

Reinhold: the unity of thought in the diversity of foundations

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Abstract: This article takes a look at some key-texts from Karl Leonhard Reinhold's philosophical course in order to show that although the author often changes the theoretical outline of his writings, there is always a fixed unity of thought that remains in all the reworked stages, namely, the search for an absolutely first and universally valid cause for all philosophy, which could put an end to the fruitless metaphysical controversies of that historical moment. For this, he does not hesitate to investigate different sources, or even change the conceptual content already used by himself, but always remains extremely faithful to his greater interest, even if it were necessary to adapt himself to the theory of whoever approached this project more closely.

Keywords: representation; consciousness; common understanding; philosophizing reason; rational realism; original foundation.

1. Introduction

In the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*¹ from 1786-71, Reinhold, after exhaustively investigating the previous philosophical schools, especially the materialist and spiritualist ones, sets himself the goal of finding a primary cause, a rigorous foundation for philosophy which, by having a simple and determined character, would secure itself against all misunderstandings, since it would be above dispute and would be able to achieve unanimity in order to contain the endless and infertile quarrels among these schools of thought.

In analyzing the Kantian writings, Reinhold realizes how much this theory progresses in comparison to previous schools, especially with regard to the distinction between body and soul², since the Critique investigates the possibility of knowledge of objects from the faculty of knowledge, separating precisely what, in knowledge, belongs to the mere mind and what belongs to things outside of it. This means completely distinguishing the mere faculty of mind from the faculty active in external sensation, something totally innovative in the philosophical realm of the time. Thus, the method of transcendental reflection adopted by Kant could overcome the barriers to the autonomy of thought, since it tried to turn knowledge into a basic foundation for the truths of religion and morality independent of metaphysics, besides its great advantage in showing how impossible it is to demonstrate, by means of proof, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God.

However, the foundational cause which Reinhold aspired to find was not yet found in critical philosophy as it lacked the conditions of general philosophy. The principles and theorems of the metaphysics created by Kant cannot find their foundation for the simple fact that this foundation, or what is in it, had not been established, since the “propedeutics of metaphysics has not yet been raised to the highest degree of a science of the faculty of knowing” (REINHOLD, 2003, p. 68). With this in mind, Reinhold rethinks the difference between the concept of knowledge developed in Critique and the concept of representation that is only presupposed therein. He then sets out for his own investigation and begins it with important questions such as: what can one know? What are the limits of the human faculty of knowing? (REINHOLD, 1963, p. 146). To establish its limits, one would first have to agree on what is meant by the faculty of knowledge, otherwise, agreement on its universal concept would become impossible.

It is in this context that the Essay³ would emerge, in which the author develops his theory of representation and focuses mainly on the concept of mere representation. As Debru explains:

¹ Briefe über die kantische Philosophie (Briefe). These are eight letters published separately in the newspaper Teuscher Merkur between August 1786 and September 1787. Three years later, they were reissued in book form with the addition of four more letters. They were edited again in 1792, this time with heavy changes in the conceptual content.

² Kant, in the chapter on paralogisms, attributed internal meaning to the soul and external meaning to the body. At the time of the metaphysicians, their own grounds for cognition of what body and soul were in themselves, outside of our form of representation, were the only means that existed for achieving the distinction between body and soul. Naturally, this could only lead to endless controversies. Only in a long and gradual process, culminating in the critique of reason, was a faculty granted to reason in order to apprehend the subjective rules and laws of a thing in itself. Thus, with the subjective law of our faculty of knowledge, appeared the first expressions of the proper use of reason, since, in their totality, subjective rules are a work solely of reason itself. The disagreement about the distinction between body and soul arose not from the fact that they are really different, as this was universally agreed on, but rather on what this difference consisted of, namely, in the laws of the faculty of knowledge of the human spirit, which was still unknown, the foundation of which was discovered in the analysis of this faculty that the Critique of pure reason undertook. In Reinhold's elaborate theory of the faculty of representation (*Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögens*), certain circumstances that were previously brought into the concept as the relationship between body and soul, are now described as references to the representative self and the represented object.

³ Essay of a new theory of the human faculty of representation (*Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*).

In 1789, in the defense and illustration he once again undertakes of the Critique according to the methods of transcendental analysis, Reinhold discovers the concept of representation as a presupposition of knowledge. According to him, in knowledge, the attribution of predicates to the object, which belong to nothing but mere representation, is responsible for the misunderstanding of which the Critique was the object [Essay, p. 62]. This confusion between knowledge and representation is, in fact, the sign of the critical problem that has never been noticed by readers of Kant insofar as it finds its origin, for example, in the question posed in 1772 about the relation between representation and object. The ignorance of the question and the confusion of the two terms are one and the same thing. Now, it is necessary to separate, whilst keeping them together, knowledge and representation: the latter is a presupposition (DEBRU, 1977, p. 178).

Mere representation, due to its simplicity, of its smaller number of characteristic notes (Merkmale), would provide a concept of knowledge capable of easily articulating sensibility, understanding and reason. These three faculties would originate from a single root, from which would emerge the two different sources of the knowledge of reason that were separated in Kant. The core of this theory is representation in general⁴, a unique foundation on which Reinhold built his entire elementary philosophy (Elementarphilosophie), whose principle of knowledge is not the possibility of experience as in Kant, but the condition of possibility of consciousness, determined from the beginning. He believes to have found this foundation in the immediate evidence of the proposition of consciousness (Satz des Bewußtseins), which would enunciate, in the form of an analytical proposition, an immediate fact, whose synthesis would escape the reasoning of the philosophers and convince without any intermediary or proof, since the foundation of proof is the proposition of consciousness itself, from which all the formal components of representation, subject and object emanate a priori. It would be an autonomous proposition, self-evident; and the whole of philosophy would depend on this original determinability, which would offer a foundation for the correctness of speculation, each time avoiding the support of another philosophically demonstrable principle and, consequently, eliminating the risk of falling into a vicious circle.

However, it is important to emphasize that, in this process, it is not a matter of investigating the cause of representation, but rather what it itself consists of, that is, what the concept of mere representation consists of. It is even less a question of investigating its definition. Indeed, if there were a definition of the fundamental (general) representation, it would not be the premise that serves all possible explanations, as there would be something above it defining it, and so on, infinitely. Thus, on the concept of the faculty of representation, one can only think (denken). And it is not only possible but necessary in order to reach an agreement and be able to conceive what after all belongs to the internal conditions of representation, insofar as they are conceivable.

On this proposition, whether it is a proposition and to what extent it is fully determined by itself, I claim that either it cannot be thought of at all, or the fact that it is thought of secures it against misunderstanding, and in this case, it is universally valid (REINHOLD, 2003, p. 357).⁵

In this way, the faculty of representation in general is taken as the highest principle of the consciousness, an indeterminable fundamental presupposition that expresses the supreme genus of all representation. All representations are under the presupposition of this faculty, which manifests itself as the first pure and indeterminate principle. The intuition, the concept, and the Idea, as well as the sensibility, the understanding, and the reason, are all representations or faculties of representations. All these concepts are species of the genus *representation*, and what is common to them is the faculty of representation in general: the most

⁴It is important to distinguish between *representation in general* (*Vorstellung überhaupt*) and *mere representation* (*bloße Vorstellung*). In mere representation (or representation in the strict sense - *engere Bedeutung*), only the internal conditions of representation are considered, that is, only mere matter and mere form taken together because they belong to the internal conditions of sensibility, concept and Idea. The subject and object are excluded from its content since they belong to the external sense of representation. –*engste Bedeutung*) on the other hand, in the form of all representations, the genus (*Gattung*) representation, which must support the proof of universal validity (*Allgemeingültigkeit*) of all representations.

⁵ Emphasis added by the author.

general predicate present in all the other predicates. The material and formal parts also derive from it. The forms of receptivity and spontaneity are representations, but insofar as they are given in the mind they are dispositions of the faculty of representation, and in so far as they are manifest in mere representation in general are, in fact, necessary and general characteristics of it. The representation of receptivity and spontaneity founded in the subject is possible only insofar as the subject itself is representable. Since receptivity and spontaneity constitute the faculty of representation, they are the foundation of all representativity and, consequently, also of the representativity of the subject itself (REINHOLD, 1963, see § XXI, pp. 273s).

2. Proposition of conscience

The statement of the principle of the theory of the faculty of knowledge in general is: “in knowledge, the object represented is distinguished both from the representation represented and from the representative represented” (REINHOLD, 2003, § XXXIII)⁶. This means that everyone must subject his own consciousness to reflection in order to convince himself of the effectiveness of the fact (Faktum or Tatsache) enunciated by the principle of consciousness, because clear and distinct consciousness is essential for all knowledge, otherwise knowledge itself could not even be thinkable. Consciousness is called knowledge (Erkenntnis) (Idem, see § XXXII) when the object (Objekt)⁷ is neither a mere representation nor the representative, but a representation distinct from both.

In the *Essay*, Reinhold presents knowledge as composed of clear awareness, distinct awareness, and awareness of the object. Thus, one can only call knowledge the awareness of an object (Objekt) that is distinct from the subject and from all representations. To put it another way, surely it is the relating (Bezo-genwerden) of the representation to a “determinate object” that can properly be called knowledge. But Reinhold insists on showing that not every relation of representation to a given object can be called knowledge, one must be in a position to show that the expression “given object” can only be used for objects of knowledge, and to show beforehand what is meant by these objects.

All representations that have been raised to degrees of logical perfection called clarity and distinctness of representation (not consciousness) have (logically) determined objects, yet these would not be effectively objects (Objekte), for the whole world would deny that they are cognizable (Ekennbarkeit) (REINHOLD, 2003, pp. 231-2).

This means that it is not because objects are properly thought of as pure concepts that existence conforms to them. Existence seeks certainty, not the predicates of a concept. “Consciousness is precisely the place where certain objects are effectively realized, and it is only this that allows one to attribute to them existence, and not just a perfect absence of contradiction” (GOUBET, 1999, p. 124, note 157). The represented representation and the represented subject are “fully determined objects” in the consciousness of representation and in self-consciousness, since representations are reported to them. However, one cannot confuse knowledge with self-consciousness or with the consciousness of representation, because in order for an object to be determined in consciousness, it must be determined in two very different ways:

(1) as an object in mere representation, through a given matter (mere matter)⁸ that immediately refers to the thing in itself (to something that is neither a representation nor the subject itself), “from which is

⁶ *Fundamentallehre*, § XXXIII. In: *Beiträge*, Band I, text of 1790.

⁷ Reinhold distinguishes between the terms *Objekt* and *Gegenstand*. The latter means that which can or cannot be represented, while the former means a real object. We mark them in parentheses in the text only when the word is *Objekt*, as its recurrence in the text is much less frequent than the recurrence of the object as *Gegenstand*.

⁸ Mere matter belongs to the internal, subjective conditions of representation. Both mere matter and mere form in general are unrepresentable (*Essay*, §XXII)



drawn the representation by which the object not yet represented becomes a represented” (REINHOLD, 2003, pp. 232-3); (2) as an object represented in consciousness, thanks to a second representation,

by which the object is elevated by the first to the degree of represented, that is, it is elevated to the degree of object (Objekt) of the consciousness, while represented. Thanks to the first of these representations, the mere object becomes represented; thanks to the second, it becomes [something] known; the first comes immediately from the given matter which is the immediate representative of the mere object (Objekt) in it, the second comes from the representation reported to the object, therefore, from a matter which is not the representative of the mere object (Objekt) in it but through the representation reported to it. Thanks to the first, the simple object is intuited through the matter that is its correspondent; thanks to the second, it is thought (gedacht) by a particular representation produced from the representation immediately related to it (Idem, p. 234)⁹.

Here one can see an important development in Reinhold’s theory and a further departure from Kant’s theory. Although elementary philosophy retains the distinction between the given and the produced, it is strongly attenuated as Reinhold puts scales of representation into the apparatus of knowledge. This is a break in the dichotomy of form and matter that opens a wide space for the philosophical movement that comes immediately after, namely, German Idealism, which will no longer accept the heterogeneity of these instances. In this way, Reinhold still maintains the concepts of sensibility and spontaneity; sensibility that offers the multiple and the understanding that thinks and connects this multiple, but they are no longer two absolutely heterogeneous instances as in Kant. Spontaneity is the faculty of conferring the form of representation to its objects. The matter is received, given to receptivity, but it does not exist in and through receptivity except insofar as the spontaneity of the faculty of representation provides that which will affect the form of representation, transforming it into the matter of representation. In this way, the faculty of representation, in general, is placed at the foundation of the faculty of knowledge, and spontaneity is attributed to it.

Two different representations belong to the consciousness of the object as such and, consequently, also to knowledge in general. The first refers immediately to the mere object and is called intuition, the second refers through the first indirectly to the mere object and is called concept¹⁰. Thus, one can see in the sensible representation, the immediate, direct representation, and in the representation of the understanding, the indirect representation. Intuition and concept, previously two opposite entities, acquire here a common nature, becoming as it were two species of the genus representation, because in this common nature of intuition and concept is found the spontaneity of this faculty. In the third degree, the role of reflection is even more relevant, because spontaneity embodies an absolute self-activity, and the unity produced by it is absolute.

An object while merely represented is what differentiates an object of consciousness from an object of representation in general (this is still undefined), insofar as it is not possible to think of consciousness without the representation of the already represented as such. For a mere object to be elevated to the level of represented, the consciousness must already have a representation, because it is through this representation that it becomes represented and object (Objekt) of the consciousness. The intuition is the representation responsible for this “becoming a represented” insofar as it immediately refers to the object, and thus, through it, this represented becomes an object of a new representation called a concept, which has the intuition for immediate object (Objekt), but for the mediate object (kt), this new representation has the represented by the intuition, the simply represented. It is, then, through the relating of these two representations to the simple object (which is already in consciousness) that knowledge (Erkenntnis) is born. (REINHOLD, 2003, pp. 234ss).

⁹ Emphasis added by the author.

¹⁰ See the statement in paragraph XXXIV of the *New Representation*

On the one hand, Reinhold distinguishes a representation that is intuition. This is conscious, but its object is not yet represented as distinct from the representation. This representation, in which the object is represented as distinct from the representation, arises only with the thought that represents the representation of the intuition. The author considers this thought as a judgment in which subject and predicate are connected, which is the representation of an intuition. Thus, the intuition is in the subject, and the represented intuition is in the predicate. “Reinhold’s fundamental thought (Grundgedanke) is therefore in the judgment starting from an intuited subject directly before the connection of the judgment, to produce the concept as a represented intuition by which the concept is thought” (ONNASCH, 2005, pp. 107)¹¹.

For the general structure of judgment, it is important to note that, in judgment, this separation is preceded by a connection; that is, for every separation from a previous connection it is presupposed that every analysis presupposes a synthesis. Thus, in judgment, two actions always occur: through one, the objective unit is produced from the intuition, and through the other, it is again related to the intuition. The production of the objective unit from the intuition is a synthetic judgment, and the linking of the objective unit produced with the intuition is an analytical judgment.

3. Common understanding

In the texts analyzed above from 1789-91, Reinhold confronts the problem of deducing a free and absolute cause for the freedom of the will, and it is from this point on that he embarks on a long road in search of the first cause of philosophy. Reinhold set out to establish this deduction starting from the faculty of representation in general, from which the faculty of desire would be derived through the action of the impulse (Trieb). This approach was not successful, generating several objections, and among them was that of Carl Schmid (1791), which, being so well-articulated, made Reinhold rethink his theory. Schmid did not agree that impulse was sufficient to differentiate the faculty of desire from other faculties. Moreover, the Idea of an absolute cause cannot be understood as a generator of representations, because its self-activity does not allow anything extraneous to be attached to it. Thus, the only contribution of spontaneity in this process of generation, which is the production of the form of a representation, never leads by itself to a real representation, because it always depends on a matter given from outside. Thus, the spontaneous action of the representative subject in the theory of reason could not be free and absolute.

What the various objections have in common is the claim that the theory of representation, as Reinhold formulated it, does not achieve its goal of deducing theoretical and practical philosophy from the same principle. His theory would remain only theoretical, since the passage from possibility to reality is deficient, since the author tries to accomplish it through the impulses (Triebe), which are the activities of the principle responsible for the reality of the representations according to the forms given a priori in the faculty of representation.

At the end of the third book of the *Essay*, Reinhold presents the conceptual development of the three faculties of representation and introduces the theory of impulses into the foundation of the faculty of desiring. The latter, through the link¹² between the faculties on the one hand and the representative force

¹¹ Author’s emphasis.

¹² This connection is established by defining representative force as the ground of what is realized through the representative subject (*Essay*, p. 560). As such, representative force differs from spontaneity, which, with receptivity, belongs to the ground for the mere possibility of representation. Reinhold emphasizes that force must “express itself according to the faculties assigned to it, and defines impulse as the relation or connection of force (*Kraft*) to faculty (*Vermögen*).” (Idem, p. 561).

Reinhold defines ‘desire’ as that which is determined by the impulse to produce a representation; and ‘faculty of desiring’ as the faculty to be determined by the impulse (*Essay*, p. 561).



(vorstellende Kraft) on the other, is responsible for the decision between mere desire and concrete action, between possibility and reality. The impulse struggles to achieve the representation of desire, that is, to perform the action, but runs into several problems, the main one already pointed out by Schmid, that the being determined by the impulse for the creation of a representation cannot be understood as desire, because in this way the necessary presupposition of representation would be the desire already constituted, and not the impulse¹³. And not all impulses can be thought of as forms of desire. Moreover, the more original the faculties of desire and representation are, the more difficult it will be to classify them together under a superior and comprehensive faculty of representation. Schmid claims that when one resorts to an already existing representation, the original creation of the other representations is not correctly defined in its determination, because it ends up in an infinite regress. Only one definition of the activity of representation is effective, that of representation in general, called representation in the strict sense.

It is no accident, as it turns out, that Schmid's objections lead Reinhold to go back on his claims and make significant conceptual changes in the text he drafts in 1792, in the last edition of the Letters on Kantian philosophy. Some commentators, among them Klemmt (1958) and Goubet (1999), bet that the philosopher should not have succumbed to the numerous and rapid criticisms of his system, but continued with the development of the theory expressed in the Essay, because the argumentation set forth in the Grundlinien¹⁴, according to Klemmt, was too appropriate to be systematically evaluated to a greater extent.

However, even though Reinhold did not take the Essay's approach further, he continued to pursue his aim of finding an indisputable foundation for philosophy, capable of uniting pure religion and pure morality. Already in the first edition of the Letters on Kantian Philosophy, the philosopher demonstrates his concern with the need for common sense, an expression used there in the sense of healthy human understanding (Gesunder Menschenverstand). His appreciation of this topic lets us see that what is in fact being asked is the role of reason in our conviction about the existence of God. For Reinhold, this question must be broken down into two others, namely: (1) does reason bring apodictic proof for the existence of God – proof that totally dispense with faith? (2) can there be faith in the existence of God without soliciting reason as a foundation? The Letters claim that the *Critique of pure reason* answered both questions in the negative. Or rather, Kant actually found the true foundation of conviction in faith commanded by reason. It is the same and only foundation of reason that offers faith to both the most enlightened and the most elementary understanding. While it offers the most rigorous examinations for the former, it is enlightening for the latter, even though the latter has more ordinary capacities (REINHOLD, 2005, see pp. 23ss).

In the *Letters* of 1792, we find an important effort by the author to unite these two instances. There, Reinhold achieves an even greater autonomy in relation to Kant's texts by eliminating the identity between will and practical reason contained in that philosophy. This identity may have been the obstacle that Reinhold found to effect the deduction of the moral law based on the faculty of representation in general since in the Essay he still relied on the Kantian identity. In this edition of the *Letters*, Reinhold tries to prove the non-impossibility of freedom by relying on sound understanding, and proposes the concept of freedom of the will as the foundation of the moral law. They will now acquire an instance of self-determination that, from the demand of the impulses, establishes the possibility and reality of freedom. This is a foundation of freedom and its actions that acquires objectivity without contradicting the principle of sufficient reason, because as Reinhold explains,

Grundlinien der Theorie des Begehrungsvermögens, contained in the third book of the *Essay*.

¹³ Reinhold defines 'desire' as that which is determined by the impulse to produce a representation; and 'faculty of desiring' as the faculty to be determined by the impulse (*Essay*, p. 561).

¹⁴ *Grundlinien der Theorie des Begehrungsvermögens*, contained in the third book of the *Essay*.

The logical law by no means requires everything that exists a cause beyond that existence (...), but it does require that nothing be thought of without foundation. Reason has, however, a very real foundation for thinking freedom as an absolute cause; that is, self-consciousness, by which the action of this faculty announces itself as a fact (Tatsache), and allows understanding to infer the possibility of freedom from its reality (REINHOLD, 2008, p. 193).¹⁵

But the question still remains: How is freedom possible? Philosophizing reason is not content with the sayings of common understanding and investigates them. In the ninth letter, Reinhold states that there is no contradiction that can disabuse the conviction of the common and sane understanding before the judgment of philosophizing reason. Both are precisely connected with the same fundamental faculties of the human spirit and announce themselves to the common understanding by irresistible and infallible feelings (Gefühle), and through them provoke convictions about which philosophizing reason, which seeks the foundations of these feelings, must remain at odds with itself as long as it cannot establish distinct and determined concepts of the fundamental faculties. (see REINHOLD, 2008, p. 207). Precisely because it can provide no justification for the possibility of freedom, philosophizing reason should be satisfied with the results of common and sound understanding regarding the reality and possibility of freedom of the will. The starting point of such a “justification” would be the self-awareness of freedom itself, assumed as infallible and absolutely certain, which by itself excludes the possibility of a refutation of the convictions of the sound understanding by philosophizing reason. The latter, through its concepts, brings only the discernment (Einsicht) of the sound understanding to the concepts and, along with it, the justification of freedom. (LAZZARI, 2004, see p. 302). By bringing together the healthy understanding and the philosophizing reason, Reinhold gives the freedom of the will, which inhabits the faculty of mind (or soul), a double perspective: as feeling and as a determined and distinct concept, making it both reality and possibility.

In the analysis of these *Letters* of 1792, it can be seen that Reinhold, ignoring some conceptual problems within them¹⁶, is satisfied with the result achieved regarding a complete foundation for moral philosophy. However, as was to be expected, given the inquisitive and self-critical spirit of the author, two years later he returns to analyze the relationship between common understanding and philosophizing reason, perhaps because he realized that this relationship was not yet exhausted, or sufficiently clear in the *Letters*. This is the essay: *On the Difference Between the Sound Understanding and the Philosophizing Reason in Relation to the Foundation of Knowledge Made Possible by Both*.¹⁷

4. Relationship between common understanding and philosophizing reason

In this essay, there is no substantial change in the content of Reinhold's initial project, which is to build the philosophical system on a first cause or a fundamental fact: the fact of consciousness (Thatsache des Bewußtseins), but rather on the way of organizing the terms. In the 1791 text, *On the foundation of philosophical knowledge*¹⁸, sensibility, understanding, and reason are the main faculties of the faculty of representation in general, based on the fact of consciousness. In *On Difference*, there are several propositions of consciousness organized hierarchically. The more specific ones are subordinated to the first, more general one; but the consciousness is the source of both the propositions of the one and the other. Multiple facts of internal experience must be of the same type as the general fact of the consciousness, and as such they

¹⁵ Author's emphasis.

¹⁶ Such as, for example, why and to what extent it is the will that decides in favor of the moral law that should be called pure and not the one that decides against it. This theme is further developed in our text published in *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*, v. 30, n. 51, pp. 750-726.

¹⁷ *Über den Unterschied zwischen dem gesunden Verstande und der philosophierenden Vernunft in Rücksicht auf die Fundamente des durch beide möglichen Wissens*. In *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen* (Beiträge, Band II - 1794).

¹⁸ *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (Fundamentschrift).



must be observed as fundamental because they are related to the general, a priori characteristics of the faculty of representation. The propositions of consciousness, because they provide concepts that present themselves in immediate judgments, are empirical (Erfahrungssätze) and are therefore not philosophical principles (Prinzipien). But

in as much as the facts established by them are immediately grounded in the subject of pure self-consciousness, these propositions contain the pure materials for ultimate philosophical principles, from which they are deduced by mediating judgments or reasoning through which the transcendental foundations, which are deduced from them, come into consciousness (REINHOLD, 1794, p. 65).¹⁹

Compared to the 1792 text, there is an addition of elements about the relationship between common understanding and philosophizing reason clearly only to provide more rigor to the methodology of the already elaborate architecture of fundamental philosophy. In reality, the general theory of the faculty of representation remains the general proposition of consciousness, and the specific theories of sensibility, understanding, and reason (i.e., theoretical and practical) remain the subordinate propositions. Each part of the system produced by each proposition of consciousness is mediated by philosophizing reason, which provides the transcendental foundations of the corresponding proposition.

The relationship between common understanding and philosophizing reason provides the origin and status of the basic propositions of consciousness: the former is the cognitive source of the facts of internal experience and provides the “pure materials” (die reinen Materialien), and reason aspires to the conditions, or “transcendental foundations” (die transcendentalen Gründe) of the facts provided by common understanding. This is its task since the foundations of facts are not found in experience, but a priori to it. Thus, there would be two kinds of principles: the true philosophical principles, which are the ultimate transcendental foundations of the facts of consciousness; and the principles of philosophy, with which the philosophizing reason has to begin. These are in a later layer and are the propositions of consciousness.

Referring to the empirical facts of consciousness, philosophizing reason has to establish its transcendental foundations, i. e. the a priori forms and laws of representation, which are necessary for the relevant facts to be possible. Philosophy then analyzes, explains and justifies the basic beliefs of the common understanding. Philosophical claims are, in turn, substantiated by their reference to the facts provided by the common understanding (IMHOF, 2018, pp. 591-2).

The important addition in this text compared to the texts of 1791 and 1792 is that Reinhold makes the common understanding explicit as being the reliable source of the facts of consciousness, which determine the structure and content of the system, because these facts represent the material foundation, the foundation of philosophy.

Approximately two years later, Reinhold makes his adherence to Fichte’s philosophy official because he considers the Wissenschaftlehre to be the only true system of philosophy, even if one takes into account that it was structured on the basis of his own elementary philosophy. However, the common and sound understanding in philosophy becomes even more important than before in Reinhold’s texts, as is expressed, especially, in the *Discussions Concerning the Concepts and Fundamental Propositions of Morality*²⁰, written in 1798. It is also for this reason that Reinhold anchors himself for a while in the philosophy of Jacobi, who was also influenced by the philosophy of common sense.

5. The Passage to Rational Realism

The abandonment of critical-transcendental philosophy, but not the suppression of its scope of finding the first cause, an appropriate starting point for philosophy, occurs, however, around 1800, with the passage

¹⁹ Author’s emphasis.

²⁰ *Verhandlungen über die Grundbegriffe und Grundsätze der Moralität.*

to the system of rational realism. This conceptual moment in Reinhold's philosophy occurs primarily through the influence received from the theory of Christoph Gottlieb Bardili. The core of Bardili's work presents itself in a doctrine of reason as a union of logic and metaphysics, and this starts from a thought conceived absolutely, that is, not really of a thinking subject, and not susceptible of negation, immutable in its perennial being capable of repeating itself as an objective and absolute operation, a rule that only founds thinking and thought (BARDILI, 1800, see § I). This work resonated with Reinhold, but not without first undergoing a critique. Unlike Bardili, Reinhold did not insist on the question of the universality and subjectivity of logical laws, but rather on the absolute character of thought found in the *Grundriß*.²¹ In this new philosophical position,

Reinhold defends a remarkable ontological thesis from its inception. He states that the properly conceived concept of thought is associated with an original unity of thought, being as «Prius κατ' ἐξοχην».²² In the course of exposing his system, Reinhold eventually proposes a pioneering idea of epistemological orientation. He assumes that thought must be conceptualized as thought in application as soon as it is supposed to obtain knowledge. In this context, he argues that applied thought in its fundamental structure is a formal and material condition of knowledge and, with respect to procedure, includes the validation of hypothetically valid knowledge (BONDELI, 2018, p. 671).

From now on, the concept of thought is taken as a new instance and point of origin for philosophizing, leaving behind the concept of representation as the basis of all philosophical knowledge. Reinhold no longer accepts thought as a faculty of the understanding different from the sensible faculty, it is not even representation anymore, because it is no longer based on the relation between subject and object. Only when the object is in the realm of the application of thought can one speak of thought about it, but never in the realm of thought itself²³. That is, thought is a more original structure than the manifestation of thought in its basic elements, as concept, judgment or inference. It is thought as thought (*Denken als Denken*) (REINHOLD, 1801-3, *Hef I*, p. 100). But what is this thought as such? Thought, in its pure nature is calculation, Reinhold answers.

Thought as thought presents itself with the character of the disposition of one and the same term to repeat itself endlessly, in and by calculation, as one and the same, in one and the same, by one and the same, as pure identity, because the essence or inner nature of this thought as thought consists precisely in this disposition to endless reiteration, which is nothing other than pure identity. This manifestation of identity can be expressed by the formula: A as A in A and by A (*A als A in A und durch A*) (Idem, p. 108). Therefore, the distinction of concepts, judgments, inferences, and the categories of thought no longer appear in the essence of thought, in A as A in A and by A, but rather in its application, the distinction of which can only draw its origin or explanation from the matter of application and not from the essence of thought. Thus, due to this nature of thought as thought, the act of negation, the non-A, is excluded, since any negation within it, in its internal nature, would be a pure contradiction. Of course, the application is not limited only to presuppose and preserve the internal nature of thought, but another nature must be added to the above formula by means of the application, the matter, designated by C. This matter of application is postulated with legitimacy and necessity, according to Reinhold, because its role is important to prevent a contradiction in the application of thought, which would then not lend

²¹ BARDILI - *Grundriß der Ersten Logik*.

²² Quintessentially first (our translation).

²³ "Thought itself" and not "self-reflective thought". This would imply precisely what Reinhold wants to avoid, namely, the notion of the activity of thought (or subjective thought). Rather, "thought is to be understood in the sense of a structure of thought and as objective thought" (BONDELI, *ibid.*, p. 673). It is plausible to say that this work already leaves the way open for the next stage of Reinhold's reflections, where he will investigate the philosophy of language called "Synonimik". *Synonymy* presents the system of rational realism in a renewed form. That is, it is concerned with the connotation of words by basing the system on a purified terminology, thus avoiding philosophical ambiguity or arbitrariness, in a word: subjectivism. Reinhold's realism, from the beginning, is a critique of subjectivism, and linguistic non-arbitrariness has to be understood as objectivism (REINHOLD, 1812, pp. 42ff).



itself to any possible analysis. In short, if there is not something else attached to thought as thought, its application would remain a mere thought, so the matter is inserted as a non-thought.

However, and structure of thought as thought is pure identity, therefore the internal nature of matter as non-thought would be simple diversity. “To this must be limited the previous exposition which serves as a simple introduction to this analysis. Everything else must free itself solely from the analysis and by the analysis which develops the application of thought as thought to matter and in matter.” (REINHOLD, 1801-3, Helf IV).

To conclude, we point out that Reinhold, throughout his quest for a first cause or foundation of the reality of knowledge, which for him is the first and most essential task of philosophy, always has in mind, in parallel, the subjectivity, the I of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, which he regards as a common principle in the philosophy of these authors. For Reinhold, who by adopting the concept of objective thought, assumes a consistent anti-subjectivism, absolute subjectivity always ends up in a psychological instance, because it consists of the free activity of the self that reflects in itself, abstracts the objects is also the opinion of Valenza, who reminds us that reason remains enclosed in the circle of the subject and can be traced back to the principle of subjectivity which Kant himself did not bring to light. In the cognitive sphere, Kant relies on a reality of knowledge that is only relative and cannot be attributed to anything absolute, and Reinhold, in the second notebook of the *Contributions* (Beiträge), summarizes the ultimate meaning of the *Critique of pure reason* in the following: “truth, in general, would only be subjective, and truth known as pure, philosophical truth, would consist of subjectivity known as pure, as pure truth.” In the field of practice, Kantian reason abandons the object-dependence that characterized it in the cognitive field, but it does not abandon the character of subjectivity, and “the character of the absolute that it assumes as practical is simply that of absolute subjectivity or subjective absolutism.” This is similar to what Reinhold comments on the falsely unconditioned nature of the moral law. And subjectivity is what lies behind, in a hidden way, both the material conditions of experience in the cognitive field and the absolute and necessity of the moral law (see VALENZA, 2018).

Although Reinhold admitted that Fichte, in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, had penetrated more deeply than Kant into the true spirit of transcendental idealism, he did not spare him criticism. In the sixth volume of the *Contributions*, Reinhold expresses his disapproval of the concept of intellectual intuition present in the philosophies of Fichte and Schelling. Both speculative and practical reason, and all pure intellection, or the absolute act of the return in itself, proceed from the error of wanting to reduce thought as thought to a mere subjective activity, and its product, to an empty form of consciousness. They attempt to perceive, contemplate, and intuit by the self, in and through individuality, that which is only possible to be thought and manifested in thought as thought and by thought. For Reinhold, the two philosophers use the term intellectual intuition to camouflage the slip of proposing the contemplation of the absolute through the senses. And they make another mistake, because for Reinhold, “to imagine is always to represent oneself, and what tends to imagine, tends to represent, therefore, it must be an empirical self that represents itself and, in doing so, cannot separate itself from its empirical nature” (REINHOLD, 1801-3, Helf VI). Thus, Reinhold concludes, this absolute self-proposed by Fichte and Schelling, which decides and puts itself in a position to represent and present in itself, in the self of each of them, is of an entirely sensible nature. The immediate consciousness (intuition of the absolute) cannot result from the external sense, an internal sense is required.

The absolute character of Reinhold’s thought, which is clearly inspired by the doctrine of reason as the union of logic and metaphysics contained in Bardili’s work, but which also carries in its bulge an influence of Leibniz’s project of universal mathematics²⁴, manifests itself as the new viewpoint of the last

²⁴ Besides showing affinity for Leibniz’s intellectual tradition when he defends the philosophical system based on the concept of thought. Bondeli also shares this impression (see BONDELI, 2018, p. 675).

and definitive philosophical revolution, “logical, metaphysical and mathematical certainty resolve into one and the same real certainty, and both subjective and objective truth into one and the same real truth.” (REINHOLD, 1801-3, Helf I).

Naturally, the author understands the problems contained also in this phase of his thought, such as, for example, the lack of a critical reflection on the intersubjective communication of ‘A as A in A and through A’, and it is no wonder that the next endeavor will be through the philosophy of language, where he will try to overcome the appearance created by the confusion of the fundamental metaphysical categories by means of a synonymic analysis, which aspires to keep away the true from the false family resemblances of concepts and words. For Reinhold, illusory knowledge is not a necessity of reason, it is only caused by a defective procedure of analysis.

Given all of Reinhold’s philosophical stages, we can conclude that even if he did not reach the foundation of the reality of knowledge as he had envisioned, his experiences certainly provided a very suitable ground for contemporary thought.

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