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Fichte's Conception of the System of Philosophy in *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben*

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It is certainly true that in past and current research, Fichte's *Anweisung zum seligen Leben oder auch die Religionslehre* (*Guide to the Blessed Life, or the Doctrine of Religion*), published in 1806, has not received the attention it deserves.¹ One of the major reasons for this might be that Fichte himself labeled it a popular work, implying that it is of no major interest for professional philosophers. At least Schelling and Hegel took it thus. In his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel harshly criticizes Fichte's popular work in general and the *Anweisung* in particular. Since almost all the books Fichte published after 1800 are of a popular nature, Hegel's criticism is mainly directed at Fichte's later work. In his courses on the history of philosophy Hegel described Fichte's "popular works" as being "without any philosophic interest" because they only suit "a general public."² Since not all of Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy have been published, it is not clear in which course or courses these remarks have been made. In the new edition of the 1825–26 lectures,³ however, Hegel does not even mention any of Fichte's so-called popular works. Moreover, the quite important distinction Hegel made earlier between Fichte's popular philosophy and his speculative philosophy is absent.⁴ The rather mild and factual tone of Hegel's remarks on the late Fichte in the 1825–26 course stands in sharp contrast to the harsh and condemnatory tone in the influential second printing of these lectures contained in the *Freundesvereinsausgabe*. Here the popular nature of Fichte's later writings is defined by Hegel as an attempt to force the readers to understand.⁵ Actually, this definition of "popular" is taken from the subtitle of Fichte's *Sonnenklarer Bericht an das größere Publikum über das eigentliche Wesen der neuesten Philosophie: Ein Versuch, die Leser zum Verstehen zu zwingen* (*A Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy:*

An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand), published in 1801.⁶ Of course, Hegel certainly did not think Fichte had succeeded or would ever succeed with such an enforcement on his readers.

Schelling, on the other hand, discusses Fichte's *Anweisung* quite extensively in his *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten fichteschen Lehre* (1806).⁷ He declares the *Anweisung* to be the third in the triad of Fichte's popular works consisting of *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* and *Vorlesungen über das Wesen des Gelehrten*.⁸ This triad is compared with the three parts of Dante's *Divine Comedy*; in this respect the *Anweisung* is associated with paradise, though it is in fact—as Schelling critically remarks—everything but a paradise, for Fichte turns the “vivid being” (*das lebendige Seyn*) into death.⁹ Schelling also implicitly charges Fichte with Spinozism by stating that if “religion is to see everything in God and thus be equal to the life of God, then the absolute consciousness [*Bewußtseyn*] is the true principle of irreligion, of everything malicious [*Argen*] and undivine in man.”¹⁰ Some years later Schelling not only accuses Fichte of having plagiarized his ideas, but also of having stolen the title for the *Anweisung* from a phrase in *Philosophie und Religion* (1804).¹¹ As is clear from the above, Schelling's criticism is directed against the actual arguments of the *Anweisung*, whereas Hegel dismisses Fichte's popular works as philosophically uninteresting altogether. This different perception might be due to the fact that Schelling, indeed, owes more to Fichte than Hegel does.

Hegel, as we have seen, focuses on the popular status of the *Anweisung*, implying that it does not attain the strict scientific standard of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. However, this criticism is rather *gratuite*, since Fichte himself explicitly distinguishes his popular philosophy from his scientific philosophy, that is, his scientific program of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. He calls the lectures of the *Anweisung* “popular.” Indeed, but all the same, they are the “brightest spot of light” that a popular rendering of philosophy can possibly reach.¹² This gives rise to the question of what Fichte had in mind by a popular rendering of his own scientific program.

If we look at Fichte's use of the term *popular* in his writings, it is apparent that it was frequently employed in order to criticize other philosophical standpoints, for example, the then-influential *Popularphilosophie*, but also the frequent attempts made to popularize the rather difficult Kantian philosophy, which Fichte reckoned to be exclusively his task. But the expression also occurs when he tries to explain something from a commonsense point of view. Within such contexts, “popular” implies using materialized pure concepts and ordinary language, but also tracing philosophical problems down to the realm of common consciousness or common experience. Fichte might feel the need for the latter due to the influence of Friedrich Niethammer; we will come back to this. In contrast, the contrary term *un-*

popular is used by Fichte to characterize his own transcendental idealism or scientific-philosophical endeavor as represented in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.¹³

According to Fichte, a popular account of his philosophy must be possible, for otherwise nobody would be able to climb to the highest standpoint of thought and autonomy of spirit (*Geist*), which is explicated by the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Everyone needs, in other words, to be directed toward this highest standpoint, which we "own" but are generally not conscious of. The idea of publishing a popular account of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is first mentioned by Fichte in a letter to his publisher Friedrich Cotta in December 1797.¹⁴ In this letter "popular" indicates something meant for a wider audience or readership, an audience not able to comprehend the rather difficult philosophy of that time, especially Kantian philosophy. With this background, it is not surprising that Fichte states that "every true philosophy, as I think, might be popular philosophy; whereas scholarly philosophy is a cobweb and the fly netted by it loses its blood and life."¹⁵ This quote clarifies the distinction between "popular" and scholarly philosophy with regard to Fichte's transcendental idealism. Only the latter can truly be called popular, since only here is the popular rendering based on a scientific philosophical investigation called *Wissenschaftslehre*. Indeed, as Fichte points out, the popular account of scientific philosophy is at bottom the same as the scientific account, with the difference lying in the method of demonstration: "In my scientific philosophical lectures I proclaim the same . . . only furnished by quite different proofs."¹⁶

It must also be mentioned that Fichte notices that any popular account of a scientific investigation is bound to the *Zeitgeist*, which means that any such account will become outdated (although, of course, the central doctrines of the *Wissenschaftslehre* remain untouched).¹⁷ Even if the *Zeitgeist* "is not as fast as the annual book fairs," Fichte himself hereby delivers an argument for the widespread neglect of his later, popular renderings of his philosophy. Indeed, soon after the *Atheismusstreit* Fichte would only publish popular works (his *Antwortschreiben an Herrn Prof. Reinhold* [spring 1801] was his last scientific publication). Around 1800 Fichte became convinced of the impossibility of conveying the content of the *Wissenschaftslehre* by means of written texts. As a consequence, he quickly lost his influence on the philosophical debate; and the philosophical world started doubting whether Fichte could keep up with the new tendencies in the debate, mainly brought in by Schelling and Hegel. Fichte's opponents had an easy target because in his popular writings he often left his theses unsubstantiated and unexplained, while difficult questions were not addressed or resolved.

In the fifth lecture of the *Anweisung* Fichte brings forth a doctrine of the five standpoints or, as he also calls them, the five ways to view the world.

Within this doctrine religion is the fourth and thus the second highest standpoint. The final and highest standpoint belongs to science and is occupied by the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In the *Anweisung* these five standpoints are elaborated quite extensively. Considering the popular status of this book, it is worth noticing that we can find similar versions of this doctrine in some of Fichte's scientific works, for instance in the second presentation of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*.¹⁸ This indicates the systematic importance of this doctrine. Indeed, in a manuscript from 1807, Fichte points out that in order to resolve the initial question of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, it is necessary to describe the principle and its division into a fivefold infinity corresponding to the five standpoints or ways of viewing the world.¹⁹ We may ask ourselves why the doctrine of standpoints unfolded in the *Anweisung* is part of a popular account. Before we can go into this question, we first need to outline the philosophical problem considered in the *Anweisung*.

The lectures of the *Anweisung* deal, indeed, with an issue of great systematic relevance. At stake is the question of how the pure being—that is, the unity of God—can be present in the manifold of the world and thus in our representation [*Vorstellung*] of this world. As we have already indicated, this question expresses one of Fichte's most important concerns in the years following his Jena period. At this point we can only hint obliquely at the origin of this problem. Most likely it is the result of discussions about the first published *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95) with Niethammer and Friedrich Hölderlin (if not directly with the latter, then indirectly via Niethammer). Already in the mid-1790s, Hölderlin is aware of the problem that Fichte in his *Wissenschaftslehre* deals illegitimately with self-consciousness as an identical proposition, “I am I” (thus two identical I-subjects), whereas this proposition involves an I-subject opposed to an I-object; and these are not two identical but differing and also distinguishable terms. This leads Hölderlin to criticize Fichte's account of self-consciousness in the *Wissenschaftslehre* as being something primary and initial in the process of deduction. In his famous philosophical fragment “Seyn, Urtheil und Modalität”²⁰ (probably 1795; “Being, Judgment and Modality”), Hölderlin distinguishes two levels: first *one* being, and second an initial bifurcation (*Ur-Theilung*) of this being into the self-consciousness of the I, so that the assembling of an I-subject and an I-object is *not* primordial, as Fichte argues in his *Wissenschaftslehre* 1794–95. In Hölderlin's fragment, “being” takes the role of the primordial moment presupposed by self-consciousness which is the source for the differentiation of being into an I-subject opposed to an I-object. It is most likely that Fichte knew about this criticism of his conception of self-consciousness in the *Wissenschaftslehre* 1794–95, for in the fifth paragraph of that work

difference is introduced in the absolute I.²¹ This introduction does not seem to be caused by any reasons relating to the development of the argument in this paragraph. In any case, Fichte just touches the issue here, and there is no elaboration of it. However, if indeed an influence of Hölderlin's argument can be supposed for the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte obviously did not care too much about it, most likely because it was not forwarded publicly. But this would change soon. The proceedings of the *Atheismusstreit* pointed out some severe systematic problems within Fichte's systematic philosophy, problems that have some resemblance to the problems Hölderlin mentioned.

One of the most influential criticisms during the *Atheismusstreit* followed from an obvious misinterpretation of the systematic status of the absolute I in the *Wissenschaftslehre* 1794–95, which consisted in its identification with God—that is, with the pure and absolute being or unity of God. This misinterpretation was widespread, notwithstanding the flood of offensive and sometimes mocking publications that Fichte wrote in order to correct this misinterpretation of his *Wissenschaftslehre*. Under the pressing conditions during the *Atheismusstreit*, it is not surprising that Fichte did not succeed in dealing systematically with the difference between the absolute unity of being and its self-conscious representation. After finally being discharged as a professor at Jena, Fichte obviously found the necessary time to deal with this problem in a more appropriate way.

In looking back on his philosophical conduct of the past years, Fichte remarks in 1804 that his main concern had been the initial unity of being and its representation in self-consciousness. Against the backdrop of Hölderlin's critique, Fichte's astonishing answer is that this initial unity is beyond and thus independent of its division [*Spaltung*] into being and consciousness. In religious terms this unity is portrayed by the Logos of John the Evangelist; in philosophical terms it is reason [*Vernunft*] or knowledge [*Wissen*] (not to be identified with conscious knowledge). Thus, the system that has this unity as its subject is consequently called "Wissenschaftslehre, logologia."²² To represent this unity takes, as Fichte points out, an extensive and long preparation under the guidance of the most abstract speculation. The *Wissenschaftslehre* thus presupposes, as it seems, an introduction or preparation. Indeed, in the introductions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the *Philosophisches Journal*, appearing in 1797, Fichte departs from our everyday sense of consciousness to show that the I must be an immediate, self-intuiting activity. Here once again Fichte appears to formulate an answer to Niethammer's earlier criticism of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, namely, that the starting point of a scientific-philosophical investigation must be something beyond denial, even for the skeptical philosopher (according to Niethammer, this must be our common un-

derstanding and more precisely the fact of experience). In any case, with this new approach Fichte openly distances himself from the Reinholdian *Grundsatzphilosophie*. This does not entail denying that philosophy is not scientific and accordingly based on a principle, but rather involves the claim that such a principle must be searched for by a more or less tentative investigation based on common understanding. This new approach is documented by a letter from early 1801 where Fichte states that his first published *Wissenschaftslehre* “bears too many traces of the period in which it was written,” hinting at the *Grundsatzphilosophie* that was in vogue during that time.²³ In the following years, the new approach for finding the starting point of speculative philosophy becomes an integral part of all new versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The second rendering of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, for example, starts explicitly with an introduction and a propaedeutics.

The new versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, as presented in Fichte’s lectures after 1800, deal explicitly with the problem of how, if there is only one unity and thus nothing that can be brought into position to differentiate this initial unity, this initial unity can be divided and differentiated into multiple subordinated principles. This is also the problem in the *Anweisung*. If, as Fichte points out here, “being as such [*an sich*] must be the very one, immutable and unchanging,” the question becomes urgent “from where mutability and changeability, which real consciousness finds in that being, enters that same being.”²⁴ According to the first 1804 course of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, the most difficult to find—note: *not* to grasp, that is, immediately accessed—is, indeed, the clear “intelligating insight” [*intelligierende Einsicht*] into the basic principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, serving the disjunction of the one without losing the absolute unity of this principle.²⁵ It is apparent that the principle for the division of the one will also provide the bridge to derive the relative from the absolute and vice versa. Fichte’s solution to the problem is that the differentiating and dividing principle comes into action because there is consciousness. Consciousness provides a pure—indicated by the neologism “intelligiren” that we have tried to translate by “intelligating”—principle dividing the absolute unity of being. Obviously Fichte hints at something belonging to the very root of consciousness; in his *Diarium* he speaks of the “true, ultimate root of the apperception.”²⁶ One of Fichte’s main concerns has been, as he has stated many times, to elucidate Kant’s unity of transcendental apperception which he reckons to be the starting point of all versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.²⁷

This important principle of Kant’s critical philosophy has been put under systematic pressure since the writings of Reinhold from the late 1780s and early 1790s. Following Reinhold, Fichte too—explicitly since

the “Second Introduction” (1797)—becomes openly critical of the way Kant presents the unity of apperception in his first *Critique*. His main argument against Kant’s account is that this unity is elaborated in its solution and not in its particular fundamental being. In other words, Kant did not describe this unity scientifically.

With regard to Fichte, we must keep in mind that the dividing principle cannot be part of a unity; rather, it is introduced with the fact of consciousness. As a consequence, there are actually two basic principles. First there is the pure unity of being and secondly the unity of consciousness. The latter must be understood as initially divided in its unity, since it is also the principle of division as such. The unity of initial being is thus opposed to the unity of consciousness, which opposition is only possible because consciousness itself is in its unity divided into the *two* terms *being* and *consciousness*. This structure reminds us of Hegel’s speculative proposition of the “unity of unity and difference.” It is due to the principle provided by consciousness that there is division at all, since it is the very essence of consciousness to be divided and to divide, but also to hold the division unified in itself by its initial operation. Within the unity of being and consciousness, being is divided by consciousness into a manifold being in consciousness, since there can be a manifold only in consciousness. The question at stake is how the unity of being, as it is for itself, can be represented by the unity of being and consciousness, whereby consciousness embodies division into the two poles of an I-subject and an I-object, but also the unity of both in a representation. We will come back to this when we elucidate the same problem with regard to the *Anweisung*.

In contrast to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the initial account of division in the first lectures of the *Anweisung* is not developed on the basis of consciousness, but on the basis of the concept of love [*Liebe*]. Although Fichte is not very explicit about this, it is likely that an exposition of the initial division on the basis of what is contained in the meaning of love must be seen in relation to the Christian, that is, religious, understanding of it. Like consciousness, love too expresses a relation of difference, namely that between the lover and the beloved, which cannot be reduced to another (we will not go into problems concerned with love for oneself). The Christian understanding of the concept of love is connected to unity and difference in its own way, as love is provided by the one God through his revelation, whereas the relation of difference is established by Jesus Christ on earth. Fichte’s use of “love” rather than “consciousness” as the dividing moment must have a different result with regard to the division itself. This becomes quite clear in the *Anweisung* when Fichte defines the difference be-

tween religion and science with regard to the fundamental question of how unity can be in the manifold.

According to the *Anweisung*, religion provides only one of the ways in which we can find unity in the manifold of the world. The difference between religion and science—that is, *Wissenschaftslehre*—is formulated in this way, that is, “science goes beyond the insight supported by religion *that* the entire manifold as such is founded in and can be reduced to the one.” In contrast to religion, science has as its task to elucidate “the insight of the *how* of this coherence,” namely that between the manifold and the one. Thus science renders “genetically what according to religion is merely an absolute factum. Although this factum in religion can be an imperturbable belief, science sublates all belief by transforming it into inspection [*Schauuen*].”²⁸ So there are two different and well-defined tasks for religion on the one hand and science on the other hand, for religion supports *that* and science *how* the manifold is founded in the one. This reminds us of Kant’s distinction between a metaphysical and a transcendental exposition of concepts. The exposition of a concept is metaphysical when it “contains that which exhibits the concept *as given a priori*.”²⁹ Such a metaphysical explanation involves some circularity, since it explains what is always already presupposed for the act of that very same exposition. If we apply the rather technical sense of Kant’s definition to the issue brought forward by the *Anweisung*, we can say that for the employment of “love” for initial division, we always already perform what we know about this concept when we try to explain it. To put it differently, religious belief on the one hand supports the insight into the unity of the manifold in God, although this unity on the other hand is always given with the mere fact of this very same religious belief. Against the backdrop of the metaphysical explanation we might be justified in the conclusion that the systematic status of the *Anweisung*—being a doctrine of religion—can thus, in Kant’s terminology, be characterized as *metaphysical*. The sixth lecture provides a justification for this interpretation, since here Fichte states simply that only metaphysics blesses.³⁰ And if we recall the task of *Anweisung*, namely to guide us toward a blessed life, this task can be characterized as a metaphysical task. In the appendix to the sixth lecture, Fichte gives an account of the notion “metaphysical.” Metaphysical is what follows necessarily and can be derived [*ableiten*] from a higher law.³¹ What is metaphysical should therefore not be taken as a factum, as Fichte clarifies; obviously because the employed concept of love can be explained on a more principled level than that provided by religion. Indeed, the metaphysical account of the *Anweisung* finds its ground in a higher principle, as the doctrine of standpoints makes clear. In other words, the doctrine of religion put forward by the *Anweisung* finds its ground in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

By contrast, the transcendental exposition is described by Kant as “the explanation of a concept as a principle from which insight into the possibility of other synthetic a priori cognitions can be gained.”³² Such an explanation incorporates the question as to the *how*. With regard to the *Anweisung*, the question is *how* the manifold can possibly be founded in the one. An explanation of this *how* surpasses the means of the *Anweisung* since, in short, religion is not able to explain what religion is. In this respect it is correct that Fichte does not inquire in what way and by what right the *Anweisung* is entitled to use the concept of love for explaining the initial division and its unity. Insofar as we are correct in characterizing the *Anweisung* with regard to its method as a metaphysical approach, it also presupposes a critique or a transcendental approach, since otherwise the whole exercise would merely produce some form of popular dogmatism. Such a critique or transcendental approach would have to examine our entitlement to use (initial) concepts like those derived from religion, that is, love. In the 1794 *Begriffsschrift* (*Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*) Fichte clarifies this by stating: “Metaphysics explains the ordinary point of view, and metaphysics is itself explained by critique.”³³

One might be somewhat surprised that Fichte, in the second lecture of the *Anweisung*, develops an argument for the possibility of “a popular account of the deepest truth.” This gives rise to the question of why a scientific account of truth, that is, one beyond the religious account, would still be necessary at all. As we already know from the *Offenbarungsschrift*, Fichte held the conviction that religious and thus moral truth cannot possibly be the exclusive domain of religion, since one would never be able to *prove* this, if reason itself did not possess this truth from the very beginning. Accordingly, in this lecture Fichte argues that if the scientific philosophical understanding [*Einsicht*] had never existed, Jesus, his apostles, or anyone else for that matter, even philosophers, would not have been able to gain such understanding.³⁴ But what grants the accessibility of this understanding? Definitely not philosophy, as every philosopher will agree that it is not by philosophy that understanding is gained. The deepest truth and insight into the unity in the manifold prevailed in all ages (that is, more precisely, all ages after Christ), although often hidden, unappreciated, or persecuted. And indeed, there have been many attempts in the past to derive that truth by means of a philosophical endeavor, but Fichte holds the *Wissenschaftslehre* to be the very first attempt which is capable of success. Religion obviously makes us aware of the initial principles, although it is not able to account for this other than metaphysically. Thus it is the task of the *Anweisung* to bring con-

temporary mankind to the standpoint from which the insight can be gained that the deepest truths must and can be made clear on the bases of a scientific philosophical discourse. Religion not founded by such a discourse holds the serious danger of leading into some kind of dogmatism, and history shows us, indeed, that this happened more than once.

Love, the important methodological principle of the first lectures of the *Anweisung*, can prevent us from falling back into such a dogmatism and false metaphysics. Indeed, the Christian understanding of love imposes on us a moral duty to prevent religious truths from such a relapse into dogmatism. Based on an understanding of love inspired by Christianity, we can argue that this love obliges us to seek a scientific justification of our religious beliefs that are assumed for the concept of love. Fichte claims, indeed, that the principles of religion can and also must be derived from those of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,³⁵ not as a result of this science, but because it follows from the *moral duty* of a Christian-inspired understanding of love. Thus, Fichte does not argue on the basis of science for the need to surpass the standpoint of religion by a higher (and in this case, highest) standpoint of science. On the contrary, “the demand to realize the science in us and in others belongs to the sphere of higher morality [*höhere Sittlichkeit*].”³⁶ A moral claim contained in Christian religion demands us to realize science. Of course, the legitimacy of this claim is ultimately grounded in science, although it is also clear that we have no immediate access to that science, for we have to be brought to this standpoint via morality and religion.

Higher morality is the third of the five standpoints, preceding the standpoints of religion and science. This third standpoint of higher morality expresses a law for the spiritual world, namely a creative [*schaffende*] law characterized as the ability to bring about something new, that is, something that was not available before. It is important to notice that this law is not creative in the sense of *ex nihilo*. It rather supplies some resting or inactive forces with new life by virtue of its creative abilities. These resting forces are identified with the solidified activity and life of God, to which we have no direct access; our access to God’s life is by virtue of the *image* of this life and activity. Therefore, as Fichte puts it, the creative law of higher morality strives for “the *qualitative* and *real* idea,”³⁷ an idea that is defined as the exteriorization of God’s inner essence.³⁸ With this in mind, we can understand that the end of higher morality is to form mankind according to its destination, namely, to approach as closely as possible the image of the divine inner essence. If we compare the Kantian perspective on the moral law, which holds the destination of mankind postponed in time and place, to the Fichtean account, we see that al-

though the *final* destination of mankind is not realized, there is nonetheless a *real* blessed life under the conditions of *this world* shown to be possible; moreover, this forming of mankind according to its destination has *real* results *here* and *now* when the creative powers of the law of higher morality bring to life (some of) the ideas of the solidified exteriorization of God's inner essence. But the next question immediately presents itself: what can account for the content of these ideas, and moreover for their divine content? As an *image* of God's life and activity, these ideas have lost the immediate divine content. The problem formulated here is therefore not trivial, because the idea in the Fichteian perspective is not qualified through a speculative logic as an idea with absolute content. Before we can go into this question, we need to shed some light on the way Fichte introduces the five standpoints in the *Anweisung*.

In the third and especially in the fourth lecture of the *Anweisung*, Fichte endeavors to *show* his audience how the one and unchanging being converts into a manifold and changing being. At stake is how changeability and conversion which consciousness finds in being enter that very same being. As we have seen above this is a similar question to the one Hölderlin addressed to the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte's solution, though, is somewhat different from the one Hölderlin seems to present in his brief sketch. Fichte argues roughly as follows.³⁹ If there is, as is indeed the case, one unchanging being, knowledge of this being is involved, because knowledge entails a proposition, expressing that "being is." Without implying anything about the content of being, the form of being is expressed by the proposition "being is." The unity of being unites being *and* the faculty that divides being in order to be able to form any proposition. In short, to state that there is only one being involves to begin with and *for us* that being and consciousness, which brings division in order to form a proposition from a unity of different terms, namely "being" and "consciousness." It is thus by means of reflection executed by consciousness that there is division at all. The very fact of this division is truly initial and neither dissolvable within real consciousness nor replaceable by something else. It is "reality," a "fact of consciousness"⁴⁰ or the "initial root of life"⁴¹ which we cannot possibly derive from anywhere; we can only, as Fichte puts it, live [*leben*] and experience [*erleben*] it.⁴²

However, it is because of consciousness and its operation by reflection that there is difference in the one being. Actually we can register two divisions. First, there is a division of the divine being within consciousness. This division results in an infinitely changeable world by the forms of reflection; more precisely, it is a classification with regard to the object which brings about the diversity of objects. The second division is inti-

mately coupled with the first and divides the world in five ways to view the world;⁴³ this division causes a classification in the “viewpoint of the object,”⁴⁴ leading to the five standpoints according to which the one enduring world is viewed and understood.

If we take a closer look at the principle of this division, it is immediately clear that it is not the same as the activity performed by the being of God; and Fichte is fully aware of this, as he remarks: “The principle of the division cannot be part of the activity of the divine being, but must be outside of it; that is, however, in such a way that this outside clearly is associated immediately with this living act and necessarily follows from this act.”⁴⁵ We see Fichte struggling to connect this principle to and distinguish it from the activity of divine being. He has, on the one hand, to distinguish it, since otherwise conscious activity would—with regard to its principle—be the same as divine activity, which is unacceptable, at least because this would lead to the same accusations Fichte had to face during the *Atheismusstreit*. On the other hand, he has to connect them because the result of the division of being must be a result that comes from the activity of that being itself; otherwise the world cannot be a result of God, but would be a result of our reflection. The absence of the latter connection could be, of course, easily linked with the viewpoint of Kantian philosophy, according to which we comprehend the world according to the principles we impose on it, that is, the world is as we comprehend or know the world. It seems obvious that Fichte tries to overcome this viewpoint. That he does so is inevitable, if we remember his point of departure, namely clarifying Kant’s principle of the transcendental apperception.

Fichte’s fundamental thought is that the unity of being and consciousness is divided by reflection, which has two results, namely the world and the way it is viewed. Both the world and the structures according to which the world is viewed have their being in their joint being with consciousness. Therefore we can never have the world without a viewpoint and vice versa. But what happens when the viewpoint manages to take a stand that merges with the dividing reflection and thus reflects the being itself? This is, indeed, the case within the fifth standpoint expressed by the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Here a unity is reflected within itself, which, because there is reflection, necessarily involves difference, although this difference is necessarily absent on the level of that unity as it is for itself, namely the absolute divine being. But if there is no difference within the pure unity, overreaching both being and consciousness, the principle of division consequently does not follow from that absolute unity. The principle of division is thus stated and not derived from absolute being. The task must be to abolish, in a scientific undertaking, this division so that we eventually end up with pure being. Such a procedure is necessary because other-

wise there would be two relatively independent principles (namely, being and division by consciousness), with the result that the *Wissenschaftslehre* would lack unity itself. This abolition determines the method of the *Wissenschaftslehre* 1794–95, where the negativity introduced on the level of the second *Grundsatz* is or at least should be abolished by the exercise of the deduction carried out within the *Wissenschaftslehre*, so that its starting point—absolute being—is, at the end of the whole undertaking confirmed to be the comprehensive content of the reflecting I.

However, with regard to the later versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, this cannot be the method followed because, as we have seen, Fichte has by then come to think of the unity of pure being or God as itself representing a pre-reflexive or even trans-reflexive structure that is only *mirrored* by the being that is in unity with consciousness (Fichte speaks in this respect of an image). Contrary to the first published version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the later versions—in principle—never result in the absolute unity preceding every division, for it is impossible to abolish the difference implied by consciousness and its reflecting operation. Moreover, there is no connection between the fundamental law of reflection (namely, division) and absolute being and therefore the division is a result of a principle different from the one supported by pure and absolute being itself. For the explanation of the *how* of the division, represented by the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the *that* of this division is merely presupposed, for it does not have its ground in pure being, but in consciousness. The principles of the scientific system therefore suffer from a lack of critique. Of course, Fichte claims to deduce the principles of the several doctrines of spirit [*Geisteslehren*], like religion and morality, from the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, but insofar as the whole system is an explanation—although a scientific one—of the functions performed by consciousness, there is no scientific justification for the initial act of division performed by consciousness, since it is not grounded in the one highest principle of absolute or pure being. If, therefore, it is not proven that the reflection of consciousness exercises the very same activity that pure being exercises in order to exteriorize itself as the ideas, the system based on this activity does not supply the proof that its principle exhaustively explains absolute and pure being. The idea as an exteriorization of absolute being only reflects the *formal structure* of the absolute, while the content of this idea draws back on a mere fact of division performed by consciousness. Both exteriorization and reflection perform the same activity only ideally. The *how* of this performance is inexplicable. Therefore the later versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* are metaphysical and in the end lead to some form of dogmatism. The only way out of this problem is an idealism that manages to show that the universal is the specific, or that the idea is also the

real content of all being. This outlines an idealism as it is unfolded by Hegel, who blamed Fichte's speculative philosophy for being dogmatic.

Notes

1. There is an old English edition of the *Anweisung* edited and translated by William Smith in *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman, 1848–49 [repr. London: Thoemmes, 1999], 2:291–496. Here the title of Fichte's book is translated as *The Way Towards the Blessed Life*, which is, in my opinion, a less proper translation of the German noun *Anweisung*.

2. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, ed. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (London, 1892–96), 3:506.

3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. P. Garniron and W. Jaeschke, vols. 6–8 (Hamburg, 1994–96).

4. Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, 8:480.

5. Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, 8:521, although not as clearly stated as in the first edition of these lectures by Michelet.

6. Unfortunately, the English translation of this book, *A Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy: An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand*, trans. John Botterman and William Rash, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1987), is not always reliable.

7. See F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61), 7:1–126. (This work is cited by series, volume, and page number in these notes.)

8. See Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 7:24–25n.

9. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 7:88.

10. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 7:88.

11. For this phrase, see Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 6:17. For the accusation of plagiarism, see 2.1:465.

12. *GA* 1.9:47.

13. See *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, in *GA* 1.2:383; and *Sonnenklarer Bericht*, in *GA* 1.7:185.

14. See *GA* 3.3:103: “Das grössere Publikum, das der Autorität nicht mehr glaubt, und der Philosophie in ihrer gegenwärtigen Gestalt unfähig ist, bedarf eines Buches, in welchem ihm, ohne den künstlichen Apparat des Systems, allgemein verständlich, und so, daß auch sein Geschmack angezogen werde, die Resultate der neuern Philosophie vorgetragen werden. Ich habe den künftigen Sommer, für welchen ich schon jetzt die Aussetzung meiner Vorlesungen angekündigt, und den ich deshalb auf dem Lande zubringen werde, der Ausarbeitung eines solchen Buchs bestimmt.” The first result of this plan seems to have been *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800); in English, *VOM*. With a somewhat different orientation, the idea of an introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* is already present in Jena. Fichte's lectures on logic and metaphysics based on Ernst Platner's *Philosophische Aphorismen* are announced as a “popular propaedeutics” (*GA* 3.2:418) or “popular introduction . . . to the entire philosophy” (*GA* 2.4:9).

15. *GA* 1.6:142: "Aber jede ächte Philosophie, dünkt mich, sey Popular-Philosophie; die Schul-Philosophie aber ein Spinnengewebe: die arme Fliege, die es umstrickt, verliert Blut und Leben."

16. See *GA* 1.8:276: "Ich trage in wissenschaftlich-philosophischen Vorlesungen dasselbe vor [as in his scientific writings and lectures]; aber ich versehe es mit ganz andern Beweisen."

17. See *GA* 1.8:278.

18. *GA* 2.8:416–20; *FW*10:312–14.

19. See *Nebenbemerkungen zu 1*, in *GA* 2.10:255.

20. Still quite common is the title "Urtheil und Seyn," of the first publication of the fragment in the Stuttgart edition of *Hölderlins Werke* (Stuttgart, 1961), 4:216–17. (See "On Judgment and Being," in H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770–1801* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1972].). This title draws on the wrong arrangement of the two-page manuscript, that is, recto is taken as verso and vice versa; see Michael Franz, "Hölderlins Logik. Zum Grundriß von 'Seyn Urtheil Möglichkeit,'" *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 25 (1986–87): 93–124.

21. See mainly *GA* 1.2:405.

22. See Fichte's letter of June 23, 1804, to a certain Appia, in *GA* 3.5:246–47.

23. *GA* 3.6:9: "Meine gedruckte Wißenschaftslehre trägt zu viele Spuren des Zeitraums, in dem sie geschrieben, und der Manier zu philosophiren, der sie der Zeit nach folgte."

24. See *Anweisung zum seligen Leben oder auch die Religionslehre*, in *GA* 1.9:101.

25. The quote is taken from the parallel text of this course provided by the second 1804 course, in *GA* 2.8:242–43n.

26. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Ultima Inquirenda: J. G. Fichtes letzte Bearbeitungen der Wissenschaftslehre Ende 1813/Anfang 1814*, ed. Reinhard Lauth (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), 138.

27. See "Zweite Einleitung," in *GA* 1.4:221–29, but also in the late *Wissenschaftslehre* 1811, in *GA* 2.12:381: "Die W.L. ist von der Untersuchung über diese Apperception ausgegangen; und durch die Lösung der Frage, was diese sey, u. warum sie nothwendig sey, entstanden."

28. See *Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, in *GA* 1.9:112; *FW* 5:272: "Sie, die Wissenschaft, geht über die Einsicht, dass schlechthin alles Mannigfaltige in dem Einen gegründet und auf dasselbe zurückzuführen sey, welche schon die Religion gewährt, hinaus zu der Einsicht des Wie dieses Zusammenhanges: und für sie wird genetisch, was für die Religion nur ein absolutes Factum ist. Die Religion ohne Wissenschaft, ist irgendwo ein blosser, demohngeachtet jedoch unerschütterlichen Glaube: die Wissenschaft hebt allen Glauben auf und verwandelt ihn in Schauen."

29. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 38.

30. See *GA* 1.9:122; *FW* 5:485: "Nur das metaphysische . . . macht seelig."

31. See *GA* 1.9:188; *FW* 5:568.

32. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 40.

33. Published in *EPW*, 97; *FW* 1:33.

34. See *GA* 1.9:70: "Ist also die wissenschaftlich philosophische Einsicht nie

vorhanden gewesen; auf welchem Wege ist denn Christus, – oder, falls bei diesem jemand einen wunderbaren, und übernatürlichen Ursprung annimmt, den ich hier nicht bestreiten will, – auf welchem Wege sind denn Christi Apostel, – auf welchem Wege sind denn alle folgenden, die bis auf unsere Zeiten hinab zu dieser Erkenntniß kamen, – zu ihr gekommen?”

35. An attempt at such a deduction can be found in Fichte's lectures *Die Principien der Gottes-, Sitten- und Rechtslehre* (1805).

36. See *GA* 1.9:112; *FW*5:472–73: “Das gottseelige und seelige Leben ist durch ihn zwar keinesweges bedingt; dennoch aber gehört die Anforderung, diese Wissenschaft in uns, und andern zu realisiren, in das Gebiet der höhern Moralität.”

37. See *FW*5:469: “Es [das Gesetz] strebt an . . . die qualitative und reale Idee selber.” What Fichte means by “real idea” he deals with mainly in his lectures *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* given in Berlin during winter 1804–5 and in his 1806 *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten, und seine Erscheinungen im Gebiete der Freiheit*.

38. See *FW*5:526.

39. See *GA* 1.9:101–2.

40. See *Sonnenklarer Bericht*, in *GA* 1.7:204.

41. See *Wissenschaftslehre Königsberg 1807*, in *GA* 2.10:116.

42. See *GA* 1.9:101; for this formula, see also *Wissenschaftslehre 1810*, in *GA* 2.11:603 and 615–16.

43. See *GA* 1.9:102; *FW*5:460.

44. See *GA* 1.9:102; *FW*5:460.

45. See *GA* 1.9:95; *FW*5:540: “Das Princip der Spaltung [kann] nicht unmittelbar in jenem Akt des göttlichen Daseyns fallen, sondern es muß *außer denselben* fallen; jedoch also, daß dieses Außer, einleuchte, als unmittelbar, mit jenem lebendigen Akte Verknüpft, und aus ihm nothwendig Folgend.”