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Fichte, the *Wissenschaftslehre* and Circular Justification in Philosophy

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Abstract

The present inquiry examines circular reasoning in the thought of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Fichte holds human mind to be inescapably circular, and further claims that to wish the abolition of the circle in question would amount to denying thought its ground. Although only a selected aspect of Fichte's system, the doctrine assists with the understanding of his wider philosophical view, as well as the subsequent philosophical discussion, especially the position of Hegel which Fichte partially inspires. While there is consensus in the literature that Fichte assigns understanding circular epistemological tasks, attempts to gain insights into his circular doctrine continue to be a source of scholarly debate among his interpreters. This essay will argue the thesis that viewed from a certain angle of vision Fichte could be shown to utilize circular justification to argue that while every philosophical inquiry yearns for certainty, the certainty in question cannot be met in practice since, in Fichte's view, "a finite rational being has nothing beyond experience."

Keywords: *Wissenschaftslehre*, epistemology, system, circularity, and linearity.

Introduction

This essay examines circular justification in the thought of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Fichte is a post-Kantian German idealist, whose original philosophical position, the *Wissenschaftslehre* (the doctrine of scientific knowledge) emerged within the context of the reconstruction of Kant's transcendental method. Yet, this does not deter him from claiming that his view is Kantianism properly stated. German idealism is a philosophical movement that was inaugurated by Kant, and restated variously by followers of the critical method, including Reinhold, Fichte,

Schelling, and Hegel. Fichte holds the mind to be inescapably circular so much so that to seek the elimination of the circularity in question would amount to denying understanding its foundation.

Although only a selected doctrine of Fichte's broader philosophical system, his circular principle assists with the understanding his wider philosophical view, as well as the subsequent philosophical discussion, especially the thought of Hegel which Fichte partially inspires.¹ There is consensus in the literature that Fichte assigns thought epistemological tasks, however, attempts to come to terms with this Fichtean doctrine remain a source of scholarly debate in the literature. Two influential insights tend to dominate this debate: foundationalism and anti-foundationalism. The debate, as I understand it relates to, on the one hand, Fichte's claim that philosophical inquiry should proceed from a self-evident principle known to be true, and his concession, on the other, that the principle in question cannot be demonstrated to be true.² The foundationalist perspective contends that although Fichte holds thought to be inescapably circular, he concedes that the initial principle of philosophy alone is capable of yielding certainty. For its part, the antifoundationalist insight argues that Fichte utilizes circular justification to designate philosophy a "hypothetical" rather than a certain science.

It will be the task of this inquiry to argue the thesis that Fichte invokes circular reasoning to claim that although it is the wish of every philosophical inquiry to yield certainty, the certainty in question cannot be met in the Cartesian sense since, according to him, "a finite rational being has nothing beyond experience".³ The inquiry proceeds in four stages. It opens with

1 Martin, Wayne, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project*. (Stanford, CA. Stanford University Press, 1997), Pg. 100.

2 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Science of Knowledge* (with First and Second Introduction). (Edited and Translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Pg. 93.

3 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Science of Knowledge*, Pg. 8.

a survey of circular demonstration in the history of Western philosophy. It next examines Fichte circular demonstration against the backdrop of his search for systematicity in philosophy. Thereafter, it explores Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a circular epistemology. It concludes with Fichte's three principles of knowledge as an example of philosophy's inability to yield certainty.

Circular Demonstration and the History of Philosophy

A demonstration is deemed circular "in so far as the truth of the system is supposed to be a function of the truth of its starting point; which in turn, is supposed to be demonstrated by the very system in question".⁴ Seen in this way, circular justification could reasonably be contrasted with its contrary, linearity, the view that an argument "presupposes explicit beginning or ending points of a chain or argument, or reflection, points which are taken as absolute in some sense or another".⁵ Proponents of linear reasoning include Augustine and Descartes, while Fichte fits the narrative of a circular thinker.

Suffice it to say that circularity and its epistemological contrary, linearity, have their origin in geometry. Although both are geometrical metaphors, they may be appropriated for non-geometrical tasks, for example, as the present discussion demonstrates they may be used for the justification of knowledge claims,⁶ and both are well represented in the history of philosophy. In relation to demonstration, Rockmore remarks that they are implicit in the thought of philosophers before and after Plato, including Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle and Nietzsche.⁷ In the German idealism movement, circular demonstration inheres in Kant's project of the *Critique of Pure*

4 Breazeale, Daniel "Certainty, Universality and Conviction: The Methodological Primacy of Practical Reason within the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *New Perspectives on Fichte*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanity Books, 1996), Pg. 44.

5 Stoehr, Kevin "The Virtues of Circular Reasoning" Richard Cobb-Stevens (Ed.) *Epistemology, The proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol. 5. (Bowling Green, OH: Philosophy Documentation Centre, Bowling Green State University, 2000), Pg. 163 – 4.

6 Rockmore, Tom. *Hegel's Circular Epistemology*. (Bloomington. IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), Pg. 2.

7 Rockmore, Tom. *Hegel's Circular Epistemology*, Pg. 2.

Reason, as is evidenced by his proposal to cause reason to critique itself.⁸ Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that linear justification remains the favorite method. This may not be unconnected with the fact that it is the method that has been passed on from generation to generation for several millennia. At least since Plato, Western philosophy has tended to construe genuine knowledge as the ability of the human mind to comprehend ultimate reality in its objective existence beyond experience.⁹

Fichte, Circular Reasoning and Systematicity

If Daniel Breazeale is right, circular demonstration appeared early in Fichte's thought; at least as early as the period of his brief sojourn in Danzig (1792 – 93), and further delineates that Fichte's thought of incorporating the same in his system was bolstered by his interaction with Johann Jacob Mnioch.¹⁰ In particular, he detects traces of circular argumentation in Fichte's early attempts to develop his original philosophical system as could be seen in the second edition of his *An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, and the first part of his *Contribution toward Correcting of the Public Judgment of the French Revolution*,¹¹ respectively. The significance of circular thinking in Fichte's thought is suggested by the fact that although his system underwent several revisions, he remained committed to the principle. Regardless of when circular doctrine appeared in Fichte's thought it was the Review of *Aenesidemus* that provided the platform and the courage for its articulation.

Published under the pseudonym *Aenesidemus* (1792), the work is a skeptical attack on the critical method in its Reinholdian expression by Gottlob Ernst Schulze. The impact

8 Breazeale, Daniel "Certainty, Universality and Conviction: The Methodological Primacy of Practical Reason within the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*", Pg. 47.

9 Crease, Robert. "Science as Foundational? Hugh Silverman (Ed.) *Questioning Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Pg. 44.

10 Breazeale, Daniel "Certainty, Universality and Conviction: The Methodological Primacy of Practical Reason within the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*", Pg. 45.

11 Breazeale, Daniel "Certainty, Universality and Conviction: The Methodological Primacy of Practical Reason within the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*", Pg. 45.

of the attack on Fichte is indicated by the draft of his correspondence with Stephani. In the draft in question, he writes:

Have you read *Aenesidemus*? It has perplexed me for some time now. It has overthrown Reinhold in my eyes, has made me suspicious of Kant, and has overturned my whole system from ground up. One cannot live under the open sky. It cannot be helped; the system must be rebuilt. And this is what I have been faithfully doing for the past six weeks or so....I have discovered a new foundation, on the basis of which it will be easy to develop the whole of philosophy. Kant's philosophy, as such is correct-but only in its results and not in its reasons....I believe that in a few more years we shall have a philosophy which is just as self-evident as geometry.¹²

Aenesidemus convinced Fichte that neither Kant nor Reinhold had secured philosophy on a solid ground. This sentiment was shared by Kant's contemporaries. Specifically, Kant's followers and critics alike feared that the systematicity he promised was nowhere present in what he offered to the world. For Kant and perhaps for several others, systematicity in philosophy was crucial for refuting skepticism. By system Kant meant the "unity of manifold modes of knowledge under one idea," made possible by the architectonic of reason.¹³ Thus, he could afford to criticize the views of his predecessors as lacking a system as he understood it. In the wake of the inauguration of the critical method, Kant's critics (Hermann, Herder, and Jacobi) called for an abandoning of his theory. Unlike his critics, though, his followers were of the view that it should be restated in order for it to meet the systematicity challenge. They thought that if the letter of his theory was sacrificed, it would be possible to save its spirit.

¹² See Fichte's Draft of a Letter to Stephani, Mid-December, 1793 in Breazeale Daniel (Edited and Translated.) *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), Pg. 270-272.

¹³ Kant, Immanuel *Critique of Pure Reason*. Norman Kemp Smith (Trans.) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), A 622/B 860.

As concerns the reconstruction effort, Karl Reinhold's pioneering role is significant. He is a former Jesuit priest, who quit both the priesthood and the Catholic Church, and fled his native Austria for Germany, where he joined the Weimar circle. His idea of systematicity meant basing philosophy on a self-evident first principle known to be true. Accordingly, he offered to deduce his Elementary Philosophy from the principle of consciousness which he thought could relate the representation to the subject and the object and also distinguish it from both. While Fichte endorsed the generic idea of erecting philosophy on a unitary principle known to be true he, however, rejected Reinhold's principle of consciousness, claiming that it failed the test of the highest ground of system: "The principle of consciousness is a theorem which is based upon another first principle, from which, however, the principle of consciousness can be derived *a priori* and independently of all experience".¹⁴ Similarly, he rejected the skeptic's principle of contradiction. Schulze had criticized Reinhold's attempt to reduce everything that goes on in the mind to representation,¹⁵ insisting that the principle of consciousness was anything but certain.

Having discredited both Reinhold's principle of consciousness and the skeptic's principle of contradiction, Fichte can now introduce his principle of identity ($A=A$) and opposition ($A = -A$) as the highest ground of philosophy. Dieter Heinrich intimates that in the early Jena period, Fichte asserted that philosophy should proceed from a self-evident principle without revealing its identity. Heinrich notes, however, that at the time of visiting with Kant in Königsberg, it was clear in his mind that that principle was the self, and restated this in the course of his discussion with Schultz. Having resolved the issue of initial ground of philosophy, Fichte then proceeded to develop his account of the positing activity of the mind. Fichte appropriates the technical term positing to free the self to posit

14 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Review of Aenesidemus*, Breazeale Daniel (Edited and Translated.) *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), Pg. 62.

15 Beiser, Fredrick "Kant's Intellectual Development: 1746-1781" Paul Guyer (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Pg. 274.

itself absolutely as both the subject and object of knowledge. We will explore Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as circular epistemology.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* as Circular Epistemology

In the Review of *Aenesidemus*, Fichte declares:

The faculty of representation exists for the faculty of representation and through the faculty of representation: this is the circle within which every finite understanding, that is, understanding we can conceive, is necessarily confined. Anyone who wants to escape from this circle does not know himself and does not know what he wants.¹⁶

He would restate this claim in *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre, or the So-called Philosophy*, his attempt to present philosophy as a coherent system. Fichte points out that the difference between his *Wissenschaftslehre* and other theories is that although other systems are equally aware of the circular nature of thought, only his theory is willing to acknowledge it. To be sure, this is Fichte's way of contending that his circular doctrine is not viciously circular but a credible epistemological method in its own right.

This essay evaluates two influential insights that tend to dominate the discussion relative to Fichte's circular doctrine: foundationalism and antifoundationalism. By foundationalism is to be understood the "form of epistemological strategy that intends to identify secure foundations for knowledge".¹⁷ By contrast, we construe antifoundationalism to be "any effort to validate knowledge claims without appealing to absolute or ultimate basis known with certainty, whether the latter is held to be unattainable or the model of knowledge as a unified

¹⁶ Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Review of Aenesidemus*, Pg. 67.

¹⁷ Rockmore, Tom. "Antifoundationalism, Circularity and the Spirit of Fichte" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *Fichte: Historical Context/Contemporary Controversies*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Books, 1994), Pg. 100.

structure resting on a foundation of certainty is rejected in principle."¹⁸

We begin with the anti-foundationalist paradigm. This insight approaches the debate from the point of view of Fichte's avowal to be true to the spirit of Kant. Viewed against the backdrop of Fichte's stated objective, Rockmore argues that Fichte uses circular justification to designate philosophy a "hypothetical science".¹⁹ For Rockmore, Fichte favors an anti-foundationalist notion of system, that is, a foundationless system of philosophy, further contending that this has to be the case since there is no way around the perceived tension in Fichte's system - deducing philosophical inquiry from an initial ground known to be true and the concession that the ground in question cannot be proven to be true.²⁰ For Rockmore, this was inspired by Kant's so-called Kant's Copernican turn in philosophy. The Copernican turn switches activity from the object and locates the same in the subject in order to explain knowledge. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that subjectivity remains an abstract epistemological principle in Kant. To know, on Kant's account, is to know the condition of the possibility of knowledge whatsoever. Kant seeks to craft a philosophy that has universal implications irrespective of time and space.

Concerned that Fichte's formulation draws comparisons with Cartesian foundationalism, Rockmore feels the need to distinguish it from the Cartesian Archimedean variant. Descartes invents the modern concept of mind by identifying an initial principle from which the remainder of the philosophical discussion could be deduced. From the apodicticity of his mind he derives the certainty of external space. Rockmore writes:

¹⁸ Rockmore, Tom. *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Pg. 8.

¹⁹ Rockmore, Tom. *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought*, Pg. 107.

²⁰ Rockmore, Tom. "Fichte's Antifoundationalism, Intellectual Intuition and Who one is" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *New Perspectives on Fichte*. (Arnhem: NY: Humanity Press, 1996), Pg. 100.

Fichte certainly shares Reinhold's acceptance of the basic rationalist's model of system in terms of an initial principle. But in consequence of his rejection of the view of that this first principle can be established as correct, Fichte makes the very circularity, which Reinhold sought to avoid as a mistake in reasoning constitutive of knowledge. It follows that circularity cannot be avoided but rather must be acknowledged.²¹

Apparently, despite Fichte's claim that his philosophy is nothing other than the Kantian the idea of erecting philosophical inquiry on a unitary principle is more akin to Reinhold who seeks to return Kant to a Cartesian model of mind. Fichte shares Reinhold's notion of system, namely, securing philosophy on a first principle known to be true, but rejects Reinhold's principle of consciousness as the highest ground of system. With his espousal of the circular doctrine, Fichte further distances himself from both Kant and Reinhold.

In this way, according to Rockmore, Fichte has shown that, contrary to popular opinion, circular demonstration does not impede the search for certainty; rather, it specifies the nature of the certainty philosophy is capable of yielding: "In his claim that theory is necessarily circular and inevitably circular Fichte rehabilitates a form of argument that had been neglected since early Greek thought".²² That is, truths are products of the conceptual frameworks within which they are entertained. Relationally, Rockmore supposes that Fichte concedes that knowledge is self-grounding; further pointing out that even his process of arriving at knowledge is circular. Following from this, Rockmore concludes:

Both the hypothetical character and the circular nature of philosophy point to the same conclusion: philosophy cannot yield certainty, although knowledge requires it. In other words, what we can we can know is that the

²¹ Rockmore, Tom. *Hegel's Circular Epistemology*, Pg. 43.

²² Rockmore, Tom. *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought*, Pg. 107.

search for knowledge is an endless task because the theoretical requirement of a foundation, in other words noncircular form of reasoning cannot be met in practice.²³

While philosophy yearns for certainty, Rockmore thinks Fichte grants that it cannot be achieved epistemologically.

The second insight (Breazeale) argues that although Fichte concedes the circularity of the mind, he still thinks that philosophy is capable of producing certainty. By designating philosophy the science of science, Breazeale conjectures that not only does Fichte think philosophy has the task of proving what it means to know something with certainty he believes it actually has the capacity to yield the certainty in question.²⁴ For Breazeale, the certainty in question is derived from philosophy's initial principle. He writes:

The misconception that Fichte believed the certainty of the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* could or ought to be somehow "proven" must be firmly rejected. On the contrary, he insisted that the first principle of a systematic philosophy must be "purely and simply certain" and explicitly added that such a proposition "cannot derive its certainty from its connection with other propositions." When Fichte concedes that 'every proof presupposes something that is simply indemonstrable' he is manifestly not suggesting that the first principle from which we proceed in philosophy cannot be known to true; instead, he is insisting that the first principle must be self-evident.²⁵

23 Rockmore, Tom. *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought*, Pg. 38.

24 See Daniel Breazeale's "Circles and Grounds in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *Fichte: Historical Context/Contemporary Controversies*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Books, 1994), Pg. 44 and Perrinjacquet, Alain "Some Remarks Concerning the Circularity of Philosophy and the Evidence of Its First Principle in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *Fichte: Historical Context/Contemporary Controversies*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Books, 1994), Pg. 72.

25 Breazeale, Daniel "Certainty, Universality and Conviction: The Methodological Primacy of Practical Reason within the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *New Perspectives on Fichte*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Books, 1996), Pg. 36 – 37.

Due to the fact that Fichte sought to craft a system comparable to geometry, argues Breazeale, it is very unlikely that Fichte would have reduced philosophy to an enterprise incapable of yielding certainty.

Adding his voice to the debate, Alain Perrinjacquet does not see any conflict between the proposal to erect philosophy on a self-evident principle known to be true, on the one hand, and the claim, on the other, that the principle cannot be demonstrated to be true. He calls Rockmore's attention to the fact that although Fichte rejects a theoretical ground for philosophy he provides a practical one.²⁶ Hence, argues Perrinjacquet, Fichte's rejection of a theoretical reason as the fundamental ground of philosophy concerns an initial type of ground and should not be construed as opposition to the idea of ground in general.²⁷

In particular, Perrinjacquet evaluates Fichte's claim that the initial ground of philosophy cannot be proven to be true against the backdrop of the disagreement between idealism and dogmatism. Recall that Fichte identifies two approaches to the knowledge question: idealism and dogmatism. The one that takes the self as the point of departure of its inquiry he names idealism; and the one that begins from the object he calls dogmatism. He does not see either of them refuting the other on its terms. Perrinjacquet further remarks that although the idealist cannot convince the dogmatist about the starting point of his system, it does not mean that the starting points of the two systems are both self-evident. Rather, it is the case, he argues, since the starting principle of idealism, to the extent that it founds the system of freedom, cannot be enforced from outside.

The foundationalist perspective is surprised by attempts to distance Fichte from Reinhold, even though earlier in his career,

26 Perrinjacquet, Alain "Some Remarks Concerning the Circularity of Philosophy and the Evidence of Its First Principle in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *Fichte: Historical Context/Contemporary Controversies*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Books, 1994), Pg. 72.

27 Perrinjacquet, Alain "Some Remarks Concerning the Circularity of Philosophy and the Evidence of Its First Principle in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*", Pg. 80.

Fichte considered himself Reinhold's disciple. And that not only did Fichte succeed Reinhold as the chair of philosophy at the University of Jena, he also inherited an audience that was familiar with the critical method in its Reinholdian presentation. Wayne Martin does not see how Fichte could have risked alienating a group that was acquainted with Reinhold's method, including its foundationalism, by offering something different.²⁸

The foundationalist insight concedes, though, that there is textual evidence to support the reading that Fichte holds philosophy to be self-grounding. For example, Breazeale concedes:

Nevertheless, there are several passages in Fichte's Jena writings (1794-1800) where he explicitly declares that philosophy must be "self-grounding" and must "establish its own possibility," passages that plainly seem to suggest that philosophical inquiry involves an inescapable circularity, in so far as the truth of the system of philosophy is supposed to be a function of the truth of its starting point, which, in turn, is supposed to be demonstrated (or "confirmed") by the very system in question.²⁹

This notwithstanding, Breazeale explains that this is merely superficial as Fichte's concession that the mind is inescapably circular does not nullify his submission that philosophy should be deduced from a self-evident principle that is certain, and that the certainty of the principle in question alone is capable of furnishing the certainty of philosophical inquiry.

At this time, a few remarks may be appropriate. When dealing with a system as complex as Fichte's it may not be useful foreclosing alternatives approaches. Besides being a bad writer, his theories underwent at least fourteen revisions. Second, the debate between the foundationalist and the antifoundationalist perspectives concerns whether the analysis of Fichte's theory

²⁸ Martin, Wayne, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project*, 83)

²⁹ Breazeale, Daniel "Certainty, Universality and Conviction: The Methodological Primacy of Practical Reason within the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*", Pg. 44.

should proceed in accordance with the letter or the spirit of his theory. The former favors the letter and the latter the spirit. Third, in order for any system to qualify as philosophy, it cannot completely escape metaphysics, including Fichte's. The question then becomes: Can one do philosophy without metaphysics? Our answer is no! We now turn to Fichte's three principles of knowledge to argue our thesis of Fichte's understanding of philosophy's inability to produce certainty.

Fichte's Three Principles of Knowledge

Fichte's three principles of knowledge are intended to highlight the opposition or tension that exist between the subject and the object, the ideal and the real, and so forth. Prima facie, the idea of contradiction should be inconsistent with Fichte who intends to rid philosophy of its dualistic tendencies. Nevertheless, we should differentiate his dualism from others since his own is transcendental. To be sure, there are several ways of interpreting this aspect of Fichte's theory; however, under the present circumstance we interpret it in light of Fichte's circularity principle. Specifically, the inquiry uses it to argue Fichte's concession of the inability of philosophy to generate certain knowledge.

Fichte's first principle of knowledge states: "That whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as something existing, is the self as absolute object".³⁰ The second principle stipulates: "So surely is a not-self absolutely opposed to the self".³¹ The third principle states: "Both the self and the not-self as posited as divisible".³² As Fichte declares, he intends to alter our way of doing epistemology so that the "the object shall be posited and determined by the cognitive faculty, and not the cognitive faculty by the object".³³ This marks a significant departure from the traditional way of doing epistemology.

30 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Science of Knowledge*, Pg. 98.

31 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Science of Knowledge*, Pg. 104.

32 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Science of Knowledge*, Pg. 108.

33 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *The Science of Knowledge*, Pg. 4.

Three inferences could be drawn from Fichte's account of the self's self-positing activity: First, he favors a first-person epistemology. This means, unlike Kant, he specifies what it is that finite human beings can realistically know. He rejects strategies that depend on the outside world in the quest to gain knowledge.³⁴ Second, Fichte has subjectivity precede representation in order to insist that any epistemological paradigm worthy of its name must subordinate representation to pre-representational consciousness. By pre-representational consciousness, Fichte means that representation should be explained by a higher preconscious principle.³⁵ Third, Fichte rejects a causal theory of knowledge in whatever form, especially in its Cartesian variation. Farr explains:

Therefore, the I is not permitted to ascribe causality to anything other than itself. It is only through the I's activity that the external world is experienced. In so far as the I discovers itself to be the ground of all experience, it discovers itself to be the ground of all laws that govern experience, and also the origin any purpose.³⁶

On this view, reason is continuously present to itself in consciousness and, therefore, cannot be reduced to a dependent variable of external space. Since positing indicates the self's summoning to free action, "the influence of the other cannot be a causal one, but an influence compatible with freedom and intelligence, namely, a summons or invitation".³⁷ Seen in this way, for Fichte, knowledge is mediated rather than immediate.³⁸

34 Farr, Arnold "Reflective Judgement and the Boundaries of Human Knowledge: The Path towards Fichte's 1794/95 *Wissenschaftslehre*" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *New Essays in Fichte's foundation of the entire Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge*. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Press, 2001), Pg.118.

35 Ameriks, Karl. *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Pg. 176 – 178.

36 Farr, Arnold "Reflective Judgement and the Boundaries of Human Knowledge: The Path towards Fichte's 1794/95 *Wissenschaftslehre*", Pg. 118.

37 Robert Williams "The Question of the Other in Fichte's Thought" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *Fichte: Historical Context/Contemporary Controversies*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Books, 1994), Pg. 146.

38 Steven Hoeltzel. "Fichte's Deduction of Representation in the 1794/95 *Grundlage*" Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Ed.) *New Essays in Fichte's foundation of the entire Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge*. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Press, 2001), Pg.41.

Understandably, Fichte's philosophy triggered the atheism controversy and resulted in his dismissal from the University of Jena. For Fichte, subjectivity was all there was and even the subject-object dichotomy existed at the second-tier level. Making the subject the substratum of his system renders Fichte susceptible to the solipsism charge, and, subsequently, atheism. The Jena community interpreted Fichte's reduction of everything to subjectivity as an attempt to deny the existence of external space or nature, and, by implication, God, something Europe was not prepared for at the time.

Conclusion

Charlene Siegfried observes that the inability of even anti-metaphysical (Nietzsche) systems to completely escape foundationalist metaphors is indicative of the fact that philosophy cannot successfully escape metaphysics.³⁹ On this note, the foundationalist perspective is correct in taking seriously Fichte's desire to create a system comparable to geometry capable of producing certainty. However, to the extent that he radicalizes Kant's modest account of mind, pointing out its fallibility and finitude of the finite subject, the anti-foundationalist may be correct in reading Fichte as conceding that the certainty sought by philosophy cannot be met in practice. Truth on this view becomes a product of the conceptual framework within which it is entertained. And this is the inquiry's understanding of what Fichte hopes to achieve with its circular doctrine. What is more, if anything is good in and of itself, philosophy is that something irrespective of whether or not it yields any measurable outcome.

39 Charlene Siegfried "Like Bridges without Piers: Beyond the Foundationalist Metaphor" Tom Rockmore and Beth J. Singer (Ed.) *Antifoundationalism: Old and New* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), Pg. 143 – 144.

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