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## I

Schelling used the word ‘construction’ to indicate an account that located a phenomenon within the whole, and thus explained it from the whole. This paper considers the place of nature within Fichte's original system — as expounded in the 1794 *Foundations of the Whole Theory of Science* and the 1795 *Outline of the Distinctive Character of the Theory of Science* — and raises the question of the explanatory function of nature within transcendental idealism. Nature is deduced, or ‘constructed’ in Schelling's term, in section four of the *Foundations*, the theoretical part of the Theory of Science. That deduction furnishes us the concept of nature as necessary and independent of us, but shows how it is permeated by lawfulness, which is the work of mind.<sup>1</sup> Nature is the object correlated with intelligence, the I as dependent on (quantitatively determined by) the not-I.

This discussion is not concerned with the problematic grounding of first principles in the *Foundations*. Whether the third fundamental principle is reached deductively by a priori reasoning or is an explanatory hypothesis abstracted from the analysis of empirical consciousness is of little importance to it, though this writer views philosophical theories as heuristic structures whose standard is coherence, not as foundationalist enterprises. The discussion is situated intellectually in Kant's Transcendental Deductions, textually in the difficult terrain of the *Foundations'* endlessly unraveling arguments. As I understand Fichte's thoughts and second thoughts about the matter, section four — the territory of quantitative divisibility where I and not-I oppose and limit each other — falls into two parts: first, an exhibition of the fluid nature of categorial thought that points toward intuition as its real moment (Kant's "thinking without intuition is empty"), secondly, the Deduction of Representation, which moves from the twofold (reflective and productive) interplay of the I's and not-I's activities in intuition toward the fixity of thought, as if to illustrate the other side of Kant's saying, »intuition without thinking is blind. "In the latter process, the whirl of productive and reflective activities is first fixed — The intutor determines itself to the *thinking* of an object"<sup>2</sup> — then understanding is submitted to the determination of judgment, and finally to the abstractive power of reason.

Fichte viewed the theoretical philosophy of the *Wissenschaftslehre's* first presentation as murky to everyone but himself,<sup>3</sup> but felt the practical theory of science provided the metaphysical foundation for the earlier treatment of cognition. The *Outline's* reworking of theoretical theory of science makes that claim clear in starting the construction of nature (or, what is the same, of sensation or quality in matter) from the I's double striving to extend itself to infinity and to reflect upon itself. If the wavering of imagination produces the objectivity or 'reality' of sensation (the intuition, where intutor has disappeared into intuited), feeling or self-affection, produced by the repeated setting and crossing of limits, produces the sensor and its synthesizing activity.<sup>4</sup> Intuition furnishes only *presence* or a sense of reality derivative from limitation; sensory and higher conscious acts are dynamic modifications of the psychic forum provided by the interplay of action and limitation (striving,

feeling, drive, inclination). It is on the psychic theater of registered affections that the changing determinacies of inner and outer intuition are displayed. Fichte claims the metaphysics of the Theory of Science is found in the practical part. There is no object without a subject; in every conscious or merely soulish act, something in or of the I acts on something independent of, but *for*, it.<sup>5</sup>

We must briefly consider the systematic integrity of the Theory of Science and its synthetic-analytic method. It is the tension between the absolute positing of the I in the first principle and the synthetic positing of the divisible I and the divisible not-I in the third that moves the argument and its regressive analysis of that synthesis.<sup>6</sup> Since argument and analysis never finally resolve the postulated original synthesis, never cut the knot but remove it to infinity,<sup>7</sup> the logical-systematic project of showing that the synthesis is grounded in thethetic positing of the absolute I is never accomplished, but pushed off into the receding infinity of the *ought* where the reconciliation is proclaimed by a philosophic *fiat*.<sup>8</sup> What is the status of the opposite factors that appear at each stage of the progressive analysis? They are intermediate links, synthetic points which accumulate between the ultimate extremes, which are themselves untouched and in need of further unification.<sup>9</sup> If we understand synthesis as the productive activity that oscillates between extremes and in touching upon them, brings the *neither/nor* of their opposition into a *both/and* of their reunion — this wavering is imagination, and its product is intuition, the logical substrate of activity-become-world<sup>10</sup> — then what its progressive dissolution into opposites and sub-synthesis does (first for the philosopher, then for the reflecting self) is to generate a series of points interposed between the infinitely removed pure I and pure not-I. Though I and not-I directionally define the line of finite realities (states of self and world), they are imperceptible, as infinitely apart as they are infinitely opposed. Perceptible points, however, the products of analysis and sub-synthesis, accumulate between them, generate a thickness, produce as it were a perceptible line: the empirical world of finite knowers and agents, and their objective setting.

## II.

Fichte is anything but clear on the argumentative structure of the theoretical section of the *Foundations*; this is not surprising, given the work's hasty writing and episodic publication. That the Deduction of Representation is not only the culminating but the crucial stage is attested by its repetition and amplification in section five of the practical part.<sup>11</sup> We shall return to this text in greater detail. The Deduction's importance is shown also by the placement of a simplified version of it at the head of the *Outline's* clarification of theoretical philosophy, in the section titled Deduction of Intuition.<sup>12</sup> The I's original activity is there said to be checked and reflected, and accounted not as the I's activity but as that of an alien something. A second free activity wrenches the first activity and rebound (or 'affect') free, examines, and reproduces or represents its contents, again not as its own activity, but as an image of the not-I.<sup>13</sup> This sketch of image-formation furnishes the clue for the explanation of sensation and of the vanishing of the sensor or subject into the sensed or object in the very activity of appropriating the content. The epitome of technical difficulty for Fichte's Theory of Science is to explain the reality of the sensed in sensation, given its origin in the I's pure activity.

If the importance of the Deduction of Representation is clear, the function of the preceding one hundred pages of the *Foundations* is very obscure. The general aim of the argument is to establish that, as intelligence, the I is determined by the not-I, or that the activity of the I establishes the interaction of the I and not-I in such a way that the former appears to depend on the latter. Attempts to mediate the apparent paradox of the dependence of an all-active I on a not-I, whose reality is just a portion of its activity alienated, all fall into a circle of contradiction. None of the categories of relation — interaction, substantiality, or efficacy — resolve the contradiction.<sup>14</sup> The unthinkably complex determining and determinable self-relation is finally seen to be the work of the imagination, described as a self-reproducing self-conflict of infinite (determining) and finite (determinable) activities. The activity wavers between extremes it cannot unite, and so temporizes the I.<sup>15</sup> Or, in an alternate explanation, in the attempt to *think* opposites together, mind wavers

between the demand for synthesis and the impossibility of accomplishing it, commutes between the extremes, and in its movement imparts a thickness and opacity to the space between, forming intuition or the spatial-temporal manifold.<sup>16</sup> Fichte's project here was evidently to interpose some basis for empirical reality between the divisible I and its counterpart.

But how can what Kant called the *sensible manifold* be traced to the activity of the I? Fichte's intent in the theoretical Theory of Science is to rewrite the *Critique of Pure Reason*, specifically the Transcendental Analytic, in order to eliminate any causality by the thing-in-itself. Even the sensible manifold, the bare given of sensation, must be accounted for from the side of the I: pure intuition, the synthesis of productive imagination, and the unity of apperception.<sup>17</sup> The latter two, functioning together as *synthesis*, are the understanding, the faculty of pure concepts.<sup>18</sup> If the understanding's work is viewed more as synthetic unification rather than as determination by bare quality or quantity, the relational categories of substance, efficacy and interaction play the key role in transforming disparate sensations into perceptions. Their conceptual content is inherence, consequence, and composition, and their temporal interpretation is time as duration, succession, and simultaneous existence.<sup>19</sup> Kant supposed all of this transcendental machinery worked upon the empirically given manifold of sensation, imposing unity on multiplicity, form upon matter. Fichte does away with the multiplicity of the given, and for the bare logical unity of apperception substitutes the synthesis expressed in the third basic principle, where the limited I is confronted by the limited not-I. He wishes to effect the synthesis abstractly and a priori, *as thought*, and thus attempts to think the synthesis by means of the pure concepts of substance, efficacy, and community, viz., alteration, continuity of alteration, and composition. The synthesis takes place not only at the level of abstract thought, but also on the level of imagination. Kant defined imagination as "the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is not present"<sup>20</sup> and described its scope as the action of the understanding upon sensibility in general. Transposing these hints to the framework of genetic explanation, Fichte makes productive imagination ultimately productive of intuition itself. Initially abstract cognitive synthesis *becomes* sensuous presence, the empirical manifold into whose

sensory manifestation the I and its productive activity disappear. What appears between I and not-I, on this side of the boundary between them, is a field of activity and reflection that has become an altering, continuous, composite something: the stuff of objectivity paradoxically derived from the I's pure spontaneity.

### **III.**

The true focus of this inquiry is the process in which nature or objectivity emerges for the I, where the not-I is constituted as an outside *reality*. Two crucial texts use metaphors of deficient perception to suggest the paradox that pure activity gives rise to reality, not once but at two different levels: On the one hand, activity appears in the guise of the affect, sensation, or intuition that appears solely as intuited; on the other, it imparts shadowy reality to the ground of objectivity, the not-I, which exerts a force against the I that is in fact imparted to it by the I. The *Outline* describes the first case, sensation as the place where the I loses itself in its object, where activity shows itself only as passivity. There its action is *intuition*, "a silent unconscious contemplation that loses itself in its object."<sup>21</sup> In the *Foundations'* Deduction of Representation, it is said the not-I is realized and empowered to limit the self's reflection when a "dark, unreflected intuition that does not reach determinate consciousness" is projected beyond the initial boundary.<sup>22</sup>

We must furnish some account at this point of the difference between activity and reflection. The origin of reflection is not a topic for theoretical Theory of Science, whose exclusive concern is the constitution of preconscious objectivity. Accordingly, the *Outline* treats the topic simply, borrowing from the practical philosophy of the *Foundations* the view that the I is impelled by a double striving, one a tendency to fill infinity, the other to comprehend it or reflect on itself as something infinite.<sup>23</sup> Its first reflection is necessary, occasioned by the limitation or check of its productive activity. It flows, however, from the nature of the I: "The I reflects simply because it reflects."<sup>24</sup>

The origin of reflection is a larger problem, however, for the 1794 *Foundations*, for the initial model of the doubling of productive and reflective activities given in the Deduction of Representation freely

avails itself of the *check* or arbitrary determinate limitation. Near the end of the deduction of imagination in the constellation of theoretical faculties, the check is introduced as a metaphor for the disappearing objectivity of the finite factor in the conjunction-and-clash of infinite and finite activities.<sup>25</sup> The check is *pictured* as throwing back, or reflecting, the I's outward-going activity; the only thing plainly asserted of it is that it is *not* posited by the positing I, while its possibility is determined by that activity.<sup>26</sup> This is restated more clearly in the practical philosophy's deduction of striving (§ 5) where Fichte asserts that the condition for the possibility of an alien influence must be grounded beforehand in the I. If difference can ever enter the I, it must have been there originally, grounded in its activity?? All this is to say, I believe, that *if the I is ever limited by alien objectivity, this can be understood a priori through the J's activity*. It is a conceptual possibility, though, not a necessity. *That* it happens, a finite I can assure itself in experience.<sup>28</sup> This is in apparent violation of the easy symmetry between thinking and experience that Fichte asserts in the *Outline* when he claims that whatever theory of science correctly deduces will show up in experience, though it would be true were there no experience at all.<sup>29</sup>

With the possibility of reflection established, we can now look to those passages where the mystery of the not-I's reality (the "dark unreflected intuition") and of the sensation's objectivity (the "silent unconscious intuition", where the intutor recedes into what is intuited) are given the explanation of which they are capable. The I has a general tendency to reflect, but it can never be conscious of itself as spontaneity or activity; reflection is always compelled, i. e., it results in consciousness of a *product*, never of an *act*.<sup>30</sup> Consciousness will never capture the spontaneous and self-reverting activity of the I, only the activity that registers its being affected by some force from without. The conscious I is conscious only of some state of itself, or, more carefully, of some alteration in its state. A double objectivity is interposed between the original activity of the I and the state of consciousness called perception, where the I identifies itself with its affect and knows itself as dependent on an external something.

We can now look to the Deduction of Representation itself,<sup>31</sup> confessing it would be unintelligible without its repetition in the

practical philosophy<sup>32</sup> and again in the beginning of the *Outline*.<sup>33</sup> [1] Fichte begins the deduction with an account of how the infinite outreaching activity of the I becomes a real something, an intuition. This intuition is the outcome of imagination: activity wavering between extremes it cannot unite. In it activity is formed into product, subjectivity transformed into objectivity. The I active in intuition can never become conscious of its activity as intutor. Fichte conveys this situation very abstractly by positing (a) the outward-reaching activity, (b) its check and deflection back toward the self at some arbitrary point, and (c) a conflict or alternation between the two activities, outgoing and incoming. The alternation temporizes and gives extension to the area between the I and its imagined boundary. This is the first circuit of energy or *productive activity*.<sup>34</sup> Since Fichte later calls this productive activity *centrifugal activity*, it is reasonable to suppose that he has in mind Kant's dynamic construction of matter in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. The first circuit (activity-check-reflection) as a whole models Kant's repulsive or resistant force, which, though it works outward, is compressed at a point.<sup>35</sup> The product of Fichte's deduction to this point may be visualized as a point-instant.

A second circuit of activity-and-reflection is generated by the continuing activity of the I, this time in a reflective, not a productive mode. [2] What differentiates the productive from the reflective mode is that the first circuit, a mere action-reaction or wavering in the imagination, is stabilized and fixed by reason, i.e., permeated with the rigidity of logical structures, rendered into a *real something*. Intuition becomes a state of the I, capable of itself being intuited and appropriated by the I as its affection.<sup>36</sup> [3] This allows the I's activity to go forth as active, distinct from this fixed product, and be reflected again as *its* activity. In the second circuit of activity-and-reflection, therefore, the intutor emerges as intuiting its prior product; this is sensation.

The second circuit is complicated, however. [3a] There is no second check, but the second outward wave of activity, essentially reflective since the productive aspect has been precipitated out, must be limited in order to intuit the previous product. Its activity is turned back again at the limit of its previous activity, i.e., the point of check

and rebound. It is deflected this time because productive activity steps beyond the previous limit, and by an unreflected act of imagination posits another intuition *on the other side of the boundary*. This is the »dark unreflected intuition« of our search, the felt reality of a limit that is not internalized and does not become a something. The not-I or nature is constructed, then, as the produced limit that acts (or reacts) as a beyond because it is an un-intuited ("dark unreflected") intuition.<sup>37</sup> [3b] The not-I, then, returns the second activity, and the wavering product of outgoing and incoming activity on this second level produces another intuition, the image or copy. This second cycle of activity-and-reflection creates the first as a state of the intuiting I. The second or reflective cycle of activity-and-return is later called *centripetal*, on analogy with Kant's second dynamic force, the so-called attractive force.<sup>38</sup> [4] A third cycle, where productive activity flows endlessly outward and is infinitely returned past the boundary and the stabilized product, produces an intuition of the intuited; it is unreflected, has but a directional and felt reality. This is the thing-in-itself or noumenon, the not-I in its ultimate capacity of distinguishing the sensation felt as mine from the outside felt as beyond.<sup>39</sup>

In the course of this deduction, then, Fichte has (with some difficulty) explained that (A) the I produces the intuition in imagination, (B) stabilizes it as a reality in the understanding, (C) makes the intuited-something into its state while distinguishing it from something else which is not itself, and (D) makes this not-I (which is nonetheless its product) the source and origin of its affection or state. The whole complex is representation. The key task of distinguishing the subject of representation from object represented falls to the reality produced by the I, but unreflectedly projected outward as the not-I, objectivity as such, or nature. No one, as Fichte rightly says, can doubt that she experiences it or something like it on the empirical level. It is incapable of further explanation *on idealistic assumptions* than Fichte has given it. His explanation of it is judicious in that, on the empirical level, our experience of it is precisely that of a *felt limit which is not me*. The theoretical part of the Theory of Science gives it just that minimal an ontological standing, though it must go through many explanatory turns to achieve that minimality.

## IV.

When Fichte again deploys this scheme of the double circuit of activity and reflection in the main section of the practical Theory of Science, it is much simplified.<sup>40</sup> The mysterious role of the check, the dark intuition projected over the boundary, the third circuit of noumenal influence that teaches the I to distinguish between sensation and object, all drop from sight. The I is said, from the first, to be productive *and* reflective, its self-reverting activity falling into centripetal and centrifugal activities. This simplification is effected by Fichte's borrowing from philosophy of nature notions that are really given to it by transcendental philosophy: Assume, he says, that the I is a self-constituting mathematical point; its activity will be inner force, reflective, centripetal activity. But if that point is posited as an I, as self-reflecting, its activity will be infinitely centrifugal.<sup>41</sup>

On this simplified model, the centrifugal and centripetal impulses of the I's activity, which issue from the demand that the I infinitely extend itself and also infinitely reflect, become the bases for the real series of presentations and the ideal series of projects. The feeling of finitude or restriction occasioned by the check upon activity both determines the I as intelligence and differentiates the activities of the theoretical and practical faculties. Infinite practical striving (as in the ever receding moral ideal) and cognition limited to knowledge of a world of finite objects and agents are reciprocal conditions for one another, the infinite and finite partial realizations of the I's absolute self-positing.<sup>42</sup> The crucial condition is the realization of the check, the dark, unreflected intuition projected beyond as not-I. Only by the doubled circuit of activity and reflection is the I in its self-activity made open to external influence. Only because its positing takes this highly complicated form of outgoing and return (rather than pure self-reversion) is its *identity* a state of reciprocity which leaves it open to the incursion that will make its action into conscious life.<sup>43</sup>

Fichte's arguments and explanations often end up more complicated than he intends, and it is usually fairly difficult to discern the intent behind large stretches of argument. Perhaps history can shed light where argument is opaque. It is clear, of course, that Fichte wishes to put Kant's transcendental synthesis of the imagination at the

center of both the theoretical and practical philosophies of the Theory of Science. Its merely formal function in Kant's theory is surpassed; what was there merely a function that related the fixed extremes of sensibility and understanding becomes in Fichte's hand the dynamic agent that evolves those extremes out of its evanescent activity. Fichte also uses Kant's model of matter as a synthesis of dynamic forces to finitize cognition in the Deduction of Representation and to differentiate willing from cognition; Fichte's language is so abstract that one tends to forget that his infinite striving nestles in a finite body. Fichte is indebted to Spinoza on this score as well, for the grand dogmatist located the boundless *conatus* in the affects, making the self-aware component of consciousness derivative from and adjectival upon sensation's registration of a change of state in the bodily environment. Finally, one ought to acknowledge Fichte's debt to Leibniz. The finite I whose cognition is based upon awareness of change of state, and whose conscious endeavors all depend on striving bears much resemblance to Leibniz's monad, the perception-machine driven by appetite, upon whose self-activity is overlaid the semblance of external influence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>J.G. Fichte: *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*. in: *Sämtliche Werke* (=SW), hrsg. v. I.H. Fichte. Berlin 1845. SW I. 64.

<sup>2</sup>J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 240.

<sup>3</sup>See GA I/2. 184-88.

<sup>4</sup>J.G. Fichte: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*. SW I. 354-56.

<sup>5</sup>J. G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. SW I. 286.

<sup>6</sup>J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 113-14, 124-25.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 143 -44.

<sup>9</sup>J. G. Fichte: *Grundlage des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 339.

<sup>10</sup>J. G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 215; *cp.IGrundriß*, SW I, 351-52.

- 11J. G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 272 -78.
- 12J. G. Fichte: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 340-44.
- 13Ibid., 344.
- 14J. G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 145 -46.
- 15Ibid., 216-17.
- 16Ibid., 225.
- 17I. Kant: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in: *Kant Werke*, Bände 3-4, hrsg. v. W. Weischedel, Dannstadt 1959, A 115, B 131-33, B 150-52.
- 18Ibid., A 119.
- 19Ibid., A 215/B 262.
- 20Ibid., B 151.
- 21J. G. Fichte: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 349.
- 22J. G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 235.
- 23J. G. Fichte: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 359.
- 24Ibid., 367.
- 25J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 210.
- 26Ibid., 212.
- 27Ibid., 271-72.
- 28Ibid., 265.
- 29J.G. Fichte: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 334-35.
- 30J. G. Fichte: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 371.
- 31J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 228-35.
- 32Ibid., 273-277.
- 33J.G. Fichte: *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 343-44.
- 34J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I, 228-29.

- <sup>35</sup>I. Kant: *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, in:  
*Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 4, hrsg. v. Königlich  
Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1911, 523-30.
- <sup>36</sup>J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I,  
230-34.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 235.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., 274.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 235 -36.
- <sup>40</sup>J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*, SW I,  
272-78.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., 273-74.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., 276-78.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., 276.