

McDowell, 1801*

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I will make some observations on McDowell's interpretation of the development of classical German philosophy and put forth some of the theoretical questions that form the background of his interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. I will focus on the chapter on self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in a wider historical context. This wider historical context involves not only a re-elaboration of the Kantian philosophy present in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* itself, but also the other texts and authors who, in a certain way, motivated its development. Finally, I will try to show, through a reinstatement of McDowell's interpretation of Hegel's *Differenzschrift* (1801), that every ontology presupposes a non-subjective transcendentalism which can be found in the rational realism of Reinhold and Bardili, as well as in Fichte's later philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Realism, German Idealism, Hegel, Fichte, McDowell.

*A cenar teco, m'invitasti
E son venuto
Non l'avrei giammai creduto
Ma farò quel chepotrò
(Ponte-W.A., L. da. Mozart, Don
Giovanni)*

In this paper, I will make some observations on McDowell's interpretation of the development of classical German philosophy and put forth some of the theoretical questions that form the background of his interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. In this case, I will focus on the chapter on self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in a wider historical context. This wider historical context involves not only a re-elaboration of the Kantian philosophy present in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* itself, but also the other texts and authors who, in a certain way, motivated its development. A similar attempt has been made by Markus Gabriel, that could be called 'McDowell of 1802', insofar as he refers to McDowell's results to the Hegelian

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writing *Glauben und Wissen*¹. However while Markus Gabriel escaped to a Neoplatonic ontology,² I will try to show, through a reinstatement of McDowell's interpretation of Hegel's *Differenzschrift* (1801), that every ontology presupposes a non-subjective transcendentalism which can be found in the rational realism of Reinhold and Bardili, as well as in Fichte's later philosophy.³

1. *Matter of style*

It is quite surprising to see how the style of monographs in the English language has changed after the lucid investigations into detailed questions in the context of a general idea of philosophy [...] have replaced the discussion of projects which seek to organize again the whole problematic field of philosophy. There are books that show all the weakness by which the temptation to turn away from German philosophy [...] was relying on the soberer argumentative tenacity typical of Anglo-Saxon texts. To form concepts that allow us to unfold, in a careful and yet determined way, problematic wholes that are difficult to master and to place them in distant spheres, is not one of the best qualities of Anglo-Saxon philosophy. [...] McDowell's book is certainly welcome for it pushes us slightly into the strategic reflections of Anglo-Saxon philosophy, and, on the other hand, brings to light [...] its climate, which becomes less self-referential but more attackable.⁴

This harsh judgment concludes Dieter Henrich's analysis of McDowell's *Mind and World* developed in a 1996 essay entitled *Zwei Naturalismen auf English*. Henrich understands McDowell's book as one of the most notable examples of Anglo-Saxon philosophy's tendency to move out of the closed circle defined by Quine's physicalist paradigm to open – or re-open – the philosophical questions of the so-called continental, particularly German, philosophy. This continental tradition contains within it philosophically fundamental questions which, for Henrich, are universal once they can direct a life (*Orientierungsfragen*), as well as borderline questions (*Grenzfragen*), that couldn't be reduced to irrefutable demonstrations.⁵

¹ GABRIEL, M. **Transcendental ontology**. New York: Continuum, 2011.

² GABRIEL. **Transcendental ontology**, p. 44.

³ On Fichte and Bardili, see FERRAGUTO, F. Ser, saber, pensamento: a confrontação de Fichte com o realismo racional de Bardilli e Reinhold. **Aurora. Revista de filosofia**, v. 27, n. 42, p. 819-840, 2015; FERRAGUTO, F. A confrontação de Fichte com o realismo racional de Reinhold e Bardilli. **Perspectivas práticas, Revista de estudos sobre Fichte**, n. 13, 2017.

⁴ HENRICH, D. *Zwei Naturalismen auf Deutsch*. **Merkur**, n. 50, 1996, p. 340. For a general account on Henrich's methodological perspective, see FABBIANELLI, F. Alle origini della filosofia classica tedesca. Gli antecedenti dell'idealismo nell'interpretazione di Dieter Henrich. **Giornale crítico della filosofia italiana**, p. 350-361, 2006; MULSOW-STAMM, M. **Konstellationsforschung**. Frankfurt a. Main, 2005.

⁵ On this topic see also FREUNDLIEB, D. **Dieter Henrich and Contemporary philosophy. The return to subjectivity**. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. For an account of McDowell's relationship to contemporary philosophical discussion see CORTI, L. **Ritratti hegeliani. Un capitolo della filosofia americana contemporanea**. Roma: Carocci, 2014.

The goal of *Mind and World* seems to correspond to this radical line of philosophical questioning. McDowell sets out to dissolve the fundamental concerns of the modern spirit that has come about as a result of the problems that motivate it: the correspondence between the coherence of the representations that a subject has of the world and the very fact that the world itself seems to be heterogeneous with respect to its own representations⁶. This restlessness finds a solution by admitting a reason ‘at large’, that is, a general and pre-subjective spontaneity, which characterizes the real as such. As shows the analysis of our receptivity, that reason is antecedent and independent of the constitution of givenness in experience through the synthesis of knowledge⁷. For Henrich, however, McDowell unfairly jumps to this spontaneity, assimilated to the Hegelian concept of spirit, disregarding “all variants of the representation of a simple givenness.” His intention would be to justify his theory of broad rationality as an opening to the world and in the world. Although he declares that this rationality is not a kind of World soul and goes back to *Bildung*’s concept,⁸ McDowell’s discourse on a “openness of the world” does not provide a more precise explanation of the relation between “thought and that which in the world becomes understood through him.” Moreover, in McDowell “the detailed epistemological work and the relative questions concerning to the mere comprehensibility of the opening of the world are ignored”⁹. One could not do all this by merely pointing out the rational ground that joins the given and the spontaneity of the subject. Doing so also requires a principle that allows spontaneity to reflexively return to itself, and thus constitute a ‘knowledge of knowledge’¹⁰. These questions could be clarified in more depth by a broader understanding of classical German philosophy, as Henrich’s implicit conclusion seems to show.¹¹ Broader, at least, than the area which Henrich defines as ‘banal’, which takes McDowell straight from Kant to Hegel.

⁶ McDOWELL, J. *Mind and world*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 4-5.

⁷ McDOWELL *Mind and world*. p. 7-13.

⁸ McDOWELL *Mind and world*. p. 87-88

⁹ HENRICH. *Zwei Naturalismen*, p. 340.

¹⁰ See BERTINETTO, A. *La forza dell’immagine*. Milano: Mimesis, 2011.

¹¹ A very interesting discussion on the implications that this question has for our comprehension of classical German philosophy was given in SANDKAULEN, B. *System und Systemkritik. Überlegungen zur gegenwärtigen Bedeutung eines fundamentalen Problemzusammenhangs*. In: B. Sandkaulen (org.). **System und Systemkritik. Beiträge zu einem Grundproblem der klassischen deutschen Philosophie**. Würzburg: Königshausen, p. 11-34, 2006.

2. *From Kant to Hegel*

In the book *Having the World in View*, McDowell responds to Henrich's criticism of the banality of his references by arguing that, rather than proposing an original interpretation of the German philosophy, he attempted to provide an instrument for criticizing Sellars' naturalism.¹² Sellars, indeed, thinks that the Kantian position presupposes that conceptual moments occurring in perception must be guided by a mere receptivity, whereas McDowell denies this blatantly, saying "I think this is not correct"¹³. Therefore, the banality of his reference to Kant reveals, in turn, the banality of Sellars' understanding of Kant. Through this interpretation of the principle which underlies the first *Critique*, according to which the concepts are empty and the intuitions are blind, McDowell can conclude that "the fact that experience presupposes receptivity indicates that there is an external constraint on thought and judgment. But since the development of receptivity implies capacities that account for spontaneity we may assume that coercion is rational"¹⁴. However, Kant did not accept all the consequences of his own thesis. Instead, he would rather limit himself to conceiving of rationality as a subjective capacity to 'control' an outside world affected by irrationality, thus laying the groundwork for the idealistic betrayal of critical philosophy's exigencies, of which Fichte can obviously be considered the icon¹⁵.

Discussions about Hegel should be different. Considering the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* chapter on self-consciousness and, especially with the notion of 'concept' Hegel would assume, all the implications contained in the Kantian transcendental perspective, bring to light the contribution of rationality in the reception of empirical material.¹⁶ The Hegelian idea, according to which "in thinking I am free because I am not in an Other but I remain free purely and simply because I am near to myself"¹⁷, does not indicate an existential condition or the fulfilment of a relation of recognition between two individuals. The struggle for recognition should be interpreted as a movement within consciousness itself as it goes beyond the separation of

¹² McDOWELL, J. **Having the world in view**. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 4, n. On this topic see also CHRISTIAS, D. Sellars Contra McDowell on Intuitional Content and the Myth of the Given. *Philosophia*, n. 43, 2015, p. 975-998.

¹³ McDOWELL. **Having the world in view**, p. 4 n.

¹⁴ McDOWELL, **Mind and World**, p. 41.

¹⁵ McDOWELL, **Mind and World**, p. 43-44.

¹⁶ For a critical interpretation of McDowell's account of Hegelian philosophy see QUANTE, M. **La realtà dello spirito. Studi su Hegel**. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2016.

¹⁷ McDOWELL, **Mind and World**, p. 44.

subject and object, and finds, in the object itself, the spontaneity that characterizes it. Thus, for McDowell, the “true idea of objectivity must be understood only as part of this structure and not as negligence of objectivity for a subjective projection.”¹⁸

This movement in Hegel’s argumentation was made possible by the fact that, throughout the development of the experience of consciousness, “being itself is consciousness.” Therefore, “the side of being itself, the thingness... is no other substance than the consciousness.”¹⁹ This brings forth a view of self-consciousness characterized by thinking, i.e., by a dimension that does not have to do with the representations, but with concepts which, for Hegel, affect a “being in itself different which immediately differs from it” but remains immanent in it. Consciousness, therefore, is immediately conscious of either its difference to the thing or its difference to the immanence of the thing itself. So, “it is not as in the representation in which consciousness has yet to expressly remember that this is its representation; on the contrary, the concept is for me, immediately, my concept.”²⁰

This Hegelian argument, which runs throughout all of McDowell’s theoretical constructions, allows us to make at least two observations concerning the position of Hegelian thought. We can make two observations, the first coming shortly after the so-called dialectics between slave and master and the second before the exposition of freedom in the figures of Stoicism, of scepticism and of unhappy consciousness:

1. The Hegelian exposition of self-consciousness appears in the context of a science of the experience of consciousness. Although this description of the development of consciousness does not correspond to the actual development of consciousness, the Hegelian description of the experience of consciousness is dominated by the presence of the ‘for us’, that is, by a split between the truth of development and the certainty of description guaranteed by philosophical knowledge as a knowledge of knowledge. If we follow along this view, the Hegelian discourse

¹⁸ In Kant’s terms, when Hegel says that with self-consciousness “we have taken a step in the land of truth,” this means that we have begun to see how to understand knowledge in terms of the power of perceptive spontaneity which concerns not only the subject, but the object as well (MCDOWELL, **Having the world in view**, p. 153). In fact, the Hegelian excerpt quoted by McDowell continues to claim that in the free being, “it is purely and simply close to myself and the object that I have as essence is, in a unit not separated, my being for me. My movement in concepts is a movement within myself” (HEGEL, G.W.F. **Fenomenologia dello spirito**. Milano: Bompiani, 2000, p. 295).

¹⁹ HEGEL, **Fenomenologia dello spirito**, p. 293.

²⁰ HEGEL, **Fenomenologia dello spirito**, pp. 293-295. Hegelian scholars, as Houlgate (HOULGATE, S. Thought and Experience in Hegel and McDowell. **European Journal of Philosophy**, n. 14, p. 242-261, 2006), have shown how this interpretation of Hegel’s account of perception and intuition is more appropriate to *Encyclopedia* than to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

in *Phenomenology of spirit* is conditioned by the attempts of transcendental reasoning of knowledge, according to which there is no understanding of being without the mediation of a consciousness that understands it. These views are those which have been developed by Reinhold, Fichte or Schelling. More generally, the Hegelian argument runs through the whole discussion (involving these authors) about the legitimacy of the coincidence of the logical structure of thought with that of reality²¹. The legitimization of this coincidence – which as Henrich has already shown, McDowell seems to avoid – has a historically determining function in the understanding of the speculative model of reason proposed by Hegel. Moreover, the same problem represents an opportunity to displace McDowell's interpretation of classical German Philosophy.²²

2. The exposition of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not end with the dialectic between slave and master. The freedom of the slave becomes abstract and, in particular, presents itself as 'obstinacy' (*Eigensinn*). "As in this case", Hegel writes, "pure form can't become essence so also this form, considered as expansion beyond the singular, can't be a universal form, absolute concept; but only an ability that dominates a certain thing, but does not dominate the universal power and the objective essence in its totality."²³ The use of the term obstinacy has two consequences. The first is that the servant's freedom comes to the coincidence between being in and of itself. However, as Hyppolite claims, this aim remains contemplative and abstract. The abstraction of this scope coincides – this is the second consequence – with the reduction of form to a particular skill which exerts a power over something singular and, in particular, exerts a formative work that, although it is aware of itself, tends to bring the thing back, as an external fact, to the rationality of the subject. In other words, the tendency of reason which characterizes the desire, which in turn brings about the movement from consciousness to self-consciousness, would not be effectively removed (*aufgehoben*), but sublimated. Hence, at this point in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the spontaneity of reason continues to coincide with the notion that the "idea of something that allows us to match our

²¹ HYPOLITE, J. *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel*. Paris: Aubier, 1946, p. 27.

²² Perhaps it is this aspect that both becomes problematic, especially for novice readers of Hegel, including the *Phenomenology* in the Hegelian speculative journey (PÖGGELER, O. *L'idea di una fenomenologia dello spirito*. Napoli: Guida, 1986.) and, on the other hand, makes phenomenology all the more interesting for those who work on transcendental philosophy and in particular for those who are interested in speculative developments of the thought of Fichte.

²³ HEGEL, *Fenomenologia dello spirito*, p. 291.

own life”²⁴, and “self-critically control our thoughts in the light of experience’s liberation”²⁵. Even if we accept a rationality shared by either the object or the subject, the problem of the objective relation would not be solved. As Henrich argues, a broad conception of rationality continues to raise the question of the necessary mediation of the thinking subject (or formative reason) in the understanding of the relation between thought and reality.²⁶

Now, from a theoretical point of view, this problem does not necessarily imply a need for transcendentalism to reassemble into the philosophy of the absolute subject. Rather, the problem would consist first in extending the conception of transcendental (or in interpreting this idea of the absolute subject which is not an absolute individual) in the sense of an understanding of the general operability of reason by means of a necessary recourse to the concrete subject’s mediation that reflects and understands.²⁷ I wonder if one can read, in this sense, the quite indeterminate reference to the philosophical development that takes place between Kant and Hegel, about which there is a note in *Having the World in View* which states that “a proper treatment of Hegel’s relation to Kant would need to take account of Fichte’s intervening contribution”²⁸.

3. *From Hegel to Fichte*

Similar questions to those discussed by McDowell are at the center of an intense debate that has motivated research of Hegelian thought’s insights about the relation between subject and reality alongside the reflection on the possibility of constructing a concept of thought (or rationality) as that which goes beyond the dualism between conscience and object and belongs to both of them.²⁹ From the historical-philosophical point of view, to form a transcendental

²⁴ McDOWELL, **Mind and world**, p. 43.

²⁵ McDOWELL, **Mind and world**, p. 49.

²⁶ This conclusion, rather than criticizing McDowell’s concept of a ‘second nature’, affirms it and shows it to be a result – not just a presupposition – of this evidently transcendental imposition of the problem. For more on McDowell’s concept of second nature, see BERTAM, G. *Zweite Natur die Auflösung des Dualismus von Kultur und Natur*. In: Barth, Ch.; Lauer, D. **Die Philosophie John McDowell’s. Ein Handbuch**. Münster: Mentis, p. 121-136. 2014.

²⁷ For this interpretation of transcendentalism and its impact on classical German philosophy, see LAUTH, R. **Die Frage nach dem Sinn des Daseins**. München: Piper, 1953; LAUTH, R. **Begriff, Begründung um Rechtfertigung der Philosophie**. Hamburg: Meiner, 1979; IVALDO, M. **Regione pratica. Kant, Reinhold, Fichte**. Pisa: ETS, 2012.

²⁸ McDOWELL, **Having the world in view**, p. 153 n.

²⁹ For a complex and historically justified explanation of this process, see HENRICH, D. **Konstellationen**. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1991; HENRICH, D. **Grundlegung aus dem Ich**. Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 2004.

doctrine of nature means to rethink Kant's criticism in a direction that allows for practical reason (i.e., the spontaneity of reason) to emerge as a theoretical principle of the object's constitution.³⁰ However, in the development of post-Kantian philosophy, this radicalization did not necessarily proceed in the direction of an absolute idealism, until it was at last corrected by Hegel.³¹ In fact, the various thinkers who attempted to go beyond subjectivity in order to understand it as part (or rather as an inevitable mediation) of a broader rationality which allows us to clarify the perception as the articulation of thought.

Although the Fichteian *Wissenschaftslehre* (WL) also takes a decisive step in this direction,³² in the post-Kantian debate, an understanding of the very different 'Fichteian' word seems to be affirmed summarized by the critiques put forth by Reinhold in 1801's *Beiträge* (especially in the first two volumes).³³ In the six volumes of the *Beiträge* (BLU) Reinhold attempts to maintain distance from Kant, Fichte and Schelling's philosophies once he has shown they are examples of the tendency to place subjectivity at the centre of all truth, although the manner in which their various philosophies place subjectivity at the centre of truth does vary.³⁴ As a consequence, they are taken as examples of the switch between the representational truth (configured by the subject who understands it) and the truth itself which for Reinhold, instead, precedes, transcends and underlies subjectivity.³⁵

In BLU II Reinhold also makes a distinction between critical philosophy and transcendental philosophy. Critical philosophy (that is, Kantian Critical philosophy) is an example of a substantial empiricism at the epistemological level and a subjectivism at a moral level.³⁶ Transcendental philosophy (that of Fichte and Schelling), instead, 'exhaust in a free act the entire philosophy. [Fichte and Schelling] are not satisfied with Kantian freedom'. They "request, seek and find full and infinite freedom – in freedom, in that freedom that does not admit and knows no other limits (*Schränke*) if not that which the freedom itself places; which

³⁰ For this formulation see IVALDO, *Regione pratica*, 2012.

³¹ For a description of the development of Classical German Philosophy see BEISER, F. *German Idealism the struggle against subjectivism*. Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

³² See RAMETTA, G. L'idea di filosofia nel tardo Fichte. *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, p. 461-468, 2003.

³³ For an account of Reinhold's *Beiträge* see BONDELI, M. *Das Anfangsproblem bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Eine systematische und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Philosophie Reinholds in der Zeit 1789-1803*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995; VALENZA, P. *Oltre la soggettività finita*. Padova: Cedam, 2004.

³⁴ BLU, I, V.

³⁵ On this topic see VALENZA, *Oltre la soggettività finita*.

³⁶ BLU, I, p. 78.

the freedom itself puts in fact and through fact of being free.”³⁷ Reinhold, however, identifies freedom as a condition for the agency of reason with the will of the philosophizing subject, thus reducing the formation of transcendental philosophy to the arbitrary exercise of a single individual. The epistemological consequence of this Reinholdian position is the thesis that in Fichte and Schelling “*über Natur Philosophieren nichts anders sey, als die Natur erschaffen,*” i.e., “philosophizing about nature is nothing more than to create it.”³⁸

This ambivalent criticism which has at the same time absolute subjectivism and radical empiricism is typical of the debate about WL at the thresholds of the nineteenth century. A speculative counter-position to that of Reinhold is assumed by Hegel in the *Differenzschrift*.³⁹ On Fichte’s WL, Hegel writes, “the I posits an objective world because in positing itself it recognizes its own defectiveness, and consequently the absoluteness of pure consciousness falls away.”⁴⁰ However, Fichte’s position is not, as Reinhold asserts, a “dogmatic idealism.” On the contrary, “what distinguishes Fichte’s idealism is that the identity which it establishes is one that does not deny the objective, but puts the subjective and the objective in the same rank of reality and certainty; and that pure and empirical consciousness are one.”⁴¹

Both Reinhold and Hegel intend to overcome subjectivity, both as the principle of WL and as the principle of philosophy. Hegel, at least in his writings of 1801, comes out in favour of Schelling’s system where “identity is not lost in the parts, nor in the result.”⁴² Reinhold, on the other hand, seems to want to redeem the doctrine of science not by saving the systematic and rigorously transcendental foundation⁴³, but by recovering its origin “in anything higher than an act of my mind.”⁴⁴ Specifically, by recovering it in thought (*Denken*) as a manifestation of a truth and of an original being implicit in all consciousness, which is independent of the theoretical and practical action of the knowing subject. This is the beginning of what Rosenkranz defines as “the conclusion of the progressive tendency of Kantianism” for the

³⁷ BLU, I, p. 153.

³⁸ BLU, I, p. 153. A discussion of the interpretation of nature in Reinhold’s rational realism was given in FERRAGUTO, F. A reflexão sobre a natureza e o problema da aplicação. *Dois Pontos*, n. 12, p. 27-43, 2015.

³⁹ On the presence of Reinhold’s rational realism in Hegel’s *Differenzschrift* see LAUTH, R. Hegel Fehlverständnis der Wissenschaftslehre in „Glauben und Wissen.” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, p. 1-34 e p. 299-321, 1983.

⁴⁰ DFS, p. 51.

⁴¹ DFS, p. 49.

⁴² DFS, p. 77.

⁴³ REINHOLD, K.L., BARDILI, G. *Briefwechsel über das Wesen der Philosophie*. Hamburg: Perthes, 1804, p. 2.

⁴⁴ BLU, V, p. 110.

benefit of a perspective that tends to progressively bring the unconditionality of consciousness to the unconditionality of reason as its content. A tendency that Rosenkranz himself sees in Bardili's work, *Grundriss der ersten Logik*.⁴⁵

Bardili's philosophical proposal focuses on the conception of philosophy as *Vernunftlehre*, i.e., as a doctrine of reason and thought. Bardili restores a notion of thought purified of all psychological, representational, empiricist and subjectivist interference. Thought refers to a general rational structure of reality which is independent of individual consciousness. There is no subject on one side and object on the other. Thought's independence from concrete subjectivity implies as a consequence the impossibility of admitting the interiority of thought itself as a negation, as a limitation and, therefore, as a synthesis that proceeds from empirical intuition.⁴⁶ It is not possible to obtain a "limitation (*Einschränkung*) or an extension [of consciousness] by a change of thought, as thought, because that would be a no-longer-thinking and thus a contradiction."⁴⁷

Briefly put, from a position aiming to take down Kant, the *erste Logik* denies the possibility of a transcendental logic⁴⁸ and reduces critical philosophy to psychologism.⁴⁹ This means that the more a philosophy is based on subjectivity, defined essentially by the relation to this which is another of thought, the more empirical it is. And this explains the ambivalence of Reinhold and Hegel's critique of Fichte. It is, on the contrary, the application (*Anwendung*) of thought to make possible "all our knowledge, every concept, every judgment, categorical and hypothetical, every syllogism." Whereby application means the particularization of thought in the contact with a given matter through the formative force of the concrete subject. In the application of thought two elements (subject, object) are not put into play, but three: thought, which comprises subject and matter; matter; and the subject that elaborates it as mediation of thought.⁵⁰

Even more radical is the rational realism presented by Reinhold in the essay devoted to the concept of phenomenology in Volume IV of the *Beiträge*. According to Reinhold, all being is none other than the expression of the necessity of the application as an immanent character

⁴⁵ ROSENKRANZ, K. **Geschichte der kantischen Philosophie**. Berlin: Voss, 1840. p. 416; for a general discussion of Bardili's philosophical view see PEIMANN, R. **Das Denken als Denken. Die Philosophie des Christoph Gottfried Bardilli**. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2009.

⁴⁶ GEL, p. 25-26, 342.

⁴⁷ GEL, p. 26.

⁴⁸ GEL, p. 13-14.

⁴⁹ GEL, p. 358-9.

⁵⁰ On Bardili's theory of application see FERRAGUTO, Ser, saber, pensamento.

of thought and matter which must be presupposed in order for the application to take place.⁵¹ There are not two moments of thought and application, but only one: the thought that in application is articulated with nature as its manifestation. “Precisely because of this, even the rational realism it is not at all opposed to a dualism – but to an absolute unity of principle.”⁵² It is not necessary to give a foundation of the object’s structure because the reference to it is guaranteed by the analysis of the same thought.

The philosopher [...] having exhausted all possible pure knowledge turns himself to the manifestation’s condition of the essence as such to clarify what is determined by this as that which is determined as essence reproduction (*Nachbild*) [...] to explain the phenomenon, to distinguish the appearance and [...] to obtain a clear knowledge.⁵³

This brief detour shows that Reinhold’s work seems to anticipate McDowell’s conclusions and also brings forth the issues present in his position. This discussion, which was developed around 1801, places the relation between thought and givenness in a horizon that does not only foresee the de-subjectivation of reason, but takes the subject to be mediation for the development of the de-subjectivized reason.

In spite of all this, Hegel’s attempts, as well as those of rational realists (Reinhold and Bardili), and even that of Schelling’s philosophy of nature, are based on an even more difficult presupposition to clarify: the transference of what is of interest to the subject who elaborates the world (in McDowell’s language: the space of reasons) into the world itself independently of the subject who understands it. In this case as well, the legitimacy of this transference can be assured only by the self-justification of the subject (the specific knowledge) that performs this operation.⁵⁴ Then, beyond the stereotypical image of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as the philosophy of the absolute subject,⁵⁵ it would be precisely this problem that characterizes the confrontation between Fichte not only with Schelling’s philosophy of nature, but with rational realism as well.

In the same year that he published the *Grundriss* review, Fichte experienced some of the crucial moments in his confrontation with Schelling and wrote a few remarks entitled *Sätze zur Erläuterung zum Wesen der Thiere*.

⁵¹ BLU, II, 176; BLU, IV, p. 107.

⁵² BLU, IV, p. 107.

⁵³ BLU, IV, p. 109.

⁵⁴ Spoken in McDowell’s terms, this means that, given the difference between the space of reasons and the space of facts, in a theory of rationality at large there is a problem in attaining the function of one who determines one’s own difference and surpasses it.

⁵⁵ This images seems implicit in McDowell’s interpretation of absolute idealism as a philosophy based on a spontaneous subjective activity, given in McDOWELL, *Mind and world*, p. 44.

Fichte begins to outline a doctrine of nature from the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s principles that lead to subscribe a judgment already formulated by Hartmann, according to which "he [i.e., Fichte] refutes in the most radical way his [Bardili's] metaphysics of nature while accepting in the doctrine of science his theory of identity, which is equally metaphysical."⁵⁶

The *Sätze* starts with a maxim and a question. The maxim is: "according to WL I transfer in nature the concept of myself, as much as I can, without annihilating nature itself, that is, without making it intelligible." The question is: "how can we understand the statement that intelligence is a superior power of nature?"⁵⁷

The perspective put forward in the *Wissenschaftslehre* prevents us from considering nature as being endowed with an immanent and independent reason of a subject who understands it. Intelligence, as the higher power of nature, therefore, has meaning only "in a system of the intelligible world. Finite intelligence is, indeed, the inferior power of that infinite intelligence. Yet this is a mere determinable (*Bestimmbar*) of that which is the higher power. This [determinable] is nature in its inexplicable and non-conceptualized elements."⁵⁸ Speaking from a Fichtean perspective, nature then results in being reducible to the self while returning to the course of determining reason by a finite intelligence. In part, however, as determinable by the self and as determined by the self it must maintain relative autonomy. In other words, finite intelligence and nature must be able to be understood as two different, but interconnected, moments of the dynamics of development of the same infinite intelligence; that is, of reason in its fundamental articulation. A third thesis that explains the essence of animals can thus be the following:

what is highest in me and independent of my consciousness and the immediate subject of it is an impulse. The impulse is the highest that I can represent myself in nature outside of me. Nature is what can be felt but absolutely not what is felt, which is already consciousness.⁵⁹

On this basis, in which the autonomy of nature is given by the irreducibility of the impulse to the consciousness of the subject, there can be access to nature: "in every atom (for me) that I find in nature I give an impulse, that is, a tendency (*Streben*) of being effective towards the

⁵⁶ HARTMANN, N. *La filosofia dell'idealismo tedesco*. Traduzione di V. Verra e B. Bianco. Milano: Mursia, 1974. p. 74.

⁵⁷ GA, II, 5, p. 421.

⁵⁸ GA, II, 5, p. 422.

⁵⁹ GA, II, 5, p. 423.

outside of oneself or of being object of an efficacy (or, more strictly, precisely by this putting and carrying out an impulse outside my Ego that I put a nature).”⁶⁰

Nature’s stratifications emerge as a function of the way in which the impulse becomes effective as a path that goes from the chemistry of matter to the articulation of the human being as a synthesis of consciousness and will.

As much as it may be legitimate to think of nature as an expression of a force that transcends its particular determinations, such a force emerges only in the light of a vision which gives it form, gives it meaning and, to use Fichte’s terms, structures it in an image. Only in the image (that is, in a rationally formed model) can multiplicity be understood as a qualitatively determined order by a force and formally by a law.⁶¹ Although this passage allows us to insert nature into the sphere of the ethical such an understanding always leads to a view of nature as constituted, certainly not ‘from’ the Ego, but ‘unto’ the Ego.⁶² As Fichte claims in 1800’s *Sonnenklarer Bericht*, WL cannot be a cosmogony, but must rather be a gnosiogony.⁶³

From this point of view, the being (the given, the object) appears as reflex of a self-relation of reason, namely, through the relationship which, according to the *Sätze* language, is instituted by finite intelligence with that infinite, that is, by the intelligence with itself and, therefore, through the reflection. It is only in reflection, in fact, that knowledge knows itself and it is understood as the synthetic unit of knowledge and known or of determinable and determined that the *Wissenschaftslehre* clarifies as *Bewusst-sein*, unity of being and consciousness of being.

Thus Reinhold’s criticism of Fichte, as well as that of Hegel, could be correct if we understood the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a form of static knowledge interested in the description of nature as something given, or if we forget the distinction, already clear in the *Sätze*, between finite and infinite intelligence, or the fact that WL, as Fichte affirms repeatedly, does not aim to replace the positive sciences, but instead wants to find the reason for understanding its constitution. Also in *Antwortschreiben an Reinhold*, released in order to properly refute Reinhold *Beyträge*’s criticisms, Fichte makes it clear that WL’s specific theme is not the relation between a given matter and a form. Instead, WL explains the form’s relation (i.e. of

⁶⁰ GA, II, 5, p. 423.

⁶¹ On this topic see GODDARD, J-Ch. **Fichte (1801-1813). L’émancipation philosophique**. Paris: Vrin, 2003.

⁶² SW, IV, p. 303.

⁶³ GA, I, 7, p. 250.

knowledge) with the totality of reason and thus highlights the relation between form and matter in the horizon of an analysis of the relation of reason with itself.⁶⁴

In the preparatory notes for his review of Bardili's *Grundriss*, Fichte may have even been able to agree with Bardili's criticism of Kant, according to which the latter wrongly identifies thinking with judging, and does not clarify thinking in its purity. Fichte can also appropriate the question of the *Anwendung* posed by Bardili and develop it outgoing from the observation that Bardili did not think enough about 'his book.' That is to say, he did not realize that the thought at the center of his theory "could not be thought without being determined to do so by reflection and that only by free reflection can he become an object for him." Only in this way, Fichte continues, can one speak of his "intellectual or pure being." Also, because "only in human thought can pure thought reach the application" and only through a human thought "arises an *object* of thought. An objective existence, an exteriority, a succession and a closeness; opposed to the intellectual being of pure thinking and its laws."⁶⁵ I wonder if Henrich's (polemic) criticism to McDowell could not be translated in these words and thus find a more extended problematical context.

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ABBREVIATIONS

GA = FICHTE, J.G. **Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften**. Hrsg. von R. Lauth, H. Jacob und H. Gliwitzky. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962-2013.

⁶⁴ GA, I, 7, p. 302.

⁶⁵ GA, I, 7, 302.

SW = FICHTE, J.G. **J. G. Fichtes sämtliche Werke**. Hrsg. von I. E. Fichte. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971.

BLU, I-VI = REINHOLD, K. L. **Beyträge zur leichtern Übersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie bey den Anfängen des 19. Jahrhunderts**. Hamburg: Perthes, 1801-1803.

GEL = BARDILI, J.Ch. **Grundriss der ersten Logik, gereinigt von den Irrthümern bisheriger Logiken überhaupt, der kantischen insbesondere; keine Kritik sondern eine Medicina mentis brauchbar hauptsächlich für Deutschland kritische Philosophie**. Stuttgart: Löflund, 1800.

DFS = HEGEL, G.W.F. **Differenza tra il sistema filosofico di Fichte e quello di Schelling**. Trad. de R. Bodei. Milano: Mursia, 2014.

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