'Kant and Fichte on Intellectual Intuition'

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Introduction

One thing that is often seen to stand in the way of a harmonious relationship of Immanuel Kant and Johann Fichte is the issue of intellectual intuition. Simply put: Kant prohibited such intuition, whereas Fichte explicitly endorsed it. Although it is true that Kant uses the notion in an almost exclusively negative sense, whereas Fichte uses it in a positive sense, this does not as such prove the actual disagreement of their arguments. Discussions within the field of transcendental philosophy and German Idealism have been marred by a lack of clarity as to the different uses made of the term.¹

As we shall see, Kant uses intellectual intuition in a number of distinctly different senses. They are intended to bring out via negativo the nature of our specific form of cognition.

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¹ Examples of useful literature on intellectual intuition are:
On Kant and Fichte, chapter V of F. Beiser German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivity (London: Harvard UP, 2002);
When Fichte takes up the term, he agrees with Kant on the restraints on cognition, yet he feels compelled to re-introduce intellectual intuition in a positive sense precisely in order to reflect on the new philosophy called transcendental. Although the very last word to be published by Kant would be a vehement declaration that, as against Fichte, his philosophy should be understood to the very letter of text, Kant displayed certain difficulties in trying to account for the “I think”. One rather dominant interpretation of this conflict, the so-called Henrich school interpretation, has been to view Fichte’s use of intellectual intuition as entailing a form of immediate (self-) consciousness in an attempt to solve an infinite regress implied in the Kantian account. But as I will argue, to reduce Fichte’s position to that of an account of subjectivity, let alone that of self-identification, is to seriously underappreciate his insistence on the “reciprocal determination” (Wechselbestimmung, see e.g. GWL, SW, I, 131) of subjectivity and objectivity. As Fichte emphasises, intellectual intuition is necessarily conjoint with sensible intuition. This is an important point for it allows a reorientation of the question of subjectivity and objectivity to take place. If intellectual intuition is necessarily conjoint with sensible intuition, this, on the one hand, has the negative consequence of denying any access to the subject in abstraction from its engagements with the world. It is then only in its interactions with the world that I may investigate the structure and nature of experience. Indeed, for Fichte, there is not really “here” a subject, and “there” an object, but subject and object are terms that mutually define each other and hence cannot be taken in separation. But this then has the enormously positive result that, with this loss of a privileged access to the subject, we

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2 ‘Declaration Regarding Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre.’ Translated by A. Zweig in I. Kant, Correspondence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 559-60. Originally published as ‘Erklärung in Beziehung auf Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre’ in Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung, Intelligenzblatt, #109, col. 876-78 (28 August 1799). We will discuss these difficulties below.


also loose the problem as to our access to the world. If the subject is only ever what it is, in its connection with the object, then skepticism about the existence of the external world is demonstrably a non sequitur. And because Fichte makes explicit the relation of subject and object, the issue of embodied consciousness may now be clarified. These are some of the wider issues at stake in Fichte’s account of intellectual intuition and the co-genetic nature of subjectivity and objectivity. Issues, however, we can only indicate here as the focus of this article will be strictly on the issue of intellectual intuition. These wider concerns will have wait for a future occasion.

To clarify the rapport of Kant and Fichte on the issue of intellectual intuition we first need to attain some more clarity as to the precise use made of it by Kant. We will do this in the first paragraph and we will show that for Kant there is not one single form of intellectual intuition, but there are at least three distinct ones. We then turn to Fichte and in §2.1 we will discuss the view given by Henrich et alia on Fichte’s solution to the problems raised by Kant’s account. Although not so much erroneous, this interpretation restricts itself overly to the question of subjectivity. Only when we see how the question of subjectivity is inherently related to that of objectivity do we see the relevance of Fichte’s account. In §2.2 we will discuss to what extent Fichte actually encroaches on the Kantian limits of cognition. §2.3 will discuss Fichte’s notion of completed consciousness, that is, his insistence that intellectual and empirical intuition must always be thought together. Finally rounding of in §3 with some conclusions.

4 Something Fichte attempts more explicitly in the Foundations of Natural Right (Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre, 1796-97)

§1. Kant on intuition

Kant's use of the term intuition is generally taken to consist of one of two possible kinds. First there are the positively endorsed intuitions by the senses of the sensible manifold. The senses, as a passive capacity for receptivity, are impressed by the outside world. Although these sense-impressions have to comply with what Kant calls the forms or “pure intuitions” of time and space, this is something, as it were, internal to the senses and is not an activity of the understanding. The resulting appearances are determined by the *a priori* concepts of the understanding to give us representations, and only these are first properly things we may be said to know. The other intuition is of the non-empirical kind, generally refered to by Kant as “intellectual intuition”. This kind of intuition is in most cases not endorsed by Kant.\(^5\) We will first need to say a bit more about the Kantian epistemology to see why this is so.

Intuition by the senses and concepts of the understanding form the two pillars of the Kantian epistemology. Because what comes to us as impressions of the senses is unconceptualised, or “blind”, Kant can deny any direct *knowledge* of the world as it is in itself and outside of any relation to us, i.e., philosophy *qua* metaphysics. Rather, all knowledge is always already mediated by the concepts proper to our human form of understanding. Furthermore, human cognition is not only mediated, it is also limited. The concepts themselves may only be said to pertain to our form of cognition and do not, as such, give any positive information about the world, they are “empty”. Human cognition is limited in that it must rely on some sensible manifold, which may only be given in experience. However, because the

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\(^5\) Exceptions are the pure intuitions of mathematics, the pure intuitions of space and time, and the intuition of apperception as found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “That representation [i.e. the I think] that can be given prior to all thinking is called *intuition.*” *KrV*, B 1321. *KrV = Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [1781/87] (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990) R. Schmidt (hrg.), nach der ersten und zweiten Original-Ausgabe. Translation in *Critique of Pure Reason*, P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (ed. and tr.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

concepts with which we determine the sensible manifold are forms of thought that are both necessary assumptions for every act of judgment, and at the same time, they cannot be reduced to empirical data, they must be considered as necessary forms of thought for us. They may thus be said to be the *a priori* forms of thought. Knowledge of the world is possible when the sensible manifold as given to the senses is correctly determined by the *a priori* forms of thought.

For the British Empiricists there had been a continuity from the perceptive to the cognitive, from the so-called “simple ideas” to complex ones. Kant now draws a clear distinction between the two. The senses are merely passive or receptive; the intellect active or spontaneous. Because sense-impression alone is inadequate to account for true and reliable knowledge, we must assume knowledge to be in part an act of the self-legislation of the mind.\(^6\)

This then opens up the heretofore unsuspected possibility of an inquiry into the *conditions* of knowledge. That philosophy now concerns the inquiry into the conditions of human cognition redefines it both qua method and scope. It limits philosophy to that which may be known *from within* our perspective. Hence the inquiry now remains immanent to the conditions of knowledge, whilst at the same time speaking of these conditions. It is here that the second sense of intuition in all its variety of non-empirical and non-endorsed uses finds its locus. As Kant reflects: “[I]n the *Critique of Pure Reason* we had to have in mind another possible intuition if we were to hold our own to be a special kind” (KdU 405).\(^7\)

Negatively affirmed instances of intuition come under a variety of forms: divine intuition (KrV B 145), *intellectus*

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6 KrV A 126: “Sensibility gives us forms (of intuition), but the understanding gives us rules.”
7 KdU = *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [1790] (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001) H.F. Klemme (hrq); ‘Erste Einleitung’ to KdU in *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften Band XX* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1942) G. Lehmann (hrg.) Translation in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, P.Guyer and A.W. Wood (ed. and tr.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). To facilitate referencing pagination refers to the Akademie Ausgabe, which is noted in both these editions.
archetypus (KdU 408), intuitiver Verstand (KdU 406), non-sensible intellect (KrV A 249, B 307),
the intuition of the whole (KdU 407). By contrasting our form of cognition with such
hypothetical forms of cognition Kant is able to bring out its unique features, without, however,
overstepping the bounds of knowledge. In that sense negatively affirmed and non-empirical
instances of intuition function in a similar vein as modern-day hypothetical worlds. In the
following three sub-paragraphs we will discuss a number of instances of such hypothetical
intellects. Moltke S. Gram offers a useful discussion of three different types of intellect and we
will loosely base our analysis of intellectual intuition in Kant on this account, supplementing it
when necessary.\(^8\)

### 1.1 A “non-sensible” intellect

Sense-impressions, according to Kant, are always already mediated by what he calls the *a
priori* or pure forms of sensible intuition time and space. As he stresses in the B edition, they
are *a priori* forms of sense impression and are not concepts (KrV B 40). They are the forms of
our cognition and hence cannot be said to be objective qualities of the world; they are
transcendentally ideal (A 28 / B 44). As a result it becomes logically possible to conceive of a
form of cognition that would somehow be able to grasp objects or impressions outside of the
forms of time and space. Such an intellect would have what he calls a “non-sensible intuition”
of the things in themselves (A 249, B 307). Although we may assume that such an intellect
would still be able to use concepts, and hence must be seen as discursive, the fact that it would
not be able to dispose of appearances (as these only appear when the senses apply the pure
forms of time and space), but only of such “non-sensible” intuitions, Kant writes that it would

\(^8\) See Gram 1981.
know via intellectual intuition (*ibid*.). In the B version of the phenomenal-noumenal distinction Kant explains how this is possible. He writes, the categories of thought do not have their origin in sensibility but in the mind. They therefore seem to allow for an application outside of the conditions of sensibility and the conditions of cognition in general (B 305). Now, this is perfectly permissible when done so as to think “beings in general”, or thought-beings; *noumena* that is (B 306). As Fichte will later come to stress, the mind is necessarily locked in a circle whenever it attempt to reflect on its own conditions, since it cannot but assume those very conditions in any attempt at reflection (WLnmK, 12-3⁹). For Kant equally there is no problem here, as long as we guard ourselves against making illegitimate inferences from a merely thought object (a negative noumenon) to *determinate* qualities of the world (a positive noumenon, KrV B 307). That is to say, we use the categories of thought to reflect on those very categories but we should not infer from the fact that we can only understand things this way, that the world must be this way.

The discussion of the first type of a negatively affirmed intellectual intellect underlines the logically contingent fact that, for us, sense-impressions are only ever given under the pure forms of time and space. With a “non-sensible” intellect the distinction between objects as they appear to the senses and objects as they are in themselves is removed. We would, however, maintain a distinction between object and mind, that is to say, the object is still given to the mind and not created by it. The argument concerns the form under which things are given to the senses, but not the fact that it is something given to the senses. As Gram stresses, it makes

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that this form of intellectual intuition is logically distinct from one that would claim that the mind itself, in thinking the object, creates the object.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{1.2 Intellectus Archetypus}

This brings us to the second form of problematic understanding, which Kant calls a creative (\textit{Überbildenches}), or archetypal intellect (\textit{intellectus archetypus}). Such an intellect would create its own object in the very act of cognition. Because the object follows from the act it can no longer be said to be given to it. Hence it would neither be a thing in itself, nor an appearance. We may understand the divine intellect to be of this kind.\textsuperscript{11} The transcendental distinction between objects of cognition and objects outside of the conditions of cognition collapses as nothing seems to be given anymore to such an intellect. Gram concludes that this takes us outside of the critical theory of knowledge that maintains precisely such a distinction.\textsuperscript{12}

Gram, in his article, refers to Kant's \textit{Inaugural Dissertation} and to the letter to Marcus Herz of February 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1772.\textsuperscript{13} These references to the problem of divine intuition are taken up again by Kant in a number of sections from the second part the \textit{Critique of the Power of Judgment} that Gram does not discuss in his article. The question whether the context remains that of early 1770's is one that I will mostly want to leave to the side. Yet the issue, why an intellect whose objects would exist necessarily (as would be the case for a divine intellect) would be a problem for Kant, does become more clear in these sections. Furthermore, it is important to discuss this in a bit more detail, if only because Fichte's notion of a “self-positing I” could be mistaken for the kind of intellect Kant rejects.

\textsuperscript{10} Gram, 1981, 290.
\textsuperscript{11} See Gram, 1981, 291.
\textsuperscript{12} Gram, 1981, 292.
\textsuperscript{13} Gram, 1981, 291.
As we might have noticed from the examples given earlier on, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* discusses quite a variety of types of cognition. The most relevant for now is one from §76. Kant writes, the distinction between the possibility and actuality of things is one that is absolutely necessary for the human cognition (KdU 401). Would that such a distinction did not apply, then all objects that I cognize would also be or exist (403). Such an understanding, for whom objects would necessarily exist, can take one of two forms; and indeed are objects and no longer representations the understanding would know. Either the intellect would be the cause of its objects, hence the kind of creatively divine intellect discussed above; or if it does not causally determine object, then such objects could be seen to “subsist” in the intellect. The latter he takes Spinoza to have advocated (§73: 393). In both cases the very distinction between concepts and sensible intuitions would have disappeared (402). Yet in both cases the unity of the understanding would have been guaranteed as a result of it.

But for Kant this kind of unity is unable to explain what is in fact the overal ambition of the third *Critique*, namely to account for the purposiveness we see in nature. The two systems give us “ontological unity” (393). Yet, purposiveness, “which does not follow at all from the connection of the things (the beings of the world) in one subject (the original being) (...), thoroughly implies a relation to a cause that has understanding [eine Ursache, die Verstand hat]” (ibid.). The two systems give us only “mere natural necessity” (394). However, although Kant here rejects such a route to the understanding of the purposiveness of nature, later on he does display a certain sympathy for it. As he writes in §80, a merely mechanical understanding of nature can never give us the desired purposiveness of nature (418). For as we have seen, such an understanding reduces everything to causes, but not causes that have understanding, we may say, causes that also explain why things take place, i.e., purposive causality.
Unfortunately, mechanical understanding comes naturally to us, whereas an alternative understanding is simply “impossible for us as humans – since for that an intuition (...), which could furnish the ground for the mechanism of the appearances in accordance with particular laws, would be necessary, and this is entirely beyond our capacity” (ibid.). This thought of a non-mechanical intuition brings Kant to some remarkable speculations about generatio heteronyma and a “universal mother” to which “an organization purposively aimed at all [the] creatures [of the world]” must be attributed (420n, 419). Kant effectively speculates on an evolutionary account of the generation of species. Although he calls it “a daring adventure of reason” perhaps purposiveness can be understood in some sort of causal fashion (419n).

The divinely creative intellect allows Kant to discuss a number of closely related issues. First, there is the fact that we are able to distinguish between the actuality and possibility of things. This means that we can think of things that are not actual. This would be impossible if thinking implied existence. And second is the question of the perceived purposiveness of nature. Here intellectual intuition allows Kant to speculate about some third route that is neither an intellect that qua divinely creative intellect is, and thus knows, the true purpose of creation, nor a reductive mechanical account, that provides causes but not purposes. We could say that Kant wants some third option beyond the opposition of finalism and mechanism.

1.3 A synoptic intellect

The question of purposiveness also plays an important background-role in the last type of intellectual intuition that Gram discusses (although he does not relate it to the question of purposiveness) and which he calls a “synoptic” or “synthetic” intellect. This would be an

intellect that starts from an intuition of the Whole or from a “synthetic universal”. This form of intuition appears most noticably in §77 of the Critique of the Power of Judgment. Kant aims to brings out the extent to which for us humans the application of concepts is necessarily contingent and that, as a result, purposiveness can only ever be a regulative idea of reason.

As Kant states in the unpublished first draft of the Introduction, if we approach nature as producing forms mechanically, our unity will only be an aggregate (KdU 20: 20). If we approach her as producing forms artistically or technically (i.e., as causally determined or as inhering in it), our unity will be a system. Now, either all generation of forms is mechanical, or some generation is not. The problem with a mechanical account of generation is that, although provided to us a priori by the understanding, we can neither disprove it, nor is it capable of explaining generation (§70). But what, Kant asks again, would be a non-mechanical account of generation? If we look at natural forms we find two things: they exhibit a natural necessity, i.e., a purposiveness, and at the same time a contingency of form with respect to the laws of nature. Such a concept combining the two would be “excessive” for consciousness (§74). To clarify this point Kant then opposes our limited, human, understanding to a form of understanding to which on three occasions he prefixes the German adjective intuitiv (406-7). This intuitive understanding is contrasted with a discursive understanding (406 / 276). However, both types of understanding still appear to maintain a distinction with something given to it. Hence it is the specifically human form of concept that Kant want to bring out.

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15 What is interesting to note is that on these three occasions Kant uses the German adjective intuitiv(en) rather than his preferred term Anschauung. Unfortunately this is not noted by the otherwise excellent translation of Guyer and Matthews. I am not an expert of the German language and so I am receptive to suggestions from experts in the field, but such a use seems to be rather significant. Normally intellectual intuition (Anschauung) is opposed to sensible intuition. Here intuitive (intuitiven) understanding is opposed to discursive understanding.

16 See also Gram 1981, 293.
Now, our limited human understanding combines common or universal (\textit{allgemeinen}) concepts with the given manifold of sensible intuition. Because there are many different ways in which the particulars of sensibility can be combined with concepts, and because they are ultimately heterogeneous, their connection is always contingent. This is because we start with what Kant calls “\textit{analytic} universals”, or concepts, to determine the particular, and not from a \textit{synthetic} universal, which would be “an intuition of the whole as such”, to then determine the particular (407). With a synthetic universal the determination of particulars under it would not be contingent precisely because it starts from the whole. Although Kant speaks of an \textit{intuition} of the whole, it is in the context of an intuitive versus a discursive intellect. Hence it is to different kinds of concepts that Kant is referring. Our understanding always proceeds from an analytical universal; that is, it works from a limited perspective towards the united understanding of the whole. It does not possess synthetic universals.

Kant discusses a number of hypothetical or problematic forms of cognition to bring out the specificity of our human form of cognition. These forms are generally indicated as possessing a type of intuition that we lack. The first form of cognition would be one where the senses would be able to grasp the world outside of the pure forms of time and space. As a result the distinction between appearance and thing in itself would collapse. The second form of cognition is one that would create the objects of knowledge in the act of knowing. For such an intellect the distinction between something merely given but not known (sensible but blind intuitions) and something active but contributed by consciousness would collapse. As such the distinction between actuality and possibility can no longer be maintained. Furthermore, this intellect is used by Kant to speculate on alternative forms understanding purposiveness that are neither reductively mechanicistic, nor assume some divine knowledge of final purposes.
The last kind of problematic intellect we discussed concerns the type of concepts that are at our disposal. The application of (empirical) concepts is always contingent because we do not posses an intuition of the whole. We only ever have partial views that first need to be brought to unity, via the regulative ideas of reason.

§2. Fichte: "Think the I"

The three texts known as An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre were published by Fichte between 1797 and 1798 and consist of two introductions, one for people without, the other for people “with a philosophical system of their own” and a single “Chapter One”. They are among the rare texts made public during Fichte’s life in which he presents an introduction to his system and that were also expressly written for publication. They are to be understood in the light of the Wissenschaftslehre nova methoda, the new presentation of his system delivered at the University of Jena in the years 1796 to 1799, hence after his lectures on the Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre from 1794/95 and before his calamitous and unfortunate departure in 1799 for Berlin following the so-called Atheism Controversy. It is in An Attempt that Fichte explicitly thematises the notion of intellectual intuition. This became necessary in order to distinguish his position from the young Friedrich Schelling’s presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre, one that was growing in popularity and that was often being

17 The vast majority of Fichte’s theoretical writings were either originally based on lectures or consist of lecture notes.
confused with Fichte’s own theory. Fichte thus distinguishes his position from Schelling, but he also responds to criticisms made by Kant on the illegitimate use of intellectual intuition.

How does Fichte initially deploy the notion of intellectual intuition? “Think the I and pay close attention to how you do this”, Fichte asks of us in characteristic fashion in Chapter One, “now think of something else.” What you notice when you pay close attention to how you do this is a transition in thought. Thought, fixed upon one point, detaches itself and focuses on another point. This transition from one point to another shows us something important about thought, it shows us that thought is an activity; it is the activity of determining (bestimmen) its object. Although for Fichte this I is more or less the same as the synthetic transcendental activity that Kant had uncovered, the fact that he now stresses thought, or consciousness, as an activity, will have profound consequences for how any subject may now be thought. As we will come to see as our discussion progresses, the reconceptualisation of subject and object as different activities will allow Fichte to radically recast the traditional opposition that sees the two as that which is internal versus that which is external. Subject and object are no longer internal / external, but become directions of determination. There is an active determination and a passively being-determined.

In this first chapter Fichte tries to bring the reader to reflect on the thought process itself. As we may deduce from the Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo, this first chapter was to be followed by a number of other chapters. These, however, Fichte was never able to complete.

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A very influential case of such a confusion is G.W.F. Hegel’s early The Difference between the Fichteian and Schellingean Systems of Philosophy (1801). See also Philonenko, 1981.

19 “The intuition we are now discussing is an act of self-positing as positing (that is, as positing anything “objective” whatsoever...)” VDN, SW, I, 528.
That this chapter is thus a mere propaedeutic must be kept in mind for our later discussion of the real significance of Fichte's use of intellectual intuition. Fichte is trying to bring the reader to the proper starting-point. When we pay attention to how we think we become aware of a difference between a fixation on a point and a tearing-itself-away, that is, a transition to another point. This activity is simply what thought is: the on-going process of the determination of objects. Whether we are explicitly aware of it or not, this process goes on uninterrupted.

The transcendental unity of apperception that is a necessary condition for all synthetic a priori judgment is what, for Fichte following Kant, is represented by the word “I”. For Kant the unity of apperception had to be seen as a spontaneous act of consciousness (KrV B §16). Yet Kant also maintained that all consciousness consists of the combination of sensible intuitions with the concepts of the understanding. That is to say, consciousness is both mediated by concepts and it is intentional or directed towards an object.

2.1 The immediacy of consciousness and the Henrich interpretation

Kant's account applies well to object-consciousness, and indeed, this had been his whole ambition, but what about subject or self-consciousness? According to a reading that has been rather prominent in Fichte studies, Kant's account created a problem in how to conceive of self-consciousness. Fichte's contribution would lay, according to this reading, in having solved this problem. This reading was first offered by Dieter Henrich in an influential article from 1966, titled “Fichte's Original Insight”. Henrich situates Fichte within a debate on the nature of self-consciousness in light of what Henrich called the traditional “reflection model of
The problem, as Manfred Frank who also subscribes to this school analyses it, was that Kant held to two conflicting commitments. On the one hand, there was the commitment to a representationalist model of knowledge; on the other hand, Kant was committed to the immediacy of the Cartesian “I think”.

According to his representationalist commitments, all knowledge is representational, composed of sensible intuitions and concepts of the understanding. Only if intuitions can be given to the senses and brought under concepts can we speak of a possible object of experience. Insofar as self-consciousness concerned empirical self-consciousness, this was fairly unproblematic. The empirical self can be an object of experience for Kant; intuitions of it may be given and the resulting knowledge falls under the same classification as other areas of knowledge, hence such knowledge is fallible, *et cetera*.

But Kant also appealed to the “I think”. Only under the assumption of the transcendental unity of apperception, or self-consciousness, could we explain how intuitions and concepts were united in representation. This form of consciousness had to be thought of as “pure” and “original”, i.e., not given by the senses, and “prior to all thinking” (KrV B 131-2). The “original-synthetic unity of apperception” had to be able to accompany all my representations, “otherwise something would be represented in me that would not be thought at all” (*loc. cit.*). That is, for there to be object-consciousness (representations), we need to assume self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, as a first principle that makes all experience possible, therefore could not be given to the senses, hence Kant states that it is given in an intuition (*ibid.*).

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21 Frank 1991, 446.
The problem this creates is the following: If all knowledge must contain sensible intuitions and concepts of the understanding, then how to “think the I”, a representation Kant claims must be able to accompany all my other representations? Is this I something factual; merely a postulate; does it accrue immediate certainty? If it is not empirical self-consciousness but another type of consciousness, then is it something real or is it merely hypothetical? Kant himself certainly struggled to clarify these matters, as witnessed by his comments when trying to explain the “I think”, something he has just called “an indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., a perception” (KrV B 422, see also A 343 / B 400):

An indeterminate perception here signifies only something real, which was given, and indeed only to thinking itself, thus not as appearance, and also not as thing in itself (a noumenon), but rather as something that does in fact exist and is indicated as an existing thing in the proposition ‘I think’ (KrV B 423).

This passage seems to raise a number of difficult problems for an orthodox account of Kant’s philosophy. The “I think” is given in indeterminate but empirical intuition, yet it is given “only to thinking itself”. Hence it appears not to be given to the senses, and indeed how could it be? Yet it has factual existence. But how is this possible if, as Kant claims in this same footnote and contra Descartes’ cogito, existence entails a relation to the I that can only be given through a sensible manifold?

Henrich and Frank explain these difficulties through Kant’s adherence to the representationalist model of consciousness. This model is said to consists of the following set of claims: Consciousness means consciousness of something; consciousness is representational or object-oriented, and this representation is, as it were, represented to (Vor-gestellt) the
subject of consciousness. The object thus stands opposite the subject. But to be aware of an
object one also needs to be aware that one is aware of the object. Object-consciousness
requires self-consciousness, for otherwise one could be aware of an object without being aware
that one is aware, which would be absurd. If one did not know that one was conscious of some
object then this consciousness would be no different than the consciousness of the pond that
reflects the image of Narcissus. Self-consciousness requires that one knows oneself and this
includes a relation to oneself. A relation to oneself means that one takes one’s self as the object
of consciousness. How do you know that this object (i.e., the self) is really one and same (i.e.,
identical) as oneself? For self-consciousness to be really consciousness of the self and not of
some entity closely resembling it (e.g., the unconscious, the body, or the proverbial “vat” in
which the brain is suspended) we would need to be able to recognise this self as identical to
the self. But this is exactly to presuppose what we aim to establish. Henrich:

Thus anyone who sets reflection into motion must himself already be both the knower
and the known. The subject of reflection on its own thereby satisfies the whole equation
“I = I”. Yet reflection alone was supposed to bring about this equation.22

If to be conscious of something we have to presuppose self-consciousness, and if self-
consciousness presupposes a relation of identity of self with itself then neither self-
consciousness nor consciousness appears to be possible. According to Henrich then, Fichte’s
solution was to effectively cut the Gordian knot by assuming the immediacy of consciousness.23

This is why for Henrich Fichte wrote that the faculty of representation is not a thing but that it exists “for and through itself” (RA, SW, I, 1124).

On this reading, Fichte tries to give an account of self-consciousness conceived as a form of self-identification. As Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel states: “Fichte’s discovery is the discovery of self-referentiality as a model of truth, that is radical in way never thematised before.”25 It is radical because Fichte claims 1.) there is no alternative to it; 2.) it is not a representationalist model; it does not refer to anything external; and 3.) self-consciousness is neither a logical identity of I and I, nor a real identity (ascribing I to itself).26 Besides the reading by Henrich, Frank and Thomas-Fogiel that we have already mentioned, this reading has also influenced the work of such authors as Robert Pippin27 and Paul Franks.28 In fact, much of the origin of this reading can be traced back to G.W.F. Hegel’s early The Difference Between the Fichtean and the Schellingean Systems of Philosophy (1801). Hegel, as is well-known, opens his chapter on Fichte’s system with the following sentence:

The foundation of Fichte’s system is intellectual intuition, the pure thinking of itself, pure self-consciousness I=I, I am.29

26 Ibid.
27 Pippin discuss Fichte in Chapter III: ‘Fichte’s Contribution’ to his Hegel’s Idealism. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42-59. Pippin claims not to be following Henrich’s reading of self-positing as self-identification (p. 49), but later on he makes precisely this point when speaking of the “I=I” (p. 54). What Pippin does not adequately account for is how self-positing has an internal relation to opposition and reciprocal determination (Wechselbestimmung). As a consequence Pippin falsely concludes that Fichte has no account of the “co-originality of identity and difference” (p. 55). Although for Fichte the two terms are not identity and difference but rather subjectivity and objectivity, it is precisely his co-genetic account of subjectivity and objectivity that is so valuable to contemporary discussions.
28 Paul W. Franks All or Nothing. Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). See e.g. p. 309: “Fichte is responding to ... the perceived demand for an actual ground of the capacity for immediate self-ascription and rational agency.”
To an extent Fichte does make this claim and he probably did to some extent understand his own project in this way. Fichte does claim that when we “think the I”, this is “both agent and action” (GWL, SW, I, 96). And in the Foundations an important role does seem to be given to the derivation from “I=I” (see GWL, SW, I, 94).30 Hence Fichte does seem to be pursuing a relation of self-identity. But this not the case; the key notion of “self-positing” is not concerned with the attempt to establish such a relation. Far from simply positing an opposition of I and world (“not-I”), and far from simply assuming the existence of some subject and some object, that then have to either establish a relation with each other (knowledge of the world), or a subject that has to establish a relation with itself (self-consciousness qua self-identification), Fichte starts with something far less assuming, something, in fact, far more concrete than his very abstract argumentation would lead one to think. What Fichte effectively starts from is what we might call concrete experience, that is, experience as it is given to us, even prior to any notion of self or of the world. When Fichte assumes an “I” that is said to be “spontaneous” or “self-positing” this means that it is simply there. It, as it were, supports itself and cannot be reduced to the mere imprint of material objects, nor is it the emanation of an absolute mind. Against the dogmatic realists and the dogmatic idealists, what needs to be accounted for is precisely the division of subject and object. This is something both parties either already assume or are unable to account for. The tradition of reading Fichte’s “I” as denoting some kind of individual, that is, a psychological, and not epistemological reading has obscured this fact. Fichte writes:

30 To demonstrate the precise function of Fichte’s “I=I” requires a very detailed reading of the first paragraph of the Foundations that cannot be attempted here. An article on the first paragraph of the Foundations is forthcoming. Detailed discussion is given in Ph.D thesis Towards a Philosophy of Freedom: Fichte and Bergson, Chapter II, Section 2 (University of Warwick, 2010).
[T]he philosopher must first show how the I exists and comes into being for itself. Secondly, he must show that this being of the I for itself would not be possible unless a being outside the I also arose for that I at the same time (VND, SW, I, 458).

The first I is the activity of determination. We need to understand how this I “exists and comes into being for itself”. If we refrain from taking this I as some subject but only as the activity of determination, then the question is, how is that this activity cannot be reduced to the mere sense impressions of material objects, but that a spontaneous, i.e., irreducible, and original, i.e. “self-positing” act of synthesis must be assumed? The question here is about determination or experience and not about the subject or self-consciousness. But once this is agreed upon, the a second question appears. Once we agree upon the irreducibility of the activity of determination, then the second, or internal, question becomes, how is it that this activity is only possible under the form of an I set over against a not-I? And indeed, although this question comes second, we must show that this happens at the same time. The two questions do not denote a sequence of events, but this is a logical order. First is the question whether experience can be reduced to material things (as against the British Empiricists). Once we agree that it cannot be so reduced, then second comes the question of how to account for the fact that experience always takes the form of an opposition of I and not-I.

I and not-I appear as necessarily conjoint. They stand in reciprocal determination. This co-genesis of subject and object is explicitly conceptualised by Fichte as consisting of different forms of activity. As he writes in the Foundations, passivity is a lower degree of activity (e.g. GWL, SW, I, 146). Experience does not already contain a ready-made subject-object opposition, but it gives us relative distances, relative forms of intimacy, relative interests between “I” and
“not-I”. Fichte’s account actually allows us to understand the precise relation of subject and object. It is this that makes his account so very valuable. Generally, when the subject-object split is discussed and when a Cartesian division is lamented, the attempt is to work back to either the one, or to the other, or to some third, but the relation itself is left unaddressed. What Fichte shows is how this relation must be understood, and how from within this relation subject and object may be seen to appear in what he calls their reciprocal determination. Although the focus of this article is on Fichte’s notion of intellectual intuition, and hence a detailed discussion of Fichte’s account of subject-object relations must lie beyond its scope, if we want to appreciate Fichte’s insistence on the necessary connection of intellectual intuition with sensory intuition, it is to the reciprocal determination of subject and object that we must turn.\(^3\)

In a nutshell then, if for Fichte experience qua “spontaneous synthesis” is something like the activity of determination (Bestimmung), then qua activity (“activity schlechthin”) it must be seen as “spontaneous” and non-reducible to the interaction of things alone. For reasons that we can only indicate here, Kant and Fichte became convinced of the necessity to posit what at first sight may only seem like a contradictio in terminus: “original synthesis”. As Fichte writes in the ‘Review of Aenesidemus’: we must think of a synthesis that precedes thesis and antithesis (RA, SW, I, 6-7). Synthesis must be understood as “original” or “spontaneous” in that, as the

\(^3\) Paul Franks (2005), who follows the Henrich school in his construal of Fichte’s argument as turning around the problem of immediate self-ascription of states of consciousness, misreads the argument as a result. He interprets Fichte’s use of intellectual intuition as an account of the necessity for someone to say “I” about him or herself in a way that is not mediated by anything else. This would be the self-positing I. This makes of intellectual intuition something that, as Franks writes, “ordinarily” does not occur on its own, that is, only contingently so (see p. 311). Whereas in the passage that he himself quotes in this context Fichte stresses more than once that intellectual intuition never occurs on its own, and is always conjoined with sensory intuition (VND, SW, I, 463-4). Franks’ account remains overly psychological because he does not see clearly enough the importance of Fichte’s demonstration of the co-genesis of subjectivity and objectivity. See Franks, op. cit., 305-313 esp.
failure of the British Empiricist project had made clear, mere impressionability, mere contiguity, and mere association cannot account for the qualitative nature of judgment. That is, it cannot account for the determination of an object qua object. In that sense, experience is not determined by sense impression alone, but, as a work of self-legislation, it may be said to “posit itself”. Note then, that at this stage it is “experience” that “posits itself” and that we are not concerned here with the constitution of some (quasi) individual self. The point is quickly lost when Fichte’s language of “I’s” is read in a psychological and not in a transcendental manner. Fichte himself explicitly warns his readers against interpreting the “I” as denoting some self, ego or individual. As he writes, the concept of self (Selbst) signifies “a relationship to something that has already been posited. (...) Hence the word ‘self’ presupposes the concept of the I (Ich)” (VND, SW, I, 530, emp. added).

What Fichte discusses is how the relationship of positing itself may be understood.

The activity of determination taken qua kind of activity (i.e. the second question from above) entails an actively determining pole (“I”) and a passively determinate pole (“not-I”). The question here is no longer its possible reduction to the interaction of material objects, but concerns its internal structure. Translated into the language of experience, we may say that within experience we find a relative distinction between an active determination and a passively being-determined. Hence self-positing, or spontaneous determination, as it were “contains” an opposition of I and not-I. Indeed, “self-positing”, or spontaneous experience, can only be what it is when taking the form of an opposition of I and not-I, standing in a relation of reciprocal determination.

32 See also R. C.S. Walker on this point: ‘Kant and Transcendental Arguments’. In P. Guyer (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 244.
33 Compare also with KrV A77 / B 103
34 DiGovanni, in his translation of the ‘Review of Aenesidemus’ translates Ich with “ego”; Heath and Lachs, in their translation of the Foundations, translate it with “self”.

To understand this properly, we must appreciate Fichte’s early *eureka!* of the ‘Review of *Aenesidemus*’ when he exclaimed: Consciousness is not a thing, but it is an *activity* (RA, SW, I, 11, 8). Much of the radical novelty of Fichte’s construal of subject-object relations lies in the fact that these are no longer first and foremost considered as things that are “already posited”, that is, not as “things”, but as relata that first appear within a relationship, as “activities”. Hence the I is only what it is in relation to a not-I, and, as Fichte always adds: *vice versa*. Reconceptualising subject and object as various forms of activity allows him to claim, on the one hand, their necessary and internal relationship, and, on the other hand, to maintain a separation in terms of “striving” and “counter-striving”.

This brief exposition should hopefully allows us to better appreciate Fichte’s insistence on the necessary combination of intellectual and sensible intuition (see e.g., VND, SW, I, 463-4). Much of the existent literature on Fichte is marred by a lack of appreciation of this important insight. The Henrich-school place too great an onus on the question of subjectivity; others have given preference to the question of objectivity.35 But for reasons indicated above, Fichte felt compelled to keep the two questions closely together. Intellectual intuition always combines with sensible intuition in what he called “complete consciousness” (*loc. cit.*).

### 2.2 Kant and Fichte on intellectual intuition

Transcendental philosophy is a thinking about thought, a *Wissen von Wissen*. To induce his reader to consider this, Fichte implores us to “think the I”. This, as we have seen, was an introductory move. When we think about thought, or when we reflect on the experience as it is

given to us, it does not make sense to say that this reflective activity is the same as our normal engagements with the world. It does not make sense to say that the reflection on thought equally consists of sensible intuitions and their determination by the understanding. However, we may certainly become aware of thought, for instance when we notice a transition in thought. Fichte wanted to distinguish this kind of awareness from the usual empirical awareness, hence he calls it *intellectual* intuition. What Kant had forbidden was an intuition by the intellect alone, hence bypassing the senses, of a sensible object. Yet at this stage of the argument Fichte is concerned with directing our attention to the specific activity that is consciousness, and not to the objects of the external world. As Fichte writes, Kant hinted at such a form of consciousness but never openly discussed it (see VND, SW I, 472).

When Kant forbade the use of intellectual intuition he had a number of things in mind. For Kant intellectual intuition could entail either 1.) an intellect that applies concepts to what comes to the senses without the mediation of the pure forms of space and time, i.e., an immediate awareness of things in themselves; or 2.) the intuition that would create its own object; or finally 3.) the intuition of the whole of experience, one that surpasses our limited and discursive point of view. As we are now beginning to see Fichte’s intellectual intuition concerns none of these. Our main interest lies with his response to the first kind. However, for reasons of completeness we will discuss all three forms.

Concerning the first form Fichte writes in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methoda* that what Kant prohibited was in fact a sensible intellectual intuition. That is, an intellectual (non-sensible) intuition of something sensible, i.e., of the thing in itself. That is to say, a direct knowledge by the intellect alone of something that can only come to us through the senses. Such an intuition would clearly be absurd. But Fichte does not claim an intuition of some
object that comes to us via the senses. Rather, the intellectual intuition that Fichte proposes is something that must necessarily be thought in addition to sensible intuition. If knowledge consists of sensible intuitions and concepts, then we are in need of some name for the (transcendental) knowledge of the self-regulative activities of consciousness. Knowledge of such activity cannot be given in experience as it is only on the basis of these activities that we first have experience. It is not an object given in experience, neither can it be merely deduced from experience. Whatever its status then, such knowledge is not empirical. Yet we cannot but assume to be at least in the implicit possession of such knowledge (whatever its form or status). For these reasons Fichte claims that such knowledge must then be given in an intellectual intuition. Immediate, though generally implicit, knowledge of the rules of the self-legislation of experience is a necessary assumption, and this Kant could not deny. Fichte:

What is intuited in sensible intuition is fixed, passive and ordinarily in space; but all that is intuited in our intellectual intuition is an acting. Kant too has such an intuition, but he did not reflect upon it. Indeed his entire philosophy is a product of this intuition; for he maintained that necessary representations are products of the acting of a rational being and are not passively received. But this is something he could have come to realize only by means of an intuition (WLnmK 32)

Kant could not deny this form of intuition because our awareness of the synthetic unity of apperception could never be derived from empirical consciousness, rather it is what first makes it possible (e.g., KrV B 130-131). And indeed Kant writes: “That representation [“I think”] that can be given prior to all thinking is called intuition” (KrV 132). But, as Fichte notes, Kant did not reflect on it. Kant did not, or at least not publicly, reflect on the status of such knowledge-claims, i.e., on the precise status of transcendental knowledge.
Concerning the third form of intellectual intuition, the synoptic intuition of the whole, we find in the *Foundations* a “limited I” and a “limited not-I” (*grosso modo* a subject and an object). The two are fundamentally opposed. This limited I appears with, and can only appear with, the limited not-I. From a transcendental perspective we see that they are reciprocally constitutive of each other. Taking inspiration from Kant’s third *Critique*, Fichte writes that from the practical perspective a perfect or complete knowledge of the world is an Ideal of Reason, something to be striven for, but that can never be attained (GWL, SW, I, 101). The not-I is what is not the I, it is what remains fundamentally unknown. For Fichte, an intuition as the synoptic view of the whole would only be possible at the expense of removing the distinction between I and not-I. But this is not possible because subject and object are genetically connected.

The second form of intellectual intuition that we discussed, the creative or *ürbildliches* consciousness may be rejected for similar reasons. One of the key stakes of Fichte's *Foundations* is to provide a deduction of the role and place of Kant’s thing in itself from the very conditions of possibility of subjectivity. Fichte demonstrates that the limited I, or a constituted consciousness, only appears with, or is co-genetic with, a limited not-I, or a constituted object of consciousness. The subject determines itself via the determination of the object. However, as we have seen, Fichte considers subject and object, not as two existing entities, but as the two poles of a relation of determination. The I is the determining pole, the not-I the determinate pole. The passivity of the not-I is a lower degree of the activity of the I. I and not-I are not entities external to each other, but entertain something resembling a constantly shifting horizon. Hence Fichte can claim that, to the extent that the not-I is determined, it becomes “part of” the I, but, to the extent that it is not yet determined, it remains what is not the I. He is thus able to clarify the notion of a thing in itself said to be
unknowable, yet causally effective. Throughout this endeavour Fichte remains faithful to the transcendental restraints. Whenever he writes that the not-I is created by the I this always means as a not-I for the I. As we cannot speak of objects outside of their relation to consciousness Fichte sometimes omits this disclaimer. But it is clear that for Fichte a subject that would create its object realiter would be absurd, as equally the possibility of there being nothing outside of consciousness realiter (contra a solipsistic consciousness). For if the I would be able to create its object realiter, then the mutually constitutive separation of subject and object will have been removed.

### 2.3 Complete consciousness

Thus far it seems there is little difference between Kant and Fichte. The most obvious use that Fichte makes of intellectual intuition is as the attentiveness to what Kant had called “thinking in general”. Fichte’s use is something purely intellectual and not empirical. Yet one might still be suspicious whether this is truly so. For does not the language of attention and activity imply that this is the attention or activity of something or of someone? If so, does this not make it something empirical rather than intellectual? When I am asked to be attentive to the agility of thought, is this not simply an awareness of the inner self, which, again, is not a knowledge-theoretical issue, but a psychological one? The language of activity and attention indeed can be somewhat confusing. First of all, this seems to be a consequence of Fichte’s typical desire to start each presentation of his *Wissenschaftslehre* from a presuppositionless place. Hence he always starts with a propædeutic to raise his audience to the requisite point of departure. Furthermore, Fichte always stresses the fact that it is the audience itself that has to raise itself
to this point. Hence there is always some performative element ("think the I"). But he is not after psychological self-observation; it is only a tool to get the audience to abandon its everyday perspective and to assume the philosophical one. Besides these methodological considerations, Fichte tried to reconceptualise the static and external opposition of subject and object into a more dynamic and immanent one involving various activities. Fichte’s philosophy may indeed be seen as a proto-form of process-philosophy.

In the Attempt Fichte asks us to “think the I”. The first step is to notice that the I is not some thing, but an activity. That this is not some quasi-empirical activity of someone was not made explicit in An Attempt as the presentation abruptly stops after the first chapter. But a similar point resurfaces in the Foundations when Fichte raises the question ‘Who was the I before it posits itself?’ That is, does not the act of positing imply that this is the act of someone? Fichte replies: No, “ich war gar nicht; denn ich war nicht Ich” (GWL, SW I, 97). The small I (ich), that is, the personal I, is not the large I (Ich), the transcendental I. The question, Fichte writes, implies “a confusion between the I as subject and the I as object of reflection for an absolute subject” (ibid.). What are these two different I’s? From the context it becomes clear that the I as “object of reflection for an absolute subject” asks after the possibility and nature of experience. The I considered as subject, the empirical I, is what is always already in relation to an opposite object. This is to ask after the form and structure of experience. When we confuse these two I’s we confuse two different questions. Hence, although Fichte’s language of activity seems to entail some quasi-empirical act, this is ultimately not what he is after. Asking us to pay attention to the agility of thought is his way to bring the reader to consider that experience.
does not come to us ready-made but that, at least in some sense, it is the outcome of a self-legislating activity. But this self-legislating activity is not an empirical activity.\(^{36}\)

There is a philosophically more pertinent point about Fichte’s novel language of activity, and this also tells us something important about intellectual intuition. Fichte’s demand to think the I is intimately related to his conviction that consciousness is not really anything outside of its actual performance. The structure of experience is only something that can be determined within actual experience. For Fichte synthetic conscious activity is of the sort that results in objects (objects for us, we should always add). When we direct our attention to this very process we are quite naturally lead to grasp this process itself as some sort of thing or object (for thought). This “object” we then assume to be the subject of thought: a thinking subject. We then ask: Who or what thing is it that thinks? But again, this is to confuse two different levels. We are so very naturally inclined to think in terms of things that we assume thought to be some sort of quasi-real object inside the brain. We then think that there is some subject that can be investigated in abstraction from the object. Fichte warns us against this confusion when he writes that this is to confuse the “concept of the I” with the “intuition of the I”: “The concept of the I is the self-reverting activity, grasped as something stable and enduring” (VND, SW, I, 533, emp. added). To contrast the concept of the I with the intuition thereof, and to claim that the concept only gives us an I that is stable and enduring, that is, thing-like, is to stress the fact that whenever we conceptualise the I (begreifen, Begriff), we inadvertently change its nature. To stress that the I must be grasped in intuition is to underline the fact that as activity this cannot be adequately grasped (begreifen) as stable and thing-like at all. The I is

\(^{36}\) See GWL, SW, I, 91 and the footnote added in 1802 (91n), where Fichte stresses the fact that Tathandlung is not an empirical activity.
not some empirical thing (spatio-temporal). Indeed, outside of the actual execution of experience we cannot even speak of it. The I as it is discussed here is not a subject and has nothing to do with us as individuals. Rather, it concerns the investigation of nature, status and structure of experience. First with an opposition of I and not-I does this (second) I have anything to do with a self or a subject. To contrast the concept of the I with the intuition of the I is to say that the question of the status and structure of experience can only be grasped in actual experience. This is the deeper reason why Ficht always insists that the reader perform the acts for him or herself. Fichte:

This agility [of thought – MK] is intuited as a process by means of which the active force wrenches itself away from a state of repose, and it can be intuited in no other way (VND, SW, I, 531, emp. added).

If thought, or consciousness, can only be intuited in its actual execution, then intellectual intuition is only possible in conjunction with sensible intuition. I can only pay attention to the structure of experience within actual experience. Although Kant may have hinted at such an understanding, it is only with Fichte that we come to see why this is so. Fichte:

I cannot discover myself to be acting without also discovering some object upon which I act; and I discover this object by means of sensory intuition, which I grasp by means of a concept (VND, SW, I, 464).

The two together first constitute what Fichte calls “completed consciousness” (ibid.). This Kant did not analyse clearly enough and as a result he considered, even if only theoretically, the possibility of apperception in abstraction from sensible intuition. Hence such awkward
formulations as “indeterminate empirical intuition” and the like. Fichte shows that this is an impossibility. Intellectual intuition, as a thinking of thought in general, or as inquiry into the nature of experience, can only take place in the actual execution of experience. We may speculate that this hints at Kant’s undigested Cartesianism of thinking that only when I abstract from all objects of experience, that I am able to attain the subject of experience. For Fichte this is to confuse two levels of inquiry. There is the nature of experience, said to be self-positing or activity schlechthin, which is called an I. And there is the structure of experience, which consists of an I and a not-I. But as should be clear, this second I is asking a different question.

The language of activities is relevant because it makes clear that the awareness of thought qua intellectual intuition is something that is only thinkable when we are engaged in the actual process of determination. The traditional opposition of subject and object is radically reconfigured as a result. Where the subject was understood as some self-legislating entity strangely on par with the objects of the external world, there is now firstly a process said to be spontaneous. The point to start from, and to limit ourselves to, is experience. This is not already composed of a world of objects, set over against a subject, but a process of determination. This process itself cannot be equated with a subject in some individuated sense, though Fichte does refer to it as “absolute I”. This process can only be thought as given in intellectual intuition. But it can only be given in intellectual intuition when there is some sensible manifold to be determined by the process. Hence intellectual intuition is conjoint with sensible intuition. Only within this process of determination do the traditional subject and object first make their appearance. It is in the determination of my world that I as individual subject am first able to distinguish this world from myself. As we discussed above, within the
process of determination an I and a not-I appear that stand in a relation of reciprocal
determination. An elaboration of this later relation of I and not-I is something we have not
really discussed in this article, as our focuss was on intellectual intuition.

Hints that Kant too understood that intellectual intuition only ever appears with
sensible intuition are found in the same footnote to B 422 from above where Kant had tried to
explain the paradoxically empirical character of apperception. He writes:

For it is to be noted that if I have called the proposition “I think” an empirical
proposition, I would not say by this that the I in this proposition is an empirical
representation; for it is rather purely intellectual, because it belongs to thinking in
general. Only without any empirical representation, which provides the material (Stoff)
for thinking, the act "I think" would not take place, and the empirical is only the
condition of the application, or use, of the pure intellectual faculty (KrV B 422n, emp.
added).

This we now read to imply the following: The I of the “I think” is purely intellectual; it pertains
only to thought; it is the synthetic a priori activity of the understanding and as such it is not
empirical. But this “I think”, as synthetic activity, needs some material or “fabric” or Stoff for it
to take place. The “I think” empirically considered, and no longer transcendentally, is a
determination, and all determination required something to be determined, some “stuff”.
Without this stuff it would not, or rather, could not take place. This stuff is the condition for the
application of the intellectual factulty.
§3. Conclusion

As we have seen, Kant makes use of a variety of hypothetical forms of cognition that he labels intellectual intuition. Contrasting our form of cognition with such thinkable forms allows him to discuss various facets of human cognition. For the most part then, Kant’s use of intellectual intuition is a negative one. It shows how human thought is mediated by the pure intuitions of time and space; it shows the importance of the distinction between the actuality and possibility of objects of cognition; it allows him to speculate about a third alternative to finalism and mechanism and, finally, it allows him to discuss why our empirical concepts are only every applied in a contingent fashion. The three corresponding forms of hypothetical cognition would dispose of a non-sensible intuition of the things in themselves; it would create the objects in the act of cognising them; it would dispose of an intuition of the whole and not that of parts.

Fichte’s use of intellectual intuition is not negative, but positive. He too uses it in more than one sense. These uses are not so much separate as forming a progressive series.\footnote{See also Breazeale 1998 for a useful discussion of this progressive series.} First he asks us to turn our attention to the thought process itself. Thought is an activity and not an object of the world. To think thought we must move away from the empirical perspective and towards the transcendental perspective. But the fact that self-consciousness cannot be thought in representationalist fashion without leading to an infinite regress does not entail that Fichte’s insistence on immediacy was intended to solve this problem. Contrary to the interpretation as given by Henrich \textit{et alia}, Fichte’s problem is not one of self-referentiality. Rather, the immediacy is ascribed to an undifferentiated experience, or to the on-going process of...
determination that is experience. It is this that is properly given. Within this experience, said to be self-positing, we must then try to understand how an I, set over against a not-I first appears. As Fichte wrote in the Introduction to The System of Ethics (1798):

As soon as any actual consciousness occurs, even if it is only the consciousness of ourselves, the separation [of subject and object] ensues. I am conscious of myself only insofar as I distinguish myself, as the one who is conscious, from me, as the object of this consciousness (SS, SW, IV, 1)\(^38\)

On the one hand then, there is indeed a form of immediate consciousness, but this is not my consciousness, for it is not differentiated into a relation of I and not-I. There is an immediate awareness of my experience and it is within this experience that I distinguish myself from what is not myself.

For Fichte intellectual intuition is not a form of immediate self-identification, but his term to speak in a positive manner about the nature of the transcendental perspective. Fichte's point here is that a thinking of thinking, or the intellectual intuition of the structure of experience, can only ever take place in combination with sensible intuition, that is, the actual performance of thought. This means that at this moment of the argument intellectual intuition and the I have nothing of an introspection and do not concern a Cartesian grounding of experience in the subject. Rather, intellectual intuition and the I here must be taken as asking the question after the nature and structure of experience. Only within actual experience, or within the activity of determination, can we then ask the question how an I appears in reciprocal determination with a not-I. Then, when this relation is clarified, may we proceed to

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inquire after something like a sense of self. But this sense of self cannot be anything outside of
the constitutive relation or Verhältnis with a “not-I”.

Intellectual intuition is not an internal vision of the self (immediate or otherwise), but
the properly transcendental interest in the structure of experience. That this experience is
sometimes said to be “in the I” or “in consciousness” must be read, not as the interior
representation of the external world in the mind, but the fact that we are in fact “internal” to
our experience. If we are internal to our experience then it is first and foremost through the
capacity to separate two sides within this experience that we may be said to stand over again
the world.

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