

of others. To those for whom it is simply folly for anyone to seek truth on his own, for those who see in the sciences nothing but a comfortable livelihood, who shrink from any extension of the same, as from a new job, and for whom no means is shameful so long as it is employed in order to silence the person who disrupts their business as usual: to them I have nothing to say.

I would be sorry if I were understood by people of this sort. To date, this wish has been fulfilled so far as they are concerned; and I hope that, in the present case as well, these prefatory remarks will so confuse them that, from now on, they will be unable to see anything beyond the mere letters, inasmuch as what passes for spirit in their case will be yanked back and forth by the secret fury pent up within them.

[First]

Introduction

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1.

Attend to yourself; turn your gaze from everything surrounding you and look within yourself: this is the first demand philosophy makes upon anyone who studies it. Here you will not be concerned with anything that lies outside of you, but only with yourself.

Even on the most cursory self-observation, everyone will perceive a remarkable difference between the various ways in which his consciousness is immediately determined, and one could call these immediate determinations of consciousness “representations.”¹ Some of these determinations appear to us to depend entirely upon our own freedom, and it is impossible for us to believe that anything outside of us, i.e., something that exists independently of our own efforts, corresponds to representations of this sort. Our imagination and our will appear to us to be free. We also possess representations of another sort. We refer representations of this second type to a truth that is supposed to be firmly established independently of us and is supposed to serve as the model for these representa-

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1. *Vorstellungen*. Throughout this translation, the noun *Vorstellung* is translated as “representation” whenever it occurs in an even vaguely technical context. In many ordinary expressions, however, the word has no special technical meaning at all, but is merely a vague term designating whatever one “has in mind,” similar to the informal sense of words like “notion” and “idea” in contemporary English usage. Fichte’s technical employment of this term is derived from Kant and Reinhold, for whom it is the most general term that can be employed to designate all the objects of our consciousness (viz., “intuitions,” “concepts,” “Ideas,” etc.) as objects of consciousness. A “representation” is, quite literally, whatever is *vorgestellt*, or “placed before,” the mind. It is important to remember that “representations” need not be thought of as copying (or “representing”) anything outside of themselves, though this is certainly the way in which they are frequently thought of within ordinary consciousness. (In this technical sense, “representation” plays a role in the writings of the early transcendental idealists similar to that played by the term “idea” in the writings of Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, and Berkeley and the expression “perceptions of the mind” in the writings of Hume.) Similarly, the verb *vorstellen*, which is here somewhat awkwardly rendered as “to represent” or “to entertain representations,” is the term that designates the activity of representing.

tions. When a representation of ours is supposed to correspond to this truth, we discover that we are constrained in determining this representation. In the case of cognition, we do not consider ourselves to be free with respect to the content of our cognitions. In short, we could say that some of our representations are accompanied by a feeling of freedom and others are accompanied by a feeling of necessity.

We cannot reasonably ask why the representations that depend upon our freedom are determined in just the way they are determined and not in some other way. For when we posit them to be dependent upon freedom, we deny that the concept of a “basis” (or “foundation” or “reason” or “ground”)² has any applicability in this case. These representations are what they are for the simple reason that I have determined them to be like this. If I had determined them differently, then they would be different.

But what is the basis of the system of those representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity, and what is the basis of this feeling of necessity itself? This is a question well worth pondering. It is the task of philosophy to answer this question; indeed, to my mind, nothing is philosophy except that science that discharges this task. Another name for the system of representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity is “experience” — whether inner or outer. We thus could express the task of philosophy in different words as follows: Philosophy has to display the basis or foundation of all experience.

Only three objections can be raised against this conception of philosophy’s task. On the one hand, one might deny that consciousness contains any representations that are accompanied by a feeling of necessity and that refer to a truth determined without any help from us. A person who denies this would either do so against his own better knowledge, or else he would have to be constituted differently than other human beings. If so, then in this case nothing would exist for him which he could deny, and thus there would be no denial. Consequently, we could dismiss his objection without any further ado. Or else, someone might contend that the question we have raised is completely unanswerable and that we are and must remain in a state of invincible ignorance on this point. It is superfluous to engage in reasoned debate with someone who makes this objection. The best way to refute him is by actually answering the question, in which case there will be nothing left for him to do but to examine our effort and to indicate where and why it seems to him to be insufficient. Finally, someone might lay a rival claim to the name “philosophy” and maintain

2. “des Begriffs vom Grunde.” The term *Grund* is variously translated here as “foundation,” “ground,” “basis,” and “reason.”

that philosophy is something completely different or something more than what we have claimed. It would be easy to prove to anyone who raises this objection that this is precisely what all of the experts have at all times considered philosophy to be, that all the other things he might like to pass off as philosophy already possess other names of their own, and therefore, that if the word “philosophy” is to have any definite meaning at all, it has to designate precisely the science we have indicated.

We have no desire, however, to engage in a fruitless dispute over a word; and this is why we have long ceased to lay any claim to the name “philosophy” and have given the name *Wissenschaftslehre*, or “Theory of Scientific Knowledge,” to the science that actually has to carry out the task indicated.

2.

One can ask for a basis or foundation only in the case of something one judges to be contingent, i.e., only if one presupposes that the thing in question could also have been different from the way it is, even though it is not something determined by freedom. Indeed, something becomes contingent for someone precisely insofar as he inquires concerning its basis. To seek a basis or reason for something contingent, one has to look toward something else, something determinate, whose determinacy explains why what is based upon it is determined in precisely the way it is and not in any of the many other ways in which it could have been determined. It follows from the mere thought of a basis or reason that it must lie outside of what it grounds or explains. The basis of an explanation and what is explained thereby thus become posited — as such — in opposition to one another, and are related to one another in such a way that the former explains the latter.

Philosophy has to display the basis or foundation of all experience. Consequently, philosophy’s object must necessarily lie *outside of all experience*. This is a principle that is supposed to be true of all philosophy, and it really has applied to all philosophy produced right up to the era of the Kantians, with their “facts of consciousness” and hence of “inner experience.”³

3. It is not Kant himself whom Fichte has in mind in this passage. This is, instead, a reference to the attempt by certain contemporary followers of Kant (whom Fichte often refers to as “so-called Kantians”) to base philosophy solely on the “facts of consciousness” or “facts of (inner) experience.” The first to propose this

(188) No objection whatsoever can be made to the principle just advanced, for the premise of our argument is derived simply from an analysis of the previously stipulated concept of philosophy, and our conclusion is merely inferred from this premise. Naturally, we cannot prevent anyone who wishes to do so from maintaining that the concept of a basis or foundation has to be explicated in some other way, nor can we prevent him from employing this term to designate whatever he wishes. We, however, are fully entitled to declare that we do not wish the preceding description of “philosophy” to be understood to include anything except what *we* have stated. Accordingly, if one does not wish to accept this definition of philosophy, then one has to deny the very possibility of philosophy in the sense we have indicated, and we have already taken this objection into account.

3.

A finite rational being possesses nothing whatsoever beyond experience. The entire contents of his thinking are comprised within experience. These same conditions necessarily apply to the philosopher, and thus it

strategy was Fichte’s immediate predecessor at Jena, Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1758–1823), who claimed to base his entire, systematic revision of Kant’s Critical philosophy on a single first principle (“the principle of consciousness”), a principle he described as no more than an expression of an “immediate fact of consciousness.” Reinhold first outlined his own “Elementary Philosophy” or “Philosophy of the Elements” in his *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (1789) and then elaborated and revised it in two subsequent works: *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen*, vol. I (1790) and *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* (1794). (A substantial excerpt from the latter is translated by George di Giovanni as *The Foundations of Philosophical Knowledge*, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris [Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1985], pp. 52–103.) For discussion of Reinhold’s crucial role in the development of transcendental idealism, see ch. 8 of Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Daniel Breazeale, “Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold’s ‘Elementary Philosophy,’” *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (1982): 785–821. For Fichte’s critique of Reinhold’s project, see his 1794 review of *Aenesidemus* (translated in EPW), as well as the illuminating letters from Fichte to Reinhold (also translated in EPW).

Another notable attempt to base philosophy on the “facts of consciousness” was made by Fichte’s colleague (and professional rival) at Jena, K. C. E. Schmid (1761–

appears incomprehensible how he could ever succeed in elevating himself above experience.

The philosopher, however, is able to engage in abstraction. That is to say, by means of a free act of thinking he is able to separate things that are connected with each other within experience. The *thing*, i.e., a determinate something that exists independently of our freedom and to which our cognition is supposed to be directed, and the *intellect*, i.e., the subject that is supposed to be engaged in this activity of cognizing, are inseparably connected with each other within experience. The philosopher is able to abstract from either one of these, and when he does so he has abstracted from experience and has thereby succeeded in elevating himself above experience. If he abstracts from the thing, then he is left with an intellect in itself as the explanatory ground of experience; that is to say, he is left with the intellect in abstraction from its relationship to experience. If he abstracts from the intellect, then he is left with a thing in itself (that is, in abstraction from the fact that it occurs within experience) as the explanatory ground of experience. The first way of proceeding is called *idealism*; the second is called *dogmatism*.⁴

As one will surely become convinced by the present account, these two philosophical systems are the only ones possible. According to the former system, the representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity are products of the intellect, which is what this system presupposes in order to explain experience. According to the latter, dogmatic system, such representations are a product of the thing in itself, which is what this system presupposes.

Anyone who wishes to dispute the claim that these two systems are the only ones possible either must prove that there is some other way to elevate oneself above experience except by means of abstraction, or else he must prove that consciousness of experience contains some additional component beyond the two already mentioned.

Regarding the first system, it will indeed become clear later on that what is called “the intellect” is actually present within consciousness, al-

1812). For a detailed account of Schmid’s variety of Kantianism and an even more detailed statement of Fichte’s objections to it, see the brilliant polemical essay of 1795, “Vergleich des von Herrn Prof. Schmid aufgestellten Systems mit der *Wissenschaftslehre*.” (In SW, II, pp. 420–58 = GA, I,3: 235–66; English translation in EPW, pp. 316–35.)

4. For Fichte’s use of these terms and the relation of the same to previous discussions by Kant and Schelling, see the editor’s introduction.

beit under another designation, and is not, therefore, something produced purely by means of abstraction. We will also see, however, that our consciousness of the latter is conditioned by an act of abstraction, albeit one quite natural to human beings.

This is by no means to deny that it might very well be possible to construct a whole by fusing together fragments from each of these two very different systems. Nor would we deny that people have, in fact, very often engaged in just such an inconsistent enterprise. We do, however, deny that any system other than these two is possible so long as one proceeds consistently.

4.

427 We will employ the term “object of philosophy” to designate the explanatory ground or foundation a particular philosophy proposes to employ in order to account for experience, for such an “object” appears to exist only by means of and only for the philosophy that proposes it. With respect to their relationship to consciousness as a whole, there is a remarkable difference between the object of *idealism* and the object of *dogmatism*. Everything of which I am conscious is called an “object of consciousness.” Such an object can be related to the representing subject in three different ways: It either appears to be something first produced by means of the intellect’s representation of it, or else it appears to be something present without any help from the intellect. In the latter case, either the properties of this object appear to be determined along with the object itself, or else what is supposed to be present is the mere existence of the object, while its properties are determinable by the free intellect.

The first relationship between the object of consciousness and the representing subject gives us a purely “made up” or invented object — whether invented for any particular purpose or not. The second furnishes us with an object of experience. The third provides us with a unique type of object [viz., the I], the nature of which we wish to establish at once.

I can freely determine myself to think of this thing or that — of the dogmatist’s “thing in itself,” for example. If I now abstract from whatever it is I am thinking of and attend only to myself, then I myself become, in this object, the object of a determinate representation.⁵ In my judgment, it

5. “so werde ich mir selbst in diesem Gegenstande das Object einer bestimmten Vorstellung.” The German words *Gegenstand* and *Object* are both rendered here as “object.” As a general rule, Fichte employs the latter term in more abstract contexts, such as the preceding discussion of the “object of philosophy,” and limits the

is because of my own act of self-determination that I appear to myself in just this determinate manner and am not determined in some other way. In the present case, therefore, it is only because I have determined myself in precisely this way that I appear to myself to be engaged in thinking at all; and this is also the reason why, of all the possible thoughts I could be thinking, I am thinking precisely of the thing in itself. I have freely made myself into such an object. I have not, however, made myself “in itself”; instead, I am required to think of myself as what precedes and is to be determined by an act of self-determination.⁶ I am, accordingly, an object for myself, an object whose properties, under certain conditions, depend upon the intellect alone, but whose existence must always be presupposed. (190)

The object of idealism is precisely this I in itself.* The object of this system, moreover, actually appears within consciousness as something real, although not as a *thing in itself*; for were the I to appear within consciousness as a thing in itself, then idealism would cease to be what it is and would be transformed into dogmatism. Instead, the object of idealism appears within consciousness as an *I in itself*. It does not appear there as an object of experience, for it is nothing determinate, but is determined solely by me, and without this determination it is nothing whatsoever and does not exist at all. Instead, it appears within consciousness as something elevated above all experience. 428

In contrast, the object of dogmatism belongs to the class of those objects produced only by means of free thinking. The thing in itself is a pure invention which possesses no reality whatsoever. It certainly does not appear within experience. For the system of experience is nothing but thinking accompanied by a feeling of necessity, and not even the dogmatist, who, like every other philosopher, has the task of providing this system of experience with a foundation, can pretend that it is anything else. To be sure, the dogmatist wishes to guarantee the reality of this thing in itself; that is to say, he wants to establish the necessity of thinking of it as the basis

former to more concrete cases of “objects of experience” (*Gegenstände* — those things which appear to “stand over against” consciousness and to limit practical action). Fichte does not, however, adhere in any rigorous fashion to this terminological distinction.

6. “ich bin genöthigt, mich als das zu bestimmende der Selbstbestimmung voraus zu denken.”

* I have hitherto avoided this expression in order not to occasion any representation of an I as a thing in itself. My concern was in vain; consequently, I will now employ this expression, because I do not see whom I have to spare.

or foundation of all experience. And he will have succeeded in doing just this if he can show that experience is really explained thereby and that it cannot be explained without thinking of this thing in itself. But this is precisely the point in question here, and one may not presuppose what has to be proven.

The object of idealism has an advantage, therefore, over that of dogmatism, for the former can be shown to be present within consciousness — not, to be sure, as the explanatory ground of experience, for this would be contradictory and would transform this system itself into a portion of experience; yet it can still be shown to be present, as such, within consciousness. In contrast, the object of dogmatism cannot be considered to be anything but a pure invention, which can be made into something real only by the success of this system.

The above remarks were added merely for the purpose of facilitating a clear understanding of the differences between the two systems and were not meant to imply anything against the latter system. It should by no means be held against a philosophical system that its object, considered as the explanatory ground of experience, must lie beyond experience; for this is true of every philosophy and is required by the very nature of philosophy itself. Nor have we yet encountered any reason why this object should, in addition to this, appear within consciousness in a particular manner.

Should anyone find these remarks to be unconvincing, this does not mean that it will be impossible for him to become convinced by our inquiry as a whole, for these are merely incidental remarks. Nevertheless, in keeping with my intention, I wish to take various possible objections into account here as well. Someone might deny, for example, that any immediate self-consciousness is involved in a free action of the mind. Once again, all we would have to do is to remind such a person of what we said above about the conditions under which such immediate self-consciousness is possible. Such self-consciousness does not impose itself upon anyone, and it does not simply occur without any assistance from us.⁷ One must actually act in a free manner, and then one must abstract from the object and attend only to oneself. No one can be forced to do this. And if someone pretends to act in this manner, no one else can ever know whether he is proceeding correctly and in the manner requested. In a word: this type of consciousness cannot be proven to anyone. Everyone must freely generate it within himself. One could object to our second claim (viz., that the thing in itself is a

7. “kommt nicht von selbst.” I.e., self-consciousness, unlike our consciousness of objects, does not come before us on its own; it has to be produced. In order to be self-conscious we have to *do* something.

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mere invention) only if one has misunderstood it. We would refer anyone who raises such an objection to our earlier description of how this concept is produced.

5.

Neither of these two systems can directly refute the opposing one; for the dispute between them is a dispute concerning the first principle, i.e., concerning a principle that cannot be derived from any higher principle. If the first principle of either system is conceded, then it is able to refute the first principle of the other. Each denies everything included within the opposite system. They do not have a single point in common on the basis of which they might be able to achieve mutual understanding and be united with one another. Even when they appear to be in agreement concerning the words of some proposition, they understand these same words to mean two different things.*

To begin with, idealism is unable to refute dogmatism. As we have already seen, the former does indeed have an advantage over the latter, in that it is able to exhibit the presence within consciousness of the foundation it wishes to employ in its explanation of experience, viz., the freely acting intellect. Even the dogmatist must concede this fact, as such, for otherwise he would render himself incapable of any further discussion with the idealist. By means of a correct inference from his own first principle, however, the dogmatist transforms this fact into an illusion and a deception and

* This is why Kant was not understood and why the *Wissenschaftslehre* has found no acceptance and is unlikely to find such acceptance anytime soon. Kant's system and the *Wissenschaftslehre* are both *idealistic*, not in the ordinary, imprecise sense of the term, but in the precise sense just indicated. Modern philosophers, however, are as a whole *dogmatists* and are firmly resolved to remain so. The only reason that they put up with Kant at all is that it was possible to make him out to be a dogmatist. But these same sages necessarily find the *Wissenschaftslehre* to be unbearable, because it cannot be transformed in this way. The rapid diffusion of the Kantian philosophy just as soon as it became interpreted in the [dogmatic] manner in which it is now interpreted is no proof of the profundity of our age; on the contrary, it testifies to the superficiality of the same. This form of “Kantianism” is the most fantastic monster that human fantasy has ever engendered, and it does little credit to the perspicuity of its defenders that they fail to realize this. Furthermore, it can be easily proven that the only thing that recommends this philosophy is that it allows people to dispense with all serious speculation and allows them to believe that they have been granted a royal patent authorizing them to continue cultivating their beloved and superficial empiricism.

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thereby renders it incapable of serving as a basis for explaining anything else; for, within the context of the dogmatist's philosophy, this "fact" is not able to vouch for its own truth. According to the dogmatist, everything that occurs within consciousness is a product of a thing in itself, and therefore this must also be true of those determinations of our consciousness which are allegedly produced by freedom, as well as of our opinion that we are free. This opinion is produced within us by the efficacious action of some thing, and those determinations we think of as derived from our own freedom are also produced in this way. We do not realize this, however, and this is why we ascribe no cause to such determinations and attribute them, instead, to freedom. Every consistent dogmatist must necessarily be a fatalist. He does not deny, as a fact of consciousness, that we consider ourselves to be free; indeed, it would be quite unreasonable to deny this. Instead, he uses his own principle to prove the falsity of this claim. He entirely rejects the self-sufficiency of the I, which the idealist takes as his fundamental explanatory ground, and he treats the I merely as a product of things, i.e., as an accidental feature of the world. A consistent dogmatist is also necessarily a materialist. He can be refuted only by postulating the freedom and self-sufficiency of the I. But this is precisely what he denies.

The dogmatist is equally incapable of refuting the idealist.

The dogmatist's principle, viz., the thing in itself, is nothing and, as even its exponent must concede, has no reality beyond that reality it is supposed to obtain by serving as the sole foundation for an explanation of experience. But the idealist undermines this proof to the extent that he is able to account for experience in a different way. In doing this, the idealist denies the very basis upon which the dogmatist proposes to erect his own account of experience. The thing in itself thus becomes a complete chimaera, and no further reason is evident why anyone should ever assume that a thing in itself exists at all. With this, the entire edifice of dogmatism comes crashing to the ground.

The absolute incompatibility of these two systems follows from what has already been said, for the implications of each nullify those of the other. Thus any system that tries to combine elements of both is necessarily inconsistent. Whenever this is attempted, the various components will not fit together, and at some point there arises an enormous gap. Anyone who wishes to challenge this claim must establish the possibility of such a combination, a combination that presupposes⁸ a continuous transition from matter to mind or vice versa, or (what amounts to the same thing) a con-

8. Reading, with the text of the original edition and with GA, "zur Freiheit, voraussetzt, müßte" for SW's "zur Freiheit, müsste."

tinuous transition from necessity to freedom.

So far as we can see at this point, both of these systems appear to have the same speculative value, and yet they can neither co-exist with nor do anything to refute each other. Thus it is interesting to ask what might motivate anyone who understands this situation — and it is not at all difficult to understand — to prefer one of these systems to the other. Why does skepticism, i.e., the complete abandonment of any attempt to answer the question concerning the foundation of experience, not become universal?

The dispute between the idealist and the dogmatist is actually a dispute over whether the self-sufficiency of the I should be sacrificed to that of the thing, or conversely, whether the self-sufficiency of the thing should be sacrificed to that of the I. What, therefore, could drive a rational person to declare himself in favor of either one of these two systems?

If a philosopher is to be considered a philosopher at all, he must necessarily occupy a certain standpoint, a standpoint that will sooner or later be attained in the course of human thinking, even if this occurs without any conscious effort on one's own part. When a philosopher considers things from this standpoint, all he discovers is that *he must entertain representations both of himself as free and of determinate things external to himself*.⁹ It is impossible for a person simply to remain at this level of thinking. The thought of a mere representation is only half a thought, a broken fragment of a thought. We must also think of something else as well, namely, of something that corresponds to this representation and exists independently of the act of representing. In other words, a representation cannot subsist simply for itself and purely on its own. It is something only in conjunction with something else; by itself, it is nothing. It is precisely the necessity of thinking in this way that drives us from our initial standpoint and makes us ask: What is the basis of representations? Or, what amounts to exactly the same question: What corresponds to representations?

The representation of the self-sufficiency of the I can certainly co-exist with a representation of the self-sufficiency of the thing, though the self-sufficiency of the I itself cannot co-exist with that of the thing. Only one of these two can come first; only one can be the starting point; only one can be independent. The one that comes second, just because it comes second, necessarily becomes dependent upon the one that comes first, with which it is supposed to be connected.

9. "als daß er sich vorstellen müsse, er sey frei, und es seyen außer ihm bestimmte Dinge." More freely: "he finds that he must think that he is free and that there are determinate things outside of him."

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433 → Which of these two should come first? This is not a question that can be decided simply by consulting reason alone. For what we are concerned with here is not how some member is to be connected to a series (which is the only sort of question that can be decided on the basis of rational grounds), but rather, with the act of beginning the entire series;¹⁰ and since this act is absolutely primary, it can depend upon nothing but the freedom of thinking. Consequently, the decision between these two systems is one that is determined by free choice; and thus, since even a free decision is supposed to have some basis, it is a decision determined by inclination and interest. What ultimately distinguishes the idealist from the dogmatist is, accordingly, a difference of interest.

One's supreme interest and the foundation of all one's other interests is one's interest in oneself. This is just as true of a philosopher as it is of anyone else. The interest that invisibly guides all of his thinking is this: to avoid losing himself in argumentation, and instead to preserve and to affirm himself therein. But there are two different levels of human development, and, so long as everyone has not yet reached the highest level in the course of the progress of our species, there are two main sub-species of human beings. Some people — namely, those who have not yet attained a full feeling of their own freedom and absolute self-sufficiency — discover themselves only in the act of representing things. Their self-consciousness is dispersed and attached to objects and must be gleaned from the manifold of the latter. They glimpse their own image only insofar as it is reflected through things, as in a mirror. If they were to be deprived of these things, then they would lose themselves at the same time. Thus, for the sake of their own selves, they cannot renounce their belief in the self-sufficiency of things; for they themselves continue to exist only in conjunction with these things. It is really through the external world that they have become everything they are, and a person who is in fact nothing but a product of things will never be able to view himself in any other way. He will, furthermore, be correct — so long as he speaks only of himself and of those who are like him in this respect. The dogmatist's principle is belief in things for the sake of himself. Thus he possesses only an indirect or mediated belief in his own dispersed self, which is conveyed to him only by objects.

→ Anyone, however, who is conscious of his own self-sufficiency and independence from everything outside of himself — a consciousness that can be obtained only by making something of oneself on one's own and

10. Reading, with the text of the original edition and with GA, “von dem Anfangen der ganzen Reihe” for SW's “von dem Anfange der ganzen Reihe” (“with the beginning of the entire series”).

independently of everything else — will not require things in order to support his self, nor can he employ them for this purpose, for they abolish his self-sufficiency and transform it into a mere illusion. The I that he possesses and that interests him cancels this type of belief in things. His belief in his own self-sufficiency is based upon inclination, and it is with passion that he shoulders his own self-sufficiency. His belief in himself is immediate.

This interest also permits us to understand why the defense of a philosophical system is customarily accompanied by a certain amount of passion. When the dogmatist's system is attacked he is in real danger of losing his own self. Yet he is not well prepared to defend himself against such attacks, for there is something within his own inner self which agrees with his assailant. This is why he defends himself with so much vehemence and bitterness. The idealist, in contrast, is quite unable to prevent himself from looking down upon the dogmatist with a certain amount of disrespect, since the dogmatist cannot say anything to him which he himself has not long since known and already rejected as erroneous. For one becomes an idealist only by passing through a disposition toward dogmatism — if not by passing through dogmatism itself.¹¹ Confounded, the dogmatist grows angry and, if it were only in his power to do so, would prosecute; while the

11. The autobiographical pathos of this observation is apparent from the following passage from Fichte's November 1790 draft of a letter to his friend H. N. Achelis in which he announces his rejection of metaphysical determinism (viz., “dogmatism”) and espousal of a Kantian philosophy of freedom (viz., “idealism”):

“The influence that this philosophy, especially its moral part (though this is unintelligible apart from a study of the *Critique of Pure Reason*), exercises upon one's entire way of thinking is unbelievable — as is the revolution that it has occasioned in my own way of thinking in particular. I particularly owe it to you to confess that I now believe wholeheartedly in human freedom and realize full well that duty, virtue, and morality are all possible only if freedom is presupposed. I realized this truth very well before — perhaps I said as much to you — but I felt that the entire sequence of my inferences forced me to reject morality. It has, in addition, become quite obvious to me that very harmful consequences for society follow from the assumption that all human actions occur necessarily. [. . .] If I have the time and the leisure, I will devote them for the present entirely to the Kantian philosophy. It would perhaps be of benefit to the world forcefully and vividly to urge Kant's first principles of morality upon the public in a popular presentation. This is a merit I would like to acquire for myself, especially in order to compensate for my having spread false first principles.”

See too the even earlier remarks on this same subject in Fichte's August/September 1790 letter to F. A. Weissshuhn. (Both of these letters are translated in full in EPW.)

idealist remains cool and is in danger of ridiculing the dogmatist.

The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it. Someone whose character is naturally slack or who has been enervated and twisted by spiritual servitude, scholarly self-indulgence, and vanity will never be able to raise himself to the level of idealism.

As we will show in a moment, one can point out to the dogmatist the inadequacy and inconsistency of his system; one can confuse and worry him on every side; but one cannot convince him, for he is incapable of calmly and coolly listening to and evaluating a theory that he finds to be simply unendurable. If idealism should prove to be the only true philosophy, then from this it would follow that in order to philosophize one must be born a philosopher, must be reared as a philosopher, and must educate oneself as a philosopher. But no application of human art or skill can make one into a philosopher. This science, therefore, does not expect to make many converts among people who are already firmly set in their ways. If it may entertain any hopes at all in this regard, these are pinned on the young, whose innate energy has not yet been ruined by the slackness of the present age.

6.

Dogmatism, however, is quite unable to explain what it is supposed to explain, and this demonstrates its inadequacy.

Dogmatism is supposed to explain representations, and it tries to make a particular representation comprehensible on the basis of an efficacious action of the thing in itself. The dogmatist, however, is not permitted to deny the testimony of immediate consciousness regarding representations. — What is this testimony? In answering this question, it is not my intention to attempt to formulate in concepts something accessible only to inner intuition, nor do I intend to engage here in an exhaustive discussion of a topic to which the greater portion of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is devoted. All I wish to do is to remind you of something everyone who has ever taken a hard look within himself must long since have discovered.

The intellect, as such, observes itself, and this act of self-observation is immediately directed at everything that the intellect is.¹² Indeed, the na-

12. “[. . .] and this act of self-observation is immediately united with everything that pertains to the intellect.” [First printing.]

ture of the intellect consists precisely in this immediate unity of being and seeing. Everything included within the intellect exists for the intellect, and the intellect is for itself everything that it is; only insofar as this is true is the intellect what it is, qua intellect. Let us say that I think of this object or that: What does this mean? How do I appear to myself in this act of thinking? I appear to myself in this case only as follows: If the object in question is one I have merely imagined, then I produce certain determinations within myself. Or, if the object in question is one that is really supposed to exist, then these determinations are present within me without any assistance from me — and I observe this production, this being. These determinations exist within me only to the extent that I observe them; observing and being are inseparably united. — A thing, in contrast, may possess a variety of different features; but if we ask, “For whom is it what it is?” no one who understands our question will answer that “it exists for itself.” Instead, an intellect also has to be thought of in this case, an intellect for which the thing in question exists. The intellect, in contrast, necessarily is for itself whatever it is, and nothing else needs to be thought of in conjunction with the thought of an intellect. When the intellect is posited to exist as an intellect,¹³ then that for which it exists is already posited along with it. Accordingly, if I may speak figuratively, there is a double series within the intellect: a series of being and a series of observing, a series of what is real and a series of what is ideal. The essence of the intellect consists precisely in the indivisibility of this double series. (The intellect is synthetic.) In contrast, only a single series pertains to the thing, namely, the real series (a merely posited being). Thus the intellect and the thing are direct opposites of one another. They lie in two different worlds, between which there is no bridge.

Dogmatism wishes to use the principle of causality to explain the general nature of the intellect as such, as well as the specific determinations of the same. The intellect is in this case supposed to be something that has been caused; i.e., it is supposed to be the second member in a series.

13. “Durch ihr Gesetzseyn, als Intelligenz.” *Gesetzseyn* (“posited being” or “being posited”) is a word of Fichte’s own coinage. For the intellect, all being is, initially anyway, simply “posited being” — i.e., the conscious representation or thought of being. What distinguishes the intellect from objects is that, in the case of the former, there can be no question of distinguishing its “being in itself” (*Sein für sich*) from its “posited being” (or “being for consciousness”). An intellect exists only insofar as it is posited (and indeed, posited by itself); and if it is posited, then it exists. Its *Sein an sich* = its *Gesetzsein*. This is what it means to say that the intellect exists *für sich* or “for itself.”