

idealist remains cool and is in danger of ridiculing the dogmatist.

The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it. Someone whose character is naturally slack or who has been enervated and twisted by spiritual servitude, scholarly self-indulgence, and vanity will never be able to raise himself to the level of idealism.

As we will show in a moment, one can point out to the dogmatist the inadequacy and inconsistency of his system; one can confuse and worry him on every side; but one cannot convince him, for he is incapable of calmly and coolly listening to and evaluating a theory that he finds to be simply unendurable. If idealism should prove to be the only true philosophy, then from this it would follow that in order to philosophize one must be born a philosopher, must be reared as a philosopher, and must educate oneself as a philosopher. But no application of human art or skill can make one into a philosopher. This science, therefore, does not expect to make many converts among people who are *already firmly set in their ways*. If it may entertain any hopes at all in this regard, these are pinned on the young, whose innate energy has not yet been ruined by the slackness of the present age.

6.

Dogmatism, however, is quite unable to explain what it is supposed to explain, and this demonstrates its inadequacy.

Dogmatism is supposed to explain representations, and it tries to make a particular representation comprehensible on the basis of an efficacious action of the thing in itself. The dogmatist, however, is not permitted to deny the testimony of immediate consciousness regarding representations. — What is this testimony? In answering this question, it is not my intention to attempt to formulate in concepts something accessible only to inner intuition, nor do I intend to engage here in an exhaustive discussion of a topic to which the greater portion of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is devoted. All I wish to do is to remind you of something everyone who has ever taken a hard look within himself must long since have discovered.

The intellect, as such, *observes itself*, and this act of self-observation is immediately directed at everything that the intellect is.¹² Indeed, the na-

12. “[. . .] and this act of self-observation is immediately united with everything that pertains to the intellect.” [First printing.]

ture of the intellect consists precisely in this *immediate* unity of being and seeing. Everything included within the intellect exists *for* the intellect, and the intellect is *for itself* everything that it is; only insofar as this is true is the intellect what it is, *qua* intellect. Let us say that I think of this object or that: What does this mean? How do I appear to myself in this act of thinking? I appear to myself in this case only as follows: If the object in question is one I have merely imagined, then I produce certain determinations within myself. Or, if the object in question is one that is really supposed to exist, then these determinations are present within me without any assistance from me — and I observe this production, this being. These determinations exist within me only to the extent that I observe them; observing and being are inseparably united. — A thing, in contrast, may possess a variety of different features; but if we ask, “*For whom* is it what it is?” no one who understands our question will answer that “it exists for itself.” Instead, an intellect also has to be thought of in this case, an intellect *for* which the thing in question exists. The intellect, in contrast, necessarily is *for itself* whatever it is, and nothing else needs to be thought of in conjunction with the thought of an intellect. When the intellect is posited to exist as an intellect,¹³ then that for which it exists is already posited along with it. Accordingly, if I may speak figuratively, there is a double series within the intellect: a series of being and a series of observing, a series of what is real and a series of what is ideal. The essence of the intellect consists precisely in the indivisibility of this double series. (The intellect is synthetic.) In contrast, only a single series pertains to the thing, namely, the real series (a merely posited being). Thus the intellect and the thing are direct opposites of one another. They lie in two different worlds, between which there is no bridge.

Dogmatism wishes to use the principle of causality to explain the general nature of the intellect as such, as well as the specific determinations of the same. The intellect is in this case supposed to be something that has been caused; i.e., it is supposed to be the second member in a series.

13. “Durch ihr Gesetzseyn, als Intelligenz.” *Gesetzseyn* (“posited being” or “being posited”) is a word of Fichte’s own coinage. For the intellect, all being is, initially anyway, simply “posited being” — i.e., the conscious representation or thought of being. What distinguishes the intellect from objects is that, in the case of the former, there can be no question of distinguishing its “being in itself” (*Sein für sich*) from its “posited being” (or “being for consciousness”). An intellect exists only insofar as it is posited (and indeed, posited by itself); and if it is posited, then it exists. Its *Sein an sich* = its *Gesetzsein*. This is what it means to say that the intellect exists *für sich* or “for itself.”

(197) But the principle of causality concerns a *real* series, not a double one. The force of an efficaciously acting cause is directed at another object lying outside of and in opposition to itself.¹⁴ This force produces a particular being within this other object, and this is all it can produce. The being produced in this way is a being that exists for a possible intellect outside of itself; it does not exist for itself. Moreover, if we assign a merely mechanical force to the object of this efficacious action, then it will, in turn, be able to transmit to an adjacent object any impression it itself has received. In this way, the movement that emanates from the first object may be transmitted through an entire series of any length you please, but nowhere within this series will you ever encounter a member whose efficaciously acting reverts into itself.¹⁵ Alternately, let us assign to the object of the first efficacious action the highest property one can assign to a thing, viz., irritability: In this case, the object would possess a force of its own and would be governed by laws of its own nature and not simply by a law assigned to it by something that affects it (which is what happens in the case of a merely mechanical series). Such an object will indeed be able to react upon an impact it receives; moreover, the being it assumes when it is affected is not determined by the particular cause, but is instead conditioned by the necessity of being something or other. Nevertheless, such an object is and remains nothing but a simple being, a being for a possible intellect outside of itself. You will not be able to obtain an intellect unless you also think of it as something primary and absolute, even though it may also be difficult for you to explain the connection between such an intellect and a being that is independent of it. — Even after such an explanation, the series is and remains a single one, and thus what was supposed to be explained has by no means been explained. The dogmatists were supposed to establish the transition from being to representing. They have not done this, nor can they, for their principle contains within itself only the ground of a being. It does not contain within itself the ground of what is directly opposed to being, viz., representing. They make an enormous leap into a world completely alien to their own principle.

14. *ihm entgegengesetztes*. As this passage indicates, Fichte frequently uses this term to mean simply “not identical to” or “different from,” rather than “formally opposed.” It is in this quite informal sense that red and yellow (or bears and tigers) can be said to be “opposites”; i.e., what one is (e.g., a bear) the other (e.g., a tiger) is not. Much confusion can be avoided by remembering that, in referring to “opposites,” Fichte is *not* always (or even usually) talking about *polar opposites* or *logically contradictory* terms such as “A” and “Not-A” or “I” and “Not-I.”

15. “das in sich selbst zurückgehend wirke.”

They try to disguise this leap in a variety of different ways. Strictly speaking, the soul must not be any special sort of thing at all; it must be nothing whatsoever but a product of the interaction between things. This is the path followed by consistent dogmatism, which simultaneously turns into materialism.

But all that can come into being in this way is something within things, and never anything separate from them — unless, that is, we also supply the thought of an intellect that observes these things. The analogies dogmatists introduce in order to make their system comprehensible — e.g., the analogy of the harmony arising from the combined sound of several different instruments — only make it easier to comprehend how contrary to reason their system actually is. The harmony, like the combined sound, does not lie in the instruments themselves. It lies only in the mind of the listener who unifies this manifold; and if such a listener is not thought of in addition, then this harmony does not exist at all.

Yet who can prevent the dogmatist from assuming that the soul is one of the things in themselves? If this is the case, then the soul is one of the things he postulates in order to carry out his task. Indeed, it is only in this way that the principle of the efficacious action of things upon the soul can be applied — for the only sort of interaction materialism allows is the interaction of things among themselves, by means of which thoughts are supposed to be produced. In their attempt to think the unthinkable, some dogmatists have wanted to presuppose that either the efficaciously acting thing or the soul — or both of them — is of such a nature that representations could be produced as a result of efficacious action. [On the one hand, one may presuppose that] the thing that exercises an effect is of such a nature that its effects would be representations — perhaps somewhat like *God* in Berkeley’s system (which is a dogmatic system and by no means an idealistic one).¹⁶ But this proposal does not help us at all; for the only kind of efficacious action we understand is the mechanical kind, and it is simply impossible for us to think of any other way one thing could exercise an effect upon another. This presupposition therefore turns out to consist of nothing but empty and meaningless words. On the other hand, one may presuppose that the soul is of such a nature that every efficacious action that is directed at it turns into a representation. But with this assertion we

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16. In George Berkeley’s phenomenalist system *God* is conceived to be an infinite, active cause who produces representations (or, in Berkeley’s vocabulary, “ideas”) in our finite minds. See *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), pars. 146–49.

are in the same situation as we were with the first one: we are simply unable to understand it.

This is how dogmatism always proceeds in all the various guises in which it appears. It leaves an enormous gap between things and representations, and it fills this gap, not with any explanation, but with a few empty words. One can, of course, memorize these words and repeat them to others, but no person has ever been able to think of anything in conjunction with these words, nor will anyone ever be able to do so. For whenever one attempts to consider precisely how this alleged transition between things and representations is supposed to occur, the whole concept vanishes into an empty froth.

Thus dogmatism can do no more than repeat its principle over and over again and in various different forms. It can state it and restate it, but it can never proceed from this principle to a derivation of what needs to be explained. But philosophy consists precisely in such a derivation. It follows that, even viewed from the side of speculation, dogmatism is not a philosophy at all, but is nothing more than a helpless affirmation and assurance. The only type of philosophy that remains possible is idealism.

What is here asserted is not intended as a reply to any objections of the reader, for there is simply nothing that can be said against it. Instead, these remarks concern the absolute incapacity of many people to understand this point. No one who understands the mere words can deny that all efficacious action is mechanical in character and that no representation can be produced merely by means of mechanical action. But this is precisely where the difficulty lies; for a certain level of self-sufficiency and spiritual freedom is already required if one is to be able to comprehend the nature of the intellect as we have just portrayed it, and it is upon this that our entire refutation of dogmatism is based. Many people have simply not progressed in their own thinking past the point of being able to grasp the single series constituted by the mechanism of nature. So long as this single series is the only one present in their minds, then, naturally enough, even if they should desire to think about representations, they will consider them too to be part of this same series. For such people, a representation becomes a particular sort of thing — a most remarkable error, of which we can find traces in even the most celebrated philosophical authors. Dogmatism is quite adequate for such people. Nor are they aware that anything is lacking in their system, for the opposed world [of representations] is not present for them at all. — This is why one is unable to refute a dogmatist by means of the proof just stated — no matter how clear this proof may be. For the dogmatist cannot be led to accept this proof, since he lacks the power or ability that is required in order to grasp its premises.

The manner in which we have dealt with dogmatism here also offends against the indulgent mode of thinking that is so characteristic of our present age. To be sure, such a mode of thinking has been extraordinarily widespread in every age, but only in our own has it become elevated to a maxim that can be expressed in the following words: “One must not be so strict in one’s inferences, nor should philosophical proofs be required to be as precise as, say, those of mathematics.” All that people who think in this lenient manner have to do is to catch sight of a few links in a chain of argument and of the rule of inference that applies in this case: their power of imagination immediately supplies them with the rest — wholesale, as it were, and without asking any further questions about its origin. Suppose that someone such as Alexander von Joch¹⁷ says: “All things are determined by natural necessity; our representations depend upon the properties of things, and our will depends upon our representations; therefore, our entire will is determined by natural necessity, and our opinion that we possess free will is only a delusion.” They find this uncommonly easy to understand and very clear to boot, despite the fact that it contains not an ounce of human understanding; and they go away convinced of this point and astonished at the rigor of this demonstration. I must remind you that the *Wissenschaftslehre* does not proceed from such an easy-going way of thinking, nor does it expect to be judged by such an indulgent standard. If even a single link in the long chain of argument it has to construct is not securely fastened to the one that follows, then this system will not have succeeded in proving anything at all.

7.

As we said above, idealism explains the determinations of consciousness by referring them to the acting of the intellect, which it considers to be something absolute and active, not something passive. The intellect cannot be anything passive, because, according to the postulate of idealism, it is what is primary and highest and is thus preceded by nothing that could account

17. Karl Ferdinand Hommel (1722–81) was a jurist and professor of law at Leipzig. In 1770, Hommel published a book entitled *Alexander von Joch beyder Rechte Doctor über Belohnung und Strafe nach Türkischen Gesezen*, in which he not only argued forcefully in favor of a system of metaphysical determinism, but also maintained that he himself possessed no personal sense of his own freedom. In 1793 Fichte included a criticism of Hommel’s “Turkish fatalism” in the second edition of his own *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*. (SW, V, p. 22 = GA, I,1: 139; English translation by Garrett Green, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], p. 45.)

for its passivity. For the same reason, no real *being, no subsistence or continuing existence*, pertains to the intellect; for such being is the result of a process of interaction, and nothing yet exists or is assumed to be present with which the intellect could be posited to interact. Idealism considers the intellect to be a kind of *doing* and absolutely nothing more. One should not even call it an *active subject*, for such an appellation suggests the presence of something that continues to exist and in which an activity inheres. But idealism has no reason to make such an assumption, for it is not included within the principle of idealism, and anything not included within this principle must first be derived. What has to be derived now are *determinate representations of a material, spatial, etc. world, one which is present without any help from us* — for representations of this sort are notoriously present within consciousness. But nothing determinate can be derived from what is indeterminate, for in that case the formal principle of all derivation, i.e., the principle of sufficient reason or “grounding principle,”¹⁸ could not be applied. Consequently, the acting of the intellect which is supposed to serve as the foundation of these determinate representations must be a determinate mode of acting; and, since the intellect itself is the ultimate ground of all explanation, this must be a type of acting which is determined by the intellect itself and by its own nature, not by anything outside of the intellect. Accordingly, what idealism presupposes is the following: The intellect acts; but, as a consequence of its very nature, it can act only in a certain, specific manner. If one considers the intellect’s necessary modes of acting in isolation from any [actual] acting, then it is quite appropriate to call these the “laws of acting.” Hence there are necessary laws of the intellect. — At the same time, the feeling of necessity accompanying these determinate representations is also made comprehensible in this way: For what the intellect feels in this case is not, as it were, an external impression; instead, what it feels when it acts are the limits of its own nature. Insofar as idealism presupposes the existence of such necessary laws of the intellect (which is the only rational thing it can suppose, since this is the only way it can explain what it is supposed to explain) it is called “Critical” or “transcendental” idealism.¹⁹ A system of transcendent

18. *der Satz des Grundes*. This is the ordinary German name for what is called in English “the principle of sufficient reason.”

19. The name “Critical idealism” (or elsewhere, “Critical philosophy”) is employed by Fichte to refer to the Kantian system, not as interpreted by contemporary “Kantians” (for whom Fichte demonstrates a scarcely veiled contempt), but rather as presented in Kant’s own *Critiques* — as interpreted by Fichte. The term “Critical” is here capitalized whenever it is employed in this specific, Kantian sense.

idealism would be one that purports to derive determinate representations from the free and completely lawless acting of the intellect — which is an utterly self-contradictory supposition, since, as we just noted, the principle of sufficient reason is certainly not applicable to completely free and lawless acting.

Just as surely as the intellect’s assumed laws of acting are supposed to have their basis in the unitary nature of the intellect itself, these laws must constitute a single system. This means that the reason why the intellect must act in certain precise ways under certain specific circumstances is because it has certain modes of acting under any circumstances whatsoever, and the former can be derived from the latter. These general modes of acting can, in turn, be further explained by referring to a single, fundamental law. Whenever it acts, the intellect assigns a law to itself, and this act of legislation occurs in conformity with an even higher, necessary way of acting or representing. For example, the law of causality is not a primary or original law; instead, it is only one of the various ways in which a manifold can be combined. The law of causality can therefore be derived from the fundamental law governing such combination, which, in turn — along with the manifold itself — can be derived from still higher laws. (201)

It follows from what has just been said that Critical idealism can set to work in two different ways. On the one hand, it may actually derive from the fundamental laws of the intellect the system of the intellect’s necessary modes of acting and, along with this, the objective representations that come into being thereby. By proceeding in this way, Critical idealism allows the entire range of our representations to come into being gradually before the eyes of the reader or listener. On the other hand, it may attempt to grasp these same laws in the form in which they are already immediately applied to objects in any particular case; i.e., it may attempt to grasp them at their lowest level (in which case they are called “categories”). Critical idealism then asserts that the objects are determined and ordered by these categories. 442

To a Critical idealist of the latter sort, i.e., one who does not derive the presumed laws of the intellect from the very nature of the intellect, one may address the following question: How did you obtain any material acquaintance with these laws? I.e., how did you become aware that the laws of the intellect are precisely these laws of substantiality and causality? (For I do not yet wish to trouble such an idealist by asking him how he knows that these are really nothing but immanent laws of the intellect.) Since the laws in question are ones that are immediately applied to objects, our idealist can only have obtained these laws by abstraction from the objects in

question. In other words, he can only have drawn them from experience. It does not matter at all that in the course of obtaining them he may have, as it were, taken a detour through logic. For logic itself arises for him only by means of an act of abstracting from objects; and thus, by proceeding in this way he succeeds merely in accomplishing indirectly something that would be all too obvious if he were to do it directly. Consequently, he has no way to confirm that the laws of thought he postulates actually are laws of thought and that they are really nothing else but the immanent laws of the intellect. In opposition to a Critical idealist of this sort, the dogmatist will assert that the idealist's "categories" are general properties of things, the basis for which is to be found within the very nature of these things themselves; and it is hard to see why we should place any more credence in the unproven assertions of the one than in the unproven assertions of the other. — This way of proceeding does not provide us with any understanding of precisely how the intellect acts and why it must act in precisely this way. In order to obtain an understanding of this, we must specify within the premises themselves something that can pertain only to the intellect, and the laws of thinking must then be derived from these premises before our very eyes.

The former mode of proceeding makes it especially difficult to see how the object itself could come into being. Even if one is willing to grant the unproven postulate made by this type of Critical idealism, it is still able to explain nothing more than the *properties* and the *relations* of the thing: e.g., that it is in space, that it expresses itself in time, that its accidents must be referred to something substantial, etc. But what is the origin of that which possesses these particular relations and properties? What is the origin of the content that assumes this form? Dogmatism takes refuge in this content, and a Critical idealism of this sort simply makes a bad situation worse.

We know very well that the thing does indeed arise through an instance of acting in accordance with these laws. The thing is nothing whatsoever but the sum of all of these relations as combined by the power of imagination, and all of these relations, taken together, constitute the thing. The object is indeed the original synthesis of all of these concepts. Form and content are not two separate elements. Form in its entirety²⁰ is the content, and it is only by means of analysis that we first obtain individual forms. But the Critical idealist who proceeds in the way we described above can do no more than assure us that this is the case. Indeed, it is something of a mystery how he himself knows this — if, indeed, he knows it at all. So long as one does not allow the thing in its entirety to come into being before the

20. "Die gesammte Formheit."

eyes of the thinker, dogmatism has still not been pursued into its final hiding-place. But it is possible to do this only if one allows the intellect to act in total — and not merely in partial — conformity with the laws of the same.

An idealism of this sort is, therefore, both unproven and unprovable. The sole weapon it can wield against dogmatism is to issue assurances that it is right; and the only weapon it can wield against the higher, complete form of idealism is helpless rage, coupled with the claim that no one can proceed any further in this direction than it itself has already gone, the mere assurance that no territory remains to be explored beyond the territory it itself has already explored, and the assertion that anything anyone says beyond this point becomes unintelligible *to it*, etc. — all of which means nothing at all.

Finally, the only laws established within a system of this sort are laws that determine only the objects of outer experience and do so by means of the purely subsumptive power of judgment.²¹ But this is far and away the smallest portion of the system of reason. Consequently, since it lacks any understanding of the overall operation of reason, this sort of half-Critical idealism gropes around just as blindly in the realm of practical reason and reflective judgment as do those who merely parrot what others have said; and — with equal ingenuousness — it copies down remarks that it itself finds to be completely unintelligible.*

21. Reading, with the original edition and with GA, *Urtheilskraft* for SW's *Wechselkraft* ("reciprocal force").

* A Critical idealism of this sort has been propounded by Prof. Beck in his *Only Possible Standpoint*.²² Despite the fact that I find his approach to be deficient in the manner just criticized, I do not wish to allow this to prevent me from testifying publicly to the high and well-earned respect I have for this man who, completely on his own, has managed to raise himself above the confusion of his age and to understand that the Kantian philosophy is not any variety of dogmatism, but is instead a transcendental idealism according to which the object is given neither entirely nor in part but is produced. I expect, moreover, that in time he will be able to raise

22. J. S. Beck (1761–1840) was a professor of philosophy at Halle and one of the more original early expositors and interpreters of Kant. Beck's major work is his *Erläuternder Auszug aus den kritischen Schriften des Herrn Prof. Kant, auf Anrathen desselben*, which appeared in three independently published volumes in 1793, 1794, and 1796. It is in vol. 3 of this work, entitled *Einzig möglicher Standpunkt aus welchem die Kritische Philosophie zu beurteilen ist*, that Beck develops his own version of transcendental idealism, the so-called Standpoint Theory. (In English, see the excerpt from Beck's *The Standpoint from Which Critical Philosophy Is to Be Judged*, translated by George di Giovanni, in *Between Kant and Hegel*, pp. 204–49.)