that separates the two, and when the exchange breaks off, the works each writes in 1802 continue to reflect the abortive private negotiations the letters contained. In *Bruno*, Schelling echoes the judgment of his new colleague Hegel that Fichte's idealism is essentially trapped inside the subjective perspective and hence *unable* to attain the broader standpoint of absolute (or "objective") idealism.[20] Fichte's *Darstellung des Wissenschaftslehre* (1801–02) not only expands the "infinite will" of the *Vocation of Man* or the "pure being" of the letters into a "system of the intelligible world," it contains an extensive critique of Schelling's new system of identity that insists that philosophy must begin in freedom to end with freedom, something no "new Spinozism" or treatment that begins with mere being can achieve.[21] The perplexity Fichte encountered when he read the *System of Transcendental Idealism* persists: "Am I more correct in saying what *I* say, or is *he* in saying what *he* says? Will we ever comprehend each other?" (*LS*, 414; *PRFS* 120).

On several scores, the contest between Fichte and Schelling must be scored a draw: Each achieves, to a remarkable degree, the

ideal of a philosophical *system* that comprehends at least some of the more important phenomena of human existence; the fact that Fichte's ends with a philosophical theology and Schelling's with an objectivistic (product-based) philosophy of art only underlines the difference of their starting points. Furthermore, each reasons according to a defensible philosophical *methodology*—Fichte insisting, "No freedom [at the top], no ethics [in the end]" (*SW* II, 150), Schelling that the philosopher must abstract from subjectivity and adopt an impersonal or objective stance to attain the absolute.

In other respects, Fichte's line of reasoning is superior to Schelling's: he fully engages with the *philosophical currents of modernity*, from Descartes's universal doubt to Reinhold's *Elementary Philosophy*, and is willing to get a consistent system of transcendental idealism from Kant's writings by subordinating his reading of the first and third *Critiques* to the "primacy of the practical" announced in the second; Schelling, who can be credited with being no *mere* child of his time, is in some way *not* a "modern," for he is quite willing to read Plato through the lens of Kant and Kant through the eyes of Plato. It is to Fichte's advantage that the *Vocation* advances its moral theology in the light of an essentially *skeptical* critique of the prospects of any defensible theory of cognition, whether realistic (Spinoza) or critical (Kant/Reinhold). Further, the *immediacy* of the moral or agent perspective that Fichte adopts and its resistance to being explained or explained away, give him a prima facie advantage—I can act if I think I can act, but if I am hobbled by a Rube Goldberg account of cognition (Kant's first critique) or neo-Darwinian explanation of the ethical, I will have to *wonder* if I can act when I *want to* act.

Who or what is to decide the issue? As recently as Wilfred Sellars's "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," the problem was deemed insoluble—there is simply no deciding between the cognitive stance (secured in and by empirical science) and the manifest image (the human as actor and bearer of social and moral responsibility).[22] Yet technology proceeds on the inverse maxim of morality: if the latter announces, "*Ought* implies *can*," the former is guided by "*Can* implies *ought*." If in fact technologies of neurological or genetic intervention succeed in realizing the clumsy totalitarian goal of

re-educating political and social "deviants" to "correct views" and social conformity, what is to prevent the practical perspective from atrophying and losing its self-claimed unique status in the human person as the sole determiner of "good" acts or acceptable behavior. Perhaps this is but a fanciful flight to an as yet unrealized and wholly unrealizable future, but if we are *in the long run* biologically and ecologically crafted to succeed (continue) rather than to sprout the Kantian "holy will," what will happen when the "moral compass" becomes a museum piece like the astrolabe or magnetic compass? Though I am personally horrified at the prospect of having to surrender my driver's license because of failing eyesight, faulty judgment, and generally slowed synaptic response, the day of governance by microchip is at hand. At this writing, automobiles are being readied for the market that depend on circuitry and global positioning systems to transport all of us far more safely and efficiently than the confluence of individual agents' fallible but "free" decisions—now seen to result sometimes in five-day traffic jams.

Notes:

1. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, Werke* 9, 1, *System des transscendentalen Idealismus (1800),* hg. Harald Korte and Paul Ziche (Stuttgart: Frommann Holzboog, 2005); cited hereafter as *SI*. F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath, intro. Michael Vater (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978); cited hereafter as *Tr*.
2. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Bestimmung des Menschen, in J. G. Fichte, Gesamtausgabe I/ 6, Werke 1799–1800*, hg. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1981; cited hereafter as *BM*. Johann Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett, 1987); cited hereafter as *VM*.
3. Fichte-Schelling Briefwechsel, ein. Walter Schulz (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968); cited hereafter as *FSB*.
4. For accounts of the controversy, see Daniel Breazeale, *EPW*, 40–45 and Yolanda D. Estes, "Johann Gottlieb Fichte," in *The History of the Western Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis, vol. 4 (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24–26, 29–30.
5. See Jacobi to Fichte 1799 in Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel*, Allwill, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill University Press, 1995), 500, 512, 519.

6. See Wayne M. Martin, "Nothing More or Less than Logic: General Logic, Transcendental Philosophy, and Kant's Repudiation of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*," *Topoi* 22, no. 1: 29–39.
7. "*Bei der Lectüre von Schellings tr. Idealismus*," GA, II/5, 413–15, translated in *PRFS* 119–20.
8. The suggestion that *Glaube* (belief, faith) would constitute the appropriate title and theme for his refutation of skepticism and philosophy of action may have come from Jacobi's 1799 attack upon him, which reprimanded Fichte for giving the impression that philosophy could be theistic instead of nihilistic: "So why did Fichte give philosophy the reputation that it *wants*, and *can* be theist?. . . It would not be any reproach to Transcendental Philosophy that it does not know anything about God, for it is universally acknowledged that God cannot be known, but only *believed in*. A God who could be *known* would be no God at all. But a *merely artificial* faith in Him in so far as it *only wants to be artificial*—i.e. simply scientific or *purely* rational—abolishes *natural faith*, and with that, itself as faith as well; hence theism is abolished as a whole" (Jacobi, 500). "Natural faith" is the key to understanding Fichte's argument.
9. Fichte to Schelling, 31 May 1801. On December 27 of the previous year, Fichte mentions that he had touched on these matters in the third book of the *Vocation of Man*, and that his view is the very antithesis of Schelling's, which make finite intelligence only a higher potency of nature (*FSB*, 116).
10. See Michael G. Vater, "The *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1801–1802," in *Fichte: Historical Context—Contemporary Controversies*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), 191–210.
11. See I, scene 1, ll. 486–98, especially,

    Wo bist du, Faust, der Stimme mir erklang,
    Der sich an mich mit allen Kräfte drangt?
    Bist du es, der von meinen Hauch erwittert,
    In allen Lebenstiefen zittert,
    Ein furchtsam weggekrümmter Wurm?

    (Reprinted in Goethe's Faust, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1963), 102. "Where are you, Faust, whose voice rang out to me, / And forced itself upon me with all its strength? / Is it you who at my slightest breath/ Trembles to the depths of your very life/ A fearful crumpled twisted worm?" Translation mine.)
12. In a letter to Fichte of 19 November, 1800, Schelling says: "But the *Wissenschaftslehre* (in just the pure form as has been advanced by you) is not yet philosophy itself; what is valuable about the former is exactly what you say, if I understand you correctly, that it proceeds

entirely in pure logic and has nothing to do with reality. It is, as far as I understand it, the formal proof of idealism, and hence science κατ ἐξοχήν. What I want to call philosophy, however, is the *material* proof of idealism" (*FSB*, 108).

13. Fichte wrote to a former student, Jean Baptiste Schad (1758–1834), on December 29, 1801, that Schelling had never understood him. Schad sent the letter to Schelling. See *FSB*, 254–56, Schelling's last letter to Fichte.
14. "*Bei der Lectüre von Schellings tr. Idealismus*," *GA* II/5, 413 (cited hereafter as LS.
15. Ibid.
16. For a fuller account, see this author's Introduction to Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), xi–xxxvii.
17. *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Prozesses* § 30, in *Zeitschrift für speculative Physik*, Bd. 1, n. 2, hg. Manfred Durner (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001), 113; cited hereafter as *DP*.
18. Translation altered, for Schelling speaks of the I in the nominative case (*das Ich*), not the accusative. On Fichte and Schelling's line of thought, the I is originally and always active and subjective; only in self-limited forms does it appear to itself as an objectified "self."
19. Translation altered.
20. See F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke* IV, 256–57, 303 ff.; *Bruno, or On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things*, trans. Michael Vater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 157, 199ff. Compare with Hegel's: "The system [Fichte's] itself is a consistent product of the work of the intellect, a mass of finitudes which the original identity cannot draw together into the focus of totality and or to its absolute self-intuition. The Subject-Object, therefore, turns itself into a subjective Subject-Object and it does not succeed in suspending this subjectivity and positing itself objectively" (G. W. F. Hegel, The *Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801), trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977], 155).
21. *SW* II, 130–50.
22. Wilfred Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 1–37. It should be noted that Sellars concludes his essay with a one-paragraph expression of the hope that a more advanced scientific perspective that deals with the human's whole central nervous system as the foundation for scientific (theoretical) analyses of cognition and agency alike will succeed in resolving the contradiction between humans' scientific self-image and the "manifest image."