Kant's "I Think" and Fichte's principle of self-positing

El "Yo pienso" kantiano y el principio de autoposición de Fichte

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Abstract: This paper discusses the relation between Kant's doctrine of pure apperception (the doctrine of the "I think") and Fichte's theory of self-positing. It shows that Kant's conception of the transcendental unity of apperception is closer to Fichte's principle of self-positing than is usually thought, and that Kant's "I think," and not Reinhold's "principle of consciousness", may have been a source of inspiration for Fichte in his attempt to justify transcendental idealism. As in Kant, in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, the activity of "self-positing" is the fundamental feature of the I-hood. Similar to Kant, in Fichte, too, the first principle expresses a peculiar kind of unity, which he calls the original unity of self-consciousness (*Tathandlung*).

Keywords: Kant; Fichte; unity of apperception; the self-positing I; intellectual intuition; "I think"; transcendental idealism.

Resumen: El presente artículo discute la cuestión de la relación entre la doctrina kantiana de la apercepción pura (la doctrina del "Yo pienso") y la teoría fichteana de la autoposición. Se mostrará que la concepción kantiana de la unidad transcendental de la apercepción se halla más cerca del principio fichteano de la auto-posición de lo que se suele pensar y que la fuente de inspiración para la justificación que hace Fichte del idealismo transcendental es el Yo pienso kantiano y no el "principio de consciencia" de Reinhold. En la doctrina de la ciencia de Fichte, al igual que en Kant, la actividad de la auto-posición es la característica fundamental de la Yoidad. Al igual que Kant, Fichte entiende que el primer principio expresa un tipo particular de unidad que él llama unidad originaria de la autoconsciencia (*Tathandlung*).

Palabras clave: Kant; Fichte; unidad de la apercepción; autoposición; Yo; intuición intelectual; "Yo pienso"; idealismo transcendental.

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One of the central issues in post-Kantian philosophy is the issue of self-consciousness. What is under consideration is the meaning and systematic function of self-consciousness that would not only clarify the dynamics of mental states, but, to an even greater extent, also legitimize the systematic grounding of philosophy in the I and explain the very possibility of a subject. The notion that the Critical philosophy needed completion has its origin in the perceived inadequacy of Kant to provide a unified structure for cognition. The early debates that undoubtedly had a defining significance in the development of post-Kantian idealism (here I have in mind the debates initiated and successfully carried out by Reinhold, Maimon, and Schulze) clearly identified the problem and the urgent need to respond to it. It was Fichte who took it upon himself to provide a new foundation for the transcendental philosophy. Fichte claimed to remain true to the spirit, if not the letter, of Kant's thought when he, following Reinhold, argued that philosophy must begin with a first principle. Yet contrary to Reinhold, who appealed to a fact (*Tatsache*) of consciousness, Fichte insisted that this principle must express a fact/act (*Tathandlung*), which is known not empirically, but with self-evident certainty. This newly found first principle was associated with the I, or, more specifically, with the principle of the self-positing I.

In this paper, I am interested in exploring the question of the extent to which Kant's concept of self-consciousness and thinking subject (or what Kant discusses under the notion of "apperception") influenced Fichte's conception of the I and what is the role that Kant's account of the "I think" plays in the highest principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. For many scholars, the difference in the two thinkers' takes on the issue of intellectual intuition casts doubt on the real significance of such relation, if not on the possibility of such a relation itself. Although it is true that Kant denies the possibility of intellectual intuition, while Fichte clearly endorses it, this does not prove the perceived disagreement of their arguments. Furthermore, Fichte himself hints at an explicit connection between his theory of self-positing and Kant's doctrine of pure apperception.[1]

1. J. G. Fichte, *Fichtes Werke*, 11 vols. (De Gruyter, Berlin, 1971) vol. I, 475ff.

In my paper, I will examine this connection, while also commenting on important differences. I will show that, in his development of the principle of the self-positing I, Fichte builds on Kant's "pure apperception," which he believes had the potential to unite sensibility and conceptuality (intuitions and concepts). Yet Kant, he argued, had not made the most of this.[2] I further suggest that Kant's conception of the transcendental unity of apperception is closer to Fichte's principle of self-positing than it is usually thought, and that Kant's "I think," and not Reinhold's "principle of consciousness,"—as many commentators believe—may have been a source of inspiration for Fichte in his attempt to find a plausible justification for transcendental idealism.

As in Kant, for whom the principle "I think" refers to the most fundamental function of thinking (cognitive activity as such), in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, the activity of "self-positing" is the fundamental feature of the I-hood. In fact, Fichte takes the position, which had already been presented by Kant, that the concept of self-consciousness contains the thought of a groundless subject spontaneously generating knowledge of its own existence. And also similar to Kant, in Fichte the first principle expresses a peculiar kind of unity, which he calls the original unity of self-consciousness (*Tathandlung*). This is a unity presupposed by and contained within every fact and every act of empirical consciousness, though it never appears as such therein. I will start with a discussion of Kant's account of the transcendental unity of apperception, then I will proceed to Fichte's principle of the self-positing I, and finally, I will draw some conclusions based on the results of the offered discussion.

1. Kant and the unity of apperception

The most famous and yet perhaps most puzzling sentence in the whole *Critique of Pure Reason* appears in the opening section of the "Transcendental Deduction" in the second edition:

(hecenforth quoted as *SW* volume: page number(s)).

2. *SW* I: 472.

> The *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all. Which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing to me.[3]

This passage introduces Kant's principle of the transcendental unity of apperception. The common interpretation of Kant's view here is that unless representations were such that *at some point* the thought "I think" *could* accompany them, then they would be nothing to me at all, or again would not be mine. And to say that the thought "I think" can accompany them is to say that they are bound together in some way by my own cognitive activity. This "binding together" is what makes it possible to think them under concepts, as combined in judgments, and as accompanied by the thought "I think."[4] But there is much more to the Kant's statement than what is explained above.

For example, neither the definition of apperception itself nor how it is related to the "I think" is clear. The logical status of the principle also needs explanation, for instance, a response to the question of why the "I think" plays such an important role.

Kant's account of the transcendental unity of apperception is a central element in his Critical philosophy. The prospect which Kant offers in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is of a constitutive connection between our rational activity and experience of an objective world. What bridges these two realms is the transcendental unity of apperception as the condition for the possibility of knowledge. From the simple fact that we are aware of ourselves (or self-conscious about our existence and our experience of the world) there follows the objective validity of the categories, and hence the existence of a causally structured spatial-temporal world of mind-independent

3. I. KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason* (further: *CPR*), translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1998) B131-132.
4. See B. LONGUENESSE, *Kant on the Identity of Persons*, "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society" 107 (1pt2) (2007) 151-152.

objects. But the subject is not just of pure epistemic interest. What often gets lost in philosophical debates about Kant's account of the unity of apperception is that this is ultimately the transcendental self, i.e., the "I" which is my "identity" and which lies behind all *my* changing experience as something which remains the "*same*." In other words, the problems that Kant attempts to solve with the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception are central to philosophy of subjectivity and concerned with self-consciousness and personal identity.

In the "Transcendental Deduction" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant tries to demonstrate that the formal conditions of the possibility of experience, the categories and their validity, are not only necessary for self-consciousness, but also follow from the subjective sources of knowledge, i.e. the transcendental unity of apperception.[5] Kant's argument is that the condition necessary for knowledge of an object, the concept or rule that "represents the necessary reproduction of the manifold of given intuitions, hence the synthetic unity in the consciousness of them" must have its transcendental ground in the transcendental apperception, a consciousness of the necessary numerical identity of the self throughout its varied representations.[6] The "necessary consciousness of the identity of oneself is at the same time a consciousness of the equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances in accordance with concepts".[7] The unity of apperception is a necessary condition for the presentation of an object. And the *a priori* rules that are the conditions of the transcendental unity of apperception are also the conditions "under which alone something can be … thought as object as such."[8] The argument of the "Transcendental Deduction" is very complex and subject to a sharp debate among Kant scholars. Its analysis would

5. *CPR* A92-111/B125.
6. *CPR* A106-107.
7. *CPR* A108.
8. *CPR* A93/B125. This summative statement of the "Transcendental Deduction" is indebted to P. Guyer's *The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*, in P. Guyer, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992) 137.

require a special discussion. There are, however, two crucial elements to this argument which are of the main concern in this paper.

The first is the claim that the unity of apperception is not just a requirement *empirically* imposed on consciousness. It is a requirement that can be known to hold *a priori.* The second crucial step in the argument is the move from the unity of apperception to the need for *a priori* synthesis. As Kant puts it, "the *analytic* unity of apperception is possible only under the presupposition of some *synthetic* one."[9] This makes possible the introduction of the categories as the appropriately fundamental rules of synthesis. The unity of apperception must thus be interpreted so as to make it plausible that it is underwritten by an *a priori* synthesis; it must be sufficiently rich to support the demand for an *a priori* synthesis of the sort that brings in the categories. Thus Kant tries to secure the analytic content of the unity of apperception, but the way he attempts to do that is purely synthetic. This leads to a dilemma, the analysis and critical evaluation of which I have made the main goal of this paper.

Let us first briefly consider what Kant means by "apperception" and what the main elements of his concept of the transcendental unity of apperception are. It is worth noticing that Kant's account of apperception differs notably from how apperception was understood by his predecessors (including not only Leibniz, but also Christian Wolff, empirical psychologists Michael Hiβmann and Christoph Meiners, as well as the empiricist philosopher Johann Bernhard Merian). However, what Kant has to say about the topic relates to the earlier accounts in important ways. Many philosophers prior to Kant argued that self-consciousness is derivative and depends on the consciousness of an object (outer-directed consciousness). But there were others who argued that self-consciousness is fundamental or "original" and does not depend on other forms of consciousness. Kant takes up both views. He can accommodate both views by drawing a distinction between empirical apperception and transcendental apperception, which he takes to be the two types of

9. *CPR* B133.

self-consciousness.[10] Recall that Leibniz had defined apperception as a sort of inner sense, or a subjective awareness of one's internal mental processes. This is a kind of apperception that Kant calls the *empirical* apperception.[11] Empirical apperception is nothing more than the consciousness of our particular, constantly changing, temporary mental states, or, as Kant puts it, the "consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perceptions [which] is merely empirical, forever variable."[12] Kant refers to empirical apperception as to the "empirically determined consciousness of my own existence."[13] We can have knowledge of ourselves through empirical apperception, or inner sense, but because the states of inner sense are merely phenomenal (located in time), inner sense provides us with knowledge of ourselves only as we exist as phenomena. According to Kant, it can be shown that empirical self-consciousness necessarily involves a consciousness of external objects, for "outer experience is really immediate and … only by means of it is inner experience possible."[14] In this sense, empirical apperception is dependent on empirically given material. It is also consciousness of some particular mental states, and as such cannot produce some universal representations, such as "I think."

Kant explains that when I introspect about my inner states, I am having a *sensory* experience of a certain sort (even if an internal sort), but this experience is only possible if its necessary conditions are satisfied. Thus it must be something more formal or basic than empirical apperception which grounds this experience, and this is nothing other than *transcendental* apperception.

In Kant, transcendental self-consciousness or apperception is prior to all other forms of consciousness. Kant refers to transcendental apperception as an "intellectual consciousness,"[15] saying that

10. Kant is drawing this distinction in the first *Critique's* "Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding".
11. *CPR* B132.
12. *CPR* A207.
13. *CPR* B275.
14. *CPR* B276-277.
15. *CPR* Bxl.

it is "pure," "original" and thus independent of all other thoughts:

> I call it *pure apperception*, to distinguish it from empirical apperception, or, again *original apperception* because it is the self-consciousness which, while generating the representation *I think* … cannot be accompanied by any further representation.[16]

Here Kant seems to develop further the idea that was present in some of the earlier thinkers, such as Merian: transcendental apperception is prior to outer-directed consciousness of objects and is independent of any such consciousness.

Yet, Kant's account of apperception is much richer than it might appear at first. He does not just introduce the notion of pure transcendental apperception, but the most central principle of his transcendental epistemology becomes the principle of the *transcendental unity* of apperception. He insists: "The *transcendental unity* of apperception is that unity through which all the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object."[17] What does Kant have in mind here? One general way to think of the transcendental unity of apperception is as a formal (i.e., abstract) unity which all experiences must have. In particular all *my* experiences satisfy the necessary condition of belonging to *me*, a single consciousness; and the transcendental unity of apperception is Kant's means of justifying this assertion, of saying how it's possible. It is important that Kant do this, partly just because he knows that he has certain experiences and that these experiences belong to his consciousness. So, in the spirit of his transcendental argument, Kant shows the conditions that *must* be satisfied in order for the actual to be possible. An example should clarify. When I observe the *Mona Lisa*, I have a unified and rich experience of the painting. What I do not have is, say, 100 distinctive experiences of different elements of the painting. But why is this the case? Kant's answer is simple: "the transcendental unity of apperception" is a faculty which unifies my different experiences and images of the object in the one most com-

16. *CPR* B132.
17. *CPR* B139.

plete experience of it.

Further, Kant maintains that *a priori* knowledge is possible, but only if there is some sort of necessity involved in my experiences. However, it is the case that sensory experiences are contingent (i.e., *a posteriori*). For example, I might or might not be staring at a blue monitor. It is not plausible, however, to claim that my experiences are not mine; also, it is not so easy to falsify the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception. In short, if *a priori* knowledge is possible—and it is—then empirical apperception is not sufficient. So Kant posits transcendental apperception to ground *a priori* knowledge. And this fits with Kant's overall scheme to overcome Hume's skepticism about knowledge. He pays particular attention to points in which Humean skepticism might infiltrate (as with empirical apperception), while preserving the spirit of Leibniz's rationalism (for instance through a focus on *a priori* nature of the apperception).

Yet, this becomes even more complicated. Kant distinguishes between the "identity of apperception" or the "analytic unity of apperception" and the "original synthetic unity of apperception."[18] He argues that the analytic unity of apperception is possible only by virtue of a synthesis or combination of representations: a multiplicity of representations can belong to the same *I* only if they are combined in one consciousness.

> Therefore it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations *in one consciousness*, that it is possible for me to represent *the identity of the consciousness in these representations itself*, *i.e.*, *the analytical* unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some *synthetic* one.[19]

And Kant holds that this "necessary synthesis of representations" is the most fundamental *a priori* condition of knowledge.[20] Kant makes an important claim here; namely, that although the transcendental

18. *CPR* B131ff.
19. *CPR* B133.
20. *CPR* B134-135.

unity of apperception is ultimately an analytic unity (of a manifold of representations in *me*), it depends on a synthetic unity (of representations that have to be combined in a single *I* (one consciousness) for my experience to be intelligible). This applies to the transcendental unity of apperception in that I can only unite a manifold of representations in my consciousness if I can represent to myself the *identity* of my consciousness in these very representations. I leave my mark of subjective consciousness on each of my representations; traces of my subjective consciousness are *united* with my representations from the manifold. And this unity is just a synthetic unity in which my concepts corresponding to these representations (allowing me not merely to perceive but also to think) occur simultaneously in me. I am connecting all my representations at once. Furthermore, as it is well known, Kant does not accept the possibility of intellectual intuition as a function of human cognition. He holds that humans are capable only of sensible intuition, so there is no receptivity without sensibility.[21] Thus he argues that since humans have no ability to intuit the manifold without sensation, the synthesis of representations is a necessary condition for the (analytic) unity of apperception. What unifies our experience is that we (each of us individually) can think of our representations as ours, which presupposes reliance on the transcendental unity of apperception. This is what Kant means, when he states that it must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all of my representations.

By introducing the "I think" as the benchmark of the transcendental unity of apperception, Kant emphasizes the most original and fundamental function of thinking, which consists in unifying objects of perpetual experience and recognizing them under specific concepts. All other modes of thinking, including mathematical, scientific, and even logical thinking, are necessarily based upon it, and, in this sense, depend on it for their success.

The kind of unity introduced by the thought "*I* think" in the statement above is not an abstract unity, but the principle in question simply states that the essence of I-hood (or *mineness*) lies in

21. *CPR* B135.

the assertion of my own self-identity, i.e., that consciousness and thinking presupposes self-consciousness. In order for me to count (or to recognize) a representation as mine, I have to be conscious of myself or identify myself as Me (the I). Thus, in Kant's "Transcendental Deduction," the statement "*I think* [which] must be able to accompany all my representations" serves to express the (self)-identity of the subject that has a variety of thoughts about objects of perceptual experience and commits him (the subject) to the unity and consistency of his thoughts about those objects. However, such immediate self-identity should not be understood along the lines of Descartes' "cogito ergo sum." When Kant states that a representation is *mine* only if it can be accompanied by the thought "I think," he does not say that a representation that is mine is accompanied by the certainty of my own existence. What is under consideration here is the activity of thought, or more precisely, the very action of self-consciousness, that is, its cognition of itself, and not any sort of substance of the same. Kant himself reminds us that the *being* of transcendental apperception is nothing other than its *activity*.[22] Kant seems to hold that the concept of self-consciousness contains the thought of a groundless subject (the pure I), whose very form is just its spontaneous cognizing activity. Kant contends that we are not justified in ascribing either phenomenal or noumenal substantiality (thinghood) to transcendental apperception. Transcendental apperception is not itself a possible object of experience. But as an act that unifies representations, the unity of transcendental apperception is the ground of both objects of experience that is external to the cognizing subject as well as to empirical self-consciousness, though, as Kant insists, the former is not identical to the latter.

2. Fichte's self-positing I

I turn now to a discussion of Fichte's treatment of issues relevant to Kant's principle of "I think."

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22. *CPR* A108.

One of the most troublesome consequences of Kant's Critical philosophy appears to be the sharp division between the sensible world and the intelligible world. By virtue of its reliance on the thing-in-itself, mind becomes cut off from the sensible world, causing a rift between the concept and intuition. The problem of how to overcome the dichotomy of concept and intuition plagued post-Kantian Critical philosophy, largely defining Fichte's own search for a foundational principle of the system that would justify the unity of the two. Taking seriously the need to connect the sensible and the intelligible worlds, he formulates the principle of the self-positing I. In the 1797 "Second Introduction" to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte reveals that in his development of the self-positing I, which could unite these two "worlds," he builds on Kant's "pure apperception," which had the potential to unite sensibility and conceptuality. But Kant, he argues, had not made the most of this.[23] Fichte clarifies that what allows the I to unite (at least temporarily) these separate spheres is the I's active experience of itself, its self-reference. He, however, warns that the self-positing I has neither any substantial quality nor is it caused by an external object, as this would make the I the kind of causal "thing" or fact that he must avoid in order to respond to the challenges of the Critical philosophy. And indeed, a fundamental corollary of Fichte's understanding of the I as a kind of *fact/act* is his denial that the I is originally any sort of "thing" or "substance." Instead, the I is simply what it posits itself to be, and thus its "being" is, so to speak, a consequence of its self-positing, or rather, is co-terminus with the same. It is worth noticing that in such an interpretation of his first principle, Fichte seems clearly to rely on Kant and his concept of transcendental apperception, to which, as we saw, must not be ascribed the status of thinghood. But this is certainly not an accidental coincidence. As we proceed, we will identify more instances of important similarities between Fichte's principle of the self-positing I and Kant's assessment of the unity of apperception as expressible by the propositional attitude "I think."

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23. J. G. FICHTE, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. by D. Breazeale (Hackett, Indianapolis, 1994) 56. (*SW* I: 472.)

But before I continue tracing the similarities, I would like to briefly comment on what is considered to be a major disagreement between Kant and Fichte in, their attitude toward intellectual intuition. The question that I would like to address here is whether the claim of the lack of correspondence between Kant and Fichte on the issue of the intellectual intuition is indeed warranted and, if so, then to what degree.

In the same "Second Introduction" of 1797 already referenced above, Fichte remarks: "the *Wissenschaftslehre* sets out from an intellectual intuition, namely, an intellectual intuition of the absolute self-activity of the I."[24] At the same time Fichte agrees with Kant that all our intuitions must be apprehended by means of the senses, which is the reason Kant rejects the possibility of intellectual intuition as a function of human cognition. Does Fichte contradict himself?

In fact, the Fichtean notion of intellectual intuition is absolutely fundamental to his version of the transcendental philosophy, which is for him nothing else but a thinking about thought, or a "Wissen von Wissen" (=*Wissenschaftslehre*). But what does this "thinking about thought" comprise? This is a reflective activity, which is certainly fundamentally different from our regular perception of the world. The reflection on thought does not equally consist of sensible intuitions and their determination by the understanding. However, as we may be empirically aware (have intuitions) of our surrounding, we may also become aware of thought (e.g. we can notice a transition in thought, etc.). But these two kinds of awareness differ in their nature. In order to distinguish the latter from the former, Fichte calls the latter intellectual intuition. He explains that "the intellectual intuition of which the *Wissenschaftslehre* speaks is not directed toward any sort of being whatsoever; instead, it is directed at an acting—and this is something that Kant does not even mention (except, perhaps, under the name 'pure apperception')."[25]

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24. J. G. Fichte, *Introductions* cit., 54-55.
25. J. G. Fichte, *Introductions* cit., 56.

The intellectual intuition that Kant rejected was an intuition of a sensible object, but performed by the intellect alone, thus bypassing the senses. And Fichte agrees that this sort of intuition cannot withstand a critique: "the immediate consciousness of the thing in itself" is "a complete perversion of reason, an utterly unreasonable concept."[26] Yet Fichte is here concerned not with our perception of the objects of the external world, but rather with the special activity, which is consciousness. As Fichte points out, Kant did hint at such a form of consciousness but never explicitly discussed it.[27]

When Kant rejected the possibility of intellectual intuition, he considered the following three usages of the term: (1) an intellect that applies concepts to what comes to the senses without the mediation of the pure forms of space and time, i.e.an immediate awareness of things in themselves, (2) the intuition that would create its own object, and (3) the intuition of the whole experience, one that surpasses our limited and discursive point of view. Fichte's intellectual intuition concerns none of these.

The intellectual intuition that Fichte proposes is something that must necessarily be thought in addition to sensible intuition. What is under consideration here is the self-regulative activities of consciousness. Knowledge of such activity cannot be given in experience, because it is only by virtue of this activity that we can have experience in the first place. This knowledge is not given in ordinary experience, neither can it be merely deduced from it. Whatever the status of this knowledge is, it is not empirical. Yet despite our inability to associate its form and status with any of the empirical properties, we do possess this knowledge. Thus, Fichte concludes that such a knowledge must then be given in an intellectual intuition. The existence (be it even implicit) of immediate knowledge of the rules of our self-legislation of experience must be a necessary assumption, and Kant could not deny this too.

What is intuited in sensible intuition is fixed, passive and ordinarily in space; but all that is intuited in our intellectual intui-

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26. J. G. FICHTE, *Introductions* cit., 56. (SW 1:472.)
27. *Ibidem.*

tion is acting. Fichte is confident that Kant too has such an intuition, but he never reflected upon it. Indeed, his entire philosophy is a product of this intuition, for he maintained that necessary representations are products of the action of a rational being and are not passively received. But this is something that he could have come to realize only by means of an intuition.[28] Kant could not deny this form of intuition because our awareness of the synthetic unity of apperception could never be derived from empirical consciousness. Rather, it is what first makes it possible.[29] And indeed Kant writes: "That representation ["I think"] that can be given prior to all thinking is called intuition".[30] But, as Fichte notes, Kant did not comment and reflect on the status of such knowledge claims, i.e., on the precise status of transcendental knowledge.

I will not delve into further details concerning Fichte's response to the possible forms of intellectual intuition identified by Kant.[31] For Fichte's concept of intellectual intuition *per se* is not of main interest to me here. Rather my goal here is (1) to show that Fichte uses the term "intellectual intuition" in a different sense than the one given in Kant's articulation of transcendental idealism and (2) to demonstrate the ways in which Fichte shared a position already presented by Kant by advancing it further into a new original principle of the self-posited I. What should be clear based on the above discussion is that Fichte's concept of intellectual intuition is not only inspired by but firmly rooted in Kant's philosophy of transcendental apperception.

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28. J. G. FICHTE, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo* (1769/99), translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1992) 32.
29. *CPR* B130-131.
30. *Ibidem*. B132.
31. For a more detailed discussion of Kant's and Fichte's accounts of intellectual intuition see F. BEISER, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivity* (Harvard University Press, London, 2002), esp. Ch. V; M. FRANK, *"Intellektuale Anschauung." Drei Stellungnahmen zu einem Deutungsversuch von Selbstbewußtsein: Kant, Fichte, Hölderlin/Novalis*, in E. BEHLER, J. HÖRISCH, *Die Aktualität der Frühromantik* (Schöningh, Paderborn, 1987) 96-126; D. BREAZEALE, *Fichte's Nova Methodo Phenomenologica: On the methodological role of „intellectual intuition" in the later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, "Revue Internationale de Philosophie" 52/4 (1998) 587-618.

The identification of pure apperception with an act of the mind, which is evident in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, echoes in Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*.[32] In Fichte's systematic philosophy, "the self-posited I" expresses both the I's act of positing itself and the fact that the I has been thus self-posited. In some sense, what is posited in this act is nothing other than the existence of (what Kant calls) the pure I: Fichte claims that the I exists only insofar as the I posits itself as existing.[33] Furthermore, Fichte's account of the manner in which this act makes objective consciousness possible reflects the logical progression of Kant's deduction of the categories: from intuition, in the productive power of imagination, and then to the relation that these two faculties have to the understanding and the cognition of objective reality. And Fichte's overall account of the logical progress of consciousness appears to be very similar to one introduced by Kant.

From the more systematic perspective, too, it seems that the difference between Kant's assessment of the unity of consciousness as expressible by the propositional attitude "I think" and Fichte's definition of the I as its own act of positing itself is primarily a difference not of content but of emphasis and approach. The later can be explained by the dissimilarity of the goals that each of the thinkers pursues, which seem to be justifiable in terms of the paradigm shift in philosophical discourse that had occurred through the transition from Kant's philosophical theory to post-Kantian philosophy.

Yet, while there appears to be no evident inconsistency between Fichte's definition of the I as the spontaneously generated activity of self-positing and Kant's account of the activity of thought as contained in the concept of pure apperception, Fichte's emphasis on the primacy of the practical in his account of the I is perhaps more evident than Kant's in the latter's explanation of transcenden-

32. Fichte holds that the first principle of human knowledge is a "*Tathandlung* which is not and cannot be found among the empirical determinations of our consciousness, but rather lies at the ground of all consciousness and alone makes it possible". J. G. FICHTE, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (Meiner, Hamburg, 1997) 11.

33. J. G. FICHTE, *Grundlage* cit., 17.

tal apperception. The first principle of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* is equally "theoretical" and "practical," insofar as the act described by this principle is not only a "knowing," but also a "doing." This special activity is a deed as well as a cognition. What is important here is that both acts cannot occur in isolation from each other, since "the I simply posits itself" requires that the I posits both itself and its world and, in this way, becomes conscious of itself and its practical agency. Thus it is aware of its (transcendental) freedom and its practical realization. The unity of theoretical and practical reason (which remains problematic for Kant) is now guaranteed from the start, inasmuch as this very unity is a condition for the possibility of self-consciousness and its freedom. In this sense, Fichte's I as the first principle of his philosophy is not merely an epistemological subject, but at the same time a moral agent. This moral significance that Fichte's concept of the I involves is absent from Kant's account in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Another point of comparison is Kant's and Fichte's attitudes toward the possibility of the existence of the unity of consciousness. In deducing the necessity of the unity of consciousness, Kant warns that the existence of a particular subsistent unity (individual self-concept) is not at all secured. Fichte shares this position. In the "Second Introduction" to the *Wissenschaftslehre* he points out that "all that could be produced by the act of combining these many different representations would be a manifold *act of thinking*, which appears as *a single act of thinking as such*, but by no means a *thinking subject* who engages in this manifold act of thinking."[34] It appears to be evident that Fichte, like Kant, is skeptical about the possibility of asserting the existence of any particular abiding subject on the basis of the existence of the unifying transcendental act of consciousness. However, contrary to Kant, for whom pure apperception is associated with the transcendental (*noumenal*) subject, for Fichte the only actually existing and acting I as a free agent is a finite, empirical, embodied, individual self.[35] Furthermore, "the I simply posits it-

34. J. G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre* cit., 61n.
35. On rebuttal of the widespread misunderstanding about the absolute character of

self," its freedom is never "absolute" or "unlimited." Instead, freedom proves to be conceivable—and hence the I itself proves to be possible—only as limited and finite. Thus, the "pure (absolute) I" is a mere abstraction and the only I that can actually exist or act is a *finite*, *empirical*, *embodied*, *individual self*.

The I must posit itself in order to be an I at all, but it can posit itself only insofar as it posits itself as limited. Moreover, it cannot even posit its own limitations, in the sense of producing or creating these limits. The finite I (the intellect) cannot be the ground of its own passivity. Instead, according to Fichte's analysis, if the I is to posit itself at all, it must simply *discover* itself to be limited, a discovery that Fichte characterizes as an *Anstoß* ("check") to the free, practical activity of the I. However, the activity required from the I is not an ordinary practical activity that allows the I to encounter and overcome (transcend) the "check" upon its own activity. Since the limitation presented by the *Anstoß* is itself posited by the I's activity (I posits for itself its own limitation), the inward activity of the I must be present as well. Moreover, it must be presupposed as the I's own rational agency, which is caused internally. The I cannot be free and conscious of itself as a free agent without setting its own limit and then recognizing and transcending its own boundaries.

Yet, the act of setting a "limit" for oneself is an intellectually conscious activity, which necessarily requires the presence of cognition in the first place. Thus, although Fichte demonstrates that the "task of limiting itself" (since a real "check" on the I's activity) is a condition for the possibility of consciousness, he is not able to explain its actual occurrence without falling into the logical circle. Only much later, in the § 13 of his *Wissenshaftslehre nova methodo*[36] Fichte will recognize this circle as the circle of consciousness in which the I finds itself trapped. As the way out of this circle, he

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the I in Fichte and for the detailed analyses of the finitude of the Fichtean self, see D. Breazeale, *Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self*, in K. Ameriks, D. Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classic German Philosophy* (SUNY, Albany, 1995) 98-102.

36. J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy* cit., 285-286.

points to the intelligible realm of freedom, the original volition, which is prior to all empirical willing and empirical cognition. This "pure" volition is a categorical demand for action, an "ought" or internal urge for an engagement with the world, in both a theoretical and a practical fashion. This idea has important implications for Fichte's conception of a free agency and freedom in general.

3. Conclusion

Let us now go back to our central topic and draw some (still preliminary) conclusions. From the above discussion it should be evident that Fichte's principle of the self-positing I is not merely inspired by Kant's transcendental unity of apperception expressible by the propositional attitude "I think." Rather, it appears to be a kind of conceptual descendent of it. Indeed, as in Kant, the principle in question refers to the most fundamental function of thinking, while in Fichte the activity of "self-positing" is taken to be the fundamental feature of the I-hood in general. And in both Kant and Fichte, the first principle expresses a peculiar kind of unity. Fichte refers to it as to the original unity of self-consciousness: a unity that is presupposed by and contained within every fact and every act of empirical consciousness, though it never appears as such therein (*Tathandlung*). However, we should be careful to not simply identify or reduce Fichte's principle of self-posited I to the Kant's concept of the transcendental unity of apperception. In his form of transcendental idealism, Kant assigns this single concept two important functions: (1) it justifies the permanence and coherence of the (transcendental) subject, and (2) it explains how the manifold contents of sensory intuition can be synthesized to produce a combined unified notion. Fichte, however, refuses to attribute this kind of functionality to his principle of the self-positing I. Instead, he immediately separates the functions of permanence and synthesis to account for the finite, empirical self.[37] While for Kant, the subject

37. For more insights about irreducibility of Fichte's view of the self to Kant's concept of subject depicted in his concept of the transcendental unity of apperception see

in question is still an abstract, transcendental "ego" akin Descartes' subject, the pure mind in its epistemological exploration, the I of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is a real, embodied self, practically engaged with the objects of the empirical reality. Fichte's I is not just the fact of transcendental apperception. It is also, and to the greater degree, the primordial activity that initiates and spontaneously generates moral striving in the world. What is posited as the starting point of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not just a concept of subject or the abstract idea of pure selfhood, but the actual self that is always striving for a self-determinacy, which is possible only through a concrete interaction with the world of objects and other selves. The very process of striving is the real history of actual consciousness that Fichte seeks to reconstruct in his transcendental philosophy.

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