Fichte on Summons and Self-Consciousness

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Abstract: J.G. Fichte held that a form of intersubjectivity—what he called a 'summons'—is a condition of possibility of self-consciousness. This thesis is widely taken to be one of Fichte's most influential contributions to the European philosophy of the last two centuries. But what the thesis actually states is far from obvious; and existing interpretations are either poorly supported by the texts or else render the thesis trivial or implausible. I propose a new interpretation, on which Fichte's claim is that reflective self-consciousness arises in the context of ad hoc efforts to coordinate action.

One of the most familiar themes from the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte is the thesis that a form of intersubjectivity is a condition of possibility of an essential component of the kind of rational agency exercised by most adult human beings—in his terms, that a 'summons' is a condition of possibility of 'self-consciousness'.[1] The thesis is taken to be one of the ways Fichte's influence is most strongly felt on the European philosophy of the last two centuries; and in part because of that, the section of the *Foundations of*

Natural Right in which it first occurs is relatively well-studied. But even a cursory look at the post-Kantian European tradition uncovers a number of apparently distinct ways of thinking about the link between intersubjectivity and agency, not all of which could have been Fichte's. A similar diversity is manifest in the interpretive literature. In this paper my aim is to isolate Fichte's thesis and to assess its plausibility. Its more precise specification can be expected to have far-reaching implications for the historiography of European philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries. Perhaps more surprisingly, on the interpretation I present here the thesis is more philosophically interesting, and more plausible, than has been appreciated.

After situating the thesis in the context of the arguments in which it occurs (§1), I clarify the conception of self-consciousness at issue in it (§2). This is relatively easy to glean from the texts: it is the disposition to form beliefs about one's first-order beliefs, desires and intentions and about the role of these in producing action. I then turn to the difficult interpretive question: what does Fichte means by 'summons'? I argue that a summons is a move in a kind of social interaction Fichte calls 'free reciprocal efficacy': negotiated (or otherwise nontrivially achieved) coordination on a joint end (§3). I conclude by explaining why Fichte might have thought his thesis true, and offer some evidence, drawn from more recent work on coordination and theory of mind, that he may have been right (§4).

1. Two deductions of individuality and right

The thesis is first stated in the deduction of the concept RIGHT in the first part of the *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796–97), where it is the topic of the second theorem (III:30–40).[2] It is reiterated in the *System of Ethics* (1798), in the section dedicated to individuality in the overview of the ma-

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[2]Unmarked in-text page references refer to Fichte 1971 and those prefaced with 'GA' refer to Fichte et al. 1962–2011. Translations are mine.

terial content of the moral law (IV:218–29).[3] Most scholarly literature refers exclusively to the *Foundations*. This seems to me a mistake. The nature of the self-consciousness that summoning is supposed to engender is difficult to glean from the *Foundations* alone, but is explored at length in the *System of Ethics*; and Fichte's presentation of the argument for the thesis in the *Foundations* contains some elements that one can see, on comparison with the *System of Ethics* presentation, to be extraneous.

In both texts, the thesis is embedded within an argument for the conclusion that the existence of a multiplicity of rational beings standing in a relation of right with one another is a condition of possibility of the reflective rational agency of any of them. Schematically (with all connectives read as material conditionals):

(1) I am conscious of myself.

(2) I am conscious of myself only if I am conscious of myself as freely acting. (IV:219; cf. III:16–20; 23–24)

(3) I am conscious of myself as a freely acting only if I have been summoned. (IV: 219–220; cf. III:30–35)

(4) If I have been summoned, then I am aware that at least one rational being distinct from myself exists (or has existed). (IV:220–221; cf. III:35–38)

(5) If am aware that at least one rational being distinct from me

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[3]Although some (e.g. Siep 1981) have thought the arguments distinct, extensive overlap in formulations, coupled with the fact that Fichte refers the reader of the *System of Ethics* to the *Foundations* for elaboration, provide strong evidence that Fichte takes himself to be rehearsing the same argument in both texts. The argument also occurs in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (1796–99) at Fichte 1994 pp. 226–240; but as the presentation there is particularly unclear (perhaps because student notes) and is not obviously consistent with the presentation in the published works, I set it aside. A longer treatment would have to consider what light it might shed on the published arguments. There is some controversy about whether a form of the same argument appears already in the 1794 *Foundations of the Wissenschaftslehre*. I agree with Breazeale 1995 that it does not.

exists (or has existed), then I am aware of standing (or having stood) in a relation of right with one or more rational beings distinct from myself. (III:41–46)

∴ I am aware of standing (or having stood) in a relation of right with one or more rational beings distinct from myself.

The purpose of the argument in the *System of Ethics* is to motivate the existence of a distinct class of moral duties that arise from the fact that a moral agent is one individual among many. These are duties to cooperate and to pull one's weight in any cooperative scheme of which one is part, so long as the net moral effect of that scheme is positive. The *Foundations* outlines *a priori* constraints on the construction of such schemes, and the aim of the argument as it appears there is to motivate the need for and possibility of such schemes from the standpoint of rational agency generally (or, as Fichte puts it, to demonstrate that the concept RIGHT is valid for rational beings).

The self-consciousness at issue in (1) is the capacity for occurrent reflective awareness that, for example, one is entertaining a philosophical argument for the conclusion that one is aware of standing in a relation of right with other rational beings. In these texts as in many others, Fichte takes his interlocutor to be willing to grant the truth of (1).

What (2) states is that a knower not reflectively conscious of itself as engaged in willing could not become reflectively conscious of itself as a knower. Otherwise put, and borrowing an understanding of 'reflective self-consciousness' that I have not yet defended, it is the claim that a being having only cognitive attitudes but no other attitudes (and in particular, lacking intentions) could have no higher-order cognitive attitudes. Fichte's justification of (2) has got some illuminating reconstructions in recent literature.[4] There is more to be said about it, but I set further consideration of it aside here. My topic is (3), which can be understood in conjunction with many plausible understandings of (2). I discuss the antecedent of (3) in §2 and its consequent in §3.

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[4]The best of these is Neuhouser 2001.

One perennial interpretive question about the *Foundations* has been whether there is a way of interacting with rational beings *qua* rational that is involved in summoning and responding to a summons, but that is distinct from the relation of right. If there is, then absent further argument (which Fichte does not appear to provide) it would seem that self-consciousness is possible for beings who do not stand in a relation of right with one another, in which case (5) would have to be supported by other considerations (which are absent). Some readers have seen a gap in the argument of the deduction at this point.[5]

Part of the motivation for this worry may stem from Fichte's apparent presentation of (3) and (4) as separate steps. Both texts contain what on its surface is a discrete argument for (4), turning on the observation that a summons involves a concept and only rational beings are capable of operating with concepts. As a result, reasonably, most readers take (4) to be a separate premise. With (4) thus isolated, the question of the justification of (5) can arise.

But there is another way of understanding (4), and that is to see it, not as a substantive step in the argument, but instead as the elaboration of one consequence of the definition of 'summons': that from the fact that a summons has been grasped as a summons, it follows without further assumptions that another rational being has been encountered. If we understand (4) in that way, we can restate the argument, dropping (4) and (5) in favor of

> (6) If I have been summoned, then I am aware of standing (or having stood) in a relation of right with one or more rational beings distinct from myself. (III:39–52)

This would come closer to the outline of the *Foundations'* deduction (where (3) and (4) are not presented as separate theorems, but instead both subsumed under the second theorem); and it seems to me to come closer to the line of thought Fichte is actually developing, in part because on this understanding there is no gap in the argument. This is the structure I will take

[5]Cf. e.g. Neuhouser 2000 p. xviii, Siep 1979 pp. 26–35.

the argument to have in what follows.[6]

In §3 I will ask: what does Fichte mean by (6), and why does he think it true? In that way I will arrive at an understanding of what summoning must amount to. This will allow me to explain, in §4, why he thinks (3) true, and why we might want to agree. But before turning to any of that we must fix the meaning of 'reflective self-consciousness' in (3).

2. Free activity and reflective self-consciousness

The antecedent of (3) describes an awareness of oneself akin, Fichte tells us, to awareness of an object (IV:218–219; III:32–33). The self it is awareness of is the (freely acting) empirical self, the 'substantial actual I' that is a 'product of nature' (IV:220). For that self to be 'freely acting' in the relevant sense is for it to be acting intelligently toward the satisfaction of some drive (IV:219). For Fichte, drives are the default conative attitudes given by our nature as organisms, and all drive-based behavior is already a form of self-determination (IV:111). Intelligence is characterized by what Fichte calls 'spontaneity' (absence of determination 'by the law of mechanism or that of organism' (IV:134)). Intelligent organisms are thus already (in one sense) free in virtue of the fact that they are intelligent, and (in one sense) self-determining in virtue of the fact that they are organisms. So: to be 'freely acting' is to be spontaneously self-determining, and the object of reflective self-consciousness is that spontaneous self-determination.

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[6]Because he presents the deduction of the concept RIGHT as having been completed by the end of *Foundations* §4, I do not take the discussion of the body in §§5–6 to play a role in the justification of either (3) or (6). Likewise, because the first theorem seeks to establish only (2), I do not take the discussion of finitude in *Foundations* §§1–2 to play a role in the justification of either (3) or (6). It goes without saying that an infinite being would not have the political problem that is Fichte's concern in these texts, and that the problem is soluble only by beings with specific causal powers; but from these facts it does not follow that finitude, or the nature of embodiment, plays an independent role in the argument in §3 and §4. Thanks to an anonymous referee for requesting clarification of the omission of these parts of the text, which do figure in some reconstructions.

Fichte explains very clearly in the *System of Ethics* that the person summoned must be 'freely acting' in this sense prior to being summoned. To be conscious of acting intelligently toward the satisfaction of some drive is, he explains, to be engaged in an intellectual act (an act of 'reflection') distinct from any intellectual activity that figured in the acting aimed at drive-satisfaction itself, an act whose intentional object (we might say, though these are not Fichte's words) is that acting. This is, Fichte tells us, a 'new' act of reflection, distinct from the intellectual activity that goes into self-determination through spontaneity, a reflection upon that first intellectual activity (IV:219). So the issue is not how the agent comes to *be* freely acting, but instead how her free action becomes an *object of her consciousness.*[7]

To explain why Fichte might think that reflective consciousness of oneself as freely acting is an essential component of the kind of rational agency exercised by most adult human beings, consider what an agent freely self-determining in the sense just described, but not conscious of being so, must be like. In addition to drives, she would need to have perceptual capacities, a store of belief-like states, some mechanism for forming derivative, instrumental desire-like states, and some mechanism for turning these into behavior. She would need to have an ability to differentiate to at least some degree the events she causes from the events she does not cause; and she would need to have at least some ability to regulate her behavior according to feedback from her environment. It is important that her behavior could, on Fichte's assumptions, be instrumentally rational in the sense of being appropriate given the contents of the states.

(Such a being would also, on Fichte's assumptions, have a kind of immediate, pre-reflective awareness of her environment and of certain of her internal states. Fichte takes such awareness to accompany having an intellect and to

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[7]I emphasize this because in the *Foundations* Fichte characterizes the summons as a 'call to free activity' and this has led some readers to think that the summoned must therefore not be freely active beforehand; but this understanding is explicitly ruled out at *System of Ethics* IV:219.

be a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of reflective self-consciousness.[8] Such a being would also be a 'self-positing subject' in the transcendental sense. But what Fichte is concerned with in the passages I am considering is only empirical reflective self-consciousness, *not* self-consciousness or self-positing in either of these senses.)

What such a being would lack is only the disposition to take the states themselves, and their role in bringing about her behavior, as objects of thought. This is how Fichte puts it. Today we would say: she would have no beliefs about her beliefs, desires and intentions.

Such a being would lack capacities that Fichte (quite unsurprisingly) sees as essential to the kind of rational agency exercised by most adult human beings. Her behavior might be instrumentally rational (or not); but she would have no views about whether or not it is. Her beliefs might be consistent (or not); but she would have no views about whether or not they are. And so on. Unaware of her attitudes, she would be unable to take up any desiderative or evaluative stance toward them, either individually or in relation to one another. She would be unable to employ familiar strategies for manipulating her motivations. (In Fichte's terms: she would be engaged in willing, but her will would not act upon itself.) This would limit her range of possible choices in an action situation (IV:178–179). More important, it would make it impossible for her to engage in prudential or moral reasoning in the proper sense, since on Fichte's account these require the capacity to step back from engagement with one's current ends in order to consider them alongside the ends of oneself at future times (in the prudential case) or of other agents (in the moral case) so that one can compare and weigh claims. This involves representing one's own ends as objects, the same kinds of objects as others' ends (in the moral case) or the ends of future selves (in the prudential case). Such representations are instances of reflective self-consciousness. The capacity to

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[8]Fichte's account of non-reflective self-awareness has been much discussed in the literature following Henrich 1967. The reader can find concise summaries of this idea and its motivations at Neuhouser 1990 pp. 68–86 and in Frank 2007.

act in a way informed by them—reflective self-determination—is required by both morality and prudential rationality on Fichte's picture (IV:179–91).

A reflectively self-conscious agent is one disposed to reflect in the way described. It is important that there is no textual evidence that anything *more* than empirical apprehension of the first-order attitudes involved in formation of intentions is involved in the reflective self-consciousness that is supposed to be produced by summoning. In particular, there is no textual basis for interpretations on which the antecedent of (3) describes possession of a self-concept containing certain social-relational determinations.[9] The same is true of interpretations on which the capacity to address reasons-statements to oneself, rather than reflective self-consciousness as I have described it, is the starting point of these arguments.[10] If what Fichte meant by 'self-consciousness' in the antecedent of (3) were already something social or interpersonal, his thesis would be trivial. That is not how it is presented in these texts.

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[9]Nance 2015, for example, reads Fichte as articulating the point, now familiar from social psychology, that a self-concept is constructed in part in social interaction with others, and that those aspects of a self-concept involving relations to others (e.g. the self-ascription of political freedom) could not be produced except in a narrow range of social milieux. This interpretation leaves a gap in the argument of the *Foundations* between §1 and following sections, since it is clear that the deduction begins from the far less controversial assumption that the reader is capable of empirical reflective self-consciousness. For Nomer, likewise, the self-consciousness at issue is a self-concept, a concept of oneself 'as subjective', which includes as determinations self-positing in (what I would call) the pre-reflective sense (Nomer 2010 p. 472) along with 'being dependent "solely" on one's own will' (482–483). Since Nomer takes the task of the *Foundations* to be to show how social organization can render these two determinations consistent (475–477), I take it that the second must go beyond the basic sense of reflective self-consciousness that I have outlined.

[10]Wood 2016 understands Fichte's thesis as the claim that the disposition to engage in any kind of self-talk is parasitic on the existence of that kind of talk in an interpersonal context. Deliberation, according to Wood's Fichte, consists in a form of self-talk—offering reasons to oneself—and Fichte's thesis is the claim that one cannot offer reasons to oneself unless one has had (these very?) reasons offered to one by another (Wood 2006 p. 74–75).

3. Summoning

Fichte's thesis—(3) in the argument in §1 above—is the claim that there is a sort of social interaction whose input is a causally efficacious, intelligent, pre-reflectively aware but not reflectively self-conscious being, and whose output, if the interaction is successful, is a being disposed to reflect and capable of reflective self-determination. What sort of social interaction is this?

There is a wide array of understandings in the literature; and so there are exceptions to this general characterization. But, recently at least, most prominent interpreters understand summoning as the conveyance of a message to the effect that the summoned *ought* to act in some way. Some, for instance Darwall and many who follow him, take summoning to be offering a reason of a particular ('second-personal') kind.[11] Others, for instance Neuhouser, take it to be the address of an 'ought'-statement with specific content.[12] More often, interpreters describe summoning as reason-giving of a perfectly generic kind and with arbitrary content—as for instance Franks[13] and Wood.[14] To

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[11]'A summons is any attempt to address second-personal reasons to another agent.' (Darwall 2005 p. 104, original is in italics; cf. also pp. 106–107 and Darwall 2006 p. 255–259). Nance 2015 (p. 612) follows Darwall explicitly in taking a summons to be the offering of a second-personal reason, as does McNulty 2016 (pp. 799–800).

[12]'The summons is a call to act, a call to realize one's free efficacy, which takes the form of an imperative: You *ought* to "resolve to exercise your agency".' (Neuhouser 2000 pp. xv–xvi) Note that Neuhouser himself supplies the 'ought' here, on which more in footnote 15 below.

[13]'Suppose a parent, Pete, is feeding a small child, Sue. ... Gradually, ... feeding comes to involve the idea that, if Sue shows no interest, then Pete must give Sue a reason for eating or drinking. Pete may make "yummy" noises ... or he may may make a game out of the transportation of food into mouth on spoon. ... In recognizing his summons to act for a reason, [Sue] discovers herself as a free and individual agent, who has a choice: either to do what Pete wants, or not. She is free, but she cannot escape her own freedom. Whatever she does or does not do will count as a response. This is the logic of any summons.' (Franks 2016 p. 107). This is one example in the literature that seems to me not merely misdescribed, but very clearly not a case of the kind of interpersonal interaction that falls under the rubric 'summons'.

[14]'[W]hat is crucial merely to the concept of the summons is that it constrains action, yet only in such a way that the being to which it is addressed may still nevertheless choose either to act according to it or not act according to it. ... What is the nature of a constraint on action that still leaves the agent free either to do or not do as it is constrained? I submit that a summons, in the precise sense in which this concept

summon someone, on this now-dominant view, is to tell them (or to alert them in some way to the fact that) they ought to do something.

There are a number of problems these readings share. One set is textual: if they are to have a basis in the text, they must suppose that several occurrences of 'sollen' in the deduction section of the *Foundations* have normative or imperatival force. But every instance of 'sollen' in the deduction is, demonstrably, epistemic.[15] There are subtler textual problems as well. Fichte describes the summons as involving, essentially, a delineation of a sphere of permissible action for the summoned party, of which she may or may not take advantage (cf. III:34, 41-43; IV:221). But generic reasons do not come with spheres of permission attached—not in fact, and not on Fichte's conception of reasons.[16]

answers to the needs of Fichte's synthetic method at this point, is the concept of a ground or reason for doing something (for doing what we are summoned—asked, invited, required—to do).' (Wood 2016 p. 83)

[15]'Sollen' (like English 'ought'/'should') has normative, imperative, narrowly epistemic, predictive and functional employments. It can be used to describe the typical or desired outcome of a process, for a very wide range of processes (chemical, developmental, argumentative, etc.). In many employments, 'is to' is the best English translation, and this is Baur's usual choice in his translation of the *Foundations*. One exception is this passage: 'Es bekommt den Begriff seiner freien Wirksamkeit, nicht als etwas, das im gegenwärtigen Momente ist, denn das wäre ein wahrer Widerspruch; sondern als etwas, das im künftigen seyn *soll*.' (III:33) Here Baur renders 'soll' as 'ought' (Fichte 2000 p. 32). This is one of very few errors in this excellent translation. It is clear that it is an error because Fichte goes on in the five paragraphs that follow to clarify what this statement means, and, plausibly, if 'soll' had some normative force in the statement, it would have the same force in these paragraphs. Yet it is clear from the context of each instance that it cannot; and Baur seems to agree, for in these five paragraphs he translates each occurrence of this verb as 'is to' or 'was to', including the occurrence in the sentence that is a precise restatement of the sentence being explained: 'Das Vernunftwesen soll eine freie Wirksamkeit realisiren; diese Anforderung an dasselbe liegt im Begriffe, und so gewiss es den beabsichtigten Begriff fasst, realisirt es dieselbe' (III:34). When Fichte writes 'Das vernunftwesen soll...' he is not describing an imperative or even a normative expectation, but instead (in the language of Gilbert 1989 pp. 347–348) a 'plain' expectation about what the summoned party *can be expected* to do, if he grasps the summons, has a typical motivational profile, and is prudentially rational. (Cf. Honneth 2001 for another interpretation on which the summons is not an imperative.)

[16]One of the most-discussed features of Fichte's practical philosophy is his claim that the theory of right is independent of and not derivable from from moral theory. In explaining this independence, he points out that right deals in spheres of permission, whereas ethics deals in imperatives (in the Kantian sense: reasons for action), and permissions are

Another problem is philosophical: none of these interpreters explains how summoning, understood as offering reasons, or reasons of a specific kind, might be involved in the genesis of reflective self-consciousness; and it is far from obvious how we are meant to fill this gap. Notice that the intelligent but not reflectively self-conscious individual described in §2 *does not lack* reasons. She is not reflectively conscious of having them, cannot arrange them hierarchically or reject some as inconsistent with others, etc.—by stipulation. But on the picture of drive-based behavior Fichte is assuming, nature has already given her reasons to act in certain ways, and her action is guided by the reasons she has. If the issuing of a summons is essentially the offering of a reason, how can it do what nature cannot? No answer to this question is on offer.[17]

There are in the literature alternatives to these accounts, some more true to the texts; but none does any better on this second score.[18] In the remainder

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different in kind from and not derivable from imperatives (III:13).

[17]It might seem that Darwall is offering such an answer, when he describes second-personal address as turning the agent's attention from the goal she is pursuing back onto her own agency: 'In the first-person perspective, agency is 'backgrounded' and no part of the agent's 'deliberative field'. ... [I]t is only from a second-person standpoint that the addresser's free agency (and that of addressees) must be posited, that is, brought into their reasoning as a premise. And when it is, addresser and addressee alike must also assume that both have the capacity to act on second-personal reasons, that both are second-personally competent.' (Darwall 2006 pp. 255–56; cf. also Darwall 2005 pp. 103–04) Notice, though, that Darwall here claims to be offering an understanding of the connection between summoning and an instance of reflection in a person already 'second-personally competent' (that is, already able and disposed to direct his attention toward himself-as-agent in the presence of such stimuli—cf. also Darwall 2006 p. 59). Fichte's stated aim, by contrast, is to explain the formation of the disposition to reflect. He could not accept a view on which that disposition must be in place already before a summons can be understood as a summons, since if that were the case his argument in the deduction would fail. Since not every experience that would trigger an instance of reflective self-consciousness in a being already disposed to reflect need be the kind of experience that might figure in a genetic account of that very disposition, Darwall's account of second-personal address does not on its own suffice to explain Fichte's thesis. (It is also not clear that this is its aim. But for those (like Nance and McNulty) who do have this aim, Darwall's account will not serve without modification.)

[18]James 2011 describes the summons as a 'self-limitation' on the part of the summoner (leaving the summoned a space of freedom—cf. pp. 3 and 45). While there is no question that summoning involves self-limitation, it is unclear how this alone could result in reflective self-consciousness. For Nomer 2010, summoning is appearing to another as a

of this section, I will propose a new interpretation on which to summon is to make a move in a kind of strategic interaction that is ubiquitous in human social life and paradigmatic of political interaction. On this interpretation, reflective self-consciousness is linked to politics in exactly the way Fichte proposes in the deduction.

Let me begin by laying out some relatively uncontroversial constraints on interpretation drawn from the passages in which Fichte characterizes summoning. Fichte defines the 'summons' at issue in (3) as the presentation of an agent's free action to that agent as a concept, for instance here:

> I [*sc.* the summoned party] understand this summons just in case
> I think my self-determination as something given in this summons, and am given to myself as free in this summons' concept.
> (IV: 220; cf. III:33)

The concept involved in the summons as the 'concept of an end' (III:37–38), which is Fichte's usual way of referring to the representation of a state of affairs that could be brought about. So the concept presented to an agent in the summons is the concept of that agent's free action as a possible state of affairs to be brought about.

But it is not free action *simpliciter* whose concept is conveyed in the summons. Fichte specifies that the concept includes an assignment to summoner and summoned of distinct exclusive spheres of activity within which they

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being whose behavior is peaceable but, unlike that of non-rational animals or inanimate objects, unpredictable, an appearance which enables the other to form the concept SELF-DETERMINING BEING, which the other then can apply to himself (p. 487). I do not see how to square this account, on which the formation of the concept involves observation but no interaction, with the text. Honneth's conception of a summons as a generic communicative act (Honneth 2001 pp. 76–77) also falls short of explaining the relation. If what Honneth has in mind is truly generic communication, it is ubiquitous in social organisms and there is no reason to think it accompanies self-consciousness in them. (Some forms of communication are possible in organisms without nervous systems.) If by contrast what is meant is a more specifically human form of flexible cooperative communication, then it will be an instance—but neither the only nor the primary instance—of the form of interaction I describe in the remainder of this section.

may act as they wish:

> I grasp this summons just in case I ascribe to myself a determinate sphere for my freedom; it does not follow that I use it [*sc.* the sphere] and fill it out immediately. (IV:221)

> Only activity in general is required, but it is explicit in the concept that the subject should, through free self-determination, choose [an action] within the sphere of possible actions. (III:34)

> The subject determines itself as individual, and as free individual, through the sphere in which, from the actions available in it, it has chosen one; and posits another individual outside itself, in opposition to itself, determined by another sphere, in which this other has chosen. Thus it posits both spheres at the same time, and only thereby is the required opposition [*Gegensetzung*] possible. (III:42–43; cf. 41)

The 'concept of my free activity' that is given as an end in the summons is, then, the concept of my free choice from within a determinate sphere of activity available to me, presented as something to be brought about in the future.

Fichte maintains that the concept conveyed in the summons must be empirical rather than innate (IV:219 cf. III:32–34, 53), that it could not be acquired through mere causal interaction with the non-rational world (IV:220; III:30–32), and that it could not be acquired through an unprompted act of spontaneous reflection (IV:220; III:33–36). Since a spontaneous intellectual act is, however, also necessary, a mere attempt by another party to issue a summons is not a sufficient condition for reflective self-consciousness (IV:220; III:33–36).

Fichte uses the terms 'summoning' and 'upbringing' interchangeably, both in the deduction itself:

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> The summons to free self-activity is what is called upbringing. All
> individuals must be brought up to be human beings, and would
> not become human beings otherwise. (III:39)

and in the appendix on family right:

> It is a natural drive in human beings to suspect beings outside
> of themselves of rationality, where this is at all plausible, and
> to treat objects (for example, animals) as though they had it.
> The parents will treat their child in the same way, summoning
> it to free activity; and in this way rationality and freedom will
> gradually become manifest in it. (III:358)

So Fichte takes parent-child interaction to be the typical site of the kind of socialization that produces reflective self-consciousness.[19] Adults can summon one another (cf. III:383–85 for one example); but typically adults summon children.

The outcome of this process of socialization is a stable disposition to reflection that can be engaged in the absence of direct social stimulus in beings who have been 'brought up' in the relevant way. But reflectiveness comes in degrees, and its breadth and precision depend, according to Fichte, on social stimuli at every stage (IV:184; cf. GA 4–1:87).

So a summons is a social stimulus, present in at least some child-caregiver interactions, which conveys the concept of free action within distinct spheres assigned to caregiver and child as a situation to be brought about. And Fichte's thesis is the claim that a stimulus of that kind has the capacity to do what mere interaction with the natural world and social interaction that does not take this special form cannot do, namely to trigger the development of a disposition to engage in reflection, given uptake and expected response

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[19]That Fichte's account of the production of the disposition to reflection is meant to be a developmental one has been emphasized by Gottlieb in recent work (e.g. Gottlieb 2016). But in a general form this has long been clear to readers (cf. e.g. Wood 2006, Honneth 2001, Franks 2016).

from the target.

What is left unclear by these texts is why summoning, so described, might have this special power. In order to understand why, we must examine a portion of the text that is usually overlooked, but that provides the key to the supposed relationship.

In *Foundations* §3.I, Fichte sets up the problem to be solved in §3 as the problem of understanding how a subject's efficacy can become an object for it (which is just another way of saying: how it can become reflectively self-conscious), and he uses, there and in §3.II, the metaphor of an 'attachment' point for the 'thread' of self-consciousness. (We need to attach the thread so that in stitching we do not continually pull the thread through: a metaphor for an infinite regress.)

Toward the end of §3.IV, he tells us the main task has been concluded, the thread has finally been attached: 'The thread of consciousness can be attached only to something like this' (III: 35). The referent of 'this' must be what he has described in the immediately preceding paragraph:

> [**I**] The concept that has been constructed is that of a *free reciprocal efficacy* [*freie Wechselwirksamkeit*[20]]in its utmost precision, which is just this [*sc.* what follows]. I can, in thinking about a free activity, add to it the thought of a free counter-activity as *accidental;* but that is not the required concept in its precision. If it is to be precisely determined, *activity and counter-activity*[21] must be impossible to think as separated. Both must be thought as constituting the *partes integrantes* of one whole state of affairs. Such a thing is now postulated as necessary condition of

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[20]'Wechselwirksamkeit' might be less awkwardly translated as 'reciprocal action' or 'interaction', but the link to consciousness of self as freely efficacious in the theorem is thereby obscured; so I have preferred this (admittedly rather awkward) translation.

[21]Fichte's terms here are 'Wirkung' and 'Gegenwirkung'. *Wechselwirksamkeit* describes the case in which two forces act upon one another to produce some phenomenon, not the case in which they cancel one another, so we cannot understand 'Gegenwirkung' here to denote cancellation or simple opposition.

the self-consciousness of a rational being. (III:34–35)

This is a difficult passage, and it is perhaps no surprise that interpreters have largely ignored it. What Fichte is saying here is that a freely efficacious being, in order to become conscious of itself as such, must engage in free *reciprocal* efficacy with another such being. It is usual to understand 'summons' to refer to something interpersonal, but unidirectional: *a* summons *b*; *b* is summoned. But Fichte here explains that the 'attachment point' is not something one person does to another, but instead something two people do together, something that neither of them could do on her own.

What kind of thing? *Wechselwirkung* is a category of causation; so we know that it is a kind of causal interaction; and we can infer from the modifier (*'freie'*) and the position in the deduction that it is meant to be a kind of reciprocal efficacy unique to freely efficacious beings. Significantly, given the overall structure of the deduction and the aim of linking the possibility of self-consciousness to rational constraints on political organization, Fichte also describes 'the necessary relation of free beings to one another' as involving a 'reciprocal efficacy through intelligence and freedom' in this oft-cited passage:

> [**II**] The relation of free beings to one another is therefore necessarily to be understood in the following way, and is posited as being so determined: the cognition [*Erkenntnis*] the one individual has of the other is conditioned on the other's treatment of it [*viz.* the one] as free (that is, that [the other] limit his freedom through the concept of the freedom of the first). This manner of treatment is, however, conditioned by the manner of action of the first toward the other, this [in turn] through the manner of action and through the cognition of the other, and so on to infinity. The relation of free beings to one another is thus the relation of reciprocal efficacy through intelligence and freedom. Neither can recognize the other if both do not reciprocally recognize one another. And neither can treat the other as a free being if both

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do not reciprocally treat one another that way.

The concept just presented is extremely important for our under-
taking, as our entire theory of right rests on it. (III:44)

We learn from [I] that the attachment point is a form of reciprocal efficacy
in which efficacy and counter-efficacy are necessarily connected. In [II] we
learn that it is also a form of reciprocal efficacy in which efficacy and counter-
efficacy are qualitatively *the same.*

We can draw two preliminary conclusions at this point. First, if by 'summons'
we take Fichte to mean only the initiation of the form of interaction he calls
'free reciprocal efficacy,' then it is not in the mere issuing of the summons, but
in the interaction that it initiates, where the work of upbringing takes place,
for it is to the interaction that the thread of self-consciousness is attached.
Second, the interaction that is doing the work is one in which the person
doing the upbringing and the person being brought up are both doing the
very same thing.

What thing are they doing? Readers commonly focus on what Fichte calls
'recognition' as the core idea in [II]. But here we must take care. Fichte's use
of the term 'recognition' seems to me limited to the cognitive component of
an interaction that also has a distinctive behavioral component: the two are
treating one another *as* free beings. The reader may prefer to call the whole
complex 'recognition.' What is important is not to overlook the fact that
it includes this behavioral component. In fact, Fichte tells us (immediately
after [II]) that the behavioral component is a condition of possibility of the
cognitive component: a is justified in taking b to be free and rational just
in case b *treats* a as free and rational; and that behavior must be present on
both sides for any recognition to take place.

What is it for b to treat a as free and rational? The parenthetical remark in
[II] tells us that it involves b's limiting his exercise of his freedom 'through
the concept of the freedom of the other'. But what is it for b to limit his

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exercise of his freedom through the concept of the freedom of a? Fichte describes what he calls the 'relation of right' as one in which 'each limits his freedom through the concept of the possibility of the freedom of the other, on the condition that the other likewise limit his in the same way' (III:52), and so there is at least some extensional overlap between the notions of free reciprocal efficacy and of the relation of right. (This will figure in the explanation I will offer below of why Fichte sees no gap in the argument of the deduction.)

But this link can help us to understand what free reciprocal efficacy is only if we already know what the relation of right is. Progress in understanding Fichte's thesis has perhaps been impeded by the common (and incorrect) assumption that to stand in a relation of right with another is to have rights and to take the other to have them.[22] On this assumption, to limit the exercise of one's freedom through the concept of the freedom of another would be to limit one's actions so as to respect the rights of the other. But this interpretation cannot be correct. For, plausibly, in order for b to limit his actions out of respect for a's rights, a would have to have rights for b to respect. yet this is an interaction in which a and b can take part even if one of them has no rights at all.

Here it is important to recall that Fichte denies the existence of 'natural' or 'universal' human rights (III:112, 149). The only rights anyone has are the legal rights assigned them by the community of which they are members (III:152, 196). Children, as we have seen, are the principal targets of upbringing. But Fichte denies that children can be holders of legal rights. Moreover, in explaining why, he remarks: 'the child, insofar as it is being brought up, is not at all free, and so not at all a possible subject of rights or duties' (III:359). If children are non-rights-holders *in virtue of the fact that they are (still) being brought up*, then taking part in free reciprocal efficacy, if

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[22]Cf. e.g. Neuhouser 2000 pp. xv-xvi. This is the basis for his interpretation, according to which the 'founding idea' of the *Foundations* is the idea that 'political rights are among the necessary conditions of self-consciousness' (xv).

that is what does the work of upbringing, must be something that individuals with no rights are able to do (and, given [II], do in the same way that people with rights can do it). So limiting one's freedom according to the concept of the possibility of the freedom of the other—standing in the relation of right to another—cannot be equivalent to limiting one's actions so as to respect the other's rights.

What is it, then? Political interaction, on Fichte's theory, is interaction aimed at solving a problem rational agents have to solve if they are to be involved in temporally extended projects alongside other such agents—regardless of whether the projects are shared, so long as the minds in which decisions are made are not shared, the projects involve extra-mental resources in a space that is shared and finite, and the projects cannot rationally be undertaken without rational expectations about the availability of those resources. Such agents, in such a situation, need to have in place a division of the space of *possible* activity into distinct exclusive spheres of *permissible* activity assigned to individuals and reliably protected. Rights fix those spheres, which is why Fichte calls this fundamental social coordination problem the problem of right.[23]

People who have the problem of right find themselves in a strategic situation in which they share an overriding interest in coordination on the delineation of such spheres. But there are many possible delineations, and individual interests may lead individuals to prefer different ones. The discipline Fichte calls 'natural right' is occupied with articulating the essential features of that bargaining problem and of *a priori* constraints on solutions to it. A

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[23]The spheres at issue in the political case encompass bodily inviolability and property; the justification for the division is the aim of coordination; and the aim of coordination is common to rational agents as such, Fichte thinks, because every form of long-term planning requires it. Some division of spheres is involved in all cooperative action, not only political action, however. This assignment might be spontaneous and unenforced in some circumstances (as when two people intent on moving a sofa each lifts a different end). Fichte offers additional reasons for thinking that the assignment of property and bodily rights in the state cannot function without administrative infrastructure and threat of sanctions. I explain this understanding of the problem of right at greater length in Kosch 2017. Thanks to editors for requesting clarification here.

philosophical theory of right can provide only constraints, not a solution, because the actual problem that each group faces is determined in part by (at least) their geographic and technological situation and whatever customs and institutions they already have in place. Circumstances change and existing customs and institutions always have deficiencies; so the problem of right is an ongoing one. Everyone, *qua* citizen, is occupied with maintaining some parts of the existing solution and modifying others.

Fichte denies that there are categorical normative principles of right. The principle of right states in the most abstract way what people who (together) want to be part of a community of free beings coexisting as free must do in order to achieve that. But it is a 'hypothetical' imperative (III:89): whether anyone actually lives in that way is a matter of 'arbitrary choice' (III:9).[24] Although Fichte thought that morality requires that one both pull one's weight in existing cooperative schemes with net positive moral effect and contribute to creating such schemes where they are needed and absent, he also denied that morality can provide *a priori* rational constraints on the construction of such schemes. This is his 'independence thesis': principles of coordination cannot be derived from the moral principle.

These aspects of Fichte's view of the problem of right seem to me crucial for understanding the nature of free reciprocal efficacy, and indeed he seems to appeal to them in clarifying what is being said in [II] in the paragraphs that follow it:

> [**III**] (I) *I can expect recognition of myself as a rational being from*

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[24]That is why Fichte describes the principle of right as merely 'technically pratical' (III:10). The only categorical obligations he admits are moral obligations, and he describes the moral principle, correspondingly, as 'absolutely-' rather than merely 'technically-' practical (IV:57). This means that the principle of right cannot (contra Neuhouser 1994 and Neuhouser 2016) be a categorical obligation of a *sui generis* political sort (here I agree with Clarke 2009); but it also cannot be a prudential obligation, where this is understood categorically (contra Clarke 2009). To place his view in a contemporary context, Fichte agreed with (for example) Bratman 1992 (cf. Bratman 2014) and disagreed with (for example) Gilbert 1989, about the normative presuppositions of 'team-' or 'we'- reasoning.

another only insofar as I treat him as one.

(1) The conditioned in the above proposition is

(a) *not* that the other recognize me in himself and in abstraction from my consciousness, perhaps before his own conscience (which belongs to morality), or before others (which belongs before the state), *but rather* that he recognize me as one *according to his and my* consciousness, synthetically unified into one (according to a consciousness common to us both), so that I can require him to concede, as certainly as he wishes to be counted as a rational being, that he knows that I myself am also one.

(b) *not* that I can prove in general that I have been recognized by rational beings in general as their like; *but rather* that this particular individual C recognizes me to be one. (III:44–45)

Here Fichte explicitly contrasts the common consciousness involved in actual instances of free reciprocal efficacy with, on the one hand, an internalized set of moral norms concerning how rational beings in general ought to be treated and, on the other hand, the legal rights individuals actually have. He emphasizes that he is not describing a situation in which the individuals have a generic belief that each has a generic claim to recognition as a rational being, but instead a situation in which they themselves, in the moment of interacting, come to share a determinate common consciousness, and must act on one another in a way appropriate to that common consciousness if they expect the relationship to continue.[25]

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[25]The common consciousness is the representation of the plan or sub-plan that the two jointly intend: that you will take that end of the sofa and I will take this one; that you will have the large lecture hall for your 10:00 class and I will have it for my 11:00 class; that I will cultivate this plot in the community garden and you will cultivate that one; and so on. What these examples have in common is that, in them, individuals voluntarily act in a coordinated way toward some shared end, which can be as minimal as mere mutual noninterference. Thanks to an anonymous referee for asking me to provide examples here.

All of this points to an interpretation of free reciprocal efficacy on which it is participation in the creation, maintenance and modification of ad hoc schemes of cooperation whose terms are limited only by the requirement that other agents (the relevant ones, or enough of them) be able to get and remain voluntarily on board.[26] On the proposed interpretation, then, the set of interactions between caregivers and young children that must constitute 'upbringing' in the relevant sense is just the set of interactions that exercise and thereby develop a child's ability to negotiate and participate in ad hoc schemes of cooperation.

Very little reflection will uncover that in fact the focus of a great deal of early childhood education does consist in the cultivation of children's ability to get along with one another as individuals with divergent, shifting ends sharing a finite space of possible activity. Some of this education is didactic instruction; but much of it consists in interactions between children, or between children and adults, which are themselves instances of free reciprocal efficacy in Fichte's sense. For example, all limit-setting has this form: its aim is that the child develop a sense of distinct spheres of permissible activity only one of which is assigned to her, but within which she is at liberty to do as she pleases. Fichte is quite right that the boundaries of these spheres are determined not by appreciation of some *a priori* valid norms of artistic self-expression, personal hygiene, sleep requirements, or the like, but instead by ongoing negotiation. This negotiation takes place between individuals unequal in power and its various outcomes reflect that inequality; but the same is true of many social interactions, including paradigm political ones.

Not much acquaintance with preschoolers is required to see that the skills involved in such interaction do not pre-date it and cannot be taught separately in advance of it, but instead are developed within it, learned by doing-together with others engaged, more skillfully, in the very same activity.[27]

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[26]By 'cooperation' here I mean only coordinated action toward a shared end.

[27]This seemed implausible to some listeners at the 2017 Pacific APA. Thanks to Agnes Callard for raising the point. Audience members at that presentation came up with several examples (including soccer and linguistic communication) of skills that can be

This kind of gradual acquisition through practice seems to be what Fichte has in mind when he describes upbringing as requiring that parents treat the child as a rational being, in the expectation that with enough such treatment it will eventually become one, in the quotation from III:358 reproduced above.

It follows from this account that not everything that falls within the extension of 'upbringing' in a colloquial sense will be involved in upbringing in the technical sense that is equivalent to summoning. In particular, non-political moral reasoning and mere rule-following do not involve free reciprocal efficacy, and training in them is not equivalent to 'upbringing' in the relevant sense. Moral concern, for Fichte, is concern for the independence of rational agency wherever it occurs, and is fully agent- and patient-neutral.[28] This is why he denies that rights can be derived from moral theory, and why he does not connect moral education in this narrow sense to self-consciousness: it is not from the fully impartial moral perspective, but from the perspective of an individual trying to cooperate with other individuals, that the difference in individual goals and perspectives matters. Likewise, rule-following, or the playing of games with fixed (non-negotiated) role-assignment, does not involve free reciprocal efficacy.[29] This is why rules make no appearance in the relevant texts. Significantly, rules are subordinate in Fichte's picture of the political as well: they can be employed in the context of ad hoc cooperation, but can never replace it.

It also follows from this account that summoning is not reason-giving, as reason-giving and free reciprocal efficacy are neither identical nor even co-extensive.[30] Of course, some free reciprocal efficacy will involve the offering

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taught to children only by engaging with children in activities that involve their use.

[28] For argument, see Kosch 2018.

[29] Gottlieb 2016 argues that upbringing consists primarily in the learning of rules and playing of rule-based games; but he offers no convincing account of how rule-internalization might be linked to reflective self-consciousness.

[30] The drive to absolute independence of which the moral end is the product is a source of reasons, in fact the source of the only categorical reasons that we have, on Fichte's view. But Fichte denies that awareness of moral reasons, however produced, plays any

and uptake of reasons. This need not be denied. Similarly, much free recip-
rocal efficacy will involve linguistic communication. But this is not because,
as on Honneth's view, the summons is a 'generic communicative act'. In-
stead it is because linguistic communication is a uniquely effective facilitator
of complex coordination.[31]

4. Coordination and reflection

Fichte's thesis can now be stated with more precision: upbringing (in the
sense defined in §3) is a causally necessary condition for the development of
reflective self-consciousness (in the sense defined in §2).[32] In this section, I

role in the genesis of reflective self-consciousness. This is a false positive for the reason-
giving interpretation of summoning. Individuals can coordinate, intelligently and in
a way that essentially involves reflective consciousness of their own attitudes, without
engaging in any communication at all, and so *a fortiori* without the communication of
reasons. Schelling 1958 contains good examples. This is a false negative.

[31]It is also important to bear in mind that complex cooperative communication (the sort
Mead 1934 and Honneth 2001 have in mind) itself relies on free reciprocal efficacy, and
that while the complex forms of cooperation engaged in by adults in typical human
societies do rely on language, the functional and evolutionary dependence relation seems
to run in the other direction (cf. Tomasello 2009, Tomasello 2014 and Lewis 1969).

[32]Fichte's emphasis on conditions of possibility of empirical self-consciousness and his
description of his project as being carried out from a 'transcendental' point of view
have led some interpreters to assume that he means to be presenting a transcendental
argument, in something like the sense of Stroud 1968, against theoretical solipsism. Allen
Wood, in his comments on the original version of this paper, and one anonymous referee
for *Mind*, have worried that my interpretation does not do justice to this supposed
aspiration. There are two reasons not to worry about this. First, Fichte's project in
the deduction does not require this reading. The presumed opponent is a skeptic about
right, someone who denies either the possibility of or the need for a form of rational
interaction with the outside world that is not governed (solely) by the principles of
individual rational choice. This person need not be a skeptic about the outside world or
the existence of other minds. (The act utilitarian caricatured in introductory philosophy
classes is usually a right-skeptic: that is part of the caricature.) For the deduction to do
the work Fichte sets out for it, 'no self-consciousness without free reciprocal efficacy' must
be demonstrable to a such an opponent. For that, it is not important that the deduction
rely on no empirical assumptions, but only that it not rely on the very assumption(s)
the opponent denies. Second, as Honneth notes, since Fichte insists that the summons
must be an empirical occurrence, if he intends to present a transcendental argument, he
is committed to 'empirical transcendentalia' (Honneth 2001 p. 69). To my mind it is
clear from the text not only that the summons itself and the self-consciousness whose

consider the plausibility of the thesis.

Notice, first, that free reciprocal efficacy as Fichte describes it does involve, as a component, reflective self-consciousness, and that the reasons to think that only a reflectively self-conscious agent can engage successfully in free reciprocal efficacy are the very ones Fichte lays out in the *Foundations*.

Free reciprocal efficacy, we have said, is participation in the creation, maintenance and modification of ad hoc schemes of cooperation. This is a form of strategic interaction in which agents attempt to coordinate on a joint course of action that would fulfill all (or enough) of the parties' interests better than unilateral action would. This coordination problem is typically impure (some equilibria are better than others), and often the different participants prefer different equilibria. We can make progress in understanding why Fichte thinks his thesis true by asking: what intellectual capacities do agents need to have at their disposal in order to solve a bargaining problem of this kind?

Plausibly, each must have a capacity to represent the others' interests, and to represent them not simply in addition to but in some sense alongside her own interests, in order to represent the set of possible courses of action in which both sets of interests are sufficiently well met that all parties can be expected to get and remain voluntarily on board. This capacity is required because any potential solution to a coordination problem of this kind has to involve behavior on all sides that is psychologically plausible to all parties: it must consist of actions parties can be motivated, and be seen by others to be motivated, to actually perform. This in turn is because, in order for any of them to act (rationally) in the way proposed, each must believe (rationally) that the others intend to act in that way as well; and each must see that the others' intention to cooperate is premised on the belief that she herself so

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development it triggers are empirical phenomena, but also that the thesis states a causal relationship between them. So I think, along with some other interpreters (cf. e.g. McNulty 2016 and Bruno 2018), that we can dispense with the assumption that Fichte is trying to provide a transcendental argument in anything like the sense of Stroud 1968.

intends (a belief that must also be rational).

In such a situation, a generic conception of human interests will not substitute for insight into the actual motivations of one's actual partners. Nor will first-order insight alone suffice. For a and b to succeed at free reciprocal efficacy, a needs not only rational beliefs about b's motivations and about what actions these are likely to produce; she also needs rational beliefs about b's assessment of a's own motivations and of what actions b thinks these are likely to produce. But b's beliefs on this topic can only be inferences from a's behavior to a's motivations; and the ability to reconstruct such inferences involves an ability on the part of a to take her own free action—not just her external behavior, but also the attitudes behind it—as an object of thought.

In the literature following Schelling 1958 it is a commonplace that the cognitive requirements of positive-sum strategic interactions of this kind are different from, and more demanding than, the cognitive requirements of zero-sum strategic interaction, and that they include the ability to engage in recursive mind-reading.[33] It is plain from the text of the *Foundations* that Fichte has singled out the same set of cognitive requirements as essential to the bargaining problem that is the problem of right as he conceives it. If we look again at [II], we see Fichte explaining the recursive structure of higher-order beliefs produced in a situation in which what it is rational for each to do depends

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[33]'It should be emphasized that co-ordination is not a matter of guessing what the 'average man' will do. One is not, in tacit co-ordination, trying to guess what another will do in an objective situation; one is trying to guess what the other will guess one's self to guess the other to guess, and so on ad infinitum.' (Schelling 1958 p. 209) '[T]he intellectual process of choosing a strategy in pure conflict and choosing a strategy of coordination are of wholly different sorts. At least this is so if one admits the "minimax" solution, randomized if necessary, in the zero-sum game. In the pure coordination game, the player's objective is to make contact with the other player through some imaginative process of introspection, of searching for shared clues; in the minimax strategy of a zero-sum game—most strikingly so with randomized choice—one's whole objective is to avoid any meeting of minds, even an inadvertent one.' (Schelling 1958 p. 211) These comments directly concern tacit coordination games; but Schelling studied such games because he thought that the intellectual process involved in them was characteristic of positive-sum strategic interaction more broadly (Schelling 1958 p. 207) and thus that examination of them would inform a better understanding of bargaining.

on her expectations about what the other will do, which she recognizes to depend in turn on the other's expectations about what she herself will do, 'and so on to infinity'. And if we look again at [III], we find Fichte explaining that what is at issue in such interaction is not the application of an *a priori* knowable standard of treatment appropriate to rational beings as a type, but instead the 'consciousness common to us both' that is the outcome converged-upon in a process of mutual accommodation.

Successful engagement in free reciprocal efficacy, then, is impossible without the capacity to take oneself-qua-agent as object of thought in exactly the way described in §2 above.[34] Plausibly, then, one function of reflective self-consciousness is that it underwrites success in interactions of this sort.

But this fact alone is not sufficient to validate Fichte's thesis. For that, we must add to the picture two assumptions that Fichte does not foreground in these texts but that we take, and he would have taken, to be relatively uncontroversial. The first is that reflective self-consciousness is a disposition that is not present in every organism, or indeed in every human being at every life stage. This is an empirical claim, and it presupposes that the presence or absence of reflective self-consciousness is (to some extent at least) behaviorally detectable. The second is that in order for capacities to be present in an organism, they must have some use. This is a heuristic principle, a staple of contemporary evolutionary explanations but also, for Kant and his followers as for many philosophers before them, an assumption without which no explanation of any capacities of organisms (rational capacities included) would be possible.[35]

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[34] Note that there are instances of coordinated action among organisms that, far from having reflective self-consciousness, surely lack any consciousness at all, because they lack nervous systems (cf. Skyrms 2003 pp. 55–56). Many human interactions may be best explained in a similar way. But Fichte's thesis does not rely on the claim that *all* coordinated human action employs reflective self-consciousness, only that a species of it—free reciprocal efficacy—does.

[35] For an example that Fichte was familiar with, in which the heuristic is not limited to the biology of non-rational animals, consider the argument Kant offers, in *Groundwork* I, for the moral function of reason: reason must be given us for some end other than happiness, since it serves us so poorly in the pursuit thereof, and since we must assume

For the thesis to be true it does not suffice that *one* function of reflective self-consciousness is participation in free reciprocal efficacy. There must in addition be no *other* function that would explain its development better or as well. (Fichte does not, and need not, claim that it has no other employments *simpliciter*.) If there were another such function, given Fichte's presuppositions, we could not rule out the possibility of reflective self-consciousness even in beings who have not participated in free reciprocal efficacy.

That he takes there to be no such function is spelled out, again, in the portions of the *System of Ethics* devoted to psychology, upon which we have drawn in §2. The 'animal with an understanding' of IV:178–80 successfully navigates its world guided by the first-order application of its intellect to the outputs of its perceptual system coupled with its natural drives. Further reflection takes place, when the right social stimulus is present, against this background of already-successful functioning and already-effective (non-reflective) self-regulation. Mere interaction with the natural world does not trigger this reflection, on Fichte's view, because it does not require it. That he takes non-cooperative social interaction not to require it follows from the thesis together with the characterization of free reciprocal efficacy given in §3 above.

Are these claims true? Perhaps surprisingly, the preponderance of evidence from developmental and evolutionary psychology suggests that in fact reflective self-consciousness does not arise spontaneously in interaction with the non-rational natural world, but instead arises only in social interaction, and indeed in the very kind of social interaction Fichte describes.

It is a prevailing view in psychology that reflective self-consciousness in the sense described in §2—the disposition to form beliefs about one's own beliefs, desires and intentions—is, just as Fichte claims, a social achievement. More specifically, many psychologists agree that reflective self-consciousness is the

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as a general principle that an organized being will contain no instrument for some end that is not the best adapted to that end (Kant 1900– 4:395–96).

product of turning upon oneself intellectual tools developed for the purpose of knowing others' attitudes in social interactions. Several types of experimental evidence are relevant to this consensus. Developmental psychologists have shown that children become able to ascribe desires and beliefs to themselves at the same developmental points at which they become able to ascribe them to others, but not before. If children came to know their own attitudes by spontaneous introspection, they should in at least some cases be able to report them without being able to do the same for others. But in fact their reports about their own attitudes are systematically incorrect until they develop the ability to report on the attitudes of others.[36] Brain-imaging studies show that the same areas of the brain are employed in other-directed and self-directed attitude-ascription.[37] Confabulation studies show adults attributing to themselves spurious beliefs, desires and even volitions in order to explain their own behavior and causal feedback from the world. Since these experiments are designed to ensure that the beliefs, desires and intentions the subjects attribute to themselves do not exist, it cannot (in these cases at least, but there is reason to think that these cases are very ordinary) be the case that these are accessed by a faculty of introspection that would be distinct from a more general capacity to interpret behavior.[38] All of this suggests that the sense most people have that their attitudes, and the attitudes' role in the production of action, are immediately available to direct introspection, is (in the words of Gopnik 1993) an illusion.[39]

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[36]These results are summarized in Gopnik 1993 and have since been replicated in dozens of further studies. Developmental psychologists agree that human theory of mind develops in stages, with a more primitive goal-perception psychology, which appears around 18 months, replaced by a fully representational theory of mind (i.e. the ability to ascribe, and self-ascribe, propositional attitudes in general) between 4 and 5, after which children gradually acquire the ability to reason using ever more complex recursively-embedded attitude ascriptions. At no stage does self-knowledge precede other-knowledge developmentally.

[37]These studies are summarized in chapter 10 of Carruthers 2011.

[38]These studies are summarized in chapter 11 of Carruthers 2011.

[39]Thanks to the editors of *Mind* for pointing to the gap in the argument corresponding to this paragraph, and to Shaun Nichols for advice on how to fill it, and especially for recommending Gopnik and Carruthers.

If we accept that the representational theory of mind, and with it the capacity to attribute beliefs and desires to oneself and others, develops in social interaction over the course of early childhood, there remains a further question: in what *type* of social interaction does it develop? Fichte's thesis requires that it develop in flexible social interactions that, while not conflict-free, are essentially cooperative. If there were evidence that it developed in social environments of pure competition, this aspect of Fichte's thesis would be falsified. Here there are two further bodies of empirical research that can be cited in favor of Fichte's account.[40]

The first is the work of Tomasello and collaborators on the connection between cooperation and theory of mind in humans and other apes. Tomasello notes that human beings are highly cooperative and capable of joint attention and action from an early age, but that highly social, but non-cooperatively social, close relatives (chimpanzees) are limited in their capacity to model their fellows' mental states (and *a fortiori*, given the assumption that this is the same capacity, to reflectively model their own).[41] On Tomasello's account, the capacity for sophisticated reasoning about the mind evolved in tandem with increasingly complex cooperative interaction, as a necessary condition for its success. Fichte's own explanation of the link between self-consciousness and cooperation is not evolutionary, of course. It is developmental. But the adaptive story is the same: what carers are preparing children for is an adult social life in which reflective representation of mental states is essential because it subserves the end of cooperation.

The second body of empirical research fits more directly into Fichte's devel-

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[40]Thanks to Shaun Nichols for comments on the presentation of empirical work in the next two paragraphs.

[41]'[T]here is no evidence that great apes can do even one step of recursive mind reading (if you will allow me this term), which is the cognitive underpinning of all forms of common conceptual ground. If, as we hypothesize, the first step on the way to what has been called mutual knowledge, common knowledge, joint attention, mutual cognitive environment, intersubjectivity, and so forth, was taken in collaborative activities with joint goals, the reason that great apes do not establish joint attention with others is that they do not participate in activities with joint goals in the first place.' (Tomasello 2009 pp. 71–72; cf. Tomasello 2014, Tomasello and Moll 2013, Moll and Meltzoff 2011)

opmental framework. This is the work of Dunn and colleagues on individual differences in the development of theory of mind and their correlation with differences in early patterns of social interaction. In this work, cooperative activities, including some forms of pretend play (especially play involving joint goals and role-assignment) and negotiation over allocation of resources (especially among siblings) emerge alongside conversation about the social world as most strongly positively correlated with early sophistication in theory of mind tasks.[42] In many of these cases the direction of causation is unclear; but this is not true of (for example) the finding that young children with siblings develop theory of mind skills on a quicker timeline.[43] Fichte did not notice the nature and importance of pretend play. Nor does he mention child-child interactions, though as the eldest of seven he could scarcely have failed to notice the frequency of disputes over 'property, possessions and rights'[44] among siblings. But in other respects this empirical work on the connection between differences in (opportunities for and types of) social interaction and (timing of development and skill at) mind reading in individual children supports his thesis.[45]

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[42]For general surveys of work on the relation between theory of mind and social interaction in children, see Hughes and Leekam 2004, Dunn 1996, Carpendale and Lewis 2015. Dunn 1996 (p. 510) singles out pretend play and conflict situations involving argument or negotiation as two of three social situations most closely linked to the development of metacognition in individual children (the third being conversation about the social world). Astington 2003 singles out one aspect of pretend play—joint planning with role assignment—and notes that it correlates more closely with theory of mind skills than mere frequency of pretend play. For discussion of the connection between styles of negotiation and theory of mind in children see Slomkowski and Dunn 1992; for discussion of the connection with other types of cooperative interaction see Dunn et al. 1991, Paal and Bereczkei 2007, Lalonde and Chandler 1995, Brownell, Ramani and Zerwas 2006; for discussion of the connection with pretend play see Astington 2003, Astington and Jenkins 1995, Youngblade and Dunn 1995, Lalonde and Chandler 1995, Leslie 1988. These studies hold fixed age and language ability, which correlate independently with success at theory of mind tasks.

[43]For studies of siblings, see Perner, Ruffman and Leekam 1994, Hughes and Ensor 2005. For evidence that child-child interactions may be more important in general than parent-child interactions in developing these skills, see Dunn 1996 (p. 511); Slomkowski and Dunn 1992.

[44]Cf. Dunn and Munn 1987.

[45]Interesting given Fichte's insistence that it is not in the moral but rather in the political sphere that reflective self-consciousness has its source is evidence that frequency of

Evolutionarily speaking, there are good reasons for all of this. Theory of mind is adaptive only where its benefits outweigh the substantial costs of having an additional system that forms and stores an additional set of representations of the products of (first-order) systems for judging, deciding, intending. Of course, we do use our capacity to reflect in some non-social situations; and sometimes this helps us negotiate them.[46] But mere monitoring and control of action does not require higher-order attitudes: a system that is on the lookout for failures to achieve goals and prepared to redirect efforts does not require having a mental representation of the goals *qua* one's own goals.[47] Likewise, we do use our capacity to reflect in purely competitive social situations; and in these the ability to detect motivations is also helpful, especially in interactions with individuals who are bad at hiding them. But a world in which human social interaction were largely limited to such situations would be a world in which incentives always lined up behind keeping one's motives opaque. It is not a priori plausible that the capacity for mind-reading should emerge at all in such a world; and the example of our nearest primate relatives bears this out.[48]

So it seems that the evidence at our disposal (from developmental and evolutionary psychology and from empirical economics) points to the truth of Fichte's thesis. Of course the information available to Fichte was not quite this good: these fields were in their infancy in the late 18th century. But the behavior they survey systematically is behavior any sufficiently acute 18th century observer of early childhood development and economic and political interaction had ample opportunity to observe; and the connection Fichte

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helping behavior is not, on its own, correlated with success at theory of mind tasks (cf. Hammond 2011, cited in Carpendale and Lewis 2015).

[46] We do this more rarely than most of us assume (see Kahnemann 2011 for examples), and it is not helpful in every non-social situation (see Carruthers 2011 (p. 274) for examples).

[47] Cf. Carruthers 2011 p. 67. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

[48] In fact, though it seems initially plausible that the more machiavellian a person is, the better he must be at reasoning about others' mental states, this is not borne out empirically either (cf. Repacholi et al. 2003, Paal and Bereczkei 2007). Thanks to Daniel Viehoff for pressing me on this point.

draws between these sets of behavioral evidence is informed by a heuristic familiar to philosophers in the 18th century.

Conclusion

I said in §1 above that we should consider §§1–4 of the *Foundations* and §18.III of the *System of Ethics* to present us with an argument of the following form:

(1) I am conscious of myself.

(2) I am conscious of myself only if I am conscious of myself as freely acting. (IV:219; cf. III:16–20; 23–24)

(3) I am conscious of myself as a freely acting only if I have been summoned. (IV:219–220; cf. III:30–35)

(6) If I have been summoned, then I am aware of standing (or having stood) in a relation of right with one or more rational beings distinct from myself. (III:39–52)

∴ I am aware of standing (or having stood) in a relation of right with one or more rational beings distinct from myself.

On the proposed interpretation, Fichte begins the deduction of the concept RIGHT from an assumption any reader should share: that he is reflectively conscious of himself as believing something. He first argues that the best explanation of this capacity is that it is a component of a more general capacity (reflective consciousness of himself as as having beliefs, desires, intentions: reflective consciousness of himself as freely acting). He then argues that the best explanation of this more general capacity is its function in the kind of social interaction in which different individuals are motivated to align their expectations and in which aligning expectations is intellectually challenging in a distinctive way. He can then point out that anyone who has had experi-

ence of such an interaction *a fortiori* must be aware both that the problem of right is a problem for her (that there are loci of reflective rational agency outside herself, and that these have the ability to interfere with her in ways she might rationally want to avoid) and that this problem is soluble in principle in at least some circumstances (that she and others together can manage their interactions in a way that minimizes such interference)—otherwise put, that the concept RIGHT is valid for her.

This paper examines not this entire argument, but only premise (3), Fichte's thesis that a summons is a condition of possibility of self-consciousness.

I argued in §2 that we should understand 'conscious of myself' as it occurs in (1)–(3) to refer to the disposition to take certain of my attitudes as objects of reflection; and I argued that in the specific form of self-consciousness at issue in the consequent of (2) and the antecedent of (3), the relevant attitudes are those involved in rational action (*i.e.* belief, desire, intention).

I argued in §3 that we should understand the idea of being 'summoned' in (3) and (6) to be that of having received and understood an invitation to engage in free reciprocal efficacy; and I argued that Fichte's actual thesis is that engagement in free reciprocal efficacy is the social trigger for the development of reflective self-consciousness. I characterized free reciprocal efficacy as coordinated action toward a shared end in a situation in which many schemes of coordination are possible and individual motives are not perfectly aligned. I explained that, since this is the basic form of political interaction on Fichte's view, a person stands in the relation of right with others just in case she engages in free reciprocal efficacy with them. This eliminates the gap that some interpreters have seen in the argument of the *Foundations'* deduction.

In §4 I explained why Fichte would have thought the thesis plausible. In the absence of some advantage that only the capacity reflectively to consider oneself-qua-agent could confer, that capacity would have no occasion to develop. Free reciprocal efficacy is the situation in which that advantage is

displayed; and so, plausibly, exposure to situations in which free reciprocal efficacy is itself advantageous is a causally necessary condition for the development of reflective self-consciousness. I then drew on contemporary research in several fields that provides independent reason to think that Fichte's thesis may well be correct

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