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SCHULZE'S *AENESIDEMUS* AND THE FOUNDATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Thomas Hidyia Tjaya

Abstraksi

*Immanuel Kant membangun filsafat kritisnya untuk menjawab pandangan skeptis David Hume mengenai kepastian pengetahuan manusia dan mencoba mendamaikan dua pendekatan yang berbeda terhadap pengetahuan dan tindakan, yakni rasionalisme dan empirisme. Dalam karyanya berjudul *Aenesidemos*, Gottlob Ernst Schulze mempertanyakan klaim Kant bahwa skeptisisme Hume telah terjawab melalui filsafat kritisnya. Artikel ini pertamanya membahas teks *Aenesidemos* dengan memberikan perhatian khusus pada kritik Schulze terhadap pandangan Karl Leonhard Reinhold mengenai 'fakultas' representasi dan kegagalan Kant dalam membedakan antara sebab dan syarat pengetahuan. Dalam tanggapannya terhadap karya Schulze ini, Fichte memperlihatkan kesalahpahaman Schulze atas pokok-pokok penting dalam filsafat kritis sekaligus menunjukkan arah filsafat kritis yang hendak ditempuhnya sendiri. Di satu sisi, filsafat kritis memang menuai polemik dengan berbagai kritik dan tanggapan yang mengubah arah filsafat Barat sendiri. Akan tetapi, di sisi lain, seluruh rangkaian peristiwa ini justru memperlihatkan sebuah dialog dalam filsafat sendiri sebagai usaha untuk menemukan fondasi kuat dan mantap atas klaim-klaimnya. Dialog ini menunjukkan keterbukaan filsafat terhadap berbagai bentuk kebenaran yang terus menerus disingkapkan.*

Keywords: Schulze, *Aenesidemos*, Fichte, Kant, critical philosophy, skepticism, Reinhold, faculty of representation.

Introduction

Gottlob Ernst Schulze's *Aenesidemos* is one of the most famous pieces of writing published as a reaction to the general project of the critical philosophy initiated by Immanuel Kant. In his *Critiques* Kant has attempted to reconcile two different approaches to human knowledge and action, namely, rationalism and empiricism, by asking questions

such as how necessary synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible. It is Hume's skepticism about the possibility of human knowledge, as Kant himself acknowledges it, that has significantly shaped the writing of these works. In the *Aenesidemus* Schulze questions the validity of the claim that the critical philosophy has answered Hume's doubts. Besides Kant, Schulze also criticizes Karl Leonhard Reinhold who has taken the philosophy in a different direction by appealing to the "spirit" of Kant's philosophy, instead of staying with the "letter."

In this article I will analyze Schulze's arguments against Kant and Reinhold in his *Aenesidemus* as well as Fichte's response to them in the Review of *Aenesidemus*. I will first begin with a brief historical background of this writing, which includes Jacobi's criticism of Kant's philosophy and Reinhold's new interpretation of it. Then I will examine the text of the *Aenesidemus*, focusing particularly on Schulze's criticism of Reinhold's "faculty" of representations and the apparent failure of Kant in distinguishing causes and conditions of knowledge. All this amounts to the suggestion that Kant has not completely answered Hume's skepticism. Following this analysis, I will discuss Fichte's response to Schulze in his review, focusing on Schulze's misunderstandings of the important elements of the critical philosophy and the direction in which Fichte is going to take such philosophy. I will end this article with a general remark on this polemic, which undoubtedly has changed the direction of the critical philosophy.

The Historical Background of the *Aenesidemus*: The Reception of Kant's Philosophy

The appearance of the *Aenesidemus* is part of the various reactions to Kant's critical philosophy, seen as a response to the challenges of the skeptic, David Hume, who argues against the possibility of a secure foundation for human knowledge. Before the *Aenesidemus*, there had appeared one significant negative reaction to Kant from Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819), arguing against what he saw as the pretensions of the Enlightenment to explain everything through the use of reason. Appealing to the old argument that any demonstration requires some principles from which it can be demonstrated, and that, in turn, requires a stopping point, Jacobi argues that such first principles can be grounded only in some kind of "immediate certainty" because they cannot be given to us by "reason." Eventually all knowledge, according to Jacobi, must rest on some kind of "faith." In the "supplement" at the end of his book entitled *David Hume on Faith; or Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue* (1787), Jacobi charged Kant with inconsistency and argued that Kant actually had not really refuted the skeptic Hume.

This is because Kant had claimed that things-in-themselves caused our sensations, which then got synthesized into intuitions. But at the same time, Kant saw the category of causality as a transcendental condition of experience, not a property of things-in-themselves. The only proper solution to Hume's thoroughgoing skepticism, according to Jacobi, was the *salto mortale*, namely, by making a "leap" to what otherwise would be the ultimate ground for human knowledge. That is how we are to be conscious of the unconditioned, which reason, as Kant argues, naturally seeks.¹

In the midst of this controversy, a voice defending Kant's philosophy came from Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1758-1823). In Reinhold's view, Kant had answered Jacobi's challenge by showing that reason and faith dealt with different aspects of reality. Kant had shown that theoretical reason was an inadequate tool for the search of a knowledge of God, and yet at the same time postulated on practical grounds both human freedom and the existence of a personal God. Thus, it would perfectly make sense for anybody to acknowledge all the claims of modern, scientific reason while holding firmly to faith in God. In his attempt to salvage the critical philosophy, however, Reinhold took himself in a much different direction than Kant. Faced with Jacobi's challenge, Reinhold concluded that Kant's view must be shown not simply to be one point of view among many others, but to be the only authoritative view on the subject. To achieve this purpose, the critical philosophy has to be shown to be a rigorous body of theoretical knowledge, a *Wissenschaft*, a "science." Kant himself had declared his intention in his first *Critique* to put metaphysics "on a secure path of a science." But Reinhold argued that Kant's philosophy was still merely on the path towards becoming a science, whereas what it needed was actually to be a science. Only as a science would philosophy have the authority it needed.

In his attempt to make Kant's philosophy a science with a secure foundation, Reinhold would have to make a methodological distinction between the "spirit" and the "letter" of the Kantian philosophy. He made it clear that in this project he had no intention of giving a historical exposition of Kant's position, but instead attempted to offer a reconstruction of Kant's arguments. Responding to Jacobi's argument that all knowledge rests on something we know with "immediate certainty," Reinhold argued that the only proper response to Jacobi's challenge was to rest philosophy on *one* fundamental principle (*Grundsatz*) that was itself "certain" and could be known "immediately." Reinhold called his new approach, "Elemental philosophy" (*Elementarphilosophie*), and the principle that expresses the basic nature of representations, "the

¹ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 66, 89.

principle of consciousness”: “In consciousness the subject distinguishes the representation from the subject and object and relates it to both.”

² This principle was elemental because it was not drawn from any other premise, but was itself derived from reflection on a fundamental, self-explanatory *fact* of consciousness. Thus, against the attacks from the skeptics, Kant’s philosophy would now be equipped with secure foundations in the form of a single fundamental principle.

Schulze’s *Aenesidemus*: The Challenges to the Critical Philosophy

The anonymous publication of the *Aenesidemus* in the spring of 1792 clearly threw the entire foundation of Reinhold’s Philosophy of the Elements into question. Its long and odd title clearly suggests that its main goal was to examine Reinhold’s work as well as to attack the critical philosophy in general.³ This work claimed to be a record of the correspondence between Aenesidemus, a first-century BC Greek skeptic, and Hermias, a so-called Kantian, offering a “Humean” attack on the Kantian position. The skeptical stance with regard to the possibility of knowledge in this piece of writing undoubtedly challenged many Kantians and proponents of the critical philosophy, despite its anonymous authorship for about a year. The identity of the author was quickly revealed to be that of Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761-1833), a professor of philosophy at the University of Helmstädt. The historical influence of this work went so far as to require Hegel to give a rather lengthy response in his evaluation of Schulze’s thoughts. This eventually shaped Hegel’s general understanding of the relationship between philosophy and skepticism.

Schulze begins his *Aenesidemus* by examining Reinhold’s principle of consciousness. He argues that this principle is hopelessly vague and ambiguous. Reinhold has argued that the concepts of subject and object are determined only by distinguishing them in representation and by referring the representation to them. This ‘distinguishing’ and ‘referring,’ according to Schulze, must be complete and be so determined as not to allow for more than one meaning. But this is not the case, as Schulze manages to point out several possible meanings of the concepts. Moreover, this principle is not universal, as there are states

² K.L. Reinhold, *The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge*, 71-72, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, eds. trans. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000, pp. 68, 70.

³ G.E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus, or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Prof. Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defense of Skepticism Against the Pretensions of the Critique of Reason*, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, eds. trans. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris.

of consciousness in which this principle does not hold, for instance, intuition. Since the principle is for Reinhold a fact of consciousness, it must be empirical. Therefore, it cannot be certain and necessary, which are the very conditions for the first principle of philosophy.

In Search for the Foundation of the Faculty of Representation

Schulze's criticism of Reinhold's notion of the faculty of representation clearly needs to be understood against the backdrop of the Kantian position on this issue. Schulze first invites the reader to ask some important and fundamental questions about the origin and source of representations in us. He agrees with the commonly held opinion about the necessity for a careful assessment and certainty about the connection between our representations and the external objects: "Since the representations in us are not the objects themselves being represented, the connection between our representations and the things outside us must be established by a careful and sound answer to this question."⁴ Quoting Reinhold's thesis, Schulze shows that the issue of the origin and source of our representations is one of those by which the critical philosophy will stand or fall: "It is the thesis of critical philosophy that a large portion of the determinations and characteristics with which the representations of certain objects occur in us are to be grounded in the essence of our *faculty of representation*."⁵ Thus, in order to assess "the true value of critical philosophy" and also "the legitimacy of its claims it makes for the apodictic evidence and infallibility of its results," Schulze directs the reader's attention to the grounds and principles from which the Kantian position is drawn, namely, that "there is in our knowledge something determined *a priori* by the mind, and that this something constitutes the form of the material given to our knowledge *a posteriori*."⁶

The context in which the assessment of the critical philosophy is done, for Schulze, cannot be but what he calls "the demands of Humean skepticism."⁷ Attention to this context is important for a twofold reason: first, it is the main goal of Kant's first critique, according to Schulze, to refute Hume's skepticism by assessing the human faculty of cognition; second, the proponents of the critical philosophy have unanimously claimed that all aspects of Hume's skepticism have collapsed through the derivation of a certain part of human cognition from the faculty of representation. Given these reasons, therefore, it is important,

⁴ Schulze, *Aenesidemus*, p. 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106, italics original.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

according to Schulze, to ask the question whether Kant's *Critique of Reason* has really answered Hume's skepticism thoroughly. The answer to this question is to be sought in a careful comparison between Hume's demands and Hume's problems on the one hand, and the principles of the critical system on the other hand, together with the grounds for the establishment of *a priori* forms in the human mind. Schulze noticed that Reinhold's Philosophy of the Elements had taken a different direction than the one Kant originally did, and therefore, wanted to examine both approaches and to determine "to which of these two sign-posts we can safely entrust ourselves, or with which the danger of being led astray is least great."⁸

Schulze first quoted Reinhold's preliminary statements regarding the nature of the faculty of representation, that (a) it is the cause and ground of the actual presence of representations; (b) it is present, in a determinate form, prior to every representation; (c) it differs from representation as cause from effect; (d) it may be inferred only from its effect.⁹ The argument for the objective existence of such a cause or the faculty of representation, however, could not be found in Reinhold's exposition of the principle of consciousness. The only "proof" of this cause, according to Schulze, was given in the *Theory of the Faculty of Representation* where Reinhold argued, "Whoever grants a representation, however, must also grant a faculty of representation, i.e., that without which no representation can be thought."¹⁰ Put in the syllogistic form, the argument goes like this:

- Major Premise* : Any two things that cannot be *thought* apart from one another can also not *be* apart from one another;
- Minor Premise* : The being and actuality of representations cannot be *thought* apart from the being and actuality of a faculty of representation;
- Conclusion* : Therefore, a faculty of representation must also exist objectively, just as certainly as representation must also exist objectively, just as certainly as representations are present in us.¹¹

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

For Schulze, the implication of such an inference would be huge if it were true, since it could be used to prove practically all philosophical systems that were dominant at that time: Spinozism, Leibnizian system and idealism. Even the theoretical reason would be able to provide an apodictic proof for the objective existence of a creator. At the same time, Kant's contention that things-in-themselves cannot be known, ironically, would be thoroughly false because it turns out that we can know those things.

Raising the question regarding the existence of the faculty of representation, for Schulze, does not involve a contradiction. It is clear that the skeptic acknowledges the existence of representations. The problem lies rather in the questions regarding the actual existence of the faculties of representations, whether such faculties really exist outside our representations of them, or whether the thought of having such faculties has a solid ground. All these, for Schulze, are "totally undecided issues," which, according to the existing philosophical principles, do not warrant a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Thus, when the skeptic uses the words "reason" and "understanding," his intention is simply "to express himself in a way that is commonly understood... to make himself understood by others."¹² It remains a disputed and undecided issue, however, "whether or not there is a true objective ground that differs from intuitions, concepts and ideas, or from any representation or cognition in man, yet has produced them all."¹³

In questioning the validity of the argument for the existence of the faculty of representation, Schulze specifically directs our attention to Reinhold's *Philosophy of the Elements*, accusing this work of contradicting its own principles as well as the results of Kant's *Critique* by "deriving actual representations from a faculty which it takes to be something objectively actual, and by defining it as the cause of the representations."¹⁴ In his *Critique* Kant has limited the application of the categories only to empirical intuitions. Thus, knowledge is for Kant possible only insofar as the categories are applied to objects of empirical intuition. In his *Theory of the Faculty of Representation*, however, Reinhold has not only simply maintained the restriction of the employment of the categories, but also wanted to establish "with even more precision than Kant" such a narrow application of the categories. Schulze thus finds it completely "incomprehensible whence the Philosophy of the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

