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Wechselwirkung in the Systematic Thought of Kant, Fichte and Hegel
Wechselwirkung en el pensamiento sistemático de Kant, Fichte y Hegel

ABSTRACT: *Wechselwirkung* does not mean the same thing for Kant, Fichte and Hegel, but plays a different role for each of their systematic arguments at distinct structural joints. Firstly, Kant's 'Third Analogy' presents a problematic conflation of pseudo-causal influence and the logical requirement for the totalization of experience. Then, Fichte takes Wechselbestimmung to characterize determination in general and is a key operative concept for the construction and justification of both logic and empirical content undertaken in his *Wissenschaftslehre*. And finally, Hegel's presuppositionless argument requires that the emergence of the concept involve the overcoming the opposition of activity and passivity.

Keywords: Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Wechselwirkung

RESUMEN: *Wechselwirkung* no significa lo mismo para Kant, Fichte y Hegel, sino que desempeña un papel diferente para cada uno de sus argumentos sistemáticos. Primero, la 'tercera analogía' de Kant presenta una problemática equivocación entre la influencia pseudocausal y el requisito lógico de la totalización de la experiencia. A continuación, para Fichte la determinación en general es Wechselbestimmung, un concepto operativo clave para la construcción y justificación de la lógica y la empiría emprendidas en su *Wissenschaftslehre*. Por último, el argumento sin presuposiciones de Hegel requiere que la aparición del concepto implique la superación de la oposición entre actividad y pasividad.

Palabrs clave: Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Wechselwirkung

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I. Introduction

The logical category of *Wechselwirkung* plays a central role for the diverging idealist systems of Kant, Fichte and Hegel.[1] [2] They share a concern to overcome the one-sidedness of empiricism and rationalism, put forth compatibilist visions of freedom, as well as moral and political ideas of dignity and reciprocal recognition. It may seem like a reasonable goal then to find try and compare their logical discussions of *Wechselwirkung* as undergirding a limitation or conditioning of causality common to Classical German Philosophy.[3] But I will argue that *Wechselwirkung* cannot function as a Rosetta stone for German Idealism, because it does not have a consistent meaning in the works of Kant, Fichte and Hegel, and its deployment is too radically inflected by their respective methodological and structural-systematic concerns.

Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of *Wechselwirkung* can function as a kind of cross-section which produces an outline of the distinctive character of their respective idealisms and, more specifically, the way each thinker sought to address the problematic relation between logic and systematic idealism. Whereas Kant takes *Wechselwirkung* as a pure category with the function of empirical determination, Fichte elevates it to a systematic logical principle at play in *any* possible determination. The structural argument carried out by Hegel's *Wechselwirkung* follows neither Kant nor Fichte, but instead takes their forms of idealism to task for their opposition of activity and passivity in general. To the extent that *Wechselwirkung* appears at inflexion points for each of their

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[2] Quotes will refer to the following English translations, according to the pagination of the critical editions:

KrV = Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, eds. J. Timmermann & F. Heiner, *Akademieausgabe*, vols. 3 & 4. Hamburg: Meiner 1998 // *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer & A. W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

GWL = Fichte, J. G., *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, in *Werke 1793–1795*, *Gesamtausgabe*, Reihe I, vol. 2. Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1965 // *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and Related Writings (1794–95)*, trans. D. Breazeale. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

WdL = Hegel, G. W. F., *Wissenschaft der Logik*, eds. F. Hogemann & W. Jaeschke, *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 11, 12, 21. Hamburg: Meiner, 1978, 1982, 1984 // *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[3] English translations of the *KrV* mostly render *Wechselwirkung* as "interaction", but Fichte and Hegel translations have diversely translated it as either "reciprocal interaction", "reciprocal action", "reciprocity of action" or simply "reciprocity". For the sake of following a unified thread, I will leave *Wechselwirkung* untranslated throughout.

systematic arguments, it can work as a heuristic to more precisely grasp the specificity of each thinker.

II. Kant's Disjunctive Community and Complete Determination

In Kant's *KrV, Wechselwirkung* is the pure category which plays the leading role in the 'Third Analogy of Experience'. But since this category has been "deduced" in the first place from the function of the disjunctive judgement, one should also consider the dialectical 'Ideal of Pure Reason' —both in its dogmatic and regulative uses— as a kind of cognate of *Wechselwirkung*.[4] The logical function of disjunction thus renders itself into a threefold thematization of *Wechselwirkung* as: 1) the analytic principle of simultaneity, 2) the dogmatic ideal of pure reason, and 3) the regulative principle of thoroughgoing determination. Fichte and Hegel will follow Kant in criticizing the second, but will in turn take Kant's account of the first and third to be inconsistent and problematic.

Kant's analogies function by arguing that there are pure, necessary concepts implicit in our experience which make it discursively graspable according to time-determinations: first, *permanence* (substantiality), then *succession* (causality) and, finally, the 'Third Analogy of Experience'[5] seeks to ground the time-determination of *simultaneity* on the concept of *Wechselwirkung* as an interactive community:

> All substances, insofar as they are simultaneous, stand in thoroughgoing community [*durchgängiger Gemeinschaft*] (i.e., interaction with one another).[6]

> All substances, insofar as they can be perceived in space as simultaneous, are in thoroughgoing interaction [*durchgängiger Wechselwirkung*].[7]

This fulfils a specific role within the 'Analytic of Principles' by schematizing pure categories into functions of time-determinations and therefore conformable to sensibility in general.[8] Thus:

[4] It is difficult to deal with Kant's pure concepts *as* concepts because of his insistence that "strictly speaking no concept given *a priori* can be defined, e.g., substance, cause, right, equity, etc." (*KrV* A 728/B 756). Unlike Fichte and Hegel's later efforts to provide a thorough account of each and every logical category, the *KrV* always discusses them in their application in a specific analytic or dialectic context.

[5] *KrV* A 211-5/B 256-62.

[6] *KrV* A 211.

[7] *KrV* B 256.

[8] *KrV* A 137/B 176ff.

> [...] a concept of the understanding of the reciprocal sequence of the determinations of these things simultaneously existing externally to each other is required in order to say that the reciprocal sequence of perceptions is grounded in the object, and thereby to represent the simultaneity as objective. [...] The simultaneity of substances in space cannot be cognized in experience otherwise than under the presupposition of an interaction among them.[9]

In the third analogy, then, Kant wants to show that *Wechselwirkung* is a concept necessarily implied by the given fact that our experience is temporally determined according to simultaneity. His argument should succeed by showing that the concept of what he calls "community" can fulfil this *a priori* role, without which, our experience would be a jumble of persisting and successive phenomena and we would be unable to grasp distinct objects as co-existing.

The key to understanding Kant's third analogy is the disjunctive function which grounds it. Logical disjunction relates a totality of elements with a determination about the elements themselves, so "A ∨ B; ¬A; ⊢ B" is a valid inference if and only if "A or B" is a *totality*. If there were other unaccounted for elements (C, D, etc.), ¬A would not *suffice* to conclude ⊢ B. This is precisely what happens in a spatio-temporal analogy: two objects are simultaneous if they do not occupy the same space at the same time. A "community" of objects is a simultaneous totality where each object spatio-temporally determines *all* others: "the objects are to be represented as being connected by existing simultaneously, they must reciprocally determine their position in one time and thereby constitute a whole".[10] This is how *Wechselwirkung* is responsible for totalizing experience not only as a simultaneous, but as a parsable *whole*, within which objects can be singled out.

There is a crucial difficulty with the concept of community, however. Kant explains that an interactive community of substances implies a pseudo-causal relation of: "reciprocal influence [*Einfluß*], i.e., a real community (*commercium*) of substances, without which the empirical relation of simultaneity [*communio*] could not obtain in experience."[11] But it is never made clear just why two objects' simultaneous coexistence should imply not only their co-presence, but their

[9] *KrV* B 257-8.

[10] *KrV* A 214/B 261.

[11] *KrV* A 214-5/B 261. — Kant's example is far from illuminating: "From our experiences it is easy to notice that only continuous influence [*Einfluß*] in all places in space can lead our sense from one object to another, that the light that plays between our eyes and the heavenly bodies effects a mediate community between us and the latter and thereby proves the simultaneity of the latter [...] and only by means of its reciprocal influence can it establish their simultaneity and thereby the coexistence of even the most distant objects (though only mediately)" (*KrV* A 213 /B 260).

mutual *interaction*. The talk of influence specifies *Wechselwirkung* relative to causality: we should distinguish from one substance *causing* another, i.e. to cause it *to exist*, and *interacting* with it, i.e. to cause *an alteration* on something already there.[12] In this sense, Kant seems to want *Wechselwirkung* to make it possible for different substances to interact with each other in a way that is "pseudo-causal", but distinct from the successive relation of cause and effect.

The text of the analogy is itself insufficient to explain just why *Wechselwirkung* has to perform this double role of undergirding the disjunctive totalization required to parse simultaneity *and also* sustaining a universal relation of pseudo-causal influence. A clear motivation is that Kant wants to respond to thinkers who held a universal community relation at the center of their theories: Leibniz's pre-established harmony, and Newton's, laws of universal motion.[13] The significance of *Wechselwirkung* is explicit in Kant's critique of Leibniz's dogmatism, which "ascribed a community to the substances of the world only as conceived by the understanding alone, [and thus] needed a divinity for mediation".[14] As a result of the monad's absolute activity, the only way a world-whole could be conceived was through divine pre-established harmony by which each monad is always already in constant simultaneous communication with all others.[15] Once we reject this presupposition, we need to find another way of grounding the totalization of simultaneity, and Kant opts for actual influence and interaction to fulfill this role.

One need only turn to the dialectical counterpart of the 'Third Analogy', 'The Ideal of Pure Reason' to see the extent of Kant's vacillation. The 'Ideal of Pure Reason' distinguishes between the dogmatic idea of God as *ens realissimum* and its necessary regulative function.[16] The ideal revolves around the use of disjunction by dogmatic rationalism as an ontological syllogism: For a

[12] Watkins, E., "Making Sense of Mutual Interaction: Simultaneity and the Equality of Action and Reaction," in C. Payne & L. Thorpe (Eds.), *Kant and the Concept of Community*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011, p. 45.

[13] What is most remarkable about the Third Analogy is that, while obviously in conversation with Newton's Third Law and Law of Universal Gravitation, this connection is totally absent from Kant's text. This is well noted by, for instance, Guyer: "[...] the third analogy must be seen as the culmination of Kant's lifelong effort to provide foundations for Newtonian science, while rejecting both Newton's metaphysics of absolute space independent of the subject of experience and Leibniz's metaphysics of utterly independent rather than completely interacting substances" (Guyer, P., *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 234).

[14] *KrV* B 293.

[15] Leibniz, G. W., *Monadology*, trans. L. Strickland. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, §61.

[16] *KrV* A 576-7/B 604-5.

thing to be concretely determined as *some*thing, it must be one of *all* the possible things that can be — or alternatively: any concrete thing must implicitly refer to the sum of all possible things by distinguishing itself from all other possible things. Therefore, "thoroughgoing [*durchgängig*] determination" inherently requires a reference to totality, which allows the rationalist to infer the existence of an unconditioned *ens realissimum* from the given fact of the existence of just about any concretely determined object.[17] — What is surprising is that Kant seems to accept this as a *logical* argument, though without its onto-theological implications.[18] He grants that: "Every *thing*, however, as to its possibility, further stands under the principle of *thoroughgoing determination*; according to which, among *all possible* predicates of *things*, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it".[19] Of course, since "being is obviously not a real predicate",[20] Kant's point is that this principle should be directed towards an empirical use, rather than hypostatized into an object of rational theology.[21] He wants to avoid postulating God's existence as if it were empirical, but acknowledges that cognition cannot function without the regulative presupposition of an *ens realissimum* — albeit excluded from the empirical and cosmological order of things.[22] Such a *regulative* idea only indirectly supports empirical determinations by giving order and systematicity to the concepts of the understanding.[23]

The tension internal to the 'Third Analogy' must now appear as symptomatic of a broader tension between the transcendental and general logic. The *KrV* offers two accounts of the unity of experience as simultaneity: the first argues that we must presuppose a concept of real community or influence as a bottom-up presupposition which accounts for the time-determination of simultaneity and co-existence in a single plane of effectivity. But the regulative "principle of thoroughgoing determination" also provides an account of

[17] *KrV* A 572/B 600ff.

[18] See, for instance, Longuenesse, B., *Kant on the Human Standpoint*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 213-4 and Grier, M., "The Ideal of Pure Reason," in P. Guyer (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 269.

[19] *KrV* A 571-2/B 599-600.

[20] *KrV* A 598/B 626.

[21] *KrV* A 582-3/B 660-1.

[22] "The ideal of the highest being is, according to these considerations, nothing other than a *regulative principle* of reason, to regard all combination in the world *as if it* arose from an all-sufficient necessary cause, so as to ground on that cause the rule of a unity that is systematic and necessary according to universal laws; but it is not an assertion of an existence that is necessary in itself" (*KrV* A 619/B 647).

[23] *KrV* A 642-5/B 670-3.

this totalization, now top-down: every possible object of experience must be subjected to the totality of conditions of experience, an ideal transcendental totality which must be not just necessary but also sufficient for the thoroughgoing or complete determination of any object. The latter should be sufficient for a concept which makes simultaneity possible and it is, on its face, unclear why Kant feels the need to add the former requirement that we presuppose a whole real community of inter-influencing substances. Ultimately, there is *too much* demanded in the allegedly critical analogy, or, at best, there is a glaringly missing argument connecting the *a priori* requirement of an influence-relation for co-presence. Kant's account of *Wechselwirkung* is thus a synecdoche for the incomplete revolution in the eyes of later idealists: both too attached to the logical strictures of dogmatic rationalism and, at the same time, insufficient as a merely critical, rather than systematic account of idealism. It is Fichte who first then sought to offer the positive and well-founded systematic development merely promised by Kant, but never delivered by his propaedeutic critique.[24]

III. Fichte's Reciprocal Determination of Pure Activity

Fichte's "*Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to be a pragmatic history of the human mind [*menschlichen Geistes*]",[25] attempting to provide a more systematic derivation of the fundamental elements of Kantian "Critical Idealism" such that: 1) that ambivalent dogmatic remnant in Kant, the presupposition of a thing-in-itself, will be "disposed of";[26] and 2) not only the fundamental *a priori* categories, but all of the constitutive faculties of "the system of the human mind" will be grounded and properly "derivable" from its foundational principles.[27] Crucially, rather than presupposing the duality of intuition and concept, Fichte's system is hypothetically circular: its starting point is only self-justified once it has shown itself to result in a system of the human mind which *completely* "agrees" with the totality of experience.[28] The overall goal remains reaching the

[24] *GWL* I/2.335. Cf. *KrV* A 11/B 25, A 841/B 869.

[25] *GWL* I/2.365.

[26] "It may well be that, because of the particular path followed in its presentation, the Kantian system had to ward off the thing in itself in this particular way. The *Wissenschaftslehre*, however, has disposed of [*hat es ... über die Seite gebracht*; has dealt with] the thing in itself in another way; it recognizes the concept of a thing in itself to be a complete perversion of reason, an utterly unreasonable concept." (Fichte, J. G., "Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*", *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings, 1797-1800*, ed. & trans. D. Breazeale. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994, §6, GA I/4.225. Cf. *GWL* I/2.324ff and "First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*", §4.

[27] *GWL* I/2.272. See also, "[First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*", §7, GA I/4.200-2.

[28] Fichte, J. G., "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*", *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and Related Writings (1794–95)*, ed. & trans. D. Breazeale. Oxford:

point where "The entire science is [...] brought to completion, and the contents of the human mind are completely exhausted.".[29]

The animating problem of the 1794 *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* is finding a way to account for a pure self-positing "I" which can actively determine itself as both determining and determinable without falling into contradiction. Fichte can only proceed from the first part of this system once its first two principles, "A = A" (§1) and "A ≠ ¬A" (§2), are mediated by the concept of "divisibility" [*Teilbarkeit*], the "action of limiting" which makes up the principle of "determination" (§3), and thus establishes that both I and not-I may be *partly* determining and determined.[30] At this point, Fichte introduces the operative concept of "reciprocal determination": "Analogously with the term 'reciprocal interaction' [*Wechselwirkung*], this more determinate kind of determining can rightly be called 'reciprocal determination' [*Wechselbestimmung*]. This is the same as what Kant calls 'relation.'".[31] This concept has nothing to do with the Kantian consideration of the interaction between substances, but is accounting for the necessarily reciprocal character of *any* determination, of determination in general, "analogously" with the disjunctive "complete determination". Unlike causality and substantiality, *Wechselwirkung* is not so much the subject of a specific section of the *GWL*, but is rather taken as a key methodological principle which is fundamental for Fichte's whole way of proceeding throughout the *GWL*.[32] Determination in general thus rests on the

Oxford University Press, 2021, GA I/2.146. — "Here a new circle reveals itself: we have presupposed certain laws of reflection, and now, in the course of our science, we discover these same laws; hence [we conclude that] these are the only possible laws. Had we begun with other presuppositions, then we would undoubtedly, in the course of our science, also have discovered other laws [...] we infer the correctness of the system from the *agreement*. But this is only a negative proof, which establishes mere probability. If the reflections we discover do *not* agree with those we presupposed, then the system is surely false." (*ibid.*, GA I/2.144).

[29] *GWL* I/2.282.

[30] *GWL* I/2.270.

[31] *GWL* I/2.290. See Acosta, E., "La transformación de la tabla kantiana de las categorías en el Fundamento de toda la doctrina de la ciencia de J. G. Fichte de 1794/95", *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, 33 (1), 2016, pp. 117-8.

[32] Most notably, Fichte reverts the order and priority of Kant's relation categories: causality (§4C) and substance (§4D) require being deduced as concepts for the theoretical faculty of the human mind, but they are products of the more fundamental laws of a divided, reciprocally determined positing (§3, §4B). The idealist solution to the problem of determinism and freedom within the *Wissenschaftslehre* hinges on just this move: The original self-positing I needs to be behind the very production of causality and substance as theoretical concepts which, taken *dogmatically* and *without* taking notice of a practical faculty always already at play, overwhelm consciousness with notions of fatalist determinism and a thing-in-itself

logical concepts of limitation and reciprocity, which come into play for *any* determination to take place, and thus take a leading operational role for the argumentative structure of Fichte's system.[33]

It is only thanks to the concept of *Wechselbestimmung* that Fichte can outline the distinction between the "Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge" where "the I posits itself as determined by the Not-I" (§4) and the "Foundation of the Science of the Practical" (§5-11), where "[t]he I posits itself as determining the Not-I."[34] In a nutshell, if the absolutely pure and self-positing I is to support a theoretical consciousness, receptive and passively attuned to knowledge of the world, we need to account for how "[t]he Not-I, as such, possesses no reality in itself", but rather "[possesses] reality insofar as the I is passively affected, which follows in accordance with the principle of reciprocal determination". Fichte's ingenious explanation of this strange conclusion is that "the same degree of activity [of the I] must necessarily be transferred [*übertragen*] to the Not-I".[35] From the practical perspective, this "transference" of activity is "summoned" by an external "impetus" [*Anstoß*] but cannot amount to either causality or influence. *Wechselbestimmung* is the *a priori* hinge concept that allows the pure concept of activity to be not only determining and self-determining, but also self-determining *as determinable*. Though "A = A" (§1) remains the absolutely unconditioned principle of his philosophy, Fichte's actual step-by-step argumentation requires instantiating the "principle of determination" at every level to produce different forms of conceptual "reciprocal determination".[36]

(*GWL* I/2.279-82, 309ff, 328, 392-3, 412-3; cf. "[First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*", §4-6).

[33] Fichte's "Principle of Reciprocal Determination" (through the influence of Maimon's skepticism) stands as a revolution of Kant's still too formal account of the principle of thoroughgoing determination, which "has dramatic consequences for both the *method* and the *content* of transcendental philosophy" (Breazeale, D., "'Real Synthetic Thinking' and the Principle of Determinability, in *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 56).

[34] *GWL* I/2.385 — The purpose of the theoretical part of the *GWL* is to show that it is thoroughly problematic: "To this theoretical part, however, our system adds a practical part, which grounds and determines the theoretical part. [Only then] The entire science is thereby brought to completion, and the contents of the human mind are completely exhausted." (*GWL* I/2.282). The later, practical section of the *GWL* positively constructs the concepts negatively shown to be required upon the infinite striving of practical reason: "reason itself could not be theoretical were it not practical. No intellect is possible for a human being unless that human being also possesses a practical power. The possibility of all representation is grounded upon the latter." (*GWL* I/2.398). This structural argumentation grounds the primacy of practical reason in Fichte's thought.

[35] *GWL* I/2.293-4.

[36] *GWL* I/2.290.

The difference with Kant should be evident, not only for the understandably controversial undermining of the second, sensible stem of human cognition, but also by the radically altered and less discussed relationship to formal, general logic. Where Kant vacillated between accounting for "thoroughgoing determination" by recourse to a bottom-up pseudo-causal relation of activity and a top-down regulative principle, Fichte has embraced the former because he deems the recourse to a rational principle of logic as a dogmatic presupposition external to the *GWL*. Fichte, thus needs to commit to justifying the laws of logic by a hypothetically circular systematic argument which Kant would never dare to.[37] Rather than introduce an external distinction between general and transcendental logic,[38] Fichte claims that his *Wissenschaftslehre* should not *presuppose*, but rather *ground* formal logic:

> Logic does not provide the foundation for the *Wissenschaftslehre*; it is, instead, the latter which provides the foundation for the former. It is purely and simply the case that the *Wissenschaftslehre* cannot be demonstrated from logic. Prior to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, one may not presuppose the validity of a single proposition of logic — including the law of contradiction.[39]

If this were not the case, logic and not the *Wissenschaftslehre*, would remain the "the science of all the sciences [...and] provide all the sciences with their foundational principles".[40]

Fichte's three foundational principles thus function by taking a particular logical principle or law of thought as given and showing them to be grounded on the pure activity of the self-positing I. So, the "First, Purely and Simply Unconditioned Foundational Principle" (§1) is arrived at by looking for an account of the *fact* that "Everyone will concede the proposition 'A is A'".[41] We arrive at "I = I" because we look for the *action* (*Tathandlung*) behind the undeniable logical *fact* (*Tat*) that A=A. Similarly, "A ≠ ¬A" is the given logical fact which is produced by the self-determining activity by which the I is not the not-I. Fichte himself draws clear parallels between the tradition of logical fundamental principles: §1 gives us "the principle of *identity*", §2 the principle of "*positing in opposition* [*Gegensetzens*]" and §3 the principle of divisibility

[37] "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*", GA I/2.144.

[38] *KrV* A 50-7/B 74-81.

[39] "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*", GA I/2.138.

[40] *ibid*.: I/2.127-8. At the same time, Fichte also says that: "The *Wissenschaftslehre* presupposes that the rules of reflection and abstraction are familiar and valid. It must necessarily make this presupposition, and there is no reason to be ashamed of this or to make a mystery of it and conceal this fact." (*ibid.*, I/2.148).

[41] *GWL* I/2.256.

or "reciprocal determination".[42] These formal laws of thought are no longer presupposed, as in Kant's *KrV*, but purportedly justified.[43]

Even conceding the convoluted hypothetical circularity of Fichte's argument, a problem arises, however, if we home in on the transition between §2 and §3: namely, that unless Fichte's "principle of opposition" is also identical to a principle of *non-contradiction*, it is *insufficient* to explain the requirement that grounds the principle of reciprocal determination. The principle of positing in opposition means that: "Every opposite, insofar as it is an opposite, is so purely and simply, thanks to an action of the I and for no other reason. Being posited in opposition is, as such, posited by the I purely and simply".[44] Fichte does say that he takes "the logical principle of positing in opposition" to be the same as "i.e., the principle of contradiction";[45] and this identification is unproblematically picked up by, for instance, Brazeale.[46] But this seems unconvincing. Specifically, it is unclear why positing something as not-I should imply an *explosive*, annihilating conclusion relative to the original identity of the I. And without such an argument, it is unclear why divisibility *must* be introduced in §3 as an answer to Fichte's rhetorical question: "How can A and –A, being and non-being, reality and negation, be thought together in a manner that does not annihilate and annul them [*vernichten und aufheben*]?".[47]

Fichte's reason to introduce a principle of *Wechselbestimmung* is to avoid the mutual cancellation of his first two principles. In general, Fichte's mode of proceeding is the repeated deployment of the third principle of determination or limitation, such that the contradictions of each proposition can be "solved" — i.e. determination grounded and "annulment" [*Aufhebung*] prevented. This is what Fichte calls his "synthetic" method, which searches for the required conditioning synthesis implicit in the contradictory "opposed [*entgegengesezt*] positings", which would otherwise "annul [*aufheben*]" each other.[48] This is, clearly, the purely negative meaning of *aufheben*: of a negation resulting in

[42] *GWL* 1/2.283.

[43] Kant took the principle of identity and the principle of non-contradiction to be mutually implied as the "supreme principle of all analytic judgements" (*KrV* A 150/B 189ff) and took the "supreme principle of all synthetic judgments" to be the requirement that "every object stands under the necessary conditions of the synthetic unity" of possible experience (*KrV* A 158/B 197). The "principle of thoroughgoing determination" further specifies this latter principle, since it requires not only being conditioned, but being *thoroughly* determined.

[44] *GWL* 1/2.265-6.

[45] "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*", GA I/2.148.

[46] Breazeale 2014, p. 55; 2021, pp. 51, 477fn84.

[47] *GWL* I/2.269.

[48] *GWL* I/2.268.

nothing and without a positive product or determination.[49] But it is unclear that Fichte has in fact grounded the principle of non-contradiction on an activity of the pure I, and —even if we granted that he manages to ground the logical principles of identity, opposition and reciprocal determination in the *GWL*— it seems like he has instead measured his account of the self-determining I against a presupposed logical principle which holds that contradictions are explosive.[50]

IV. Hegel's Overcoming of Essence

Hegel's distinct account of *Wechselwirkung* has the purpose of avoiding the pitfalls of Fichte and Kant's brands of idealism. Explaining this requires an account of why *Wechselwirkung* reappears as a category in the *WdL*, not only worthy of a subchapter of its own, but seemingly effecting the central transition from the 'Doctrine of Essence' to the 'Doctrine of the Concept', or from the 'Objective Logic' to the 'Subjective Logic'. Doing so will require accounting for the link between Hegel's treatment of *Wechselwirkung* in particular as well as its structural function for the overall argument of the *WdL*.

Hegel calls Fichte's the "more consistent form [of] transcendental idealism [which] did recognize the nothingness of the spectral *thing-in-itself*"[51] and acknowledges the significance of Fichte's philosophy insofar as it inaugurates a new set of methodological and systematic questions which Kant left unsatisfied.[52] But then again, Fichte still fails to fix the inconsistencies which befell Kantian transcendentalism: "the subjective attitude assumed in the attempt prevented it from coming to fruition".[53] In particular, Hegel's critiques of Fichte in the *WdL* concern the centrality of the figure of infinite striving in the *GWL* — since Hegel believes Fichte fails to make this regress into a coherent

[49] This use is more continuous with Kant's eliminative account of logical contradiction (*KrV* A 264-5/B 320-1) and differs from Hegel's well-known account of the positive productivity of *Aufhebung* (*WdL* 21.94-5).

[50] After giving an otherwise very thorough analysis of the method of the *GWL* and its relation to the principles of formal logic, Seebohm argues that the first "primordial mutual cancelling" between §1 and §2 is not commensurate with later "dialectical contradictions" between determinate concepts and propositions in §4 (Seebohm, T. M., "Fichte's Discovery of the Dialectical Method" in D. Breazeale & T. Rockmore (Eds.), *Fichte: Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies.* Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1994, pp. 24-5, 29-30). His core argument, that because Fichte does not use to word "contradiction" in the text of §3, the law of non-contradiction is not at play until its first use in §4 seems hardly convincing — it merely suggests that Fichte is careful to conceal the presupposition of the explosive character of contradiction.

[51] *WdL* 21.32.

[52] *WdL* 21.47-8, 62-3;12.15.

[53] *WdL* 21.32.

account of thoroughgoing determination.[54] Hegel consistently refers this impasse in the *results* of the *GWL* to its flawed *foundationalist* beginning;[55] so the shadow of Fichte looms large behind Hegel's critique of foundationalism as a motivation to make the *WdL* radically *presuppositionless*.[56] This explains why Hegel sought a new method to make "the dead bones of logic [...] be quickened by spirit and become substance and content [...] fit to be pure science";[57] rather than distinguish between general and transcendental logic or seek another *more* fundamental science to undergird logic. As such, the failure to account for the extant presupposition of formal logic is just as problematic in Hegel's view as the impossibility of achieving any empirical determination through an infinitely bad striving.

Breazeale hints that Hegel goes beyond Fichte by "endorsing the absolute dominion of the *Satz der Wechselbestimmung* and denying the possibility of any self-evident starting-point for philosophy".[58] By considering the Kantian and Fichtean insistence that *Wechselwirkung* accounts for thoroughgoing *and* reciprocal determination, a plausible enough explanation of the critical hinge-function of *Wechselwirkung* for Hegel's *WdL* is thus: an 'Objective Logic' which began with the problem of lacking any determination between the mutually vanishing moments of 'Being' and 'Nothing' and has arrived at a "completed" determination: the concept. And yet, this similarity is all too schematic. A more thorough consideration of the methodological distinction between each author's way of proceeding will reveal that this similarity is a rather superficial product of a larger abstraction. We have to distinguish the specificity of Hegel's argument from Kantian or Fichtean readings.

[54] "The philosophy of Kant and Fichte holds out the *ought* [*Sollen*] as the resolution of the contradictions of reason — though it is rather only a standpoint that remains fixed in finitude and therefore in contradiction." (*WdL* 21.123). This logical problem (retrenching, rather than overcoming the opposition between infinity and finitude) is at the basis of the metaphysical limitations of *subjective* idealism: [...] the idealism of Kant and Fichte [does] not go beyond the ought and the infinite progress but remain[s] in the dualism [*Dualismus*] of existence [*Dasein*] and being-for-itself. It is true that in these systems the thing-in-itself or the principle of infinite resistance [*Anstoß*] immediately enters into the "I" and becomes something only for-it; but it proceeds from a free otherness which perpetuates itself as negative being-in-itself. The "I" is therefore indeed determined as idealization, as a-being-for-itself, as infinite reference to itself; but the *being-for-one* is not completed to the point where the beyond of that in-itself, or the direction to the beyond, vanishes" (*WdL* 21.150).

[55] *WdL* 21.82.

[56] *WdL* 21.55-6. See Houlgate, S., *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005, pp. 29ff.

[57] *WdL* 21.37.

[58] Breazeale 2014, p. 56.

Unlike Kant's, Hegel's discussion of *Wechselwirkung* no longer deals with a reciprocity between *substances*, but with the unity of an action *across* substances, that is, a reciprocity *between* cause and effect.[59] This is meant to suspend both the traditional models of substantiality and causality, and thereby bring the sphere of essence as a whole to an end — the question is just how and why *these* categories and not others complete the 'Objective Logic'. The relation of "influence" Kant called *Wechselwirkung*, the "reciprocity between agent and patient [*Handelnden und Leidenden*]"[60] is actually closest to what Hegel addresses under 'Action and Reaction'. Here, substances are not one-sidedly causal relative to one another, but have a relation of mutual active influence and passive receptivity between them: the active substance "now acts, for it is the negative power over itself; at the same time it is its own presupposition; thus it acts upon itself as *upon an other*, upon *the passive substance*."[61] The effective core of causality is now located in an interactive relation which is more concrete than the broadly conceived parameters of formal tautology and real infinite regress.[62] This change enables the consideration of the tension between two contents once "causality no longer has a *substrate* in which it *inheres*",[63] and is no longer indifferent but *interacting*. Hegel calls this kind of relation "conditioned causality" and explains that in it "the cause *refers back to itself* in the effect".[64] The argument of 'Action and Reaction' is meant to show that a substance's action, considered as one-sidedly opposed to the passivity of another substance implies and triggers its activity.[65] Thus, "the *activity* [*Tätigkeit*] which in finite

[59] This is foregrounded by di Giovanni's felicitous translation of *Wechselwirkung* as "reciprocity *of* action".

[60] *KrV* A 80/B 106.

[61] *WdL* 11.405.

[62] These are the respective dead ends of *formal* and *real* causality respectively. Hegel's has been called an "identity theory" of causality (Meyer, T., "Hegels wesenlogisches Kausalitätskapital als Identitätstheorie der Kausalität," in *Hegel-Studien* 51, 2018, pp. 114-6) defined as a relation that involves sharing a common content across two formally distinguished moments called the "cause" and the "effect": "Because of this *identity of content*, this causality is an *analytic* proposition." (*WdL* 11.399). Formal causality is an empty identity which expresses nothing: "The cause is *extinguished* in its effect and the effect too is thereby extinguished" (*WdL* 11.398). Real, determinate causality is conditioned by an excessive manifold of content that makes causality "external to itself" and liable to producing a (bad) "infinite regress" (*WdL* 11.403). Causality thus rehearses the chief problematic oscillation between formal tautology and real, other-determined infinite regress observed throughout the 'Doctrine of Essence'.

[63] *WdL* 11.405.

[64] *WdL* 11.407.

[65] The argument's *denouement* involves accounting for *reaction*, when "the passive substance is *preserved* or *posited* by the active, namely in so far as the latter sublates itself; but, on the

causality runs into the bad infinite progression is *bent around* [*umgebogen*] and becomes an action that returns to itself, an infinite *reciprocal action*."[66]

It is easy to see the rehearsal of now familiar Kantian and Fichtean themes: the reciprocity of activity and passivity hones causality into a relation of influence which enshrines a self-mediating process without the requirement of an external substrate. Moreover, this is achieved by producing an account of "a *passivity posited by its own very activity*".[67] But this account of *Wechselwirkung* does not, however suffice to explain why Hegel moves on to say that: "Causality has thereby returned to its *absolute concept* and has at the same time attained the *concept* itself."[68] At minimum, by distinguishing 'Action and Reaction' from *Wechselwirkung* Hegel is picking up on the double aspect of Kant's 'Third Analogy' and separating the pseudo-Newtonian claim about disjunctive universal influence and the ideal function of totalization. The more difficult question is explaining the argument towards the concept while holding true to the requirement that the science of pure thought be undertaken without presuppositions, since this *forbids presupposing* the goal of reaching the concept. *Wechselwirkung* has a unique structural task then, that cannot be shared by either Kant or Fichte, who each presuppose the foundation of conceptuality distinct from sensibility and the pure, self-positing I.

We must therefore reject readings which reduce Hegel's argument to a redeployment of a transcendental argument. For instance, Di Giovanni claims that Hegel's argument radicalizes the Fichtean disposal of the thing-in-itself, such that by transitioning to the concept, we are effecting a transition into a concept of "discourse", which is free from any "spectral" thing-in-itself, because only that which it posits within itself "counts", "makes sense", "matters", "makes a difference" or is *wirklich*, "*effectively* real".[69] Similarly, Fink-Eitel argues that the key to the transition to the concept is that when two heterogenous substances confront each other, a point of coherence must be found in the constitutive,

other hand, it is *the act of the passive substance itself* to rejoin itself and thus to make itself into what is originary and a *cause*." (*WdL* 11.406).

[66] *WdL* 11.407. — Here, "it is no longer *substrates* that are referred to each other but substances; in the movement of conditional causality, the still left over *presupposed immediacy* has been sublated, and *what conditions* the causing activity is only *an influence* [*Einfluß*], or *its own passivity*. But this influence, moreover, does not come from another substance originating it but from precisely a causality which is conditioned by influence, or one which is mediated." (11.408).

[67] *Ibid*.

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] di Giovanni, G., *"Hegel's Anti-Spinozism,"* in D. G. Carlson (Ed.), *Hegel's Theory of the Subject*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 39 and di Giovanni, G., "Introduction" in *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. xxxiv-v and xlvii-viii.

reciprocal co-determination, analogously to the *Wechselbestimmung* between the I and the not-I.[70] They both take Hegel to be leveraging a Fichtean *practical*, recognition-based argument against Fichte's metaphysical argument from the *Wissenschaftslehre*. They simply take the Hegelian specificity of his argument to be a more radical cancellation of externality and a thematization of a single *universal* relation of mutual interaction. But this still involves introducing a transcendental leap —as if, *in the end*, we *cannot but* presuppose the concept— into Hegel's purportedly immanent progression. From such a perspective, not only is the particularly Hegelian character of the argument lost, but, as Fink-Eitel concedes, the "step toward this recognition is logically irreducible and, in fact, can only be described metaphorically".[71] Such accounts are thus only superficially more helpful than McTaggart's frank admission regarding the transition from causality to the concept: "I must confess myself unable to follow this."[72]

Instead, I argue that *Wechselwirkung* functions as the Hegelian culmination of essence because it involves sublating the abstract *opposition between* activity and passivity. Hegel's admittedly obscure claims about the "elevation" of necessity to freedom require that:

> In the reciprocity of action, therefore, necessity and causality have disappeared; they contain both the *immediate identity* as *combination* and *reference* and the *absolute substantiality of the differences*, consequently their *contingency*, the original *unity* of substantial *difference* and therefore the absolute contradiction.[73]

Activity is itself absolute contradiction, because it contains "both the *immediate identity* as *combination* and *reference* and the *absolute substantiality of the differences*", which is to say, activity is constituted as the contradiction which is "the original *unity* of substantial *difference*". *Wechselwirkung* involves, first, the simultaneous co-present relation between reciprocally interacting substances, so that, secondly, it unveils the fact that *each* activity by itself was already reciprocal in a slightly different sense. Reciprocity *of* action holds onto the moment when the contradiction, which activity in general *is*, is held onto speculatively. The purpose of the 'Doctrine of Essence', then, was to portray the one-sidedness of activity, of positing [*Setzen*] of another, which is instead

[70] Fink-Eitel, H., *Dialektik und Sozialethik. Kommentierende Untersuchungen zu Hegels „Logik"*, Meisenheim: Anton Hain, 1977, pp. 177-8 [trans. IBB].

[71] *ibid.*, p. 191.

[72] McTaggart, J. M. E., *A Commentary on Hegel's Logic*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1964, 194.

[73] *WdL* 11.408.

revealed to have been abstract and immediate *because of* and not despite its active character.

Wechselwirkung enables the emergence of the logical structure of the concept because the *concept is organic activity,* which is *both* active and passive, rather than *purely* active, and is thus self-determining to the extent that it is a self-realizing and self-transformative contradiction. This is radically unlike Kant, whose whole *KrV* is grounded on embracing the opposition between active conceptuality and passive sensibility, or Fichte, who sought to *reduce* passivity to pure activity. Instead, a Hegelian contradiction is absolute to the extent that it is able to *keep hold of itself* despite, but also *through*, the changes in its interactions with externality: "*Speculative thought* consists only in this, in holding firm to contradiction and to itself in the contradiction, but not in the sense that, as it happens in ordinary thought, it would let itself be ruled by it and allow it to dissolve its determinations into just other determinations or into nothing".[74] To say that activity is itself absolutely contradictory is not to say that it is either impossible or absurd, but on the contrary, that it is *by virtue* of this self-contradiction —by virtue of articulating activity and passivity— that it is self-differentiating in a way that escapes the impossible bind of essence between tautology and regress, domination and indifference.

Activity, insofar as it has renounced the blindness of pure activity and the emptiness of a static conception of being, is *both* active and passive; and thus *the concept* according to the organicity of speculative philosophy proper — it is this absolute contradiction as the root of movement, activity and life.[75] When Hegel says that causality and its necessity must "unveil" themselves, he does not mean that we need to take up a subjective position respective to the determined objectivity of being and essence — let alone that we are free only in thought.[76] Hegel's talk of the "transparence" of the concept refers rather to the preservation of an identity not despite, but *thanks to the transformation* which it undergoes in its *externalization*. It is actually blind necessity which *loses* any capacity for a self-referential identification because of its reliance on other-determination. It is by having refined the problem of self-mediation

[74] *WdL* 11.288. — A more thorough account of the contradictory nature of pure activity insofar as it enmires itself *against* passivity demands a lengthier analysis of Hegel's account of the logical category of "violence" (*Gewalt*) (*WdL* 11.405ff) which cannot be given here.

[75] In an *Anmerkung* to 'Contradiction', Hegel proclaims: "identity is only the determination of simple immediacy, of inert being, whereas contradiction is the root of all movement and life; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, is possessed of instinct and activity." (*WdL* 11.286); and also: "Something is alive, therefore, only to the extent that it contains contradiction within itself: indeed, force is this, to hold and endure [*zu fassen und auszuhalten*] contradiction within." (*WdL* 11.287).

[76] *WdL* 11.409.

into a problem of activity in general, that the 'Doctrine of Essence' as a whole concludes by arriving at a mediated or *articulated unity of mediation and immediacy* which Hegel calls "the concept" — which is a *free* self-determining process which is self-grounding and self-instantiating because of its capacity to *express* and *remain* itself in its other.

V. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has laid out the different structural functions which *Wechselwirkung* plays for the systematic arguments espoused by Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Kant recognized that *Wechselwirkung* was essential for a complete or "thoroughgoing determination", but he considered this principle ambiguously in a schematic disjunctive relationship between substances along the time-determination of simultaneity and influence. It is Fichte's logical "insight" to see this principle at work at the ground-level of the concept of determination *qua* limitation in general and independently of any reference to either formal logic or spatio-temporal experience of objects.

Hegel no longer presupposed, like Kant, the opposition and synthesis of the two sources of cognition as active, spontaneous understanding and passive, receptive sensibility. But he also aimed to surpass Fichte's systematic presupposition of an annihilating *opposition* between activity and passivity — which could only be "solved" by reducing passivity to activity. Fichte's *ad-hoc* synthetic constructions require reintroducing immediacies that are radically alien and irreconcilable to the purity of the original activity. Both in terms of method and metaphysical content, Fichte's remains a philosophy which *de facto* proceeds by an absolute counterposition between immediacy and mediation, so any attempt at grasping free self-determination through the *purity* of infinite striving, remains the self-contradictory abstract opposition to the finitude it is bound to. To this extent precisely, it remains caught in the sphere of essence. Grasping the structural method by which Hegel's unity of presentation and critique engages with the history of logic and metaphysics makes it possible to see how he is taking a unique step *away* from both Kant and Fichte.

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