

MAIMON'S CRITICISM OF REINHOLD'S "SATZ DES BEWUSSTSEINS"

In a letter of January 1795 Schelling wrote Hegel: "Philosophy is not at an end yet. Kant has given the results, the premises are still missing. And who can understand results without premises?"<sup>1</sup> The opinion that Kant had not completed philosophy but rather that he had first given the possibility of an adequate philosophical, that is scientific, mode of question with regard to the principles of human knowledge and action had not originally been introduced by Schelling. Even the early and most serious interpreter of Kant, such as the early Maimon, Fichte and others, found themselves compelled to statements such as Schelling's, if for a variety of motivations. Above all Reinhold, who was praised by Kant himself as a capable interpreter of his philosophy,<sup>2</sup> was motivated in own systematic design in 1789 by the necessity of furnishing the premises for the Kantian theory of the faculties of knowledge.

At first Reinhold meant to develop these premises through a theory of the faculty of representations (*Vorstellungsvermögen*).<sup>3</sup> Starting from the primarily formal consideration that philosophy, if it wants to emerge from the contradictions of standpoints of the different schools, has to go back to universal principles, Reinhold tries to define the only conditions under which such principles can be obtained. He consequently starts out from the question "How are those universal grounds of knowledge and principles possible?"<sup>4</sup> Actually, the possibility of answering such a question presumes that a different question has already been answered sufficiently, namely the question of the limits of the human faculty of knowledge. This question, can only be answered if one presumes a universal concept of the faculty of knowledge. At this point Reinhold introduces his concept of representation (*Vorstellung*) or of the faculty of representations. He says: "It is utterly impossible to come to an agreement about the universal concept of the faculty of knowledge, as long as differences remain with regard

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<sup>1</sup> *Briefe von und an Hegel*, (ed. By J.Hoffmeister), Vol. I, Hamburg, 1952, p.14.

<sup>2</sup> cf. I. Kant, *Werke*, (ed. by W. Weischedel), Vol. V, Darmstadt 1957, pp. 168ff.

<sup>3</sup> cf. K. L. Reinhold, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, Jena 1789 (reprint: Darmstadt 1963) p. 67. In the translation of the philosophical terminology of Kant and his period I have, as far as possible, made use of the terms used by H. J. Paton, *Kant's Metaphysic of Experience*, London 1965. For the translation of the Ms. I am much indebted to D. von Recklinghausen.

<sup>4</sup> *loc.cit.*, p. 141.

to the concept of the faculty of representations".<sup>5</sup> For every concept of knowledge presumes the concept of representation. A more detailed explication of the concept of representation developed by Reinhold cannot be undertaken within this context. We must be satisfied to point out the different notions which later became relevant for his "principle of consciousness" (*Satz des Bewußtseins*). In the first place, Reinhold defines his concept of the faculty of representations as follows: "In its wider sense the term 'faculty of representations' sums up everything that primarily belongs to the conditions of a representation".<sup>6</sup> This definition makes it possible for him to differentiate between exterior and interior conditions of representation, the exterior conditions being all those without which a representation cannot be thought, but which, on the other hand, have to be distinguished from the mere concept of the representation, such that they may be left out of consideration in an attempt to define the universal concept of the representation.

Reinhold finds two of these exterior conditions: the representing subject and the represented object. By eliminating both of these material conditions of any representation from the analysis of the concept of the representation he meets the presupposition necessary for his endeavour. He has, at least formally, opened up the possibility of defining a universal and organizing principle of all modes of human knowledge and action.

Reinhold attempts to integrate these results into the context of a systematic design which he calls Elementary Philosophy (*Elementar-Philosophie*). He conceives Elementary Philosophy to be the only possible system of principles that lay the foundation for theoretical and practical, and equally for formal and material philosophy.<sup>7</sup> To be Elementary Philosophy it has to be based on a universal principle, which, not being provable any further, is the first<sup>8</sup>, highest and only<sup>9</sup> principle. However, such a principle of all philosophy can only be expressed through a fact which can neither be due to experiences nor to particular theoretical reflections through a fact rather that should be present within us in a way such that it has to be capable of accompanying all particular experiences and thoughts. Consequently, this fact can only be the consciousness itself, which is contained in the sentence that expresses it insofar as it is representable.

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<sup>5</sup> *loc.cit.*,pp. 181ff.

<sup>6</sup> *loc.cit.*,p. 195.

<sup>7</sup>cf. K. L. Reinhold, *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*, Jena 1790, p. 344.

<sup>8</sup> *loc.cit.*,p. 115ff.

This first and universal sentence of Elementary Philosophy is the "principle of consciousness", which, treated extensively in the contemporary discussion, is worded in an as it were dogmatized form in the definition: "In consciousness the representation is distinguished by the subject from subject and object and related to both".<sup>10</sup> This principle (or at least the position characterized through it which was taken at the time to be a developed Kantian position) was hailed by the different sciences which were intimately dependent upon contemporary philosophical doctrines, for instance by the advocates of a cautiously Kantianizing empirical psychology. Through the Reinholdian foundation of a critical philosophy made possible by this principle, they found themselves escaping from the dilemma brought about on the one hand by the necessity to integrate Kantian results into their disciplines and on the other hand by the impossibility of finding such Kantian categories as could be interpreted psychologically, and from which the Statements of empirical psychology could be deduced.<sup>11</sup>

However, the "principle of consciousness" was not only admired and accepted; it was sharply criticized. Of all immediate critical reactions to Reinhold's model, the *Aenesidemus* by G. E. Schulze and Fichte's review of the *Aenesidemus* have drawn most attention. Earlier than these two authors, however, Salomon Maimon had discussed Reinhold's theory, anticipating in a certain sense the critical argument of Schulze; and in a second critical attempt, he had shown the aporie that was to become relevant later for Fichte's reflections. As far as I know the respective criticism of Maimon was directly considered neither by Fichte nor by other later critics of Reinhold. This has probably not been due so much to its lack of substantial importance as to the fact that it appeared in a place a little remote from the philosophical discussion, namely in K.P. Moritz' *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*<sup>12</sup>. Publication of Reinhold-criticism in a periodical of empirical psychology may be regarded as proof of the particular importance which Reinhold's philosophy bore for this discipline, but the philosophical significance of Maimon's criticism can hardly be exhausted by this fact. There seems to be at least a historical justification to take up once again the material aspects of this criticism.

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<sup>9</sup> *loc.cit.*,p. 353ff.

<sup>10</sup> *loc.cit.*,p. 162.

<sup>11</sup>cf. here the works of C. C. E. Schmid (*Empirische Psychologie*, Jena 1791) and L. H. Jakob (*Grundriß der Erfahrungs-Seelenlehre*, Halle 1791), where the way the traditional elements of empirical psychology are combined with Kantian and Reinholdian elements may be studied in detail.

<sup>12</sup>*Gnothi Sauton oder Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, 10 Vols., Berlin 1783ff. 13

Maimon criticizes Reinhold on two levels: primarily on a formal level by not acknowledging the status of universality Reinhold claims for his principle of consciousness and secondarily on a material level by discussing Reinhold's concept of consciousness. The two lines of criticism are not independent of each other: their interdependence is such that criticism of the postulation of universality follows from the implications contained in the critical analysis of the concept of consciousness. However, the historical genesis of this criticism moves in the opposite direction. Maimon was led to criticism of Reinhold's concept of consciousness through the criticism of the postulation of universality. Consequently, criticism of the status of the principle of consciousness shall be treated here first.

Maimon's starting point is the suspicion of incompleteness in Reinhold's attempt to define consciousness in general (*Bewußtsein überhaupt*) as a form of relationship between representation, representing subject, and represented object<sup>13</sup>. Following Maimon's line of thought, consciousness in general can not in fact be defined adequately through the category of representation, as a representation always presupposes an already synthesized multiplicity as the represented, which it refers to as to an object. Thus a representation presupposes a synthesis, and accordingly, the possibility of the consciousness of a representation presupposes a synthesis, too. However, there are kinds of consciousness that, unlike the consciousness of a representation, do not presuppose a synthesis, as for instance the consciousness of a perception (*Wahrnehmung*). For, as Maimon says, a "mere perception does not, before it has been brought into some synthesis, relate to anything except itself, and only by having been thought of as part of a synthesis does it relate to the synthesis, as a representation relates to that which is represented through it."<sup>14</sup> This difference between representation and perception, elaborated by Maimon, implies the consequence, hard to refute phenomenologically for Reinhold himself, that consciousness in general can not be defined satisfactorily through the concept of representation and its relations to subject and object. In consequence, according to Maimon, the principle of consciousness can not be upheld as a universal principle.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögens*, p. 322.

<sup>14</sup> *Gnothi Sauton*, loc. cit., Vol. 9, Nr. 2, p. 108 note.

<sup>15</sup> Maimon tries to get the same result in the same context through a different reflection. His argument in that case is such: If a representation is possible only under the presupposition of a synthesis (a represented object) it must be referable to the thing in itself. For the thing in itself is a possible synthesis in general; the represented object, however, is a real synthesis. Since the concept of a synthesis in general belongs necessarily to the concept of a specific, i.e. real synthesis, the possibility of relating the representation to the thing in itself follows from the possibility of relating the representation to a real synthesis. A concept of representation, though, that permits this consequence is inappropriate for the definition of consciousness in general, the consciousness of a perception

This line of reasoning is very like that of *Aenesidemus*, which also denies the universality of this principle by trying to give evidence that there are other kinds of consciousness that can not be reduced to a relationship between representation, subject, and object.<sup>16</sup> And even Fichte, in his review of *Aenesidemus*, prefers to stay away from the question of universality, though he tries to support Reinhold as far as possible against Schulze's reflections.<sup>17</sup> It may therefore be assumed that Maimon's attack on the postulation of universality expressed critically a suspicion that was widespread at the time.

If Maimon had been satisfied with his criticism, this would only be the comparatively uninteresting historical merit of having developed independently from and a little earlier than others, a point that later was to become rather common. But he believed he could trace back the deficiency noticed in Reinhold to a difficulty that is not unique to a certain position (in our case the Reinholdian) but rather a difficulty that hints at a predicament incurred by any attempt to define consciousness in general. Primarily, for Reinhold and for Maimon likewise, consciousness in general is regarded as being that which is common to all the various kinds of consciousness. Yet contrary to Maimon, Reinhold holds that this common moment can, to a satisfactory extent, be defined by transferring the genus-

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can not be put into relation to a thing in itself, i.e. to a synthesis in general, because it does not presuppose a synthesis in Maimon's sense. Consequently, Reinhold's "principle of consciousness" can not be universal (cf. *loc. cit.*, p. 108 note). - This criticism is not very convincing because it assumes a strange concept of a thing in itself. It is indeed correct, that the concept of a specific synthesis must necessarily contain the concept of a synthesis in general. But according to Kant, whom Maimon refers to explicitly in this place, a synthesis in general is by no means a thing in itself, but primarily nothing but "the mere effect of the power of imagination, of a blind yet indispensable function of the soul" (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 103).

<sup>16</sup>cf. G. E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie*, 1792 (reprint: *Neudrucke seltener Philosophischer Werke*, Vol. 1 ed. by Kant-Gesellschaft, Berlin 1911), pp. 70ff. - Schulze's critical thesis runs as follows: "Thus, sometimes there are states of representation and of consciousness within us, that do not contain all elements, which have in the 'principle of consciousness' been named as essentially belonging to each of these three states" (73). As an example of such states he adduces above all the intuition (*Anschauung*) where during the act of intuition the represented object is by no means discerned from the intuition as a form of representation. - However, Reinhold could object to this argument that the characteristic of being affected *immediately*, denotes precisely the intuition. Consequently, postulating to discern intuition and object of intuition in the act of intuition would contradict that concept of intuition which defines intuition as a mode of representation. Given such a concept, the moment of discerning could be qualified indeed as existing, but infinitely small in degree. Therefore the immediacy that characterises this concept would be nothing but a specific kind of discerning (cf. Reinhold, *Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögens*, p. 362)

<sup>17</sup>cf. J. G. Fichte, *Werke* (ed. by F. Medicus), Vol. 1, Darmstadt 1962, p. 134; - Fichte's caution with respect to this point is not bound to express that he approved of the criticism delivered by Schulze. Fichte's reserve may just as well hint at his particular interest in the "principle of consciousness." He is concerned about having this principle understood as being derived from empirical data. It holds true of this principle, then, that it "is based on a different principle, yet is stringently provable a priori and independent of any experience" (*loc. cit.*, p. 136). In the context of his defense of Reinhold it is remarkable, however, that he does not pay attention to the problem of universality which is certainly important for Reinhold.

species relationship to the relationship between consciousness in general and the different kinds of consciousness: "The consciousness of the representation, the consciousness of the representing (the self-consciousness), and the consciousness of the represented relate to consciousness in general as species relate to the genus. They are distinguished only by their objects, and what they have in common is called consciousness in general."<sup>18</sup> What, indeed, is this common element? For Reinhold it is "the act of relating the mere representation to object and subject, which consequently we have to assume as the real nature of consciousness in general."<sup>19</sup>

Maimon, on the other hand, regards this as untenable. For what Reinhold tries to make evident as the common element and therefore as consciousness in general, is in itself just a kind of consciousness, since the act of relating the three moments named by Reinhold can be thought of only as an act of consciousness, which therefore already in itself presupposes consciousness in general.<sup>20</sup> This Maimonian argument is based on an assumption that holds for all attempts to define consciousness through a reflection of its various kinds; the assumption, indeed, that to talk of a kind of consciousness already implies the acquaintance with that which, in the discussion presented here, has been named consciousness in general. One consequence of this assumption, not wholly unimportant for the philosophical discussion of the problem of consciousness, would be that every attempt to define consciousness by means of the method specified above is futile because necessarily circular.<sup>21</sup> And it is precisely this conclusion that Maimon draws from his discussion of Reinhold's principle of consciousness when finally he states: "Consequently, consciousness in general, too, abstracted from the particular kind of consciousness, can not be conceived through interior characteristics. However, as the result of the addition of a particular specific distinction it may be conceived as not only this particular kind of consciousness but as consciousness in general. That is why

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<sup>18</sup>*Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögens*, p.325.

<sup>19</sup> *loc.cit.*,p. 327.

<sup>20</sup>Besides, according to Maimon, Reinhold neglects a fifth kind of consciousness within the concept of consciousness laid down by him, viz. the consciousness of the specific kind of the respective relations between representation, subject, and object. Consequently for Maimon "relating a representation and its being related to its object and subject amounts to not one but five kinds of consciousness; consciousness of the subject, consciousness of the object, consciousness of the representation, consciousness of relating these three to each other in general, and consciousness of the specific kind of relating and being related of each of these three" (*Gnothi Sauton, loc. cit.*, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 8).

<sup>21</sup> Reference to this argument is certainly not remarkable because of its originality in the context of the discussion about possibilities of foundation this formal aporie had frequently been considered in Maimon's time, for instance with Kant in the problem of the definition of the forms of judgment (cf. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 245) and with Reinhold in the repulse of the foundation of consciousness through the representing power (cf. *Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögens*, p. 339).

consciousness in general can not be defined except in a circle, because it necessarily has to appear in all definitions, being the most general of all characteristics."<sup>22</sup>

Unconditional negation of the possibility of defining consciousness in general seems, at first sight, to be nothing but a repetition of Kant's wellknown consideration in the beginning of the Paralogisms (B 403 f), exploited by Maimon against the Kantian Reinhold. But Maimon's objection would not appear to be interpreted adequately by this reduction to Kant, since it has to be considered in relation to the criticism of the universality of the principle of consciousness. In this connection the criticism of the basic concept of consciousness guarantees the successful repulse of potential attempts to present Reinhold's fundamental error as a merely formal mistake, a mistake that could have been avoided if the possibilities of empirical proof were not that limited in Reinhold's design. It is only through the repulse of such attempts at reconciliation that Maimon succeeds in making his intentions clear, viz., to show that for every theory which finds in a specific concept of consciousness a basis not supportable any further, either the basic of this theory must remain transcendent or the theory is circular. Maimon sees this thesis verified in Reinhold's theory. Therefore, the failure of this theory is stated not solely for its own sake but even more because it is of interest for a specific type of theory as an indication of its principal deficiency.<sup>23</sup>

As shown above, these critical reflections of Maimon had no immediate effect. However, they are not to be considered a remote and private speculation but to be taken as thoroughly serious reflections referring to what could be called somewhat generally the idealistic problem of foundation. This is confirmed by the example of Fichte, who discussed carefully the question, raised up by Maimon, of the necessary circularity of "first, highest, and absolute" principles. To be sure, it is no longer a concept of consciousness like the one Reinhold had in mind, which, in connection with the problem of foundation of philosophical theory, had raised discussion of this question: - as regards

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<sup>22</sup> *Gnothi Sauton, loc. cit.*, Vol. 9, Nr. 3, p. 9. It must be noted that Maimon does not develop this criticism of Reinhold's concept of consciousness in confrontation with Reinhold's theory directly. He refers to C. C. E. Schmid's *Empirische Psychologie (loc. cit.)*, whose definition of consciousness coincides almost literally with that of Reinhold. Maimon himself points this out, indicating at the end of his reflections on this topic the identity of the definitions offered by Schmid and Reinhold.

<sup>23</sup> It may be of some interest, that a few years later Maimon tries, in a rather peculiar way, to avoid the difficulties which he had shown to exist in Reinhold's theory. In his *Versuch einer neuen Logik -- nebst angehängten Briefen des Philaletes an Aenesidemus* of 1794, when trying to evade the circle criticised, he incurs a contradiction, maintaining explicitly in one instance that consciousness in general could not be defined while in another he defines it as "the unspecified consciousness or the act of knowing in general" (p. 213).

that, the inadequacies of Reinhold's design had become apparent too rapidly. However, the question was raised by Fichte mainly as a conceivable objection against the possibility of philosophical theory in general. In this respect he surpasses Maimon, whose *critical Intention* was limited to proving the circularity of a specific type of theory without taking into consideration any further consequences for the possibility of theory in general. Yet the necessity of taking these implicit consequences into account follows from the reflection that otherwise the possibility of doubt would by a merely formal consideration be dogmatized and consequently rendered sterile.

Thus Maimon's criticism of Reinhold may, for all its unpretentiousness, with some justification be considered important in a double respect: primarily as a contribution to material criticism of a historical position, and secondarily as an indication of a problem that deserves attention beyond the horizon of a particular period. This is also stressed by Fichte. He states, of the Critical Scepticism and explicitly of Maimon who represented it, that he "uncovered the inadequacy of the reasons hitherto existing and thereby indicates where more solid ones may be found. Through him science gains, if not in substance then certainly in form. And these is little awareness of the interests of science if the discerning sceptic is denied the respect he deserves".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>*Werke*, loc. cit., Vol. 1, p. 315 note.