This review of Leonhard Creuzer’s Skeptische Betrachtungen über die Freiheit des Willens mit Hinsicht auf die neuesten Theorien dieselben is the first of three book reviews published by Fichte in the Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung [ALZ]. It is unclear whether Fichte asked to review Creuzer’s book himself or was assigned this review by C. G. Schütz, the Jena Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric who was editor of this influential journal. Fichte’s review appeared, unsigned (as was the practice of this and most other journals at the time), on October 30, 1793.¹

Christian Andreas Leonhard Creuzer (1768–1844), who was six years younger than Fichte, studied at Marburg and Jena and became a Lutheran Pastor in Marburg in 1801. In 1803 he was appointed Professor of Practical Philosophy at the University of Marburg. Creuzer published very little, and his chief work remained the book reviewed here by Fichte.

One immediate consequence of this review, which included brief but sharp criticism of the so-called “intelligible fatalism” defended by Karl Christian Ebhard Schmid, who wrote the Forward to Creuzer’s book, was to embroil Fichte in a public controversy with Schmid, his future colleague in Jena.² This controversy continued after Fichte’s own appointment to the faculty, in May 1794, and

²Karl Christian Ebhard Schmid (1761–1812) was a Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Jena. Schmid was among the first generation of academic Kantians and became the first professor to
concluded with the publication, in the spring of 1796, of Fichte’s devastating “Comparison between Prof. Schmid’s System and the Wissenschaftslehre,” with its notorious “act of annihilation” of his opponent. In a “Clarification” published on February 14 and 15, 1794, in the “Intelligenzblatt” of the ALZ, Schmid responded vigorously to the criticisms of the anonymous reviewer of the Creuzer and Gebhard books, thereby provoking a “Counter-Clarification” from Fichte in the March 26 issue of “Intelligenzblatt,” in which he identified himself as the author of the reviews of both Creuzer’s and Gebhard’s books.

For further light on Fichte’s response to Schmid’s attack, see his letter to Hufeland, of March 8, 1794, in which he expressed his hope “in the near future to show Mr. Schmid that I may well have penetrated somewhat more deeply than he has into the spirit of the Kantian philosophy.”

Fichte’s comments on the theory of the will in this review should be compared with his discussion of the same topic, a year earlier, in the new §2 (“Theory of the Will in Preparation for a Deduction of Religion in General”) that he added to the second edition of his Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation (written in the winter of 1792 and published in the spring of 1793). Although Fichte mentions Reinhold with admiration in this review, and appears to adopt his sharp distinction between “Wille” and “Willkür,” he also criticizes, in passing, Reinhold’s account of the relationship between free determinations of the will and natural causality. This criticism did not escape Reinhold’s attention, as is shown by his January 12, 1794, letter to Fichte.

The review of Creuzer is particularly significant because it provides evidence of Fichte’s struggle, just prior to his first sustained effort to construct his own systematic version of the Critical philosophy, to think through the crucial distinction between “the will” (Willen) and the “power of free choice” (Willkür), as well as the distinction between the realm of noumenal freedom and that of...
sensible causality. Although the problems related to these distinctions cannot be resolved within the confines of a brief review, Fichte declares his belief that the key to a solution lies in certain hints provided by Kant in the Critique of the Power of Judgment and in his other late writings, and proposes that one can resolve these problems only by positing a new, higher faculty of free choice, in which the act of determining is not to be distinguished from the product of the same (determinate being or the process of becoming determined). Only a few months later, in the review of Aenesidemus, Fichte characterized the pure I, qua first principle of philosophy, in precisely these terms: as a Tathandlung, or “fact/act.”


Things go on as they always have: The dogmatic misunderstanding of the limits of reason incites the attack of the skeptics upon the very faculty of reason and demands that the latter submit itself to a critique. Insofar as these limits are yet again overstepped, this once again rouses the refutation of the skeptics and requires—not, fortunately, that one undertake a new critique, but rather, that one once again call to mind the results of the previously accomplished critique. The object of Mr. Creuzer’s skepticism (which, admittedly, is only inappropriately called such, since, along with the Kantian school, he assumes—as a fact of consciousness—the existence of an ethical law within human beings) is the theory of freedom. The upshot of his investigations is that none of the previous theories of freedom have satisfactorily resolved the struggle between the interest of practical reason and that of theoretical reason, and none have achieved their praiseworthy goal of giving rise to a new, satisfactory theory of freedom. One problem with this book is that it is constructed on the basis of an incorrect plan (a claim that can be substantiated only by delving into the details, which would overstep the limits of a review) and thus is not composed with the strictest rigor, in some places repeating itself and in others treating matters which do not belong within the scope of the work—e.g., the refutation of Spinozistic pantheism, of egoism, and of many other similar things; another problem is that it raises no objections to the pre-Kantian theories of freedom that have not already been made.

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Instead of summarizing the entire book, however, the reviewer would like to
concentrate his inquiry upon a single point which promises some genuine gain,
at least for the presentation of science. — As many supporters of the Critical
philosophy have maintained, and has been shown in an illuminating manner
by Reinhold, one must carefully distinguish between those manifestations of
absolute self-activity [Selbsttätigkeit] by means of which reason is practical and
assigns a law to itself, and those [other] manifestations through which a person
(in this function of his will) determines himself to obey or not to obey this law.
We do not wish to reprove Mr. Creuzer for at some times seeming to observe this
distinction and at others neglecting to do so, and thereby to reprimand him for his
clear failure to have thought through the above distinction in its full determinacy.
But he claims that the definition of freedom of the will that, in its essentials, is
agreed to by Reinhold, Heydenrich, and ultimately by Kant himself—viz., that
the freedom of the will [Freiheit des Willens] is the power or faculty [Vermögen]
to determine oneself, through absolute self-activity, to obey or not to obey the
ethical law—that is, the faculty to determine oneself to act in one [of two] dia-
metrically opposed ways—violates the law of logical ground. (Since the re-
viewer is less concerned with determining the merit of the author than with
determining the lasting value of his work, he has no reservations about referring
to a book whose contents he does not know whether Herr Creuzer, in composing
his own book, could have made use of—since he does not have the Teutscher
Merkur at hand.) In any case, Reinhold has thoroughly refuted this possible
objection in advance (in his Letters on the Kantian Philosophy, vol. 2, pp. 282ff.).
Yet it is this reviewer’s conviction, which he affirms with full respect for this
great and original thinker, that Reinhold has neither indicated nor overcome the
basis of the misunderstanding in question. “The logical law of sufficient reason,”
writes Reinhold, “by no means demands that everything that exists must have a
cause distinct from its own existence.” “Instead, it demands only that nothing be

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7 Karl Heinrich Heidenreich (1764–1801), Professor of Philosophy at Leipzig. This is an allusion to Heidenreich’s Betrachtungen über die Philosophie der natürlichen Religion, vol. 2 (1791).
8 das Gesetz des logischen Grundes. Satz des Grundes means “grounding principle” or “principle of [sufficient] reason.” Grund is here translated variously as “ground,” “basis,” or, occasionally, “reason.”
9 The book in question is the second volume of Reinhold’s Letters on the Kantian Philosophy, which originally appeared in installments in the Deutscher Merkur. Fichte himself was acquainted with Reinhold’s Letters in book form, but was obviously uncertain when the letter in question originally appeared in the Deutscher Merkur and thus uncertain whether it was published early enough for Creuzer to have been acquainted with it at the time he was composing his own book.
thought of without a ground. Reason, however, has to think of a quite real ground \[\textit{einen sehr reelen Grund}\], that is, it has to think of freedom as an absolute cause.” And later Reinhold writes that reason has to think of freedom “as a \textit{fundamental faculty} or \textit{basic power} [\textit{Grundvermögen}], which, as such, cannot be derived from any other faculty, and hence also cannot be grasped and explained on the \textit{basis of any other faculty}.” The reviewer is in complete agreement with this statement, yet it seems to him to include an error, insofar as one might be misled by other features [of Reinhold’s account] to think that the faculty of freedom is not a fundamental faculty. — Specifically, one has to distinguish between the \textit{act of determining}, as a free action of the intelligible I, and \textit{determinate being},\(^\text{10}\) as an appearing state of the empirical I. — The first of the above-mentioned manifestations of the absolute self-activity of the human spirit [that is, that manifestation of absolute self-activity by means of which reason is practical and assigns a law to itself] appears as a fact: in the determinate being of the \textit{higher power of desire} [\textit{Begehrungsvermögen}], which of course must not be confused with the will, but which, precisely for this reason, must not introduced into a theory of the will. Self-activity gives this faculty its \textit{determinate form}, which is determinable in only one way and which appears as the ethical law. One must distinguish this from the manifestation of absolute self-activity in the \textit{act of determining the will}. The latter does not and cannot appear [within consciousness], because the will is originally \textit{formless}; instead, the latter is assumed purely as a postulate of the ethical law, which is given to consciousness through the previously indicated form of the original faculty of desire and is not, therefore, an object of knowing, but rather of belief or faith [\textit{Glaube}]. \textit{Inclination} [\textit{Neigung} (\textit{propensity} as such), as the determinate being of the (higher or lower) \textit{faculty of desire}, does appear [within consciousness], but not the elevation of the latter to actual \textit{willing}. The will never appears as \textit{determining}, but always as \textit{determined}; the determination has already occurred. If it had not occurred, then the will would not appear as \textit{will}, but rather, as \textit{inclination}. The apparent sensation of determining oneself is not a sensation at all, but rather, an unnoticed inference from the \textit{lack} of any sensation of the determining power. Insofar as the will is “self-determining” it is not a sensible faculty at all, but is instead a supersensible one. The \textit{determinate being} of the will does appear, however, and this raises a question concerning this act of determining oneself to a certain satisfaction or non-satisfaction, a self-determining that must be assumed as a postulate of reason for the possibility of imputation\(^\text{11}\): Is this act

\(^{10}\) \textit{das Bestimmtseyn}. The sense of this term in this context is to designate the “determinate state” of some system (in this case, a determinate state of the finite or empirical I), which is itself to be understood as the \textit{product} of some specific “\textit{act of determining}” [\textit{das Bestimmen}].

\(^{11}\) \textit{Zurechnung}. The word is here employed in the sense in which an action is “imputed” or “ascribed” to a subject, who can therefore be held \textit{responsible} for it.
of self-determining the cause of the appearance of being determined to the same satisfaction or non-satisfaction? If one answers this question affirmatively, as Reinhold actually does (see p. 284 of the above mentioned “Letter,” where he says “the freedom (of the will) is fully comprehensible to me from its effects, by means of which it occurs among the facts of consciousness,” etc.), then one draws something intelligible down into the series of natural causes, and is thereby also misled into displacing it into the series of natural effects; that is, one is misled into assuming something intelligible that is not intelligible. It is quite correct to say that “anyone who believes he is entitled to ask on what basis freedom has determined itself to A rather than to not-A thereby proves, through circular reasoning, the nothingness of freedom, inasmuch as he has already presupposed the nothingness of freedom and, if he understands himself correctly, the nothingness of any will whatsoever.” But the person who says this has, without realizing it, already drawn him into this circle by assuming that freedom could at the very least be a cause in the sensible world. The source of this misunderstanding can be eliminated only by returning to what seems to this reviewer to be the true spirit of the Critical philosophy, which teaches that the principle of sufficient reason can be no means be applied to the act of determining absolute self-activity though itself (i.e., to the act of willing), for this is a unified [Eine], simple, and completely isolated action. In this case, the act of determining is itself, at the same time, the process of becoming determined, and the determining subject is what becomes determined. For determinate being, as an appearance, some actual real ground in a preceding appearance must be assumed, in accordance with the law of natural causality. However, insofar as the determinate being produced through the causality of nature is supposed to be in harmony with the act of free determination (a harmony that, for the sake of a moral world order, also must be assumed), then the ground of such harmony can be assumed to lie neither in nature, which exercises no causality over freedom, nor in freedom, which has no causality within nature, but only in a higher law, which subsumes and unifies both freedom and nature—in, as it were, a pre-determined harmony of determinations through freedom with determinations through the laws of nature. (On this point, see Kant, On a Discovery According to Which Any New Critique of Pure Reason Has Been Made Superfluous by an Earlier One, p. 122 ff.) What is incomprehensible is not how a “thing in itself,” which is independent of the laws of natural causality, could determine itself, nor that an appearance within the sensible world must

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11Ueber eine Entdeckung nach der all neue Critik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll (1790). In English, see Henry E. Allison, The Kant-Eberhard Controversy (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973), which contains a translation of Kant’s text; see esp. 158–160. See, too, of course, the remarks on this subject in the Critique of the Power of Judgment.
necessarily have its ground in a preceding appearance; instead, what is incomprehensible is how both of these objects [viz., thing in itself and appearance], which are completely independent of each other, could nevertheless be in harmony with each another. We can, however, comprehend why we cannot comprehend this harmony: namely, because we have no insight into the law that joins together freedom and nature. — Incidentally, it seems to this reviewer that this is also Kant’s true opinion of the matter, and that the assertion, which is found in many passages in his writings, that freedom must possess causality within the sensible world is put forward only in a preliminary manner, pending closer determination of the proposition in question. The evidence for this is to be found in Kant’s distinction between an empirical and intelligible character of human beings, as well as in his claim that no one can know the true level of his own morality (which is based upon his uncognizable intelligible character), and in the fact that he asserts that purposiveness is the principle of the reflective power of judgment, which connects both legislations (the possibility of which can be comprehended only with reference to a higher, third type of legislation). This seems to emerge most clearly from his proof, in his article on radical evil (which now forms the first part of Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone\(^{15}\)), that we are entitled to assume an absolutely free will because of the necessity of imputation, as well as from his appeal to an unfathomable, higher assistance (which does not, as it were, without any assistance from us, determine our intelligible character, which is to be determined only through absolute self-activity, but instead makes our appearing, empirical character harmonize with our intelligible character, which is something that can occur only by virtue of that higher legislation). This manner of proof and this appeal to higher assistance are so intimately interwoven with the spirit of the Critical philosophy that anyone who, like Mr. Creuzer, finds this manner of proof and this appeal to be so out of place within this philosophy, to be so much at odds with common sense, and to be so laughable must be very poorly acquainted with this same spirit. It would be a simple task to show such a person that he himself, in consequence of the premises he assumes along with the Kantian school, must necessarily assume these propositions as well. — After investigating this theory, Mr. Creuzer turns to the examination of Schmid’s theory

of intelligible freedom, a theory that is sufficiently familiar to all readers of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. As much as this theory, considered purely in its speculative aspect, satisfies Mr. Creuzer, he also shows, in an equally clear and illuminating manner, that it utterly abolishes all morality. On this latter point this reviewer is in complete agreement with the author; indeed, what Prof. Schmid, in the Foreword to this book, has to say in his own defense on this point, seems, at least to this reviewer, even worse than the charge itself. Imputation, guilt, and merit: all of these, by Prof. Schmid’s own admission, would fall away within his theory, and it would now be up to him to show how, in this case, one would be able to think of a law that is valid for every action that is judged thereby. The kind of morality that would remain is precisely the same morality that remained in previous theories of happiness and perfection: to be good is a stroke of good fortune, and to be bad is a misfortune. Let us quote Mr. Creuzer himself concerning the first point: “One can transfer from place to place within a theory the unthinkable thought, the non-thought, of a necessity that is not a necessity, of an unlimited power [Vermögen] that is unable to do everything, of an incapacity [Unvermögen] that is nevertheless the most complete power, of a necessary ground that does not necessarily ground anything, of an individual thing that behaves like an abstract universal thing and is therefore both determinate and indeterminate, and finally, of an independence that proceeds from a double dependence,” — Does this characterization also apply to Reinhold’s definition of the freedom of the will? Or does it apply only to those definitions that confuse reason and will? — “an unthinkable thought that is nevertheless supposed to count as a cardinal thought; one can transplant this non-thought from the sensible world to the world of noumena; one can avoid certain objectionable and, on account of their determinacy, somewhat discomforting formulas and replace them with more comfortable (by which I mean more manageable and less determinate) ones; and finally, one can invent a new faculty of free choice [Vermögen der Willkür], tear it from its natural context, and thus set it up as an isolated indeterminacy.” If one does not take this expression too literally, the latter is precisely what this reviewer has done here, and he asks whether anyone could recognize the existence of a universally valid ethical law and be consistent without doing the same thing. “But,” concludes our author, “the contradiction itself remains what it was: the understanding is unable to think in opposition to the laws of all thinking.” And now it is up the public to decide whether what we have here is yet another contradiction, or mere incomprehensibility. As for the rest, the reviewer believes that philosophy can expect many good things from Mr. Creuzer, just as soon as his extensive and manifold book learning acquires a better order and he has acquired more maturity in his spiritual activity.