

# SCHULZE'S *AENESIDEMUS* AND THE FOUNDATION OF PHILOSOPHY

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## Abstraksi

Immanuel Kant membangun filsafat kritisnya untuk menjawab pandangan skeptis David Hume mengenai kepastian pengetahuan manusia dan mencoba mendamaikan dua pendekatan yang berbeda terhadap pengetahuan dan tindakan, yakni rasionalisme dan empirisme. Dalam karyanya berjudul *Aenesidemus*, Gottlob Ernst Schulze mempertanyakan klaim Kant bahwa skeptisisme Hume telah terjawab melalui filsafat kritisnya. Artikel ini pertama-tama membahas teks *Aenesidemus* dengan memberikan perhatian khusus pada kritik Schulze terhadap pandangan Karl Leonhard Reinhold mengenai 'fakultas' representasi dan kegagalan Kant dalam membedakan antara sebab dan syarat pengetahuan. Dalam tanggapannya terhadap karya Schulze ini, Fichte memperlihatkan kesalahpahaman Schulze atas pokok-pokok penting dalam filsafat kritis sekaligus menunjukkan arah filsafat kritis yang hendak ditempuhnya sendiri. Di satu sisi, filsafat kritis memang menuai polemik dengan berbagai kritik dan tanggapan yang mengubah arah filsafat Barat sendiri. Akan tetapi, di sisi lain, seluruh rangkaian peristiwa ini justru memperlihatkan sebuah dialog dalam filsafat sendiri sebagai usaha untuk menemukan fondasi kuat dan mantap atas klaim-klaimnya. Dialog ini menunjukkan keterbukaan filsafat terhadap berbagai bentuk kebenaran yang terus menerus disingkapkan.

**Keywords:** Schulze, *Aenesidemus*, Fichte, Kant, critical philosophy, skepticism, Reinhold, faculty of representation.

## Introduction

Gottlob Ernst Schulze's *Aenesidemus* is one of the most famous pieces of writing published as a reaction to the general project of the critical philosophy initiated by Immanuel Kant. In his *Critiques* Kant has attempted to reconcile two different approaches to human knowledge and action, namely, rationalism and empiricism, by asking questions such as how necessary synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible. It is Hume's skepticism about the possibility of human knowledge, as Kant himself acknowledges it, that has significantly shaped the writing of these works. In the *Aenesidemus* Schulze questions the validity of the claim that the critical philosophy has answered Hume's doubts. Besides Kant, Schulze also criticizes Karl Leonhard Reinhold who has taken the philosophy in a different direction by appealing to the "spirit" of Kant's philosophy, instead of staying with the "letter."

In this article I will analyze Schulze's arguments against Kant and Reinhold in his *Aenesidemus* as well as Fichte's response to them in the Review of *Aenesidemus*. I will first begin with a brief historical background of this writing, which includes Jacobi's criticism of Kant's philosophy and Reinhold's new interpretation of it. Then I will examine the text of the *Aenesidemus*, focusing particularly on Schulze's criticism of Reinhold's "faculty" of representations and the apparent failure of Kant in distinguishing causes and conditions of knowledge. All this amounts to the suggestion that Kant has not completely answered Hume's skepticism. Following this analysis, I will discuss Fichte's response to Schulze in his review, focusing on Schulze's misunderstandings of the important elements

of the critical philosophy and the direction in which Fichte is going to take such philosophy. I will end this article with a general remark on this polemic, which undoubtedly has changed the direction of the critical philosophy.

### **The Historical Background of the *Aenesidemus*: The Reception of Kant's Philosophy**

The appearance of the *Aenesidemus* is part of the various reactions to Kant's critical philosophy, seen as a response to the challenges of the skeptic, David Hume, who argues against the possibility of a secure foundation for human knowledge. Before the *Aenesidemus*, there had appeared one significant negative reaction to Kant from Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819), arguing against what he saw as the pretensions of the Enlightenment to explain everything through the use of reason. Appealing to the old argument that any demonstration requires some principles from which it can be demonstrated, and that, in turn, requires a stopping point, Jacobi argues that such first principles can be grounded only in some kind of "immediate certainty" because they cannot be given to us by "reason." Eventually all knowledge, according to Jacobi, must rest on some kind of "faith." In the "supplement" at the end of his book entitled *David Hume on Faith; or Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue* (1787), Jacobi charged Kant with inconsistency and argued that Kant actually had not really refuted the skeptic Hume. This is because Kant had claimed that things-in-themselves caused our sensations, which then got synthesized into intuitions. But at the same time, Kant saw the category of causality as a transcendental condition of experience, not a property of things-in-themselves. The only proper solution to Hume's thoroughgoing skepticism, according to Jacobi, was the *salto mortale*, namely, by making a "leap" to what otherwise would be the ultimate ground for human knowledge. That is how we are to be conscious of the unconditioned, which reason, as Kant argues, naturally seeks.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of this controversy, a voice defending Kant's philosophy came from Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1758-1823). In Reinhold's view, Kant had answered Jacobi's challenge by showing that reason and faith dealt with different aspects of reality. Kant had shown that theoretical reason was an inadequate tool for the search of a knowledge of God, and yet at the same time postulated on practical grounds both human freedom and the existence of a personal God. Thus, it would perfectly make sense for anybody to acknowledge all the claims of modern, scientific reason while holding firmly to faith in God. In his attempt to salvage the critical philosophy, however, Reinhold took himself in a much different direction than Kant. Faced with Jacobi's challenge, Reinhold concluded that Kant's view must be shown not simply to be one point of view among many others, but to be the only authoritative view on the subject. To achieve this purpose, the critical philosophy has to be shown to be a rigorous body of theoretical knowledge, a *Wissenschaft*, a "science." Kant himself had declared his intention in his first *Critique* to put metaphysics "on a secure path of a science." But Reinhold argued that Kant's philosophy was still merely on the path towards *becoming* a science, whereas what it needed was actually to *be* a science. Only as a science would philosophy have the authority it needed.

In his attempt to make Kant's philosophy a science with a secure foundation, Reinhold would have to make a methodological distinction between the "spirit" and the "letter" of the Kantian philosophy. He made it clear that in this project he had no intention of giving a historical exposition of Kant's position, but instead attempted to offer a

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 66, 89.

reconstruction of Kant's arguments. Responding to Jacobi's argument that all knowledge rests on something we know with "immediate certainty," Reinhold argued that the only proper response to Jacobi's challenge was to rest philosophy on *one* fundamental principle (*Grundsatz*) that was itself "certain" and could be known "immediately." Reinhold called his new approach, "Elemental philosophy" (*Elementarphilosophie*), and the principle that expresses the basic nature of representations, "the principle of consciousness": "In consciousness the subject distinguishes the representation from the subject and object and relates it to both."<sup>2</sup> This principle was elemental because it was not drawn from any other premise, but was itself derived from reflection on a fundamental, self-explanatory *fact* of consciousness. Thus, against the attacks from the skeptics, Kant's philosophy would now be equipped with secure foundations in the form of a single fundamental principle.

### **Schulze's *Aenesidemus*: The Challenges to the Critical Philosophy**

The anonymous publication of the *Aenesidemus* in the spring of 1792 clearly threw the entire foundation of Reinhold's Philosophy of the Elements into question. Its long and odd title clearly suggests that its main goal was to examine Reinhold's work as well as to attack the critical philosophy in general.<sup>3</sup> This work claimed to be a record of the correspondence between Aenesidemus, a first-century BC Greek skeptic, and Hermias, a so-called Kantian, offering a "Humean" attack on the Kantian position. The skeptical stance with regard to the possibility of knowledge in this piece of writing undoubtedly challenged many Kantians and proponents of the critical philosophy, despite its anonymous authorship for about a year. The identity of the author was quickly revealed to be that of Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761-1833), a professor of philosophy at the University of Helmstädt. The historical influence of this work went so far as to require Hegel to give a rather lengthy response in his evaluation of Schulze's thoughts. This eventually shaped Hegel's general understanding of the relationship between philosophy and skepticism.

Schulze begins his *Aenesidemus* by examining Reinhold's principle of consciousness. He argues that this principle is hopelessly vague and ambiguous. Reinhold has argued that the concepts of subject and object are determined only by distinguishing them in representation and by referring the representation to them. This 'distinguishing' and 'referring,' according to Schulze, must be complete and be so determined as not to allow for more than one meaning. But this is not the case, as Schulze manages to point out several possible meanings of the concepts. Moreover, this principle is not universal, as there are states of consciousness in which this principle does not hold, for instance, intuition. Since the principle is for Reinhold a fact of consciousness, it must be empirical. Therefore, it cannot be certain and necessary, which are the very conditions for the first principle of philosophy.

### ***In Search for the Foundation of the Faculty of Representation***

Schulze's criticism of Reinhold's notion of the faculty of representation clearly needs to be understood against the backdrop of the Kantian position on this issue. Schulze

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<sup>2</sup> K.L. Reinhold, *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge*, 71-72, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, eds. trans. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000, pp. 68, 70.

<sup>3</sup> G.E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus, or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Prof. Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defense of Skepticism Against the Pretensions of the Critique of Reason*, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, eds. trans. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris.

first invites the reader to ask some important and fundamental questions about the origin and source of representations in us. He agrees with the commonly held opinion about the necessity for a careful assessment and certainty about the connection between our representations and the external objects: “Since the representations in us are not the objects themselves being represented, the connection between our representations and the things outside us must be established by a careful and sound answer to this question.”<sup>4</sup> Quoting Reinhold’s thesis, Schulze shows that the issue of the origin and source of our representations is one of those by which the critical philosophy will stand or fall: “It is the thesis of critical philosophy that a large portion of the determinations and characteristics with which the representations of certain objects occur in us are to be grounded in the essence of our *faculty of representation*.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, in order to assess “the true value of critical philosophy” and also “the legitimacy of its claims it makes for the apodictic evidence and infallibility of its results,” Schulze directs the reader’s attention to the grounds and principles from which the Kantian position is drawn, namely, that “there is in our knowledge something determined *a priori* by the mind, and that this something constitutes the form of the material given to our knowledge *a posteriori*.”<sup>6</sup>

The context in which the assessment of the critical philosophy is done, for Schulze, cannot be but what he calls “the demands of Humean skepticism.”<sup>7</sup> Attention to this context is important for a twofold reason: first, it is the main goal of Kant’s first critique, according to Schulze, to refute Hume’s skepticism by assessing the human faculty of cognition; second, the proponents of the critical philosophy have unanimously claimed that all aspects of Hume’s skepticism have collapsed through the derivation of a certain part of human cognition from the faculty of representation. Given these reasons, therefore, it is important, according to Schulze, to ask the question whether Kant’s *Critique of Reason* has really answered Hume’s skepticism thoroughly. The answer to this question is to be sought in a careful comparison between Hume’s demands and Hume’s problems on the one hand, and the principles of the critical system on the other hand, together with the grounds for the establishment of *a priori* forms in the human mind. Schulze noticed that Reinhold’s *Philosophy of the Elements* had taken a different direction than the one Kant originally did, and therefore, wanted to examine both approaches and to determine “to which of these two sign-posts we can safely entrust ourselves, or with which the danger of being led astray is least great.”<sup>8</sup>

Schulze first quoted Reinhold’s preliminary statements regarding the nature of the faculty of representation, that (a) it is the cause and ground of the actual presence of representations; (b) it is present, in a determinate form, prior to every representation; (c) it differs from representation as cause from effect; (d) it may be inferred only from its effect.<sup>9</sup> The argument for the objective existence of such a cause or the faculty of representation, however, could not be found in Reinhold’s exposition of the principle of consciousness. The only “proof” of this cause, according to Schulze, was given in the *Theory of the Faculty of Representation* where Reinhold argued, “Whoever grants a representation,

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<sup>4</sup> Schulze, *Aenesidemus*, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106, italics original.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

however, must also grant a faculty of representation, i.e., that without which no representation can be thought.”<sup>10</sup> Put in the syllogistic form, the argument goes like this:

- Major Premise:* Any two things that cannot be *thought* apart from one another can also not be apart from one another;
- Minor Premise:* The being and actuality of representations cannot be *thought* apart from the being and actuality of a faculty of representation;
- Conclusion:* Therefore, a faculty of representation must also exist objectively, just as certainly as representation must also exist objectively, just as certainly as representations are present in us.<sup>11</sup>

For Schulze, the implication of such an inference would be huge if it were true, since it could be used to prove practically all philosophical systems that were dominant at that time: Spinozism, Leibnizian system and idealism. Even the theoretical reason would be able to provide an apodictic proof for the objective existence of a creator. At the same time, Kant’s contention that things-in-themselves cannot be known, ironically, would be thoroughly false because it turns out that we can know those things.

Raising the question regarding the existence of the faculty of representation, for Schulze, does not involve a contradiction. It is clear that the skeptic acknowledges the existence of representations. The problem lies rather in the questions regarding the actual existence of the faculties of representations, whether such faculties really exist outside our representations of them, or whether the thought of having such faculties has a solid ground. All these, for Schulze, are “totally undecided issues,” which, according to the existing philosophical principles, do not warrant a simple “yes” or “no” answer. Thus, when the skeptic uses the words “reason” and “understanding,” his intention is simply “to express himself in a way that is commonly understood... to make himself understood by others.”<sup>12</sup> It remains a disputed and undecided issue, however, “whether or not there is a true objective ground that differs from intuitions, concepts and ideas, or from any representation or cognition in man, yet has produced them all.”<sup>13</sup>

In questioning the validity of the argument for the existence of the faculty of representation, Schulze specifically directs our attention to Reinhold’s *Philosophy of the Elements*, accusing this work of contradicting its own principles as well as the results of Kant’s *Critique* by “deriving actual representations from a faculty which it takes to be something objectively actual, and by defining it as the cause of the representations.”<sup>14</sup> In his *Critique* Kant has limited the application of the categories only to empirical intuitions. Thus, knowledge is for Kant possible only insofar as the categories are applied to objects of empirical intuition. In his *Theory of the Faculty of Representation*, however, Reinhold has not only simply maintained the restriction of the employment of the categories, but also wanted to establish “with even more precision than Kant” such a narrow application of the categories. Schulze thus finds it completely “incomprehensible whence the *Philosophy of the Elements* obtains the right, in laying down its foundations, to apply the categories of *cause* and *actuality* to a suprasensible object, viz., to a particular faculty of representations which is neither intuitable nor given to any experience.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

According to Schulze, Reinhold failed to give an adequate account of the characteristics of the faculty of representation. What Reinhold ends up doing is simply deriving those characteristics from those of representations, which Schulze finds unproductive: “For, from the constitution of an effect, it is never possible to infer with certainty the constitution of its cause or of the objective ground that supposedly had produced it, or the nature of this ground. Causes even require that they be thought as different from their effects.”<sup>16</sup> By making such derivation or inference, in Schulze’s view, Reinhold has confused thoughts about effects and those about their causes. For this very reason, such a move is invariably invalid, even with the supposition of the existence of the faculty of representation: “How can one possibly hope to discover, therefore, the characteristics of the faculty of representation, even if it were proved that any such faculty actually exists, by an extrapolation of the characteristics of representation?.”<sup>17</sup> What we have now, according to Schulze, is nothing but “a definition of the characteristics of the very representation which is supposed to be the effect of the defined faculty, adorned however with the entirely empty title of *power* or *faculty*.”<sup>18</sup> For Schulze, the derivation of the characteristics of the faculty of representation from those of representations is completely meaningless. It is simply an admission of “human ignorance” regarding the nature of such faculty. This is precisely what Reinhold does in his *Philosophy of the Elements*, according to Schulze. The work arbitrarily assumes “the being of a faculty of representation, and attributes to it as its property and mode of operation what, according to experience, ought to be found in representations instead.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, since Reinhold’s definition of the faculty of representation is derived from the representations themselves, Schulze argues that it can only explain those representations that “are referred to an object and subject and are distinguished from both,” as Reinhold defines it in his *Theory of the Faculty of Representation*, but certainly not those that do not have such characteristics and yet deserve the name “representations.” Thus, Reinhold’s faculty of representation may not be universal enough to cover the different kinds of representations, especially those that lie outside the scope of his definition of representation.

### ***The Charge Against Kant for Failure To Respond To Hume’s Skepticism***

We recall from the previous section Schulze’s reminder that the question regarding the proof of the existence of the faculty of representation must be placed in the context of Hume’s skepticism about the possibility of knowledge. It is Kant who then responded to Hume by establishing a philosophical system that involves “the deduction of the necessary synthetic judgments from the mind, and the determination of their connection to the cognition of empirical objects.”<sup>20</sup> It is important, therefore, for Schulze to pose this question, “Has the Critique of Reason really refuted Hume’s Skepticism?” In other words, Schulze finds it necessary to find out whether or not Hume would find the Kantian position “sufficient and compelling,” a philosophical system which holds that “the necessary synthetic judgments must originate in mind, in the inner source of representations, and that they are the form of experiential cognition.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Schulze first acknowledges that there are unquestionably in human knowledge necessary synthetic judgments, which cannot be understood simply on the basis of mere experience. The necessity of such judgments clearly does not depend on the frequency of their occurrences in our mind. Schulze then argues that there is a circular argument in Kant's first *Critique* in that it "tries to refute Humean skepticism by assuming as already unquestionably certain the very propositions against whose *legitimacy* Hume directed all his skeptical doubts."<sup>22</sup> The *Critique*, as Schulze sees it, claims that the original determinations of the human mind function as the real ground or source of the necessary synthetic judgments found in our knowledge. Yet, it does so by inferring, from the fact that we can only *think* of the faculty of representation as the ground of these judgments, that "the mind must *be* their ground *in actual fact*, too."<sup>23</sup> In other words, Kant assumes that (a) anything present in our knowledge must necessarily have a corresponding objective presence of a real ground and cause that differs from it, and that (b) it is justified to infer from the constitution of something as it is in our representations its objective constitution outside us. For Schulze, Hume's skeptical stance can be refuted only in two ways: first, by establishing "the contrary of his assertions regarding the concepts and principles of causal connection from indisputably certain propositions," and second, by showing "contradictions or *non-sequiturs* in his assertions about the problematic nature of the use we make of our representations of the relationship of cause to effect."<sup>24</sup> Instead of doing either, according to Schulze, Kant's *Critique* establishes its claims precisely on the very propositions that Hume finds "uncertain" and "deceptive."<sup>25</sup>

What is questionable in Kant's *Critique*, in Schulze's view, is not only the major premise of the inference, namely that the necessary synthetic judgments spring from the mind and lie in us *a priori*. Its minor premise is also problematic because it is simply not true that, in order to be thought as possible, these judgments *have* to be thought as present *a priori*, and as originating in the mind. It is possible that all our knowledge has its origin in something other than the mind, for instance, in "the efficacy that objects present *realiter* have on our mind."<sup>26</sup> Here Schulze identifies three unjustifiable moves that Kant has made in the *Critique*. First, it is incorrect to assume, as the *Critique* does, that "the *consciousness of necessity* that accompanies certain synthetic propositions constitutes an *infallible* sign of its having originated *a priori* and in the mind."<sup>27</sup> This necessity is to be distinguished from that which accompanies actual external or internal sensations, for instance, when we perceive the branches of a seen tree in the order in which they are present to the mind at some given moment. The latter lasts only for a time, and occurs only under certain circumstances, whereas the necessity that accompanies certain synthetic judgments occurs each and every time the judgments are present in us. Given the possibility that actual internal or external actions produce in us cognitions which, when combined, would be always accompanied by the consciousness of necessity, one cannot say, according to Schulze, that the necessity of a cognition is "a sure and unerring sign of its origin *a priori*."<sup>28</sup> Second, Kant has argued that we do not have knowledge of things-in-themselves. If this is the case, we cannot know what influence they will or will not bring on the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> See also Nectarios G. Limnatis, *German Idealism and the Problem of Knowledge: Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, Amsterdam: Springer, 2008, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

determinations we have in the mind, either. Third, Kant does not give a better explanation about the presence of necessity in the mind by deriving it from the mind than doing so from objects outside us and from their mode of operation. By choosing one derivation over the other, Kant does nothing but substitute one form of non-knowledge for another. If it were more beneficial and comprehensible to trace the necessary synthetic judgments to the mind rather than to objects outside us, according to Schulze, Kant should be able to show us at least one property in the mind that the external objects lack, which is determinant of the clarity and comprehension of the exposition. Since the *Critique* says nothing about such property, the claim about the *a priori* origin of the necessary synthetic judgments in the mind becomes unwarranted. Hume has indeed argued that the concepts of cause and effect cannot have arisen from experience. Thus, the issue for him is “what, in fact, is to be found in experience.” The *Critique*, by contrast, poses a different issue, namely, “the origin of what is present in our cognition.”<sup>29</sup>

For Schulze, the *Critique* has not demonstrated the full power of the human faculty of cognition. It argues, for instance, that “there is only one way to *think and represent*, as *possible*, that intuitions and concepts which precede actuality of an object refer to it,”<sup>30</sup> namely, as the conditions and forms of knowledge. Schulze contends that there are other ways of thinking about the relation between the object and the corresponding concept in the mind, for example, in terms of a *pre-established harmony* between them and the effects of our faculty of cognition. By virtue of this harmony, the *a priori intuitions* and *concepts* would truly make the object present, as they would also conform to the constitution of the thing-in-itself. Moreover, the fact that human reason has so far failed to accomplish something despite all its efforts, for instance, to know things-in-themselves, it does not follow that it is by nature incapable of doing so. Thus, the question regarding the ground of synthetic *a priori* judgments, in Schulze’s view, eventually leads us to the problem of the nature of the human mind.

For Schulze, what Kant means by the ‘mind’ is not very clear: it could be understood either as a *thing-in-itself*, or as *noumenon*, or a *transcendental idea*.<sup>31</sup> If the *Critique* held the mind, *qua thing-in-itself*, as the source of the necessary synthetic judgments, then the work would clearly contradict the whole spirit of the critical philosophy because we would not have the knowledge of the subject of representations (or the mind). Since the categories ‘cause’ and ‘actuality’ can be applied only to empirical intuition, and since we cannot intuit the subject of representations but can only “immediately perceive the alternations of the inner sense,” then we can never attribute knowable and real actuality to the subject. In short, if the *Critique* were to derive the presence of necessary synthetic judgments in us from the mind *qua* a thing-in-itself, it would betray its own principles, “making up for the lack of natural explanatory causes by supposing supra-natural ones, and encouraging intellectual sloth in the search of comprehensible causes for the presence of those judgments.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, if the mind, *qua noumenon*, were the source of our synthetic judgments, the *Critique* would be “promoting an empty product of thought to source of a constituent component of our knowledge”<sup>33</sup> because *noumenon*, as the critical philosophy understands it, is completely unknown to us. Thinking of the mind *qua transcendental idea* does not work, either, because

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



transcendental ideas in the critical philosophy refer to certain *a priori* concepts that never extend to the objects of experience directly. Their only function is “to encompass the experiential cognition attained through sensibility and understanding, and to produce in them the supreme unity and completeness which reason needs, but which is totally foreign to the understanding.”<sup>34</sup> For this very reason the ideas and principles of reason do not give us the knowledge of a transcendental object understood in the sense of something that exists outside our representations. In short, it is not very clear as to what Kant really means by ‘mind’: “He leaves his readers free to understand by it a ‘thing-in-itself,’ a ‘noumenon,’ or an ‘idea’.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus, for Schulze, the task of the proponents of the Kantian philosophy is not finished yet because Kant has not yet adequately answered Hume’s skepticism: “As things now stand, the charge is not unfounded that its boast of victory over Hume’s skepticism is unjustified and hence idle.”<sup>36</sup> Hume’s attacks on the employment of the concepts and laws of causality are so devastating that “we have been left, after his attacks, with no materials with which to build a system of philosophy.”<sup>37</sup> Schulze realizes that the search for the secure foundation of human knowledge cannot be put to rest, particularly after Kant’s failure to Hume’s attacks: “Until we have remedied this loss in full, therefore, we should not presume to say or decide anything about the origin of human knowledge.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Fichte’s Review of the *Aenesidemus*: Refuting Skepticism and Mapping Out Direction**

Towards the end of his *Aenesidemus*, Schulze expresses his wish for the continuing search for the grounds of human knowledge: “How I wish that the friends of critical philosophy might yet resolve them and put them to rest!”<sup>39</sup> It turns out that friends of the critical philosophy clearly have not given up on the search, despite the latest attacks from Schulze himself. When his review of the *Aenesidemus* was published in 1794, Fichte himself had been thinking for more than two years about the possibility of philosophy as strict science. Fichte definitely admired the author of the *Aenesidemus* and the challenging issues raised in the work. In his writing to J.F. Flatt in the fall of 1793, Fichte called the *Aenesidemus* “one of the most remarkable products of our decade.”<sup>40</sup> This work convinced Fichte that neither Kant nor Reinhold had provided philosophy with a secure foundation.<sup>41</sup>

In his review of the *Aenesidemus*, Fichte proceeds in a rather cautious way. He first begins by acknowledging the contribution of skeptical philosophers to the advancement of philosophy by showing that reason has not, as yet, reached the ultimate goal of turning philosophy into a science: “Skepticism should crown its work by impelling reason to the sublime goal of its enquiries.”<sup>42</sup> After a brief outline of *Aenesidemus*, Fichte then begins to examine the main points of objection from the author of the work. Since Reinhold’s principle of consciousness is not specifically and in great details discussed in

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> Beiser, p. 267.

<sup>41</sup> Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, edited by David S. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 147.

<sup>42</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Review of Aenesidemus*, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, eds. trans. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000, p. 137.

this article, I will simply make a brief point on this issue here. First of all, Fichte agrees with the author of the *Aenesidemus* that the concepts of “distinguishing” and “referring” in Reinhold’s exposition of representation are ambiguous. He then expands *Aenesidemus*’s argument (or disclosed “an even deeper ground”) that Reinhold’s thesis (“In consciousness, representation is distinguished by the subject from subject and object, and is referred to both”), is not an analytical proposition, but rather synthetical: “Obviously the performance of representing, the act of consciousness, is itself a synthesis all the same, for it differentiates and refers.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the principle of consciousness is “based on empirical self-observation and, as such, it undoubtedly expresses abstraction,” a point that Reinhold denied.<sup>44</sup> Yet, there is a wrong assumption here, Fichte suggests, namely that one must begin from an actual fact to establish the first principle of philosophy. Since Reinhold was looking for a sort of normative, rather than factual principle for philosophy, the first principle could not be an “actual fact” but rather a norm-guided action. In other words, Fichte argues that such principle “does not have to express a fact just as *content* [or actual fact]; it can also express a fact as *performance* [or actual deed]. He leaves open the possibility of Reinhold’s proposition about the principle of consciousness to be empirical as long as it was not proven otherwise.<sup>45</sup>

Fichte then shows some of his defense of Reinhold, for instance, when he examines the *Aenesidemus*’s contention about Reinhold’s concept of representation as “narrower than what it has to explain” because such definition, according to the *Aenesidemus*, would leave out intuition as representation. Fichte comments that Reinhold rightly did so because the original object could not be perceived at all. Thus, “intuition can be referred, prior to all other perception, to an object, the *non-ego*, which is opposed to the subject *ab origine*; such *non-ego* in general is not *perceived*, but *posited ab origine*.”<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Fichte defends Reinhold’s view against the *Aenesidemus*’s contention that “the object and subject occur immediately in consciousness, and that representation, by contrast, occurs mediately.”<sup>47</sup> He argues that in empirical consciousness the absolute subject, the *ego*, and the absolute object, the *non-ego*, occur, by a representation, by being referred to them: “They are in it only mediately, *qua* representing, and *qua* represented.”<sup>48</sup> Fichte’s conclusion about the *Aenesidemus*’s treatment of Reinhold’s principle of consciousness is that the objections in the work have failed to shake the foundation of the principle *as such*, but nonetheless are important to it “as *first* principle of all philosophy and as a mere fact.” Therefore, according to Fichte, “the objections make a new justification necessary.”<sup>49</sup>

One can only access the “nature of Aenesidemian skepticism,” as Fichte calls it, when one looks carefully into the *Aenesidemus*’s critique of Reinhold’s concept of the faculty of representation. For Schulze, such skepticism “leans towards a very presumptuous dogmatism,” and, to some extent, it even “takes this dogmatic position as established and granted, in spite of its own previously stated principles.”<sup>50</sup> Fichte accuses the author of the *Aenesidemus* of completely misunderstanding or misinterpreting Reinhold and charging the latter’s Philosophy of the Elements for claims which the author himself

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<sup>43</sup> Fichte, *Review of Aenesidemus*, p. 140.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

“has imported into it from his own store.”<sup>51</sup> The author of *Aenesidemus* seems to think, according to Fichte, that the faculty of representation exists as a thing *that represents*, completely independent of the one representing it. This author fails to recognize that “the faculty of representation exists *for* the faculty of representation and *through* the faculty of representation.”<sup>52</sup> For Fichte, this is a necessary circle that no one can get out of. One cannot access the mind from the outside, and there is no mind that is not already for itself or related to itself. To insist otherwise, as the author of the *Aenesidemus* does, is to show one’s ignorance of oneself and of what one really wants.

Further, Fichte corrects the basic assumption that the author of the *Aenesidemus* made, namely, that for Hume all our representations of things derive from their impressions upon us. Hume could not have done so without already presupposing the law of causality, which he was then disputing. Rather, according to Fichte, Hume was proposing the principle only *hypothetically* in the context of the then prevailing philosophical system of John Locke in order to challenge the system on its own terms. What Hume was really proposing are the following: (a) Whatever is to be understood, must be represented; (b) In order to be real, any cognition must conform to the things outside it; (c) There is no principle that could guarantee our acquisition of knowledge of objects insofar as these objects are thought to be something different from our representations; (d) Even the principle of causality is no help in this matter; neither is the principle of contradiction in grounding the causality principle for the required determination.

Having said that, Fichte then examines the grounds for the claim in the *Aenesidemus* that Kant has failed to respond to Hume’s skepticism. First, it is argued in the work that since “the disposition of our mind is all that we can *think* of as the ground of synthetic judgments, it is inferred that this mind must *be actually* and *in itself* the ground judgments.”<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, Schulze found this move problematic because it was precisely this inference that Hume had contested. In response to this criticism, Fichte asked the author of the *Aenesidemus* (a) to explain to the public what the following statement could mean: “A certain A, which indeed itself a *thought*, is *in itself* – and *independent of our thinking* – the ground on which we judge,” and (b) to indicate where Kant said that the mind is the ground of indubitable synthetic forms of judgments and that he already presupposed the validity of the law of causality in his search for the ground of those judgments. This, again, seems for Fichte to prove the ignorance of the author of the *Aenesidemus*. Second, Kant never argued, as the *Aenesidemus* claimed, that he had proven the possibility of thinking *only* of our mind as the ground of synthetic judgments.<sup>54</sup> Nobody held such an opinion, according to Fichte. Moreover, while this objection might work against an empirical proof, it would certainly be misplaced to be used against a proof derived from a *a priori* principle.

In a good number of paragraphs Fichte shows how the author of *Aenesidemus* himself had not understood Kant’s first *Critique*. For instance, when Schulze claimed for the necessity for us “to think of a sensation as being present during the time in which it is present” while the necessity “would come from outside,” Fichte retorts that it is precisely the task of the critical philosophy to show that we do not need a transition from the outer to the inner, or the other way around, and to demonstrate that “all that arises in our mind is to

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

be completely explained and comprehended by the mind itself.”<sup>55</sup> Regarding Schulze’s treatment of the different possible functions of the mind when grounding *a priori* cognitions, Fichte agrees that the mind cannot do so as thing-in-itself because, as Kant has argued, the category of causality cannot be applied to a *noumenon*. Neither can we apply to it the principle of real ground, but only that of logical ground. But, “inasmuch as the mind is the ultimate ground of certain thought-forms, it is noumenon; inasmuch as these are unconditionally necessary laws, the mind is a transcendental idea, but one which is distinguished from all the rest in that we realize it through intellectual intuition, through the *ego sum*.”<sup>56</sup> Fichte suspects that the author of the *Aenesidemus* raises his objections against this procedure because “he wants the absolute existence [*Existenz*] or autonomy of the *ego* to be valid *in itself* (just how and for whom we do not know), whereas it should only hold *for the ego itself*. It is *for the ego* the *ego* is *what* it is, and is *why* it is. Our knowledge cannot advance beyond this proposition.”<sup>57</sup> On this issue the difference between the critical philosophy and the Humean system is clear: Hume’s system does not acknowledge the human limitations in this respect, but rather still leaves open the possibility of going beyond it; the critical philosophy, by contrast, has demonstrated the absolute impossibility of such an advance. For the critical philosophy, according to Fichte, it is simply “a whim, a dream, a non-thought” to think of a thing that supposedly has existence [*Existenz*] and certain constitutional characteristics *in itself* and independently of any faculty of representation.

Towards the end of his review on the *Aenesidemus*, Fichte returns to the discussion of the thing-in-itself in Kant’s philosophy by pointing out “that old mischief” that views the thing-in-itself as existing independently of any faculty of representation. This mischief, according to Fichte, lies at the origin of both the skeptical and dogmatic objections against the critical philosophy. He interprets Kant’s distinction between phenomena and noumena as that which “was certainly intended to hold only provisionally and, for the general reader.”<sup>58</sup> Fichte seems to hold that there is in human nature a “drive,” so to speak, to always connect the object with the human faculty of representation and each intelligence: “Along with the thing, one always thinks oneself as the intelligence striving to know it.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, it is “absolutely impossible” for human nature to think of a thing independently of any faculty of representation, as the author of the *Aenesidemus* argues. Fichte then gives his own interpretation of Kant by arguing that Kant “has not traced the pure forms of intuition, space and time, to a single principle as he has done for the categories; nor could he have done so in accordance with his plan of merely paving the way for science.”<sup>60</sup> Clearly for Fichte, the critical philosophy will not reach its ultimate goal before it is grounded on a single principle and becomes science.<sup>61</sup> Reinhold has moved in this direction by “drawing the attention of philosophical reason to the fact that the whole of philosophy must be traced back to one single principle, and that one cannot discover the system of the permanent modes of operation of the human spirit prior to the discovery of its keystone.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> See Nectarios, *op.cit.*, pp. 112 ff.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

With this claim Fichte shows us what he himself is planning to do with his philosophy, as he puts the unfinished task of the critical philosophy upon his shoulder.<sup>63</sup>

### **Conclusion: the Directional Shift in the Critical Philosophy**

We have seen in the above analysis Schulze's criticism of Reinhold's Philosophy of the Elements, and more generally of Kant's critical philosophy. He shows that nothing has been known or demonstrated with certainty about the existence or properties of things-in-themselves, nor about the origins and conditions of knowledge, more specifically, the existence and nature of the faculty of representation. In positing the existence of the faculty of representation as its cause, according to Schulze, Reinhold has violated the principle that the categories are applicable only to possible objects of experience. In a similar manner, Kant too has failed to recognize the distinction between the cause and condition of knowledge. The problem arises as to how we are to access the origins and conditions of knowledge since they are not within the limit of human experience. This question poses a great challenge to the critical philosophy, and in some significant way, changes the direction it has taken. In response to this question, Fichte later introduces the concept of "intellectual intuition," which is the act by which the 'I' intuits itself, by which it is given to itself. In such an intuition the 'I' grasps or apprehends a necessary truth that can serve to justify some other claims. Fichte then argues that the basic first principle of philosophy, which Reinhold has sought in his principle of consciousness, can *only* be given in such an intellectual intuition, and therefore, no further justification is needed for it. Further, Fichte shows that it is the nature of the mind to be self-referential. One cannot find out what the mind is unless one makes reference to the fact that the mind is already related to itself. Thus, in Fichte's view, Schulze's demand that we first figure out what the mind-in-itself is and *then* arrive at the belief that we have access to it, is completely absurd.

Going through the development of the critical philosophy in the wake of Schulze's attacks, we recognize the peculiar nature of Schulze's skepticism in that it is *not* anti-critical or anti-reason. Unlike Jacobi, Schulze does not argue that reason can *never* provide the single principle that grounds philosophy and that it can only come from a kind of faith. He rather still shares the belief of the critical philosophy in the power of reason to provide a secure foundation for knowledge. In other words, in his critique of Kant and Reinhold, Schulze uses the very principle that Kant has provided at the beginning of his first *Critique*, namely, that all our beliefs must be able to sustain the free and open examination of reason.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the proponents of the critical philosophy, however, Schulze argues that the critical philosophy has failed to perform the task it has taken up to answer the Humean attacks on the possibility of knowledge. In this sense Schulze's skepticism is not at odds with reason as such, or certainly not with the guiding principle of the critical philosophy. It is incumbent upon such philosophy to take up the challenges. If it refused to answer the critique, Schulze seems to argue, it would lapse into the very dogmatism it has criticized, and the whole foundation of this philosophy would collapse. Fichte did pick up these challenges by the discovery of the nature of the mind and of the basic structure of self-consciousness, and his responses to them indeed changed the direction in which the critical philosophy had been moving. What Fichte was doing shows us the inherent character of dialogue within philosophy itself in the form of self-criticism. Without such a dialogue, our knowledge, including philosophical one, will not make any progress.

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<sup>63</sup> Fichte ends his review by commenting on the attacks against the Kantian moral theology, which I left out in this article since it was not discussed in the section on Schulze's *Aenesidemus*.

<sup>64</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the First Edition, A xii, and its footnote.

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