
SUMMARY

FICHTE IN CONTEXT

This book is a collection of Marek Siemek's texts on Johann Gottlieb Fichte, his philosophy and related topics, written by Siemek throughout his life, from 1960s to 2000s. The content is based on the drafts of a book on Fichte, prepared by the Author himself in 2005-2006. These essays have been already published, but the versions published in this volume are not direct reprints – they are later versions, reworked by the Author.

Fichte's philosophy was the main theme of Siemek's master's thesis, written under Bronisław Baczko's guidance in the mid-1960s. In his first approach to Fichte's thought Siemek chose the opposition of the spontaneity and the reflection as the leading ideas for his interpretation. The starting point for Fichte was Kant's problem how to reconcile the necessity of recognition of truth in an act of knowledge with assumed freedom of human subject. To solve this problem, Fichte put freedom in the first place, as a prime condition not only of action, but also of recognition and of knowledge. In this early interpretation Siemek pointed out, that the development of self-consciousness consists of the transition from the immediate freedom in spontaneous acts of subject (inadequate cognition) to the mediated freedom in reflective relation to object. What's even more important, this is not only the reflection on the object of cognition, but also the reflection on itself, the reflection on reflection. The process of mediating and universalizing freedom can be described as a process of the rationalization and the alienation. The opposition of the spontaneity and the reflection becomes subsequently the foundation of Fichte's theory of culture as a development of self-consciousness, independent not only from the nature, but also from the contingency of a single act of subjective freedom. The culture appears to be a form of universal (intersubjective) freedom, ruled by the law (*Gesetz*). That's how Fichte's transcendental idea of freedom leads to the concepts of the law, the state and the nation. In the third chapter of this thesis Siemek discusses Fichte's activism: the more active subject is, the more evident it manifests its freedom of action. In this point

Fichte's philosophy comes from moral interpretation of freedom to the philosophy of history. The field of historical process is the world – as it is found and as it is being perpetually created. The world as it is found is treated as a substance to be formed by an active subject, as a substance for perpetual shaping. On the other hand, in an act of reflection the subject can refer only to the already shaped world, to the "found" (or met) forms of the world. This contact of the reflective subject with the already shaped world is called alienation.

The most important context for Fichte's thought is Kant's transcendental philosophy. Siemek discussed thoroughly the relation between these two systems in his renowned book *The Idea of Transcendentalism by Fichte and Kant* (1978), nonetheless he developed some detailed questions and added some new remarks in the texts collected in this volume. Generally, Siemek treated Fichte not only as the true successor of Kant's philosophy (in opposition to the contemporary so called „Kantists“, who followed more traditional, metaphysical trails in Kant's philosophy), but also as a true founder of the transcendental philosophy. In Kant's works the idea of transcendentalism is still mixed with problems discussed from the old point of view, while Fichte chose only some most original concepts to formulate his Science of Knowledge. Namely, he solved the paradox of thing-in-itself as the unrecognizable source of cognition by putting in its place the subject (which is not unrecognizable, because it can be described as active in freedom, or free in acting). The subject (I, *Ich*) sets itself (*setzt sich*) in opposition to not-I (*Nicht-Ich*), which sets limits to its possibilities. The subject recognizes its limits in the object, therefore the setting of the subject as the source of knowledge means at the same time the recognition of the conditions (and limitations) of subject's free actions. The action of the subject (*Tathandlung*) is thus primary rule of Fichte's Science of Knowledge, instead of assumed by the Kantist's (Reinhold's etc.) primary rule of consciousness (*Satz des Bewusstseins*).

Siemek in his early texts compared Fichte's writings from the Jena period (*Wissenschaftslehre*) with late writings from the Berlin period (philosophy of religion), clearly showing his sympathy for the first of abovementioned periods. Later he focused almost exclusively on the Jenaer period, mainly on the Science of Knowledge. Siemek presented the most thorough discussion on this theory in the preface to the Polish edition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* writings, that he had also translated into Polish. The main idea of Science of Knowledge appears to be a transformation of Kant's question "What may I know?" into new formula "What IS Knowledge?". Henceforth it is not only epistemological, but also ontological question. To explain the meaning of the idea of transcendentalism as a turning point in the modern philosophy Siemek introduced the distinction between the epistemic and the epistemologic fields (areas, approaches). The epistemological approach to the idea of knowledge means focusing on the relation subject-object (and therefore it is separated from ontical, i.e. metaphysical questions), while epistemological approach means focusing on the ontological status of the knowledge itself, on referring the knowledge to itself (self-reference

of knowledge). The idea of transcendentalism is based on two main principles: 1) the subject does not only learn knowledge, but also it acts, therefore it should be considered in these two aspects at the same time; 2) knowledge is intersubjective (knowledge takes its shape in relations between subjects). Subsequently, the Science of Knowledge, according to Fichte, was meant not only as a theory of knowledge in strictly philosophical sense, but also as the theory of science in a broader meaning, as the foundation of the natural sciences. There cannot be true science without philosophical justification and validation. The science cannot explain and validate itself, it needs to be validated by philosophy, i.e. by the epistemological and ontological considerations on the relations between the subject and the object of science.

Siemek made an original attempt to reconstruct and to interpret Fichte's theory of pictures, of making pictures and of "picture-likeness" or "picture-being" (*Bildlichkeit*) as an interesting development of the Science of Knowledge. He claimed, that the ideas of pictures and of making pictures (and not of notions, thoughts etc.) was a very core of Fichte's theory. In this theory a picture is either a kind of sensual notion, or a kind of cognition more primary than notion. Whole Fichte's theory of presentation, representation and cognition is based on the idea of picture, says Siemek. A picture contains two moments of knowledge mentioned above: it represents something (a picture of an object) and at the same time it reflects to itself (a picture of a picture). The object (or generally – a being) appears to the subject only in this dual representation and, on the other hand, a picture cannot be taken only as a representation of an object, but also as such, as a picture itself.

Fichte and Schelling represent two different paradigma's of post-Kantian, transcendental philosophy. Siemek treated them as the alternative: Fichte or Schelling? – and his own answer is obviously clear. Schelling's mistake, according to Siemek, consists in assuming, that the transcendental conditions of thinking are already established as a set of some strict rules, and therefore they can be hold as something stable, as a kind of identity of a subject. And if they can be identified and formulated as an identity, they can be also surpassed; philosophy can transgress outside the transcendental horizon of thinking and acting, to the areas of Nature or God. It's incorrect, says Siemek, because transcendental conditions of thinking are never established as a "hard" identity of subject. They are constantly "under construction", because any act of thinking is also subject's action (*Tathandlung*), not datum. Transcendental conditions of thinking are being established all the time anew, not established once and for all time. In Schelling's case the path from the philosophy of identity leads to the philosophy of nature, which is completely contrary to the transcendental philosophy. Siemek claims, that most of the classical German philosophy unfortunately chose this wrong way, losing the chance to make philosophy a kind of theory of knowledge or science (not necessarily strictly in Fichte's sense).

The comparison of Fichte's and Schelling's systems of philosophy has been stated already by young Hegel, who claimed, that Fichte's philosophy is a synthesis of Kant's

one (in setting the form of objectivity) and Jacobi's one (setting the conflict between the subjectivity and the objectivity). Siemek's interpretation follows Hegel's early text. Siemek compared Fichte's Science of Knowledge with Hegel's idea of absolute knowledge. Just like Fichte's Science of Knowledge, Hegel's absolute knowledge is a kind of knowledge of knowledge, therefore it is epistemological (not just epistemical) theory and at the same time ontological, while it takes into account the ontological status of knowledge (being of knowledge, being as knowledge). Hegel expressed the principles of the idea of transcendentalism with a slightly different set of notions than Fichte (from Jena period), but generally the similarities between these two philosophers are remarkable.

Finally, Siemek compared two versions of the transcendental philosophy: Fichte's „classical“ one and Husserl's „modern“ one. Although Husserl didn't pay much attention to Fichte's works, nonetheless Siemek found some interesting parallels. Both philosophers were searching for the source of knowledge and both pointed out, that this source is to be found in the subject's activity, and not in the outer nature. Both wanted philosophy to be a kind of critical and most general science, in opposition to (or rather: as a foundation of) the natural sciences. Both wanted philosophy to be a kind of meta-science.

Bartosz Działoszowski