III

Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

Editor's Preface

The winter of 1793–94 was for Fichte a period of philosophical discovery. Under the provocation of Aenesidemus's skeptical attack on Kant and Reinhold, Fichte had been forced to reexamine his own philosophical standpoint and to reconsider the entire issue of the nature and status of philosophy. It was in the course of this process of reconsideration that he hit upon what would prove to be the key ideas for his reconstruction of transcendental philosophy, namely, a clear appreciation of the actively self-constitutive character of the I; a resolve to construct a new, "scientific" system of transcendental philosophy along the lines anticipated by Reinhold, but taking as his starting point not the concept of representation, but rather that of the self-productive Act (*Tathandlung*) of the I; and finally, a new and deeper understanding of the relationship between the theoretical I (the "intellect") and the practical, striving I.

Following his initial, private efforts to develop these new insights (in the unpublished "Eigne Meditationen über ElementarPhilosophie/Practische Philosophie"), Fichte felt sufficiently confident to make a tentative public announcement of his new standpoint (in the *Aenesidemus* review). At the same time he realized that he had done no more than make a promising start. The substantial task of articulating the basic structure and working out the details of the new system still remained to be accomplished. It was at precisely this moment (January 1794) that Fichte received the unexpected invitation to assume Reinhold's vacated chair at Jena.[1] Flattered and delighted as he undoubtedly was by this marvelous

[1]For further information concerning Fichte's "discovery" during the winter of 1793–94 and concerning the first published hints of this discovery, see the editor's introduction and the preface to Section I.

and unexpected opportunity, he nevertheless made a serious effort to postpone his appointment to give himself a full year to develop his new system prior to assuming the post. This is the reason for the ambivalence of his carefully worded reply to the university's official invitation.

> To the extent that I have made any progress as an independent thinker, I have become more and more convinced that, . . . *thanks to the critical attention it has received,* philosophy has come very near to its lofty goal of being a science possessed of certainty—a goal which it has nevertheless not yet reached. One of the chief aims of the studies in which I am presently engaged (and to which I intended to dedicate the leisure I had obtained) was to determine whether this goal should be abandoned or what needed to be done in order to achieve it. Thanks to a fortunate stroke of luck, I have discovered—much sooner than I could have hoped—the path which, in my opinion, must lead in that direction. I have tried this path and believe it to be highly probable that it is the correct one. Had the road to another sort of activity not become open to me at this point, I would have devoted a few years of my life completely and exclusively to this project—one which can only be properly accomplished in a period of uninterrupted leisure. After making a rough estimate of the entire project, I calculate that it will be completely finished by Easter of 1795.
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> Apart from the interruption and perhaps the complete discontinuation of this project (even if it turns out to be nothing but a new experiment) there would be another inconvenience involved in my beginning my teaching duties by Easter of 1794. A teacher of philosophy has to have a system which (in his own view at least) is completely tenable. At the moment I have no system that fully satisfies me, and would thus be unable to live up to the high expectations of me which are raised by this honorable offer.[2]

When a postponement proved impossible, Fichte had no choice but to accelerate his systematic labors and devote his few remaining months in Zurich to developing his system as far as possible in the short time available. He also had to acknowledge the fact that "this new decision must alter my entire plan of studies, for from now on, instead of continuing with my dry speculations, I will have to plan to communicate them in my lectures."[3] And indeed, the first published version of his new system (viz., the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*) was nothing more than the published text of the course of "private"[4] lectures Fichte began giving only a few days after his arrival in Jena on May 18, 1794.

[2]Draft of a letter to C. G. Voigt, January 15, 1794 (see *AA* III, 2: 42–43).

[3]To K. A. Böttiger, February 4, 1794.

[4]As "Professor philosophiae ordinarius supernumerarius" Fichte received a small salary, for which he was, among other things, expected to deliver a series of free "public" lectures to the entire academic community. In addition to these public lectures, he also gave one or more courses of "private" lectures each semester, for which he was paid directly by the attending students.

As part of his preparation, Fichte undertook two projects during the spring. First, he accepted Lavater's timely invitation to deliver a series of lectures on transcendental philosophy.[5] Second, he agreed to write a short "prospectus" of his new system. This text was to be published and circulated in Jena prior to his arrival and was intended as an "advertisement for himself" and "invitation" to prospective students. The idea of writing such a "prospectus" was first suggested by Fichte's Jena friend and confidential correspondent, K. A. Böttinger, who had proposed the idea in response to Fichte's concern about assuming his new position before a published version of his new system had become available. Fichte responded with enthusiasm to Böttinger's suggestion. especially when he learned that he would be able to substitute the projected German-language prospectus for the formal Latin "disputation" normally required of newly appointed professors.[6]

Initially Fichte envisioned his "invitational work" as a short summary of his new standpoint and, accordingly, planned to revise for this purpose the lectures he was then delivering in Zurich.[7] Writing to Gottlieb Hufeland on March 8, 1794, he stated that his prospectus "will establish the *concept* of philosophy in an entirely new manner and will develop the first principles of philosophy up to Reinhold's Principle of Consciousness—for which it will furnish the proof—and will also perhaps establish the first principles of an entirely new sort of practical philosophy." At some point during the next month, however, Fichte altered his conception of this project. Rather than a survey of his still-evolving system, he prepared instead a far more general treatise on "the concept of philosophy." Most of the final text was, accordingly, devoted to matters of philosophical methodology and to a general discussion of how philosophy might become a science. The promised presentation of the first principles of Fichte's new system was relegated to a very brief and schematic final section, whereas the promised deduction of the Principle of Consciousness did not appear at all.

[5]These are the same Zurich lectures discussed in the preface to Section II.

[6]Fichte to Böttiger, February 4, 1794. Böttiger first proposed the German-language "prospectus" in a no longer existent letter to Fichte written during the second half of January 1794. Fichte was officially notified that he could substitute a German-language prospectus for the Latin disputation in a letter from G. C. Voigt, February 17, 1794.

[7]In this letter of March 1, 1794, to Böttiger, Fichte reiterates his enthusiasm for writing a German-language prospectus of his system and thanks his friend for his advice in this matter, adding, "I had materials for this purpose almost completed. For this purpose I would like to have printed at once some lectures which I am currently delivering before some of the leading intellectuals and statesmen of Zurich, with Lavater at the forefront. These lectures concern the concept of philosophy as well as the first principles of the same, while at the same time providing an overview of my new system." This same letter contains Fichte's very first reference to his new system as *Wissenschaftslehre* (Theory of Scientific Knowledge), a name he says he chose in order to distinguish his system from "mere '*love of knowledge*' or '*philosophy.*'"

Unlike most of Fichte's subsequent publications, which were printed from hurriedly prepared lecture manuscripts, *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* was carefully composed and revised, and was intended for the general philosophical reader (and not merely for the use of students attending Fichte's lectures). He devoted unusual care to the style and tone of this work and expressed general satisfaction with the results.[8] The text was sent to the printer by late April and was available in Jena by the second week of May.

The title Fichte chose for his prospectus is significant, for it marks the first appearance in print of the term *Wissenschaftslehre.* However, as Fichte himself carefully noted, *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* was not meant to be a part of the new system itself or even a summary or overview of the same. Instead, it is a collection of loosely related reflections upon the character of philosophy in general, plus a few vague hints about the author's new system. Like some of Fichte's later writings (most notably the two familiar introductions of 1797), it is a text *about* the *Wissenschaftslehre,* and thus does not constitute a part thereof. To employ the terminology proposed by Fichte himself in the preface to the second edition, it is intended to be a work of "critique" rather than a contribution to "philosophy" (or "metaphysics"). The task of "critique" is to investigate the possibility and meaning of metaphysics, while at the same time laying down the method and rules of the same. As Fichte put it in an interesting, unpublished note of 1794–95: "There can be a doctrine of transcendental philosophy, or *Wissenschaftslehre.* [There can also be] a *theory thereof,* which deals with issues such as how it [viz., the *Wissenschaftslehre*] is to be achieved and with what right, that is, with the sort of *validity* it has. The former is based upon the latter. My book *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre.* Parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason.*"[9]

Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre is of enduring interest to students of the *Wissenschaftslehre* precisely because of its status as "critique." It is Fichte's first and most sustained attempt to philosophize about his own philosophy and to state the goals and methods of the same in clear, nontechnical language. Thus it is indeed, as Fichte himself suggests in the preface to the second edition, an excellent introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre.* Here, more clearly than anywhere else, Fichte explains what he understands by the terms *science* and *system,* as well as

[8]In his letter to Böttinger, April 2, 1794, Fichte mentions the care he is devoting to writing his prospectus and reports upon his efforts "to find an easy and graceful tone to express the principles of a speculation which really goes a good deal deeper than Kant's, but to communicate it in a manner as if it were not a profound speculation." See too Fichte's letter of July 1794 to his old friend F. A. Weisshuhn, responding to the latter's praise of the prose style of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre.*

[9]From Fichte's *Nachgelassene Schriften zu Platners "Philosophischen Aphorismen," 1794–1812.* In *AA* II, 4: 53.

how he understands the relationship between science and systematic form.

How is science possible at all? To answer such a question, says Fichte, is the task of a "science of science itself" or "Theory of Scientific Knowledge" (*Wissenschaftslehre*). But is such a "science of science itself" *itself* possible, and if so, what will it be like? This is an issue for "critique" to decide, and thus an analysis of the concept of the "science of science" forms the main topic of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre.* This analysis reveals the need for an "absolutely certain" first principle for the proposed new science, a demand that provokes a series of important reflections upon the character of "first principles" in general and "absolutely certain" ones in particular. Further reflection on the concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* leads to a consideration of the relationship between its form and its content, as well as to a consideration of the problems involved in demonstrating the consistency, uniqueness, and completeness of the proposed science of science. Other issues treated in this preliminary critique include the relationship between the proposed science of science and the other, special sciences, including logic, and the relationship between such a science and the system of human knowledge itself.

Some of the most interesting portions of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* are devoted to explaining the difference between any act of empirical consciousness (including empirical self-consciousness) and that Act of absolute self-positing expressed in the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*—an Act of which, Fichte admits, we may never actually be (directly) conscious at all. To be sure, philosophy must deal with "representations," and the act of representation is the "highest act" in which the philosopher as such can engage. But from this it does not follow that representation is the highest act of the human mind. Against Reinhold, Fichte insists that we can and must form the concept of a still higher act and that the principle expressing this highest act of the mind will be the required first principle of our new science. Fichte emphasizes the difference between philosophical reflection and ordinary (or "natural") consciousness and calls special attention to that "free act" of reflection and abstraction with which the former must begin.

Finally, the brief "Hypothetical Division of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" which concludes the first edition deserves to be better known. For even though it is in most respects superseded by the subsequently published detailed presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* it nevertheless offers an instructive overview of the general structure and organizational strategy of Fichte's Jena system. For all of its brevity it sheds valuable light on such problematic issues as the relationship between the "theoretical" and "practical" portions of the system and the distinctive nature of each.

The contemporary reader, no less than the prospective students of

1794, will discover much of interest in *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre.* It is an essential document for understanding what Fichte was trying to accomplish in his best-known work, *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre.* Moreover, by explaining what he considers to be the task and method of any legitimate philosophical system, Fichte provides his readers with criteria and evaluative guidelines which they are encouraged to apply to his own system. Indeed, he expliticly exhorts his readers to take an open-minded, experimental attitude toward his works: to test them by the standards he himself here proposes.

Though Fichte's understanding of his own system underwent rapid change and development, he continued to recognize the unique value of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* and authorized a second edition in 1798. Indeed, it continued for years to have a special claim on the affections of its author, who considered it to be the most accessible of all of his technical writings. Thus, he warned in 1797, "for those who have failed to understand my easiest speculative writing, that is, the one concerning the concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* I cannot write anything within the field of speculation which will be easier to understand."[10]

The text of *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie* upon which the translation is based and to which the volume and page numbers in the margins refer is *SW,* I: 29–81 (*AA* I, 2: 107–63). Like the *SW* text, the translation follows the text of the second edition, which differs in many—mostly very minor—ways from the first edition. (The differences are clearly indicated in the *AA* text, which is based on the first edition.) Most of the changes concern matters as minor as orthography and punctuation, and very few of them are of any philosophical interest. Where the changes seem to involve any significant differences of meaning, the first edition text is translated in the notes. The editor of *SW,* I. H. Fichte, had access to his father's personal library and included some of Fichte's marginal comments to *Concerning the Concept of Wissenschaftslehre* in the *SW* edition of the text. These comments, which are of uneven interest, are also translated in the notes. The most significant changes in the second edition were the addition of a new preface, the omission of the brief "Hypothetical Division of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" which concluded the first edition, and a new appendix reprinting two negative book reviews written by unsympathetic critics—

[10]"Annalen des philosophischen Tons," *SW,* II: 481n. Compare this with the nearly identical comment from the preface to the first edition of *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (*SW,* I: 88; *H/L,* p. 91): "so far as the work as a whole [viz., *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*] is complained of, I confess from the start that in the field of speculation I shall never be able to write anything that will be intelligible to those who have found it beyond them."

the first, a review of the first edition of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* and *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre;* the second, a review of Schelling's "On the Possibility of a Form for All Philosophy." Both prefaces, as well as the "Hypothetical Division," are translated. The appended reviews have not been translated.

Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* or, of So-called "Philosophy"

I,29

Preface to the First Edition

Reading the modern skeptics, in particular *Aenesidemus*[1] and the excellent writings of Maimon,[2] has convinced the author of this treatise of something which already appeared to be most probable, namely, that despite the recent efforts of the most perspicacious men, philosophy has not yet been raised to the level of a clearly evident science. The author believes that he has found the reason for this, and believes that he has discovered a simple way to satisfy completely all those very well-grounded demands which the skeptics make upon the Critical Philosophy, and in a manner which at the same time provides a way to unite the conflicting claims of the dogmatic and critical systems, just as the Critical Philosophy

The title page of the original edition includes the note "an invitation to the lectures on this science by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, designated professor at the University of Jena."

[1]*Aenesidemus, or Concerning the Foundation of the Elementary Philosophy Propounded in Jena by Professor Reinhold, including a Defense of Skepticism against the Pretensions of the Critique of Reason* (1792). This anonymously published defense of "Humean skepticism" by G. E. Schulze was reviewed by Fichte in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in February 1794. For further information, see the translation of Fichte's review, Section I, above, as well as the editor's preface to the same.

[2]Salomon Maimon (1752–1800) was one of the most original early critics and interpreters of Kant. In his own philosophical writings, Maimon proposed to recast the Critical Philosophy in a self-consciously skeptical mode, dispensing entirely with any vestiges of the doctrine of things in themselves. Maimon's "empirical skepticism" accounts for empirical representations entirely in terms of the unconscious spontaneity of consciousness. Fichte was well acquainted with and profoundly impressed by Maimon's works, which had a significant influence on his own revision of transcendental idealism. Fichte frequently expressed his admiration for Maimon's achievement. For example, in his letter of March–April 1795 to K. L. Reinhold, he wrote: "My respect for Maimon's talent knows no bounds. I firmly believe that he has completely overturned the entire Kantian philosophy as it has been understood by everyone until now, including you, *and I am prepared to prove it*"

unifies the conflicting claims of the various dogmatic systems.* The author is not in the habit of speaking about things that he has not yet accomplished, and, in the present case, would either have carried out his
I.30 intentions or kept forever silent on the subject, were it not for the fact that the present occasion seems to demand that he render an account, both of how he has employed his leisure until now and of the work to which he intends to dedicate himself in the future.

The investigation which follows pretends to no more than hypothetical validity, though from this it by no means follows that the author is able to base his assertions only upon unprovable hypotheses, nor that they are not the results of a more profound and sound system. Admittedly, it will be years before I can promise to be able to lay this system before the public in a worthy form. Nevertheless, I still expect that people will be fair enough to postpone disputation until they have examined the whole system.

The primary object of this work is to permit students at the university to which I have been called to decide whether to entrust themselves to my guidance along that path which leads to the supreme science, and to allow them to judge whether they can entertain the hope that I can shed enough light on this path to enable them to follow it without stumbling dangerously. Its second object is to solicit the judgment of my patrons and friends regarding my undertaking.

The remarks which follow are intended for those readers who belong to neither of the above classes.

The author remains convinced that no human understanding can advance further than that boundary on which Kant, especially in the *Critique of Judgment,* stood, and which he declared to be the final boundary of finite knowing—but without ever telling us specifically where it lies. I realize that I will never be able to say anything which has not

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(translated in full below, Section X, no. 12). Fichte corresponded with Maimon for several years and sent him a copy of the first edition of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre.* The writings of Maimon that most influenced Fichte were *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie* (1790); *Streiferein im Gebiete der Philosophie* (1793); *Die Kategorien der Aristotles* (1794); and *Versuch einer neuen Logik* (1794). In English, see the extract from Maimon's *Letters of Philaletes to Aenesidemus,* translated by di Giovanni, in di Giovanni and Harris, *Between Kant and Hegel,* pp. 159–99. See too, Samuel Atlas, *From Critical to Speculative Idealism: The Philosophy of Salomon Maimon* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).

*The real controversy between criticism and dogmatism concerns *the connection between our knowledge and a thing in itself.* In this controversy the skeptics have correctly allied themselves with the dogmatists and with healthy common sense (which certainly deserves to be considered, not of course as a judge, but as a witness called to give testimony). Some future *Wissenschaftslehre* might well be able to settle this controversy by showing the following: that our knowledge is by no means connected directly through representation with things in themselves, but is connected with them only indirectly, through *feeling;* that in any case things are *represented* merely *as appearances,* whereas they are *felt as things in themselves;* that no representations at all would be possible without feeling; but that things in themselves can be recognized only *subjectively,* i.e., insofar as they affect our feeling.

already—directly or indirectly and with more or less clarity—been indicated by Kant. I leave to future ages the task of fathoming the genius of
I,31 this man who, often as if inspired from on high, drove philosophical judgment so decisively from the standpoint at which he found it toward its final goal. I am just as sincerely convinced that nothing, following Kant's spirit of genius, could contribute more to philosophy than Reinhold's[3] systematic spirit, and I believe that I recognize the honorable place which Reinhold's Elementary Philosophy will always be accorded, despite the further progress which philosophy must necessarily make under the guidance of whomever it may be. I have no malicious wish to undervalue or depreciate any service at all. I realize that every step which science has ever attained had first to be climbed before a higher one could be reached, and I really take no personal credit for the fortunate accident that I am called to work after excellent workmen have gone before me. Furthermore, I know that in science merit is based not on the luck of discovery, but rather on the integrity of the search—which is something in regard to which everyone can only judge and reward himself. This is not said for the benefit of those who are great men and those who would emulate them, but rather for the benefit of those other, not so great, men. It was not intended for anyone who finds it superfluous.

In addition to these serious people, there are also facetious ones who warn philosophers not to make themselves ridiculous by raising exaggerated exectations regarding their science. I have no wish to judge whether such persons are really laughing from their hearts, out of inborn joviality, or whether there may not be among them some who are simply forcing themselves to laugh, as a means of spoiling for unsophisticated inquirers an undertaking which they themselves—for comprehensible reasons—do not enjoy witnessing.* Since, to the best of my knowledge, I have not yet provided nourishment for the humor of these persons by raising such high expectations, then perhaps I may request them to hold their laughter for the present and to wait until this enterprise has formally miscarried or been abandoned—not for the sake
I,32 of philosophers and still less for that of philosophy, but for their own sake. They may then ridicule our faith in mankind (to which they themselves belong) and our hopes regarding mankind's great abilities. Then, whenever they require consolation, they may repeat their consoling maxim: "Mankind is beyond help. This is how it always has been and always will be."

[3]K. L. Reinhold (1758–1823) was the previous occupant of Fichte's chair at Jena. Concerning Reinhold's systematic revision of Kant, the so-called Elementary Philosophy, see the editor's preface to Fichte's *Aenesidemus* review, above, Section I.

**Malis rident alienis.*[4]

[4]"They smile at the misfortunes of others." Freely quoted from Horace, *Satires*, II: 3, 72.

Preface to the Second Edition

This little book was out of print, and I needed it in order to refer to it in my lectures. Furthermore, with the exception of some essays in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten,*[5] it is the only work so far in which the manner of philosophizing in the *Wissenschaftslehre* is itself an object of philosophizing, and therefore it serves as an introduction to this system. For these reasons I have arranged for a new edition.

Despite its specific title and contents, even the intention and the nature of this treatise have been frequently misunderstood. Thus, on the occasion of this second edition, it is necessary to do what I thought quite unnecessary in the first edition: to clarify these points specifically in a preface.

One can philosophize about metaphysics itself (which does not have to be a theory of the so-called things in themselves, but may be a genetic deduction of what we find in our consciousness). One can embark on investigations into the possibility, the real meaning, and the rules governing such a science. And this is very advantageous for the cultivation of the science of metaphysics itself. The philosophical name for a system of this sort of inquiry is "critique." This, anyway, is all that ought to be called by that name. Critique itself is not metaphysics, but lies beyond
I,33 metaphysics. It is related to metaphysics in exactly the same way that metaphysics is related to the ordinary point of view of natural understanding. Metaphysics explains the ordinary point of view, and metaphysics is itself explained by critique. The object of genuine critique is philosophical thinking. If philosophy itself is also to be called "critical," this can only mean that it criticizes natural thinking. A pure critique is intermixed with no metaphysical investigations. The Kantian critique for example, which presents itself as a *critique,* is by no means pure, but is itself largely metaphysics. Sometimes it criticizes philosophical thinking, and sometimes it criticizes natural thinking—which, taken by itself, would be no cause for reproach, if only the distinction between the two kinds of critique had been clearly indicated, as well as the kind to which each individual investigation belonged. A pure metaphysics, as such, includes no additional critique beyond that critique with which one is supposed to have come to terms in advance. Accordingly, none of the previous versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* which present themselves as metaphysics, are pure metaphysics—nor could they have been, since this unaccustomed way of thinking could not have been expected to gain a hearing without the critical pointers which accompanied it.

[5]Viz., the first and second introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1797). In *SW,* I: 417–518; *AA* I, 4:183–269 (translated in *H/L,* pp. 3–85).

The nature of the following treatise is thus precisely indicated. It is a part of the critique of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* but it is by no means the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself, nor is it a part of the *Wissenschaftslehre.*

It is, I said, a part of this critique: specifically, it describes the relation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to ordinary knowledge and to those sciences which are possible from the standpoint of ordinary knowledge, and it describes this in terms of the content of knowledge. But there is another approach which contributes greatly toward forming a correct concept of our system, toward guarding against misunderstanding, and toward providing a means of entry into this system: namely, a consideration of the relation of transcendental thinking to ordinary thinking in terms of
I,34 its form, that is, a description of the point of view from which the transcendental philosopher views all knowledge and of his state of mind when he engages in speculation. The author believes that he has explained himself with some clarity on these points in his two "Introductions" to a new presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (in the previously mentioned journal, 1797)—especially in the Second Introduction. A science and the critique of that science support and explain each other reciprocally. It will not become easy to render a systematic and complete account of the procedure of the *Wissenschaftslehre* until it is possible to provide a pure exposition of this science itself. Until such time as he himself or someone else can complete this job, the author asks the public's forgiveness for the preliminary and incomplete character of this work.

All that has been altered in this second edition are a few phrases and expressions which were not sufficiently precise. Some footnotes which embroiled the system in still avoidable polemical quarrels have been omitted—as has the entire third section ("Hypothetical Division of the *Wissenschaftslehre*"). This third section had from the beginning only a temporary purpose, and its contents have since received much clearer and more ample expression in the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre.*[6]

Since I am reissuing the treatise in which I first announced my system, it is perhaps not improper to add some remarks concerning the history of the reception this system has received so far. Few persons adopted the reasonable measure of keeping temporarily silent and then reflecting a bit. Most betrayed their stupid astonishment at the new phenomenon and greeted it with idiotic laughter and tasteless ridicule. The more good-natured tried to excuse the author by treating the whole thing as nothing but a bad joke, while others, in all seriousness, speculated that the author might soon be committed "to certain charitable institutions."

[6]*Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95). In *SW,* I: 83–328; *AA* I, 2:249–451 (translated in *H/L,* pp. 89–286).

It would be a most instructive contribution to the history of the human spirit for someone to recount the reception received by various philo-
I,35 sophical propositions upon their first appearance. It is a genuine loss that we no longer possess the first astonished judgment of contemporaries concerning some of the old systems. But there is still time to assemble a collection of such first reviews of the Kantian system—including, at the head of the list, the one which appeared in the renowned Göttingen *Gelehrten-Zeitung*[7]—in order to preserve them as curiosities for future ages. I myself wish to undertake this task for the *Wissenschaftslehre,* and, as a first step, I am appending to this treatise two of the most remarkable hostile reviews of it.[8] Naturally, I append them without any additional comment. The philosophical public, which is now better acquainted with my system, requires no such comment, and for the authors of these reviews it is a sufficient misfortune to have said what they did.

Despite its terrible reception, this system nevertheless soon found a fate happier than that which has fallen to the lot of any other system. It has been adopted enthusiastically by several brilliant young thinkers, and, following long and mature examination, a celebrated veteran of philosophical literature has given it his approval.[9] From the united efforts of so many excellent minds it is to be expected that this system will soon be described from many different angles and that it will be widely applied and will achieve its aim of reforming philosophy and thereby affecting scientific practice as such. There are similarities between the first reception of this system and the reception of the different and immediately preceding presentation of the same system—or, as some experts believe, of the different, immediately preceding system.[10] (I have good reasons for claiming that my system is simply a different version of the preceding
I,36 one, but I hereby solemnly renounce any further dispute over this point.) But despite their similar receptions (though, as is to be expected from the Kantians, the reception given to the *Wissenschaftslehre* turned out to be

[7]The hostile review to which Fichte here refers was a review of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* which appeared in the January 19, 1782, issue of the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen,* a journal Fichte believed to be particularly hostile to his own writings as well.

[8]The two reviews (which are not included in this translation) are J. S. Beck's review of Fichte's *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* and *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre,* which was published in February 1795 in the *Annalen der Philosophie und des philosophischen Geist* and an anonymous review of F. W. J. Schelling's *Ueber die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt,* which appeared in the January 9, 1795, issue of the same journal. It is interesting to note that Fichte treats the review of Schelling's book as a review of the *Wissenschaftslehre.*

[9]The "celebrated veteran of philosophical literature" to whom Fichte refers is K. L. Reinhold, whose (temporary) conversion to the standpoint of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* was made public in a long and laudatory review of Fichte's writings, published in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in January 1798.

[10]I.e., Kant's system.

much more coarse and vulgar than the one given to Kant's writings), it is to be hoped that the two—systems or versions of the same system—will not share the same result: the generation of a swarm of slavish, brutal imitators. One would think that the sad, immediately preceding affair would deter the Germans from taking up the yoke of slavish imitation twice in such close succession. In addition, the form which has so far been selected for presenting this theory—a form which shuns the fixed letter—appears to have protected its inner spirit against such thoughtless imitators. Furthermore, it is not to be expected that the friends of the *Wissenschaftslehre* would eagerly welcome such homage.

This system is still indescribably far from completion. The foundation has scarcely been laid so far. The erection of the building has barely begun, and I wish all of my writings up to now to be considered merely as preliminary works. Previously I feared that, for better or for worse, I would have to bequeath my system to some future age which might be able to understand it, and that I would be forced to hand it down in the dead letters of that particular form in which it first presented itself to me. But now I can embrace the solid hope of gaining agreement and advice even from my own contemporaries—the hope of seeing my system assume a universal form through the shared labor of many persons and the hope of bequeathing it as something living within the spirit and the manner of thinking of my age. This hope has altered the plan which I had when I first announced my system. To be specific, I will for the present proceed no further with the systematic elaboration of this system; instead I will first try to elaborate more fully what has already been discovered and to make it completely clear and obvious to every impartial person. A first step in this direction has already been made in the previously mentioned journal, and I will proceed with this project to the extent that my more immediate academic duties permit. I have heard
I,37 from several sources that many persons have found these essays[11] illuminating, and if the public attitude toward the new theory has not been more generally altered, this might well be due to the fact that the journal in question seems not to have a very wide circulation. With the same aim in mind, just as soon as time permits, I intend to publish a new attempt at a purely and strictly systematic presentation of the foundations of the *Wissenschaftslehre.*

Jena, Michaelmas, 1798

[11] I.e., the two previously mentioned "Introductions" which appeared in the *Philosophisches Journal* in 1797. These were intended as introductions to the *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* to which Fichte later alludes. Only the first part of the announced "New Presentation" was ever published.

I,38

Part I
Concerning the General Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

§1. Hypothetical Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

The surest way to unite divided parties is by starting with something on which they agree.

Philosophy is *a science.* All descriptions of philosophy are as unanimous on this point as they differ regarding the *object* of this science. Now what if the source of this lack of unanimity were simply that the concept of science itself, which they all recognize philosophy to be, was not completely developed? And what if the determination of this single feature on which everyone agrees were sufficient to determine the concept of philosophy itself?

A science possesses systematic form. All the propositions of a science are joined together in a single first principle, in which they unite to form a whole. This is also generally admitted, but is this enough to exhaust the concept of science?

Suppose that someone were to base a system upon a groundless and indemonstrable proposition: the proposition, for example, that there are in the air creatures with human desires, passions, and concepts, but with ethereal bodies. And suppose further—something which in itself is entirely possible—that he were to erect upon this proposition an ever so systematic natural history of these ethereal spirits. Would we recognize
I,39 such a system to be a science, no matter how strictly inferences are made within it and no matter how closely its individual parts are linked to each other? On the other hand, when a person states a single theorem—a craftsman, perhaps, who asserts that when a pillar is erected at a right angle to a horizontal surface it stands perpendicular and that, no matter how far it is extended, it will never incline toward either side (which he may have first heard someone say and later discovered to be true in diverse experiences)—everyone will admit that he possesses scientific knowledge of what he asserts, even though he cannot systematically demonstrate his proposition from the principles of geometry.[12] Now

[12]Here, as elsewhere, the translation follows the text of the second edition. The text of this passage in the first edition includes the additional example of historical knowledge and reads as follows: "On the other hand, when a person states a single theorem or fact—a craftsman, perhaps, who asserts that the perpendicular to a horizontal line forms a right angle on both sides, or the uneducated farmer who says that the Jewish historian Josephus lived during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem—everyone will admit that these men possess scientific knowledge of what they assert, even though the former cannot systematically demonstrate his proposition from the first principles of geometry nor the latter provide a methodologically correct substantiation of the historical accuracy of his statement. Both have merely taken the matter on trust and faith." Throughout the discussion which follows, the first edition repeats the example of the farmer's historical knowledge every time the craftsman's geometrical knowledge is mentioned.

why do we refuse to call that sound system which rests upon an unproven and unprovable proposition a science? And why do we call "scientific" the knowledge of the second man, which, as he understands it, is connected with no system?

The reason is undoubtedly because the former system, despite its methodologically correct form, contains nothing which could be known; whereas the latter, which altogether lacks a methodologically correct form, asserts something which the man really *does know* and *can know.*

It appears to follow that the essence of science lies in the character of its content and in the relation of this content to the consciousness of the person said to "know" something.[13] Thus systematic form seems to be something merely incidental to science—not its aim, but merely the means to this aim.

We may provisionally consider the matter in the following way: Suppose that for some reason the human mind were able to know only very little with certainty, and that regarding everything else it could entertain only opinions, guesses, suspicions, and arbitrary assumptions. And suppose too, and again, for whatever reason, that it really could not rest content with knowledge which is either so limited or so uncertain. In this
I,40 case its sole means for expanding its knowledge and making it more certain would be by comparing what is uncertain with what is certain and then inferring the certainty or uncertainty of the former from its equivalence or inequivalence (if I may make provisional use of these terms until I have time to explain them) to the latter. If an uncertain proposition were the equivalent of one that is *certain,* then it could be safely assumed that it would be certain too. If the uncertain proposition were opposed by one that is certain, then we would know that the uncertain proposition would be false. The mind would thus be insured against being deceived any further by the false proposition. It would be freed from error, but it would not have gained truth.

I will make myself clearer. A science is supposed to be something unified and whole. For a person who lacks any systematic acquaintance with geometry, the proposition that a pillar erected at a right angle to a horizontal surface is perpendicular is without doubt a single whole, and to this extent it is scientific knowledge.

But we also consider geometry as a whole to be one science, though it contains many more propositions in addition to this one. Now how and by what means do a number of propositions, which in themselves differ greatly from each other, become *one* science, become one and the same whole?

[13]In the first edition, this sentence reads: "It follows that the essence of science lies in the character of its content, which—at least for the person who is supposed to be acquainted with the science—must be something certain."

This undoubtedly occurs because the individual propositions were not scientific propositions by themselves, but only became scientific in the context of the whole—through their position within and relation to the whole. But merely by connecting parts we can never produce anything which is not already present in one of the parts of the whole. So if among the propositions which were bound together there had not been one which was certain, then the whole which was produced by binding these propositions together would not be certain either.

Consequently, at least one proposition has got to be certain, and this proposition then, so to speak, communicates its certainty to the other
I,41 propositions: so that if and insofar as the first proposition is certain, then a second proposition is too; and if and insofar as this second one is certain, then a third one is, etc. In this manner several propositions, which are perhaps very different in themselves, would come to share one common certainty, and thus they would constitute only one science, since they would *all* have *the same* certainty.

We have just referred to a proposition (we have assumed that there is only one such) as purely and simply *certain.* Now this proposition cannot derive its certainty merely from its connection with the other propositions. On the contrary, since nothing can arise from the union of several parts which is present in none of those parts, this proposition must be certain previous to its association with the others. But all the other propositions must derive their certainty from this proposition. *It* has to be certain and established in advance of all connection with other propositions. None of the other propositions have to be certain in advance; they all become certain and are established for the first time through this association.

This also makes it obvious that the assumption we have been making is the only correct one and that in each science there can be only one proposition that is certain and established prior to the connection between the propositions. Were there several such propositions, then either they would have no connection at all with the other proposition that is certain and established prior to the connection, or else they would be connected to it. In the first case they would not then be part of the same whole, but would constitute one or more separate wholes. But the only way in which propositions are supposed to be connected to each other is by sharing a common certainty, so that if one is certain then another one must also be certain, and if one is uncertain then the other one must also be uncertain; and all that is supposed to determine the connection between the two propositions is the relation of the certainty of the one to the certainty of the other. But a proposition which possesses its own certainty independently of the other propositions could not be connected with them in this manner. If its certainty is independent then it remains certain even if the others are not. Consequently, such a proposi-

tion would not be connected via certainty with the other propositions at all. A proposition of this sort, one which is certain prior to and independently of the association with others, is termed a *first principle.*[14] Every science requires a first principle. In fact, if we consider the innermost
I,42 character of science, a science could well consist of only one proposition, a proposition which is certain in itself (though naturally it would not be called a "first principle" in this case, since nothing else would be based upon it). Furthermore, a science can have no more than one first principle, for if it had more than one it would be several sciences rather than one.

In addition to that proposition which is certain prior to the connection with others, a science may also contain other propositions, which are recognized as certain only because of their connection with the first principle and are recognized to be certain only in the same way and to the same degree that the first principle is recognized to be certain. As was previously indicated, this connection between propositions is established by showing that if proposition *A* is certain, then proposition *B* must also be certain, and that if proposition *B* is certain, then proposition *C* must also be, etc. Connection of this sort is called the "systematic form" of the whole (i.e., that whole which originates from the individual parts). What is the point of connecting propositions in this way? This is undoubtedly not done merely in order to demonstrate virtuosity in the art of connecting, but rather in order to confer certainty upon propositions which lack it. Systematic form is, consequently, not the aim of science, but is an incidental means toward the achievement of this aim, a means which can be employed only when a science consists of several propositions. Far from being the essence of science, systematic form is merely one of its incidental properties. Science may be imagined as a building whose main object is soundness. The foundation is sound, and thus once the foundation has been laid this main purpose would be accomplished. But one cannot live in a mere foundation, which by itself provides protection against neither the willful attack of the enemy nor the unwilled attacks of the weather; so one adds side walls and a roof above them. Every part of the building is attached to the foundation and to the other parts, and in this way the entire building becomes sound. But nobody constructs a sound building merely in order to have an opportunity to attach things to each other; one attaches things to each other in order to make the building sound, and the building is sound to the extent that all of its parts rest upon a sound foundation.

The foundation is sound. It itself is based not upon some additional
I,43 foundation, but rather upon the solid earth. Upon what then do we

[14]"ein Grundsatz."

propose to base the foundation of our scientific structure? The first principles of our systems should and must be certain in advance. Their certainty cannot be demonstrated within the systems themselves; on the contrary, every proof which is possible within these systems presupposes the certainty of these first principles. If *these first principles* are certain then of course everything that is derived from them is also certain: *but from what is their own certainty derived?*

After we have answered this question, will we not be faced with a new, quite distinct one? In the construction of our theoretical structures we wish to infer in the following manner: *if* the first principle is certain, then another specific proposition is certain too. What is the basis for this "then"? What is the basis for this necessary connection between a proposition and a first principle, thanks to which the one is supposed to turn out to be just as certain as the other? What are the conditions for this kind of connection, and how do we know *that* they are the conditions and that they are the *exclusive* and *sole* conditions? And how is it that we ever come to assume that there is a necessary connection between different propositions and that this connection is governed by a unique and exhaustive set of conditions?

In short, how can *the certainty of the first principle itself* be established? And what is *the warrant for that specific kind of inference by which we infer the certainty of other propositions from the certainty of the first principle?*

That aspect of the first principle which is to be communicated to all the other propositions within a science I term the *inner content* of the first principle and of the science as such. That manner in which this inner content is to be communicated from the first principle to the other propositions I term the *form* of the science. The question, therefore, is this: How are the form and content of a science possible at all, that is, how is science possible?

It would take a science to answer these questions: *the science of science as such.*

Prior to the inquiry we cannot say whether or not it will be possible to
I,44 answer this question, that is, we cannot determine in advance whether our knowledge in its totality has a recognizable and sound foundation, or whether (at least *for us*) it rests upon nothing at all, no matter how closely its individual parts are linked together. But if it turns out that our knowledge does have a foundation for us, then this question must be answerable, and there must be a science within which it is answered. And if there is such a science, then our knowledge has a recognizable foundation. Consequently, in advance of the inquiry we can say nothing about whether our knowledge is well founded or is groundless. The possibility of the required science can be demonstrated only by its actuality.

It is arbitrary what name we give to such a (still merely problematic)

science. But suppose that it could be shown that, in the wake of all previous experience, the field which remains available for scientific cultivation is already occupied by the appropriate sciences and that there appears to be only one uncultivated plot remaining, namely, the one marked out for the science of science as such. And suppose, furthermore, that under a familiar name ("philosophy") one discovers the idea of a science, that is, the idea of something which wishes to be or to become a science, but which cannot decide where it should take root. In this case it would not be improper to direct it toward the empty plot we have discovered. It is immaterial whether or not people have always meant precisely this by the word "philosophy." Afterward, this science (if philosophy ever becomes a science) will be justified in casting off a few names which it has previously assumed out of (a by no means exaggerated) modesty: the names "esoteric amusement," "hobby," and "dilettantism."[15] The nation which discovered this science would deserve to give it a name in its own language,* in which case it could be called
I,45 simply "science," or "Theory of Scientific Knowledge" [that is, *Wissenschaftslehre*]. And accordingly, what has previously been called "philosophy" would be "the science of science as such."

[15]"den Namen einer Kennerei, einer Liebhaberei, eines Dilettantism."

*This nation would also deserve to coin in its language the other technical expressions to be employed in the science. Thereby this language itself, as well as the nation which speaks it, would gain a decisive superiority over all other languages and nations.

[Additional remark in the second edition:]

Given an arbitrarily chosen fundamental term (for every language must begin with something arbitrary), there is even a system of philosophical terminology which, in respect to all of its derived parts, is necessary and must be proven to be so by proceeding in an orderly fashion and in accordance with the laws governing the metaphorical designation of transcendental concepts. Philosophy, which in respect to its concept is something valid for all reason, would consequently become something quite national in respect of its terminology—something selected from the inmost character of the nation that speaks the language in question and, in turn, something which perfects the national language by making it as specific as possible. However, this systematic-national terminology cannot be instituted in advance of the completion of the system of reason itself, both in its entire scope and in the total development of all of its parts. Terminological specification is the last task for philosophical judgment, a task which, taken in its entire scope, may easily be too great for a single human lifetime.

This explains why the author has not yet accomplished what he seems to have promised in the above remark, but has instead made use of whatever technical terms he found available, whether from German, Latin, or Greek. For the author all terminology is merely provisional, until such time as it can be established in a universal and permanently valid manner (whether this task be allotted to the author himself or to someone else). For the same reason I have devoted little attention to terminology as such and have avoided fixed definitions. And for the same reason I have not made any personal use of some apt remarks which others have made concerning this point (e.g., a proposed distinction between "dogmatism" and "dogmaticism"), since such remarks are only relevant to the present state of science. I will continue to make use of circumlocution and multiplicity of expression in order to give my presentations the clarity and specificity necessary to fulfill my intentions in each particular instance.

§2. Development of the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

One should not infer anything from definitions. This means either that one should not, without any additional reason, infer that because one is able without any contradiction to conceive that a thing which exists
I,46 quite independently of our description of it has a certain property, that this property has to be encountered in the real thing. Or else it means that in the case of a thing which is supposed to be first produced by us, according to our concept of its purpose, we should not conclude that just because we can conceive of this purpose, it can therefore really be achieved. But this maxim certainly does not mean that one should not have a purpose in one's mental or physical labors, or that one should not attempt to make this purpose plain, even before setting to work, but should rather leave the results of his labor up to the play of his imagination or of his fingers. The inventor of the aerostatic spheres[16] could certainly calculate their size and the relation of the air within them to the atmosphere and thus the speed with which his machine would move, even before he knew whether he would discover a gas which could make his machine sufficiently lighter than the atmosphere. And Archimedes could design that machine with which he wished to move the earth from its position, even though he was certain that he could discover no place outside the earth's gravitational field from which he could operate his machine. So too with the science which we have just described: it is not something which exists independently of us and without our help. On the contrary, it is something which can only be produced by the freedom of our mind, turned in a particular direction—supposing that such mental freedom does exist, which is also something that we cannot yet know. Let us specify in advance this direction [in which we must turn our minds in order to construct a *Wissenschaftslehre*], and let us obtain for ourselves a clear concept of *what* our task is to be. The question of whether or not we can actually produce the science in question will be decided by whether or not we actually do produce it. The issue at present, however, is not this, but instead concerns what it is that we actually want to produce. And this is determined by our definition.

(1) The science we have described is supposed to be, above all, a
I,47 science *of science as such.* Every possible science has *one first principle,* which cannot be demonstrated within that science itself, but must be certain in advance of the science. But where is this first principle supposed to be proven? The answer is undoubtedly: in that science which has to establish the basis of all possible sciences. In this regard the *Wissenschaftslehre* has to do two things. First of all, it has to establish the pos-

[16]Jacques Etienne Montgolfier (1745–1799), who, with his brother Joseph, invented the hot-air balloon in 1783.

sibility of any first principles whatsoever—to show how, to what extent, under what conditions, and perhaps to what degree anything at all can be certain, as well as what the phrase "to be certain" means. Second, it has the special task of demonstrating the first principles of all the sciences which are possible—something which cannot be done within these sciences themselves.

Every science which consists not of one single, isolated proposition, but rather of several propositions which together constitute a whole, possesses *systematic form.* This form is the condition which governs the connection between the derived propositions and the first principle. It provides the justification for inferring from this connection that the derived propositions are necessarily just as certain as the first principle. So long as the special sciences retain their unity and do not concern themselves with matters which do not pertain to them, this systematic form can no more be demonstrated within these special sciences than can the truth of their first principles. On the contrary, the possibility of their form is already presupposed. Consequently, a universal *Wissenschaftslehre* has the responsibility for establishing the systematic form for all possible sciences.

(2) The *Wissenschaftslehre* is itself *a science.* Thus it too must begin with *one first principle*—a first principle that cannot be proven within the *Wissenschaftslehre,* but has to be presupposed for this to be possible as a science. But neither can this first principle be proven within any higher science. For in that case this higher science would itself be the *Wissenschaftslehre,* and the science whose first principle first had to be demonstrated would not be the *Wissenschaftslehre.* Consequently, this first principle—the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* and through it the first principle of all science and knowledge—simply cannot be proven. That
I,48 is to say, it cannot be traced back to any higher principle, in relation to which its own certainty would become evident. Yet this first principle is supposed to provide the foundation for all certainty. It therefore must surely be certain: certain in itself, through itself, and for its own sake. All other propositions will be certain because they can be shown to be in some respect equivalent to this first principle. But this principle has to be certain merely because it is equivalent to itself. All other propositions will possess only an indirect certainty derived from the first principle; the first principle has to be immediately certain. All knowledge is based upon this principle, and apart from it no knowledge at all would be possible. It itself, however, is based upon no other knowledge; it is the principle of knowledge as such. It is absolutely certain; that is, it is certain *because* it is certain.[17] It provides the foundation for all certainty;

[17]The editor of *SW* prints the following note to this passage and identifies it as Fichte's own marginal comment: "One cannot without contradiction ask about the basis for the certainty of this first principle."

that is, everything that is certain is so because *it* is certain, and if *it* is not certain, then nothing is. It provides the foundation for all knowledge; that is, if one has any knowledge at all then one knows what this principle asserts. One knows it immediately as soon as one knows anything at all. It accompanies all knowledge. It is contained within all knowledge. It is presupposed by all knowledge.

Insofar as the *Wissenschaftslehre* is itself a science, and one which is to consist of several propositions and not merely of its mere first principle (from the fact that this theory has to establish the first principles of all the other sciences it follows that it must consist of several propositions), then it must possess *systematic form.* But it can derive neither the *specific character* nor the *validity* of this form from any other science, for the *Wissenschaftslehre* has to establish not just the principles (and thus the inner content) of all other sciences, but also their form (and thus the possibility of the
I,49 connection between various propositions within these sciences). Consequently, the *Wissenschaftslehre* has to contain this form within itself and has to establish it through itself.

We only have to analyze this a bit in order to see what it actually says. Let us provisionally call that about which one knows something the "content" of a proposition and that which one knows about this something the "form" of a proposition. (In the proposition "Gold is a body," what one knows about are gold and body, and what one knows about them is that they are in a certain respect equivalent, and to that extent they may be substituted for each other. It is an affirmative proposition. This relationship constitutes its form.)

No proposition is possible without both content and form. There must be something about which one has knowledge, and there must also be something which one knows about this thing. It follows that the initial proposition of the entire *Wissenschaftslehre* must have both content and form. Since this proposition is supposed to be certain immediately and through itself, this can only mean that its content determines its form and its form determines its content. This particular form can fit only this particular content, and this content can fit only this form. Any other form for this content or any other content for this form would invalidate the proposition itself and, with it, all knowledge. The form of the absolute first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is, therefore, not only furnished by this principle itself, it is also put forward as absolutely valid for the content of this proposition. Should the *Wissenschaftslehre* turn out to have other first principles in addition to this absolute first one, these others can be only partially absolute; they must, however, be partially conditioned by this first and supreme principle[18]—for otherwise there would not be one single first principle. Consequently, the "absolute first"

[18]"Because in the first case they would not be first principles at all, but would instead be derived principles; and because in the second case, etc." (Fichte's marginal note).

element in any such additional principle would have to be either its content or its form, and the conditioned element, similarly, would have to be either its form or its content. Supposing the unconditioned ele-
I,50 ment to be the *content,* then the *form* of this content would be conditioned by the absolute first principle. Accordingly, the form of this content would be determined within the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself, through it and through its first principle. Or supposing the reverse—that is, that the *form* is the unconditioned element—in that case the *content* of this form would necessarily be determined by the first principle, and thus, indirectly, its form would be determined as well, insofar as it is supposed to be the form of a certain content. Thus, in this latter case as well, the form would be determined by the *Wissenschaftslehre,* and indeed, by its first principle. But if an absolute first principle, a *Wissenschaftslehre,* and a system of human knowledge as such are to exist, then there cannot be any first principle which is determined in neither form nor content by the absolute first principle. Consequently, there can be no more than three first principles: one which is determined, in respect to its form as well as to its content, absolutely and simply by itself; one which is self-determined in respect to its form; and one which is self-determined in respect to its content.

If the *Wissenschaftslehre* contains still other propositions, these must all be determined, in respect both to their form and to their content, by the first principle. Consequently, a *Wissenschaftslehre* must determine the form of all of its propositions, insofar as these are considered separately. But this kind of determination of the individual propositions is possible only insofar as these propositions mutually determine one another. But every proposition has to be *completely* determined, that is, its form must fit only its content and no other content, and this content must fit only this form in which it is found and no other form. Otherwise, the proposition in question would not be equivalent in its certainty to the first principle (one will recall what was said on this subject above), and thus the proposition would not be certain. Now if all the propositions of a *Wissenschaftslehre* are to be different (which they must be, since otherwise they would not be several different propositions, but would instead be repeated instances of one and the same proposition), then no proposition can be completely determined except insofar as it is determined as
I,51 one proposition among many. In this manner the entire series of propositions is completely determined, and none of them can occur at a different position within the series than the position it occupies. The position of every proposition in the *Wissenschaftslehre* is determined by another specific proposition and itself determines the position of a specific third one. Thus the *Wissenschaftslehre* determines its own form through itself and in its entirety.

The form of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is necessarily valid for its content.

For if the absolute first principle was immediately certain (i.e., if its form suited only its content and its content suited only its form), and if all possible additional propositions are determined directly or indirectly, in respect to their form or to their content, by this absolute first principle (if, as it were, these additional propositions are already contained in the absolute first principle), then what is true of the first principle must be true of the others as well: their form must suit only their content and their content must suit only their form. This holds true of the individual propositions. The form of the whole, however, is nothing more than the form of the individual propositions considered as one. What holds for each individual proposition must also hold for them all considered as one.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* is, however, supposed to furnish not only *its own* form, but the form of *all possible additional sciences* as well, and it is supposed to guarantee the validity of this form for all sciences. But this is conceivable only if every proposition in the other sciences is already contained in some proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and is thus already present in its own proper form within the *Wissenschaftslehre.* This provides us with an easy path back to the content of the absolute first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* concerning which we can now say more than we were previously able.

Suppose that "to know with certainty" means nothing else but to have an insight into the inseparability of a particular content and a particular form (which is meant as no more than a nominal definition, since a real definition of knowledge is quite impossible). Then, from the way in
I,52 which the absolute first principle of all knowledge determines its form simply through its content and its content simply through its form, we can already, to some extent, see how the form of the entire content of knowledge might be determined—if, that is, the first principle includes all possible content. Accordingly, if our presupposition is correct and if there is one absolute first principle of all knowledge, then it follows that the content of this first principle must contain all possible content and must itself be contained in the content of no other proposition. Such content would be content pure and simple, absolute content.

It is easy to see that when we presuppose that such a *Wissenschaftslehre* is possible at all and when, in particular, we presuppose the possibility of its first principle, we are always already presupposing that there really is a system in human knowledge. If there is such a system, then it can also be shown (independently of our description of the *Wissenschaftslehre*) that there must be such an absolute first principle.

If there is no such system then only two possibilities are conceivable. The first is that there is nothing at all which is immediately certain, and our knowledge consists of one or more infinite chains in which every proposition is based upon another, higher proposition, and this higher

one, in turn, is based upon a still higher one. We build our dwelling upon the earth. The earth rests upon an elephant. The elephant stands upon a tortoise. The tortoise? Who knows what it is standing on? And so on, ad infinitum. If this is the actual state of our knowledge, then of course we cannot change this fact. It would follow as well that we possess no sound knowledge. Perhaps we have traced the chain of propositions back to a particular one and have found everything to be sound so far. But who can guarantee that if we were to dig a bit deeper we would not discover that our knowledge has no foundation and thus has to be abandoned? Our certainty would only be something begged and borrowed, and we could never be sure that it would remain certain tomorrow.

In the second case our knowledge could consist of several finite series,
I,53 each ending in a first principle based only upon itself. But then there would be several such first principles completely isolated from and unconnected with each other, since each establishes itself entirely independently of the others. There might, for example, be within us several innate truths, each of which is equally innate. But we could expect no further insight into the connection between these innate truths, since the connection lies beyond the individual truths. Or, to take another example, perhaps things outside of us contain a variety of simple elements which are communicated to us by the impression made upon us by the things. We, however, would not be able to penetrate to the connection between these simple elements, since nothing can be more simple than the simplest elements discovered in the impression. If this is the actual state of our knowledge, if human knowledge in itself is essentially such a piecework (as the actual knowledge of many men is), if our minds originally contain several threads which have no point of connection and which cannot be so connected, then once again we are in no position to struggle against our own nature. Our knowledge, so far as it extends, would indeed be certain, but it would not be a *unified* knowledge. Instead, it would constitute *many* sciences. In this case our dwelling would certainly be sound, but it would not be a unified, coherent structure. It would, instead, be a conglomeration of separate chambers, and we would be unable to pass from one to the other. It would be a building in which we would always be lost and would never feel at home. It would contain no light, and we would remain poor despite all of our wealth, because we could never estimate our fortune, never consider it as a whole, and never know what we actually possess. We could never employ one portion of our possessions to improve the others, because no portion would bear any relation to any other portion. Moreover, our knowledge would never be complete. Every day we would have to expect that a new innate truth might express itself within us, or that experience might present us with a new simple element. We would always have to be ready to pitch a new hut somewhere. In this second case no universal science
I,54 would be needed in order to provide the foundation for the other sci-

ences. Each science would establish its own foundation, and there would be just as many sciences as there are separate, immediately certain first principles.

If, however, instead of one or more system fragments (the first possibility) or several different systems (the second possibility), the human mind is supposed to contain one complete and unified system, then there has to be one such supreme and absolute first principle. Though our knowledge may radiate from this first principle in ever so many lines, from each of which branch out still more lines, they must still all cohere in one single ring, which is itself attached to nothing, but supports itself along with the entire system of knowledge through its own power. We have here a planet which supports itself through its own gravity and which irresistably attracts to its center all that we build—so long as we actually erect our structures on its surface and not, as it were, hanging in the air, and so long as we build perpendicularly and not, as it were, aslant. Not even a speck of dust can be removed from the gravitational field of this planet.

We cannot decide in advance of the inquiry whether or not there is any such system or any such first principle (which is the condition for the possibility of such a system). Not only is the first principle a proposition which is, as such, incapable of proof, it also cannot be demonstrated that it is the first principle of all knowledge. Everything depends on the experiment. Should we discover a proposition possessing all of the internal conditions necessary for the first principle of all human knowledge, we will then inquire whether it also possesses the external ones, namely whether we can trace back to it everything that we know or believe that we know. If we succeed in this, then we will have shown—by actually constructing it—that such a science is possible and that there is a system of human knowledge which it portrays. If we fail to construct such a science, then either there is no such system at all or else we have just not discovered it and must leave this discovery to our more fortunate successors. Simply to assert that such a system does not exist because *we* have failed to discover it is a presumption whose refutation does not deserve serious consideration.

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Part II
Explication of the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

§3

To explicate a concept scientifically (and it is clear that we are speaking here only of this highest type of explication) is to assign it a place in the overall system of the human sciences, that is, to show which concept

determines its place and which other concept has its place determined by it. Yet the concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as such is itself the locus of all scientific concepts and assigns them all to their places within and through itself. Clearly, we are here speaking only of a hypothetical explication. That is to say, the question is the following one: Assuming that there are already sciences and that these sciences contain some truth (which is something which one can by no means know prior to the general *Wissenschaftslehre*), what then is the relationship between that *Wissenschaftslehre* which is supposed to be established and these other sciences?

The answer to this question too is contained in the mere concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre:* these sciences are related to the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the same way in which something established is related to the foundation upon which it is established. The various sciences do not assign a place to the *Wissenschaftslehre;* it assigns them to their places within[19] and through itself. Thus, all we have to do here is to develop this answer further.

(1) The *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to be the science of all the sciences. Thus arises, to begin with, the question: How can the *Wissenschaftslehre* guarantee to provide the foundation, not merely for all the sciences which have been established so far and with which we are already familiar, but for all the sciences which are possible? How can it guarantee to exhaust completely the realm of knowledge?[20]

I,56

(2) In this respect the *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to provide all the sciences with their first principles. It follows that all those propositions which serve as first principles of the various particular sciences are, at the same time, propositions indigenous to the *Wissenschaftslehre.* Thus one and the same proposition has to be considered from two points of view: as a proposition contained within the *Wissenschaftslehre,* and also as a first principle standing at the pinnacle of some particular science. In the *Wissenschaftslehre,* inferences are drawn from this proposition insofar as it is considered as a proposition contained within the *Wissenschaftslehre.* In the particular sciences inferences are also drawn from the same proposition, considered this time as the first principle of the science in question. Now either the same inference is drawn from this proposition in both the *Wissenschaftslehre* and in the particular science, or else different inferences are drawn in each. In the first case, the *Wissenschaftslehre* would include not only the first principles but also all of the derived propositions of the particular sciences, in which case they would not be particular sciences at all, but merely parts of one and the same *Wissenschaftslehre.* The second case is likewise impossible, since the *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to supply all the sciences with their form. The alternative is that something

[19]"—Not really within the *Wissenschaftslehre,* but nevertheless within the system of knowledge which the *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to portray" (Fichte's marginal note).

[20]"This against Aenesidemus" (Fichte's marginal note).

else (which admittedly can be derived from nowhere else but the *Wissenschaftslehre*) must be added to a mere proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* when this proposition becomes the first principle of a particular science. Thus the question arises: What is this "something else" which is added? Or. since this "something else" constitutes the difference in question, where is the precise boundary between the *Wissenschaftslehre* and every particular science?

(3) Furthermore, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to determine in the same respect the form of all the sciences. We have already shown how this might be done. We are, however, faced with another science called "logic" which makes the same claim. The *Wissenschaftslehre* has to be distinguished from logic; we must examine the relationship between them.

(4) The *Wissenschaftslehre* is itself a science, and we have already spec-
I,57 ified what it has to accomplish qua science. Yet insofar as it is simply a science, a type of knowledge (in the formal sense), it is a science of *something*. It has an object, and it is clear from what has already been said that this object can be nothing else but the system of human knowledge as such.[21] The question then arises: What is the relationship between this science, qua science, and its object as such?

§4. To What Extent Can the *Wissenschaftslehre* Be Sure That It Has Exhausted Human Knowledge as Such?

Human knowledge in its entirety is not the same as what has truly been known or has been imagined to have been known *so far*. Suppose that a philosopher had really mastered the latter and was able to prove by a complete induction that his system includes all that is known so far. He would nevertheless still be a long way from having accomplished the task of philosophy as such. For how would he demonstrate by induction from previous experience that there could be no future discovery which would not fit into his system? It would be no better for him to excuse himself by saying, for example, that he only intended to exhaust that knowledge which is possible in the present sphere of human existence. For were it the case that his philosophy were valid only for this sphere, then he would be acquainted with no other possible sphere. Therefore he could not be acquainted with the limits of that sphere which his philosophy is supposed to exhaust. He has arbitrarily drawn a boundary whose validity he can scarcely demonstrate except by appealing to past

[21] "Since this science asks (1) How is science possible at all? and (2) claims to have exhausted human knowledge, which is supposed to be based upon a single first principle" (Fichte's marginal note).

experience, which may always be contradicted by future experience, even experience within the same purported sphere of human existence. In order to discuss human knowledge in its entirety in an exhaustive manner one has to determine unconditionally and absolutely, not only
I,58 what man is capable of knowing at his present level of existence, but what he is capable of knowing at any possible and conceivable level of his existence.*

Such an exhaustive determination of human knowledge is possible only if it can be shown, first, that the proposed first principle is exhausted, and, second, that no other first principles except the one proposed are possible.

A first principle has been exhausted when a complete system has been erected upon it, that is, when the principle in question necessarily leads to *all* of the propositions which are asserted and when *all* of these propositions necessarily lead us back to the first principle. The negative proof that our system includes no *superfluous* propositions is that no proposition occurs anywhere in the system which could be true if the first principle were false—or could be false if the first principle were true. This is the negative proof, because a proposition not belonging to the system could be true even if the first principle of the system were false, or false even if it were true. If the first principle is given, then *all* of the propositions must be given as well; each individual[25] proposition is given in and through the first principle. From what has already been said
I,59 about the interconnection of the individual propositions of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* it is clear that this science would immediately include, and indeed would itself constitute, the negative proof in question. This will

*Reply to a possible objection:[22] The actual tasks of the human mind are certainly infinite, both in their number and their scope. They could be accomplished only by a completed approximation to infinity—something which in itself is impossible. But they are infinite only because they are immediately given *as* infinite tasks. There are infinitely many radii in an infinite circle whose center is given, but when the center is given, so too is the whole infinite circle with its infinite number of radii. Of course one end of each radius lies at infinity, but its other end lies in that center which every radius has in common. The center is given and so is the direction of the radii (for they are supposed to be straight lines). Thus all of the radii are given. (Among this infinite number of radii, which ones are actually to be drawn is something which is *determined* by the gradual development of our original limitation.[23] But these radii are not thereby *given* along with the center of the circle.) Human knowledge is infinite in *scope,* but its *nature* is totally determined through its own laws and can be exhaustively described.[24]

[22]In the first edition, the title of this remark reads: "Reply to a possible objection, though one which could only be made by a 'Popular Philosopher.'" For a brief account of the antispeculative "popular philosophy" movement in late eighteenth-century Germany, see Beck, *Early German Philosophy,* pp. 319–24. (The text of this "reply" is here translated from the second edition, which differs in minor respects from the first.)

[23]"Is something which is *determined* by the influence of the Not-I" (first edition).

[24]"The tasks confront us and are to be exhaustively enumerated. But they are not completed and cannot be completed" (Fichte's marginal note).

[25]"Particular" (Fichte's marginal note).

demonstrate that the science as such is *systematic,* that all of its parts are connected in one single first principle. Furthermore, the science is a *system* (or is complete) when no additional propositions can be deduced from the first principle. This furnishes the positive proof that the system does not include fewer[26] propositions than it should. The only question then is the following: When and under what conditions can an additional proposition be deduced? For clearly nothing is proven by the merely relative and negative criterion that *I* cannot see how anything further can be deduced from the first principle. There might well come after me another person able to see something where I can see nothing. We require a positive criterion in order to be able to demonstrate absolutely and unconditionally that nothing more can be deduced. This criterion can only be this: that the very principle from which we began is at the same time our final result. It would then be clear that we could go no further without retracing the path we have already taken. In some future exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* it will be shown that this theory really does complete this circuit, that it leaves the inquirer at precisely the point where he started, and thus that the *Wissenschaftslehre* also includes within and through itself the second, positive proof.*

Yet even if the proposed first principle is exhausted, and a complete system is erected upon it, it still does not by any means follow that the
I,60 exhaustion of this principle involves the exhaustion of human knowledge as such. It is true that nothing can be added or subtracted from *this* completed system, but what is there to prevent wider future experience from adding to human consciousness propositions which are not based upon that first principle and which, therefore, presuppose one or more additional first principles (even if no traces of such new propositions should be presently observable)? In short, why should not one or more systems in addition to this one which has been completed be able to exist in the human mind? Admittedly, these systems would not have the least connection with each other or have the smallest point in common with each other or with that first system, but then they are not supposed to if they are to constitute several systems rather than one. In order, therefore, to prove satisfactorily that such new discoveries are impossible, it must be shown *that* there can be only one system within human knowledge. But since the proposition that all human knowledge constitutes but one, single, internally consistent [system of] knowledge must itself be

[26]"Does not include more" (first edition).

*Consequently the *Wissenschaftslehre* has absolute totality. Within it, each thing leads to everything and everything leads to each thing. However, it is the only science which can be completed. Completeness is thus its distinguishing feature. All other sciences are infinite and can never be completed, for they do not complete the circle and return to their first principles. The *Wissenschaftslehre* has to demonstrate that this is the case and show why it is so.

part of human knowledge, it can only be based upon that proposition which has been proposed as the first principle of all human knowledge and can be demonstrated only on the basis of this first principle. For the present, we would at least have established the following: namely, if, at some future time we were to become conscious of another first principle, this new first principle could not simply be *another* one, *distinct* from the one proposed; it would have to come into *formal* contradiction with the previous first principle.[27] The reason for this is as follows: It was presupposed above that the proposed first principle includes the proposition "there is a single system in human knowledge." Thus every proposition which we suppose not to be included in this unified system would not merely differ from the system,[28] but its mere existence would con-
I,61 tradict the system, since this system is supposed to be the only one possible. The supposed additional first principle would contradict the proposition derived [from the previously proposed first principle], which asserts the unity of the system. And since *all* of the propositions in this system are inseparably connected to each other (i.e., if any one of them is true, then they are necessarily all true, and if any one of them is false, then they are necessarily all false), the new principle would contradict every single proposition of that system—specifically, it would contradict the first principle of that system. If we presuppose in addition that this proposition alien to our system should itself have a systematic basis in consciousness in the manner described above, then it follows merely from the formal contradiction which its existence represents that the system to which this alien proposition is said to belong would also materially contradict the entire previous system and would thus have to be based upon a principle directly opposed to that of the first system. Thus, for example, if the first principle of the first system were the proposition "I am I," that of the second would have to be "I am not I."

We neither can nor should directly conclude from this contradiction that such an additional principle is impossible. If the previous first principle includes within itself the proposition "there is a single system of human knowledge," then, of course, it also includes within itself the proposition "nothing must stand in contradiction to this single system." But both of these propositions are only deduced from this first principle itself. Thus, when we assume that everything which follows from this principle is absolutely valid, then we are already assuming that the prin-

[27]"It must be the exact *opposite* [of the previous first principle]" (first edition).

[28]From this point to the end of the paragraph the first edition reads: "but would be opposed to it, since that system is supposed to be the only system, and would have to be based upon a first principle which contains the proposition, 'human knowledge is *not* a single system.' If one continued to infer back, one would have to encounter a first principle squarely opposed to the previously proposed first principle. If, for example, the first one was 'I am I' then the other one would have to be 'I am not-I.'"

ciple in question is the absolute and sole first principle and that it governs human knowledge completely. There is thus a circle here from which the human mind can never escape. It is good to concede its presence explicitly, in order to avoid being confused later by its unexpected discovery. The circle is as follows: If proposition *X* is the first, highest, and absolute first principle of human knowledge, then human knowledge constitutes one single system, for this conclusion follows from *X*. However, since human knowledge is supposed to constitute a single system, it follows that proposition *X*, which (according to the proposed science) is actually the foundation of a system, is the first principle of
I,62 human knowledge as such and that the system established upon *X* is that single system of human knowledge.

Now no one has any cause to be embarrassed by the existence of this circle. To desire the abolition of this circle is to desire that human knowledge be totally without any foundation. It is to desire that nothing should be absolutely certain and that all human knowledge should instead be only conditional, that no proposition should be valid in itself, but rather that every proposition should be so only on the condition that the proposition from which it follows is valid. In a word, it is to claim that there is no immediate truth at all, but only mediated truth—but *without anything to mediate it.*[29] Whoever so wishes can always ask himself what he would know if his I were not an I, that is, if he did not exist, and if he could not distinguish something not-I from his I.

§5. What Is the Boundary Separating the Universal *Wissenschaftslehre* from the Particular Sciences Which Are Based on It?

We have already found (in §3) that one and the same proposition cannot be in the same respect both a proposition of the general *Wissenschaftslehre* and the first principle of a particular science. Something additional is required in the latter case. This "something else" can be derived only from the general *Wissenschaftslehre,* since this contains all possible human knowledge. Yet this additional something must not already be included in the same proposition which is to be elevated by the addition of this something else to the status of a first principle of some particular science. If this were the case, then this proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* would already be the first principle it is supposed to become, and there would be no boundary separating the particular sciences from the parts of the general *Wissenschaftslehre.* Consequently there must be some individual proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* which

[29]This sentence was added in the second edition.

is united with that proposition which is supposed to become a first principle [of a particular science]. The objection that we are dealing with here is not one which arises directly from the concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself, but is instead one arising from the presupposition that there really are other sciences in addition to and separate from
I,63 the *Wissenschaftslehre*. It follows, similarly, that this objection can be answered only by means of a presupposition. It will, for the moment, suffice if we can merely indicate some possible way of drawing the boundary. We cannot nor should we demonstrate here that the boundary drawn is the true boundary—though it well might be.

Let us, accordingly, assume the following: that the *Wissenschaftslehre* includes all of those specific actions which the human mind is necessarily forced to perform—whether conditionally or unconditionally; that, at the same time, the *Wissenschaftslehre* proposes that the ultimate explanatory ground for these necessary actions is the mind's utterly free and uncoerced ability to determine itself to act at all; and therefore, that the *Wissenschaftslehre* provides for both a necessary and a non-necessary, or free, mode of acting. Thus the *Wissenschaftslehre* could determine what the actions of the human mind are insofar as it acts of necessity but not insofar as it acts freely. If it is further assumed that the free actions of the mind are also to be determined somehow, then this could not occur within the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself. Yet since we are here dealing with *determination,* it must occur within *science,* and thus must take place within the particular sciences. Now the object of these acts can only be that which has been furnished by the *Wissenschaftslehre* as something necessary (since nothing is present except what the *Wissenschaftslehre* has provided, and it provides nothing at all except what is necessary). It would therefore have to be the case that in the first principle of a particular science an action which has been permitted to remain free in the *Wissenschaftslehre* becomes determined. Thus the *Wissenschaftslehre* would furnish that first principle with its necessity and its freedom as such, whereas the particular science would provide this freedom with a specific determination. And thus we have discovered the sharp boundary we were seeking: as soon as an action which is in itself free has been given a specific direction, we have moved from the domain of the general
I,64 *Wissenschaftslehre* into that of some particular science. Let me use two examples to make myself clear.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* furnishes us with space as something necessary and with the point as absolute limit. But it grants to the imagination complete freedom to place this point wherever it likes. As soon as it has made specific use of this freedom, by, for example, moving the point toward the boundary of the unbounded space and thus generating a line,* then we no longer find ourselves within the domain of the *Wissen-*

*[Note to the first edition only.] A question for the mathematician: Is not the concept of straightness already included in the concept of a line? Is there any other sort of line except

schaftslehre, but instead within the territory of a particular science called "geometry." The first principle of geometry is the overall task of limiting space in accordance with a rule, or the task of spatial construction. In this manner geometry is sharply separated from the *Wissenschaftslehre.*

The *Wissenschaftslehre* furnishes us with nature[30] as something necessary—with nature as something which, both in its being and its specific determinations, has to be viewed as independent of us. It also furnishes (again, as something necessary) the laws according to which nature
I,65 should and must be observed.* But the power of judgment still retains its complete freedom to apply these laws or not to apply them at all. It also retains the freedom to select from the multiplicity of laws whichever law it chooses for application to whatever object it chooses from the multiplicity of objects. It is free, for example, to consider the human body as raw matter, as organized matter, or as animate matter. But as soon as the power of judgment has been given the task of observing a particular object according to a particular law,[31] in order to determine thereby whether and to what extent the object conforms or fails to conform to the law, then the power of judgment is no longer free, but is subject to a rule. And accordingly, we are no longer within the *Wissenschaftslehre,* but instead are within the area of another science called "natural science." The first principle of natural science is the overall task of comparing every object of experience to every law of nature in our

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a straight one? Is the so-called curved line anything other than a stringing together of infinitely many points which are infinitely close to each other? This conclusion seems to me to be vouched for by the fact that the curved line is originally the boundary line of infinite space. (An infinite number of infinite radii are drawn with the I as their center. Our limited imagination, however, must assign a terminal point to each of these radii. Considered as one, these terminal points constitute the original curved line.) This makes it clear *that* and *why* the task of measuring the circumference of a circle by a straight line is an infinite task, one which could only be accomplished if an approximation to infinity could be completed. At the same time it becomes clear why the straight line cannot be defined.

[30] "The *Wissenschaftslehre* furnishes us with a not-I which is absolutely independent from the laws of mere representations" (first edition).

[31] "E.g., determining whether animal life can be explained merely on the basis of what is inorganic, or whether crystallization might perhaps be the transition from chemical bonding to organized structure, or whether magnetic and electrical forces are essentially the same or different, etc." (Fichte's marginal note).

*[Note to the first edition only.] Strange as this may seem to many natural scientists, it will nevertheless be shown in due course that the following can be strictly demonstrated: viz., that the scientist has imposed upon nature all of those laws which he believes that he learns by observing nature, and that all of these laws—the most specific as well as the most general, [those governing] the construction of the smallest blade of grass as well as the movements of the heavenly bodies—must be derivable in advance of all observation from the first principle of all human knowledge. It is true that we cannot become *conscious* of any law of nature or of any law whatsoever unless some object is provided to which the law can be applied. It is true that not all objects necessarily have to conform to the law and that they do not all have to conform to it to the same extent. It is true that no single object does or can conform to the law totally and completely. But just for these reasons it is also true that we do not learn these laws of nature by observation, but rather that the laws provide the basis for all observation. They are not only laws governing a nature independent of us; they are also laws governing the manner in which we have to observe nature.

mind. Natural science consists entirely of experiments (and does not consist in a passive relationship to the unregulated effects of nature upon us). We undertake these experiments voluntarily, and nature may or may not correspond to them. In this manner, natural science is sufficiently distinguished from the *Wissenschaftslehre* as such.

Thus (though we note this only in passing) we can already see why only the *Wissenschaftslehre* will possess absolute totality and why all the
I,66 particular sciences will be infinite. The *Wissenschaftslehre* contains nothing but what is necessary. If what is necessary is so in every respect, then its quantity is also something necessary, that is, it is necessarily limited. All other sciences start with freedom—the freedom of our mind as well as the freedom of nature,[32] which is absolutely independent of us. If this is to be real freedom absolutely ungoverned by any law, then no sphere of activity can be prescribed for it, for such a prescription could only be made according to a law. Consequently, the spheres of activity of the particular sciences are infinite. Thus an exhaustive *Wissenschaftslehre* represents no threat to the human mind's infinite progress toward perfection. The *Wissenschaftslehre* does not negate this infinite progress; on the contrary, it provides it with a foundation which is totally secure and beyond all doubt. It assigns to the human mind a task which it cannot complete in all eternity.

§6. How Is the General *Wissenschaftslehre* Related to Logic in Particular?

The *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to establish the form for all possible sciences. According to a common opinion, which may contain some truth, logic does the same thing. How then are these two sciences related to each other, particularly in regard to this enterprise which they would both assume?

An easy path into this highly important inquiry is revealed as soon as we recall that logic is supposed to furnish nothing but mere form, whereas the *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to supply content as well as form. In the *Wissenschaftslehre,* form is never separated from content nor is content ever separated from form. Both are united most intimately in every proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre.* But if the propositions of logic contain merely the form of possible sciences without their content, then these logical propositions are not at the same time propositions of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* but are distinct from them. It follows that the
I,67 entire science of logic is neither the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself nor a portion of this theory. No matter how odd this may sound, given the current

[32] "Of the not-I," (first edition).

state of philosophy, logic is not a philosophical science at all. It is, instead, a separate science in its own right (which, however, should not detract in the least from its dignity).

If this is what logic is, then it must be possible to indicate a particular determination of freedom by means of which scientific activity crosses from the realm of the *Wissenschaftslehre* into that of logic—a move which establishes the boundary between the two sciences. It is easy to point out this specific determination of freedom. In the *Wissenschaftslehre,* content and form are necessarily united. Logic is supposed to establish mere form separated from content. Since form and content are not originally separated, this act of separation can only occur through freedom. Consequently, logic would come into being through this free separation of mere form from content. The name for such an act of separation is "abstraction," and thus the essence of logic consists in abstraction from the entire content of the *Wissenschaftslehre.*

It would follow from this that the propositions of logic would have nothing but form. But this is impossible since, according to the concept of a proposition as such, a proposition must have content as well as form (see §1). Thus the content of logic must be that which was merely form in the *Wissenschaftslehre.* This content again receives the universal form of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* though this form is here specified to be the form of a logical proposition. This second free act, the act through which form[33] becomes its own content and turns back upon itself, is called "reflection."[34] No abstraction is possible without reflection, and no reflection is possible without abstraction. Each, considered separately from the other and in itself, is an act of freedom. If, thus separated, they are related to
I,68 each other, then each is the necessary condition for the other. For synthetic thinking, however, they constitute only one and the same action, looked at from two sides.[35]

The special relationship between logic and the *Wissenschaftslehre* follows from the above. The former does not *provide the foundation* for the latter; it is, instead, the latter which provides the foundation for the former. The *Wissenschaftslehre* simply cannot be deduced from logic. Prior to the *Wissenschaftslehre,* one may not presuppose the validity of a single proposition of logic—including the law of contradiction. On the contrary, every logical proposition and logic in its entirety must be deduced from the *Wissenschaftslehre.* We have to show that the forms which are established within logic really are the forms of a particular content

[33]"As such" (Fichte's marginal note).

[34]"This second free act, by means of which form becomes the form of form itself, as its content, is called *reflection*" (first edition).

[35]"[. . .] possible without abstraction. Considered in themselves, both are acts of freedom. However, when they are reciprocally related to each other, then each is the necessary condition of the other" (first edition).

within the *Wissenschaftslehre.* Logic, therefore, derives its validity from the *Wissenschaftslehre,* but the validity of the latter is not derived from the former.

Neither is the *Wissenschaftslehre conditioned* and *determined* by logic. The opposite is the case. The *Wissenschaftslehre* does not, for example, obtain its form from logic. It possesses its form within itself and only establishes this form for a possible free act of abstraction. It is the *Wissenschaftslehre* which is the condition for the validity and applicability of logical propositions. The forms established by logic may not, in the ordinary business of thinking and in the particular sciences, be applied to any content other than that content which they already contain within themselves in the *Wissenschaftslehre.* They do not have to be applied to the entire content which they contain within the *Wissenschaftslehre,* for then no particular science would arise, and we would have instead only repetitions of portions of the *Wissenschaftslehre.* Nevertheless the logical forms must necessarily be applied to a portion of the content of the *Wissenschaftslehre,* to a content which is comprised within the content of the latter. If this condition is not met, then the particular science which is thereby produced is no more than a castle in the air—no matter how logically correct the inferences within this science may be.[36]

I,69 Finally, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is something which is necessary (not that it is necessary as a clearly thought out and systematically constructed science, but rather as a natural predisposition). Logic, on the other hand, is an artificial product of the freedom of the human mind. Without the *Wissenschaftslehre,* no knowledge or science would be possible at all; without logic, all of the sciences could still have come into being, only somewhat later. The former is the sole condition for all of the sciences; the latter is a highly beneficial device for securing and facilitating scientific progress.

I will give examples to illustrate what has just been scientifically deduced.

"$A = A$" is undoubtedly a logically correct proposition, and insofar as it is, it means "*if* A is posited, then A is posited." This raises two questions: Is A posited? And why and to what extent is A posited, *if* it is posited? Or, in other words, what in fact is the connection between this *if* and this *then?*

Suppose that the A in the previous proposition means "I," and thus that it possesses its own specific content. In this case the proposition means first of all "I am I," or "*If* I am posited, then I am posited." But because the subject of this proposition is the absolute subject, the subject purely and simply, then (in this single case) the proposition's inner con-

[36]"This was the procedure of those pre-Kantian dogmatic systems, which propounded a false concept of 'thing'" (Fichte's marginal note).

tent is posited along with its form: "I am posited, *because* I have posited myself. I am, *because* I am." Consequently, logic says: "*If A* is, then *A* is." The *Wissenschaftslehre,* however, says: "*Because A* (i.e., this specific *A* = I) is, then *A* is." And thus the first question, "Is *A* (i.e., this specific *A*) posited?" would be answered in the following way: It is posited, *for* it is posited. It is posited unconditionally and absolutely.

Suppose that the *A* in our original proposition did not mean "I," but something else—anything else—instead. Then what we have just said permits us to see the condition under which we can say that *A* is posited and also lets us see the justification for the inference "if *A* is posited, then *A* is posited." The reason is as follows: the proposition "*A* = *A*" is originally valid *only for the I.* It is a proposition derived from the proposition
I,70 "I am I," which is a proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre.* Thus all of the content to which the proposition "*A* = *A*" is supposed to be applicable must be contained within the I. Therefore, *A* can be nothing but something *posited within the I,* and the proposition in question now reads: "That which is posited within the I is posited." If *A* is posited within the I, then *A* is posited (i.e., to the extent that it is posited as something possible, actual, or necessary). And this proposition is incontrovertibly true—if the I is supposed to be I. If, furthermore, the I is posited because it is posited, then everything which is posited within the I is also posited because it is posited, and so long as *A* is something which is posited within the I, then *A* is posited if it is posited. Thus our second question is answered as well.

§7. How is the *Wissenschaftslehre,* qua Science, Related to Its Object?

Every proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* has form and content. One knows something, and there *is* something about which one has knowledge. But of course, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is itself the science of something, and not this "something" itself. Consequently, the *Wissenschaftslehre* as such, along with all of its propositions, would be the form of a certain content which is present in advance of this theory. How is the *Wissenschaftslehre* related to this content, and what are the consequences of this relationship?[37]

The object of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is, after all, the system of human knowledge. This knowledge exists independently of the science of the same, though it is only through this science that such knowledge is

[37] "Note that we have entirely abstracted from this question until now, and that everything which has been said so far needs to be modified in the light of the answer to this question" (Fichte's marginal note).

established in a systematic form. What then is this new form, and what distinguishes it from that form which must be present prior to this science? And how is this science as such distinguished from its object?

We may call what exists in the human mind independently of the science in question "the acts of the mind." These constitute the *what* which is present in advance. These acts occur in certain specific ways,
I,71 which serve to distinguish one act from another and which constitute the *how* of what is present in the mind. Therefore, both content and form are originally present in the human mind prior to our knowledge, and they are inseparably connected with each other. Every act occurs in a specific way, in accordance with a law. This law determines the act. If all the acts of the mind are connected among themselves and are subject to general, specific, and individual laws, then they present a system for any observer.

It is, however, by no means necessary that the temporal order in which these acts occur in our minds should actually correspond to that systematic order in which they are derived from each other. It is not necessary that we should first become conscious of that act which subsumes all others and furnishes the highest law, and that we should next become conscious of that act which subsumes fewer acts, and so forth. Furthermore, it by no means follows that we encounter these acts in a pure and unmixed state. Several acts which some possible observer might well be able to distinguish from each other might appear to us to be only one act. The highest act of the intellect,[38] for example, is the act of self-positing, but it is by no means necessary that this be (temporally) the first act of the mind of which we are clearly conscious. Nor is it necessary that we ever become clearly conscious of this act of self-positing, or that the intellect be capable of thinking simply "I am," without at the same time thinking of something which is *not itself.*

The acts of the human mind include the entire contents of any possible *Wissenschaftslehre,* but they do not contain this science itself. In order to create such a science an additional act of the human mind is required, an act not included among all of these actions, namely, the mind's act of becoming conscious of its own mode of acting as such. Since this new act is not supposed to be included among those acts of the mind which are all necessary—and which comprise all the necessary acts there are—it must be a free act. Consequently, the *Wissenschaftslehre,* insofar as it is supposed to be a systematic science, originates in exactly the same way

[38] "The highest act of the human mind" (first edition). In the second edition of §7 Fichte substituted "die Intelligenz" in almost every passage where, in the first edition, he had written "der menschliche Geist." The translation follows the second edition, without further indicating substitutions of "the intellect" for the first edition's "the human mind."

that all systematic sciences do, namely, through a specific determination
I,72 of freedom, which in this case is the specific free act of raising to consciousness the manner in which the intellect acts. All that distinguishes the *Wissenschaftslehre* from other sciences is this: the object of these other sciences is itself a free act, whereas the object of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is a set of necessary acts.

By means of this free act, something which in itself is already form (i.e., the necessary action of the intellect) is incorporated as content into a new form (the form of knowledge or consciousness). Thus the act in question is an act of reflection. These necessary actions are torn from that sequence in which they themselves might occur and are set forth in a pure, unmixed form. Consequently this same act is also an act of abstraction. It is impossible to reflect without abstracting.

That form of consciousness in which the intellect's necessary mode of acting is to be incorporated is itself undoubtedly included among the intellect's necessary modes of acting, and the intellect's mode of acting will undoubtedly be incorporated into the form of consciousness in precisely the same way in which anything else is incorporated into this form. Thus the question: Where, for the purpose of a possible *Wissenschaftslehre*, is this form supposed to come from? is not intrinsically difficult to answer. Yet if one thus avoids the question of form, then all of the difficulties come to focus on the question of content. In order to incorporate within the form of consciousness the necessary manner in which the intellect acts, we must already be familiar with this manner of acting as such—which manner of acting must, consequently, already be incorporated within this form of consciousness. Thus we would be caught up in a circle.

According to what has been said, this manner of acting is supposed to be separated as such from all that it is *not*, and this separation is supposed to be accomplished by an act of reflective abstraction. This abstraction occurs freely. Philosophical judgment[39] is not led to engage in such abstraction by a blind compulsion. The whole difficulty is contained in the following question: What rules guide freedom in this act of separation? How does the philosopher know *what* he is supposed to recognize
I,73 as part of the intellect's necessary mode of acting and what he should discard as something merely accidental?[40]

This is something which he simply cannot know, insofar anyway as he is not already conscious of that which he is supposed to raise to consciousness (which is self-contradictory). It follows that this activity is governed by no rule at all and that there can be no such rule. The human mind makes various experiments. By blind groping it succeeds in

[39]"The human mind" (first edition).
[40]"How does the human mind know *what* to incorporate and to discard?" (first edition).

reaching the dawn, and only then does it emerge into the bright light. It is led at first by obscure feelings* (the origin and reality of which the *Wissenschaftslehre* has to disclose). And if we had not begun with obscure feelings for things which we did not clearly recognize until later, we would still have no clear concepts to this day and would still be that lump of clay which first wrenched itself from the earth. This is also confirmed by the history of philosophy, and we have now provided the real reason which explains why it is only after much aimless wandering that a few people have been able to become conscious of something which, nevertheless, lies openly in every human mind and which anyone can easily grasp once it has been pointed out to him. All philosophers have shared
I,74 the same goal: they all wished to use reflection in order to separate the manner of acting necessary to the intellect from any accidental accompanying conditions. And all philosophers have actually accomplished this separation—only more or less purely or completely. On the whole, however, philosophical judgment has always progressed and moved nearer to its goal.

Yet this act of reflection is also a part of the intellect's necessary mode of acting—not insofar as such reflection does or does not occur (for in this respect reflection is free), but rather insofar as it occurs *in accordance with laws* and insofar as the specific manner in which such reflection occurs is something determined (on the condition that it occurs at all). From this it follows that the overall system of the intellect's manner of acting must include within itself the laws which govern this reflection. Once this science has been completed, then one can of course check to see whether or not one has succeeded in including within it the laws governing such reflection. One might, therefore, believe that a clearly evident demonstration of the correctness of our scientific system would at least be possible after the fact.

Yet those laws of reflection, which, in the course of the *Wissenschafts-*

*This makes it clear that the philosopher requires an obscure feeling for what is right, or genius, to no less an extent than does, for instance, the poet or the artist. The difference is in the type. The latter needs a sense of *beauty;* the former needs a sense of *truth.* Certainly, such a sense does exist.

[Additional remarks in the second edition:]

I am not quite sure how and why, but an otherwise admirable philosophical author[41] has become a bit agitated over the innocent assertion contained in the foregoing note. "One would," he says, "prefer to leave the empty word 'genius' to tightrope walkers, French cooks, 'beautiful souls,' artists, and others. For sound sciences it would be better to advance a theory of discovery." One should indeed advance such a theory, which will certainly happen as soon as science has reached the point where it is possible to discover such a theory. But where is the contradiction between such a project and the assertion made above? And how will we discover such a theory of discovery? By means, perhaps, of a theory of the discovery of a theory of discovery? And this?

[41]Viz., Salomon Maimon. The passage Fichte quotes (inexactly, as usual) is from Maimon's essay "Ueber den Gebrauch der Philosophie zur Erweiterung der Erkenntnis," which was published in the *Philosophisches Journal* 2 (1795).

lehre, we find to be the only possible laws through which a *Wissenschaftslehre* could come into being (even if they agree with those rules which we hypothetically presupposed at the outset of our enterprise), are nevertheless themselves results of their own previous employment. Here a new circle reveals itself: we have presupposed certain laws of reflection, and now, in the course of our science, we find that these are the only laws possible. From this we conclude that our presupposition was correct and that our science is formally correct. If we had started with other presuppositions, then we would undoubtedly have also found in our science that other laws are the only correct ones. The only question is whether or not these laws would have agreed with the ones we presupposed. If not, then we could be sure that either the laws we presupposed or the laws we discovered (or, most likely, both) were false.

I,75 Thus we cannot prove anything after the fact by the indicated type of faulty circular inference. Instead, we infer the correctness of the system from the *agreement* between what we presupposed and what we discovered. But this is only a negative proof, which establishes mere probability. If the reflections we discover do *not* agree with those we presupposed, then the system is surely false. If they do agree, then it *may* be correct; but it does not necessarily *have to* be correct. For even though it is true that, if there is only one system in human knowledge, then there is but *one* way in which such agreement can be *correctly deduced,* it nevertheless always remains possible to produce such agreement accidentally through two or more *incorrect deductions* which cooperate to produce such agreement. The situation here is like that of testing division by multiplication. If I fail to obtain the product desired and obtain any other number instead, then I have certainly erred at some point in my calculations. If I obtain the results desired, then it is probable that I have calculated correctly, but it is still no more than probable. For I might have made the same mistake in multiplying that I did in dividing; I might, for example, have said that $5 \times 9 = 36$ in both cases. Thus the agreement would prove nothing. So it is with the *Wissenschaftslehre:* it is not merely a rule, but it is at the same time the calculation [according to this rule]. A person who doubts the correctness of our product does not doubt the eternal validity of the law which prescribes that one must posit the one factor just as many times as the same unit is contained in the other factor. Perhaps he is just as sure of the law as we are, and what he doubts is simply whether we have correctly followed the rule in question.

Thus, even if we establish that supreme systematic unity which is the negative condition for the correctness of our system, something more is still required. This "something more" is something which can never be strictly demonstrated, something which can only be assumed to be probable, namely, that this unity itself is not something which has been accidentally produced by means of incorrect deduction. Several strategies

may be used to increase this probability: if the series of propositions are no longer present in one's memory, one may think them through again
I,76 several times; one may proceed in the opposite direction and deduce the first principle from the results; one may reflect upon one's own reflections, etc. In this way the probability becomes ever greater, but what was merely probable never turns into a certainty. If a person has pursued his inquiries with honesty* and without having presupposed those results which he wished to discover, then he may indeed content himself with this probability. And if someone doubts the tenability of our system, we may demand *that he point out to us the error in our reasoning.* But one may never claim infallibility. That system of the human mind which is supposed to be portrayed by the *Wissenschaftslehre* is absolutely certain and infallible. Everything that is based upon this system is absolutely true. It never errs, and anything which has ever been or will ever be necessarily
I,77 present within a human soul is true. If *men* have erred, the mistake did not lie in something necessary; instead, the mistake was made by free reflective judgment when it substituted one law for another. If our *Wissenschaftslehre* is an accurate portrayal of this system of the human mind, then, like this system itself, it is absolutely certain and infallible. But the question is precisely whether and to what extent our portrayal is accurate,** and this is something which we can never show by strict proofs, but only by probable ones. Our portrayal contains truth only on

*The philosopher requires not merely the sense of truth, but the love of truth as well. By this I do not mean that he should eschew the attempt to establish previously assumed results by means of reasoning which he himself realizes to be sophistical—but which he might believe he can conceal from his contemporaries. In such a case he himself knows that he does not love truth. Yet everyone is his own judge in this matter, and no person has the right to accuse another of this kind of dishonesty, unless the evidence for it is glaringly obvious. But the philosopher must also guard against those involuntary instances of sophistical reasoning, to which no investigator is more prone than the investigator of the human mind. He must seek only the truth, whatever it turns out to be. It is not enough that he have an obscure feeling of this duty. He must become clearly conscious of it and must make it his supreme maxim. He must welcome even the truth that there is no truth at all—provided only that this were true. He must not be indifferent to any proposition, no matter how dry or oversubtle it appears to be. All propositions must be equally sacred in his eyes, for they are all part of the same system of truth, and each supports all the others. He must never ask, "What consequences will this have?" but must proceed straight along his path, no matter what the consequences may be. He must shirk no effort, and yet he must always be prepared to abandon the most strenuous and profound endeavors the moment someone shows him or he himself discovers that they are unfounded. And suppose that he has made a mistake? What more would this be than the common fate of every thinker so far?

**[Note to the second edition.] The modesty of this remark has been contrasted with the great immodesty which, it is alleged, the author has subsequently displayed. It would certainly have been impossible for me to have foreseen the sort of objections with which I would have to deal and the form which these would take. And of course at that time I was not nearly so well acquainted with the majority of philosophical authors as I am now. Otherwise, I would not have failed to react in advance to the objections which have actually been made. Meanwhile, there is nothing in the above remark which contradicts my conduct since then. The above remark is concerned only with objections to my *inferences.* My opponents, however, have not yet reached that point. They are still quarreling over the first principle, i.e., over my entire view of philosophy. My innermost conviction, then as

the condition and only insofar as it is accurate. We are not the legislators of the human mind, but rather its historians. We are not, of course, journalists, but rather writers of pragmatic history.[42]

Pertinent to this also is the fact that a system can actually be on the
I,78 whole correct, even though its individual parts lack complete self-evidence. Here and there it may contain an incorrect inference or a faulty syllogism; demonstrable propositions may be advanced without proof or be proven incorrectly; nevertheless, the most important results may still be correct. This would appear to be impossible. It would seem that the tiniest deviation from the straight line must necessarily lead to an infinitely increasing deviation. And this is certainly what would happen if man had to arrive at all that he knows by means of clear thinking, and if it were not far more often the case that he is unconsciously governed by the fundamental tendency of reason, which, by means of new deviations from the straight path of *formal* and logically correct argument, leads him back to the only result which is *materially* true—a result which he would never have been able to arrive at by making correct inferences from his incorrect intermediary propositions.[43] The deviation would grow and grow if feeling did not often compensate for the previous deviation by producing new deviations from the straight path of argument—deviations which lead him back to a point he would never have been able to regain by means of correct inference.

Thus even if a universally valid *Wissenschaftslehre* were to be established, philosophical judgment would still have work to do in this field. The *Wissenschaftslehre* will require continual improvement. There will always remain gaps to be filled, proofs which require improvement, and terms which have to be more precisely specified.

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well as now, is that, so long as one knows what the issue is, there can be no quarrel whatsoever concerning this point. And, in fact, I never counted upon such a dispute. I am speaking of objections which give at least the appearance of being well grounded, which offer at least a pretense of *proving* and *establishing* something. Those persons who have supposedly been struck by my alleged immodesty have not offered such objections. Here is the explanation, an explanation which I could not then suppose would be necessary: Rubbish of this sort—viz., the sort of rubbish which is spoken by those who have not acquired the necessary preliminary knowledge or conducted the necessary preliminary exercises and who show that they do not even know what is at issue; the sort of rubbish which is uttered in a howling and spiteful tone; the sort of rubbish which cannot have sprung from zeal for the progress of science and thus must spring from less worthy motives, such as petty jealousy, vindictiveness, thirst for glory, desire for money, and other similar motives—such rubbish does not deserve the slightest forbearance, and in replying to such rubbish one is not governed by the rules of *scientific* dispute at all.

Why do these commentators fail to draw *the only* conclusion which is appropriate, viz., that the tone which displeases them so much owes its origin solely to their own tone?

[42]"A history is pragmatically composed when it teaches prudence, i.e., instructs the world how it could provide for its interest better than, or at least as well as, has been done in the past." Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 34n.

[43]"And this is certainly what would happen if man were merely a thinking being and not a feeling one as well" (first edition).

I have two more remarks to add to the foregoing.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* presupposes that the rules of reflection and ab-
I,79 straction are familiar and valid. It has to make this presupposition, and there is nothing to be ashamed of in this and no reason to make a mystery of it and to conceal the fact. Just like any other science, the *Wissenschaftslehre* may express itself and draw direct conclusions. It may presuppose all the rules of logic and may employ whatever concepts it requires. But it presupposes these things merely in order to be able to make itself intelligible; thus it presupposes them without drawing the least conclusion from them. Everything provable must be proved: except for that first and highest principle, all propositions must be derived. Thus, for example, though neither the logical principle of opposition (i.e., the principle of contradiction, which is the basis of all analysis) nor the principle of sufficient reason (i.e., "no two things are opposed to each other unless they are equivalent in some third thing, and no two things are equivalent unless they are opposed in some third thing," which is the basis of all synthesis) is derived from the absolutely first principle, they are derived from two first principles which are based upon the absolutely first principle. These two principles are indeed first principles, but they are not absolute ones. They only contain an absolute element. Accordingly, these propositions [i.e., the two principles containing something absolute], along with the logical principles based upon them, must indeed be derived, though not proven. Let me make myself even clearer: the *Wissenschaftslehre* establishes a proposition which has been thought and then expressed in words. Such a proposition corresponds to an action of the human mind, an action which, in itself, does not necessarily have to have been *thought of* at all. Nothing has to be presupposed for this action—nothing except that without which it would not be possible qua action. What is necessary for the possibility of the action in question is not something which is tacitly presupposed; it is, rather, the business of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to establish it clearly and definitely, and to establish it *as* that without which the action in question would not be possible. If, for example, action *D* is the fourth action in a series, then it must be preceded by another action, *C*, and must be proven to be the sole condition for the possibility of action *C*. *C*, in turn, must be preceded by action *B*. Action *A*, however, is simply possible; it is totally unconditioned, and thus it neither
I,80 may nor should presuppose anything at all. However, the *act of thinking* of action *A* is an entirely different action from *A* itself and presupposes far more. If we suppose that the thought of *A* is itself action *D* in the sequence of actions which we have to establish, it is then clear that it presupposes *A*, *B*, and *C* for its possibility. Furthermore, since the first task of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is to think this first act of the mind, it is also clear that *A*, *B*, and *C* must be tacitly presupposed. It is only when we arrive at proposition *D* that these presuppositions are proven, but by then we have again presupposed several more things. The form of the science, therefore, is

constantly surging ahead of its content. This is the reason for our previous announcement that the science as such can possess no more than probability. What is portrayed and the portrayal of the same are members of two different series. In the first series nothing unproven is presupposed; the second series is not possible unless some things are presupposed at the beginning which cannot be proven until later.

The kind of reflection which governs the whole *Wissenschaftslehre* (insofar as it is a science) is an act of *representing.* From this it by no means follows that everything which is reflected *upon* is also nothing but an act of representing. In the *Wissenschaftslehre* the I *is represented.* But it does not follow that the I is represented merely *as* representing.[44] Other features may well be found in this I. Qua philosophizing *subject,* the I is indisputably only a representing I, but it might well be more than this qua *object* of philosophizing. Representing is the highest and absolutely first act of the philosopher as such. But the absolutely first act of the human mind might well be something else. In advance of all experience it is already probable that this is so, since representation is something which can be exhaustively described and which operates in a thoroughly necessary manner. Consequently, there must be an ultimate foundation for the necessity of representation, a foundation which, qua ultimate foundation, can be based upon nothing further. Assuming this to be true, it would follow that a science based upon the concept of representation might indeed be a very useful propaedeutic to our science, but could not itself be the *Wissenschaftslehre.*[45] One thing which certainly
I,81 does follow from what has been said here is that we can be concious of all of the intellect's modes of activity (which are supposed to be exhaustively described within the *Wissenschaftslehre*) only in the form of representation, that is, only insofar as and in the manner that they are represented.

63

Part III
Hypothetical Division of the *Wissenschaftslehre*

§8

The absolute first principle must be shared by all the parts of the *Wissenschaftslehre,*[46] since it is supposed to provide the foundation, not

[44]"Die Reflexion, welche in der ganzen Wissenschaftslehre, insofern sie Wissenschaft ist, herrscht, ist ein *Vorstellen*; daraus aber folgt gar nichte, dass alles, *worüber* reflectirt wird, auch nur ein Vorstellen seyn werde. In der Wissenschaftslehre *wird* das Ich *vorgestellt*; es folgt aber nicht, dass es bloss *als* vorstellend vorgestellt werde."

[45]An allusion to Reinhold's Elementary Philosophy, which takes the concept of representation as its highest concept and starting point. See Fichte's discussion of this in the *Aenesidemus* review, above, Section I.

[46]This entire "Hypothetische Eintheilung der Wissenschaftslehre" was omitted from the

merely for a portion of human knowledge, but rather for knowledge in its entirety. Division presupposes an opposition, the terms of which must both be equivalent to some third term.

Suppose that the highest concept is the I, and that a not-I is opposed to this I. It is clear that the not-I cannot be placed in opposition to the I unless it is *posited,* and indeed, posited within the highest thing we can conceive of, that is, posited within the I. It would thus be necessary to
64 consider the I in two different respects: as that *in* which the not-I is posited, and as that *which* is posited in opposition to the not-I, and which, consequently, is itself posited in the absolute I. This latter I is supposed to be equivalent to the not-I, in the sense that they are both posited in the absolute I, and, at the same time and in the same respect, it is supposed to be opposed to the not-I. But this is conceivable only if there is in the I some third element in terms of which the I and the not-I would be equivalent. This third element is the concept of quantity. Both the I and the not-I have a quantity which is determined through their opposition to each other.* The first possibility is that the I is determined by the not-I (in respect of its quantity). To this extent the I is something dependent, and its proper name is "intellect." This dependent I is dealt with in the Theoretical Part of the *Wissenschaftslehre.* This Theoretical Part is based upon the concept of representation, a concept which is itself derived from (and thus is to be demonstrated by means of) the first principles.

The I, however, is supposed to be absolute and to be determined purely and simply by itself. But if it is determined by the not-I, then it is not self-determined—which contradicts the highest and absolute first principle. In order to avoid this contradiction, we must assume that that not-I which is supposed to determine the intellect is itself determined by
65 the I—though in this case the I would be considered not as the representing I, but rather as an I which possesses absolute causality. Yet such a causality would entirely cancel out the opposed not-I and, along with it, those representations which are dependent upon the not-I. Therefore, the assumption of such an absolute causality would contradict the second and third first principles. It follows from this that we have to represent this absolute causality *as* something which contradicts representation, as something which *cannot be represented,* as a causality which is not a causality. The concept of a causality which is not a causality is, however, the concept of *striving.* Such causality is conceivable only under the condition

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second edition, as well as from *SW* (which follows the text of the second edition). Page numbers in the margins of this section refer to the pages of the first edition (see *AA* I, 1: 150–52).

*The only absolutely a priori concepts are the concept of the I, the concept of the not-I, and the concept of quantity (limitation). All other concepts are derived from these three by means of opposition and equation.

of a completed approximation to infinity—which is itself something inconceivable. This concept of striving (the necessity of which has to be proven) provides the foundation for the second part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is called the Practical Part.

Considered in itself, this second part is far and away the most important. Admittedly, the first part is no less important, but it is so only as the foundation of the second part and because this second part is quite unintelligible apart from it. It is only in the second part that the Theoretical Part is precisely delimited and given a sound foundation. This is so because the necessary striving that it brings to light makes it possible to answer the following questions: Why, given the presence of an affection, must we have representations at all? What justification do we have for referring the representation to something outside of us as its cause? What justification do we have for even assuming the existence of a faculty of representation, which operates completely in accordance with laws (which laws themselves are not represented as indigenous to the faculty of representation, but rather as the laws of the striving I—the
66 applicability of which is conditioned by the effect upon feeling of the counterstriving not-I)? In this second part the foundations are laid for new and thoroughly elaborated theories of the pleasant, the beautiful, the sublime, the free obedience of nature to its own laws, God, so-called common sense or the natural sense of truth, and finally, for new theories of natural law and morality, the principles of which are material as well as formal. All of this follows upon the establishment of three absolutes: an absolute I which is governed by laws which it gives itself and which can be represented only under the condition of an affection by the not-I; an absolute not-I which is free and independent of all of our laws and which can be represented only as expressing these laws—either positively or negatively, but always to a finite degree; and an absolute capacity within ourselves to determine ourselves absolutely according to the effects of both the not-I and the I, a capacity which can be represented only insofar as it distinguishes an affection by the not-I from an effect of the I or from a law.[47] No philosophy can go beyond these three absolutes.

[47] "Alles durch Aufstellung dreier Absoluten. Eines absoluten Ich, unter selbstgegebnen, unter Bedingung einer Einwirkung des Nicht-Ich vorstellbaren Gesetzen; eines absoluten von allen unsern Gesetzen unabhängigen und freien, unter der Bedingung, daß es dieselben positiv oder negativ, aber immer in einem endlichen Grade ausdrücke, vorstellbaren Nicht-Ich; und eines absoluten, unter der Bedingung, daß es eine Einwirkung des Nicht-Ich von einer Wirkung des Ich, oder einem Gesetze unterscheide, vorstellbaren Vermögens in uns, uns nach Maaßgabe der Einwirkung beider, schlechthin zu bestimmen."