http://dx.doi.org/10.7213/1980-5934.30.051.DS02 ISSN 1980-5934

Reinhold on the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason

A relação entre o entendimento comum e a razão filosófica em Reinhold

Silvan Imhof[*]

University in Freiburg, Breisgau, Germany

Abstract

In 1791 Karl Leonhard Reinhold expressed full agreement with Kant's verdict that appeal to common understanding is not acceptable in philosophy. Only three years later Reinhold presented a philosophical methodology in which common understanding was explicitly assigned an essential function. In my contribution, I shall first reconstruct Reinhold's account of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason (Section 2). According to this account, common understanding is supposed to provide a multitude of empirical facts of consciousness. Philosophising reason takes these facts as the starting point of philosophical analysis and establishes their a priori, transcendental grounds. Common understanding and philosophising reason thus fulfil complementary roles: philosophy analyses, explains, and justifies the basic beliefs of common understanding; philosophical claims are, in turn, substantiated through their reference to the facts provided by common understanding. I shall also show that the account of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason

[*]SI: Doutor, e-mail: silvan.imhof@unifr.ch

enables Reinhold to deal with some objections against his philosophical system. The appeal to common understanding thus serves the purpose of corroborating the structure and the contents of the Elementarphilosophie. In Section 3, I shall suggest that Reinhold's introduction of common understanding was not influenced by common-sense philosophy but rather by the Wolffian conception of the relation between common cognition and philosophical cognition. Reinhold accepted the general outline of Wolff's rationalist conception but adopted it to the framework of critical philosophy. In my concluding remarks (Section 4) I shall briefly indicate that the main characteristics of the account of the relation between common understanding and philosophical reason withstood Reinhold's later changes of philosophical systems.

Keywords: Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Common sense. Post-Kantian philosophy.

Resumo

Em 1791, Karl Leonhard Reinhold expressa aprovação ao veredito de Kant. Conforme o entendimento comum, não pode ser aceito pela filosofia. Apenas três anos depois, Reinhold apresenta uma metodologia filosófica que atribui ao entendimento comum uma função essencial. Na minha contribuição irei reconstruir a relação entre razão filosofante (Seção 2). Conforme esta reconstrução, o entendimento comum deveria providenciar um conjunto de fatos empíricos da consciência. A razão filosofante toma estes fatos como ponto de partida da análise filosófica e estabelece os fundamentos a priori e transcendentais deles. A analise filosófica justifica e explica a crença básica do entendimento comum. As afirmações filosóficas são, por sua vez, sustentadas através da referência deles aos fatos providenciados pelo entendimento comum. Irei também mostrar que a descrição da relação entre entendimento comum e razão filosofante permite a Reinhold lidar com algumas objeções contra o seu sistema filosófico. A apelação para o entendimento comum tem a ver também com a intenção de corroborar a estrutura e os conteúdos da filosofia elementar. Na seção 3 irei sugerir que a introdução de Reinhold do entendimento comum não é influenciada pela filosofia do common-sense, e sim pela concepção wolffiana da relação entre conhecimento comum e filosófico. Reinhold aceita a descrição geral da concepção racionalista de Wolff, mas adota, também, os elementos gerais da filosofia crítica. Nas minhas observações conclusivas (Secção 4) irei indicar rapidamente as caraterísticas do tratamento da relação entre entendimento comum e razão filosofante nos escritos tardios de Reinhold.

***Palavras-chave**: Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Entendimento comum. Filosofia pós-kantiana.*

Reinhold and Kant's verdict on common understanding

In the *Prolegomena*, Kant made it clear that the appeal to common understanding is not acceptable in philosophy. Although the use of common understanding is indeed valuable and legitimate in concrete practice, "one can never appeal to common human understanding [gemeinen Menschenverstand] in metaphysics as a speculative science of pure reason" (AA IV, p. 371)[1]. So, according to Kant, Hume's adversaries, the Scottish common-sense philosophers Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and Priestley, had completely missed the point of the problem, and the only remedy for Humean scepticism is "a critical reason that keeps common understanding in check", "because only in this way will it remain sound understanding [gesunder Verstand]" (ibid., p. 259). In *Ueber das Fundament* (1791), Karl Leonhard Reinhold expressed full agreement with Kant's verdict on Scottish common-sense philosophy and common understanding in philosophy in general. He believed that "the summoning of and the intervening of common human understanding" was potentially detrimental to the "progress of philosophising reason [philosophirende Vernunft] and thus to the interests of mankind and science" (REINHOLD, 1791, p. 52). Even though the judgments of common understanding can be an "infallible remedy for the aberrations of *thinking*", it is "a lethal poison" if it is used "as actual nourishment for philosophising reason" (p. 52-53)[2].

In spite of this verdict, Reinhold himself introduced common or sound understanding into critical philosophy and explicitly did so in his essay "*Ueber den Unterschied zwischen dem gesunden Verstande und der philosophierenden Vernunft in Rücksicht auf die Fundamente des durch beide möglichen Wissens*" ("On the difference between sound understanding and philosophising reason with respect to the foundations of the knowledge made possible by both"; henceforth: *Ueber den Unterschied*), published in the second volume of the *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen* (1794). This seems to mark a significant move, not only in

[1] All translations from the original texts are my own. For reasons of authenticity, I have tried to preserve the original and sometimes quite complex German syntax as far as possible.

[2] See KUEHN (1987), especially Chapter X, and NEHRING (2010).

terms of his relation to Kant but also regarding the development of his own system, the Elementarphilosophie.

In this contribution, I shall first present the main features of Reinhold's conception of the relation between common or sound understanding and philosophical reason, including an overview of some methodological problems that Reinhold may have intended to solve on the basis of this conception (Section 2). Thereafter, I shall suggest that Reinhold, by introducing common understanding into critical philosophy, seems to have adopted a Wolffian method (Section 3). I shall conclude with the remark that the conception of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason is a topic that is also present in further stages of Reinhold's changeful philosophical career (Section 4).

Reinhold's account of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason

The general account

Common understanding had already been mentioned in Reinhold's earlier writings[3], but it was never assigned any theoretical function in the Elementarphilosophie. This happens only in 1794, in *Ueber den Unterschied*[4], where Reinhold presents an elaborated systematic account of common understanding and incorporates it as an essential feature into his methodology. It is widely acknowledged in the literature on Reinhold that *Ueber den Unterschied* marks a turning point in the development of the Elementarphilosophie[5]. The most important change seems to be that at this point Reinhold gives up his initial intention of building a philosophical system on just one fundamental fact, namely on the fact of consciousness. His "deductive monism", according to which

[3] See especially: "Über Popularität und gesunden Menschenverstand. Fragment eines Briefwechsels". Der neue Teutsche Merkur, 12. Stück, p. 419-429, December 1791.

[4] According to Reinhold, this essay had already been written in summer/autumn 1792 (see REINHOLD, 1794, p. V).

[5] For an overview, see FABBIANELLI (2004). The issue of the so-called "re-organised" Elementarphilosophie is discussed in Henrich (1991), Bondeli (1995), Stamm (1995), Frank (1997), Berger (1998), and Lazzari (2004).

all theorems of a theory must be deduced from one single first principle, is replaced by an account that allows for further facts of consciousness that together make up the foundation of the system and form the basis of all deductions. Moreover, it is common understanding that is supposed to be the cognitive source of all these facts of consciousness, including the one fact of consciousness that was assigned the status of a single first principle in the earlier Elementarphilosophie.

Unfortunately, Reinhold does not tell us anything about his motives for revising his old system. In fact, he does not even give the faintest impression that he is presenting something essentially new. It is clear, though, that *Ueber den Unterschied* is an attempt at developing a philosophical methodology. Reinhold adds a fragment of an unpublished and undated letter from an anonymous "philosophical friend" to his essay that begins with the following assertion: "What is lacking is a *methodology* for pure philosophy" (REINHOLD, 1794, p. 66). What follows is a programmatic sketch of the task of philosophy in which the Elementarphilosophie is credited with having found the "*highest* fact that lies at the ground of all real truth" and the "discovery of the elements of its determined concept" (p. 70). All the same, there is still something missing regarding the completion of the system: "The determined presentation of what has been discovered now demands the establishment and classification of the facts that are more concrete and subordinate to the *highest* fact, besides an exhaustive analysis of all of them" (ibid.). In *Ueber den Unterschied*, Reinhold answers to the questions raised in the letter so that this essay can reasonably be seen as an attempt at proposing an adequate methodology for the Elementarphilosophie.

Reinhold starts with determining the concepts of sound understanding and philosophising reason. In the Elementarphilosophie, sensibility, understanding, and reason are the major sub-faculties of the general faculty of representation. Understanding is the faculty of conceptual representation and is called "*understanding* in the *narrowest sense*" (p. 4). Reason, in turn, is the faculty of ideas that refer either to objects of outer experience or to the representing subject, and, through the latter, to "facts of *inner experience*" (p. 5). "*Mere sound understanding*" ("*bloßer gesunder Verstand*") signifies understanding in a wider sense

that consists of what is common to both understanding and reason and implicitly excludes sensibility. If understanding in this wider sense is active in outer and inner experience, it can also be called "*common* understanding" ("*gemeiner* Verstand", p. 10) because in this function it is common (*communis*) to both the philosopher and the non-philosopher.

These definitions indicate that common understanding and philosophising reason are not two different faculties but just two different functions of the same faculty, i.e. of understanding in a wide sense, including reason. Furthermore, they make it obvious that common understanding is in no way related to the faculty of sensibility. It can therefore not be literally called "common *sense*".

The difference between the two functions of understanding in a wide sense can be clarified by looking at Reinhold's definition of philosophising reason: while common understanding is involved in experience, philosophising reason "rises *beyond* experience" (p. 5), because it looks for the "*grounds* of experience" ("*Gründe* der Erfahrung") whose effects are only present in experience. The task of philosophising reason is to find the "*transcendental*" grounds of experience (p. 7). Grounds of this kind can neither be empirical nor transcendent, that is, they can neither be given in experience nor exist without the subject (unlike, for example, the grounds of sense impressions). Transcendental grounds are therefore the "absolute and ultimate grounds of experience, *insofar* as it [i.e. experience] *depends* on the representing *subject*" (p. 8). These grounds must be "*given* in the subject itself and exist *prior* to all real experience".

In sum, the task of philosophising reason is to determine the transcendental conditions of the possibility of those facts of inner experience that are given through common understanding. Because the facts of inner experience as such are related to the subject of experience, they can be seen as the effects or products of the subject's reason and understanding. Understood in this sense, the grounds of experience are present prior to experience, and are, therefore, a priori grounds. Philosophising reason thus provides an a priori, transcendental justification of facts of inner experience that are given in common understanding: "Common understanding is content with the *proximate* grounds and hence stops at the *facts* of experience; philosophising

reason deals with the *ultimate* grounds and thus goes *beyond* the facts of experience [and proceeds] to its grounds" (p. 10-11).

As Reinhold points out, philosophising reason is only interested in the facts of *inner* experience. Facts of this kind are related to the subject of experience or the representing subject. Only in relation to the representing subject, that is, its faculty of representation, can one hope to find any a priori, transcendental grounds of empirical facts, while the ultimate grounds of the facts of outer reason are inaccessibly transcendent. Philosophising reason is not interested in facts of inner experience that concern the particular, individual psychological states or the particular constitution of the individual mind. It rather looks for the most general features of representation that all representing subjects share because they are constitutive of representation and, therefore, the a priori, general conditions of representation. The relevant facts of inner experience, as provided by common understanding, are thus related to the most basic and general characteristics of the faculty of representation that are inherent in the faculty of representation prior to all experience and, because of that, directly accessible in common self-consciousness.

While in the initial presentations of the Elementarphilosophie there is only one fact of consciousness, Reinhold now, in *Ueber den Unterschied*, speaks of a plurality of facts of inner experience that are supposed to be of the same kind as the general fact of consciousness. They are facts relating to general, a priori features of the faculty of representation and are thus to be regarded as fundamental. Although he does not mention any specific facts, it is not too difficult to guess which facts Reinhold has in mind if one goes back to a passage in *Ueber das Fundament* from 1791:

> For the purpose of the sciences of sensibility, understanding, and reason, the definitions of *sensory representation*, *concept* and *idea* with respect to the *specific* that cannot be drawn from the definition of representation have to be determined through specific *propositions of consciousness* that express *specific kinds* of consciousness, and that, with *respect* to the *common features* they state, stand under the *proposition* of *consciousness in general* (that expresses what is present in *any* instance of consciousness) but are, with *respect* to their *specific features*, immediately evident through the *fact* that they refer to (REINHOLD, 1791, p. 106).

This description fits perfectly in Reinhold's conception of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason in *Ueber den Unterschied*. First, there is not only one single proposition of consciousness but several. Second, these propositions are arranged in hierarchical order: there is a first, most general proposition of consciousness, and there is a plurality of subordinate, more specific propositions of consciousness. The features that all (kinds of) representations share can be deduced on the basis of the former whereas the specific features of the specific kinds of representations are determined on the basis of the latter. The relevant kinds of representation are sensory representations, concepts, and ideas, which belong to the faculties of sensibility, understanding, and reason, respectively. Third, in the same way as the general proposition of consciousness expresses the general fact of consciousness, the specific propositions of consciousness express specific facts of consciousness. The specific facts are related to the specific facts in the same way as the general proposition of consciousness is related to the general fact. Fourth, as all these facts, whether general or specific, are facts of consciousness, consciousness must be the source of all of them. For completing the account, it suffices to add the thesis from *Ueber den Unterschied* stating that the cognitive source of facts of inner experience is common understanding.

If this hierarchically ordered set of facts of consciousness and corresponding propositions of consciousness is given, a ground is available on which the entire structure of the Elementarphilosophie can be erected: the general theory of the faculty of representation rests on the general proposition of consciousness while the specific theories of sensibility, understanding, and reason rest on subordinate propositions. Moreover, the subdivision into theoretical and practical philosophy (theory of the faculty of cognition and theory of the faculty of desire) too is grounded in specific propositions of consciousness (see REINHOLD, 1791, p. 107). Each proposition of consciousness thus yields one part of the system, and in each part the transcendental grounds of the corresponding proposition are established by philosophical reason.

If one considers this result, Reinhold's appeal to common understanding in *Ueber den Unterschied* does not appear to be a radical change of method. He rather makes explicit the method he had already applied implicitly

in his earlier writings on the Elementarphilosophie. The only substantial addition is the thesis that common understanding is the primary source of the fundamental facts of consciousness. This is to say that Reinhold's elaborated methodological account does not result in a thoroughgoing re-organisation of the structure and the contents of the Elementarphilosophie. On the contrary, the elaborated methodology serves the purpose of backing the general architecture of the Elementarphilosophie and provides a firmer foundation for the major propositions that have already figured in earlier presentations of the system.

Some specifics

Although the new outline of the methodology does not require substantial changes within the system of the Elementarphilosophie, Reinhold achieves significant progress in clarifying the origin and the status of its basic propositions:

> The *source* of this Elementarphilosophie is *inner experience insofar as it is independent of outer experience*, that is, insofar as it consists of *facts of pure self-consciousness*.
>
> The propositions through which the concepts of these facts that are immediately drawn from these *facts* are resolved and presented in *immediate* judgments I call *propositions of consciousness*. They are all empirical propositions [Erfahrungssätze] and *insofar* no philosophical principles [Prinzipien]. But as far as the *facts* that are established by them are immediately grounded in the *subject of pure self-consciousness*, those propositions contain the *pure materials* for the ultimate *philosophical principles* that are deduced from them by *mediate* judgments or *reasonings* through which the *transcendental grounds* that are deduced from them come into consciousness (REINHOLD, 1794, p. 65).

The question about the origin and the status of the basic propositions is answered in general in Reinhold's account of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason: the former provides the "*pure materials*" ("die *reinen Materialien*"), the latter

their "*transcendental grounds*" ("die *transcendentalen Gründe*"). In order to better understand the general account, questions about some of its specific features have to be answered.

(1) How does philosophising reason proceed from the materials, i.e. the facts of consciousness, to propositions of consciousness, and from there to their transcendental grounds? The task of philosophising reason is carried out in two steps, the first of which is taken by reflection and abstraction. By reflecting on the given facts and by comparing them, their constitutive characteristics are determined. This enables philosophising reason to abstract from all particular characteristics of the facts of inner experience. What remains are characteristics that refer to general features of the subject's faculty of representation that can be expressed in propositions containing only general, basic concepts.

The resulting propositions are the basic propositions of consciousness that, in a second step, can be analysed by philosophising reason. At this point, it needs to be emphasised that the kind of analysis Reinhold has in mind is not traditional Leibnizian analysis, that is, it is not a decomposition of given concepts for making the characteristics that a concept contains implicitly fully explicit. It is rather a kind of transcendental analysis: a certain fact (of consciousness) can only obtain if the elements that constitute the fact fulfil certain conditions. Given a certain fact, one can thus determine a priori the characteristics that an element must possess in order for the fact to obtain. This makes it possible to determine the characteristics that the corresponding concept must necessarily contain[6]. In short, the result of the kind of philosophical analysis that Reinhold intends to be applied to the propositions of consciousness consists in an examination of the a priori conditions of the possibility of the facts stated by the propositions. Philosophising reason thus aims at transcendental conditions or grounds of the facts provided by common understanding.

[6] For a discussion of Reinhold's transcendental analysis of the concept of representation on the basis of the fundamental proposition of consciousness, see Imhof (2018). If I am right, Reinhold never straightforwardly intended to conduct a logical deduction from axiomatic principles. Talking of *deductive* monism is therefore at least ambiguous if not misleading.

(2) What exactly are transcendental grounds? According to Reinhold, philosophising reason looks for the *transcendental* grounds of the facts of consciousness. As such, they cannot be found in experience but must be prior to experience. Furthermore, they must be accessible to cognition and therefore cannot be transcendent. Hence, a priori grounds must be related to the representing subject and can only be found in self-consciousness whose object is the subject's faculty of representation. On these conditions and with the general outline of Reinhold's Elementarphilosophie in mind, there is only one possibility of specifying transcendental grounds: what is a priori present in the subject's faculty of representation are the forms of representation, that is, the general form of representation and the specific forms of sensory representation, understanding, and reason as well as the forms of cognition and desire. The task of philosophising reason is to find the grounds of the facts provided by common understanding. This is achieved by establishing the a priori forms on which these facts depend and by which they are constituted.

(3) In the quotation above, it is not fully clear what is supposed to be a *principle*. On the one hand, there are the facts of consciousness. They are certainly basic facts, and the propositions expressing them are basic, irreducible propositions. Furthermore, they are the ground on which the philosophical system is erected by philosophising reason. But, as Reinhold writes, all propositions of consciousness are *empirical* propositions, and *insofar* they cannot be *philosophical* principles. If this assertion is taken at face value, it must be acknowledged that, contrary to everything Reinhold has said earlier about the proposition of consciousness as the single first principle of the Elementarphilosophie, it cannot be a philosophical principle at all. Nevertheless, Reinhold's "*insofar*" indicates that the propositions of consciousness are still principles *in a certain sense*. On condition that the facts of consciousness given by common understanding are the "*pure materials* for the ultimate *philosophical principles*" (p. 65), they provide the starting point for philosophical analysis. In this function, they are the beginning or origin of philosophical reasoning in the literal sense of "*principium*". They also provide the ground on which the *philosophical* system is erected and are thus principles in the literal sense of "*Grund-Sätze*". Still, they are not

philosophical principles because neither are, they a priori proposition or serve as axioms from which theorems can be logically deduced nor do they have any explanatory or justificatory force — on the contrary, they themselves are what is in need of philosophical explanation or justification. The genuine philosophical principles are a priori propositions that only philosophising reason can provide. They describe the general and the specific a priori forms and laws of representation. Since they are transcendental grounds, they form the basis of any philosophical explanation or justification. There are, then, two kinds of principles: on the one hand, the ultimate transcendental grounds of the facts of consciousness are the true *philosophical* principles while on the other hand, the propositions of consciousness are the principles *of philosophy*, that is, the propositions with which philosophical reasoning has to start.

(4) For what reasons can Reinhold assume that common understanding is reliable? If this assumption could not be justified, philosophical reasoning could be suspected to lead to uncertain, if not false results because it is applied to questionable propositions. Reinhold vindicates his assumption by presupposing that common understanding is not a special faculty of cognition but, like philosophising reason, simply a special function or mode of the faculty of understanding (including understanding and reason in the narrow sense). As such it is just as reliable as understanding itself; but that means that the facts of consciousness provided by common understanding really are facts, and that the propositions derived from these facts are true because understanding (in the wide sense) "contains nothing but pure conditions of truth; it is merely dependent on its own laws, and it is not capable of any illness [Krankheit] and neither of any degree of health. Understanding as such can never err" (p. 19). Nevertheless, Reinhold does not deny the possibility of error altogether. Rather, there are different causes of error or "illnesses" of understanding, the worst of which is its deliberate misuse (p. 19-21); but none of these illnesses has its origin in understanding itself. Since they can be identified and

eliminated, common understanding can be kept *sound* and thus act as a reliable source of truth[7].

Some problems solved

As I have already mentioned, Reinhold does not say anything about his theoretical motives for explicitly introducing common understanding in *Ueber den Unterschied*. I shall now briefly discuss three methodological problems of the Elementarphilosophie to which the appeal to common understanding may be a solution. These problems have already been identified by different critics before. In what follows, I shall not go into their objections in detail but rather focus on their systematic impact. This is also supposed to support my thesis that Reinhold's newly conceived methodology does not result in a reorganisation of his system but is intended to strengthen the structure and the results of the Elementarphilosophie.

(1) The first problem is that the Elementarphilosophie contains propositions or theorems that obviously cannot be deduced only on the basis of the fundamental proposition of consciousness[8]. This is most evidently the case with Reinhold's definitions of sensory representation, concept, and idea but also as regards the principles of theoretical and practical philosophy. The first, fundamental part of the Elementarphilosophie deals with the analysis of the basic concept of representation by making reference to the fundamental proposition of consciousness. This concept of representation in general is supposed to be generic, i.e. to contain all the characteristics that all species of representation have in common. It is clear, though, that it is logically not possible to deduce the concepts of the species from the concept

[7] It is obvious that based on this presupposition philosophical truths can only be attained if understanding is sound. The implicit moral aspect of the dependence of philosophy on sound understanding is further developed in "*Ueber den Einfluß der Moralität des Philosophen auf den Inhalt seiner Philosophie*" (REINHOLD, 1796).

[8] Objections of this kind are mentioned in Reinhold's letter to Johann Benjamin Erhard, dated 18 June 1792, and can be attributed to Immanuel Carl Diez, Carl Christian Erhard Schmid, and, maybe, Erhard himself (see STAMM, 1997). Similar objections have been put forward earlier, e.g. by Johann August Eberhard, Johann Christoph Schwab, Karl Heinrich Heydenreich, or August Wilhelm Rehberg. For a good overview, see the introduction in Fabbianelli (2003).

of the genus, for the specific characteristics are not contained in the generic concept. It is hard to belief that Reinhold had not been aware of this standard logical rule, however. This raises the question as to where from he can take the specific characteristics of the different species of representation.

The answer that can be found in Reinhold's new methodological account is quite straightforward: the specific characteristics come from the same source as the proposition of consciousness, i.e. from consciousness. In consciousness, we are aware that the representation refers to the object and the subject, and that it is distinct from both (fact of consciousness). In the same way, we are aware that some representations stand in specific relations to their object and subject. In fact, we are aware of the differences between sensory representations, concepts, and ideas and likewise of the difference between cognition and desire. Awareness of the different kinds of representation thus constitutes further facts of consciousness that are, like the fundamental fact of consciousness, given in inner experience. Philosophising reason can draw all the necessary characteristics that constitute the structure of the philosophical system from the same source, that is, from consciousness or inner experience. And, as it is not specifically philosophical experience, it belongs to common understanding. By appealing to the facts provided by common understanding, Reinhold can plausibly justify the systematic structure of the Elementarphilosophie and defend himself against the objection that the subdivisions of his theory and its architectural structure are artificial and arbitrary. The philosophical system is firmly grounded in the facts of consciousness that are provided by common understanding.

(2) According to another objection, Reinhold cannot guarantee that the basic concepts of his theory actually do refer to something real. It could be said, and it has been said, for instance by Wilhelm August Rehberg and Karl Heinrich Heydenreich, that the Elementarphilosophie starts with mere definitions of its basic concepts and then simply analyses them. It may be admitted that these analyses are logically correct but as long as no further justification for the definitions is provided, both the analyses and the concepts may as well have an empty extension. As no proof is supplied that the basic concepts refer to something real, the

Elementarphilosophie is at best a piece of formal philosophical art but not, as it aspires to be, a substantial theory of the faculty of representation.

Again, objections of this kind can be countered by appealing to common understanding: the analyses of the Elementarphilosophie are not arbitrary definitions but concepts that are given through facts of inner experience that are, as such, related to something quite real, namely the human faculty of representation. Far from being in danger of being a merely formal theory without any substantial content, the Elementarphilosophie and hence its concepts, principles, and theorems can again be said to be firmly grounded in the mental reality that is accessible to common understanding.

(3) Finally, there is a well-known objection first put forward by Gottlob Ernst Schulze in his *Aenesidemus* (1792) and later on taken up by Fichte in his *Aenesidemus-Review* (1794). Even though *Ueber den Unterschied* is not a direct reaction to Fichte because it had already been written in 1792, Reinhold claims to have anticipated and answered Fichte's criticism in his essay (see REINHOLD, 1794, p. V). The objection put forward by Schulze and Fichte is that, in actual fact, Reinhold's fundamental proposition is an *empirical* proposition. As such, it is not qualified for the role of the absolutely certain first proposition of philosophy because any empirical proposition is open to sceptical doubt as long as there is no proof of the reliability of experience. In view of the fact that no such proof can be supplied on the basis of an empirical proposition in a non-circular way, Reinhold's fundamental proposition is like any other empirical proposition not beyond doubt until it has been deduced from higher a priori principles.

Reinhold's answer to this objection does not consist in denying that the proposition of consciousness is an empirical proposition. On the contrary, he explicitly affirms that the general proposition of consciousness is an empirical proposition like all propositions of consciousness for it expresses a fact of inner experience given by common understanding. But, as it has been shown in Section 2.2, propositions of consciousness, including the fundamental proposition of consciousness, are not *philosophical* propositions to Reinhold's mind. Rather, they are principles only in the sense that they provide the empirical starting point (the "materials") for philosophising reason. Starting

from empirical propositions, philosophising reason proceeds by transcendental analysis and, by doing so, establishes the transcendental grounds of the empirical facts. These grounds are non-empirical, and only the ultimate transcendental grounds are the genuinely *philosophical* principles. Unlike Schulze and Fichte believe, Reinhold does not take the fundamental, admittedly empirical, proposition of consciousness as an axiom for the purpose of logical deduction but reduces it by transcendental analysis to non-empirical, transcendental principles.

Wolffian roots

Appeal to common sense and common understanding in various ways is widespread in 18th century philosophy, and Reinhold does not give any hints as to which sources, if any, he is drawing on. It is definitely not any kind of common-sense philosophy that conceives of common sense literally as a kind of *sense*, for Reinhold defines common understanding as consisting of understanding and reason, hence as a faculty of concepts and ideas. Thus, common sense is certainly not a faculty of intuitive, sensory cognition. A likely source of inspiration, by contrast, might be found in the Wolffian tradition. Although Christian Wolff is commonly known as an exemplary proponent of Leibnizian rationalism, there are also lines of thought in his works that are surprisingly empiricist in nature.

In the first paragraph of his *German Logic*, Wolff defines philosophy ("*Welt-Weisheit*", literally "World Wisdom") as the "science of all possible things, of how and why they are possible" (WOLFF, 1754, § 1, p. 1). He then says that this science is understood as "an ability of understanding to unshakably demonstrate everything claimed on indisputable grounds [Gründen]" (§ 2). In this respect, he continues, "*common cognition* [*gemeine Erkäntniß*] is distinguished *from a philosopher's cognition*" (ibid., § 3, p. 2). For although one can learn a lot from experience, only the philosopher is able to give the grounds for why something can be as it is. Thus, according to Wolff, common cognition yields empirical knowledge, but it does not state its grounds or give reasons. The task

of philosophy, by contrast, is to provide the grounds of the empirical knowledge that is acquired through common cognition.

In his *Logica* Wolff defines philosophical cognition ("*cognitio philosophica*") in a similar way as "*cognition* of the reasons of what is or happens" (WOLFF, 1740, § 6, p. 3). Philosophical cognition is to be distinguished from historical cognition ("*cognitio historica*") that encompasses knowledge of all kinds of empirical facts, be it scientific or everyday knowledge. The difference between historical and philosophical cognition is that the former "stops at the bare acknowledgment of the fact, but the latter, having progressed beyond, brings the reason of the fact out in the open, in order that it is understandable why something of this kind is possible" (see § 7).

The correspondence with Reinhold's already cited assertion that while common understanding "stops at the *facts* of experience, philosophising reason deals with the *ultimate* grounds and thus goes beyond the facts of experience [and proceeds] to its grounds" (REINHOLD, 1794, p. 10-11) is striking. This parallel suggests that Reinhold conceives of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason in the same way as Wolff conceives of the relation between common or historical cognition and philosophical cognition: the former gives the empirical facts while the latter provides their reasons or grounds. As in Reinhold's account, in which the facts established by the common understanding form the foundation on which the philosophical system can be erected, "historical cognition provides the foundation of philosophical cognition" in Wolff's account (1740, § 10, p. 4). And just like Reinhold's philosophising reason takes the basic concepts given in common understanding as the starting point for analysis, Wolff's *philosophia prima*, like any other philosophical discipline, derives its fundamental notions from experience that rests on historical cognition (see § 12, p. 5).

Wolff applies the general conception of the relation between common cognition and philosophical cognition to his doctrine of the soul as well. In *German Metaphysics* he writes that his plan is first to state only what we perceive of the soul in everyday experience and what everybody can recognise. This is supposed to serve as the ground for deducing something else that not everybody can immediately see (see WOLFF, 1751, § 191, p. 106–107). Later on, referring back to § 191, Wolff tells the reader that

there he was only concerned with the "effects" ("*Würckungen*") of the soul that we are able to perceive. Now, it needs to be examined in which way the perceivable effects are founded in the essence of the soul (see ibid., § 727, p. 453). This, again, is reminiscent of Reinhold who claims that common understanding must first provide the facts of consciousness. As they all are empirical facts given in inner experience, these facts relate to the subject and can be seen as the effects of the subject's faculty of representation. Because the grounds of these effects are inaccessible to experience, the transcendental grounds of the facts of consciousness must thereafter be established by philosophising reason with reference to the a priori characteristics of the subject's faculty of representation.

Although Reinhold makes no explicit mention of Wolff, it is plausible to assume that Wolff's relevant writings were well-known to Reinhold. There are salient systematic correspondences between his conception of the relation of common understanding and philosophising reason and Wolff's conception of the relation between common cognition and philosophy. Nevertheless, there are also significant differences. First, according to Wolff, philosophy is the science of all things. This is why any cognition, be it scientific or common, is in need of philosophical examination. Reinhold, by contrast, restricts the range of empirical facts that are philosophically relevant to very general facts of inner experience that are exclusively related to the representing subject. Second, to Wolff's mind, the philosophical grounds of any kind of things lie in the essences of the respective things, which are accessible to reason through conceptual analysis. In contrast, the only grounds that are acceptable in Reinhold's view are transcendental grounds that are to be established by transcendental analysis with reference to the subject's faculty of representation. Third, in Wolff's very general understanding of the task of philosophy, very general philosophical principles are required. The major rationalist principles are the principle of contradiction (*principium contradictionis*) and the principle of sufficient reason (*principium rationis sufficientis*). Since Kant has shown that these principles are merely formal, logical principles that can only be principles relating to the analytic truth but not too substantial, truth, they are not available as philosophical principles to Reinhold. Genuine philosophical principles thus have

to be substantial principles. That is to say that they can only be the most general features of the subject's faculty of representation that make representation possible, i.e. the general forms of representation.

These differences show that Reinhold does not simply adopt the Wolffian method because it rests on rationalist presuppositions that Reinhold does not accept. All the same, he accepts the central methodological assumptions of Wolff's method: on the one hand, empirical facts or knowledge are the primary objects, and, indeed, the foundation of philosophical reasoning; on the other hand, philosophy has to give a priori grounds for empirical knowledge that is provided by common understanding. Reinhold confines these assumptions to the requirements of transcendental philosophy: only facts of inner experience, relating to the representing subject, form the foundation of philosophical reasoning; and the scope of philosophical reasoning is exclusively restricted to a transcendental analysis of just this kind of empirical facts. By doing so, it establishes their transcendental grounds. Thus, Reinhold seems to have 'transcendentalised' the Wolffian method.

The continuance of Reinhold's methodological account

Reinhold's 'transcendentalised' Wolffian methodology has been elaborated in the context of the Elementarphilosophie, and, actually, for the purposes of the Elementarphilosophie. I have tried to show that the account that Reinhold presented in *Ueber den Unterschied* is intended to strengthen the Elementarphilosophie at the stage of development it had reached at that time. Common understanding was introduced as the reliable source of facts of consciousness that determine the architectural structure of Reinhold's system as well as its contents. These facts of consciousness in sum represent the material ground or the foundation of philosophy. Referring to the empirical facts of consciousness, philosophising reason has to establish their transcendental grounds, i.e. the a priori forms and laws of representation that are necessary for the relevant facts to be possible. Philosophy thus analyses, explains, and justifies the basic beliefs

of common understanding. Philosophical claims are, in turn, substantiated through their reference to the facts provided by common understanding.

Although Reinhold's account of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason had been developed with the aim of strengthening specifically the Elementarphilosophie, its main characteristics withstood Reinhold's later changes of philosophical systems. This was obviously possible due to a certain tolerance of the account with respect to both what is to be taken as a basic fact and what conception of philosophical analysis one subscribes to. Even far-reaching differences in both respects have left the general relation between common understanding and philosophising reason untouched.

In late 1796/early 1797, Reinhold definitely gave up his Elementarphilosophie and officially declared that he had become a Fichtean. Despite this conversion and even though he now considered the Wissenschaftslehre to be the only true scientific system of philosophy, the role of common understanding in relation to philosophy became even more important than it had been before. In *Verhandlungen über die Grundbegriffe und Grundsätze der Moralität*, Reinhold explained that "the intention of the present *undertaking* is not at all to establish *philosophemes* but rather *dicta of common and sound understanding*" (REINHOLD, 1798, p. 59). Reinhold here seems to have tried to establish what he thought to be the generally acknowledged fundamental facts or beliefs of common understanding in order to provide a basis for philosophical analysis, that is, a foundation for philosophy[9].

Officially still being a Fichtean, Reinhold tried in his subsequent writings (*Sendschreiben an J.C. Lavater und J.G. Fichte über den Glauben an Gott, Ueber die Paradoxien der neuesten Philosophie*, both 1799) to mediate between Fichte and Jacobi. Fichte claimed that absolutely certain knowledge can be attained through philosophical reason. Jacobi, by contrast, who was influenced by common-sense philosophy, believed that even a philosopher cannot help accepting our everyday believes as true by

[9] Zöller (2004) and di Giovanni (2004) claim that, in actual fact, Reinhold was a proponent of popular philosophy. This claim can be countered by noting that Reinhold called for scientific, systematic philosophy as a necessary complement to common understanding at any stage of his career.

virtue of a deliberate act of faith. In order to reconcile the two points of view, Reinhold repeatedly appealed to his conception of the relation between common understanding and philosophising the reason, according to which both fulfil complementary roles. One can even say that exactly this conception acted as the bridge that Reinhold believed to exist between the otherwise incompatible positions of Jacobi and Fichte.

Perhaps the most radical change in Reinhold's career took place around 1800, when he gave up critical or transcendental philosophy altogether and began to advocate Rational Realism, a theory first proposed by Christoph Gottlieb Bardili. The issue of the relation between common understanding and philosophising reason was treated the last time against the background of the new theoretical framework in "Ueber das Verhältniß des gesunden Verstandes und der philosophirenden Vernunft zum gemeinen Verstande und zur spekulirenden Vernunft" ("On the relation of sound understanding and philosophising reason to common understanding and speculating reason", 1803). After having shown the right way of philosophical reasoning, that is, the way of Rational Realism, Reinhold reached a conclusion that was still not substantially different from earlier statements:

> Thus, also *common* cognition, in its *sounder* expressions, [i.e.] the genuinely *sound* in human understanding [Menschenverstand], namely *faith* of *conscience* [*Glaube* des *Gewissens*], as well as *genuinely empirical knowledge*, is not at all dismissed by *rational Realism* as a *mere illusion* affecting the standpoint of common, non-*philosophical*, consciousness, but only purified, and recognised as well as confirmed in its purity as what it is (REINHOLD, 1803, p. 248-249).

References

BERGER, A. Systemwandel zu einer "neuen Elementarphilosophie"? Zur möglichen Rolle von Carl Christian Erhard Schmid in der Entwicklung von Reinholds Elementarphilosophie nach 1791. *Athenäum*, v. 8, p. 137-210, 1998.

BONDELI, M. *Das Anfangsproblem bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold:* Eine systematische und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Philosophie Reinholds in der Zeit von 1789 bis 1803. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1995.

DI GIOVANNI, G. Die Verhandlungen über die Grundbegriffe und Grundsätze der Moralität von 1798 oder Reinhold als Philosoph des gemeinen Verstandes. In: BONDELI, M.; LAZZARI, A. (Eds.) *Philosophie ohne Beynamen*. System, Freiheit und Geschichte im Denken Karl Leonhard Reinholds. Basel: Schwabe, 2004. p. 373-392.

FABBIANELLI, F. (Ed.) *Die zeitgenössischen Rezensionen der Elementarphilosophie*. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms, 2003.

FABBIANELLI, F. Einleitung. In: REINHOLD, K. L. *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*: Zweiter Band. Hamburg: Meiner, 2004. p. IX–CIII.

FRANK, M. '*Unendliche Annäherung*': Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik. Frankfurt A.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997.

HENRICH, D. *Konstellationen*: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795). Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991.

IMHOF, S. Karl Leonhard Reinholds transzendentale Deduktion. In: WAIBEL, V. L.; RUFFING, M.; WAGNER, D. (Eds.) *Natur und Freiheit*: Akten des XII. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018. (In press).

KUEHN, M. *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800*: A Contribution to the History of Critical Philosophy. Kingston, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987.

LAZZARI, A. "*Das Eine, was der Menschheit Noth ist*": Einheit und Freiheit in der Philosophie Karl Leonhard Reinholds (1789-1792). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2004.

NEHRING, R. *Kritik des Common Sense*: Gesunder Menschenverstand, reflektierende Urteilskraft und Gemeinsinn – der Sensus communis bei Kant. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2010.

REINHOLD, K. L. *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens*. Jena: Mauke, 1791.

REINHOLD, K. L. *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*. Zweyter Band. Jena: Mauke, 1794.

REINHOLD, K. L. *Auswahl vermischter Schriften*. Erster Theil. Jena: Mauke, 1796.

REINHOLD, K. L. (Ed.). *Beyträge zur leichtern Uebersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie beym Anfange des 19*. Jahrhunderts. Sechstes Heft. Hamburg: Perthes, 1803.

STAMM, M. Das Programm des methodologischen Monismus: Subjekttheoretische und methodologische Aspekte der Elementarphilosophie K. L. Reinholds. *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, v. 35, p. 18-31, 1995.

STAMM, M. Ein Brief Reinholds über Diez und die Reorganisation der Elementarphilosophie. In: HENRICH, D. (Ed.); IMMANUEL, C. D. *Briefwechsel und Kantische Schriften*. Wissensbegründung in der Glaubenskrise Tübingen – Jena (1790–1792). Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997. p. 898-914.

WOLFF, C. *Philosophia rationalis sive logica*. Halle: Renger, 1740.

WOLFF, C. *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*. Halle: Renger, 1751.

WOLFF, C. *Vernünftige Gedancken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erkäntniß der Wahrheit*. Frankfurt, Leipzig: Renger, 1754.

ZÖLLER, G. Ancilla sensus communis. Reinhold über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik. In: BONDELI, M.; LAZZARI, A. (Eds.). *Philosophie ohne Beynamen:* System, Freiheit und Geschichte im Denken Karl Leonhard Reinholds. Basel: Schwabe, 2004. p. 345-369.

Received: 08/23/2018
Recebido: 23/08/2018

Approved: 09/20/2018
Aprovado: 20/09/2018