
SUMMARY

THE IDEA OF TRANSCENDENTALISM IN FICHTE AND KANT. A STUDY IN THE HISTORY OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMATIC OF KNOWLEDGE

This book aims at a description and analysis of a theoretical revolution in the history of philosophical thought, to which it came through the advent of the idea of Transcendentalism. This idea emerged for the first time in the critical philosophy of Kant and was further developed and in a sense accomplished by Fichte in his "Doctrine of Science". However, the Author's proper objective is not a strictly historical presentation of the views of both thinkers concerning the essence of the "transcendental philosophy", but rather an attempt to understand the objective theoretical process whose realization are those views and which consisted in the development of a radically new structure of the philosophical *problem of knowledge* as a whole.

This new structure, as well as the specific character of the spiritual breakthrough underlying its emergence, are generally outlined in Chapter I ("Kant: Transcendentalism as an epistemological standpoint"). The Author begins with a description of a fundamental qualitative difference which obtains already with respect to the form of philosophical questions concerning knowledge between the "transcendental" standpoint of Kant expressed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the traditional problematic of the "theory of cognition" in modern philosophy from Descartes to Hume. This difference consists in a complete heterogeneity of two fields or levels of theoretical thinking, on which the problematic of knowledge emerges and functions and whose internal structure is chiefly determined by the assumed relation of "knowledge" and "being". On the first of these levels knowledge appears in its direct form as "cognition", i.e. as already strictly separated from the cognizable "reality"; this level – characterized by the Author as the direct *epistemic* level of theory – presupposes therefore a division of "subject" and "object", "consciousness" and "thing", the "cognizing" and the "cognized", of thinking and being. It is within such split theoretical space that the classical "theory of cognition" before Kant works: this is the typical form of a philosophical treatment of the problem of knowledge on the

epistemic level of theory. Kant instead was the first to put the problematic of knowledge on a radically new level of thinking, called by the Author, in contrast to the former one, *epistemological*. Its specific character consists in the fact that it is the level of questions concerning the total structure of the epistemic level, i.e. the conditions of the necessary *relation of knowledge and being*, the *a priori* foundation of the congruence and correspondence between “cognition” and “object of cognition”, in one word: the *ontology of knowledge*.

In the following parts of Chapter I the Author shows how this new space of epistemological thinking is created by the very Kantian idea of Transcendentalism. The Author reconstructs first Kant’s concept of “transcendental philosophy”, whose proper meaning he places in investigations into the “*a priori* conditions of possible experience”. He also shows that this problematic from the very beginning transcends the horizon of the traditional “theory of cognition”. The guidelines are here an analysis and interpretation of the Kantian doctrine of the “transcendental ideality” (which for Kant means at the same time “empirical reality”) of the *forms* of empirically adequate cognition – of time and space and of the categories of pure understanding. It is precisely in this doctrine, interpreted as a specific *ontology* of the whole “realm of possible experience”, i.e. of the subjective-objective world of human experience, that in Author’s opinion the new – epistemological – standpoint on the problem of knowledge finds its fullest expression. The essential meaning of this standpoint is in turn explained with reference to two main theses of Kant’s epistemology: of the structural *unity* of the whole realm of the epistemic “experience” (e.g. of the necessary feedback between “subject” and “object”), and of the “phenomenal”, “appearance-like” and therefore not absolute, ontologically dependent character and status of this realm. The epistemological stance opens thus a view on a new problematic of a transcendental ontology of “experience” and of the whole world of the empirically given – a problematic which is fundamentally different both from the questions of the traditional “Metaphysics” and of the “theory of cognition” situated on the epistemic level.

In the concluding part of this chapter the Author discusses the most important early reception and interpretation of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (Jacobi, Reinhold, Schulze, Maimon, Beck) and explains why the whole epistemological sense and content of Kant’s Transcendentalism were misunderstood or even overlooked. It happened because both critics and followers of Kant in this initial phase considered his work from the traditional “cognition-theoretic” standpoint borrowed directly from the familiar schemata of the mainstream Enlightenment philosophical culture. The common ground of these early discussions with Kant is therefore wholly determined by the structure of a principally pre-Kantian space of thought, characteristic of thinking which does not transcend the epistemic level of theory.

From this viewpoint Fichte is the first to count as one who tried to elaborate further on the Kantian idea of Transcendentalism. The Author develops this account in

Chapter II (“Fichte – the Kantians – Kant”), where he discusses the specific character of Fichte’s Kant-reception, with special focus on the differences between Fichte and the whole “cognition-theoretically” oriented circle of the first Kantians and Anti-Kantians. He aims not only at an interpretation of Fichte’s attitude towards Kant, but also at a discovery of the true genesis and structure of Fichte’s “Doctrine of Science” as an all-encompassing philosophical project. The Author’s primary objective is a critique of the “genetic illusion” common in the literature on Fichte, according to which the theoretical standpoint expressed by the “Doctrine of Science” can be traced back directly to the “cognition-theoretic” problematic of the first Kant-discussions (first of all discussions between Reinhold, “Änesidemus”-Schulze and Maimon concerning such questions as the possibility of a “deduction of representations”, interpretation of “things in themselves” or the problem of the “fundamental principle” of critical philosophy as a system). In fact the problematic of these discussions – together with the whole complex of questions concerning the “theoretical philosophy” in the Kantian sense – plays only a secondary role in Fichte, placed in the context of a presupposed perspective which gives this problematic an entirely new meaning. Additionally the Author shows how the emergence of this new all-encompassing view (identical with the epistemological stance) coincides with a radically new interpretation of Kant, which for the first time is to be found in Fichte and finds its expression in the “reverse order” of his Kant-readings and considerations pertaining to Kant. A detailed analysis of Fichte’s development in the years 1790–1794 (thus before his first appearance in the discussions concerning the “theoretical” problems of Kantianism) makes clear that Fichte from the very beginning read Kant differently and that he read a *different* Kant than contemporary Kantians did. Namely he starts from the “practical” questions of the will and freedom, i.e. from the ethical problems of the *second Critique* of Kant. But, more than that, he considers these problems almost from the beginning from a still more general perspective of questions concerning the ontological foundations of the *unity* and *mutual relationship* of both orders distinguished by Kant: freedom and nature, practical and theoretical reason, action and cognition, in one word: from the perspective of the *third Critique* of Kant, i.e. the *Critique of Judgement*. Only then, in such a perspective, emerges in Fichte’s thinking the whole complex of questions pertaining to the *first Critique*, i.e. the problematic of Kant’s “theoretical” philosophy proper, together with the related discussions between the first Kantians and Anti-Kantians. Therefore this problematic functions here from the very beginning not as an autonomous “cognition-theoretic” reflection, but rather as it appears in the broader context of the whole of Kant’s philosophy, determined first by the thesis of the “primacy of practical reason” and then by the ontological standpoint of the “reflective faculty of judgement”.

In Chapter III (“Doctrine of Science” in its relation to “Critique of Reason”) the Author shows how precisely in this new context in which Fichte interprets Kant it is possible for him to grasp correctly the epistemological meaning of Kant’s

Transcendentalism. Subject-matter of the analysis and interpretation are here the fundamental theoretical assumptions of the system of the "Doctrine of Science" founded by Fichte. The Author comes to the conclusion that the philosophical problem of knowledge in this system from the very beginning does not (as opposed to the Kantians) lie in the epistemic, but (as for Kant) in the epistemological field of theory, produced by the "reverse" order and the unusual context, in which Fichte read all three *Critiques* of Kant. The difference of both levels of theory is explained first on the example of Fichte's critique of the received "Kantianism of the Kantians" and then through a detailed reconstruction of the positive meaning given by Fichte to Kant's "transcendental Idealism" as well as the way he further develops this standpoint in his "Doctrine of Science". Finally the Author presents the problems with respect to which Fichte's Transcendentalism goes beyond the limits of the original Kantian project of the "Critique of Reason". Namely Fichte undertakes to develop a complete "system" of transcendental philosophy, which, although envisaged in Kant's writings, was never realized by him. From this standpoint, too, Fichte's "Doctrine of Science" appears as the first genuine development of Kant's philosophy: whereas Kant has merely created the epistemological standpoint of philosophy, Fichte constructs a complete and consistent philosophical Epistemology, being at the same time a transcendental ontology of knowledge.

In the concluding Chapter the Author sums up the most important results of his considerations, stressing once again the importance and the proper meaning of the theoretical turn brought about by Kant's and Fichte's Transcendentalism. He also sketches the new epistemological and ontological problematic, constitutive for Fichte's philosophy, due to which Fichte's "Doctrine of Science" can be regarded not merely as a genuine continuation of Kant's Transcendentalism, but also as the first philosophy *after Kant*, not only in the historical, but in the theoretical sense of the word as well.

Z języka niemieckiego tłumaczył *Marcin Poręba*