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herausgegeben von

Helmut Girndt (Duisburg)
Wolfgang Janke (Wuppertal)
Wolfgang H. Schrader (†) (Siegen)
Hartmut Traub (Mülheim a. d. Ruhr)



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Schelling's Subversion of Fichtean Monism, 1794–1796

Richard Fincham

(1) The early Schelling's relation with Fichte is a topic about which there is little agreement. It is easy to read Schelling's *On the Possibility of a Universal Form of All Philosophy* of 1794 as exhibiting »discipleship,« just as it is easy to realise that, within later works, this initial idolatry turns into critical ambivalence. It is, however, far less easy to arrive at any decisive conclusion concerning either *when* Schelling's discipleship comes to an end or *what* provokes his change of attitude.

This paper endeavours to shed some light upon these questions. It is suggested that the dissolution of Schelling's initial discipleship can, to a large extent, be explained by considering criticisms of the first exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* found within the writings of Schelling's then friend, Friedrich Hölderlin, and the man who Hölderlin considered his »philosophical mentor,«¹ Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. At all times, Schelling continues to agree with Fichte that Kant's transcendental philosophy must be reconstructed as a monistic system. But, it is argued here, that Schelling becomes increasingly dissatisfied with Fichte's (early) attempts at such a reconstruction insofar as they revoke central tenets of Kant's critical philosophy that, for Schelling, are in no need of revision.

Such an interpretation is suggested by Schelling's assertion within his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* of 1796 that »by itself the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, or contains, the genuine *Wissenschaftslehre*.«² If

¹ F. Hölderlin, »Brief Nr. 118« in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), vol. 3, p. 225.

² F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophisches Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus in Werke* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1976ff.), vol. 3, p. 72.

Kant's *Critique* is the genuine *Wissenschaftslehre*, the question emerges as to precisely what status does the Fichtean *Wissenschaftslehre* possess for Schelling in 1796. It is argued here that by 1796 it has become, for Schelling, an illegitimate system, a worthy, but nonetheless flawed attempt to reconstruct Kantian transcendental philosophy as a monistic system, which Schelling no longer wishes to wholeheartedly support.

(2) One contentious feature of Fichte's early expositions of his *Wissenschaftslehre* was the manner in which they remained in the shadow of Reinholdian *Grundsatzphilosophie*.³ In these early expositions Fichte thus seems committed to the claim that the ultimate foundation of a system of transcendental philosophy could be expressed as a *Grundsatz* from which particular principles were synthetically derivable. Fichte thus derives *a priori* truths about experience from propositions expressing that which is *not* an object of experience, namely the transcendental I. This proved controversial insofar as, for more orthodox Kantians, it seemed to propose deriving *facts* from that which can only be *thought*. Immediately after its initial appearance, therefore, many thinkers dismissed Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as an insufficiently critical system. For example, in the early months of 1795, Niethammer writes that 'philosophy cannot begin *a priori* and instantly synthetically descend from an *a priori* immediately certain proposition, as something in itself unconditional, to the series of conditions.'⁴ Niethammer thus dismisses Fichte's 'absolute first *Grundsatz*' as 'a fantasy of the brain' and writes that 'in the whole extent of our knowledge [...] no proposition [*Satz*] can be found that has the required apodictic unconditional certainty to ground upon it [...] a system of our knowledge.'⁵ It seems plausible that these critical reflections influenced Hölderlin. For, as is revealed by the fragment, 'Judgement and Being,' whilst Hölderlin agrees with Fichte that the system of knowledge must be grounded by One unitary foundation, he is adamant that this foundation eludes expression within a proposition. *Contra* Fichte, Hölderlin thus de-

3 For a discussion of these issues, see M. Stamm, 'Prinzipien und System: Rezeptionsmodelle der Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes 1794' in *Fichte-Studien* 9 (1995).

4 F. I. Niethammer, 'Von den Ansprüchen des gemeinen Verstandes an die Philosophie' in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1969ff.), vol. 1, p. 23.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 44-5.

clares that, rather than expressing the absolutely unitary ground of the system of knowledge, the identical judgement (*Urtheit*) '»I am I« is the most fitting example of arche-separation [*Urtheilung*].'⁶ Therefore, for both Hölderlin and Niethammer, neither the proposition 'I am I' nor, indeed, any proposition can serve as a *Grundsatz* expressing the ultimate foundation of the system of knowledge.

Could it be that Schelling developed an increasingly ambivalent attitude towards Fichte through an awareness of these issues? There is much evidence to support this conclusion, although it remains unclear whether this was due to the influence of Niethammer and Hölderlin or his own independent reflections.

Within *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy*, Schelling proceeds as if he were fully committed to the *Grundsatzphilosophie* initially promulgated by Fichte. For, Schelling claims there that: philosophy is only scientific insofar as its particular propositions are systematically interconnected with a single *Grundsatz*; that the *Grundsatz* of every science cannot itself be conditioned within the science grounded upon it; and that the science of philosophy cannot itself be conditioned by any other science.⁸ So, just like Fichte, Schelling argues that philosophy is the 'theory (science) of all science,' which is itself grounded upon 'an absolutely unconditional *Grundsatz*,' which he expresses as 'I is I.'⁹ And, like Fichte again, Schelling argues that the philosopher should begin with this *Grundsatz* and dismisses the regressive analytic-inductive method employed by Kant.¹⁰

However, Schelling's *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (written a few months later) exhibits a marked ambivalence towards this aspect of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. There, Schelling maintains that a regressive analytic-inductive method is at least just as valid as its opposite. Furthermore,

6 Hölderlin, 'Urteil und Sein' in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 502.

7 See Schelling, *Ueber die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt* in *Werke*, vol. 1, p. 269.

8 See *ibid.*, pp. 270-1.

9 See *ibid.*, p. 280. Fichte himself defined the 'system' of transcendental philosophy - or '»Wissenschaftslehre« - as '»the science of science as such.«' *Fichte's sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Veit & Co., 1845-6), vol. 1, p. 45.

10 See Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 1, p. 279. Schelling's dismissal of Kant's analytic-inductive method is most probably inspired by Fichte's remarks within his *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. See *Fichte's sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, p. 57.

whilst Schelling, at one point, seems to paraphrase Fichte, in claiming that the »sheer Being« of the »absolute I« is adequately expressed by the »Grundsatz [...] ›I am I,‹¹¹ he nevertheless, a few pages later, issues the ambiguous caveat that »of course it would be incomprehensible how the science [of philosophy] could be grounded upon One *Grundsatz*, if one were to suppose that science is, as it were, *encapsulated* [eingeschachtelt] within that *Grundsatz*.«¹² Another passage makes it clear that, although Schelling believes that the unitary unconditional foundation of knowledge can be adequately expressed by the *Grundsatz* »I am I,« he does not believe that the specific dynamics of the manner in which the unconditional grounds the *conditioned* can be rendered fully comprehensible by Fichte's synthetic dialectical argumentation. For whereas Fichte maintained that the fundamental propositions of formal logic are themselves conditioned by more fundamental *Grundsätze* that express the unconditional foundation of human knowledge, Schelling argues that these very same *Grundsätze* are in fact conditioned by formal logic. For Schelling claims that the *Grundsatz* »I am I« is an identical proposition of *particular content*, conditioned by the *formal, content-less* proposition, $A = A$.¹³ This is, however, not to say that Schelling claims that formal logic is a science over and above the science of philosophy. It is rather the case that Schelling's »absolute I,« as the unconditional foundation of all knowledge, conditions the proposition $A = A$, which in turn conditions the *Grundsatz* expressing the »absolute I,« »I am I.«¹⁴ So, whereas Schelling continues to

11 Schelling, *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* in *Werke*, vol. 2, p. 103.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 113n.

13 »[...] the proposition $A = A$, as a *general formula* (for positing as self-identical), precedes all other formal *Grundsätzen*. Insofar as it is a *particular* proposition – (of particular *content*) – it stands under the general species of absolutely posited propositions, which are conditioned by it insofar as it is a mere formula.« *Ibid.*, p. 148.

14 »All unconditionally posited propositions, that is, all those whose positing is conditioned by the identity of the I [...] can be called *thetical*. Thetical propositions are all those which are conditioned only by being posited in the I, that is, since everything is posited in the I, all those which are *unconditionally posited*. [...] Among thetical propositions, one kind is that of identical propositions. For instance, $A = A$ can be taken as a particular proposition (among those in which subject and predicate are the same, i.e., whose subject has only itself as predicate. Thus I is only I, God only God ...).« *Ibid.*

claim that the »absolute I« can be expressed by the *Grundsatz*, »I am I,« he nevertheless in some sense disassociates the *Grundsatz* as *such* from its referent. Therefore, even within *Of the I*, Schelling appears critical of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*. For, Schelling claims there that Fichte's synthetic derivations are entirely conditioned by formal logic, and thus cannot – as Fichte believes – access an unconditioned sphere that itself conditions formal logic. So, although we are, for Schelling, compelled to postulate an unconditioned foundation grounding all knowledge, formal logic provides an ultimate point, beyond which knowledge cannot reach. Schelling thus returns towards a more orthodox Kantian position, to maintain that the precise reasons *why* we *think* in accordance with certain forms always remains inscrutable.

This critique of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie* nevertheless remains deeply veiled within *Of the I*. Within 1796, however, when writing a counter-critique of a review of *Of the I*, Schelling is no longer so reluctant to explicitly attack this aspect of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The review was written by Johann Benjamin Erhard, a close friend of Niethammer, who shared his negative assessment of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*.¹⁵ Either a reading of Schelling's *On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy* or simply the superficial similarities between Schelling's *Of the I* and the *Wissenschaftslehre* had obviously convinced Erhard that Schelling was simply Fichte's disciple. Erhard therefore mistakenly attacks *Of the I* with arguments targeted at the very *Grundsatzphilosophie* to which Schelling's text does not subscribe. Schelling was therefore particularly angry about this misrepresentation of his position, and it is for this reason that the counter-critique contains his most forceful denunciation of Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*; a denunciation, which ironically largely agrees with the position of the reviewer to whom the counter-critique is directed. For there, Schelling tells us that the purpose of *Of the I* was: »to liberate philosophy from the stagnation into which it had unavoidably to lapse owing to

15 For an insight into the relationship between Erhard and Niethammer and their views concerning Fichte's first exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, see Niethammer, *Korrespondenz mit dem Herbart- und Erhard-Kreis*, W. Baum, ed. (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1995). The content of these letters are discussed within Stamm, »Prinzipien und System: Rezeptionsmodelle der Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes 1794« in *Fichte-Studien* 9 (1995).

ill-fated inquiries into a first *Grundsatz of philosophy*. [The author, i.e., Schelling himself] wanted to prove that true philosophy can start only from free actions, and that abstract *Grundsätze* as the mainstay of this science could lead only to the *death* of all philosophy. The question as to which *Grundsatz* could furnish the starting point for philosophy seemed to him unworthy of a man who feels himself to be free [...]. Since the author considers philosophy as a product of a *free man*, or as an act of freedom, he believes that he has a higher conception of it than many a tearful philosopher who thought he had found the lack of unanimity among professors to be the cause of the atrocities of the French Revolution and of all the unhappiness of mankind, and who wanted to remedy this unhappiness with an empty and futile *Grundsatz* in which he imagined philosophy to be encapsulated [*ingeschachtelt*].¹⁶

At the time of writing this counter-critique Schelling was living much closer to Jena in Leipzig and, at that point, cannot have been unaware of the general dissatisfaction with Fichtean *Grundsatzphilosophie*. At the time of writing *Of the I*, however, Schelling, who was then at the Tübingen seminary, remained distanced from developments in Jena, and therefore may well have adopted this critical stance towards this aspect of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* through his own independent reflections.

(3) Fichte's initial indebtedness to Reinholdian *Grundsatzphilosophie* was not, however, the only feature of his work that proved contentious for its early audience. There was also criticism of Fichte's transformation of Kant's transcendental I into a *sheer activity* that is *immediately* its own object. For this overstepped the central tenet of Kantian criticism that neither the transcendental I nor anything unconditional could be an object of immediate consciousness and, to some of its initial audience, it therefore seemed that Fichtean transcendental philosophy degenerated into the very kind of uncritical dogmatic metaphysics to which Kant's *Critique* was directed. Such reflections are clearly exhibited within Hölderlin's letter to Hegel of January 26th 1795. For in this letter Hölderlin argues that because any object of immediate consciousness must appear within time, it makes no sense to talk of the I as an activity that intuitively itself *as it is in itself*, and thus makes no sense to equate a unitary absolute sphere with I-

consciousness.¹⁷ Hölderlin thus denies that the unitary unconditional foundation of the system of knowledge can be, as Fichte believed, coherently conceived as invested with I-consciousness. That Schelling was thinking along similar lines is demonstrated by the fact that, soon after receiving this letter from Hölderlin, Hegel received a letter from Schelling that makes almost exactly the same point. For Schelling tells Hegel that »consciousness is not possible without an object. But [...] for the absolute I, there is no object *whatsoever*; for if there were, the absolute I would cease to be absolute.«¹⁸ Schelling thus agrees with Hölderlin that *all* consciousness is essentially intentional in structure, so that self-consciousness cannot occur within the unitary Absolute. Their similar approaches to this issue may well have been inspired by earlier studies of Spinoza at the Tübingen seminary and, in this regard, it is highly suggestive that in these letters they both equate Fichte's »absolute I« with Spinoza's »God.«

Spinoza argues that God cannot possess an »intellect« analogous to our own insofar as God's »thought« cannot, like man's intellect, be posterior to [...] or simultaneous with the objects of understanding.¹⁹ For, as the unified foundation of all Being, God *qua Natura naturans*, cannot Himself think of anything particular. However, in Jacobi's influential work, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*, it is maintained that Spinoza's God is incapable of any *thought* at all. Jacobi thus writes that »because of [His] transcendental *unity* and thoroughgoing absolute infinity [Spinoza's God] can have no object of thought.«²⁰ Such re-

17 »Fichte's [...] *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [...] will interest you very much. In the beginning I suspected him very much of dogmatism; he appears [...] to have stood very much at the crossroads, or still to stand there – his absolute I (= Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and outside of it there is nothing; hence there is no object [*Object*] for this I, for otherwise not all reality would be within it; however, a consciousness without object cannot be thought, and if I myself am this object, then I am as such necessarily limited, even if it were only within time, hence not absolute; therefore within the absolute I I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness, I am (for myself) nothing, hence the absolute I is (for me) nothing.« Hölderlin, »Brief Nr. 95« in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 3, p. 176.

18 Letter from Schelling to Hegel, 4th February 1795. Cited in the »Editorischer Bericht« concerning Schelling's *Vom Ich* in Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 24.

19 B. Spinoza, *The Ethics*, S. Shirley, trans., S. Feldman, ed. (Hackett, 1992), p. 45.

20 F. H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn in Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998ff.), vol. 1.1., p. 19.

flections were clearly important for Hölderlin, who, in some notes on Spinoza composed in the Tübingen seminary, reproduces this quotation practically word for word.²¹ Hölderlin thus interprets Spinoza as maintaining that the dichotomous structure of intentionality contradicts the absolutely unitary foundation of a philosophical system. In this respect, we can see how, for Hölderlin, Kant's conception that I-consciousness is essentially characterised by *thought's* self-reflection, and that such self-reflection has an intentional structure, in no way contradicts the teachings of Spinoza. Furthermore, the fact that his own reading of Spinoza was almost certainly influenced by Jacobi (and possibly Hölderlin also) may explain why Schelling also sees things in this way. So, this may explain why both Hölderlin and Schelling negatively react to Fichte's investment of the Absolute with I-consciousness. So, whilst they agree with Fichte that Kantian transcendental philosophy must be reconciled with some kind of Spinozistic monism, they are undoubtedly dissatisfied with the way that Fichte's reconciliation subverts Kantianism by claiming that I-consciousness is originally non-intentional and subverts Spinozism by investing the Absolute with I-consciousness. As far as both Hölderlin and Schelling are concerned, however, it is possible for such a reconciliation to remain true to the doctrines of both Kant and Spinoza by maintaining that I-consciousness is characterised by a dichotomous intentional structure, grounded by an Absolute that is itself devoid of consciousness.

Schelling's *Of the I* can indeed be read as the bare outline of a philosophical system that synthesises the thought of Kant and Spinoza without subverting their central tenets. For it describes how any consciousness *at all* can only occur within the »empirical« sphere in which subject and object reciprocally condition one another.²² The »absolute I,« which Schelling postulates as underlying this sphere, is thus conceived as neither possessing consciousness nor as something which can become an object of con-

21 »The cause of the world is neither understanding nor will. For will and understanding do not occur *without an object*. And *no object occurs* as a result of the transcendental *unity* and absolute infinity of the first cause. And it is incoherent to produce a concept prior to its object, to have a determinate will before there is something to which it could relate itself.« Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 492.

22 See Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 88–9.

sciousness.²³ However, for Schelling, my consciousness of myself as I re-establishes the unity of the Absolute within the multifarious empirical sphere. *Contra* Fichte, I-consciousness is not an expression of freedom, but rather »an unfree urge,«²⁴ insofar as it is an action to which the »empirical subject« is compelled by the »absolute I.«²⁵ Furthermore, echoing Kant's arguments within the »Transcendental Deduction,« Schelling describes how it is the conscious subject's »striving« to re-establish the unity of the »absolute I« that conditions our objective experience.²⁶ The conscious subject »unifies« a manifold of disparate representations to constitute objective experience and, in so doing, it recognises its reflection within that unified objective experience to produce I-consciousness, and it is precisely by means of such I-consciousness that the unity of the »absolute I« is said to be re-established. So, although, for Schelling, the »absolute I« is *itself* in no way invested with I-consciousness, it is only through the assumption of an »absolute I« that both the »unity« of our objective experience and our unity of consciousness are conceivable.²⁷ So, whilst the relation that Kant identifies between I-consciousness and objective experience is, for Schelling, only conceivable through the assumption of a Fichtean »absolute I,« he nevertheless succeeds in showing how Kantian transcendental

23 See *ibid.*, p. 90.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

25 Within *Of the I*, Schelling describes the apperceptive I-subject as the »empirical I« insofar as he believes that the appellation »empirical« should be applied to anything within the *conditioned* subject-object sphere. He thus tells us that »the word *empirical* is usually taken in a much too narrow sense. Empirical is everything that is in contrast to the pure I, everything essentially related to a not-I, even the original positing of any contrast [*Entgegensetzen*] as posited in some not-I, a positing which is an act that has its source in the I itself, the very act by which any contrasting becomes possible. *Pure* is what exists without relation to objects. *Experienced* is what is possible only *through* objects. *A priori* is what is possible only *in relation* to objects but not *through* them. *Empirical* is that *through which* objects are possible.« *Ibid.*, p. 100n.

26 »My empirical I is subject to change, but in order to retain its identity in that change it strives to elevate the objects which change it, to a *unity* – (categories) – and thus, through the identity of its *striving*, it establishes the identity of its *existence* [*Daseins*] as a permanent principle of representations in the change of time.« *Ibid.*, p. 135.

27 »If there were no absolute I, one could not comprehend how a not-I could produce a logical I, a unity of thinking.« *Ibid.*

philosophy can be granted a monistic foundation without overstepping its central tenets.

It is also possible to read Hölderlin's »Judgement and Being« as the programmatic sketch of a philosophical system that likewise synthesises the thought of Kant and Spinoza without overstepping their central tenets. For there Hölderlin also maintains that *all* consciousness is only conceivable within the sphere in which a divided subject and object are reciprocally related, whilst also maintaining that the division between subject and object necessarily presupposes an absolute unity that cannot be conceived as invested with I-consciousness.²⁸ However, Hölderlin differs from Schelling insofar as he argues that we cannot justifiably describe the Absolute as an »I.« So, Hölderlin could not support Schelling's claims that I-consciousness is the product of a fractured »absolute I« striving to re-unite itself. Indeed, in a later text, »On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit,« Hölderlin seems to provide a critique of such a conception insofar as he reflects upon a position that conceives of the I »as an oppositable unity [*entgegensetzbares Einiges*]»,²⁹ that is, an original unity that fractures itself into an I-subject and I-object. For Hölderlin, such a position declares the opposition of I-subject and I-object to be »a deception or contingency that [the I] produces for itself, in order to know its identity,« and is objectionable insofar as it follows that the I *as such* is not actually conscious of *itself* at all.³⁰ Hölderlin therefore claims that, whilst I-consciousness necessarily presupposes a unitary Absolute, it cannot be legitimately described as an »I« and that it is in fact not wholly subjective at all. In »Judgement and Being,« it is thus described as »Being proper [*Sein schlechthin*]». «³¹

This argument against the early Schellingian claim that the I is an »opposable unity« follows from Hölderlin's position in »Judgement and Being« and it is therefore quite likely that Hölderlin was in possession of this

argument in 1795. If this were the case, then Hölderlin would have had the opportunity to confront Schelling with such an argument, to endeavour to convince him to adopt a conception of the Absolute nearer his own.

(4) Although the ambivalence Schelling exhibits towards Fichte's monism in *Of the I* parallels many of Hölderlin's contemporaneous reflections on these issues, it seems unlikely that this concordance was the product of mutual influence. When considering Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, however, there need be no hesitation concerning whether Hölderlin could have influenced the position taken in that work. For in June 1795 Hölderlin left Jena for Nürtingen near Tübingen and met Schelling on at least two occasions for philosophical discussion, as is documented within letters Hölderlin sent Niethammer, in which he speaks approvingly of Schelling's »new convictions« and intimates that they should meet with Niethammer's approval.³² There is, however, little agreement concerning the precise nature of these »new convictions« that Hölderlin refers to.³³ However, it is possible that Hölderlin is referring to a turn within Schelling's work that he himself is responsible for influencing. For within the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling, like Hölderlin, clearly no longer believes that the »Absolute as such« is exhausted by the purely subjective spontaneity of thought and freedom.

The »criticism« and »dogmatism« evoked within the title of that work refer to positions that conceive the Absolute as, respectively, either an »absolute subject« or an »absolute object.« This distinction seems to refer to the contrast between Schelling's own position in *Of the I* on the one hand and Spinoza's monism on the other. A second distinction is drawn between »a critique of our cognitive faculties« and »dogmatism [*Dogmatismus*]«, a distinction which clearly refers to Kant's critical philosophy on the one hand, and the uncritical metaphysical positions to which it is directed on the other. Kantian criticism and dogmatism are, for Schelling, two different approaches to »theoretical philosophy,« and thus

32 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 225.

33 For two alternative interpretations see: D. Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*, E. Förster, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 114–6 and A. Pieper's »Editorischer Bericht« concerning Schelling's *Philosophisches Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritik* in Schelling, *Werke* vol. 3, pp. 27–9.

28 »If I say: I am I, the subject (I) and the object (I) are not united in such a way that no separation could be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated; on the contrary, the I is only possible by means of this separation of the I from the I. How can I say: I! without self-consciousness? Yet how is self-consciousness possible: In opposing myself to myself, separating myself from myself, yet in recognising myself as the same in the opposed regardless of the separation.« Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 503.

29 Ibid., p. 538.

30 Ibid., p. 540n.

31 Ibid., p. 502.

concern knowledge of empirical reality. In contrast, »criticism« and »dogmatism« describe philosophical systems which enter the sphere of »practical philosophy« in order to *postulate* something regarding a unitary Absolute underlying empirical reality. These distinctions are designed to establish the result that, whilst it may refute dogmatism, Kantian criticism is not inconsistent with Spinoza's monism. That is, although it must declare it to be theoretically indemonstrable, Kantian criticism cannot refute the claim that the Absolute is an »absolute object« insofar as it has no validity outside the sphere of the »fact of experience.«

Schelling argues that the conflict between criticism and dogmatism arises because philosophy *begins* within the empirical sphere, in which subject and object are divided, so that any *ascent* beyond this sphere seems to require that we privilege one of the two sides of this divide. In this way, Schelling provides an argument against Fichte that entirely agrees with Niethammer's reflections. For whilst Niethammer argued that philosophy cannot *begin* from anything other than the »fact of experience,« Schelling denies here that the assertion that the Absolute is purely subjective can be based upon something that we know with more certainty than the »fact of experience.« We can therefore see that, in the space of a mere eighteen months, Schelling has totally changed his position: In *On the Possibility of a Universal Form of Philosophy* he argued, like Fichte, that philosophy should begin with the unconditioned and descend to the conditioned; in *Of the I*, this movement was declared to be just as valid as its opposite; but, in the *Philosophical Letters*, he argues that such a movement is illegitimate.

As in *Of the I*, Schelling argues that an ascent beyond the »fact of experience« is necessary insofar as Kant's philosophy has shown that theoretical knowledge, experience and self-consciousness are only possible on the assumption of a prior absolute unity, which Kant himself did not investigate. But, because this unitary Absolute grounds the possibility of theoretical knowledge, it cannot itself be an object of theoretical knowledge. Because it claims that the generation of the »fact of consciousness« is »graspable« as an object of theoretical knowledge, Fichte's early *Wissenschaftslehre* thus becomes viewed by Schelling as an invalid or inconsistent system. This criticism is clearly implicit within Schelling's claim that, insofar as it provides the »science« of all theoretical knowledge, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the *genuine Wissenschaftslehre*: »The *Critique of Pure Reason* [...] is valid for all systems, while every system bears the stamp of individuality on the

face of it, because no system can be completed otherwise than *practically* [...]. The more closely a philosophy approaches its system, the less it can claim universal validity [*Allgemeingültigkeit*].

By itself the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, or contains, the genuine *Wissenschaftslehre* because it is valid for all science. Nevertheless, science may rise to an absolute principle [*Prinzip*] and it *must* do so if it is to become a *system*. But the *Wissenschaftslehre* cannot possibly establish One absolute principle in order to become a *system* (in the narrower sense of the word). It must contain, not an absolute principle, not a definite and consummate system, but the canon for all principles and systems.³⁴ There are three ways in which this passage exhibits a deep ambivalence towards Fichte's early *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Firstly, the strict relation between the concepts of »science« and »system,« established by Reinhold and taken over by Fichte, falls apart here. For Schelling, »science« and »system« are no longer interchangeable terms, and he himself returns to a Kantian conception of »science« whilst continuing to embrace a Fichtean conception of systematicity. For Schelling at this time, a science is a consistent body of theoretical knowledge-claims and, insofar as Kant's *Critique* provides a consistent body of knowledge-claims regarding the conditions of possibility of *all* theoretical knowledge, it provides a »science of science,« and is thus fully entitled to the name *Wissenschaftslehre*. Yet, *this* »science of science« still necessarily presupposes a unitary foundation, and it is assertions concerning this Absolute which produce a »system.«

Secondly, Schelling no longer believes that assertions regarding the Absolute can expect universal assent. Whilst, for Reinhold and Fichte, the assertion of the foundation of their systems was supposed to adduce universal acceptance, for Schelling, the foundation of a system is merely a *practical postulate* that cannot adduce such assent.

Thirdly, whilst Schelling continues to agree with Fichte that Kant's philosophy is insufficiently systematic, he denies that any assertions attempting to »systematise« it can themselves constitute knowledge-claims.

34 Schelling, *Philosophisches Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus* in *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 72.

He thus tells us that: »no system [...] is, in its consummation, an object of knowledge.«³⁵

Whether we embrace either criticism or dogmatism depends upon the type of human beings we are. He who »feels« himself to be autonomous will embrace criticism, whereas, he who does not will embrace dogmatism.³⁶ The former conceives of the Absolute as subjective, whereas the latter conceives of it as objective. The highest good, which the former strives to realise, will be the elimination of the opposing »other,« whereas the highest good, for the latter, will be passivity in the face of the other. Paradoxically, however, Schelling reveals that such ethical efforts are in fact striving for the same condition. For if an »absolute subject« were realised, it would no longer be a subject, so that *my* reality as a conscious subject would vanish within an infinite, not wholly subjective, reality.³⁷ Thus, Schelling shows that whereas criticism and dogmatism may be perfectly consistent systems, there is only One Absolute to which both systems attempt to ascend. Criticism will assert that it is an »absolute subject,« whereas dogmatism will assert that it is an »absolute object,« but it is in fact neither. It is rather an »absolute unity« in which subjectivity and objectivity are absolutely identical.³⁸ Within the *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling therefore, for the first time, thinks that the Absolute may not be completely reducible to the subjective spontaneity of thought and freedom.³⁹ Here, as he will do in later work, he thus thinks of it as analogous to

35 Ibid.

36 See *ibid.*, p. 75.

37 »[If] every object is lost for me, and therewith also the consciousness of myself as subject [then] *my* reality vanishes in the infinite reality: [...] I cannot do away with the object without also doing away with the subject as such.« *Ibid.*, p. 97.

38 »If *both* systems [criticism and dogmatism] strive for the perfecting of human knowledge by one absolute principle, this must be the point of agreement between both systems. For if all controversy ceases in the Absolute, the controversy between different systems must cease in it too, rather all systems must terminate in it; they must vanish in it as contradictory systems.« *Ibid.*, p. 99.

39 »He who has reflected upon freedom and necessity has found for himself that these two principles must be *united* in the Absolute: *freedom*, because the Absolute acts by unconditioned autonomy and *necessity*, because it acts only according to the laws of its own being, the inner necessity of its essence. In the Absolute there is no longer any will that could have reality independently of those acts. Absolute freedom and necessity are identical.« *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Hölderlin's »Being proper,« as an identity of the spontaneity that constitutes subjectivity and the productivity that constitutes objectivity.

(5) Between 1794 and 1796 Schelling's work thus moves from an initial appropriation of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* towards a deep-seated ambivalence towards Fichte, inspired by a far more orthodox Kantianism. Schelling is attracted to Fichte's monism insofar as he believes that the many syntheses Kant outlined in accounting for the possibility of knowledge are only comprehensible insofar as we presuppose an *original* unity that Kant did not investigate. But, between 1794 and 1796, Schelling gradually rejects all of the distinctive features of the monism Fichte adopted within his first expositions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. For, Schelling rejects the notion that the monistic foundation can be adequately grasped as a *Grundsatz*, he rejects the investment of this foundation with I-consciousness and, eventually, even rejects the notion that this foundation is purely subjective. In this regard, Schelling's complex appropriation and critique of Fichte's writings within these early years sow the seeds of the mature Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* insofar as, within that work, Schelling systematically explains how both the »fact of experience« and the fact of our self-consciousness necessarily presuppose an Absolute that is not *wholly* subjective.