



## *The Parallax Leap*

### *Fichte, Apperception, and the Hard Problem of Consciousness*

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In *The Phenomenon of Life*, Hans Jonas defines a problem as a “collision between a comprehensive view” and “a particular fact which will not fit into it.”<sup>1</sup> Part of Jonas’ concern is how death and life pose problems for views that explain the world as vital and mechanical, respectively. While vitalist and mechanistic views face the easy problem of accommodating facts amenable to their explanatory methods, they face the hard problem of facts that resist these methods. Thus, vitalism collides with the fact that life expires for no apparent purpose and mechanism collides with the fact that death elicits outrage and hope.

A more recently formulated hard problem confronts physicalism. In “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” David Chalmers argues that physicalism cannot show why scientifically explicable phenomena like perception and action are “*accompanied by experience*,”<sup>2</sup> by the fact that there is something it is like to perceive and act—a fact that Chalmers attributes to subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> This fact is absurd insofar as it is neither amenable to the explanatory methods of science nor entailed by phenomena so amenable. Absent a supplementary principle of explanation, the “rich inner life” or phenomenal character of experience is “objectively unreasonable” for physicalism, which must behold this first-personal fact across an explanatory gap.<sup>4</sup>

A precursor to the hard problem of consciousness confronts nihilism, which denies that anything exists without an external condition. Jacobi coins this term in a 1799 open letter to Fichte to signify the loss of faith in the immediacy of experience, in the fact that the reality of what we perceive and the value of what we do—“*the true*”—is manifest without mediation by or inference from external conditions. This fact collides with the nihilism of rational “science,” which abstracts from the true by reflecting endlessly on its conditions. Nihilism “ceases to feel its pressure,” becoming lost in a “game” of reflection.<sup>5</sup> Nihilism thus disavows our pre-reflective experience of directly perceiving and acting in the world. Jacobi’s reply is that the true gives reason its “value”: faithless reason, numb to the true, lacks purpose. He accordingly appeals to what it is like to perceive and act, stating that perception is marked by a “feeling” or “*intimation of the true*” and that one “feels” that one is free and has “*inner certitude*” of the reality of one’s actions.<sup>6</sup> As he says in his *Spinoza Letters*: “I have... no conviction more vital than that *I do what I think*.”<sup>7</sup>



Jacobi traces nihilism to “the ancient *a nihilo fit*,” the principle that nothing exists without a condition, and regards Spinoza as its exemplar, for his fidelity to this principle entails that nature is a machine whose parts have infinite causal conditions and in which direct perception and free action are “mere illusion.”<sup>8</sup> Jacobi must locate “the *wonder* of perception and the unfathomable *mystery* of freedom... outside the mechanism of nature,” for nihilism denies that we feel the true in perceiving and acting, that “[i]n our consciousness... reason and freedom are found inseparably connected.”<sup>9</sup> Like physicalism, nihilism collides with the first-personal fact of what perception and action are like. Unless this problem is solved, nature’s inclusion of conscious experience will remain, as Chalmers warns the physicalist, an “unanswered question” and, as Jacobi chides the nihilist, “completely inexplicable.”<sup>10</sup>

One advantage of Kant’s Copernican turn is to dismiss the question that imposes this hard problem. We need not ask how nature is accompanied by the first-person standpoint because “I think” is a form of thinking that must be able to accompany any cognition of nature.<sup>11</sup> The first person is neither the illusion that Jacobi dreads nor the absurdity that concerns Chalmers, but a condition of the possibility of cognizable nature. Kant’s term for this condition in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is “apperception,” which denotes the self-consciousness that unifies our consciousness of nature *qua* sum of appearances under universal and necessary laws, *viz.*, the categories of the understanding.<sup>12</sup> If cognizing nature assumes the first-person standpoint as its ground, that standpoint poses no hard problem. No view that conflicts with the first person collides with an inexplicable fact, but only collides with itself.

Fichte inherits the Kantian insight that a Copernican turn is parallaxic: we see that nature depends for its lawful unity on apperception precisely by marking a reorientation in objects that arises from a reorientation toward ourselves. As Kant says in the B-Preface, just as Copernicus’ success in astronomy requires registering a shift in the motion of celestial bodies given our revolving position, success in metaphysics requires registering a shift in the position of empirical objects given our peculiar constitution. Objects’ *a priori* spatiotemporality arises when we see that they must conform to our forms of cognition.<sup>13</sup> In *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte embraces this parallax, pursuing “a complete revolution in the way we think” such that “the object will be posited and determined by our power of cognition, and not vice versa.”<sup>14</sup>

Yet Kant’s formal conception of apperception worries Fichte in his *Nova Methodo* lectures. This conception cannot exhaust the ground of experience, for it does not show why we posit objects “*at all*.” For Fichte, it is our agency that first opens a world of objects, *viz.*, as ends and obstacles: “it is by means of such acting—and, moreover, only insofar as it is a hindered or arrested activity—that we obtain any consciousness whatsoever of what is actual.” The apperceptive I “catches sight” of objects because it originally discovers itself “*as acting*” among, toward, and away from them. As Fichte says: “[e]xperience refers to acting. Concepts originate through acting and exist for the sake of acting; only acting is absolute.” Apperception, then, is not a form of thinking but a real activity. Indeed, it is only by affirming the I’s real activity that transcendental idealism can establish “the primacy of practical reason,”<sup>15</sup> *contra* nihilism.

Fichte adapts Kant’s idea of apperception in order to refute Spinozism’s nihilistic corollary.<sup>16</sup> Whereas Kant holds that the “I think” is “a thinking, not an intuiting,” Fichte

argues in his *Aenesidemus* review that apperception must be “realized through intellectual intuition” if transcendental idealism is to exhibit the “existence and autonomy of the I.”<sup>17</sup> As he explains in the *New Presentation*, apperception is an intellectual intuition insofar as it grasps the I as “an acting.”<sup>18</sup> Fichte addresses his argument to those with a “lively zeal” for “science,” i.e., for an idealism whose absolute ground is “faith in oneself... in one’s own self-sufficiency and freedom.” He disregards “those who, as a result of protracted spiritual servitude, have lost their own selves... yanked back and forth by the secret fury pent up within them.”<sup>19</sup> Theirs is a faithless reason, one in thrall to external conditions, committed to a nihilistic view that contradicts their I-hood.

In what follows, I argue that, for Fichte, the I poses no hard problem because it collides exclusively with nihilistic views like Spinozism, which are refuted by a properly idealist conception of apperception, according to which the first-person standpoint is the absolute ground of our experience of nature. If idealism refutes nihilism, nature is no more explicable than that there is something it is like for me to perceive and act. In Section 1, I show why Kantian apperception is necessary for possible experience. In Section 2, I reconstruct Fichte’s argument that a modified conception of apperception refutes guises of nihilism, thereby solving the hard problem of consciousness. In Section 3, I suggest that transcendental idealism undermines Chalmers’ proposed solution to and Daniel Dennett’s dismissal of this problem.

## 1. What-It-Is, What-It-Is-Like, For-Whom-It-Is-Like

To grasp the necessity of apperception for possible experience, consider two explanatory gaps. An empirical gap separates scientifically explicable physical facts from directly accessible phenomenal qualities in that the latter neither are nor follow from what is so explicable. This gap is empirical because it lies between scientific and ordinary experience, between a *posteriori* encounters with the objectively physical—what-it-is—and subjectively phenomenal—what-it-is-like. As Chalmers argues, physicalism cannot close this gap.

A further, non-empirical gap separates the phenomenal character of experience from its subjective character in that experience’s involving something it is like, which varies across conscious episodes, cannot explain its involving something it is like for me, which abides across conscious episodes *qua* mine. This gap is non-empirical because it lies between experiential states and an experiential standpoint, between episodes in a heap and their belonging to a unity: my perspective.<sup>20</sup> Whereas particular experiences have phenomenal character—a what-it-is-like—the whole of experience has subjective character—a for-whom-it-is-like. As Kant shows, only a transcendental idealist conception of apperception can close this gap.

In the A-Deduction, Kant says:

consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called inner sense or empirical apperception. That which should necessarily be represented



as numerically identical cannot be thought of as such through empirical data. There must be a condition that precedes all experience and makes the latter itself possible, which should make such a transcendental presupposition valid.<sup>21</sup>

This passage shows why an account of experience that fixates on the empirical gap rises to the level of empirical apperception, the “inner sense” of “determinations of our state,” and why this is insufficient. As “consciousness of oneself,” inner sense exhibits the phenomenal character that collides with physicalism and nihilism.<sup>22</sup> But since empirical data are contingent, the content of inner sense is “forever variable.” It yields nothing necessary, no “abiding self” whose identity can unify the “stream of inner appearances.”<sup>23</sup> By itself, then, empirical apperception is blind to its own “condition.” This condition, Kant says, is a “transcendental presupposition” and, just before this passage, he says it is “nothing other than transcendental apperception.”<sup>24</sup> Hence, we must turn from the empirical gap between physicality and phenomenality to the non-empirical gap between phenomenality and subjectivity; that is, an account of experience must rise to the level of transcendental apperception. Crucially, this indicates that the hard problem of consciousness ultimately requires filling the transcendental gap.

Kant elucidates transcendental apperception in §16 of the B-Deduction:

The I think must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me... I call [the I think] pure apperception, in order to distinguish it from the empirical one... I also call its unity the transcendental unity of self-consciousness in order to designate the possibility of *a priori* cognition from it. For the manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be my representations if they did not all together belong to a self-consciousness; i.e., as my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must yet necessarily be in accord with the condition under which alone they can stand together in a universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not throughout belong to me.<sup>25</sup>

Empirical apperception by itself is a phenomenal flow with no abiding self, “dispersed and without relation to the subject’s identity.”<sup>26</sup> Since empirical data are contingent, their **condition** of unity differs in kind: it must be “transcendental.” Kant ascribes transcendental unity to “a universal self-consciousness” in which I can regard determinations of my state as mine. Whereas inner sense arises **a posteriori**, self-consciousness “precedes” representations as the **a priori** condition of their unity, the lawful structure of which unity is provided by the categories.<sup>27</sup> Hence Kant calls transcendental apperception the “supreme” principle of cognition, without which “I would have as multicoloured, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious.”<sup>28</sup> Since inner sense affords merely a contingent unity of phenomenal consciousness, it cannot be mistaken for transcendental apperception.<sup>29</sup>

The relevant gap for an account of experience is thus non-empirical. Experience’s involving a what-it-is-like cannot explain its involving a for-whom-it-is-like; that is,





phenomenal consciousness cannot explain its own unity. We fill this gap if we see that consciousness presupposes self-consciousness as its transcendental condition. As Kant says: “only because I ascribe all perceptions to one consciousness (of original apperception) can I say of all perceptions that I am conscious of them.”<sup>30</sup> Physicalism and nihilism may leave conscious experience unexplained. But we cannot simply combine outer sense of physical objects and inner sense of determinations of our state. This would yield a heap of episodes lacking the lawful unity of a self-conscious perspective, which is why the hard problem ultimately confronts us with the transcendental gap. A representation is “nothing for us” unless it can belong to the “standing and lasting I” that is the “transcendental ground” of the “lawfulness of all appearances,” that is, of “the formal unity of nature.”<sup>31</sup>

If there is something it is like to perceive and act in nature, it is something for us. It belongs to the first-person standpoint of transcendental apperception, which functions to unify nature under laws. This standpoint poses a hard problem only for views that nihilistically evade the fact of phenomenality or inadequately explain that fact by halting at the level of empirical apperception.<sup>32</sup> This is to say that the I poses no hard problem for any truly comprehensive view. Consciousness presupposes self-consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

A manifold of representations is only mine if it can belong to the “thoroughgoing identity” of apperception—if, Kant says, I can “combine” it in “one consciousness” in “an act of spontaneity.” Yet apperception, for Kant, is a “simple representation” in which “nothing manifold is given,” a form of thinking whose manifold depends on sensation.<sup>34</sup> For Jacobi, apperception annihilates perception of the true insofar as it “add[s]” the object to a sensory manifold by combining the latter in consciousness, as he says in *David Hume on Faith*.<sup>35</sup> Kant thus seems to indulge a nihilistic game of reflecting on mediating external conditions—here, subjective rather than causal.<sup>36</sup> For Fichte, however, we refute nihilism if we regard apperception as an immediate consciousness or intellectual intuition of the I’s real spontaneity. I will now reconstruct Fichte’s refutation and show how it solves the hard problem of consciousness.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. The Primacy of Practical Reason

In §6 of the Second Introduction to the *New Presentation*, Fichte announces the “gist” of his philosophy: “[r]eason is absolutely self-sufficient... It follows that everything reason is must have its foundation within reason itself... In short, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is transcendental idealism.”<sup>38</sup> Although the “letter” of Kant’s idealism leaves the apperceptive I dependent on sensibility for a manifold, its “spirit” seeks to show that experience is absolutely grounded on reason, or “the pure I.”<sup>39</sup> Fichte’s textual support for transcendental idealism’s identity with the *Wissenschaftslehre* is Kant’s claim in §16 that apperception is the supreme principle of cognition.<sup>40</sup> Fichte describes apperception as consciousness that is “the same in all consciousness,” “not determinable by anything contingent within consciousness,” “determined by nothing but itself,” and “determined absolutely.”<sup>41</sup> We saw that, for Kant, since contingent inner states yield no I, the latter must determine itself spontaneously. Fichte now adds that the I must determine itself “absolutely” on pain of “dogmatism,” his term for nihilistic views like Spinozism for which “everything that occurs within consciousness is a product of





a thing in itself,” including consciousness “allegedly produced by freedom.”<sup>42</sup> Unless the I absolutely determines itself—unless its spontaneity unconditionally grounds experience—dogmatism is possibly true.<sup>43</sup> The letter of Kant’s idealism tolerates this possibility by restricting the I to a form of thinking dependent on sensibility.<sup>44</sup>

If consciousness is a mere product, as Jacobi fears, spontaneity is illusory.<sup>45</sup> We would then deny subjectivity and the phenomenality that it conditions, trading the for-whom-it-is-like and what-it-is-like of experience for the what-it-is of existence. But we avoid this nihilistic result if we prove that apperceptive spontaneity grounds consciousness. In *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte says that this proof requires positing the I as a first principle, positing its “activity” as a ground from which to derive the forms of cognition, including sensibility. He charges that Kant “points” to this activity but provides no derivation,<sup>46</sup> clarifying his charge in the *New Presentation*: if, as Kant holds, consciousness is “conditioned” by the I, its content arises outside the I, limiting (if conforming to) the latter; but if consciousness is “determined” by the I, its content is derivable from the I’s spontaneity alone.<sup>47</sup> This content includes the forms of sensibility, on which the I would not be dependent.<sup>48</sup> Only by showing that practical reason is, in this sense, “the source of the theoretical” can an idealist consistently affirm the former’s primacy.<sup>49</sup> But how precisely can idealism prove the primacy of practical reason?

Fichte credits Kant with directing our gaze away from objects toward ourselves, a parallax turn he identifies with the “spirit” of idealism.<sup>50</sup> As he says in §1 of the First Introduction, philosophy’s “first demand” is to “look within [one]self,” as this alone draws attention to the system of representations that are “accompanied by a feeling of necessity” and the question of its “basis.” Since Fichte’s synonym for this system is “experience”—whether inner or outer,<sup>51</sup> it follows that it includes inner sense of phenomenal states and outer sense of physical facts and that the question of its basis concerns the apperceptive I. Since the I must determine itself absolutely on pain of dogmatism, it follows, moreover, that this question specifically concerns the apperceptive I’s unconditional spontaneity, that is, the primacy of practical reason. Fichte proves the latter by contrasting two responses to philosophy’s first demand.

Just as the condition of empirical apperception differs from it in kind, the basis or first principle of experience is non-empirical. A dogmatist posits as its principle the thing in itself, while an idealist posits the I.<sup>52</sup> Like Jacobi, Fichte identifies consistent dogmatism with Spinozism, which nihilistically renders the I “an accident of the Not-I,” a product of mechanical nature. Idealism instead views the Not-I as a “way of looking at the I,” a limitation of its activity.<sup>53</sup> A dogmatist requires the Not-I to ground our representations: the latter must be effects in a system of conditions to preserve nature’s causal closure. Fichte replies in §6 of the First Introduction that no one, not even a dogmatist, can “deny the testimony of immediate consciousness,” which “everyone who has taken a hard look within themselves must long since have discovered,” viz., that the I is an “immediate unity of being and seeing.” The I is not simply conscious of objects of possible experience but is conscious of this consciousness, that is, is self-conscious. An object “exists for” the apperceptive I in this sense: its “being” is conditioned by my “seeing” it. To ask “[f]or whom” an object exists, then, is to invoke the I as the unity or “double series” of being and seeing.<sup>54</sup>



Fichte indicates why dogmatism's nihilistic corollary raises the hard problem that confronts physicalism. Dogmatism neglects the "ideal" series of apperceptive seeing, limiting its inquiry to the "real" series of objective being in which each member is the effect of another "lying outside" it. This series yields nothing that "exist[s] for itself," specifically, nothing that "*observes itself*," like the apperceptive I.<sup>55</sup> It therefore cannot explain consciousness, for it excludes the latter's condition. As we saw, the hard problem of consciousness ultimately confronts the transcendental gap and is solved only if we rise beyond empirical apperception to transcendental apperception: a what-it-is cannot explain a what-it-is-like precisely because it cannot explain a for-whom-it-is-like. Dogmatism's limited inquiry generates the hard problem by tracing causal conditions in a real series that lacks the transcendental condition of an ideal series. Hence Fichte infers that dogmatism cannot "transition" from being to seeing. Indeed, he says, "in all the various guises in which it appears," dogmatism "leaves an enormous gap" between being and seeing.<sup>56</sup> As a guise of dogmatism, physicalism leaves the same—transcendental—gap because physicality's inability to explain phenomenality is essentially its inability to explain subjectivity.

Dogmatists and physicalists cannot rise above empirical apperception. As Fichte says: "[m]any people have simply not progressed in their own thinking past the point of being able to grasp the single series constituted by the mechanism of nature... For such people, a representation becomes a particular sort of thing."<sup>57</sup> As we saw, mere empirical apperception is blind to its own condition, viz., the spontaneity of combining representations in one consciousness. Only transcendental apperception closes the gap between the what-it-is-like and for-whom-it-is-like of experience. It is the "self-sufficiency and spiritual freedom"<sup>58</sup> by which idealism can prove the primacy of practical reason and refute dogmatism.

Nevertheless, theoretical reasoning cannot settle the dispute between idealism and dogmatism:

Neither of these two systems can directly refute the opposing one; for the dispute between them is a dispute concerning the first principle, i.e., concerning a principle that cannot be derived from any higher principle. If the first principle of either system is conceded, then it is able to refute the first principle of the other. Each denies everything included within the opposite system. They do not have a single point in common on the basis of which they might be able to achieve mutual understanding and be united with one another. Even when they appear to be in agreement concerning the words of some proposition, they understand these same words to mean two different things.<sup>59</sup>

A clash of first principles is theoretically insoluble. First, each is a derivational ground and so underivable. Second, each supports rigorous, thoroughgoing explanation, producing a system as plausible as its contrary. Third, each renders a contrary system incoherent, lacking common ground with the same and yielding a stalemate. As Fichte elsewhere explains, "[e]very philosophy presupposes something that it does not demonstrate on the basis of which it explains and demonstrates everything else."<sup>60</sup> A dogmatist can by "a correct inference" from her principle discredit the alleged "fact"



of spontaneity as “an illusion,” thereby colliding with no hard problem.<sup>61</sup> And one is “unable to refute a dogmatist” by positing the I’s spontaneity, since her principle entails spontaneity’s incoherence. Katalin Balog identifies the same theoretical insolubility between physicalism and anti-physicalism:

[e]ach side can unseat the other side’s core assumption if they are permitted to make their own core assumption. The anti-physicalist appeals to the anti-physicalist principles, the physicalist appeals to the conceivability of a purely physical world with phenomenality. Both can show that, once granted that one core assumption, their view is consistent and can rebut challenges from the other side. Neither side can, without begging the question against the opponent, show that the other’s position is untenable.<sup>62</sup>

Positing subjectivity as the principle on which phenomenality depends begs the question against a physicalist, for whom there is neither the empirical nor the transcendental gap whose closure requires subjectivity. She is free to posit physicality as her first principle, produce a consistent and complete system, and talk past her disputant. But then her core assumption, like her disputant’s, is a bare assurance.<sup>63</sup>

The dispute must therefore be resolved practically. For an idealist, this requires grasping the primacy of practical reason, viz., by grasping one’s apperceptive spontaneity. One cannot be compelled to do so, Fichte says: “self-consciousness does not impose itself upon anyone, and it does not simply occur without any assistance from us. One must actually act in a free manner.”<sup>64</sup> The primacy of practical reason must therefore be proven first-personally. Likewise, denying its primacy must be refuted first-personally: its denial must be self-refuting. Hence, although Fichte cannot refute the dogmatist with theoretical reasoning,<sup>65</sup> he can show that she practically refutes herself.

Positing a first principle in response to philosophy’s first demand is done, Fichte says, “by means of a free act of thinking.”<sup>66</sup> This is because a response is normative. I hold myself as responsible for it and regard it as correct.<sup>67</sup> A dogmatist’s “inner self” agrees in this respect with her disputant: her capacity to posit a principle is inescapably normative and thus spontaneous. As Fichte puts it, “a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item” but “is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it.”<sup>68</sup> No response, then, is compatible with dogmatism’s nihilistic corollary. Positing the Not-I is accordingly a performative contradiction, since its corollary precludes its possibility. In placing my response in the real series of mechanical nature, I belie it qua response.<sup>69</sup> I refute myself. As Fichte infers, a dogmatist’s denial of the primacy of practical reason is her “antidote” to her own position, her “cure.”<sup>70</sup>

In the Paralogisms, Kant says that if we abstract from the I, we “turn in a constant circle, since we must always already avail ourselves of the representation of it at all times.”<sup>71</sup> Fichte agrees in the *Foundations*, stating that a dogmatist positing the Not-I must “think unawares of the *absolute subject as well*, as contemplating this substrate,” and so must “unwittingly subjoin in thought the very thing from which they have allegedly abstracted, and contradict themselves.”<sup>72</sup> But Fichte denies Kant’s claim that apperception merely thinks the I, arguing that it must intellectually intuit the I if we are to prove the primacy of practical reason. Fichte clarifies that intellectual intuition does not grasp a







“being,” which Kant prohibits,<sup>73</sup> but rather “an acting—and this is something that Kant does not even mention (except, perhaps, under the name ‘pure apperception’).”<sup>74</sup> Of course, when Kant mentions “apperception,” he means a mere representation. For Fichte, however, the I’s spontaneity must, on pain of dogmatism, be intuitably real. Intellectual intuition is accordingly the immediate awareness of the I’s reality. It apprehends the “I do” that must be able to accompany my representations, the “acting” that grounds “the encountered object of this acting”<sup>75</sup>—the primacy of practical reason.

Proving this primacy is first-personal. I discover that I am “active” and “cannot be driven from this position.”<sup>76</sup> Fichte invokes Jacobi against complaints that this discovery is indemonstrable.<sup>77</sup> Jacobi’s rhetorical point in charging that nihilism leaves perception and action “inexplicable” is that it offers third-personal explanations, whereas the true is not explicable by external conditions. Intellectual intuition of spontaneity is indemonstrable because it is unconditioned, attained “not through a *transition*, but by means of a *leap*.”<sup>78</sup> Nihilistic views refute themselves by resisting this leap. Like dogmatism, physicalism fails to rise to the apperceptive standpoint that closes the transcendental (hence also the empirical) gap. If we want to avoid nihilism and any hard problem that confronts its various guises, we must, Fichte says, “elevate ourselves.”<sup>79</sup>

### 3. Transcendental Realism’s Waver

Consciousness poses a genuine problem for Fichte, one that is insoluble absent a practical stand. An idealist takes this stand by demonstrating that subjectivity collides with no comprehensive view because it conditions any view’s being comprehensive. I conclude by briefly suggesting that transcendental idealism undermines Chalmers’ and Dennett’s responses to the hard problem.

A transcendental realist treats appearances as things in themselves lying beyond our sensibility. In the Paralogisms, Kant argues that since her representations nevertheless rely on sensibility, they are “insufficient to make their reality certain.” She “can never be fully certain of reality from any possible experience” and so she “plays the empirical idealist.” Hence her position wavers between casting reality beyond her standpoint and acknowledging features of that standpoint from which she cannot infer that reality. By contrast, a transcendental idealist treats appearances as representations and so need not doubt their reality: they exist “on the immediate testimony of [her] self-consciousness.” She is thus “an empirical realist,” for she grants appearances “a reality which need not be inferred.”<sup>80</sup> She achieves a stable position, unlike her wavering counterpart.

Dennett’s response to the hard problem exhibits a transcendental realist’s waver. In “Quining Qualia,” he acknowledges such a problem’s nihilist threat by observing that many insist on qualia—on experience involving a what-it-is-like—as a “bulwark against creeping mechanism.” However, on the assumption of “third-person objective science,” he argues that qualia cannot exist because their inversion is neither introspectively detectable nor intersubjectively comparable.<sup>81</sup> In “A History of Qualia,” he explicitly infers the dissolution of the hard problem from qualia’s non-existence: if consciousness is a “user-illusion” as real as El Dorado,<sup>82</sup> there is no empirical gap, but only physical facts. Yet Dennett cannot infer such—or any—facts from within his own user-illusion.



As a transcendental realist, he cannot cognize reality on the basis of representations that he himself discredits.<sup>83</sup> Hence, he plays the empirical idealist.

Chalmers fares no better. Affirming qualia **contra** Dennett, he supplements physical principles with psychophysical principles, raising consciousness from *explanandum* to *explanans* in order to render perception and action explicable.<sup>84</sup> But expanding one's metaphysical principles does not entail a principled metaphysics. That requires proof of our right to the concepts on which such principles rest. In the Deduction, Kant observes concepts that “circulate with almost universal indulgence, but that are occasionally called upon to establish their claim by the question *quid juris*, and then there is not a little embarrassment about their deduction because one can adduce no clear legal ground for an entitlement to their use either from experience or from reason.”<sup>85</sup> A transcendental deduction proves our right to the categories as concepts that universally and necessarily condition the possibility of experience. As Chalmers offers no such deduction, his principles risk the “embarrassment” of conceptual grounds to which we lack right, the fate of a transcendental realist's disregard for experiential conditions.<sup>86</sup> Worse yet, he says that his principles need only appeal to “non-empirical constraints such as simplicity and homogeneity.”<sup>87</sup> But these are constraints to which physicalism can equally appeal, mere theoretical concerns that we saw guarantee an insoluble dispute. Worse still, raising consciousness to a principle presupposes self-consciousness as its supreme principle.

Given the nature of the disputed datum—what it is like for me to perceive and move through the world—a practical stand is needed. According to Fichte, transcendental idealism serves this end by inviting us to view the concept of apperceptive activity as “primary” and that of being as “derivative.”<sup>88</sup> This involves the parallax of shifting from a world that poses a hard problem of consciousness to one whose problems are primarily, familiarly practical. Such is the resolve necessary for overcoming the various guises of nihilism.<sup>89</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 9.
- 2 David J. Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness.” In *The Character of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8.
- 3 Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” 5.
- 4 Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” 5. Cf. Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–50; Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 127 (1982): 127–36; Joseph Levine, “Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1983): 354–61.
- 5 F.H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 511–12.
- 6 Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 513–14, 529–30.
- 7 Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 193.
- 8 Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 187–8, 530–1.

- 9 Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings* 519, 530. Cf. G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*, trans. and ed. R.S. Woolhouse and R. Francks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 270: “perception, and everything that depends on it, is *inexplicable by mechanical principles*, by shapes and motions.”
- 10 Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” 8; Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 193.
- 11 Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900), B131–2; cf. A383.
- 12 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A126–7, B136–7, A401–2.
- 13 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Bxvi–i.
- 14 J.G. Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. I.H. Fichte (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965), I:421.
- 15 J. G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. R. Lauth, H. Jacobs, and H. Gliwitzky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-holzboog, 1962–2012), IV/2:61. Cf. Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 5:30, 121; 8:13–14.
- 16 Although Jacobi charges Fichte with nihilism in the open letter, depicting the *Wissenschaftslehre* as an “*inverted Spinozism*” that reduces objects to moments of “pure and empty consciousness” (502), we will see that, in texts that provoke Jacobi’s charge, Fichte argues that his idealism refutes Spinozism’s nihilistic corollary.
- 17 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B157; Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:16. On nihilism’s role in German idealism’s formation, see Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
- 18 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:472.
- 19 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:421–2; Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, IV/2:17.
- 20 This unity is presupposed by experience, *a fortiori* scientific experience of the brain; cf. Dan Zahavi, “Brain, Mind, World: Predictive Coding, Neo-Kantianism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Husserl Studies* 34, no. 1 (2018): 47–61.
- 21 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A107.
- 22 On discontinuities between Kantian and contemporary theories of consciousness, see Thomas Sturm and Falk Wunderlich, “Kant and the Scientific Study of Consciousness,” *History of the Human Sciences* 23, no. 3 (2010): 48–71.
- 23 Cf. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D.F. Norton, M.J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 162.
- 24 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A106–7.
- 25 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B131–2.
- 26 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B133.
- 27 On the inner sense/apperception distinction, see Henry Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 277–9; Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62; Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 239n.
- 28 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B134–5.
- 29 As Kitcher (Patricia Kitcher, “The Unity of Kant’s Active Thinker.” In *Transcendental Philosophy and Naturalism*, ed. J. Smith and P. Sullivan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55–73) observes, Tetens’ conception of inner sense as the record of an act of thinking fails to secure the apperceptive ground of cognition. Recording acts of thinking, even associating different feelings with different acts, e.g., assumptions



- as opposed to inferences, is insufficient for apperception, for the latter requires a single consciousness to unify the acts of thinking that rationally constitute cognition, e.g., the assumptions that support the inference to a conclusion (62–6). For criticism of Kitcher’s account of apperception, see Sebastian Rödl, “The Single Act of Combining,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 87, no. 1 (2013): 213–20.
- 30 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A122. Cf. Dan Zahavi, “Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29 (2003): 63–92; Dan Zahavi and Uriah Kriegel, “For-Me-Ness: What It Is and What It Is Not.” In *Philosophy of Mind and Phenomenology: Conceptual and Empirical Approaches*, ed. D. Dahlstrom, A. Elpidorou, and W. Hopp (New York: Routledge, 2015), 36–53.
- 31 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A116, A123, A127. Cf. Gottlob Frege, *The Frege Reader*, ed. M. Beaney (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 339: “If there is no owner of ideas then there are also no ideas, for ideas need an owner and without one they cannot exist.”
- 32 Cf. Kitcher, “The Unity of Kant’s Active Thinker,” 70–1.
- 33 One may wonder if apperception explains how phenomenality arises. But Kant need only explain how it composes a unity of consciousness. Whereas physicalism’s causal explanation of how things arise renders phenomenality absurd, Kant’s formal explanation of what unifies consciousness renders it intelligible.
- 34 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B132-3, B135.
- 35 Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 335.
- 36 Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 337, cf. 335n45.
- 37 Wayne Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte’s Jena Project* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Robert Pippin, “Fichte’s Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism.” In *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 147–70; Lance P. Hickey, “Fichte’s Critique of Dogmatism: The Modern Parallel,” *The Philosophical Forum* 35, no. 1 (2004): 65–80; Daniel Breazeale, *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Martin, Pippin, Hickey, and Breazeale observe the merits of Fichte’s idealism as an alternative to naturalism but overlook its ability to solve the hard problem of consciousness. Tse articulates a Fichtean critique of physicalism but does not offer a refutation of nihilism (Plato Tse, “Fichte’s Critique of Physicalism: Towards an Idealist Alternative,” *Inquiry* 62, no. 5 (2019): 527–45, 532).
- 38 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:474; cf. 462–3, Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, IV/2:25.
- 39 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:477, 479n; cf. 478. For Fichte’s distinction between I-hood and selfhood, see Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:255–7, 476, 501–4, 530n, III:57.
- 40 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B136, 132; corrected citations from Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:475, 476.
- 41 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:476.
- 42 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, SW I:430.
- 43 See Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:443.
- 44 Fichte acknowledges that Kant posits a thing in itself, but claims that it functions as a noumenon, whose concept enables thought to delimit appearances and thus depends solely on the I’s thinking (Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:482–3); cf. Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:491, 514.
- 45 Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 189; cf. Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:100.
- 46 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:96, 100; cf. Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B145–6.





- 47 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:477. Fichte's distinction between the I as conditioning and as determining is comparable to Kant's distinction between the highest as supreme and as whole (Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, AA 5:110).
- 48 See Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:488.
- 49 Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, IV/2:61; see Matthew C. Altman, "Idealism Is the Only Possible Philosophy: Systematicity and the Fichtean Fact of Reason," *Idealistic Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 1–30.
- 50 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:479.
- 51 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:422–3.
- 52 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:424–5.
- 53 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:119–20; Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, IV/2:43–4; cf. Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:499.
- 54 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:435–6.
- 55 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:435–7.
- 56 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:438. Fichte also describes this as a gap between "things" and "representations."
- 57 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:439.
- 58 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:439.
- 59 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I, 429; cf. 499, 509-n.
- 60 Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, IV/2:17.
- 61 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:430, 439; cf. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, IV/2:15–16.
- 62 Katalin Balog, "In Defense of the Phenomenal Concept Strategy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84, no. 1 (2012): 1–23, here: 20. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. J. Stambaugh (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985): "[t]he truth of a principle can in general never be demonstrated by success. For the *interpretation* of a success as a success is, after all, accomplished with the help of the presupposed but unfounded principle" (138).
- 63 Balog (Balog, "In Defense of the Phenomenal Concept Strategy," 21) claims that the dispute can be settled by comparing "the overall simplicity and explanatoriness of the respective metaphysical frameworks." But these are only further theoretical concerns in a theoretically insoluble dispute. Each system boasts the simplicity of a first principle. And each boasts the explanatoriness of derivations grounded on that principle.
- 64 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:429; cf. 499.
- 65 See Fichte: "We certainly can refute [dogmatists'] system *for us*; indeed, it must be refuted, and this is something that can be accomplished quite easily [...] But we cannot refute it *for them*" (Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:510). Cf. Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte's Spinoza: 'Common Standpoint,' 'Essential Opposition,' and 'Hidden Treasure,'" *International Yearbook of German Idealism* 14 (2018): 103–38.
- 66 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:425.
- 67 See Pippin, "Fichte's Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism," 158: "[t]o assume [dogmatism] would still be to determine oneself to act as if determinism were true. But that would make it a norm for action and so to refute oneself." Cf. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 129–30; Allen Wood, "Fichte on Freedom: The Spinozistic Background." In *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. E. Förster and Y.Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 132.
- 68 Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I:434; cf. 505.
- 69 See Fichte: "in presupposing the thoroughgoing validity of the mechanism of cause and effect, [dogmatists] directly contradict themselves. What they say stands in





- contradiction with what they do; for, to the extent that they presuppose mechanism, they at the same time elevate themselves above it. Their own act of thinking of this relationship is an act that lies outside the realm of mechanical determinism” (Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:509–10); Cf. F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. E.E. Harris and P. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 30.
- 70 Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, IV/2:16.
- 71 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A346/B404.
- 72 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:97; cf. 500–1.
- 73 See Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, B148, B307.
- 74 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:472.
- 75 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:463. Failing to intuit one’s spontaneity, Fichte says, is a weakness of character, not intellect (505).
- 76 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:467.
- 77 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:508.
- 78 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:298.
- 79 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:503–6. Cf.: “There is... nothing demeaning about [the dogmatist’s] situation *per se*. Anyone who today accuses his brother of this sort of incapacity was necessarily once in this same condition himself; for this is the condition into which we were all born, and it takes time to raise oneself above this condition” (511).
- 80 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A368-72.
- 81 Daniel Dennett, “Quining Qualia.” In *Mind and Cognition: A Reader*, ed. W. Lycan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 392.
- 82 Daniel Dennett, “A History of Qualia,” *Topoi* 39, no. 1 (2017): 5–12, 3b–4b.
- 83 Dennett’s deference to cognitive science cannot survive this discrediting, for scientific objectivity is bound by the conditions of experience. Science cannot dispense with the apperceptive standpoint because it is an experience differing only in degree from ordinary experience. See Zahavi, “Brain, Mind, World.”
- 84 Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” 17.
- 85 Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, A84-5/B117. While Blamauer (Michael Blamauer, “Is the Panpsychist Better Off as an Idealist? Some Leibnizian Remarks on Consciousness and Composition,” *Eidos* 15 (2011): 48–75) detects an idealist solution to the hard problem of consciousness in Leibniz, the latter’s silence on the question *quid juris* bespeaks a transcendental realism.
- 86 Although Chalmers’ empirical idealism is less obvious, he arguably attempts to infer from experience’s what-it-is-like to its transcendently real principles of explanation.
- 87 Chalmers “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” 19.
- 88 Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, I:499.
- 89 For helpful comments, I thank Martijn Buijs, Addison Ellis, Gabriel Gottlieb, Matt Habermehl, Colin McLear, Kevin Temple, and Plato Tse. This chapter develops my 2017 CPA commentary on David Suarez (manuscript), “Why Subjectivity Can’t Be an Object.”

