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## The Usefulness of the Kantian Philosophy

*How Karl Leonhard Reinhold's commitment to Enlightenment influenced his reception of Kant*

The present study relates to filling of the gaps in our understanding of Reinhold's philosophy. Rather than looking at the details of the *Elementarphilosophie*, this study concentrates on Reinhold's way toward it. By focusing on the development of Reinhold's understanding of the Kantianizing term 'practical reason' his initial and later understanding of the Kantian philosophy will be investigated. This leads to a picture that is very different from the one mentioned above, according to which Reinhold's main merit lies in pointing out some of the weaknesses of the Kantian system and trying to repair them. In the present study, Reinhold's theory of the faculty of representation appears as a way to present the unique and important discoveries made by the critical philosophy, rather than as an attempt to remedy its faulty foundation. Although my findings will have a bearing on how we are to view Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie*, the foundational aspect of his work in the early 1790s falls beyond the scope of this study. Rather, this study provides a background against which the need to undertake this foundational work arose. This perspective is a result of bringing the strong continuity between Reinhold's pre-Kantian writings and his efforts on behalf of the Kantian philosophy to the fore. Reinhold's frame of reference is not so much Kant, but rather his Enlightenment ideal of what philosophy should do for mankind. In order to substantiate this claim, the present study starts with investigating Reinhold's thoughts on philosophy before he knew about Kant, after which it shows how this determined his reception of the Kantian philosophy and how it gave rise to the need to come up with a solid foundation of it. This means that although the focus of the study is on aspects of Reinhold's philosophy in its 'Kantian phase', the relationship of Reinhold's presentation of the Kantian philosophy to the actual letter and spirit of the master himself is a sideline in the investigation. Rather than showing Reinhold as criticizing Kant, he is presented as creatively employing the Kantian philosophy within his own Enlightenment framework.

This intention, to show Reinhold's authentic development as a spokesman on behalf of the Kantian philosophy, has implications for the methodology employed in this study. Of course, if we really want to know what Reinhold's intentions and motivations were in dealing with the Kantian project in the way he did, we would have to ask him and hope for a truthful answer. As in all history of philosophy, or history in general, this is unfortunately not possible. However, studying Reinhold's texts from different periods, before and after he became acquainted with the Kantian philosophy, reveals that there are some persistent continuities in Reinhold's thought. These enable us to understand why, initially, Reinhold read Kant with a strong interest in morality and religion and why, later, he chose to present the new philosophy from the point of view of a theory of the faculty of representation. This approach requires a methodological focus on the sources, Reinhold's writings, rather than on previous interpretations of these writings. Rather than providing an explicit discussion with the available literature, the present study aims to provide an interpretation that is guided by what Reinhold himself thought interesting (as evidenced by his writings). I believe this interpretation will be a useful addition to existing interpretations.

One of the premises of the present study is that in order to understand how Reinhold came to interpret the Kantian project in the way he did, it is imperative to understand his background, the tools with which he worked his way into an understanding of the Kantian philosophy. **Chapter 1** presents the first, factual, building blocks that are needed for a proper understanding of Reinhold's background. It sketches his life from his education in Vienna up to his move to Kiel in 1794. During this twenty-year journey Reinhold stopped over in Leipzig, Weimar and Jena. Yet his journey to Kiel did not only take him to different geographical places. He also travelled from Catholicism to Protestantism, from being a monk and priest to being an *Aufklärer*, a 'Kantian' and an *Elementarphilosoph*, from writing poetry, reviews and Masonic speeches to publishing a 600-page monograph and many articles dealing with the results of the Kantian philosophy. This remarkable journey will serve as the backdrop against which the argument of the present study will unfold. Apart from introducing Reinhold as an historical figure, the first chapter also briefly introduces his works in so far as they originate in the period discussed. The aim of introducing Reinhold and his works in this manner is to present a preliminary account of his interests and activities during the period investigated.

The remainder of the study is organized chronologically. Thus, **Chapter 2** investigates Reinhold's earliest works, that is, the works predating his acquaintance with the Kantian philosophy. Reinhold produced a great variety of writings during this period, ranging from reviews and Masonic speeches to articles and small books. A common theme of these writings is their interest in *Aufklärung*, Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Since Reinhold was among the very first authors in the German speaking world who addressed the question 'What is Enlightenment?', it is clear that he had definite ideas about the nature and tasks of Enlightenment; ideas that were at least partly shaped by the context of his education in the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Schönborn Reinhold can be called the "Idealtypus des Aufklärers." Schönborn, *Reinhold. Eine annotierte Bibliographie*, 10.

Vienna of Empress Maria Theresa and her son Joseph.<sup>2</sup> The first step towards understanding Reinhold's engagement for Enlightenment consists of an investigation of his efforts on behalf of clarifying the concept of Enlightenment, that is, answering the question 'What is Enlightenment?' The chapter then proceeds thematically, presenting Reinhold's thoughts on, first, the role of history, and, secondly, the importance of involving both mind and heart, both reason and the senses in order to achieve Enlightenment. It is clear that Reinhold's thoughts on both these subjects are related to his involvement in Freemasonry and the Order of Illuminati. Further, this chapter addresses the consequences of Reinhold's views on Enlightenment. It will be shown how the two themes mentioned above are related to his criticism of blind, superstitious forms of religion and how he thinks these problems may be remedied. In the end the chapter will provide an evaluation of the compatibility of his sometimes radical statements on the nature of religion with his statements elsewhere that true Enlightenment will not harm true religion. In this manner the chapter presents a multi-faceted account of Reinhold's views on Enlightenment, which considers different kinds of writings and approaches the subject from different angles.

For a proper understanding of Reinhold's interpretation of the Kantian project, however, it is not enough to concentrate on his philosophical background; there is also an important historical question that needs to be investigated, as to how and why Reinhold started studying the Kantian philosophy. This will be dealt with in **Chapter 3**. Unfortunately, this question does not admit of a straightforward answer, since we lack conclusive sources regarding the historical facts concerning Reinhold's 'conversion to Kantianism'. By presenting several plausible stories of how the Viennese refugee became interested in Kant, the chapter seeks to show that, although we do not have all the facts we would like to have, we can still put together a reasonably plausible picture if we compare the different perspectives. One of these perspectives focuses on the indirect influence of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), with whom Reinhold got acquainted through his benefactor in Weimar, Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813). Reinhold reviewed Herder's *Ideen*; so did Kant. Reinhold then sought to defend Herder against Kant's objections, yet the way in which Kant responded may well have interested Reinhold for his criticism of metaphysics. Another perspective focuses on the letter Reinhold produced about a year and a half after the skirmish with Kant, in November 1786, to Christian Gottlob von Voigt, in which he presents his plans with regard to the Kantian philosophy. The story emerging from that letter strongly suggests that Reinhold had political reasons to be involved in the Kantian philosophy. These reasons are wholly absent from the third perspective, the account that Reinhold gives of his conversion to Kant in the Preface to his *Versuch*. This stylized account presents the story of an intellectual and religious crisis, which was solved by the Kantian philosophy. Evaluating these three stories, the chapter aims to bring them together by taking a closer look at the first letter Reinhold wrote to Kant, and noting the influence of the reviewing activities of Christian Gottfried Schütz (1747-1832) in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*.

2 For Reinhold's debt to the 'reformist Catholicism' of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, see Batscha, *Karl Leonhard Reinhold*.

The consequences of the way Reinhold most likely made himself familiar with the Kantian philosophy will become clear in **Chapter 4**, which discusses the first products of his pen dedicated to the Kantian philosophy, the ‘Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie’, appearing in *Der Teutsche Merkur* in 1786 and 1787. The chapter presents these articles in their historical context, which is dominated by the pantheism controversy about correspondence between Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) regarding the alleged Spinozism of the late Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). The analysis of the contents of Reinhold’s articles in this chapter shows that they are strongly related to his pre-Kantian writings. Having thus presented the *Merkur*-‘Briefe’ in their historical context and as a continuation of Reinhold’s previous interests, the chapter turns to his employment of Kantianizing terminology in them. Although his use of the terms ‘practical reason’ (*praktische Vernunft*) and ‘pure sensibility’ (*reine Sinnlichkeit*) suggests a strong influence of the Kantian philosophy, Reinhold in fact employs these terms in a way that profoundly differs from anything found in the writings of Kant up to that point. Strikingly, he employs both terms to call attention to the feature of the Kantian philosophy that is most relevant to him: the necessity of combining or unifying reason and sensibility, or the spontaneous and receptive capacities in the human cognitive faculty. ‘Practical reason’ is presented as the way in which reason and sensibility come together to provide a rational ground for the crucial religious conviction that there is a God. ‘Pure sensibility’ plays a more indirect role in a similar argument regarding the rational ground for the conviction that the human soul will have a continued existence after the body has died. The term represents the unity of the receptive and spontaneous capacities needed for human cognition. Reinhold’s use of this Kantianizing terminology goes hand in hand with the historical way of arguing that was the hallmark of his writings on Enlightenment.

Reinhold’s reception of Kant took on a new shape in his substantial monograph *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, published in 1789, when he was already teaching at the University of Jena. **Chapter 5** will present the work in its historical context and analyze its structure. It will be shown that Reinhold’s efforts to provide a theory of the faculty of representation as a premise for the Kantian theory of cognition are strongly related to the project of the *Merkur*-‘Briefe’, in which the most relevant feature of the Kantian philosophy was deemed to be its potential for understanding the receptive and spontaneous cognitive capacities as producing cognition as a result of their unified activities. The theory of the faculty of representation as presented in the Second Book of the *Versuch* states that in any representation both the receptivity and the spontaneity of the capacity for representation must be involved. Since any cognition is a form of representation, this also holds good for all forms of cognition. According to Reinhold, presenting a theory of the faculty of representation as a premise for the Kantian theory of cognition should help people to understand the Kantian philosophy better. His efforts to increase the acceptance of the Kantian philosophy are no longer presented with the Kantianizing terms ‘practical reason’ and ‘pure sensibility’ but in Reinhold’s own terms of a theory of a faculty of representation. By 1789, Reinhold’s previous use of especially ‘practical reason’ could no longer seriously serve the function it had in the *Merkur*-

‘Briefe’, namely that of signaling the potential of the Kantian philosophy for forging a connection between rationality and sensibility. In the meantime Kant had published his second *Critique*, which stressed the purity of practical reason and warned against the influence of sensibility. The fact that, at the very end of his *Versuch*, Reinhold does discuss ‘practical reason’ is, as will be argued in this chapter, strongly related to the appearance of the second *Critique*, and especially to its review by August Wilhelm Rehberg (1757-1836). Reinhold’s answer to this review in his *Versuch* shows that his theory of the faculty of representation causes tension when it is also to be the basis of practical philosophy. The premise that the basic actions of the human mind always involve some level of both receptivity and spontaneity does not combine well with Reinhold’s need, fuelled by Rehberg’s review of the second *Critique*, to establish absolute freedom, or pure spontaneity.

The subsequent development of Reinhold’s practical philosophy, culminating in the publication of the second volume of *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, shows that the ad hoc solution presented regarding practical reason and the freedom of the will in the *Versuch* was not satisfactory. In the years following the publication of the *Versuch* Reinhold not only defended and revised his *Elementarphilosophie* but also developed a theory of the freedom of the will in several articles. This development of Reinhold’s position on the freedom of the will is presented and analyzed in **Chapter 6**. It starts with the position in the *Versuch*, through the articles that appeared in *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* up to the second volume of the *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, which was published in 1792 and contains, apart from new material, adapted versions of the earlier articles. In his efforts to establish a free will, Reinhold comes to distinguish sharply between practical reason and the will. By 1792 it is clear that the mediation between reason and sensibility is no longer situated in ‘practical reason’ (as it was in the *Merkur*-‘Briefe’) but rather in the freedom of the will, which is situated in the capacity to choose between following the moral law or the natural law of desire, whenever it is confronted with the question whether to satisfy a particular desire. This understanding of the kind of freedom that is needed for morality, the freedom to choose the morally right or the morally wrong way, was Reinhold’s pre-Kantian starting-point on freedom.