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Self-consciousness as a process according to Johann Gottlieb Fichte

Keywords: self-consciousness, Fichte's philosophy of right, Fichte's philosophy of consciousness, Fichte's self-consciousness process, Fichte's family law
Słowa kluczowe: samoświadomość, filozofia prawa Fichtego, filozofia świadomości Fichtego, proces samoświadomości Fichtego, prawo rodzinne Fichtego

The article explores the process of self-consciousness of personhood, as presented by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in his work *Foundations of Natural Right According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* (further referred to as *Foundations*) published in 1796–1797. The Right presupposes the existence of laws that govern relationships in a society. Understanding the personhood affects the goals and objectives of the legal system. Reflecting on the thought of Johann Gottlieb Fichte helps to consider the fundamental aspects of personhood. Understanding of the human being is significant for living in a society because it forms the basis for concepts of justice, equality, participation, and rights, which are some of the permanent questions of humanity. In his treatise, Fichte considers human beings to be reasonable, mature, and free personalities. Starting from this statement, he also shows what exactly contributes to the formation of reasonable and mature personhood. Deducing marriage law, he touches on the topic of gender inequality. Being limited by conditions of the society of his time, taking into account the culture and tradition, he nevertheless shows the conventionality of this inequality.

The philosopher pays attention to the self-consciousness of people. Johann Gottlieb Fichte proves with mathematical precision that the mutual education of a man and a woman in a family contributes to the creation of harmonious,

mature personhood and, as a consequence, a harmonious and mature society. While recognizing the then existing order in which women did not have the right to vote, he makes the state responsible for protecting women. In his works, having considered the problem of gender inequality and inequality between strata of society, Fichte tries to find a way out of this state of affairs and thus solve basic problems of humanity.

Fichte was only thirty-four when he finished this work. He had already then been considered a young, genius philosopher. In the same period, he became a lecturer at the renowned University of Jena. Politics and social engagement played a major role in Fichte's thought from the beginning to the end of his career. The philosopher regards self-consciousness as the fundamental principle of his philosophical system. Self-consciousness is captured in three principles: I posits itself, I opposes not-I, I opposes some (quantitatively) divisible not-I to quantitatively divisible I within I.

Foundations are an attempt to define fundamental principles underlying liberal politics by implementing a Kantian perspective to solve problems that were raised but imperfectly resolved by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Fichte's work is a defence of the claim that all human beings, mature rational beings, regardless of social class, hold a set of natural rights.

This paper is comprised of three parts, an introduction, and a conclusion. The introduction outlines the political and historical conditions in which the thinker lived and worked. The first part presents Fichte's theory of self-consciousness as the fundamental contribution of the thinker. The second presents the thesis of right as derived from pure reason, since right is the necessary condition for the manifestation of the practical self and its action. The third part presents the practical application of the theory of consciousness in natural right on the example of marriage law according to Fichte. The conclusion summarizes the possibility of practical adoption of Fichte's philosophical system in the contemporary times.

Introduction

Johann Gottlieb Fichte was born on 19 May 1762, in the small village of Rammenau in Upper Lusatia in rural Saxony. His father was the first in his family to be liberated from serfdom, and worked as a weaver and his income was barely enough to support himself, his wife and eight children. At that time, feudalism was still dominant in the region, with the exception of the cities of Dresden and Leipzig. Production in Saxony, as in most of Germany, was

primarily agricultural. Capitalist relations had only recently emerged and most of Germany remained unaffected. In 18th century rural Saxony, poverty was a common condition. It was a striking contrast to the more agreeable living conditions of the still sparse middle class and, even more remarkably, to the extensive estates of the landed gentry. Thanks to his remarkable abilities, Fichte drew the attention of his benefactor Baron Haubold von Miltitz, who took him into his protection and provided for boy's education at the renowned Landesschule Pforta in Naumburg and at universities of Jena and Leipzig.

After graduating from university, Fichte spent some time working as a tutor for several Saxon families. Later he moved to Zurich, returned to Leipzig for a short time, and then left for Warsaw, where he also worked as a tutor. In 1791, he visited Kant in Königsberg, there he published the work *An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, which attracted the attention of Kant himself, resulting in an upsurge in his popularity. He then worked for some time as a private tutor in Gdańsk. In 1793, he became professor of philosophy at Jena¹ and at once proved to be an excellent teacher after taking over the chair from C.L. Reinhold. He continued Reinhold and Maimon's attempts at a new perspective on Kantian critical philosophy. Finding the axiom, or the fundamental principle, was the essence of his explorations. In fact, such a principle, from which the whole of transcendental philosophy could be traced, is formulated by Fichte as the "principle of consciousness". It serves as the first principle of a philosophy as a whole, and all further philosophical developments have been deduced from it. The fundamental principle, while being the initial point, returns at the end as the point of destination, creating a cyclical system in which one thing leads to everything and everything leads to one thing.

Over the next five years, Fichte published the books that together comprise his philosophical system. In 1798, following a bitter experience with the publication of a theological article, he had to resign his professorship and departed for Berlin in 1799, where he stayed until 1806. However, in 1806 he was driven out of Berlin by the French occupation, and consequently spent some time lecturing in Königsberg and Copenhagen. In 1807, he returned to Berlin and after the establishment of the University of Berlin became its first rector. During one of the typhus epidemics that frequently accompanied the Napoleonic Wars, he contracted the disease from his wife, who selflessly devoted herself to caring for the wounded in military hospitals, and died on 27 January 1814 at the age of fifty-two. Fichte's life was a fascinating convergence

¹ See: A. Kenny, *Krótką historia filozofii zachodniej*, transl. by W.J. Popowski, E. Bryll, Warszawa 2005, p. 295.

of talent, circumstance and the spiritual potency of the man. Even his death was extraordinary: his wife contracted typhus and was about to die, and he came to kiss her for the last time. After this gift of love, his wife recovered but he contracted the infection and died in a romantic culmination of his exceptional life.

Fichte certainly represented the qualities of a great personality: the consistency and integrity of nature, honesty and directness, combined with a desire for independence and tremendous self-control. The philosophical system he has built reflects these traits. Fichte, in a strictly scholastic form, tries to derive the entire substance of his system solely from the concept of I.

1. Fichte's theory of self-consciousness

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, a representative of German idealism, lived a short but fulfilling life. In his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte proposes three fundamental principles² underlying all knowledge.³ These principles are related to each other as thesis, antithesis and synthesis: the self-establishment of I, the opposition of not-I, and the resolution of the opposition by the limitation and definition of I and not-I.⁴ It is essential to mention these principles as they are the principles of self-consciousness to which the thinker refers in his *Foundations*.

Foundations begin with defining rationality as a process of interaction between the an actor and an action.

What exists for a rational being exists in the rational being; but there is nothing in the rational being except the result of its acting upon itself: what the rational being intuits, it intuits within itself; but there is nothing in the rational being to be intuited except its own acting; and the I itself is nothing other than an acting upon itself.⁵

This whole process is a process of self-consciousness, because: "All being, that of the I as well as of the not-I, is a determinate modification of consciousness; and without some consciousness, there is no being".⁶ From the very beginning,

² See: M. Urban, *Hans Urs von Balthasar wobec idealizmu niemieckiego. Myśl chrześcijańska a refleksja filozoficzna*, Kraków 2017, p. 112.

³ See: J. Fichte, *Teoria wiedzy. Wybór pism*, transl. into Polish by M.J. Siemek, J. Grewicz, Warszawa 1996, p. 33.

⁴ See: K. Gloy, *Wprowadzenie do filozofii świadomości: problematyka i historia zagadnienia świadomości oraz samoświadomości*, transl. into Polish by T. Kubalica, Kraków 2009, p. 193.

⁵ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right, according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. by F. Neuhauser, transl. by M. Baur, Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Fichte holds that without consciousness there is no being. Based on the definition of “I-hood” [*Ichheit*]⁷, the rational conscious personality, Fichte determines that only acts, which lead to self-consciousness, are necessary.⁸ Fichte founded his philosophy on the principle of identity: I is I.⁹ This inner acting of a rational individual occurs either with necessity or freedom.¹⁰ And what is a necessity? Necessity is the non-conscious acting of a rational being:

What emerges in the necessary acting (although, for the reason indicated, the I does not become conscious of its acting) itself appears as necessary, i.e. the I feels constrained in its presentation [*Darslellung*] of what emerges.¹¹

Reality is thus presented as an constraining necessity. A rational being finds itself in circumstances that can be perceived as constraint: “feels constrained in its presentation [*Darslellung*] of what emerges. The criterion of all reality is the feeling of having to present something just as it is presented.”¹²

An individual can be considered rational only because he or she is self-conscious. The scope of the act of a rational being is to do everything proper to represent itself as itself. A rational being is not conscious of its action: “for it itself is its acting and nothing else”¹³

According to Fichte, the focus of a rational being’s consciousness is the object, understood as opposition of acting:

The I becomes conscious only of what emerges for it in this acting and through this acting (simply and solely through this acting), and this is the object of consciousness, or the thing. There is no other thing that exists for a rational being, and since one can talk of a being and of a thing only in relation to a rational being, it follows that there is no other thing at all.¹⁴

The differences between objects are attributable to the different ways of I’s acting, if the object is rooted in and defined by acting of the I. The necessary acting of the I, through which any object can be defined for the I the way it is, is among conditions of self-consciousness. Importantly, it is necessary to distinguish the object from the process in which it emerges. This process is

⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸ See: F. Neuhouser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity*, Cambridge 1990, p. 11.

⁹ See: *ibid.*

¹⁰ See: E. Coreth, P. Ehlen, J. Schmidt, *Filozofia XIX wieku*, transl. into Polish by P. Gwiazdec-ki, Kęty 2006, p. 12.

¹¹ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right...*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

acting. And if the object is not a result of this acting, but exists independently of it, then: "(...) the acting itself becomes a mere conceiving, comprehending (*Begreifen*), and grasping of a given".¹⁵

Fichte calls this method a concept. The concept and its object cannot be separated. I's action, with respect to its form, is a concept, while the content its action is an object. An ordinary man only recognises objects: "(...) the concept disappears in the object and coincides with it".¹⁶ Thus, self-consciousness is the "philosophical genius"¹⁷ that adds a new realm to the volume of consciousness:

the talent of finding, in and during the acting itself, not only that which emerges in the acting, but also the acting as such, as well as the talent of uniting these completely opposed directions within

Fichte strongly opposed an empty, formal philosophy that offers a concept devoid of an object.¹⁸ He argued that "(...) true philosopher's observation is reason in general as it proceeds necessarily, according to its inner law".¹⁹

To recapitulate, the following formulas from Fichte's philosophical system can be outlined:

- The identity "I is I" is an axiom of self-consciousness.
- Self-consciousness is an activity based on three necessary foundations.
- Necessary foundations are: necessity, freedom and acting itself. If these three elements are present, then the process of self-awareness of the spirit becomes viable. When facing the situation of necessity, the I is not conscious of its acting because it is constrained as a necessity (*Darstellung*), and this means that the object has reality. The criterion of reality is the need to present things the way they are presented. Freedom, in contrast, manifests itself in acts resulting from one's choice and decision. A rational being must therefore act in such a way if it is to exist as a rational being at all. Reality defined as life functions as self-consciousness, the purpose of which is to define the concept of an object. Life desires to be defined, to be determinate in the sense of conscious development. It is made conscious through the self-awareness of a rational being: we need to become deeply conscious of the way we approach making a judgement on validity or invalidity, and look at ourselves (*merke auf*

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See: J.G. Fichte, *Kilka wykładów o powołaniu uczonego*, transl. into Polish by T. Kupś, Toruń 2012, p. 113.

¹⁹ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right...*, op. cit., p. 7 (full quote: *The object of the true philosopher's observation is reason in general as it proceeds necessarily, according to its inner laws, without any external goal*).

dich selbst). Only then we can understand the basis of our course of action and contemplate it from within.

2. Right as a concept of pure reason

A series of things that are done in order to achieve a particular result – such is the definition of a process provided by Oxford dictionary. If the goal is self-consciousness discussed in the first part of this article, then this series of things would be actions initiated either out of necessity or out of freedom (i.e. by choice and one's own decision) that will lead to self-consciousness. Firstly, Fichte explores the possibility of self-consciousness, assuming that it is achievable by free, rational beings capable of making intellectual observations of themselves, the result of which will be the grasping of the I (comprehension of the I). This is because the object of such observation (the I) itself appears to be present not as a result of this action, but to exist in itself.

In the case of right, which is discussed in the second part, we face a paradox because the very concept of law implies constraints (or coercion), while the concept of personal freedom is central to Fichte's theory of right. Fichte's theory of right is built on freedom, not happiness, and this is Fichte's answer to the central claim of paternalism – a principle which, in tacitly justifying tyranny, assumes that happiness is the ultimate goal of political society and that citizens can only achieve it with guidance from a party playing the role of protector. This is where one can observe constraints from other members of society (another condition of necessity, as in the process of self-consciousness).

In *Foundations*, Fichte attempts to prove that the self-consciousness of human beings requires principles of right (*Recht*). The strategy he follows to this end is based on Kant's transcendental method as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Fichte seeks to deduct the core concepts of political philosophy by presenting them as conditions for the possibility of self-consciousness (similarly to Kant's application of the *a priori* category of reason to objects of experience is a condition of self-consciousness as one subject).²⁰ In this way, *Foundations* explore the conditions under which an individual subject can achieve self-awareness, and argue that right or political justice are among these conditions.

Having started from exploration of the essence of the individual, Fichte moves on to the nature of interpersonal recognition and action, which can be most accurately addressed by examining natural right in the context of

²⁰ See: T. Długacz, "Człowiek w systemie filozoficznym Fichtego", in: *Czasopismo filozoficzne*, 2015, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 92–106.

human behaviour. Fichte assumes that in the other person we meet another equal, spiritual personal I. In placing the relationship between right and self-consciousness at the core of his theory, Fichte suggests that politics has a deeper, formative role in positing individuals in the concept of the I, that is, making them think of themselves as free personalities who, simply by virtue of their ability to define their own practical objectives, deserve a set of rights identical to the rights of every other person.

To define the concept of law, Fichte uses deduction, considering it sufficient, leaving out moral right, because he believes that “as soon as the correct deduction is given, every unbiased mind will accept it of its own accord”.²¹ According to Fichte, reality and necessity accord with acting of the reason: “A real philosophy presents concepts and the object at the same time, and never treats one without the other”.²²

The thinker explains natural law as a true philosophical science by virtue of which the condition of society can be improved. He places the hope and responsibility on the philosopher to show “(...) that this determinate action is a condition of self-consciousness, and showing this constitutes the deduction of that concept”.²³

The German thinker defines right as a concept of pure reason, from which it follows that “(...) the concept of right is the concept of the necessary relation of free beings to one another”.²⁴ Therefore, the rational being will inevitably posit itself “as one among several rational beings that it assumes to exist outside itself”.²⁵ In his philosophy of right, Fichte intends to prove that human individuality, including human body, is not only natural but socially practical. By doing so, he distances himself from a position that is a cornerstone of the philosophy of right: recognition is only possible on the basis of mutual recognition. According to Fichte, each person should make this recognition not only before a judgement of their own conscience (as this is the sphere of morality, not right), but also in a very specific way: by creating some kind of common consciousness for both (or many). Such an agreement is precisely what constitutes a legal reality. The law, unlike the moral right, does not require a person to have good will, but only to act in conformity with the law. Law also requires acknowledgement of the freedom of all rational beings, meaning not interfering with their self-realisation.

²¹ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right...*, op. cit., p. 10.

²² Ibid., p. 7.

²³ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

In terms of the structure of the philosophical system, Fichte proposed the circular character of the system. He believed that the point of origin of a system has to return at a new level, at the end of the process, which confirms the accuracy of the conclusions. Beginning with the axioms, progressing by deductive steps, one must arrive again at the first principle. Such “loop” allows verification of the constructed system becomes a journey through an external reality that circles around its spirit. Starting from the subjectivity of the I in the process of deduction, the I is interpreted. By applying the speculative method, Fichte also developed a dialectic in which contradictions were the driving force of reasoning. Therefore, by starting from an obvious basis, and using systematisation, the system of philosophy is completed. Foundations are comprised of form and content. According to Fichte, there are only three types of foundations: unconditional in form and content, unconditional in form and derivable from the first in content, and deduced from the first or second in terms of form and unconditional in content. As a foundation and guiding principle, Fichte adopted a thesis illustrating the identity of the subject: the position of I is I (according to the right of identity: “A” is “A”), that is, I asserts I.

Fichte consistently explains the importance of natural right as a philosophical science. Therefore, among other things, he argues that:

1. “The concept of right should be an original concept of pure reason”²⁶ because it describes specific actions of a rational being and must be considered in a specific manner, namely: “The philosopher has to describe this determinate action itself with respect to its form, as well as to describe what emerges for reflection in this acting”.²⁷
2. To explain this concept, Fichte identifies the relationships between rational beings and defines the notion of “an individual, as one among several rational beings that it assumes to exist outside itself, just as it takes itself to exist. I posit myself as rational, i.e. as free. Thus the concept of right is the concept of the necessary relation of free beings to one another”.²⁸
3. In describing the concept of freedom, Fichte highlights the element of spontaneity in its manifestation, the relationship of mutual influence, and the limits of one’s freedom.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See: F. Neuhausser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity*, op. cit., p. 3.

4. Thus, Fichte deduces the completeness of the object of the concept of right as “a community among free beings as such”.³⁰ In this context, each member of society limits his or her external freedom to his or her internal freedom, so that “all others beside him can also be externally free”.³¹
5. Fichte’s doctrine of right does not refer to moral obligation, but to self-consciousness: “each is bound only by the free, arbitrary [*willkürliches*] decision to live in community with others, and if someone does not at all want to limit his free choice [*Willkür*], then within the field of the doctrine of right, one can say nothing further against him, other than that he must then remove himself from all human community”.³²
6. In his work, Fichte deduced the concept of right simultaneously with its object as a condition of self-consciousness.

As results from the above, relations with other free subjects are fundamental to one’s own subjectivity, since a person can only imagine that he or she is free if he or she is treated as such by another person who also considers himself or herself to be free. A perhaps controversial undertone of this thought is that the conditions of self-consciousness as an individual separate from others requires a form of what German idealists called “universal” self-consciousness. According to Fichte’s philosophy, the awareness of one’s own individuality entails relations with other beings who one considers to belong to the same community as oneself: one of free, rational and self-conscious subjects. Thus, one of the reasons for Fichte’s philosophy’s lasting impact on later continental philosophy is that it offers a rational justification, based on the conditions of something as fundamental as self-consciousness, for the relations of reciprocity and equality among subjects, which modern political thought and contemporary philosophy generally regard as one of major ideals.

3. Marriage law according to Fichte

The following part presents the philosopher’s approach to matrimonial law, therefore illustrating the applicability of Fichte’s philosophical system in practice. Its purpose is to demonstrate how the sensual world should be arranged in order to fulfil the concept of right in it. To identify the object of natural law, Fichte proposes to begin with understanding the nature of marriage. He draws attention

³⁰ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right...*, op. cit., p. 9.

³¹ Ibid., p. 10.

³² Ibid., p. 11.

to the fact that marriage emerges as a legal, moral and natural communion. When studying marriage from the perspective of Fichtean philosophical system, we can clearly observe the same process of self-consciousness, in this case comprised of the following components: in the role of necessity appears nature and its purpose,³³ in the role of freedom – the self-consciousness of a man and a woman, and in the role of action – the inner work of both subjects of the marriage union, striving to achieve the supreme human virtues.³⁴

In the process of deduction of marriage, Fichte adds the concept of sex to that of the individual. Hence, an individual acts based on a tendency to maintain a species. The primary purpose of organic nature is the reproduction of beings of the same species, and in this context individuals are the means of producing a species. To this end, the force that creates the species must be divided and embodied in nature as gender separation. Thus, sexual desire and satisfaction are embedded in nature's plan. Fichte argues that in order to accomplish its purpose, nature has equipped one sex with the power to act actively, and the other with ability to provide "passive" assistance. The naturally active sex is male, the passive sex is female, and together they contribute to producing offspring. Fichte shows the distinction in the substance of sex and proves its being inherent to the purpose of nature. When describing men and women as rational and free beings who embrace their nature and constitute a society, Fichte also explains the mechanism of choosing a particular partner for marriage.

The thinker analyses what it means for a woman and a man to live in harmony with nature. Apart from natural goals in marriage, each of the partners has their own goals as rational beings. Love, as the primary form of female sexual desire, interacts with the sexual desire of the man, and thereby the man learns the love that is not his original drive.

For Fichte, love is the most prominent union between nature and reason. "It is the only juncture where nature penetrates into reason (...). This love is woman's natural drive to satisfy a man. (...) For the woman, the only satisfaction is of the heart. Her only need is to love and be loved".³⁵ In this

³³ See: J.G. Fichte, *Powołanie człowieka*, transl. into Polish by A. Zieleńczyk, Kraków 1956, p. 31.

³⁴ See: M. Siemek, *Idea transcendentalizmu u Fichtego i Kanta*, Warszawa 1977, p. 113.

³⁵ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right...*, op. cit., p. 268 (full quote: *The moral law requires one to forget oneself in others; love surrenders itself altogether for the other. Allow me to give a brief summary: the sexual drive neither manifests itself nor resides in an uncorrupted woman; only love does, and this love is woman's natural drive to satisfy a man. It is, to be sure, a drive that urgently demands to be satisfied. Its satisfaction, however, does not consist in the woman's sensual satisfaction, but in the man's; for the woman, the only satisfaction is of the heart. Her only need is to love and be loved*).

way, the drive for submission acquires the character of freedom and becomes an action to coexist with the mind of the woman. In other words, the nature of woman is the appeal of love. A woman's dignity is that of belonging to her husband, her life becomes part of her husband's life. Such is the moral tendency of woman's nature. The moral inclinations of the male nature are manifested in magnanimity. Realising his own desire to be dominant over the person who trustingly submits, he voluntarily relinquishes all his power. On the other hand, cowardice and weakness on his part inhibit his submission to the process of love generated by the woman. By means of deduction, Fichte explains the origin and presence of marital affection after overcoming the initial difficulties, in the further development of love: "The exchange of hearts and wills is complete".³⁶ Thereby, Fichte proves that marriage is a relationship by which the human being becomes whole:

It is only in union with a loving woman that the masculine heart opens itself to love (...) it is only in marital union that the woman learns magnanimity, (...) and thus with each passing day of their marriage the union becomes more intimate.³⁷

Fichte attempts to answer the question on how one can lead the human species from nature to virtue. His answer is: "Only by reproducing the natural relation between the two sexes".³⁸

In examining such a worthy task, the philosopher presents a definition of marriage and its purpose: "Marriage is the perfect union of two persons of each sex that is grounded upon the sexual drive and has itself as its own end".³⁹ Therefore, Fichte concludes that marriage has no other purpose than itself. Moreover, he claims that "the marital relation is the most genuine mode of existence, as required by nature, for adult human beings of both sexes".⁴⁰ Possessing a body is a prerequisite for self-consciousness, since the ability to achieve one's goals requires a direct link between one's will and the sensory world in which these goals are defined. Thus, human consciousness is

³⁶ Ibid., p. 272.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 273 (full quote: *It is only in union with a loving woman that the masculine heart opens itself to love, to a love that gives of itself without restraint, and loses itself in its object; it is only in marital union that the woman learns magnanimity, conscious self-sacrifice in accordance with concepts: and thus with each passing day of their marriage the union becomes more intimate.*)

³⁸ Ibid. (full quote: *This also answers the question: how can one lead the human species from nature to virtue? I answer: only by reproducing the natural relation between the two sexes. There is no moral education of humankind, if it does not begin from this point.*)

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 274.

necessarily embodied, and our bodies have a significant role in constituting us as rational beings.

Fichte is convinced that the most remarkable aspects of humanity can be fully revealed only in marriage. Importantly, according to the philosopher, marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman. Other types of relationships are not accepted as marriage, and he strongly condemns other arrangements. His arguments are as follows: a woman fulfils her dignity when she can commit herself entirely to only one man, and a man is completely consistent with the will and all desires of one woman to make her happy. The philosopher believes that in the case of polygamy, women's position is interpreted as a way to serve the needs of men, and they are not considered rational beings, which is contrary to the philosopher's standpoint, whereas polyandry is considered to be mere zoophilia, devoid of dignity and rationality. "By its very nature, the marital union is inseparable and eternal, and is necessarily entered into as eternal"⁴¹ — in other words, for a woman to stop loving the husband is to relinquish her dignity, and for the man to stop loving his wife is to relinquish his male magnanimity. In his analysis of marriage law, Fichte argues that the highest duty of the state is to protect "the personality of its citizens". This protection is explicitly stated in the social contract, and as a result, the protection of citizens' personality forms the foundation of all rights. The state should pay special attention to the inner moral life of women, because they are prone to be forced to submit to the sexual pleasure of a man without love, and therefore lose their personality and dignity.

Fichte remarks that it is unacceptable for a woman to become a means or instrument for satisfying anyone's whims and fancies: "It is the state's absolute duty to protect its female citizens against such coercion".⁴² The thinker shows that marital relationships are the core values and background for becoming a mature and complete human being. Fichte indicates that, according to the moral character of the woman, her sexual desire initially takes the form of self-sacrificing love, and only a man is able to confess all that the manifestation of such love arouses in him, and by virtue of his innate magnanimity can resist the temptation of unlimited domination. Only the union of these two positions, according to Fichte, provides the effective incentive for moral education, and thereby for the development of both spouses. The exchange of natural virtues between a man and a woman for the common good is presented as a process of human education. Johann Gottlieb Fichte recognizes a higher sense of the marital relationship.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 276.

⁴² Ibid., p. 278.

Conclusion

Today, society is experiencing a crisis of basic establishments, including marriage. Fichte's philosophy can prove to be helpful for the reconstruction of a meaningful inner world of modern people. Starting with a single brick, Fichte managed to construct a beautiful Palace of the Human Spirit. Fichte's philosophy of self-consciousness is still relevant. For a long time, individual consciousness was overwhelmed by collective consciousness, and people hardly distinguished between their I and We. According to Fichte, it is not possible to be truly a human unless one undertakes acts of self-consciousness and self-creation. Possessing a body is a prerequisite for self-consciousness, since the ability to achieve one's goals requires a direct link between one's will and the sensory world in which these goals are defined. Thus, human consciousness is necessarily embodied, and our bodies have a significant role in constituting us as rational beings.

How does the process of thinking and feeling work? How are they linked in an individual? Such questions can be helpful in the process of becoming self-conscious. Because many acts of consciousness unfold unconsciously, this activity requires a wilful effort. According to Fichte, self-consciousness is the ability of intellectual observation or of establishing a distance between oneself and oneself as an observer.⁴³ This distance contains territories where the conscious objects of feelings, emotions, thoughts, judgements, and their concepts are contained. It is a process of studying the inner world, deepening and extending it. Self-consciousness is a point at which a person begins to self-create. Consciousness consists of streams that permeate people; it is an elemental force that humans connect with in moments of self-consciousness. It is as if they are seizing part of the universal consciousness and keeping it for themselves. Self-consciousness is a creative act that may or may not be experienced. One only needs to reach the outer streams of consciousness: mental, emotional, cognitive – the streams flow, but there is no personhood in them. Personhood is an act of creativity. It will not build itself, and neither will knowledge. A sublime emotional world will not emerge by itself. These are points of self-consciousness that are created by people. Fichte places self-consciousness at the heart of his philosophy. He regards consciousness as inherent in every human, and intrinsic at a fundamental level to reality as such. It is a primary stream of meaning-making, mediation, and interaction of objects that, although recognised by humans, are greater than them.

⁴³ See: K. Gloy, *Wprowadzenie do filozofii świadomości...*, op. cit., p. 193.

Consciousness is something we need to see in ourselves and observe how it works in us in order to use it properly. Fichte preached the unity of knowledge and freedom, creativity and science, morality and theory building. All this creates consciousness. For Fichte, the nature of knowledge is free creativity. Consciousness, according to Fichte, creates itself. Through intellectual contemplation of the activity of consciousness, one can understand the core principle of all knowledge. I Am – this is the pure nature of action as such. The Twelfth Book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* says that Mind, the World's Mind, is the pure energy of thought, devoid of materiality.

Consciousness affirms itself constantly in the acts of its actions. Each event occurs physically, each object is physical, constrained, and finite, and has its boundaries in space and time. Each event, thing, and object is constrained and finite. Consciousness, by contrast, has no boundaries, it surpasses the finite and combines constrained objects into general images and stories. Looking at oneself from the outside is also an act of consciousness. How can one assess oneself and find the distance between oneself and one's feelings, emotions? The ability to develop distance from oneself is based on the ability to be self-conscious. Consciousness distinguishes a rational person from their self, from their experiences and ideas, it forms an integral perspective of I. Fichte maintains that consciousness is confirmed in each and every act.

The main purpose of his *Foundations* is to show that what is essential to humans has its origin in themselves, and this is self-consciousness. Starting from this statement and pursuing it, the philosopher presents a vision of a society whose rights would be fully realised. Nowadays, when uncertainty and constant changes in the environment challenge the traditional vision of the world, people seek support. As Fichte expounds, one of such supports methods is self-consciousness.

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Summary

Self-awareness as a process according to Johann Gottlieb Fichte

The article deals with the problem of the process of self-consciousness of free beings, presented by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in the work *Grundlagen des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* (*Foundations of Natural Right According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*), published in 1796–1797. Politics and involvement in social activity played a major role in Fichte's thought from the beginning to the end of his career, but the thinker recognizes self-awareness as the basic principle of his philosophical system.

The introduction to the article describes the political and historical situation in which the thinker lived and worked. The first part presents Fichte's theory of self-consciousness as the key work of the thinker. The second part presents the concept of right as a concept of pure reason since right is a direct condition for the manifestation of the practical I and its action. In the third part, the practice of using the theory of consciousness in natural right is shown, based on the example of marriage law. In conclusion and to sum up, the possibility of a practical application of Fichtean philosophical system in contemporary times is discussed.

Streszczenie

Samoświadomość jako proces według Johanna Gottlieba Fichtego

W artykule poruszono problem procesu samoświadomości istot wolnych, przedstawiony przez Johanna Gottlieba Fichtego w dziele *Grundlagen des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre*, opublikowanym w latach 1796–1797. Polityka i zaangażowanie w działalność społeczną odgrywały wybitną rolę w myśli Fichtego od początku do końca jego kariery, ale za podstawową zasadę swego systemu filozoficznego myśliciel uznaje samoświadomość.

We wstępie opisane zostały sytuacje polityczna i historyczna, w których żył i działał filozof. W pierwszej części przedstawiona została teoria samoświadomości Fichtego jako podstawowe dzieło myśliciela. W drugiej opisano pojęcie prawa jako pojęcia czystego rozumu, ponieważ jest ono bezpośrednim warunkiem przejawiania się praktycznego „ja”, jego działania. W trzeciej pokazano praktykę korzystania z teorii świadomości w prawie naturalnym na przykładzie prawa małżeńskiego. W zakończeniu, podsumowując, przedstawiono możliwość praktycznego zastosowania filozoficznego systemu Fichtego w obecnych czasach.