A CRITICAL EXPLICATION OF THE FIRST TWO SECTIONS OF FICHTE’S

GRUNDLAGE DER GESAMTEN WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I offer a critical explication of the theoretical section of Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (*Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, abbreviated as *Grundlage*); in doing so, I explore the highly idiosyncratic mode of philosophical reasoning used in that text. In doing this, it is of decisive importance to understand how a set of philosophical figures function to drive the development of the conceptuality required for Fichte’s project. As such, the explication of this work partly involves tracing the way in which figurative language and geometrical schema develop and drive the determination of that conceptuality. In closely following the *Grundlage*’s series of concepts and schemata, we are better able to understand the decisive importance such figures play in Fichte’s thought, and, more generally, develop a deeper appreciation of the role of the imagination in philosophical thinking.
Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1
Chapter 1: Fichtean Schemata and Figurative Language.......................... 10
Chapter 2: Architectures of System................................................................. 25
Chapter 3: I and not-I ....................................................................................... 51
Chapter 4: Division and Determination.......................................................... 71
Chapter 5: the Principle of Ground ................................................................. 89
Chapter 6: Efficacy and Substantiality.............................................................. 108
Chapter 7: Inter-active and Independent Activities........................................ 139
Chapter 8: Consciousness as Crossing............................................................. 164
Chapter 9: Ideal and Real Ground................................................................. 176
Chapter 10: the Determination of Totality...................................................... 199
Chapter 11: Imagination and Anstoß............................................................... 211
Chapter 12: the Deduction of Representation................................................ 235
Conclusion: The Role of Liminal Figurativity in the Grundlage................. 253
Bibliography ....................................................................................................... 257
Introduction

How at all does the empirical I stand to the pure I? Anyone who wants to be a philosopher will more than appreciate a little information on this, and above all want not to become a ludicrous creature by being transformed, eins zwei drei kokolorum, into speculation.

— Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding unscientific postscript

Fichte’s thought is difficult to understand but easy to caricature. As Günter Zöller notes, the difficulty of his work arises from the fact that he “eschewed established philosophical terminology, continued to revise the presentation of his philosophical position throughout his lifetime and made unprecedented demands for sustained concentration on the listeners of his lectures and the readers of his works” (Fichte’s Transcendental Philosophy 25). As opposed to this, the central position which he gives to the I, especially in his Jena period, makes it easy to reduce his philosophy to a slogan: “The I is to be the central principle of philosophy,” which, when read superficially, appears to be nothing more than philosophical narcissism¹. The seeming opacity of his thinking, when combined its traditional reception as a mere subjective idealist—a paving stone on the way from Kant to Hegel—had left the careful study of his work in a state of near total neglect until the relatively recent resurgence² of interest in his work in the second half of the twentieth century. Given the difficulty of engaging Fichte, and the ease of dismissing him as the “Philosopher of the I,” one might wonder if understanding Fichte is worth the effort.

¹ This is a comparatively benign way of interpreting the Fichtean centrality of the I. In Eclipse of Reason, Max Horkheimer writes, “in [Fichte’s] early doctrine, according to which the sole raison d’être of the world lies in affording a field of activity for the imperious transcendental self, the relation between the ego [das Ich] and nature is one of tyranny.” Horkheimer understands modern rationality to be much closer to this portrayal of Fichte than that rationality itself recognizes.

² Foreshadowed by Heidegger’s lectures on German Idealism, but truly coming into its own, in German speaking countries, with Dieter Henrich’s work on Fichte (Henrich, Einsicht). In the English speaking world, Daniel Breazeale has been instrumental in both making his work accessible in translation and in editing multiple anthologies which comment on some phase of his thinking. See the bibliography, below, for an indication of its scope.
I initially encountered Fichte’s work in a graduate course on German Idealism; at this time, I became acquainted with the work of his Jena period (1794 — 1800). This period of his thinking is marked by both an insistence on establishing scientific (i.e. Wissenschaftlich) rigor within philosophy and the project of securing, through philosophical thought, the foundations of the other sciences. In itself, this is not unusual, as many thinkers of the same era (e.g. Karl Leonhard Reinhold, Jacob Sigismund Beck, etc.) understood themselves as having a similar, if not identical, project. Nor is it unique to Fichte that he finds his point of departure in the study of Kant’s critical philosophy (the same is true of Reinhold and Beck) or even that he aspires to “complete” the Kantian project. What struck me about Fichte was the way in which he thematizes representation itself: representation—the experience of a certain set of mental determinations as free or constrained—isn’t simply presupposed but set forth as something which must be explained, but must itself be accounted for. Given the critical parameters of Fichte’s philosophy, this cannot mean explaining representation on the basis of something which exists wholly independently of it. Representation must be accounted for on the basis of something not wholly other to it, yet also more fundamental than it (i.e. unlike representation, not requiring a higher ground to explain). This means that the principles which account for the emergence of representation can neither be “things in themselves” nor themselves mere representations. If these principles were things in themselves, he would be left with the skeptical impasse of how knowledge of such things is possible; if they were mere representations, he would be presupposing the very thing he sets out to account for.

Fichte’s turn to the I (das Ich) must be understood in terms of this exigency. On the one hand, the I is the being for whom there are representations; on the other, it is, itself, the representing being (the Kantian legacy)— the I is active in representation. But merely appealing to the I is not sufficient; the representations which must be accounted for are not mere fancy but are bound up with feelings of necessity and constraint. How and why should the I limit itself in this way? Yet,
once again, appealing to a thing-in-itself as the limiting principle of the I is not acceptable, as that outstrips the limits of critical philosophy. The I, “itself,” becomes something which must be understood—not, at this point, by appealing to a ground outside the I, but through a more nuanced examination of the I’s self-constitution. Like representation, the I cannot be simply presupposed, but the peculiar logic of its “self-positing” must be investigated.

At this point, the problem of representation becomes the problem of self-consciousness; this is because the I’s existence is unthinkable apart from its self-positing. For Fichte, self-consciousness is not a matter of coming to be conscious of something which pre-existed that act, but is itself the activity through which both the being which is conscious and the being which that being is conscious of exist. For the I to be an I, it must be conscious of itself as an I. Indeed, this is why Dieter Henrich understood Fichte’s thought to be of contemporary relevance. Henrich writes, “[a]nyone seeking a suitable concept of ‘self-consciousness’ must go back to Fichte and the knowledge he achieved”—it is not new that the I is taken as an explanatory ground (consider Descartes); what is new is the way in which self-consciousness itself becomes a problem. Thus, in Fichte’s Jena period, we find two questions which are not without contemporary relevance—the question of the emergence of representation, and the question of essential nature of subjectivity. Because of this relevance, it is the aim of this dissertation to provide readers with some access to Fichte’s thought in its earliest, distinctively Fichtean phase—his work from 1794, by way of the lecture handbook he published that year.

The text under consideration here is Fichte’s 1794 lecture handbook, *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (*Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, hereafter abbreviated as *Grundlage*). This was the first (and only public) detailed presentation of the foundation of his philosophy, and, as the date suggests, we also have in this text a representative presentation of the earliest phase of the Jena period. Though many essays have been written, there has been little in the way of a sustained
explication of this text. Because the chief interest for this work is the emergence of representation and the self-constitution of the I, I will limit the investigation of the Grundlage to the first two parts.

To make sense of this work, we will also be making extensive use of two other texts from this period—the prospectus for the same lecture course (Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre) and an essay he wrote on the origin of language the following year (“On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language”). I examine this later essay in order to come to terms with a certain set of “figurative” terms which are used repeatedly in the Grundlage; we will need to develop some understanding of how and why he uses such figurative terms in what is supposed to be a “scientific” undertaking.

*Chapter outline*

In chapter one, I briefly outline Fichte’s understanding of figurative language and its connection to the schemata of the imagination. In chapter 2, we develop an account of what the Grundlage intends to accomplish from an examination of aforementioned prospectus. This will provide us with an initial orientation to the Grundlage’s subject matter, methodology, and problematic. Chapter 3 considers the two most basic fundamental principles of the Grundlage and the fundamental contradiction which they present. Chapter 4 considers the way in which the method of the Grundlage seeks to determine a synthesis of this contradiction and how this leads to the determination of the third fundamental principle. In chapter 5, the implications of the third principle are shown to lead to a new, dialectical strategy for overcoming the contradiction of principles. This chapter is key, as it explores the most basic character of Fichte’s methodology and shapes its most fundamental concept. Chapter 6 presents the initial determination of the “theoretical synthesis” and the basic contradiction it contains. Through the determination of this

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3 A notable exception being George Seidel’s Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre of 1794: a commentary on Part 1. As the title indicates, the work is limited to an examination of the first part. In this dissertation, we are also examining the much longer second section.
contradiction, two basic theoretical concepts are uncovered: efficacy and substantiality. Chapter 7 discusses the need to posit two forms of “independent activity” in order to account for the determinate applicability of substantiality and efficacy, one corresponding to each concept. Chapter 8 examines Fichte’s discussion of consciousness in connection with the need to synthesize the independent and “inter-active” forms of activity. Chapter 9 investigates the identity of real and ideal grounds in the concept of efficacy and outlines the way in which subject and object are opposed in the conceptual schema adumbrated so far. In chapter 10, we follow Fichte’s attempt to syntheses the theoretical contradiction through a consideration of opposed conceptions of “totality” in accordance with the concept of determinability. In chapter 11, the final synthesis is presented as the work of the imagination. A decisive moment in this consideration will be the positing of an event of impact of check (Anstoß) to the I’s “outreaching” activity. Chapter 12 presents an inverted redetermination of the theoretical section’s starting point and deduces representation (and all of its key faculties) from this newly determined inception, completing the circular self-determination of the first two parts of the Grundlage. I conclude with some prospective reflections on what Fichte’s mode of reasoning suggests about the role of figurative language in philosophical thought.
Chapter 1
Fichtean Schemata and Figurative Language

Figures of Representation

Fichte writes that “we can be conscious of all of the intellect’s modes of activity … only in the form of representation [Vorstellung], that is, only insofar as and in the manner that they are represented” (FW 1:81). In a somewhat later text⁴, Fichte refers to these Vorstellungen as “immediate determinations of consciousness” which are either dependent on our freedom or on the posited existence of something both independent of consciousness and constraining with respect to it. Representations are not vague or amorphous intimations, but the determinate opposition of that which is represented (das Vorzustellende) to a representing agent (FW 1:104). The object of a representation is thus represented for a subject. This double character of representation means that one must distinguish a representation from both object and subject. Even when the object of representation is freely⁵ invented, as when one freely imagines a blue rose, the representation of the blue rose is still taken to be distinct from what is being represented. One can arguably create a series of representations of the same imaginary rose, just as it is taken for granted that one can have many representations of a real one. However, the real importance of the correct analysis of representation is linked the possibility of disciplined knowledge—Wissenschaft. In any given science there is a necessary distinction between the subject matter of a discipline and the representational form in and through which that subject matter is understood. The systematically arranged propositions of biology are distinct from frogs, roses, and cellular structures; those of mathematics are distinct from numbers, equations, and ratios; the explicitly formulated principles of chemistry are distinct from the transformations of chemical substances. In each case, we have a distinction between what is

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⁴ 1797’s Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre, FW 1:519-534.
⁵ Though the reproductive imagination is never perfectly free.
represented and the representation of it. Of course, a determination of consciousness is distinct from a linguistic proposition written in a treatise of chemistry. But, for Fichte, such written language only become meaningful when actively brought to life in the consciousness of an individual knower. At best, it is the handmaiden of its meaning; at worst, its opaque shell.

Of course, the presentation (Darstellung) of the Wissenschaftslehre—as the Wissenschaft of Wissenschaft itself—itself occurs in the medium of representation. This is not simply true of its empirical expression in a series of books; though the Wissenschaftslehre is indeed to be published in one or more volumes of work, these writings are but the footprints of the living representations of the philosopher, the representations which give them meaning. The limits of Vorstellung are, at the very least, the limits of a philosophical Darstellung such as the Grundlage, and, for reasons we will explore in some depth, Vorstellung is in turn limited to what can be given (directly or indirectly) in the “intuitions” (Anschauungen) of empirical consciousness. But the Wissenschaftslehre is to deduce activities of the “human spirit” which are not, as the conditioning consciousness, immediately accessible to empirical consciousness (FW 1:91). For this reason, they must be somehow thinkable even if they are not immediately given in intuition, but such thought (the series of representations constituting philosophical thought) remains dependent upon images or figures and thus upon the

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6 Indeed, the readiness of this distinction points to one of Fichte’s most troubling issues given contemporary thought on language. William Rasch explores the way in which writing is subordinated to (and made a mere vehicle for) the expression of the concept in his essay, “Chastising Reflection” (Rasch 1992). Indeed, even the much more charitable interpretation given by Jere Paul Surber understands the Fichte’s reflection on language as “a defense—perhaps the only explicit defense mounted in the period of German idealism—against linguistic-based metacritical attacks on the possibility of transcendental philosophy” (Surber, Place 121). Given the possibility that thinking be conditioned and limited to language, Fichte needs to defend the possibility of a thinking which has validity independent of language.

7 By empirical consciousness, Fichte means consciousness in its in determinate relation to an intuited object. Though it always conditioned by such a determination, this limitation can be abstracted from (though not surpassed) through the free, reflective activity of thought. Thus, the limit of empirical consciousness can be defined as the limit of what can be immediately evident to consciousness as an object of intuition. That is to say, what is fundamentally not an object of intuition (for instance, an activity conditioning intuition, or a thing as posited in its independence of intuition) cannot be a fact (Tatsache) for empirical consciousness. Even thinking requires that the thought be (in some way) an object of intuition, i.e. an figure (Bild) of what is being thought, an figure which must find its beginning in the same faculty which produces empirical figures—the imagination (Einbildungskraft).
imagination. Consider the following quote from a lecture contemporaneous with the writing of the Grundlage, regarding the way a new “series” commences once one abstracts from the series of sensory representations:

The new series [Reihe] into which we are supposed to be introduced is the series constituted by the actions of the human spirit itself, and no longer the series constituted by the objects of these actions. These actions are supposed to be represented. But since no representation is possible without an image [Bild], images of these actions must also be present [es müßen demnach Bilder dieser Handlung vorhanden sein]. But all images are produced by the absolute spontaneity of the imagination [Einbildungskraft], and thus so too are these images. We are acquainted with some of these images—though by no means with the highest actions of the human mind—from Kant’s writings, where they are called “schemata,” whereas the way the imagination operates with such images is called by Kant the “schematism.” Transcendental philosophy in its totality ought to be and can be nothing but an accurate schema of the human spirit in general [ein getroffenes Schema (not Bild) des menschlichen Geistes überhaupt].

Is there anyone who cannot see that this assigns an entirely new and unforeseen task to the imagination… Is there anyone who cannot see that the feelings on which these images are based lie in a deeper region of the human mind, and that the ability to delineate [Entwurfen] such images is exactly what we have already described as “spirit”? (1971 203-4)

Here we see the necessity of image [Bild] for representation, images produced through the “absolute spontaneity” of the imagination. But what sort of images are these? They are not merely the images given in outer intuition. And how do such images relate to representations, or are they themselves representations? Finally, is the “accurate schema” mentioned here an image, a representation, or something else entirely? We must bear these questions in mind as we proceed. In any case, these images are in some sense already present—they condition the representations which constitute the Wissenschaftslehre. This indicates that they are not products of the reproductive imagination, but of the more fundamental productive imagination. In other words, these images are not produced by the self-conscious and free activity of the philosopher, but are encountered as having already been produced by the imagination as a condition of such philosophical enquiry.

8 Namely, Über den Unterschied des Geistes, und des Buchstabens in der Philosophie, a summer lecture series given in 1794. The English translation used is found in Breazeale 1998, 192-215 as “Concerning the difference between The Spirit and the Letter within Philosophy.” The German version consulted in reference to any departures from Breazeale’s translation was the version collected in VDG (72).

9 As we will see, the figure of a series is itself an important Fichtean trope.
Of course, the concept of “image” has a lengthy history\(^\text{10}\). Just as a representation is distinct from what is represented, an image is distinct from what is imaged. But we recognize images due to the likeness which they have to the “original” which is imaged. In invoking Kant’s schematism, here, Fichte must not be referring to an image which is somehow simply given in intuition, but to the schema which allows such judgments of likeness to occur in the first place. For Kant, schemata are conditions of images; they are conditions for our capacity to link a more or less determinate intuition with a concept. Yet a schema, in this special sense, is “something that one cannot bring to any image whatsoever” (CPR B 181). When Fichte proclaims that transcendental philosophy aspires to be a “accurate Schema of the human spirit in general,” he isn’t suggesting that it is to be a literal picture of the human spirit, but that it is to bring forth a determinate representation of how these unrepresentable schemata function to make disciplined knowledge possible. This suggests that the “task” of the imagination which Fichte describes is one for the reproductive imagination, but also that the images developed in such a philosophy are themselves images of these schema—in the language above, delineations or outlinings (Entwurfen) but not “depictions” of these pre-existing images. But these more fundamental images are themselves rooted in feelings (Gefühle) which reside “deeper in the human mind [Gemüt].”

The Dangers of Figurative Language in ‘On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language’

But the question of the relation between language and thought cannot be entirely excised from our discussion. In another contemporaneous work (US)\(^\text{11}\), Fichte understands language to be the “expression of our thoughts through arbitrary signs [willkürliche Zeichen]” (US 302). His use of

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\(^\text{10}\) A history given its decisive trajectory in the Platonic dialogues.

the word “arbitrary” is meant to express the lack of any necessary “resemblance” (ähnlichkeit\textsuperscript{12}) between the sign (as sensible representation) and the expressed concept; such signs are chosen with the intent of occasioning the same “concept” of which one thinks in another rational being. Importantly, this intent and the instruments used to achieve it “presupposes a [rational] choice” (303)—language is not a matter of dull instinct, but of free activity. Note that the implication of this is that both reason and thought are held to exist independently of language\textsuperscript{13}, suggesting that language is but the vehicle of the concept. Indeed, Fichte explicitly states just this in a footnote:

I do not prove here that man does not think without language and that without it he could have had no universal abstract concepts. He is capable of this simply by means of the images [der Bilder] which he projects through phantasy. It is my conviction that language has been held to be much too important if one believed that without it no use of reason at all would have occurred.

Note that, though he refuses any notion of thought being conditioned by language, he does suggest that thought may be conditioned by images. But, if thought is possible independently of language, what would drive the invention of language in the first place? The need to share thought.

The “primordial language” (Ursprache)—the first language which Fichte deduces as its earliest and simplest form—takes the form of a spontaneous and extemporaneous “imitation [Nachahmung]” of nature. This occurred due to the practical needs that all rational beings have—the need to both avoid unnecessary conflict with other rational beings and to harmonize one’s activities with others so that one might accomplish more (i.e. subject nature to the rational ends of freely self-determined agents). To this end the sounds of natural things were imitated, and gestures or “sketchings in the

\textsuperscript{12} This lack of resemblance should be tempered by the extent to which the original sounds of language are all imitations of sounds either made by or accidentally associated with the represented object.

\textsuperscript{13} With respect to reason, the “drive to realize a language” is grounded in a higher drive to “discover rationality outside of oneself” (US, 309). In turn, the drive to discover such rationality in another is itself grounded in a more general drive corresponding to the “highest principle of humanity” and, indeed, reason, namely, the imperative to “always be at one with yourself [sey immer einig mit dir selbsts]” (305). The ultimate purpose of language is to allow for the rational harmonization of oneself with oneself, a harmonization which would be obstructed by misinterpretation of another rational being’s intent but which might also be furthered through cooperation with another rational being.
sand” were used to point to an object and to mime the actions and shapes of natural things (310). Language is thus originally linked to the sensible present, in particular with both acoustic and visual intuition. But what of the concepts which one seeks to communicate? If language is but the vehicle of these pre-given and independent concepts, how could they arise in the first place?

The earliest and most primitive concepts are “sensible concepts.” These are derived via abstraction from the objects of “external representation;” (cf. “sensible concept of substance,” 319-20). Having seen a number of trees, one abstracts from their differences in favor of certain similarities. The most “primitive” concepts are thus something like a general representations, and conceptuality continues to develop on the basis of this form of abstraction. Thus, for Fichte, the concept of a species (Gattungsbegriff) of flower is produced through an abstraction from individual differences among specific representations of flowers by attending to their similarity of “shape, color, and smell” (318) and setting aside their differences. In turn, the concept of genus (Geschlechtsbegriff) (such as that of a ‘tree’ as opposed to a ‘birch’ or ‘spruce’) is produced later through a further abstraction. Most abstract of all are the concepts of “thing” and “being,” the latter largely being understood as “that which endures as opposed to the mutable [das Dauernde im Gegensatz des Wandelbaren]; “being” is nothing more than the “sensible concept of substance” [das sinnlichen Begriff der Substanz]” (319-320).

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14 Jere Paul Surber points to these earliest visual signs as an indication that Fichte cannot be unproblematically placed in the metaphysical tradition subordinating writing to speech (as described in Derrida’s Of Grammatology). Though such visual forms must not be confused with Derridean “arche-writing,” Surber regards the very early place of “inscription” in Fichte’s narrative as a locus (especially vis a vis its difference from alphabetical writing) of difference within “the heart of ‘writing’” (Surber, Language 76).

15 The break with Ursprache is in turn motivated by the limitations of visual signs—such signs are inconvenient because they presupposes attention and proximity of the other, not to mention the light of day (312). There becomes a need to substitute other sounds for such visual signs—not through purely novel creations adopted through convention, but on the basis of imitating sounds accidentally related to them. Ultimately – in the case of any objects for which there wasn’t “even an accidental sound”— sounds are derived through the imitation of sounds for objects which “stand in a certain relation to it” (315).
Here, Fichte asserts that such sensible concepts pertain merely to the objects of sense, and not to the “transcendental” explanation of how such representations of objects of sense are possible in the first place. To account for the sensible, one must turn to the supersensible. On Fichte’s account, the investigation of supersensible ideas commences when the progressive tendency of the human spirit is unchained from the immediate demands of survival, freeing humanity to develop “spiritual ideas [geistigen ideen]” (321) through its explanation of sensible appearances. At first, this drive is satisfied in an explanation of sensible appearances through an appeal to a fundamental form of sensible appearance; that is, when such explanation encounters “one and the same appearance” in numerous such explanations, that appearance is taken as the “ultimate cause” of the others. At some point the same drive would seek a ground for that final explanatory appearance, indeed, for all appearance. In this way, the human spirit is driven to a judgment through which a supersensible god is understood to be the cause of all appearances; Fichte presents this judgment as an enthyme: “there is a world, therefore also a God”\textsuperscript{16}. It is on this basis that the supersensible ideas are “discovered [entdeckted] … from this higher viewpoint,” namely “the soul, immortality, etc.” (322). The discovery and explanation of these ideas occurs through representations of these ideas, i.e. in the development of “spiritual concepts [geistige Begriffe].”

It is at this point that we find the thread binding together the seemingly unrelated senses of figure (schematic and rhetorical). In his consideration of how signs are found for these spiritual concepts, he writes:

There occurs in us a unification of sensible and spiritual representations through the schemata produced by the imagination. Designations for spiritual concepts are borrowed from these schemata. That is, the sign, which already signified in the language the sensible object [Gegenstand] from which the schema was taken, was transferred to the supersensible concept itself. The sign is admittedly founded on the basis of an illusion [Täuschung], but through this illusion the sign was also understood. This is because, for the other to whom

\textsuperscript{16} Fichte notes that this judgment is deceptive if taken to be valid for the understanding. Setting aside the missing premise, he attends to a peculiarity in the judgment’s antecedent, “there is a world.” He notes that this is but a belief, a belief rooted in feeling and not a form of knowledge (ibid.).
the spiritual concept was communicated, *the same thought* [Gedanke] *also depends on the same schema*. The schema is “taken from” [bergenommen] the sensible object. Fichte—despite his special use of “intellectual intuition”—remains committed to the Kantian\(^{17}\) refusal of some form of supersensible intuition (which Kant dismissively calls “intellectual intuition”) which would provide immediate access to supersensible objects. Similarly, for supersensible ideas to be represented, they must be “brought under the forms of sensibility” (ibid, see below). This is why the schema operative in a supersensible idea must itself be “taken” from sensible intuition\(^{18}\); though there are, indeed, two representations, they are developed from the same schema. There are, then, two acts of transference, the second which occurs on the basis of the first, the “borrowing” [entlehnen] of the name from the object which presupposes the prior transference of the schema. This is the decisive moment of torsion in Fichte’s account of figuricity— in order to account for the inmost functioning of the human spirit, spirit must borrow from those schemata which it has already created. We must now consider how this act of transference takes place. On what basis was an object selected to “lend” the relevant schema? Consider his example of the I and the word ‘Spiritus’:

Thus, to give an appropriate example, the soul, the "I" must be conceived as immaterial insofar as it is opposed to the corporeal world. But if it is to be represented, it must be posited outside of us in accordance with the laws governing how external objects are represented, brought under the forms of sensibility [die Formen der Sinnlichkeit], and therefore represented in space. Here is a manifest conflict of the "I" with itself: reason [Vernunft] wishes the "I" to be represented as incorporeal, and the imagination [Einbildungskraft] wishes it to appear only as occupying space, as corporeal. The human spirit seeks to resolve this contradiction by assuming something as substrate of the "I" which it opposes to everything that it knows as grossly corporeal. Thus, the human being, if he is still accustomed to

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\(^{17}\) This is not the meaning “intellectual intuition” has in Fichte’s works. Though this term is not used in the *Grundlage*, it is already an important concept for Fichte, one linked to the possibility of a “method of demonstration” for philosophical truths. It is nothing short of an enactment of the subject-object character of the I in which that which is intuited is not different from the being whom intuits. For an exploration of Fichte’s use of this concept, originating out of a reading of Reinhold, see Jürgen Stolzenberg’s *Fichtes Begriff der Intellektuellen Anschauung* (1986).

\(^{18}\) This would presumably hold for abstract sensible concepts as well.
obtaining materials for his representations primarily from the sense of sight, will choose for his representation of the "I" such matter as is not visible but which he nevertheless perceives [or feels, spurt], for example, air [or breath, Luft], and will call the soul Spiritus. (322-3)

The name ‘Spiritus’ is transferred from the same object from which the schema was borrowed. Such transference suggests an analogy being made between soul and air, but such an analogy could not be understood to follow from a supposed similarity of the analogized terms. To judge their similarity, they must be compared, but, for Fichte, the finite, human spirit can only compare objects through their representations. Given that schemata are required from representation and that such schemata are only first given in the relation of conceptuality to sensible intuition, any comparison between the sensible and supersensible presupposes that the relevant schema has already been transferred from a sensible object to a supersensible idea. The original transference is motivated, not by a preestablished similarity between sensible object (Luft or air) and supersensible idea (the soul [Seele] as “Spiritus”—breath), but through the specific exigency of a conflict between reason and imagination.

The conflict in question arises between a requirement of reason and the “imaginative” requirement of representation. Through freely enacted activity, reason seeks to account for the sensible through supersensible ideas. In the course of doing so, reason opposes the supersensible I to the sensible or “corporeal” world, and “wishes” [will] to represent it as incorporeal. But, for it to be represented, it must be posited as an object or representation, over and against (“outside” of) our existence as representing (not represented) subjects. But this means that the I must be brought “under the forms of sensibility”—it must be posited as something with extension and position19, that is, it must be posited as something corporeal. For this reason, the imagination—as the faculty through which the schemata are produced—“wishes” to represent it as corporeal. Why this necessity? Isn’t it possible— even common— to represent something which are fundamentally

19 We will examine the necessity for this more deeply in a discussion of related passages in the Grundlage and Über den Begriff.
beyond sensibility, beyond intuition? For reasons we shall investigate at some length, Fichte believes that representation requires intuition, that a doubled intuitive activity (both in-tuitive and “ex-tuitive”) is presupposed by Vorstellung as an activity.

The human spirit resolves this conflict by representing the incorporeality of the I through the schema proper to something corporeal: air and, on the basis of this transference, the sign associated with the relevant object, “spiritus,” is the transferred to the soul. Why air? Air is both given in sensibility, but is not given in (what was once) the dominant sense for sensibility—vision. Air is not present for the eyes, but one nevertheless “feels” it. Indeed, the motivation of this choice presupposes a primacy given to vision, for air only represents the soul through vision’s failure to see it, through its invisibility. One presumably “feels” it through other forms of sensibility in general—touch and hearing. The relation of air to vision is analogous to the relation of spirit to sensibility in general, but only on the basis of what is not given in air. Air is adequate to “spirit” only insofar as it is not given for vision. It is not so much that air and the soul are similar, that some predicate is actually shared between them; quite on the contrary, what is common to them is an absence with respect to sense: the absence to vision of the former is used to figure the required absence to sensibility of the latter. There isn’t a likeness between air and soul, there is a likeness in their departure from the demands of presence.

There is, then, what one might call a merely formal analogy between air and spirit: air is, for sight, what the incorporeal soul would be for every possible form of sensibility: nothing. There is

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20 Though Fichte does not use the term analogy here, Kant refers, in a footnote in Religion within the Limits of Reason alone, to the way in which sensible figures are used to symbolize the supersensible. He writes, “in the ascent from the sensible to the supersensible, it is indeed allowable to schematize (that is, to render a concept intelligible by the help of an analogy to something sensible), it is on no account permitted us to infer (and thus to extend our concept), by this analogy, that what holds of the former must also be attributed to the latter” (RGV 74). In the Prolegomena, Kant refers to analogy as, not the “imperfect similarity of two things,” but as the “perfect similarity of relations between two quite dissimilar things” (§ 58). In the context of Fichte’s discussion, we might say that there is a “perfect similarity” between two relations: that between air and sight, and that between Spiritus and sensibility.
no suggestion that they are somehow similar with respect to their essential nature. Of course, air is more than something which does not appear for vision. Consider the sound of the wind, its touch upon the face, the pressure we feel in our lungs and cheeks, the resounding exhalations of our speech; consider the cessation of such breath at death. Though it does so largely through the other senses, air appears, it is something for sensibility—it appears in its link to our most basic corporeal existence. But, at least in Fichte’s account, these associations were not part of the rational motivation for the selection of this schema. The basis of the analogy underwriting this transference—air’s invisibility—does not justify the representation of the “borrowing” idea as truly similar to the “lending” object or, put differently, the transference of the concept’s content to the soul.

We must emphasize that this isn’t simply a matter of suggestive names or signs, or that the formal character of this analogy is trivial. Recall that Fichte states that “the same thought [Gedanke] also depends on the same schema” (322). If thought depends on that shared schema, how can the thought of soul, itself dependent upon the schema for air, avoid the unfounded transference of content, of those properties which were not part of this rational motivation? Indeed, despite the merely formal motivation for the choice of air, we are unavoidably import the content into our representation of the soul as Spiritus. This, indeed, is the fundamental “illusion” (Täuschung) which Fichte identifies in the double transference of schema and sign. The illusion at issue is the apparent similarity between the sensible and supersensible object—the appearance, established first through this transference—that air and soul are not merely similar in their respective relations to eyes and sensibility, but are somehow similar to each other independently of those relations.

In fact, this apparent but false similarity is necessary for the sign to work. The other who is listening or reading presumably first thinks of the ordinary use of the sign and its associated schema, but is lead (through her power to follow the course of reasoning used by the other) to understand its proper, rational use. But consider the way in which the dependence of the sign upon an illusion
(due to schematic transference) may lead to the confusion which obscures the original, rational motivation for the selection of the schema:

The transference of sensible signs to supersensible concepts is nonetheless the cause of an illusion. Through this manner of signification, it becomes easy to confuse the spiritual concept expressed in this way with the sensible object from which the sign was borrowed. If the spirit were signified by a word which, for example, expressed shadows, then primitive man would think of the spirit as something composed of shadows. Thus perhaps [there arose] the whole mythology of shades in Orcus.

This illusion, however, was unavoidable; those concepts could not have been signified in any other way. Thus, anyone who had not yet exercised his power of thought enough to be able to follow the more advanced spirit of the original developer of those spiritual ideas in their more rigorous abstractions will also be unable to grasp the sense in which that developer understood the figurative expression [bildlichen Ausdrücke]. Thus, one such as this would believe that one was only discussing the sensible object from which the name was borrowed, and thinks the spiritual object to be material. (323-4)

If this illusion leads to the confusion of the spiritual concept with the sensible object from which the required schema was borrowed, this does not suggest that those led astray by this illusion draw no distinction between the sensible and supersensible. The danger, here, isn’t primarily one of a crude materialism which would suggest that the soul is composed of ordinary air. On the contrary, this distinction is preserved insofar as one still seeks to address what cannot be seen by mortal eyes. However, the illusion of similarity is now entirely unchecked by the original context of its rational motivation; it is simply taken as a pre-existing similarity between sensible object and supersensible idea.

Fichte notes that this illusion is “unavoidable” because “these concepts could not have been signified in any other way” (323). However, it is only unavoidable for those who are “unable to follow the more advanced spirit of the original developer of those spiritual ideas in their more rigorous abstractions.” For such a one, it becomes “impossible to grasp the sense in which the originator understood the figurative expressions.” In other words, this illusion arises out of a failure to understand the original (and entirely formal) exigency of the schema’s adoption. In the absence of that context, the purely formal motivation for representing the soul through the sensible schema
gives way to an uncritical exportation of content, leading to the uncritical and unfounded transference of sensible imagery to the supersensible soul. Mythology and superstition arise out of such confusion. From the representation of the supersensible soul on the basis of sensible shadows, “there arose the … mythology of the shades of Orcus.”

The “figurative expression [bildlichen Ausdrücke]” through which supersensible ideas are communicated is unlike more familiar instances of figurative language. It doesn’t involve a similarity already existing between two things discovered independently of each other. With the supersensible, the represented idea can only be represented figuratively. The illusion that they are, in fact, similar arises from the perfect absence of sensible content in the latter. The peculiarity is the way in which the supersensible representation borrows the schema operative in its representation from the sensible—a borrowing where the sensible content of the “borrower” does not precede the event of borrowing. In the ordinary use of figurative expression, the ‘figured’ thing has a sensible content independent of the image which figures it; the use of a figurative expression can then be evaluated on the basis of whether or not the ‘figure’ is somehow adequate to that schema. In the case of the supersensible idea, there is no such distinction, and no true question of adequacy of the schema of one to the schema of the other. There simply is no empirical intuition of the supersensible idea which would make it representable for another in a non-figurative way.

The limit of sensibility is also the limit of the form of representation. In the above discussion, supersensible ideas are beyond sensibility and beyond representation. However, representation can and does represent that which cannot be sensibly given, and must do so through the forms of sensibility. Given the unavoidable illusion this creates, and the tendency to transfer both form and content to the figured “idea,” such figures must be understood within the context of their rational exigency. In other words, one must “follow” the course of rational “abstraction”; the course of rational thought as portrayed in a series of propositions is the course of an activity in
which we find the exigency of the original transference. It is also the activity which preserves the
difference sustaining the opposition of the “borrowing” and “lending” objects in light of that
original exigency. This tension isn’t simply found in the history of philosophical thought, but within
the Wissenschaftslehre itself.

Liminal figuration

If Fichte is right, there is no thinking without image, and no image without imagination. With regard to the necessarily “supersensible”21 subject of the Wissenschaftslehre, the presentation of
this thinking to others—the “publication” of this thought—must borrow figures from sensibility. These borrowed images must figure schemata22 which are already present in the human spirit—the
most basic schemata of the productive imagination. But there is no empirical “image”—as
abstracted and reflected upon—without its stabilization, without its rational determination as
something for reflection. In other words, the thinking of the Wissenschaftslehre isn’t simply a matter of
conceptual determination, nor is it an arbitrary or merely “poetic” array of images; the animacy and
power of this thought is found in the interplay of these activities, the transfigurations they enact.
Thinking isn’t found in one or the other, but in their mutual solicitation—in their emergence and
interplay at moments of impasse, where impasse provokes “experiment.” Indeed, a peculiarity of
this Wissenschaftslehre follows from the fact that it takes the fundamentals of the “system of human
knowing” for its subject matter. In the circulations of Fichtean dialectic, we will show how the
seemingly distinct, “reproductive” imagination of the limited I aspires to enact a redoubling of the
prior activity of productive imagination.

21 Supersensible as it treats the conditions of sensibility.
22 I follow Fichte’s reference to the schematism in the above material to distinguish the images which are
given in empirical consciousness from the fundamental figures of the productive imagination which Fichte
considers. However, the word is only very rarely used in the Grundlage itself.
To make further sense of the exigency of both my own project and the project *Fichte* sets for himself, let us return to a consideration of the nature and task of *Wissenschaftslehre* and the role of the *Grundlage* with respect to it.
Chapter 2

Architectures of System

The Grundlage was originally intended to be a mere supplement to his first lecture course in Jena, 1794-5. As was common practice, this course also had a prospectus advertising its aims and significance. As one would hope, it is a very good place start if one seeks to develop an understanding of the principles and methodology of Fichte’s system. In this light, let us briefly turn to Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre\(^{23}\) and his Anaesidamus\(^{24}\) review to better understand what its task is supposed to be, why is it “demanded” of us, and how this demand relates to the form and content of the system.

Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre überhaupt

The prospectus advertises the first public offering of a new system announced and briefly adumbrated in a review he wrote the previous year. He announces the ambitions of the system in no uncertain terms: “The Wissenschaft we have described is the Wissenschaft of Wissenschaft,” a form of Wissenschaft which would “establish the fundamental principle \([\text{fundamental principle}]\) of all possible forms of Wissenschaft” (UB 47). It is to be true “first philosophy,” properly establishing philosophy as a form of Wissenschaft as well as establishing the first principles of all other such forms of the same. Given these extreme ambitions, it is natural to ask why such a Wissenschaft is needed, why one would think it to be possible, and in what form it could be possible. The prospectus\(^{25}\) attempts to answer these questions.

\(^{23}\) Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre (FW 1:29-81), hereafter abbreviated as Über den Begriff. English translation, Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre, pp. Breazeale 1988, abbreviated CCW.

\(^{24}\) Indeed, Fichte’s new system is first mentioned and adumbrated in his review of Anaesidamus, published early in 1794. The 1792 publication of Anaesidamus (FW 1:1-25) presents G.E. Schulze’s self-consciously Humean critique of the philosophy of Kant in both its original formulation and as formulated by Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Here, Fichte explicitly reformulates “Critical Philosophy” in terms of a priority of the self-posting of the I as given in intellectual intuition (Breazeale 1988, pp. 59 – 82).

\(^{25}\) In his preface to the second edition of the prospectus (written four years after the Grundlage), Fichte describes the character of the Wissenschaftslehre differently than within the original prospectus. The
Fichte finds the need for *Wissenschaftslehre* in the post-critical skepticism of Gottlob Ernst Schulze and Salomon Maimon. Such skepticism continues to persists because philosophy has not achieved the “status of a manifest [evident] *Wissenschaft*” (UB 29). The *Wissenschaftslehre* is accordingly intended to realize this potential. If skepticism suggests that knowledge of things essentially opposed to the activity of knowing is impossible, philosophy as *Wissenschaft* and indeed “queen” of the disciplines would demonstrate how knowledge, indeed *certain* knowledge, is possible, not just of objects in general, but for the determinate objects of *all* of the specialized *Wissenschaften*.

But philosophy has not attained this status. That is, philosophy is not yet *manifest Wissenschaft* with obvious first principles and a clear method. For Fichte, achieving this status is only thinkable on the foundation laid by Kant. Kant’s critical philosophy is taken by Fichte to be a victory over the various contending forms of dogmatism, that is, over any claim to knowledge of *Dingen an sich* obtained by the uncritical progression of reason beyond the limits of the understanding. Despite Kant’s famous awakening from dogmatism through the aegis of Humean skepticism, the skeptical challenge of Humean philosophy, particularly as presented in Salomon Maimon’s critique of Kant’s critical philosophy, was not satisfactorily met. At this stage in Fichte’s thought, the problem is not

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26 Fichte assumes as a point of general agreement is at least supposed to be a *Wissenschaft*, a point which has lost a good deal of consensus since his day. However, even if it is supposed to be a *Wissenschaft*, it isn’t one alongside many others, but fundamentally different from all other disciplines.

27 See a discussion of both Fichte’s understanding of dogmatism and his reading of Kant as anti-dogmatic in Jalloh 1988. Jalloh discerns some confusion in the immediate post-Kantians grasp of transcendental idealism (Jalloh 35).

28 See Kant’s *Prologomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*. This particular work’s concern with *Metaphysics as Wissenschaft* very much sets the stage for Fichte’s project of a *Wissenschaftlich* philosophy.

29 Salomon Maimon is, in many ways, Fichte’s Hume. For a discussion of the somewhat problematic relationship between Maimon’s skepticism and rationalism, see Meir Buzaglo’s *Solomon Maimon*, 83-88.
so much found in Kant’s insight, but with the presentation (Darstellung) of this insight. Fichte understands himself to be presenting the same insight, going so far as to write “I realize that I will never be able to say anything which has not already—directly or indirectly [unmittelbar oder mittelbar] and with more or less clarity [deutlicher oder dunkler]—been indicated by Kant” (30-1). But everything hinges on the words “mittelbar” and “dunkler.” The skeptical “demands” [Anforderungen] made of Kant’s system arise from these dark and indirect moments in his philosophy—what is required is not a rejection of critical philosophy, but a clarification of its true meaning with respect to such demands. In meeting such demands, one would “unify” the opposed partisans of skepticism and critical philosophy, “just as the Critical Philosophy unifies the conflicting demands of the various dogmatic systems” (UB 29). This unification of opposed demands is not a matter of appeasing through capitulation, but of demonstrating the ground from which such demands themselves may arise, and showing that this ground is itself accounted for within (Fichte’s presentation of) the critical system. Skepticism arises out of the apparent disjoining of knowing and things, and Fichte notes that the real issue dividing critical philosophy and dogmatism (which, indeed, drives the skeptics to the dogmatic side) is the problem of the “connection between our knowledge with a thing in itself.” There must be some way of showing how knowing can relate to its object.

This unrealized aspiration of philosophy derives from two inadequately developed concepts: the improperly developed concept of what philosophical knowledge should consist in and the inadequate concept of Wissenschaft in general. These two inadequacies are not unrelated; he proposes

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30 The later second preface explicitly refers to Kantian critical philosophy as an “anderen Darstellung ebendesselben Systems” (UB 35). The importance of the distinction between the Darstellung and System will be developed below.

31 The unity of the skeptical and dogmatic positions is presumably to be found in the assumption that the intelligibility of the notion of a “thing in itself” can only be established by our immediate knowledge of such things. For the skeptic, the absence of an immediate connection between our knowledge and the thing makes the notion of a “thing in itself” absurd. For the dogmatist, this connection is assumed, and the thing is known in both its immediacy and its independence from knowing.

32 As Wayne Martin points out, this exclusion of things-in-themselves is methodological and not ontological (Martin, Idealism 66).
that the concept of philosophy may be itself determined through the adequate characterization of Wissenschaft (38).

Fichte proceeds from what he takes to be two points of universal agreement about philosophy and Wissenschaft: 1.) Philosophy is a Wissenschaft, if not yet a manifest one. 2.) All Wissenschaften possess systematic form\textsuperscript{33}. But does such systematicity suffice to characterize the fundamental character of Wissenschaft? How is it distinguished from ordinary, ‘Unwissenschaftlich’ forms of knowing? If we consider a more developed statement of the second point, that the “systematic form” of a discipline is found in the way in which “[a]ll the propositions\textsuperscript{34} of a Wissenschaft connect in a single fundamental principle and unite within it to form a whole,” we still are at a loss of how the mere form would establish its character. Indeed, Fichte notes that this characterization cannot be adequate or even essential to Wissenschaft. He points out that we would not recognize the most rigorously and tightly constructed system of supposed “knowledge” to be a proper Wissenschaft if it was established on a “groundless and unprovable” principle\textsuperscript{35}, for it does not contain what one can know.

If systematic form without knowable content fails as Wissenschaft, one might also suspect that content without systematic form would also fail on that measure, but Fichte surprisingly affirms the contrary. He argues that single proposition (be it a “doctrine or fact”) can be Wissenschaftlich even without any systematic connections to other propositions. The strangeness of this claim demands we pause with his two examples; in investigating them, we will find that the seeming outlandishness

\textsuperscript{33} As we will see, though this is a point of common agreement, it also misses the crux of the issue.

\textsuperscript{34} “Proposition” translates Satz, which is a cognate of Setzen. It has an original sense of something set down, i.e. established and expressed in a statement. A fundamental principle would then be one which is grounded, or “set” on its proper ground. These propositions are predicative in form—they express a judgment which determines a subject with a predicate. Judgments, in turn, are not arbitrary, but are valid insofar as they refer to a ground justifying the determination of the judgment.

\textsuperscript{35} He amusingly speculates about a system founded on the postulated existence of ethereal creatures living in the air.
of this claim conceals something essential to the Fichtean conception of knowing—the way in which the one and many, the whole and the parts, figure the driving problematic of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

In his first example, he holds that a craftsperson’s knowledge of single proposition, that “the perpendicular to a horizontal line forms a right angle on both sides”\(^{36}\) is itself an instance of *Wissenschaft*. Perhaps tellingly, the second example was removed from the second edition of the essay: an unstudied farmer’s knowledge of the fact that “the Jewish historian Josephus lived during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem.” Not only are both taken as instances of *Wissenschaft*, they are taken to be such *despite the fact that neither of them can demonstrate the truth of their respective proposition* \(^{(39)}\). Indeed, they “have *Wissenschaft* of a particular subject matter even if these propositions were merely taken on “trust and faith”\(^{37}\). But if the possessors of these two propositions cannot demonstrate their validity, how do they acquire the status of *Wissenschaft*? Fichte proclaims that it is because, though lacking “proper, scholarly form,” both propositions express something which they “actually *know [wissen]* and can *know*.” From this he draws the preliminary conclusion that the “essence [*Wesen*] of a *Wissenschaft* consists in the *constitution [Beschaffenheit]* of its contents and this – at least for one who is supposed to be the possessor of the *Wissenschaft*—must be certain [*Gewiß*]; it must be something which he can know” \(\text{(ibid.)}\). There are two aspects to this essence, then: 1.) the specific constitution or “make-up” of the *Wissenschaft’s* contents\(^{38}\) [*Inhalt*] and 2.) the *certainty of this constitution* for the knower. For Fichte, certainty must always be thought in reference to both what such certainty concerns—the constitution of its content—and with the one for whom it is certain.

A merely formal certainty divorced from any content is merely the product of abstraction from the unity of form and content; at best it is a consideration for logic \(\text{(cf. 68)}\), at worst it is no better than

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\(^{36}\) In the second edition, this is changed to “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 to either side.”

\(^{37}\) Perhaps unsurprisingly given the extreme contentiousness of this point, the language of “trust and faith” was stricken from the second edition of this work.

\(^{38}\) Though *Inhalt* isn’t plural here, I am translating it as *contents* to set it in distinction to *Gehalt*. See the discussion below.
the system of ethereal creatures dismissed above. Nor can this certainty be said to inhere in the proposition itself independently of a knower for whom it is certain. It with a similar spirit that he states refers to systematic form as a mere means [mittel] to an end [Zweck]. Form is not an end in itself but merely a means of establishing certainty for a knower regarding something to be known. The contingent (zufällig) character of systematic form has already been demonstrated in the non-systematic knowledge of the farmer and craftsperson. However, this must not be taken as suggesting that form is somehow arbitrary or superfluous with respect to content.

Fichte is not suggesting that the two non-systematic cases exhibit an indifference of form to content, he is simply pointing out that they are cases Wissenschaft with a non-systematic form. Systematicity is contingent; form is not. Indeed, the word Beschaffenheit gives us a hint at to what form craftsperson’s knowledge might take. As a cognate of Schaffen, Beschaffenheit has strong connotations of making as, in English, one might talk about the “make-up” of an object. Perhaps the craftsperson has knowledge of her proposition not through its systematic connections with other propositions, but through the way in her proposition is bound up with her practical activity, her making. Her proposition is established as certain for her in relation to her activity of building, and the knowledge of right angles is certainly bound up with that activity. Her inability to systematically prove her knowledge from other propositions merely prevents her from demonstrating this knowledge to another in a systematic form; however it is certainly possible for

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39 But what of the farmer’s history? It may be that this example was dropped precisely because the farmer’s lack of connection to the historical subject matter. However, if the proper “make up” of history’s subject matter are the events of the past which shape the present, and the events recorded by Josephus (most importantly, the destruction of Jerusalem) shape the life of the farmer in some decisive way, maybe the connection isn’t as far fetched as it seems.

40 This is made even clearer in the second edition where the proposition expresses the fact 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 heard someone say and later discovered to be true in diverse experiences)” (39). The parenthetical makes the relation to the craftsperson’s practical experience quite explicit.

41 She could presumably impart this knowledge to another by expressing in the context of a relevant practical activity.
her to *practically* demonstrate the proposition. If the necessity of form must always be thought in connection to its contents, then this holds *a fortiori* for *systematic* form as well. When does systematicity become necessary?

To illustrate the proper role of form, Fichte has us consider the possibility that the human spirit [*Geist*] can know only “very little with certainty,” but also that it “could not be satisfied” [*sich nicht wohl begnügen könnte*] with this “narrow or uncertain cognizance [*Kenntnis*].” In such a case, the human spirit’s only way of “expanding and securing” this certainty would be to compare the uncertain cognizance of something with something known as certain, and to establish the certainty or persisting uncertainty of the first on the basis of its “equivalence [*Gleichheit*] or non-equivalence [*Ungleichheit*]” with the second; should the uncertain proposition be equivalent to a certain one, it would itself become certain; should it contradict a certain one, it would be known as false and, at the very least, “free one from error” (ibid.). Note that there must be at least one certain proposition to establish the certainty of any other proposition. Furthermore, we must determine just what this equivalence consists in. Perfect identity appears to be too strong a form of equivalence, for perfect equivalence would suggest that any given proposition is not a separate form of knowledge but the mere repetition of something already known. If the myriad propositions contained in a discipline are distinguished by their content, then the equivalence at issue must be a matter of their form. In other words, such *Gleichheit* must somehow relate differing propositions and do so in such a way as to preserve their differences in content while also preserving the formal equivalence that allows their certainty to be determined. However, what it *means* for the form to be equivalent cannot merely be a matter of the identical structure of propositions (as if form were an indifferently homogenous container of a variety of a disciplines contents)—the equivalence of form must somehow be found in the specific relation of form and content in each proposition. To state (borrowing an example

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42 This lack of satisfaction is telling, for it further hints of the *practical* wellsprings of theoretical cognition.

43 *Kenntnis* is being used in distinction to *Wissen* to underscore the lack of certainty of these representations.
from below) that “gold is a body” seems “formally” equivalent to stating “gold is a fish”—both are, after all, simple predications. If “gold is a fish” is non-equivalent to other propositions of metallurgy, this suggests that the equivalence of form is a matter of the form of the system as a whole. Perhaps the “non-equivalence” at issue is the way in which a false assertion would put the discipline in conflict with itself.

And indeed, Fichte proceeds to note that “[a] Wissenschaft must be [soll] one, indeed one whole [ein Ganzes]” (ibid.). This is even true of the knowledge of the craftsperson and farmer, for their respective proposition “is for one without coherent acquaintance with geometry or history, doubtlessly a whole, and to that extent a Wissenschaft.” (40). Here it is clear that there is indeed at least one minimal, formal requirement for a proposition to be Wissenschaft, and that is wholeness (that it form part of a whole or be a whole unto itself). The proposition known as true by the craftsperson and farmer forms a whole unto itself. In cases where there is more than one proposition, and indeed a multitude of propositions, the unity of these propositions as parts of a whole Wissenschaft must not be imposed upon unconnected fragments; such propositions must form “one and the same” whole despite great differences between them. Such a proposition only becomes an instance of Wissenschaft “through its position [Stelle] within and through its relation [Verhältnis] to the whole” (UB 40). Stelle implies not just that it is somehow indeterminately within the whole, but that it has a determinate place within it and thus a determinate relation to it. But if the whole is nothing more than the totality of relations between uncertain propositions, we are left with nothing better than an empty system of formal consistency, little better than the absurd system of ethereal creatures rejected above. The certainty in question isn’t the empty certainty of formal consistency, but certainty with respect to the constitution of its content. That form of certainty cannot be created through the internal relations among the propositions of a Wissenschaft, for “by merely connecting parts we can never produce anything which is not already present in one of the parts of
the whole.” This indicates that “at least one proposition must be certain,” such a proposition would “impart its certainty to the other propositions” through a kind of contagious certainty. All propositions of the Wissenschaft would proximally or ultimately share in the singular certainty\(^ {44} \) of the first—all have “only one certainty in common” [nur Eine Gewißheit gemein haben]. We will develop a better sense of what this certainty consists and why it is singular if we explore how certainty functions as a principle of connection (Verbindung).

We must first pause and consider what it means for two propositions to be connected—what binds them together? For it is not a matter of just any kind of extrinsic, haphazard connection, but of a connection which would establish the unity of a Wissenschaft. Recall that the essence of a Wissenschaft was initially determined through a consideration of the constitution of its content. One could thus presumably distinguish one Wissenschaft from another on the basis of the differently constituted contents proper to each. But a proposition doesn’t count as an instance of a particular Wissenschaft just because it expresses a judgment about that Wissenschaft’s content. For instance, I could spend hours making pronouncements about plants without adding to botany in the least. We must recall the second aspect of the essence of a Wissenschaft—this Beschaffenheit must be certain for the one putatively possessing Wissenschaft. And, as we noted above, it must either be certain for the knower independently of the other propositions of the Wissenschaft or certain through its immediate or ultimate dependence on a proposition which does have independent certainty. Thus, while there are innumerable ways of arbitrarily connecting any number of propositions, such connections only become Wissenschaft if they establish certainty for the possessor of this Wissenschaft regarding the

\(^ {44} \) This kind of language is sometimes taken to be Fichtean bravado, implying the manifest absurdity that one could derive all the true propositions of a Wissenschaft from its fundamental principle, a perfect completeness not even expected of logic or mathematics. But this is explicitly ruled out by Fichte within this essay when he writes that the “sphere [Wirkungskreis] [of the particular Wissenschaften] … is infinite” (66). Only the Wissenschaftslehre is completable as a “totality.” But this leaves us with the question of what it could possibly mean for all the propositions of a Wissenschaft to share the same certainty. It is worth noting that Fichte’s two examples of fundamental principles for specific Wissenschaften (namely geometry and natural science) are presented not as axioms but as “general tasks” (Aufgabe überhaupt, 65, 66).
Wissenschaft’s content. Such connections amount to the following relation: “When one proposition is certain, so must the other be certain, and if the first is not certain, the other would not be certain either” (41). If such connections are the only way in which propositions are bound together as it were internally, it would follow that there would be only one independently certain principle for each Wissenschaft. This is precisely Fichte’s assertion. “The propositions [of a Wissenschaft] cannot be otherwise connected with each other than through one and the same certainty” because that certainty is the sole principle of their connection. This means that the only way for multiple propositions to share a certainty is for one among them to impart it to all the others. Two independently certain propositions would have distinct certainties, and there would be no dependence relation between them and thus no connection within a single Wissenschaft.

Fichte is setting up a disjunctive syllogism when he considers two apparent possibilities regarding the connection between independently certain propositions: they would either have no connection at all (at least not within a single science) and form “separate wholes,” or they would have a connection (41). Because the identity of a certainty (as “one and the same” certainty) is strictly determined through a chain of dependence imparted by a single independently certain proposition, a second independent certainty would have no place in that chain; the two independent propositions would lack any principle which would connect them within a single Wissenschaft. We are left with the first part of the disjunction: Each would necessarily form a whole (either unto itself or as the basic principle of a complex Wissenschaft). Consequently, the unity of the propositions as a systematic whole is established in the principle which expresses that certainty without appeal to another

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45 I use this word prospectively with a view to what will be called the “inner content” of a Wissenschaft below. “Internal” refers to characteristics such propositions have through their relations to other propositions within a Wissenschaft. One could say that they have an “external” unity on the basis of their shared property of expressing certainty with respect to the constitution of a given content. Such external unity depends on their internal unity, for only on the basis of their internal interconnection can they all share a common certainty.

46 The Wissenschaftslehre itself is a peculiar exception to this as it has not one but three principles with at least partially independent certainty! And yet, even for it there is only one proposition which is independent with respect to form and content.
principle within the same Wissenschaft—such a proposition is the fundamental proposition (fundamental principle) which establishes Wissenschaft’s claim to (one and the same) certainty as a whole.

The metaphoric etymology of the word Grund-satz is not lost on Fichte. He expands on this figure of ground through a consideration of the necessary structure of a building: “Should the Wissenschaftslehre be a building, the fundamental aim of this building would be stability [Festigkeit]. The ground is stable, and once the ground is laid [gelegt], the aim would have been achieved.” If form refers to the structure of this edifice of the Wissenschaftslehre, the ground beneath that structure is neither within the structure nor outside the logic of its bearing. The content of the founding proposition is this connection to the earth which transmits stability to the structure as a whole. Fichte notes that one doesn’t build for the arbitrary pleasures of joining such parts together; one builds to secure the parts to this foundation, to transmit the stability of the earth to the parts comprising the whole. The foundation is not the foundation as one part among others, but as that which allows all the parts to rest [ruhen] on solid ground. As a part of the building, it is one part among others; as that which grounds the whole (Ganze) in the stability of the earth, it is the principle transmitting protection to those seeking shelter within it. “[t]he ground is stable, and isn’t grounded on [yet another] new ground, but rather on the stable, earthen ground [feste Erdboden].” The temptation, here, is to understand this ground and the stability it affords to be the sole structuring principle of the building, but Fichte also notes that “no one can live in a mere foundation, which by itself provides neither shelter 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.” Apparently, even the soundness of the building isn’t to be valued for its own sake, but only insofar as it affords shelter (schützen) from both the enemy and the elements. On the one hand, this again suggests the priority of the practical to the theoretical—to understand the exigency of the building (both as activity and as product) one
must understand the extent to which it affords shelter to the ones building and seeking shelter within it; the extent to which it furthers the free self-determination of such inhabitants. On the other hand, one must also note a certain fear of the outside, a fear of the open driving this construction. The outside threatens with its willful enemies and with the indifference of its weather. With the raising of its walls against such enemies and the roof against such weather, one is also opposing the shelter of interiority to the exposure of the exterior.

The figure of building upon a foundation suggests that certainty is a matter of firmness, soundness, or stability. It also leads us consider what the stabilizing certainty of the foundation consists in, and what way of connecting the parts of this doctrinal building (Lehrgebäude) ensures that the connected parts share in that stability. Fichte poses the questions, “how can the certainty of the fundamental principle in itself be established [begründen]? What establishes the authority [Befügnis] of the determinate way in which the certainty of other principles is inferred from it?” (UdB 116). The former becomes the question of content; the latter the question of form.

The fundamental significance of the fundamental principle lies in the way it mediates the individual proposition and the discipline as a whole; this is because it is both a Satz among other Sätzen and a fundamental principle. It is both part of the whole and secures the unity of the whole through its stabilizing certainty. The fundamental principle has two faces, one turned outward toward the earth and one facing inward to the other parts of the system: “[t]hat aspect of the fundamental principle which is to be imparted to all the other propositions within the discipline I call the ‘inner content’ of the fundamental principle and of the Wissenschaft as such.” First, we note the “inner”—the emphasis is given to the internal relation of the parts of the building as components of a system. What, then, would be the “outer” content but the connection to the earth? Secondly, we should be careful to distinguish this “inner content” (innern Gehalt) from the early discussion of the “make-up of its [a Wissenschaft’s] contents” (Beschaffenheit ihres Inhalts) discussed
earlier in connection with the essence of \textit{Wissenschaft}. Though both \textit{Inhalt} and \textit{Gehalt} are cognates with \textit{halten} (to hold) and can both be translated as “content,” the latter term has connotations of unity, inner consistency, and import that the first does not\textsuperscript{47}. In connection with the recent metaphoric of building, the \textit{Gehalt} even has a sense of that when “holds” the building together out of its resting on the earthly ground. There is indeed a sense in which \textit{Gehalt} isn’t simply contained and thus subordinated to form, but has a formal dimension of its own. In other words, the inner content, as the specific form of certainty imparted\textsuperscript{48} by the fundamental principle to all the other propositions in the system, refers both to that which is held inside and that which holds the inside together. He continues, “[t]he manner [\textit{Art}] in which this inner content is to be imparted [\textit{mitteilen}] from the first principle to the other propositions I term the \textit{form} of the \textit{Wissenschaft}” (117). Form is again a matter of relation—ultimately of the relation of any subordinate proposition to the first principle which would impart certainty to it. Through this characterization of form and inner content, the driving question takes a new form: “How are the form and content of a \textit{Wissenschaft} possible at all? i.e. how is the \textit{Wissenschaft} itself possible?”\textsuperscript{49}

Fichte emphasizes that it is as yet unknown whether such a \textit{Wissenschaft} is possible, whether our “entire knowledge has a stable ground, or if it, despite the most intimate connections among its parts, ultimately rests on nothing” and the answer to this question of possibility could only be shown through its actuality (117). The \textit{Wissenschaftslehre} would be the \textit{Wissenschaft}\textsuperscript{49} that could answer this question. Its most basic concern is the question of the possibility of grounding the \textit{Wissenschaften}, of

\textsuperscript{47} Consider the discussion of \textit{Gehalt} and \textit{Inhalt} in Michael Inwood’s \textit{A Hegel Dictionary} (109).

\textsuperscript{48} The English phrase impart nicely reflects the German verb \textit{mitteilen} insofar as the logic of parts and wholes will remain important throughout this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{49} Fichte returns to his building metaphor at this point; within the land upon which a \textit{Wissenschaft} can be constructed, there is “one undeveloped [ungebautes] plot of land” that would be the site of the “\textit{Wissenschaft} of knowledge forms in general.” Philosophy isn’t yet found in this undeveloped land and must—if it seeks to realize its \textit{Wissenschaftlich} potential—, be directed to this one last space. If philosophy were to be developed into a true system, and establish the principles of its knowing in the highest ground thereof, it would become \textit{Wissenschaftslehre}; just as the fundamental principle is the ground of all other propositions of a \textit{Wissenschaft}, the \textit{Wissenschaftslehre} must become the fundamental \textit{Wissenschaft} of those \textit{Wissenschaften}. 
the grounding of the fundamental principles which establish the Wissenschaften in their respective forms of certainty. To do this, it must therefore develop an understanding of what certainty means and “to what degree something can be certain” and also establish the “systematic form” which the Wissenschaften presuppose but cannot ground. But the Wissenschaftslehre is also a Wissenschaft, and is unique among Wissenschaften insofar as it must establish its certainty for itself. In order to serve as the “foundation [Grundlage] of all certainty” the fundamental principle (or Grundsätze) which establishes its certainty cannot depend upon a higher Wissenschaft nor is it exempt from the requirement that it be certain independently of all the other Sätze constituting the Wissenschaft. The importance and centrality of such a principle cannot be overstated:

All other propositions only have a mediated form of certainty derivative from it—it must be immediately certain. Upon it, all knowing [Wissen] is grounded and without it no knowing is possible; it is not grounded in another knowing, but is the proposition of knowing, pure and simple [er ist der Satz des Wissens schlechthin]. This proposition is simply certain, that is, it is certain because it is certain and nothing is certain if it isn’t certain. It is the ground [Grund] of all knowing, that is to say, one knows what it declares insofar as one knows anything at all. It accompanies all knowing, is contained in all knowing, and all knowing presupposes it. (121)

Note the way in which the above passage shifts from the Satz character of the fundamental principle to the Grund that such a fundamental principle would express. Given that we are not yet in possession of an explicit formulation of this principle as a Satz, it would either follow that we do not know anything at all, and, in fact, no one has known anything in the ages prior to the Wissenschaftslehre, or that we already do possess the Grund that such a fundamental principle expresses. Given that the stated aim of the Wissenschaftslehre isn’t establishing the possibility of Wissen, but of Wissenschaft, the task must be one of formulating a Grund which is somehow already known. As a form of Wissen, it must presuppose that Wissen is already possible. If the certainty of this Satz is to be determined on the basis of a knowing that it expresses, then we must already be in possession of that knowing; we must already possess the Grund which that Satz expresses. Insofar as we know anything, we are already in possession of it. However, the exigency of the Wissenschaftslehre derives
from the fact that, for certainty (Gewissheit) to be possible, the ground of such knowing must be known explicitly. Gewissheit requires that one know the ground of knowing, and in the grounding of all other forms of knowing in that knowing.

Fichte thinks that such a Wissenschaft of Wissenschaft cannot consist of a single proposition—he asserts that this is entailed in its task; for the Wissenschaftslehre to ground the certainty found in the fundamental principles of all other disciplines, it must connect its singular certainty to a multiplicity of propositions. It follows that, as required of any other Wissenschaft consisting of more than one Satz, it must have systematic form. However, as in the case of the above discussion of certainty, this form cannot be established by a higher discipline, and must indeed be established through this Wissenschaft for both for itself and for the ancillary Wissenschaften. The Wissenschaftslehre establishes both the form and the content of these disciplines, and we must resume our earlier discussion of form and content with this in mind.

There are three levels at which we might discuss the form and content of a Wissenschaft—the level of the Wissenschaft as a whole, the level of its fundamental principle, and the level of its myriad propositions. We have already briefly considered the first two levels, but now need to consider the third. At the level of individual propositions, Fichte suggests identifies the content (Gehalt) of a proposition with “that about which one knows something;” the form of a proposition is “that which one knows about this something” (121). Recall, from our earlier discussion, that the “inner” content (Gehalt) of a Wissenschaft is the specific form of certainty imparted to all the subordinated propositions by the fundamental principle and which, as shared by those propositions, establish them as members of a single Wissenschaft. At the level of in individual proposition, however, Gehalt refers to that about which something is known. In his example, “Gold is a solid,” he identifies this known content with both “gold” and “solid.” The suggestion, here, is that “that about” which one knows something is already contained within the content of the Wissenschaft’s fundamental principle.
With respect to systematic and propositional form, recall that the form of a *Wissenschaft* is the manner in which its specific certainty is imparted—it doesn’t refer any arbitrary connection, but the determinate way in which the propositions are connected so as to allow the communication of this certainty from certain propositions to uncertain ones. But, at the level of an individual *Satz*, the form of a proposition is the knowledge posited in connection with its content. In the above proposition regarding gold, the form is explicitly identified with the “relation” (*Beziehung*) between gold and body, with the qualified and hence determinate degree of sameness and exchangeability expressed of these terms. The point to note, here, is that the form is relational on both the level of the *Wissenschaft* as a whole and at the level of an isolated proposition. Just as the propositions cannot be arbitrarily connected to form a whole, but must be connected in such a way as to transmit the certainty imparted by the fundamental principle to the subordinate, uncertain propositions, so must the determinate relation of the terms expressed in a single proposition be grounded in such a way as to preserve that certainty.

The fundamental principle considered as *Satz* must also be thinkable in terms of this distinction between *Gehalt* and *Form*. Given that the fundamental principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* must be immediately certain through itself, the form and content of this proposition must be thought to determine each other in such a way that any substitution of a different form or content for those expressed in this principle would cancel (*aufheben*) the proposition and, indeed (given that it is supposed to be a fundamental principle) “all knowing”\(^{50}\) with it (122). That which is known must remain tightly coupled with what is known about it. The nature of this tight connection can be better understood if we extend Fichte’s example of gold and solids. If we compare the proposition “gold is a solid” with “silver is a solid,” we would find that the content has indeed changed, but it seems that the form remains the same. However, this is not the case. If, as discussed above, we think of

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\(^{50}\) This cancellation of “all knowing” is, of course, hypothetical. If one were to imagine a different content or form, then knowing would be inconceivable.
the content as not simply the predicated subject, but both silver and solids, and form as the relation between all parts of a proposition’s content, then a change in the content is a change in the form. Similarly, if we were to propose that “some solids are gold,” we would appear to have the same content but a different form. In such a case, we are arguably no longer predicating something of “[all] gold,” but some solids (and, implicitly, some, but not necessarily all, gold). The content has indeed changed. To change the form is to change the content. To change the content of a fundamental principle would amount to changing it to a different Satz, and, in light of the above discussion of shared certainty, this would either simply falsify it or, at best, put it at the head of an entirely different Wissenschaft.

In any case, unlike an empirical statement about the solidity of gold, this founding proposition is supposed to be “certain immediately and through itself” and it is this which entails that “its content determines its form and its form determines its content.” One might suggest that this mutual determination occurs with the statement “gold is a solid” as well. Indeed, if, as Fichte soon suggests, knowing with certainty amounts to having an “insight into the inseparability of a particular content and a particular form” (123), and this seems to imply that such inseparability is not unique to a fundamental principle but to any proposition which can be known with certainty. But, in the case of most propositions in a Wissenschaft, neither the form nor the content of that statement is certain immediately through the respective content or form. The determinacy in question is determinacy with respect to certainty, and what is sought is a principle which is entirely certain through itself alone. With the fundamental principle of the Wissenschaftslehre, the certainty is found in the immediate certainty of form and content—the certainty of one follows immediately through the other and depends on no higher principle. On the face of it, it seems that there are a good number of propositions which have this sort of self-evidence. It may be that one has, in the (pre-atomic) concept of gold, the predicates “soft, metallic, yellowish solid,” and that “gold is a solid” states an
analytic truth— one certain already through the mere concept of gold. But the content of this proposition isn’t the (merely formal) concept of gold, but gold as part of the empirical world. It is not immediately clear that, through one’s mere definition of gold, one has come to any certainty about something opposed to the mere concept.

However, though both form and content must have no higher determining ground in the highest fundamental principle of a discipline, it is conceivable (and, indeed, the case) that there could be a Satz with a partly absolute character (“zum Theil absolut,” 122). Though the form of a proposition might be conditioned by a higher principle, its content might be entirely unconditioned. The same holds, mutatis mutandis, for unconditioned form and content. In such cases, the form and content would still be unique to each other—the fact that the form is conditioned by a higher principle does not suggest that it is identical to a higher principle, quite the contrary. Such a Satz would be a fundamental principle insofar as its form or content would be unconditioned but subordinate to the highest fundamental principle for which form and content are entirely unconditioned. This means that either its form or content would be “given” by a higher principle, and that the partly absolute principle be “determined through itself” only with respect to its form or content.

The “form of the whole is nothing other than the form of the singular propositions considered as one” (123). Just as a single proposition can constitute a complete Wissenschaft, one might also entertain the idea that a complete Wissenschaft containing myriad propositions can be thought as a single Satz. If all the singular propositions of a discipline are contained within its fundamental principle, then the distinction between the hypothetical Satz constructed of all its Sätze and the fundamental principle is the distinction between an articulated unity where the parts of that unity have determinate relations among one another on the basis of a distinction between form and content and the absolute unity expressed in a single certainty—an indivisibility of form and content.
The question would thus arise of how an articulated diversity of propositions could be developed from such unity. To better understand how this might word, we require a deeper consideration of what the object of the Wissenschaftslehre is.

**The “Object” of the Wissenschaftslehre**

Like any other Wissenschaft, the Wissenschaftslehre is the disciplined knowing of something and is not itself this “something” which it seeks to know (140); this something corresponds to the Gebalt for the Wissenschaftslehre’s Form. Fichte characterizes that “something” as the “system of human knowing [das System des menschlichen Wissens],” a ‘system’ which is “present independently from the Wissenschaft concerning the same, but is arranged by it into a systematic form.”

Note two things: 1.) that the object of the Wissenschaftslehre isn’t the systematic form of Wissenschaften überhaupt, nor the human spirit in general, nor even human knowing as such, but the ‘system’ of human knowing. There are, then, two systems to be considered here, and one must accordingly distinguish between the pre-given systematicity of human knowing from the systematicity of the Wissenschaft which treats it. Calling this a ‘system’ already implies that the system of human knowing might itself consist of a grounded set of elements, and that the grounding element of such a system is also what establishes that system’s unity and even, in some sense, “contains” all the other elements. 2.) that this object is the system of human knowing. There must, indeed, be a system of knowing prior to the systematically presented knowing of that system, and if there is an ‘original system’-- a system which might serve as the model of systematicity-- it is that which is found to be ‘already there’ before the system as Wissenschaft.

Like the grounded system of propositions constitutive of a Wissenschaft, such a system must have its own form and content. Indeed:

That which exists [da … ist] independently in the human spirit may be referred to as the actions [Handlungen] of the same. These are the what which is present—they occur in a certain, determinate way [Art]. Through this determinate way one is distinguished from the other, and this is the how. Therefore, within our spirit prior to our knowing there is
primordially content [Gehalt] and form, and they are inseparably united with each other. Each action occurs in a distinct way according to a law, and this law determines the action. Should all of these actions be interconnected and be subordinate to general, particular, and singular laws, then there would also be a system for a possible observer.

He again deploys the traditional distinction between form and content as that between Wie and Was, but here the distinction isn’t between the knowledge regarding something and the something which is known, but between what is present (an action in the human spirit) and how it is present (vis-à-vis its determinate place within the system of the human spirit). As in the case of complex Wissenschaften, the systematicity of the human spirit is found in the way in which these actions form an ordered whole; the form of this system is and its ordering through a hierarchical (“general, particular, and singular”) set of laws (Gesetzen). As one must expect, the source of such laws is not something opposed to or ‘beyond’ the human spirit— the highest actions are those which “grant” (gibt) the laws governing subordinate action.

In connection with this “granting,” Fichte draws a distinction between the temporal order in which the various activities of the human spirit appear (for a possible observer) and the systematic order in which they take place together:

However, it is not at all necessary that these actions are actually found, one after the other, in this systematic form; [it is not necessary] that the first action to be found would be the one which contains all the others under it and grants the highest, most general law, and that the next to be found would be the one subsumes fewer actions, and so forth. Furthermore, it by no means follows that these actions are found in a pure and unmixed state; it follows that some, which would indeed be distinguishable for a possible observer, should appear as a single [action].

In a quite familiar and classic figure, the most encompassing laws are referred to as the “highest.” There is, then, two separate orderings of actions: one in terms of the height (the generality or specificity of the law it grants) and another in terms of temporal priority. As he soon points out, such temporal priority refers to the order in which such acts “attain to clear consciousness” (zum deutlichen Bewußtseyn komme). But this temporal ordering is complicated by the fact that such actions are tend
to occur in a mixed (not “unmixed” or pure) state; the fact that these acts occur in a “mixed” state suggests that they occur simultaneously (zugleich). If self-positing is the “highest action of the human spirit,” it is of "little necessity that this action ever attains to pure consciousness, or that the human spirit is ever capable of simply thinking [fähig sei, schlechthin zu denken] ‘I am’ without simultaneously thinking that something else is not I.” If, as we shall see, the positing of the I and the positing of the not-I are separate actions, they are not separate in their initial appearance for consciousness. There is, then, a fundamental difference between the systemic order of the human spirit and the order of consciousness. For this systemic order to become the subject matter of a Wissenschaft, the Wissenschaftslehre must cross between the orders systemic order of human knowing and the temporal order of consciousness.

The above problem is also a problem of necessity. To see this, we must consider the reason why the Wissenschaftslehre isn’t itself part of its subject matter. It begins in a free action through which the “type of action of the human spirit in general is raised [erheben] to consciousness.” On the one hand, the consciousness to which this ‘type of action’ attains is itself is itself included in this ‘type of action’ and is accordingly part of the Wissenschaftslehre’s subject matter. On the other hand, though this ‘type of action’ includes “the entire subject matter [Stoff] of any possible Wissenschaftslehre,” it does not contain “the Wissenschaftslehre itself” (141). This is because, as stated in an earlier context (134), the Wissenschaftslehre only “contains all the determinate actions of the human spirit that it

51 According to Fichte, every Wissenschaft is established through a determination of freedom through which its object is constituted; the objects of the ancillary Wissenschaften—even of natural science—only become objects through a free act which determines something originally “left free” by the Wissenschaftslehre. For instance, though the Wissenschaftslehre establishes the necessary existence of a not-I existing independently of the “laws of mere representation,” it leaves free the way in which the not-I is to be determined as an object for a specific Wissenschaft; for instance, the not-I might be determined “as raw, or as organized, or as animate matter” (134). But, in the current context, “the Wissenschaftslehre is distinguished from other Wissenschaften solely through the fact that the object of the latter is a free act, whereas the object of the former are necessary actions.” Though other Wissenschaften are indeed characterized as having “free actions” as their object, these free actions have a retrospective necessity when considered from within the Wissenschaft founded by them. One the other hand, note that the necessity of the Wissenschaftslehre’s content is only necessity under the presupposition of the more fundamental freedom of the human spirit to determine itself to action (134).
constrainedly and necessarily performs —whether it is conditioned or unconditioned.” As itself a product of freedom, it is not part of its own subject matter. Given the Fichtean emphasis on freedom, one might wonder if any of the actions of the human spirit are necessary. Indeed, if the actions of the human mind with which the *Wissenschaftelehre* is concerned are necessary, the highest “explanatory ground” for this necessity is found in the human spirit’s “unconstrained and uncoerced capacity to determine itself to act” (134). From the standpoint of this highest ground, all the actions of the human spirit are (ultimately) free, but, given its free self-determination to action, such action is only possible under certain conditions. Such conditions are the “laws” (*Gesetzen*) through which it determines itself to act.

Recall that the form of the system of human knowing is found in “general, particular, and specific laws” (141), laws which are themselves given through actions of the human spirit. An action is necessary to the extent that it presupposes and is determined by such a law and therefore by a higher action. Such necessity is not of accidental interest to a possible *Wissenschaft*; if the subject matter in question had no form, the *Wissenschaft* regarding it would have no content. But the aforementioned ‘mixture and simultaneity’ present for empirical consciousness is not itself ordered by the necessity which makes it possible. For instance, as indicated above, the thought of the I must occur simultaneously with the thought of the not-I despite the fact that the I’s self-positing it the “human spirit’s highest action” and higher even than the positing of a not-I. The implication, here, is that the necessity of an action must be distinguished from its thinkability; the self-positing of the I, on its own terms, is absolutely free, but the thought (or determinate consciousness) of that action is conditioned by necessary laws. The problem is that these different forms of conditioning are not clearly distinguished in consciousness; it is not initially clear that the self-positing of the I has that priority. Because the positing of the not-I is not a condition of the positing of the I, but indeed a condition of the thinkability of that action, we might say that the priority (or, at least, simultaneity)
of the former with respect to the latter is “accidental” (see below) with respect to the original systemic order—it is contingent upon the requirement of thinkability and not adequate to the systemic relation between those acts.

It is in this light that the founding act of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in question is one which distinguishes one series (Reihe) of actions from another—the series of actions as they exist in their “mixed” concurrence and accidental (zufällig, 143) contingency is opposed to a series through which these actions are reflectively considered and systematically presented according to a hierarchy of principles. The lawfulness or order of this system is to be isolated from that which is the product of chance or even freedom—such systematicity is the form considered above in distinction to content (Gehalt). The free act which opposes the form and content of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is thus that which “is to take up” [wird … aufgenommen] that which was “form” in the preexistent system of human knowing; this “form” is precisely the previously considered systematicity of the human spirit, which is now referred to as the “necessary action of the human spirit” [die notwendige Handlung des menschlichen Geistes] or the “necessary manner of action [Handlungsart] of the human spirit.” This necessary action or “mode of action” is not “an” action among others but the systematic totality of actions which are conceivable in terms of and ordered system of laws. This system is taken up in a “new form”—the form of “knowing [Wissen] or consciousness [Bewußtseyns]” (142).

Given that the object of this *Wissenschaft* is the system of human knowing, the “newness” of this form cannot merely consist in its status as knowing or consciousness. If the newness of this form is not found in its status as a form of consciousness, it must be found in the way in which the free act in question inaugurates a knowing of knowing. The “new form” Fichte refers to must be reflection (Reflexion)—introduced earlier in his discussion of logic as an action through which form

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52 Indeed, Fichte notes in a passage just below the current discussion that the origin of this form presents no problem for the Wissenschaftslehre, as it is already included among the “modes of action” which it investigates (ibid.)
becomes content (138); because knowing itself is part of this system, this is also a redoubling of knowing upon itself. However, for form to be “taken up” as content for a new form, it must be isolated from its original content. Such Gehalt presumably consists in the “accidental” entanglements existing in the first series in the specificity of their mixed concurrence along with those aspects of such action which are only thinkable in connection to freedom. This action is what Fichtean calls “abstraction”—the dissociation or isolation (Absonderung) of form from content (138).

Such abstraction has a disruptive aspect: it consists in a severing or splitting (trennung); it separates the actions of interest from the original “series” (Reihe) in which they appear in their “mixed” and impure form (142). Insofar as this presents a new ordering of these actions—one which in arranges them in their unmixed purity—it commences what will soon be determined as a second series. At this point, however, we should note that the disruptive aspect of abstraction carries with it another circular threat to the Wissenschaftslehre’s self-enclosure.

Though the form of consciousness in which this type of action is represented is itself already present as part of the represented system and requires no separate accounting, the “subject matter” [Stoff] to be taken up into consciousness presents a fundamental and, indeed, “classical” problem. For the “human spirit’s necessary manner of action to be taken up in the form of consciousness, it

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53 I introduce this word in connection with the verb trennen to underscore the extent to which the separation, isolation, and purification of the various modes of action tear them away from the tissue of their original context. The splitting apart of the original series effected through this abstraction must not be thought as a passive mirroring which only receptively illuminates but otherwise leaves unscathed the order it reflects. Abstraction isn’t a mere “drawing away” (abs-trahere) but a cleaving apart.

54 In Daniel Breazeale’s “Circularity & Grounds in Jena Wissenschaftslehre,” he contends that moments of circularity we find in this and related texts do not belie Fichte’s fundamentally foundationalist project. Such forms of circularity are “bound up with rational explanation in general” (Breazeale, Circularity 61)—a process which necessarily moves back and forth between the grounded and ground. The circularity which is a threat is a circularity which lacks a determinative ground of any kind. Tom Rockmore, on the other hand, finds a distinctly anti-foundationalist current in these texts, one which suggests the contemporary relevance of Fichtean thought given the collapse of the foundationalist project. He notes, “we could do well to follow the spirit of Fichte’s effort to find knowledge through the model of an ungrounded system” (italics mine, Rockmore, Antifoundationalism 111).

55 John Sallis isolates five circles in the systemic logic of the Wissenschaftslehre as it works in these and closely related texts. He has a keen eye for the metaphoricity of this text, and a sense of how this various forms of circulating both corroborate and decenter each other (Sallis, Spacings 23 – 66).
must already be known as such; it accordingly must already have been taken up in this form.” This is because the systematicity to be isolated from the chaos of simultaneity of mixture must already be known as such in order for it to be cleanly severed from its original (“mixed”) milieu. In other words, if the human spirit must be capable of abstracting “from everything which is not” the proper subject matter of this Wissenschaft, the question arises as to how the human spirit knows “what to take up and what to leave behind” (142). In order to know what to take up, it must already be capable of distinguishing the system of the human spirit from the haphazard relations of its content. To all appearances, it must have a rule at its disposal which would guide it in the isolation of systematicity of these actions, but the possession of such a rule would presuppose that it is already conscious of what it seeks to isolate. Fichte asserts that there simply can be no rule for this, presumably because the application of any such rule is conditioned by the determination (at least in general) of the subject matter to which the rule is to be applied. His characterization of how progress is to be (and, indeed, has already been) made is revealing:

The human spirit makes various experiments [Versuche]; it arrives at dawn through blind groping, and first through this crosses over to bright day. In the beginning, it is lead by an obscure feelings (the origin and actuality of which the Wissenschaftslehre is to reveal), and we would still have no clear concepts to this day and remain the clod of earth [Erdkloß] which wrenched itself from the ground [Boden] if we did not, in the beginning, feel obscurely that which we eventually knew clearly.

In the above, the progress is figured\(^{56}\) as a movement from darkness to the light of day and as a matter of wresting free from the ground. The “obscure feelings” (dunkle Gefühle) do not derive their obscurity from the fact that they lead to aspects of the human spirit which are somehow hidden. They are, indeed, hidden in plain view, and the fitful trajectory of the history of philosophy owes its errant gropings into the obscurity of what lies in the open:

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\(^{56}\) Such figures are not without precedent in the history of philosophy; this is an unmistakable reference to Plato’s Republic but also to the Promethean myth of human origin and the book of Genesis, where, in Luther’s translation, God makes the primal human “aus einem Erdentloß, uns blies ihm den lebendigen Odem in seine Nase” (Bibel, Luther Mose 2:7). The “wresting” free is nowhere in Genesis nor in the Promethean myth.
This is also the history of philosophy! And we have indicated the proper ground for why that which lies in the open in every human spirit, and which anyone can grasp when it is clearly demonstrated, only attains to the consciousness of a mere few after a great deal of errant wandering. All philosophers have ventured forth toward the established goal; all wanted to isolate the necessary type of action of the human spirit from the accidental conditions of the same. All have actually isolated [this], only with varying degrees of purity and completeness. On the whole, however, philosophical judgment has progressed farther and farther and drawn nearer to its goal.

But the above reflection is itself within the scope of Wissenschaftslehre’s subject matter insofar as it occurs “according to laws” and insofar as its “actuality is conditioned by the determinacy of its manner of reflecting.” Indeed, as we will see, the opening of the Grundlage, however systematic it may seem, already contains a moment of arbitrary choice—its own errant wandering.
Chapter 3
I and not-I

The First Principle

We must seek out \([\text{aufzusuchen]}\) the absolutely-first, simply \([\text{schlechthin}]\) unconditioned fundamental principle of all human knowing \([\text{Wissens}]\). It can neither be demonstrated \([\text{Beweisen}]\) nor determined \([\text{bestimmen}]\) if it is to be the absolutely primary fundamental principle. (FW 1:91)

All proof presupposes\(^{57}\) the validity of the rules and through which a proof can be counted as a proper “proof.” Such rules cannot themselves be proven, unless they are themselves derivative of yet higher principles. In light of this, the absolute primacy of the sought after principle—that which would establish the possibility of all knowing without itself being determined by a prior principle—presents a difficulty. Insofar as proofs are themselves means of knowing, they derive their validity from this absolutely first principle. How is knowing to be lead back to such a principle if not through proof? How can one “seek out” the ground of all knowing? The very “seeking” indicates that we both do not yet possess the \(\text{Wissenschaftlich}\) form of what we are seeking, but that we also must somehow already have the means to find and establish what we seek to know—some basic access to it which establishes it as knowable. Furthermore, by the very fact that knowing this principle is itself one form of knowing among others, the knowing of it occurs through the validity of the knowing it grounds.

As the fundamental principle of a particular \(\text{Wissenschaft}\), that which we are seeking must be expressed in a propositional form. The \(\text{Grundlage}\), as the presentation \((\text{Darstellung})\) of the fundamentals of a \(\text{Wissenschaft}\), consists of an ordered series of \(\text{Sätze}\) entertained by and for an empirical consciousness; in other words, the series of \(\text{Sätze}\) constituting the \(\text{Grundlage}\) is itself a certain ordering

\(^{57}\) Daniel Breazeale posits that this demand for a single, unconditioned principle at the basis of all proof derives from Fichte’s reading of Reinhold’s “principle of consciousness”—this principle must be real and actual, not formal (Breazeale, Between 793).
of determinations of that empirical consciousness. Though the absolutely unconditioned principle isn’t determined by anything “prior,” in the order of conditioning, it certainly isn’t among the first sentences of the Grundlage. We must again draw a distinction between the order through which these facts are thought and the order through which they occur as considered in chapter 2.

As a proposition, the first principle already has a duality of form and content: it “expresses” \([\text{ausdrückt}]\) a fundamental “factual action” (\(Tathandlung\))\(^{58}\) in propositional form. Its content would be the fundamental factual action establishing the possibility of empirical consciousness. Fichte uses his neologism in distinction to the word \(\text{Handlung}\) (“action”). Whereas \(\text{Handlung}\) denotes the various determinate modes of action available to human spirit (cf. “thinking,” 140), this \(Tathandlung\) is not a mode of activity among others, but the fundamental activity which conditions the consciousness of any other mode. \(\text{Tat}\) is a cognate of the German verb \(\text{Tun}\), and refers (like the early sense of the English “fact”) to an act or deed; as part of \(\text{Tatsache}\), it comes to denote “fact” in the modern sense. The facts of empirical consciousness are thus the thing we know more or less immediately—those things which are directly\(^{59}\) evident to consciousness. In coining \(Tathandlung\), Fichte isn’t simply inventing a one-word pleonasm, but suggesting that this activity is a basic “factual activity” of human consciousness. Furthermore, this factual activity must be posited as the “foundation \([\text{Grundlage}]\)” despite the fact that it “intrinsically \([\text{an sich}]\)” is not a fact for it. For it to become an object for consciousness, it would first have to cease acting as a condition of such consciousness (a condition of the opposition of subject and object) and become a mere object for it. For this reason, it “cannot appear among the empirical states \([\text{empirischen determinationen}]\) of our consciousness” (92).

\(^{58}\) Wolfgang Janke understands this term to name “the original-synthetic unity of self-consciousness” (Janke 71). Such an activity would possess the inherent unity required for a first principle.

\(^{59}\) The language of “immediacy” and “directness” should not suggest that consciousness isn’t mediated. For Fichte, consciousness is both knowing in its greatest immediacy (\(\text{Bewußt-sein}\)) and the “independent activity” striving to maintain the unity of such knowing through a constant “crossing over” between its terms (FW 1:166-7).
Here it is already clear that the *Wissenschaftslehre*, though necessarily rooted in the facts of empirical consciousness, is necessarily driven

Fichte indicates that the first principle is unconditioned in both form and content. By this, he means that both form (*how* this principle is expressed) and content (*what* is expressed in the principle) is not dependent upon any higher principle, and is entirely *a priori*. This is not to say that it exists, self evidently and thematically, in every consciousness as such, but that it is at least implied in every act of judgment\(^{60}\) within consciousness. To deduce\(^{61}\) this principle, we begin with the most self evident judgment, a judgment which has the bare form of the linking subject and predicate: \(A = A\). This form is common to all determinate judgments, even those which express a mere negation\(^{62}\). This highest and emptiest judgment appears to be certain and self evident, but is entirely empty of specific content. The first principle would be that which *grounds* the validity of this self evident assertion. For reasons we shall soon be quite familiar with, this ground is a *grounding*—an act; for if it were it not an act of pure spontaneity (and hence having not further ground as spontaneous), it would be derivative and would lack the status of fundamental principle.

The initial judgment we are given is, quite simply, \(A = A\); ―if \(A\) exists, then \(A\) exists‖ (93). Here, \(A\) does not (as yet) stand for any particular content—it doesn’t matter what we might posit,

\(^{60}\) And judgment, for Fichte, is the form all knowledge must take. Propositions express the determinate forms of this act.

\(^{61}\) Tom Rockmore argues persuasively that Fichtean deduction must not be thought of on the basis of the Kantian model of deduction. In place on this (and in light of Fichte’s discussion of “pragmatic history”), a better model is the Platonic “likely story that can never be strictly proven, based on certain assumptions from which he reasons rigorously” (Rockmore, Deduction 74). The advantage this interpretation has over the Kantian model is the way in which it dovetails with Fichte’s use of the terms “experiment” and “decree,” not to mention his discussion (noted above) of philosophy groping its way along in the dark. However, given the task which Fichte sets for himself, this model of a “likely story” will only serve insofar as it leaves the “scientific” character of the *Wissenschaftslehre* intact.

\(^{62}\) Though the possibility of such negative judgments will be first fully established with the second principle.

\(^{63}\) One should not be misled by the mathematical appearance of this symbolization or compare it to the biconditional of modern logic—the first and second places do not have identical significance. Nor should one understand this *simply* as an “if … then” statement—the second position, that of the predicate, must maintain the sense of “as.”
only that when we posit something, it is indeed posited as itself. If A is posited as existing, then A (as the subject of judgment) is indeed posited as A (the predicate). Here we find the pure form of the copular identity; entirely apodictic in form, but entirely indifferent with respect to content. It is the necessity of the conjunction that is of decisive importance— the “necessary connection” between the subject and predicate given the identity of A with itself. For, as Fichte points out, we do not know if something we could label “A” exists apart from the judgment; the assertion “A = A” only means that a necessary connection does indeed exist between the wenn and so of this judgment, given that A remains ‘A’. If such a necessary connection, which Fichte labels X, does exist, then how is this possible in the first place? Or, more to the point, how does it come to pass that this necessary connection is posited and indeed posited as absolutely valid? But it is clear that it is indeed valid, and that the positing of this connection does not depend on a higher judgment for its ground. That is, “the necessary connection between both terms” is posited as “purely and simply, and without any ground” (93). For what would that ground be? If it were itself a judgment, it would presuppose the grounding of what it claims to ground; that is, it would already imply the validity of this necessary connection. What proof of it would not presuppose it? As self evident, there is no higher ground to appeal to. Even the complete expression of the sought after “highest principle” requires the simple spontaneity of the positing of this connection. For the “highest” principle we are looking for would not ground “A is A” as a separate act of judgment; rather, “A = A” is itself a limited expression of this principle.

But even if we accept this connection to be absolutely necessary, and that this necessity derives from an act which has no higher ground, we have not yet determined why it is. We have yet

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64 For Fichte, a positing which does not have a higher ground is not the same as an arbitrary positing. The validity of this positing doesn’t come from the whim of an finite intelligence, but from an activity presupposed through all judgments of identity.
to develop the truth of its self evidence if we are to understand reflectively why “A = A” is necessarily true and “A = B” is not.

Fichte claims “A=A” is true irrespective of the existence (or even definition) of A. Furthermore, even though X is ungrounded, its application is conditioned insofar as any relation (such as necessary connection) presupposes terms which are related. For X to be posited, one must be able to posit some “A” to which X applies. Again, this does not mean that A must exist, but that its existence must be at least entertained or hypothetically posited in order to posit it as identical with itself. We must still ask, with Fichte, “under what condition is A?” (93). In the absence of a “real” A, how does the judgment “A=A” come to be? For whom are these terms conjoined (vereinigt)? His answer establishes the linchpin of his system: They are conjoined in the consciousness of the thinker who considers them, the principle conjoining them is nothing other than the basic principle of that consciousness as a self positing, self identical being: the I (das Ich).

The I enters as a judge. X exists within the I “at least” to the extent that it is always an I which judges, and it is the consciousness of the I which forms the site of connection. A, insofar as it is posited as identical with itself through X, is posited in the I as identical with itself. Note that the I is both an activity and a site— the activity of positing and that “in which” something is posited. The I is the locus of both the hypothetical positing of A, and the necessary connection X which holds between A and itself. Insofar as A exists in this judgment, it exists for the I and within the I. A thus has, to that degree, existence within and for that I. Fichte takes “A = A” to express nothing other than “if A is posited in the I, it is thereby posited, or, it thereby is” (94).

65 In his essay, “Satz and Urteil in Kant’s Critical Philosophy and Fichte’s Grundlage der Gesamten Wissenschaftslehre” (2001), Jere Paul Surber traces a transformation in the respective priorities of Satz and Urteil between the works of Kant and Fichte. Whereas, in Kant, Urteil (a judgment) is given priority over Satz (proposition, or expression of an enacted judgment), this is reversed in the work of Fichte. Surber sees this as also an increased priority given to language— not (as discussed above) as the condition and limit of rationality, but as the domain of expressed, enacted activity. It is the concreteness of a Satz which bears witness to an act of the human spirit.
This equivocation between *Setzen* and *Sein* is fundamentally decisive for Fichte. The subject position is now the “position” of being posited within the I; the predicate is A’s existence as A (we must not forget the “so” *als* of predication). We must also notice the role of X, here—it is now the necessary connection between being posited within the I and its *being thus*. The necessary connection between A and A, X, is the same as the necessary connection between the positing of A within the I and the *existence of A as A*. Fichte proceeds to maintain that “the I posits, by means of X, that A exists absolutely for the judging I, and that simply in virtue of its being posited in the I as such.” Notice the role of X in this assertion; through X, the I posits that A *exists for* the I purely through it being *posited in* the I. A’s “being posited within the I” makes possible its being *for* the I (we might add, recalling the previous assertion, *as A*) through X—the necessary connection of A (as posited in the I) and A (as being so for the I) as posited by the I. There is, then, an essential unity between the activity which posits the subject of predication and the “sphere” in which something is posited; the current ‘X,’ as the essential connection between subject and predicate, depends upon this unity of positing and the sphere of the posited. It is in connection with this that Fichte takes the above assertion to imply that the I posits within itself “something that is permanently uniform, forever one and the same.” But the being of this “something” must be understood in the very terms we have been using—it is *as it is* (as “one and the same”) through being *posited* by the I as *in* the I. What could this be but the X which establishes the necessary connection between subject and predicate? It was initially posited as being in the I, and it *is* the necessary connection between being and positing in the I. Ultimately, X must be that which is in common between the two terms—the positing *in the I* of something and being *for the I* as something. Here the joining effected by the I through X indicates the identity of that which posits A and that *in which* A is posited as A. That is to say, this “something” (X) is not to be taken as some kind of enduring substrate which passively or objectively glues the separate senses of A together, but refers to the actively posited *identity of the I* as...
that which posits and the I as the “within which” something is posited. X, as the necessary connection in predications of identity thus means nothing less than “I = I” (ibid.). Using the earlier gloss of predication, this means “if one posits the I in the I, then the I is for the I as such.” This follows with respect to X; for, if the I in which one posits is the very I which posits, and the I for which the I is must also be the I which is for the I, then clearly the I of positing is the I in which the I is posited— the identity which we sought in the principle X.

This is of decisive importance, for Fichte claims that one is able to conclude that the I exists (“Ich bin” not “Das Ich ist”) from the assertion “I = I.” Because this move is extremely important and extremely terse and dense, we must examine the passage closely. Fichte writes, “Yet the proposition ‘I am I’ is unconditionally and absolutely valid, since it is equivalent to the proposition X; it is valid not merely in form but also in content. In it the I is posited, not conditionally, but absolutely, with the predicate of equivalence to itself; hence it really is posited, and the proposition can also be expressed as I am.” (95). If X is none other than the principle “I = I,” then, in any act of judgment, we are already presupposing, as its condition, I = I. But, in this statement, the I which is posited and predicated of itself in an act of judgment is the same I which enacts this judgment— the form and content are both established as valid. Were no I to exist, there would not be an I to posit nor an I to posit something within. This is because the I is not a being separable from the act of judgment— judgment is an activity of the I itself, in Fichte’s account, the I is fundamentally nothing more than what it posits itself to be through such activity; the I is only what it is for itself. Thus, in being posited at all, it is posited as being identical with itself in and through the I. Note that this posited equivalence is clearly an activity; the judgment, even in its empty formality, remains an act of judgment, an act that is nothing other than the activity which is the I. For Fichte, the I is not an empirical personality, nor a noumenal ground of thinking beyond the reach of understanding, but
the posited self identity of judging (or, more generally, positing) activity which has, as its ground, nothing other than its own spontaneous positing.

Fichte understands Kant’s famous transcendental unity of apperception in just this way: as the positing of an I which accompanies every such judgment, but which itself is nothing other than this activity of positing. Not an entity among entities, not as a singular, historical I which may or may not exist (which always presupposes a prior positing) but the formally identical “I think” which accompanies any representation⁶⁶ (cf. CPR B 132).

We are now in a position to understand how the relation between the identity of the I and the copula of judgment. The I is not fragmented into diversity by the diversity of its judgments, but posits itself as identical (always the same as effectuated through X— its own, posited self identity) in and through that series. In any judgment, the I posits itself as identical with itself in and as the

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⁶⁶ For Kant, this transcendental unity of apperception presupposes the formal, analytic unity of the subject which must be thinkable with every representation and the synthetic activity which allows the manifold to conform with the analytical unity. But this synthesis is the spontaneous activity (B131) of an unknowable soul or self. The specious reality of the soul as identical with this merely formal, logical I is rejected by both Kant and Fichte. And yet, for Fichte, there is no difference between the spontaneous, synthesizing activity of this I and the reality of the I. The self in not the unknowable ground of spontaneous activity- it is this activity. The being of the I is precisely this activity. The Fichtean neologism- Tat-handlung- is intended to show that this factual-activity is the mode of being of the I, a mode of being which requires no underlying, permanent “I” which would somehow be different from this activity. The I is not conceived as a thing or even a passively enduring soul, but as the self-effectuation of this activity. Though Kant rejects any notion that an permanently underlying I (or soul) can be proven from the unity of apperception, the very distinction between the “logical” I and the unknowable, noumenal I of the soul remains in place. In other words, the space for the soul is preserved even though(and even precisely because) any attempt to prove its existence falls into fallacy. However, for Fichte, even this distinction is specious. The formal identity of the I is the self-effectuating product of the I’s activity- the I has no intelligible reality apart from this activity. This difference is the difference which sequesters the “noumenal” I in Kant, and the foreclosure of this difference entails a kind of ubiquitous immanence of the I in Fichte. Fichte, of course, understands this non-difference to be what Kant must have meant, given that even a noumenal positing is still effectuated by the activity of the I and nothing other than the I. All else would entail dogmatism (for Fichte, an “I-in-itself” is a contradictory chimera). However, even for Fichte, the identity of form and content, established here, is to some extent “promissory” and the telos of practical activity. We might say that the course of the Wissenschaftslehre is a synthetically developed movement from the merely formal I to a (albeit never fully attained) concretion of the I as identical with the content of its positing. The important point is that they are not presupposed as opposed, and thus condemned to an inconceivable incommensurability which certainly could not form the basis of Wissenschaft. The Absolute I (as the unity of content and form) is both the formal inception of this movement and the infinitely distant goal.
positing, and in and as the site of positing; without this identity, one would have an unconnected series of arbitrary events, and no ground for necessary connection. The coherence which is necessary for any form of disciplined knowledge, let alone the Wissenschaftslehre, is established through this self identity. The I, the site and self-constitutive structure of this coherence, is not a passive receptacle\(^\text{67}\) of the contents of judgment but a constant activity of establishing and identity with itself in and through these judgments. For Fichte, the I is nothing apart from this activity of self positing; the self identification of the I indicates a unity between the production and product of an activity, and underlies the possibility of any predication as the site and actuating principle of predication. The I is not thing which is somehow also active, but rather this activity pure and simple as it is for itself.

For this reason, the identity of Sein and Setzen is most immediate and concrete in the I. In any instance of positing, we are able to say “I am,” not because there must be a being supporting this activity, but rather because the I is nothing other than this self positing. If we understand this in terms of I=I, or I am I, we can understand the absolute character of this self identity of the I. What is the ground of this positing? Nothing more then its own enactment the I posits itself as positing; the I exists at the enactment of this positing. “The I posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists; and, conversely, the I exists and posits its own existence by virtue of merely existing” (96). The I is out of its own self positing, and its own being is both the ground and the enactment of its own positing. There is no higher ground to its being than its own self positing, for its being is its own self positing. Because the assertion “A = A” was held to be absolutely certain in empirical consciousness— and even, as a law of thought, conditioning its most basic truths, the assertion I = I, and thus “I am,” are held to be absolutely certain as the condition of that proposition’s validity. “Hence it is a ground of explanation of all the facts of empirical consciousness, that, prior to all

\(^\text{67}\) This role will later be given to the Verstand.
positing in the I, the I itself is posited.” We have been led from the facts of empirical consciousness to their condition.

As self positing, and the ground of its own activity, in this activity the I is the “absolutely posited, and self-founding ground of a certain activity [Handeln] of the human spirit … and thus of its pure character; the pure character of activity as such, in abstraction from its specific empirical conditions” (95-6). It is the pure activity conditioning the various, conditioned forms of activity (presumably, all determinate acts of empirical representation) made possible through this founding. For this reason, Fichte concludes that “I am” is the expression of “a factual action [Tathandlung], and the only one possible, as will inevitably appear from the Wissenschaftslehre as a whole.” But, given what we’ve already discussed, we must avoid understanding this in a metaphysical sense. Fichte understands his project in the tradition of critical philosophy; if we are to remain within its bounds, we must remain within the bounds of judgment (the faculty through which Wissen is established), and judgment is product of this pure activity of self positing. We are thus entitled, at this point, to believe that this highest act remains the highest act of the human spirit (des menschlichen Geistes)— the representational mind with all of its empirical determinations— it is the highest act which we can claim to know as unconditioned and through which we might ground the specific judgments conditioned by it. For the purpose of the Wissenschaftslehre it is the “factual action” (Tathandlung) we were looking for. Only through the fulfillment of the Wissenschaftslehre will it become clear that no other form of genuine activity is possible for it; as we shall see, the positing of any other activity would be nothing other than dogmatism— outstripping the bounds of judgment.

We must now return to the copula of predication and rethink it in terms of this primacy of the I in judgment, for Fichte’s unique understanding of predication will not only have immediate consequences for the connection of the I’s being to its self positing, but will also have decisive implications for the unfolding of the work as a whole. In a lengthy footnote, Fichte develops a
renewed understanding of predication with respect to the above conceptuality. With “A=A,” the first position indicates something as posited, either “purely and simply” (schlechthin) in the case of the I, or according to a ground, as is the case with everything not I. With regard to the second ‘A’:

The second A designates what the I, reflecting upon itself as object, finds [vorfindet] to be present in itself, because it has first posited within itself. The judging I predicates something, not really of A, but of itself, namely that there is an A in it; and hence the second A is called the predicate. Thus in the proposition “A=B,” A designates what is now being posited; B what is already encountered [angefroffen wird] as posited. ‘Is’ expresses the passage of the I from positing to reflection upon what has been posited. (FW 1:96)

In the above, the I posits the subject of predication within itself, but “finds” or encounters the same as something within itself—this ‘as’ denotes a predicate which truly applies only to the I, that it finds posited within itself in a determinate way. The copular “is” consists of the “passage” (Übergang) from fundamental positing to reflection, and this passage opposes a fundamental act of positing to a reflective determination of something as something. The passage of the copular “is” reveals something quite peculiar, for the I is presented as both originally positing the subject, but also as “finding” or “encountering” the subject as reflectively predicated. Hence, the subject of predication is both the product of the I’s activity and something strange to it. In both linking and distancing the subject and predicate, the copula already manifests the difficulty and strangeness of the self limitation of the I—for, as we will see, this form of self relation is necessarily mediated by an other.

If we again consider the structure of this predicative judgment, now applied to the I itself as ‘I am I,’ we are led to a more nuanced understanding of what this means with respect to the being of the I. With respect to the copular form of this judgment, Fichte distinguishes the subject and predicate position in terms of the positing of something and the being of something. The subject is that which is “simply posited” (das schlechthin gesetzte); the predicate refers to the posited as “the being” (das seinede) which is posited. The latter position, as the being of the posited, refers not
simply to a general and ambiguous “existence of some X,” but the being of something as that something.

In other words, the I is “purely and simply” posited by itself — it has no other ground then itself; on that basis, in the predicate position it is said to be (as the I). Thus the I is because it has posited itself: “the I is because it has posited itself.” With regard to the predicate position, the I which is for the I as the I is the same as the I for whom the I is the I — “The I in the first and second sense are to be purely and simply the same” (97). The I, and the I alone, is entirely identical in subject and predicate. This makes the positing and being of the I equally identical. It posits itself because it is, and is because it posits itself (97). If the I is the ground of its own being, this entails that it is absolute, for that which can be understood as the ground of its own existence has an absolute existence, and we have arrived at the absolute subject; “That entity whose being (essence) consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing is the I as absolute subject.” But we should not forget the “for” of Fichtean predication (in reflection, the predicate presents the posited for the I as something): “the I is absolute and necessary for the I. What does not exist for itself is not an I”; “[t]he I exists only insofar as it is conscious of itself”; and “[I] exist only for myself; but for myself I am necessary (in saying ‘for myself,’ I already posit my existence” (98). The I is only to the extent that it is for itself — the being of the I and its self consciousness (Selbstbewuβtsein) are inseparable. It is only for itself, and necessarily so. Furthermore, if one frames the equivalence of Sein and Setzen entirely in terms of being, and one recalls that the I is as I for the I, we arrive at the understanding that “for the I, I am both absolutely because I am and am absolutely what I am.” Simplifying this into a single proposition, we have a decisive formulation of the above basic factual action (Tathandlung) sought at

68 Fichte will soon develop this into a notion of the I as “subject-object.”
69 As Frederick Neuhouser points out, Fichte “uses the notion of self-positing to refer to a particular kind of self-consciousness and that his characterization of the I as absolute or unconditioned is to be understood as consisting in the claim that the subject has no existence apart from this self-awareness.” If the I is not self-positing, it is not an I. The question of what the I was before self-consciousness becomes meaningless given the equivalence of self-consciousness and self-positing (Neuhouser 1990).
the basis of consciousness: “The I inceptually [ursprünglich] posits its own Being [Sein]” (98). If “A=A” is a certainty for empirical consciousness, and the possibility of the truth of A = A is found in the absolute self positing of the I, then the ground of this most basic certainty for consciousness is found in the self positing of the I.

The aforementioned “distance” of the copula already suggests how the I might encounter its own production as something “real” and opposed to it. For Fichte, predication is indeed connected with reality, not simply the reality of the I, but the “realism” of representation—the reality of objects opposed to the I. Fichte notes that the category of ‘reality’ (Realität) is produced through the abstraction of the form of judgment from its content; such form presents a fundamental type of activity (Handlungsart) attributable to the human spirit. Note that “reality” is not being discussed as a set of “things in themselves,” but as a category which would condition the very thinkability of “real” things in their determinate existence. Since thought must take the form of representation, the thinkability of a thing requires that it be thinkable in terms of the principle of identity, and this requires that it be posited within the I, and posited in terms of the I’s identity (FW 1:99). But, for critical philosophy, the limits of the thinkable are the limits of being; the posited existence of a reality which is in principle beyond the scope of the I is unintelligible, as is the posited nonexistence of such a reality (as in dogmatic idealism). In a fundamental way, the limit of the I is the limit of sense, and the limit of any sense which could be given to “being.” “Everything which is, only is insofar as it is posited within the I, and there is nothing beyond the I. No possible ‘A’ in the above proposition (no thing) can be anything other than something posited in the I” (99). For the being of something to be

70 More precisely, “things” are both posited as being independent of the I, but recuperated into the I through that recognition. The positing of a “thing-in-itself” is a necessary, one might say “structural” moment of the I’s self positing. But to posit such things apart from the logic of the I’s self positing is dogmatism, pure and simple.

71 As noted above, the positing of an independent thing is unavoidable. For Fichte, the emphasis on accounting for this necessity (while indeed contextualizing it within the higher necessity of the I’s self positing) distinguishes his system from dogmatic idealism.
thinkable, it must be posited *within* the I in accordance with the principle of identity; beyond this, there is nothing. “Everything to which the principle ‘A=A’ is applicable has reality to the extent to which the principle is, indeed, applicable. That which is posited through the mere positing of any given thing *irgendeines Ding* (a positum in the I), is the reality in it, is its essence [*Wesen*]” (ibid.). That is: 1.) any given thing has reality insofar as it can be first *posited in the I* and then *reflectively* “found” within the I *as* something and 2.) Fichte understands a thing’s “essence” (as that which is posited through its bare positing) to be the same as its reality; and thus reality only emerges *through* positing.

Let us return to the strangeness of the copula. We might reasonably suppose that even the “=” in “I = I” indicates a relation between the positing of the I and being posited for the I *as* the I. If these immediately collapse into one another, we have an unintelligible and undifferentiated unity. Even in respect to the I, if we wish to understand the self positing of the I determinately (and thus intelligibly), for the I to be meaningfully posited *as* I (in distinction from what is not I) requires that it be posited as *not* something not-I. For the I to be *for* the I equally requires a difference between positing and being posited for reflection. For *Wissenschaft* to be possible, the first principle must be in some sense commensurable with the basic structure of determinate representation.

If the I alone cannot account for the distinction between subject and predicate, then the mediation at work here requires something beyond the logic of identity. Given that knowledge essentially develops through properly grounded judgments, and these are mediated by the copula, the first principle, though “absolute,” is also (for the purposes of representation and thus intelligibility) insufficient to establish the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a form of *knowledge*. The only form of knowledge possible for it would be the empty formalism of the self identity of the I. The determinate self positing of the I is impossible without an “alien” principle. In short, the first fundamental principle isn’t sufficient to account for the determinacy of representation. To account for difference, there must be a foil for identity.
Second Fundamental Principle: Conditioned with respect to Content (seinem Gehalt nach bedingter)

Unlike the first fundamental principle, the second is partially conditioned. On the one hand, with respect to its form, there is nothing “prior” or “higher.” In this respect it is as unconditioned as the first principle: we again have an absolute positing—that is, the positing of something without a ground outside of the I\textsuperscript{72}. However, the content is another matter; as we shall soon see, the content is something utterly derivative of and conditioned by the first principle—it is “conditioned” insofar as its content is only possible given the self identification of the first principle. We again find the abstract and derivative expression of this second principle among the facts (Tatsachen) of empirical consciousness (101). Though presented in terms of the copula, and to this extent conditioned by the first principle, we begin not with a judgment of identity, but of negation: “\(~A\text{ [does]} \not= A\)” (101). This terse formulation distills the ubiquity of negative judgments to its pure form. Notice again the order with respect to the copula (“\(=\)”). The posited \(~A\) is not posited as \(A\).

This is indeed a self evident, unimpeachably valid judgment of empirical consciousness, for clearly \(A\) and \(~A\) are not the same. But Fichte points out the nature temptation to render the above non equivalence into an equivalence “\(~A = \sim A\).” This would bypass the essential negativity we are attempting to isolate entirely—we are left with mere self predication. For we are investigating a judgment concerning \(A\) and \(~A\), not \(A\) and \(A\) or \(~A\) and \(~A\). To reduce it tautology precisely misses the point and leaves us with the only our earlier \(X\); with the second proposition, we are struggling with the question of how any non tautological judgment is possible. How should we know such judgments are possible in the first place? How are we to isolate the genuinely negative moment in terms of the negated predication which is presented here? Fichte wishes to isolate the non tautological element in its underivable factuality; not only is this non tautological element a fact of

\[72\] Though the positing of a particular “something” opposed to consciousness requires a ground, the positing of something not-I in general is fundamentally ungrounded for reasons which will become clear.
consciousness. Without it, the system of knowledge collapses into empty identity. For, as will become clear, the non tautological element is the precondition of any determinacy whatsoever.

Hence, we must dwell on the significance of the “~” and the “not” which separates them. Above all, the “not = A” must not be reduced to “= ~A”—the former negates the copula and thus denies or cancels predication, the later negates the predicate (i.e. A) but in a way entirely consistent with the copula. It is through rendering them equivalent that we slide back into the judgment of identity; rendered equivalent, we would simply arrive at “~A=~A,” and, given that the selection of the content of this relation of identity is arbitrary, this formally amounts to the same thing as A=A; we would merely be reiterating the already established basis of the above X (102). For this reason, we must carefully distinguish the negated predication from the negated predicate. Though the negated predicate indicates a hypothetical non identity with A, it has a very different role in the proposition “A is not equal to ~A” than the negated copula. This is because the tilde is attached to “~A,” defining it as an opposed term. As such, it indicates the posited existence of “something” different than A and not the relation between two terms. On the other hand, the not (nicht) mediates, in quite a precarious way, A and ~A. It defines a (non)relation between the two terms: A and ~A. In other words, the nicht foregrounds the non identity of ~A in relation to A, indicating a basic difference which cannot be reduced to identity. In terms of the first principle, it is the negation of X (the necessary connection at work in identity) not the negation of one term or the other, and, as a negation of that X, it is a negation of the I as such. On the one hand, the ‘not’ indicates a relation between A and ~A, on the other, it indicates the absence of any common ground between them which would make such a relation possible. Thus, the ‘not’ has a certain ambiguity with respect to the possibility of thinking A and ~A together—it defines a relation (and, for Fichte,

\[73 \text{See p. 92-93 for the equivalence of “=” and the } \text{logischen Kopula.} \]
relations are only thinkable on the basis of a common ground) which is one of absolute exclusion: a non-relation\(^7\).

The self identity of the self’s self positing cannot serve as the basis for the non identity or even opposition among predicates. Since it cannot be derived from the positing of identity, and thus cannot be entirely derived from a higher principle which is unconditioned and available to us as a fact of consciousness, the possibility of negation, when combined with our methodological commitment (to the unity of knowledge grounded in knowing/thinking and not an unintelligible, alien principle) requires an absolute “counter positing” (Entgegensetzen) on the part of the I, which, like self positing, finds no higher ground then its own enactment. However, like the self positing of the I, for a critical philosophy this act must be a spontaneous positing on the part of the I and not immediately posited as the activity of an alien principle. Here, we are not discussing any determinate content but rather the possibility of the form of opposition (negation). Negation is the unconditioned formal aspect of the second principle, the possibility of which is only thinkable as an activity of the I.

And yet the content does derive from a higher principle. Negation is entirely empty, and indeed unintelligible, in the absence of a negated term. This is why the first principle has priority over the second—only in the first do we find the unconditioned unity of both form and content. However, this first principle is not enough precisely because of its absolute identity; in the first principle, the self identity of the I does not admit of any distinction from the I. The most fundamental content of the second principle is found in the application of the merely formal principle of negation to the undifferentiated content of the first principle. The I conditions the

\(^7\) But what can possibly ground this relation as a relation, given that there is no “common ground” between \(A\) and \(\sim A\)? We will see how this ambiguity drives the formulation of the third fundamental principle.
content of the principle of negation, and we arrive at the not I through the form of the activity of counter-positing.

This not I, however, is not simply the abstract, superficial product of a prior certainty with a new form. It is not as if we are simply externally combining the “results” of the first principle with the negative form of the second, leaving us with something which remains entirely thinkable in terms of the first. In the absolute positing of negation, the I is positing the non identical as alien to itself. Given the absolute self identity of the I, the positing of non identity entails the positing of something ‘not-I’ which is not posited as identical (or posited as not-identical) to the I; the absolute negation posits and initially irreducible opposedness to the unity in identity of the I. However, this absolute opposing remains an activity of the I— the I itself posits the not I as opposed to it. It is both a product of the I’s activity, and posited as absolutely opposed to that activity. The fundamental tension that this presents for the I— simultaneously within and beyond the sphere of the I’s positing— is one that drives the entire Wissenschaftslehre.

The necessity of positing a not-I is seen most clearly in Fichte’s discussion of the possibility of representation; an noted earlier, representation necessarily involves the distinction between the representing subject and that which is to be represented. In connection with this distinction, Fichte writes:

If I am to represent anything at all, I must oppose it to the representing I. Now within the object of representation there can and must be an X of some sort, whereby it discloses itself as something to be represented, and not as that which represents. But that everything, wherein this X may be, is not that which represents, but an item to be represented, is something that no object can teach me; for merely in order to set up something as an object, I have to know this already; hence it must lie initially in myself, the presenter, in advance of any possible experience. (105).
The objectivity of the represented cannot be derived from any particular opposed empirical object, but only through something already lying within the I. The very possibility of representation requires the opposing (entgegen setzen) of the “representing” (Vorstellende) and the to be represented (Vorzustellendes); this requires that one “know” beforehand the possibility of opposedness pure and simple. The I, as we shall see, must be able to posit something as not being posited by the I. Otherwise, the object (Gegenstand) presented—“placed before” consciousness—would not be distinguishable as an object—as something opposed to the I. Though we have not yet arrived at any particular object, we have arrived at the pure form of objectivity.

Fichte sees the inability to understand this insight as a basic instance of “spiritual blindness”—either the object (as the ground for objectivity) is simply assumed to exist independently of representation or one attempts to derive the concept of objectivity via abstraction from all possible objects of Vorstellung (the very structure of which presupposes the not I). We arrive at the crucial importance of the second fundamental principle of the Wissenschaftslehre. On the one hand, we see the double effectuation of negation in negating the self identity of the I, one is also positing what the I is not. This is not any posited content in particular, but the possibility of the non identical, and hence representable, as such. Yet the not I is not a particular object which the I must encounter as an obstacle, but the inceptive positing of difference that makes such an apparent “obstacle” possible (objectivity). It is not a being which somehow precedes the positing it is not a being at all. Considered in itself, it is not.

In terms of the overarching aim of the Wissenschaftslehre, however, Fichte notes that we are only left with an activity of negation which allows for the assertion “~A is not equal to A” — the full significance of the second principle only becoming intelligible with the third principle (105). It is

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75 Compare this to the “transcendental object = x” of the first edition of Kant’s first critique.
clear why this is so: negation, even as it establishes two terms in opposition, is unable to account for any mediation between those terms. The second principle, even as it articulates the possibility of negation in terms of the not I, demonstrates how far Fichte’s idealism is from establishing the unity demanded by his methodology; the opposition encountered in the second fundamental principle presents a problem for the unity in identity of the I. The non identity posited in negation threatens to shatter the self identity of the I. Indeed, the trajectory of the Wissenschaftslehre’s development emerges from the determinate and synthetic resolution of this fundamental impasse of identity and non identity.
Chapter 4
Division and Determination

*The Third Principle: Unconditioned as to Content, Conditioned as to Form*

The third principle of the *Grundlage* can be derived from the indeterminate conflict between the first two fundamental principles. The formal necessity of the third can be fully derived from the prior two as an *Aufgabe*—the task of determining this indeterminate conflict through the mediation of a third principle; more precisely, it is conditioned by the form of *identity*—the task is to maintain the identity given the apparent conflict of the first two principles. In terms of *Inhalt*, the specific way that this mediation is accomplished is not derived from the prior principles, but is, like the unconditioned aspects we've encountered so far, the product of a spontaneous positing of the absolute I. The manner in which this happens is also the content, for only given the manner of positing these terms together can each of the terms first become *something* (*etwas*)—a predicable term in relation. Just as absolute positing is ultimately the ground of this mediation, the ground which we are driven to posit in our investigations will involve an “experimental” leap beyond the analysis of principles we are already given. He refers to this leap as an “unconditioned degree of reason” (*Unbedingten Machtspruch der Vernunft*) (106) and as determined through a “special law [Gesetz] of the mind” (108). Let us further situate this degree in the necessity which requires it.

If no solution to this impasse is analytically contained within the first two fundamental principles, we are justified in positing what can be the only solution which preserves the validity of the principles which we have already determined to be absolute. When, through deduction, we are both certain that the two principles must both apply, but we are unable to apply them without their mutual annihilation, we are also deductively impelled to posit a ground for their non-cancelation in nothing other than the spontaneity of fundamental positing. Once again, the deductive necessity

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76 We will return to this key trope shortly.
which drives Fichte’s investigation will be driven beyond the mere analysis of already given ideas, the justification for this “experimental leap” being found in the normative imperative which structures his entire system. More precisely, in staying close to the critical demand driving the Wissenschaftslehre, this problem must be solved through recourse to either the already determined principles (which can be understood as the demand for formal identity through systematicity—differences are ultimately mediated in a way which preserves the unity of I=I), or from the absolute spontaneity of the I (what one might call the correlative demand of epistemic autonomy—one should not ground knowledge in the unknowable and contradictory, but in the activity of knowing itself). If it is determined that a hitherto underived concept is necessary to preserve this unity without recourse to dogmatism, Fichte believes that an “experiment” becomes necessary which establishes the inevitable necessity of positing such a principle. How do we begin?

This time, we do not begin with an apodictic statement from empirical consciousness, but develop and articulate the contradiction between the first two principles. Fichte develops this contradiction in five steps. First, the very positing of the not-I involves the negation of the positing of the I (106). Insofar as the not-I is posited in the I, the I is not posited, and is suspended (aufgehoben) (ibid.). But the very positing of the not-I depends upon the self-identical positing of the I; insofar as the not-I is posited, the I must also be posited in its identity with itself as the site of that positing. Hence, the second principle entails the positing the not-I within the I. Secondly, we see that this counter-posing (Gegensätze) unavoidably requires the positing of the I, for what is the

77 With the word “aufheben,” a Hegelian interpretation is almost unavoidable, but it must be avoided. This word, for both thinkers, can be translated as ‘suspension’ (a better choice, for Fichte, than cancel, nullify, or sublate) but the sense in which Fichte uses it needs to be carefully developed on the basis of its use in the WL. For now, let it suffice to note that the word, like our word ‘suspension,’ has etymological connotations of something being lifted up, and thus, perhaps, “out of” applicability. However, one must keep in mind that this suspension is both a denial of validity with respect to a given domain (the scope in which the principle is supposed to be valid), but a denial which is inseparable from the demand for its validity precisely with respect to that domain. As will become apparent, the problem arises from the domain being poorly delimited, an indication that the principle is also at least partly indeterminate. In other words, suspension indicates that the determinacy of the application, along with the determinacy of the domain of its application, is in question.
not-I apart from its opposition to the I? That is, as positing in opposition to the I, one must also posit the I as the opposed of the counter-positing (Gegensetzen) within the identical consciousness. In other words, both the I and the not-I must be posited within an identical conscious. This is a problem since we do not yet have a concept which would allow us to mediate this opposition. Thus, thirdly, the second principle suspends itself. This wouldn’t be a problem if we hadn’t already demonstrated that the second principle has unconditioned validity. In his fourth step, Fichte points out that the self-suspension of the second principle depends upon its own validity, but that this validity, in turn, is itself suspended with this self-suspension, and thus cannot be considered suspended after all. If the second principle lacks validity, then it actually does not suspend itself since this self-suspension depends upon its validity—its self-suspending suspends its suspension. Thus, Fichte observes that it simultaneously suspends and does not suspend itself; the not-I is simultaneously both posited and not-posited in the self.

Finally, we see that not only is the second principle in this peculiar state of being both suspended and suspended in its suspension, but the first as well. “For, if I=I, everything is posited that is posited in the I. But now the second principle is supposed to be posited in the I and also to not be posited therein. Thus I does not = I, but rather I = not-I and not-I = I” (107). In positing I = I, one necessarily posits the I (as we have seen in the analysis of the first fundamental principle, only I = I implies the actual positing of I, as opposed to the hypothetical A = A). However, given the peculiar double suspension of the second principle, which must itself be posited in the I, the content of the I itself is both posited and not-posited in the I. In other words, insofar as one posits the I, one does and does not posit the not-I as belonging to the I as part of its self-identity. Positing the I, in light of the validity of the second principle, necessarily must entail the positing and not positing of the not-I within the sphere of the I. Insofar as this entails the positing of the not-I, it entails “I = not-I”; insofar as the not-I is not posited in the sphere of the I, it is not in opposition to the I and so
must be considered identical with it: “not-I = I.” If the I is understood to be fundamentally self-identical, one must *posit itself as opposed to itself*. In doing so, it suspends itself as identical, but, in doing so, it suspends the validity of the first suspension. Thus, the I must be seen to both suspend and not suspend itself. We are left with the double-suspension of the first principle which arises from the proposition that the I posits itself as opposed to itself.

One might justifiably ask why Fichte doesn’t simply reject one or both principles in accordance with the law of non-contradiction—a law which seems just as necessary as formal identity and the non-identity of opposites; it seems to be an affront to logic to maintain that both principles both suspend themselves and do not suspend themselves. The trouble is that this impasse was reached from principles which were shown to be unconditioned given the unavoidable presupposition of two laws of reflection. The two principles are entailed by the self-evident truths “A=A” and “A is not = ~ A”. “All of these conclusions have been derived from the principles already set forth, according to the laws of reflection that we have presupposed as valid; so they must be correct” (108). We can only reject the principles if we reject the “laws of reflection” which are presupposed as the basis of disciplined knowledge in general—even the principle of non-contradiction—depends upon the fundamental negativity found in the positing of the not-I.

Now, this impasse must be overcome or the basic project of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not viable. As Fichte puts it, this is because this indeterminate double suspension threatens to shatter the identity of consciousness, and this identity is “the singular absolute foundation of our knowing” (107). If consciousness is conceived as knowing in its activity, a contradiction which suspends the identity of this knowing destroys the edifice built upon that activity (knowledge). We must conceive of a way in which both terms of this contradiction can be thought together; to do this, Fichte must search for a principle (again labeled “X”) which allows the duplicity of this self-suspension to have its own validity without leading to the impasse of indeterminate opposition; we need an additional
principle which will allow the indeterminate\textsuperscript{78} double-suspension of the first two principles to become determinate. “[W]e have to determine some X, by means of which all these conclusions can be granted as correct, without doing away with the identity of consciousness” (FW 1:107). Not only must this X allow the mediation of the opposed principles, but it must also preserve the truth of all the (apparently contradictory) consequences Fichte derives from them, including the double-self suspensions found in the fourth and fifth points— the knot our impasse. Crucially, the contradiction is not to be “resolved” (the principles are not welded into a static unity; the opposition is not immediately reduced to one term or the other) but preserved in a way that allows for its determinate unfolding. All of these consequences must be preserved, but in a way which allows their apparent contradiction to become the very motion of inquiry. The path of its suspension becomes the course of the \textit{Wissenschaftslehre}; the impasse itself becomes the road.

\textit{Fichte\textquoteright s “Experiments”}

As we noted earlier, in order to transform this impasse into a way of inquiry, we must go beyond the principles which we have derived precisely to preserve the possibility of their determinate opposition. The method is, at times, described by Fichte as involving experiment\textsuperscript{79}. In conducting this experiment, we ask what must be the case for the identity of the self to be possible even in the positing of the not-I? The “experimental” aspect of this endeavor has nothing to do with empirical research, but rather the crossing of a limit— the limit which constitutes the indeterminate opposition

\textsuperscript{78} That this is a problem of determinacy (Bestimmung) is already clear from the contradictory double-validity of opposed consequences of the fundamental principles. Only if they apply to the same domain in the same, undifferentiated way do these principles come into opposition and impasse. The task of the WL, as we shall see, will involve the increasingly subtle determination of the uneliminable “between” which allows both principles to hold sway.

\textsuperscript{79} Günter Zöller argues that the recourse to a word like “experiment” is an attempt to distinguish living philosophy from ways of thinking which are “artificial” and “removed from life.” Like a scientific experiment, philosophical speculation isolates “some real-life process” and studies it under “artificial, systematically simplified conditions” (Zöller, \textit{Transcendental 30}). I strongly endorse this interpretation, as it dovetails nicely with Fichte’s repeated admonition that philosophical thought can only be understood if it is enacted— a feat requiring genuine spirit— and that this enactment only serves to bring into consciousness something which, as a conditioning for of activity, is already operative within consciousness.
of the impasse. This limit marks the absence, within the first two principles, of their “co-
thinkability.” Not finding the resources through an analysis of the task itself, we must “try something out” which could provide a solution to this problem. That is, the necessity of this Experiment, as such, derives from the fact that the answer is not found in the analysis of the prior principles, but by the spontaneous positing of an un-derived principle which is required to maintain their co-existence without annihilating either. Thus, we must go beyond the resources of the first principles in order to uncover what must already be the case for their opposition to be possible in the first place. In this way, the “experimental” character of this inquiry recapitulates, in philosophical reflection, the unconditioned activity which it attempts to make clear.

This “experiment”, however, is far from an arbitrary (“spontaneous”) casting about for any answer without regard to the peculiar requirements of the task. Though the way in which the first two principles are to be reconciled is indeed unconditioned, we do have a derived form (our task) and thus a determinate “shape” which the solution must take. More precisely, though the “Inhalt” of the solution is not found in the statement of the task, the form of the task determines the necessary characteristics which any solution is to have. In order to think two opposed principles in a way which does not involved annihilation, there must be some way which allows each to be granted its unconditioned validity, and which prevents this validity from canceling the validity of its opposed term. As will be made clear, the only relation which could allow both principles to retain their validity would be one which restricts the application of one to the other.

We are thus driven to “experimentally” develop a principle which would allow for the preservation of the identity of consciousness in the face of the non-identity of the not-I. Fichte thus searches for this “X” which would allow the preservation of both self-identity and opposition. What do we know about this X?
Fichte notes that this X must, like the opposites to be combined, exist in the consciousness (Bewuβtsein) of the self (107); however, this consciousness is nothing beyond the self-positing of the self through itself. The activity of counter-posing (Entgegensetzen), the “product” of which is the not-I, requires this X to be possible. If the “product”, which is the not-I, is conditioned by X, then X cannot be derived from the second principle. Furthermore, this X, which only exists as the possibility of the co-positing of the first two principles, cannot be derived from simple identity of the I=I. Since this cannot be derived from the prior principles, it must be understood as the product of a spontaneous positing of the I. Once again, when what we need cannot be derived but must be the case for the factual opposition to exist in the first place, our only recourse is to the unconditioned activity of the I. Is X, itself, this activity? This cannot be the case, as it is already produced as the condition of the identity of consciousness. In other words, X only indicates the presence in consciousness of a mediating relation which allows I and not-I to be posited together without shattering the unity of consciousness; the activity which effects X remains to be determined. This is not a matter of indeterminately pronouncing that, by fiat, the activity of the I simply makes it so, we must further determine the nature of the activity which produces X (as the co-thinkability of the first two principles); anything else would short-circuit the progress of the Wissenschaftslehre and run the project aground in the shallow waters of dogmatic idealism. We shall see that, dogmatism, for Fichte, is the recourse to the merely posited (be it an ideal activity of a thing in itself). For the Wissenschaftslehre to progress, this activity, labeled Y, requires further determinacy.

Though the form of the task is already available to us, we do not yet have the resources to derive the form of the activity Y. Fichte writes, “the manner in which they [the two fundamental principles] could be unified does not lie within them, but rather they are determined by a specific law of our spirit, that through that experiment is supposed to be brought to consciousness” (108). Note the connection between the figure of law (as something set down, as a representation of power) and
the decree (Machtspruch) of reason (Vernunft) mentioned earlier. This law (Gesetz— an unconditioned positing as a law) is specific (besonders), indicating its character as a further determination beyond the affordances of the prior principles. There is, then, nothing rational in the laws coming to be, but an irrational (or non-rational) coming to be which conditions reason’s work. Reason is figured as speaking from power (Macht-spruch)—a speaking out of power which inevitably suggests the political figure of a king or leader. As determined by nothing prior, this speaking out of power is determined by the indeterminate freedom of the I. But this power must also have been applied by the I, as governing the limitation of the I. If reason is also this faculty of establishing the possibility of its use, and does so from Macht, the I is both lord and subject with respect to this decree. The philosopher isn’t making the decree, but already the subject of it, and only points to it in reflection (cf. 144). In the experiment of thought, the impasse solicits figure of speaking-out-of-power. This is the first truly significant deployment of reason (Vernunft) in the Grundlage, and we must reassert, for it is so important, that it is not yet rational.

Since the unsurpassable first principles do not afford an “analytical” derivation of Y, the synthetic activity of Y must be determined experimentally— we must search for a principle which has the required form beyond the resources we have already been given. But this does not leave us at a point of arbitrary supposition— the form of the task supplies a clue to the form of the action. The impasse has a determinacy do it, one which doesn’t contain, but solicits, the active principle of its own surpassing. Y, the activity which produces X, is to a degree already determined as to its form in terms of the task which it is deduced to accomplish: “The form of this action is completely determined by the task referred to above. The opposed I and not-I are to be unified thereby, to be posited together, without mutual elimination. The opposites in question must be taken up into the identity of the one consciousness.” (107-8).
The form of the activity Y is essentially the unification of opposed principles. On the one hand, it partakes of opposition; on the other, it suspends this opposition in the singular identity of consciousness. In this way, Y is seen to mediate between opposition and unity– synthesizing elements which appear to be mutually extrinsic. On a purely formal level, the co-existence of opposed principles is only possible given the delimitation of the scope of each, for only in qualifying this scope (that is, only through restricting the applicability of one principle to the other) can the unqualified opposition at the root of this impasse be avoided. The activity we are searching for must, for this reason, involve the restriction\textsuperscript{80} of the scope of each principle. Let us examine, in more detail, what this entails for the specific project of the Grundlage.

We know that if I and not-I are posited in the same way and in the same sense, we have an absolute contradiction; the I and the not-I are both posited and not posited in the I. As we have seen, we cannot think of the opposition as indeterminate; we must understand the opposition to be determinate in such a way such that the sense in which the not-I is posited excludes the sense in which the I is posited. This mutual exclusion of the I and not-I requires the opposition of the I and not-I to be relative to a limit which renders their opposition determinate in just this way. The X, which we have posited as the condition of the “product” of the opposed not-I becomes the limit (\textit{Schranke}) which de-fines the relative exclusion of the I and not-I. Y, the activity which produces the limit, becomes einschränken– limitation (108).

Is this \textit{Schranke} the sought after X? Fichte points out that the notion of limit brings more with it than a simple restriction; “there also lies within it the concept of reality and negation” (109). reality and negation bring with them a surplus over what was strictly required– a surplus which could

\textsuperscript{80} We should ask at this point, how is it thinkable that \textit{absolute} principles, such as the two fundamental principles, allow for such a restriction of their scope? This seems to be a particular problem for the first principle, since any such restriction would seem to sunder the identity of I=I. It will become clear that this restriction is the root of a peculiar scission which emerges within the I itself– for it will \textit{both} be unrestricted and restricted. The “between” of this scission will become a site of particular interest to this dissertation.
only cloud what is truly essential since it brings more with it than is strictly called for or construable as necessary to satisfy the task. Though, in abstracting from the judgment, Fichte has already defined reality— as that of which it is possible to apply the relation of identity, reality, and negation— these only have applicability when X is presupposed. To isolate what is truly essential in X, we have to abstract from reality and negation and look at what this relation implies. Normally, limitation indicates the partial denial of reality. “to limit something means, not to cancel the reality of it entirely, but only in part [zum Teil” (108). He figures limitation on the basis of an image of a divided unity; the figure of a part was nowhere among the pre-given concepts, but was solicited out of the exigency of impasse.

The concept of part (Teil) is key, for it implies the divisibility (Teilbarkeit) of what was once whole. Thus, abstracting from reality and negation, we are left with merely divisibility, the possibility of dividing parts from a whole. Fichte understands the concept of divisibility to condition “quantifiablity in general” though not yet allowing us to posit a “determinate [bestimmte] quantity.” The importance of quantity in the Grundlage’s dialectic demands that we pay careful attention to the relation between divisibility and quantity.

Consider the example of dividing a circle in two. To divide something into parts, one must somehow keep in view the whole that one divides— from which one individuates these parts. Only with respect to this (now no longer present) whole circle is the section of the circle part of that whole. We might thus conclude that a part can only be posited as part only in light of the whole, but, in opposing the part to the whole, the part is also opposed to itself as an indistinguishable part of that whole. But, with respect to that pre-given whole, a part is essentially something which leaves a “remainder” and it must be opposed to this for it to be a part. When the part is established as a part, the whole which it is not longer recedes, and it is immediately opposed, not to the whole, but to another part. In one sense, that remainder is simply the section that remains present in the circle;
in another, the remainder is the whole which has receded in favor of the parts. This is because we must thing of opposition in terms of quantity, and, if something is to be determined as part and opposed to the whole, both whole and part must be “parts” of a higher unity. As we will see more clearly in a related figure, this unity cannot be given. Given the distinction of a part as part, that which remains of the whole allows one to compare those parts with respect to that whole, but only in the sense that the limitation of one part entails an ascription of this remainder to the other; in other words, to posit one term as limitation of a whole is to posit a reciprocally determinate excess to that limit beyond the limit as remainder. But this must be a double excess, for there is also a remainder of the whole as part of a higher unity. The whole itself is both a part and not a part, and does not receive determinacy from an opposed, determinate whole. The whole can only receive its determinacy from its parts, and in this sense, is mutually determined with these parts in a higher whole which cannot be divided or placed as a part in with respect to this circle. It is through this limit that the parts are parts, but it is also the very inscription of this limit which establishes the whole in its determinacy. This structure of parts-limit-whole does not indicate abstract concepts, but rather this mutual implication at work in any division. Limitation occurs as the reciprocal determination of the part and its remainder. When Fichte writes of quantity, he is, of course, not describing some measurable substance that can be poured on one side of a scale or the other, but rather this relation of determinate reciprocity with respect to the reality of one term or the other.

As he notes, we have not yet established any determinate quantity of opposition, but only the possibility of setting-into-parts what was once whole, and thinking in terms of part and opposed-part (or remainder). Establishing the determinacy of this quantity, aside from its mere possibility, will issue its own deeply peculiar problematic which we noted above, and an ancient one. How is one to divide the whole? How can one divide a whole which, as well indicated and will see again
soon, can never be present or represented as a whole? How are we to compare the two parts of the division, when the qualitative distinction dividing them seems to offer no common “ground”?

To resume, the X we have been searching for becomes the divisibility of the I and not-I, and the activity Y becomes the positing of the I and not-I in their divisibility, the partitioning of the whole. How does this manifest with respect to the I and not-I? “the I is not posited in the I to the extent, that is, to which the not-I is posited with that part of reality. A part of reality—that posited in the not-I—is canceled in the I. This proposition is not contradicted by the second. Insofar as the not-I is posited, so must the I be as well; for they are both posited as divisible in general with respect to their reality” (109). The part and remainder are thus the I and the not-I as posited parts of a whole. This “to the extent” is key—the “I” is not-posited only to the extent that the remaining part of reality is posited in the not-I. The reality posited in the not-I is not extinguished, but posited as not-posited in the I, this “posited not-positing” being inseparable from the affirmation of the reality in the not-I; they are moments in the same effectuation.

Can we consider the action of limitation in isolation from the counter-positing which demands it? For an action of division must precede these divisions, and it is not clear what would be opposed to this action as to-be-divided. This would amount to an attempt to think of a limit without a determinate quantity to be limited; without any reality to be limited—the “beyond” of the limit only arises through the limit. It is clear that the action “Y” is only enacted as such with the counter-posing of the other part which necessitates the positing of the limited part. Only in “reflection”\textsuperscript{81} can this whole be conceived of in separable moments. For this reason, Fichte notes

\textsuperscript{81} If we recall the discussion of abstraction and reflection in chapter one, reflection involves the abstraction from content and the explicit treatment of the form as content. More broadly, we can consider it the movement of isolating an aspect of a particular activity in order to explicitly thematize it. If abstraction, as the activity of separation, is elided, the aspect in question is fixated as independent of its concrete involvement in an activity of which it is just one moment.
that Y must be considered “one and the same”\textsuperscript{82} with the activity of counter-posing— it is impossible to posit one without the other because they are the same. Applying the concept of divisibility, the quantification of a part through limitation is also the positing the remainder which forms the (derivative) “reality” of the not-I.

Only at this point does the concept of “reality” (set aside earlier in favor of divisibility) have applicability. Recall that reality is understood of those “things” to which one can apply the relation of identity; it obtains only with respect to that which is posited through the mere positing of the thing (99). Only with that determinate positing (the positing of something) can a predicate be posited of that something. This is because the positing of something as something (in the case of “A=A,” A being posited as A) already establishes the most basic predication. We say of a posited something that it is this something. But to posit something as something necessarily involves positing it as other than something else. What consequences does this have for the impasse of the first two principles?

We are now able to understand how the first two principles can retain their validity: through the mutual restriction of their application made possible in division. To make this clear, let us begin by considering the case of the “I” prior to division. This “absolute I” defies all predication and hence cannot be considered “something.” “The absolute I of the first fundamental principle is not something (it has no predicate and can’t have any), it is what it is pure and simple, and that cannot be explained any further.” To say something “of” the I requires the positing of a difference “from” the I. The perfect self-identity of the absolute I resists any explanation because, as we have seen with the first fundamental principle, the possibility of “explanation” (taken as an instance of

\textsuperscript{82} This is not to say that the meanings of “Y” (as the effectuation of division) and counter-posing (as the positing of the not-I) are identical, but that the activity in question is the same activity considered from two different positions in the development of the \textit{Wissenschaftstlehre}. Abstraction and reflection is unavoidable, and the appearance of one activity in different contexts can lead to the illusion that the same activity is many different kinds of activity.
judgment and hence predication) presupposes this identity; the I is the site of all identity, the place of the copula. To posit something of the I is to subordinate the I to a determination which is actually derived from it. In other words, as the possibility of predication, it is beyond predication. Because this absolute self-identity can be conceived of as the principle of “alle reality,” what could the not-I be in opposition to this? The absolute I is absolutely undivided, and the positing of not-I without divisibility yields a self-refuting contradiction—a remaining quantity which includes nothing. For this reason, if the not-I is opposed to the absolute I as a remaining quantity of activity which is not attributed to the not-I, this ‘pure’ not-I is “absolutely nothing.” Any positing of the not-I as in opposition to the I in a way that attributes relative reality to what is posited is already a positing of the I and not-I in their divisibility. Properly speaking, nothing is opposed to the absolute I. The is the clearest demonstration of why we cannot consider the not-I to be “something” when not considered relative to a specific determinative limitation, only with respect to the “limitable I” does the not-I become a “negative quantity”– a determinate quantity of activity posited over and against the limited I.

Returning to Y, we now see that all predicatable “reality” depends upon this fundamental divisibility. Were there no divisibility, and thus no counter-posing, we would be left with the empty identity of the I. Fichte writes, “Now all reality is in consciousness by means of this concept [of divisibility], and to the not-I is allotted that part of it which does not attach to the I and vice versa” (110). reality, we recall, denotes the applicability of the relation of identity. Consciousness of reality requires division and opposition. The absolute I, as the principle of reality, is not “real” for consciousness; the not-I, considered in isolation, is the negation of reality; only with the mutual limitation and the corresponding division of activity between the I and not-I does the concept of “reality” have determinate applicability.
Let us briefly recall the fundamental impasse of two basic principles. The double self-suspension of the first two principles emerged through the way they led to an unmitigated contradiction– the conclusion that both the I and the not-I must be posited within the I. This led to a further conclusion that the validity of the second principle, and the first with respect to the second, were both suspended and not suspended– suspended because they led to a contradiction, and not suspended because they were only suspended in first place when their validity was presupposed. The not-I is and is not to be posited in the self; the I is and is not to be posited in the self along with the not-I. We were left at a veritable tangle of contradictions. The knot at the heart of this tangle was summarized in the conclusion that the I must posit itself as opposed to itself (or I = ~ I and ~I = I– in positing the I, we posit it in opposition with itself). Fichte recalls this formulation of the impasse in his attempt to determine whether or not divisibility resolves it: “The I must be identical to itself, and yet also opposed to itself.” How can we intelligibly suppose this contradictory proposition while maintaining the unity and identity of consciousness? Let us see if concept of divisibility resolves this— does this new concept afford us with a solution?

Fichte continues:

But, with respect to consciousness, the I is equal to itself, consciousness is one: but in this consciousness the absolute I is posited as indivisible; whereas the I to which the not-I is opposed is posited as divisible. Hence, insofar as there is a not-I opposed to it, the I is itself in opposition to the absolute I.

For Fichte, consciousness, describes the immediacy of the activity of knowing, including the knowing of the philosophical intellect as it develops these propositions; as knowing, such consciousness necessarily involves both limitation and unity- limitation due to the apparent opposition of the object of knowledge, and unity given the understanding that it is knowing (if it were at odds with itself it would be an irrational contradiction and not knowing). Strictly speaking, the I, considered as absolute, is not a form of consciousness. However, in consciousness one posits
the absolute I as indivisible (cf. the first fundamental principle), in contrast to the divisibility of the I (of consciousness) which is posited over and against the not-I. One must posit the divisibility of the I if the positing of the not-I (essential to the second fundamental principle) is to be possible in relation to the I (as the “negative quantity” with respect to the activity of the limited I). The I as limited is divisible, as opposed to the indivisibility of the absolute I. We now see how it could be that the I is opposed to the I through the concept of divisibility.

In order to understand what this self-opposition entails, and how it is even possible (even given divisibility), we need to examine it more carefully. The I, as absolute, is not divided from anything and nothing is opposed to it. Given the identity of the activity of division and counter-posing, we see that the concept of divisibility is not applicable to the absolute I— the I as absolute cannot be taken to be one part of a division; the absolute I has no remainder, since it is the principle of reality tout court. Insofar as divisibility is applicable to the I, the not-I is always opposed to the I, i.e. as a negative quantity is opposed to a limited positive quantity. We recall that the activity Y (the action originating divisibility) and counter-posing are one and the same activity. It is thus clear that 2.) the counter-positing of the not-I is inseparable from the positing of the I as limited. At this point, the part is not opposed to the whole but opposed to another part with respect to the whole.

Here, we see that the not-I is posited in the I and not posited in the I. It is not posited in the absolute I as such, for only insofar as it is a not opposed to an “absolute” (and indivisible) I can it be thought of as “part” of the absolute I (an indifferent part of its absolute quantum); though the not-I is posited “within” the absolute I, it is “nothing” with respect to that I. The not-I is not posited in the limited I, because its determinacy is only understandable as the exclusion of a limited activity which would otherwise be posited in the I. Insofar as one can ascribe limited reality to it, it is only thinkable in opposition to the limited I. But now we see 3.) that the I must be doubled in order for

83 This notion of “part” can only make sense from the perspective of limited philosophical reflection. The absolute I, strictu sensu, has no “parts.”
the viability of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to be preserved. This is not to say that the limited I is something *other* than the absolute I, but that the limited I is a restriction of the absolute I, a restriction effected by the opposition of the not-I\(^8\). In other words, the absolute I is opposed to nothing (one might think of it as … absolutely indifferent?) but “contains” all reality (and thus all *relative* oppositions) indifferently; for this reason, we cannot conceive it to be opposed to the limited I as “something other.” The limited I “is” the absolute I with respect to a particular division, a division which the not-I has reality relative to as the ineliminable accompaniment of all division.

“And so all opposites are united without interfering with the unity of consciousness, and this is at once the proof that the established concept [i.e. divisibility] was the correct one” (110). However, we should note that this unification comes at the expense of the doubled aspect of the I; the unity of consciousness is preserved through the duplicity of the I, a duplicity which drives the rest of the *Grundlage*.

This exhausts the part of the *Grundlage* which develops the consequences of unconditioned and absolute principles, for, as we have seen in connection with Fichte’s *Begriff* essay, there can be only three fundamental principles (one wholly unconditioned, and two partially unconditioned)— an assertion which is only fully grounded with the completion of the *Wissenschaftslehre*’s circular course. He notes that “for this point on, the matters which are unconditioned and absolutely certain are exhausted.” These matters are completed with the prospective formulation of the third principle: “I posit in the I a divisible not-I in opposition to a divisible I” (110). This completes the keystone of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and establishes the ground and limit of all true philosophy. However, this moment of fulfillment is more of a beginning than an end– the connection between the unconditioned and the determinacy of the conditioned has not been established. In other words, it is not clear that we are able to move beyond an empty circulation between these three principles.

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\(^8\) And the not-I, again, is nothing with respect to the absolute I– we might say “nothing other” than the I, but this may give the misleading sense that the not-I is somehow identical, in meaning, to the absolute
After all, “everything which must be encountered in the system of the human spirit must be derivable from the established principles.” The fact that systems are the goal of the derivation indicates that we remain interested in the validity of the various elements which make up those systems. We recall from chapter two that the importance of systematicity strictly follows from the need to convey the validity of first principles to derivative propositions. But how are we to create a bridge between these unconditioned principles and the determinate propositions which make up a system of disciplined knowledge?
Chapter 5
The Principle of Ground

Given Fichte’s self-understanding of the Wissenschaftslehre as merely presenting Kant’s critical philosophy from a different standpoint, it is perhaps not surprising that the three fundamental principles are analogous to the categories of quality found in Kant’s philosophy. What is remarkable is the way that these categories are presented as fundamentally unstable and in need of determinate synthesis. They are not presupposed, but demonstrated in their emergence through a spontaneity solicited by an impasse. With divisibility, the unifying principle corresponding to the category “limitation,” the mutual limitation of the not-I and the I allows for resolution of the chief impasse of the first section of the Grundlage. However, it is not the case that the contradiction is “resolved” (in the sense of being completely overcome), but the infinite resolution of the impasse is set in motion. A deeper analysis of the mutual implication of qualitative opposition and “quantitative” division will provide us with an understanding of the how this movement within and between the unconditioned principles is possible. What is it about the nature of judgment, for Fichte, which would favor qualitative judgments in particular? How does the role of quality necessarily entail the quantitative language of Fichte’s dialectic? How does he figure the highest act of synthesis, and what instability is already figured in that figuration?

If one conceives of judgment as grounding the validity of a proposition (Satz) which, prima facie, may or may not be valid, one must first look at what is usually translated into English as the “principle of sufficient reason”- the “grounding-principle” (Satz vom Grund) which would establish them as valid. In searching for this principle, we are searching for the ground for understanding one proposition’s validity and the invalidity of its contrary. What reasons can we provide which fully account for the necessity of what seems, prima facie, contingent and arbitrary? What grounds our judgment in matters beyond this inner circle of absolute principles? Without such a principle, all
sciences which would seek to go beyond unconditioned principles (as the very endeavor seeking to explain the necessity ground underlying apparently contingent and haphazard phenomenon) would falter—stripping the ground from beneath all rational explanation. We must find a ground for such judgments if further knowledge is to be possible.

In the *Grundlage*, Fichte writes that this principle is found by abstracting from the content of the fundamental opposition between the I and not I, leaving only the pure form of the resolution of this conflict, the pure form of the third principle. Doing so, we arrive at the “mere form of the union of opposites through the concept of divisibility” (111) a form which can be schematically expressed as “A is partly = ~A and vice versa.” To develop this rather terse articulation of the principle, we might say that, given any two opposed terms, there is some way in which the terms are alike; furthermore, given any two similar terms, there is some way in which the terms are opposed. The ground for the likeness of distinct terms is dubbed the “relation-ground” (*Beziehungsgrund*); the ground for the difference between distinct terms the “differentiation-ground” (*Unterscheidungsgrund*). In other words, one grounds judgments of similarity on a relation-ground (both copper and zinc *conduct electricity*), and one grounds one’s judgments regarding the difference between two terms on a differentiation-ground (unlike zinc, *copper turns a certain shade of blue* when exposed to moisture). In order to understand how this connects to the conventional understand of the grounding-principle, we should recall that the principle of ground is to provide an understanding of why things should be one way and not the contrary way. Thus, it must somehow contain the ground of both possible (but not “co-possible”) terms, and, it must also provide the ground for the affirmation of one possibility and the negation of the other. The first is given in the relation-ground, the second in the differentiation-ground. As we will now see, the essence of both principles depends on a proper understanding of how divisibility is bound up with judgment.
We recall that the principle of divisibility allows us to state that the I is both suspended and not suspended through the counter-posing of the not-I. In a partial sense, the I is negated; in a “counter-partial” sense, it is not. Abstracting from this content, we would affirm that the one term of a judgment is both suspended and not suspended by the positing of the opposed term. To supply a concrete example, if I am saying that “the apple is red” (dub this “A”) there is a sense in which the counter-proposition (“the apple is not red,” or “~A”) is negated, but another sense in which the counter-proposition is not negated. The sense in which it is not negated is the relation-ground between the two propositions; the sense in which they are is the differentiation-ground. Consider the fact that our example concerns the particular color of an individual apple; the counter-proposition and the proposition both have in common a determinate judgment concerning the redness of said apple. So, though it seems that the two propositions in question are absolutely opposed, this is not at all the case. The second proposition has more in common with the first than the non-contradictory proposition, “the maple in my yard provides decent shade.” In fact, it is only on the basis of this “having-in-common” that any actual opposition can exist between the two–both propositions are nearly identical formally, and it is only one difference between them (the differentiation-ground) that sets them into opposition. Similarly, if I were to say “this red apple is like the one I just ate,” the very statement of similarity (between A₀ and A₁) is only possible given the difference between the two–such difference is the basis for even the closest comparison. In this way, the ground for a judgment of likeness is partially found in the opposition between the terms compared, just as the ground for opposition is partially found in what is common between two opposed propositions.

85 One might compare this to the Leibnizian principle of the identity of “indiscernibles”, for if there is no discernable aspect through which two terms can be opposed, then those terms cannot be opposed but are identical.
Thus, in Fichte’s rather terse formulation, “A is both canceled and not canceled through the positing of a ~A. Consequently, it is only partly canceled, and, in place of the X in A which is not canceled, is in ~A, not ~X, but rather X itself posited. And thus is A = ~A in X.” This X is the relation-ground – the commonality between the opposed propositions which is the condition of the possibility for their opposition. If I were to correctly judge that ravens are a different species of the genus *Corvus* than crows, it is only on the basis of their common membership of the genus *Corvus* (which is shared by all members of both species) that their differences can become determinately opposed. Similarly, in judgments which affirm the likeness or connection between two terms, there must be some ground according to which they are *opposed* to each other. Given the proposition ‘A=B,’ which is not equivalent to ‘A=A,’ there must be a ground for *distinction* precisely so they can be compared. “But if B is not posited through the positing of A, it is to that extent = ~A; and by the equation of the two we posit neither A nor B, but an X of some sort, which = X, = A, and = B... From this it is evident how the proposition A = B can be valid, though as such it contradicts the proposition A = A. X = X, A = X, B = X. Hence A = B to the extent that each = X: but A = ~B to the extent that each = ~X."86 (111). Given that B is not posited through A alone (for, if it were, it would simply be another term for A), there must be some sense in which it is not A. The equivalence between A and B only occurs on the basis of an X they have in common, but, insofar as they are distinct terms, there must be some ground according to which they are, in fact, distinct. For instance, making a minor change to the above example, we could state “Ravens are a species of the genus *Corvus*. “ The properties common to any member of the *Corvus* genus is clearly the relation-

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86 This formulation first appears to be problematic, since if both were ~X, they would have both X and ~X in common. But we must remember that Fichte is framing this principle in terms of *Teilhärkiet*. Even if we conceive of both A and B as X, and X as a whole of which A and B are opposed parts (recall our analysis in the context of the opposition of the I and not I), both A and B are, strictly speaking, not X (~X) as this would render the part equivalent to the whole. In other words, by positing A as a part, I am positing that there is something in excess of A which distinguishes it from the whole of which it is a part. Though they are, in a partial sense, both X, they are also, in the sense that they are both parts, ~X, and leave a remainder which provides a basis for distinction.
ground emphasized in this judgment, but the relation of likeness itself presupposes that there is an
differentiation-ground which allows us to distinguish them (a singular constellation of properties
including size, call, texture and color of feathers, etc., which is not posited through Corvus alone);
A=B only insofar they have something in common (the relation-ground of genus), the very
discernibleness of A and B indicates that there is some part (the differentiation-ground- the ground
for distinguishing one species of Corvus from the remaining species) which they do not have in
common.

We see that this duplicity of ground is only possible through divisibility, since it is a matter
of the partial equivalence (“X”) and partial difference (“~X”). In both equivalence (“A=B”) and
opposition (“A v ~A”) there is a ground in unity (both have an X in common) and a ground for
opposition (both have a part of a unity which excludes the other part of that unity; in other words,
there is something which A and ~A do not have in common- X, even if it belongs to X). How are
we to make sense of this common part? Though it is a part which is common to both, it is not
common to only a part of both (a subtle distinction, to be sure). More precisely, given any (not just
some) positing of A or any positing of ~A, one posits that part, Xb, which is common to both. In a

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87 At this point, one might wonder how a part can be opposed to a whole in this way. Given that common
ravens (Corvus corax) form a part of the genus Corvus, and that any distinction in judgment requires that both
terms “= ~X” (where X is the Beziehungsgrund) how could the whole in question (Corvus) = ~X? Isn’t
Corvus, itself, the X? This requires a subtler analysis of the relation than the one given above. In a certain
sense, both Corvus and Corvus corax are parts; the undivided whole delimited by the Beziehungsgrund is not Corvus
but the characteristic marking “what is common” to Corvus and Corvus corax. The Beziehungsgrund, in other
words, delimits a unity which includes the properties of Corvus and the properties of Corvus corax (a unity
which would be different than the one delimited by the Beziehungsgrund of Corvus and, say, Corvus comix). In
merely positing Corvus, their remains the part of the unity including the properties of Corvus corax. In merely
positing Corvus corax, one does indeed posit Corvus; but one leaves out the possibilities of not-being Corvus corax—
in other words, the remaining part of Corvus is excluded. In this way, both Corvus and Corvus corax are
~X, because this X is not identical with Corvus even though (and precisely because) it includes it.

88 For clarity’s sake, I will denote the use of X indicating the Beziehungsgrund as Xb and the X indicating the
Unterscheidungsgrund as Xu.

89 Because of this, it is tempting to think that the Beziehungsgrund is something like the “intersection” of A and
~A, but this temptation must not lead one to suppose that Xb is a part which consists of the “overlap” of
instances of A and ~A. This is because there is no “overlap” of A and ~A, given that the positing of one is
the suspension of the other, but there is some characteristic (Merkmale) which is common to any positing of A
or any positing of ~A.
sense, the relation-ground “includes” both, and does not exist as some overlapping part generated after the fact; it is a precondition for their distinctness in the first place. In the case of their differentiation-ground, one refers to an $X_u$ which opposes A and $\sim A$, or which allows A and B to be discernible from each other. In other words, in positing A, one posits that there is a part of A ("$X$") which is not common to B, and this is also true, mutatis mutandis, of positing B. Once again, any positing of A or $\sim A$ entails positing that common part ($X_u$) which renders them opposed to each other, just as positing of $A=B$ entails positing that part which is not part of the other. The puzzle then becomes: what is the nature of the relation between relation-ground and differentiation-ground?

Fichte uses the examples of an affirmative judgment concerning the classification of birds and a negative judgment concerning the classification of plants to illustrate this relation. He writes, “a bird is an animal: here, the relation-ground reflected upon is the determinate concept of animal, that it consists of matter, of organized matter, of animate living matter; while differentiation-ground, which are disregarded, consist of the specific differences among the various kinds of animal, whether they are bipeds or quadrupeds, and have feathers, scales, or a hairy skin. Or, [consider the judgment that] a plant is not an animal: here the differentiation-ground reflected upon is the specific set of differences between plant and animal, while the ground of conjunction to be disregarded is organization [i.e. organized matter] in general” (116). In the first example, the affirmation does not relate two species of animals, but the specific kind of animal and “animality” as such. The relation-ground can be conceived of as the characteristic marking the undivided unity, the (as yet) undivided whole of which the particular animal and animality are parts; on the basis of this characteristic, we have an affirmative judgment reflecting on the belonging of both parts to that undivided whole. In

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90 See footnote 3 for a clarification of why “animalness” itself must be conceived of as a part, even if Fichte does not make this clear.
distinguishing plants and animals, we see that differentiation-ground is the ground for dividing one part of the unity delimited by the relation-ground (organized things) from another.

The division occurring with distinguishing judgments presupposes that what-is-to-be-divided share a common “characteristic” (Merkmal[^1]) which acts as a relation-ground. In distinguishing two things (judging, for instance, that a tree is not an oak tree), one presupposes a commonality of the things to be distinguished (being trees). Likewise, the relation established through affirmative judgments presupposes that there is some ‘subordinate’ characteristic (color, for instance) which acts as a differentiation-ground, for a relation implies the non-identity of the related.

Though Fichte doesn’t explicitly address this question, one might wonder what distinguishes a characteristic as a characteristic, for this is already a judgment, and it seems that, in determining a characteristic as a characteristic, one is already making a judgment which must be grounded through the appeal to that which is not a characteristic, which recedes, “unnoticed,” (we might say unvermerkt) into the background. With the determination of a characteristic as such, one has already enacted a complex judgment, both that this characteristic is such, and that this characteristic only partially applies to a higher unity. Let us reserve this question until it arrives in a different form with respect to a different figure.

Resuming our reflection on judgment, note that Fichte implies that a determinate ground must have two faces, that of exclusion and inclusion. For it is the divisibility of the sphere of “reality” which is presupposed, here, and what a judgment does is divide that sphere. One can think of relation-ground as the characteristic, for example, “M,” as delimiting a quantitative (i.e. divisible) unity which determines the possibility of further division within that unity. M, as characteristic, delimits the pre-given whole of which, with reference to a second ground, (“N”), both A (reality which is predicated as N) and ~A (as not-N) are parts. One must make a distinction, however,

[^1]: The word ‘Merkmal’, as linked to merken, suggests that the characteristic in question is not necessarily essential to the bearer of this characteristic, but that it presents itself as a noticeable distinction for the intellect.
between part and characteristic. With respect to its role as ground, N is not a part, but a predicate applicable to the reality within that part; A and ~A thus are all predicable as M, but not as N. One could not, in other words, posit A as identical with itself if one posits it as ~N, for this would yield a contradiction \( A = N \text{ and } \sim N \). In the above observations, we see that we can and must conceive the “same” characteristic as two different kinds of ground, as a double-ground, for it delimits the sphere of its applicability by not being applicable beyond that sphere. It makes possible the division of the included reality by establishing it as a distinct, divisible unity (a “quantum”) to which it is applicable, but does so through excluding that reality which it cannot be applied to. N is only N, not “within” the scope of its applicability (for this would imply that it isn’t a characteristic but the characterized—N isn’t supposed to be a subject in this context, but a predicate), but at the limit of its applicability. For it is here that it includes/excludes, and it is here that it is established as a characteristic. But the limit of N’s applicability is also M, for only given a divisible reality delimited by M can N be applied to the scope include/excluded by it. In short, N is both relation-ground and distinction ground; it is relation-ground insofar as it grounds the determination of a divisible quantum as included within its sphere, and differentiation-ground insofar as it grounds the exclusion of part of a higher, divisible quantum. The ground for N’s capacity to ground, on the other hand, is M, which itself must be also be double-faced. This must start somewhere, there must be a “highest” unity, the unity of divisible reality (as delimited through divisibility), but what kind of judgment could divide the wholly indeterminate? What could delimit the sphere of reality, as the sphere of the predicable in general? We can already anticipate that the applicability of judgment is itself determine by an enactment which cannot be thought of as grounded in the same sense.

Let us investigate some further, telling consequences of this “mutuality” at work in divisibility. To begin, given any judgment of similarity or difference, there is only one differentiation-ground and one relation-ground. To suppose many would equally be to suppose an
ambiguous mélange of relations of differentiation and similarity, and hence either many judgments or no judgment at all. This is not to say that the characteristics to serve as the grounds in question must be thought of in complete isolation from other characteristics, but that each of these other characteristics delimit a different scope where a single relation-ground and a single differentiation-ground apply. Given the double character of ground, what establishes one as differentiation-ground and the other as relation-ground? Let us consider an example. If I distinguish oak trees from other trees, the explicit differentiation-ground would be the oakness of the tree, the relation-ground that which delimits the sphere of trees in general, but there is also the implicit exclusion of non-trees from the judgment, and the sphere of oak trees is posited as a unity. With respects to the grounds themselves, it is only in their relation that they achieve their distinctness, a relation which is enacted in judgment. It is the act of judgment, in its unity, which takes the form of a reciprocal determination of each with respect to the other. As we will see, the character of the judgment (analytic or synthetic) is given through the priority of the divisible unities to be considered.

Given the way in which divisibility works with respect to relation-ground and differentiation-ground, one already can conceive of two forms of judgment—judgment which takes two parts together in terms of a “higher” unity (their relation-ground) by “abstracting” from the principle which opposes them to each other, and judgment which takes a unity and divides it on the basis of a difference (Unterscheidungsgrund) by abstracting from their principle of unity. One posits the whole through the parts, the other posits the parts through the whole. In other words, one can “com-

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92 For instance, blue feathers may provide the Unterscheidungsgrund for a particular species of bird, but only given a scope delimited by other characteristics (beak shape, wing span, etc.) which delimit the scope which allows this Unterscheidungsgrund its application. Without those characteristics, one would be left with a wholly indeterminate judgment (blue feathers alone do not distinguish anything in particular), but this is not to say that those characteristics are, themselves, multiple Unterscheidungsgrund in the context of a single judgment.

93 Oakness can both be thought of as a collection of characteristics (leaf shape, root structures, etc.), but, in this judgments, those characteristics are taken as a single ground.
prehend” the sameness of terms which are initially determined as non-identical94, or explicitly articulate a differentiation in a presupposed unity. These two forms of judgment should look familiar. For Fichte, the unity of division and the division of unity become the basis for understanding what Kant called analytic and synthetic judgments, for synthesis is precisely a taking together what was initially held to be apart, and analysis involves the separation of what was initially held to be a unity. In one case, a characteristic is found to apply to the terms which were not initially taken together on the basis of that characteristic, in the other, a unifying characteristic becomes the basis which allows for the differentiation of what was initially taken together on the basis of a “subordinate” characteristic. Thus, the progression of analysis is one of finer and finer determination, and the progression of synthesis situates these determinate distinctions within higher determinate unities. In other words, the synthesis is a movement of wider and wider inclusion, analysis of determinately dividing what are initially posited as indeterminate unities. They are mutually conditioning, for synthesis requires opposed parts to synthesize, and analysis requires a pre-given, synthetic unity to divide. Synthesis is not the blurring of distinctions, but only occurs in determining the unity of these distinctions. Analysis presupposes higher distinctions, synthesis explicitly determines them; synthesis contains indeterminate distinctions, analysis determines those. This, then, is not to say that synthesis lumps together indeterminately opposed parts, but that its progression depends on the determination of these parts in their unity. This is of crucial importance, for these moments condition the movement of the Grundlage. Should a given “unity” contain a contradiction, it must be analyzed, and, through the determination of the indeterminate contradiction, make possible a determinate synthesis of these parts.

94 But only given a precise understanding of their Beziehungsground—opposites cannot be suspended in their opposition through their mere addition to each other, as that would lose both the principle of their unity and the sense of their opposition.
Fichte figures the progression of synthesis an antithesis in terms of height and depth. This is certainly not an innovative figure. The figuration of “higher” and “lower” syntheses deploys a classical figure of height and depth, one that suggests the elevated position of a throne (especially the divine throne) and also the increasing perfection of ascension as one approaches the divinely order starry sky. The broadest unity is sphere delimited through of the applicability of reality, and it is the highest principle for the Satz vom Grund. As one descends from this height, finer and finer determinations are made within this sphere. In this way, it is possible to develop a ranking of judgments—movements of division and unification corresponding to analytic and synthetic judgments. In the most familiar instances, synthesis climbs “upward” toward greater inclusion, each new synthesis achieving a whole according to a particular characteristic which opposes that unity to another characteristic, and, in doing so, “abstracting” from the characteristic which differentiated its “lower” terms (cf. 118). Analysis descends into finer and finer divisions. Analysis and synthesis are thus relative to the direction in which one is moving on this chain of division and unity.

What, then, delimits the higher sphere, that of reality as the scope of the applicability of the principle of reason (Satz vom Grund)? Something quite peculiar becomes evident when one attempts to apply this principle of ground to its own condition. The fundamental synthesis presupposed by the grounding-principle—that which establishes the unity to be divided—can indeed be understood as the synthesis of a prior division of parts. Arguably, the divisibility of the absolute I as the site of positing is what is being posited. But, for this to be a determinable unity, it must already be determined, and, as absolute, it cannot be determined. Nothing could be opposed to its absolute unity, no opposed characteristic is possible on this level.

Fichte holds that the absolute synthesis of the third fundamental principle is distinct from other forms of synthesis in that it has no further “ground” than the self-identical positing expressed in the first (the spontaneous self-positing of the I) and the unconditioned positing of the not-I
expressed in the second; but even these two leave the means by which opposites are to be united (i.e. through divisibility) to the absolute spontaneity of divisibility and synthesis demanded of the third. The division reflected in the third demonstrates the single occurrence through which opposites are not brought into unity by a “higher” principle (which could only be the pure self-identity of the not-I) but by a “lower” principle (119). The I makes the synthesis of I and not-I possible, not in reference to a higher unity, but through the absolute positing of divisible reality. In other words, the not-I and the I are not unified by the “determinate” quantum of the absolute I (there is no determinacy, only indeterminate spontaneity of absolute activity) but by the unconditioned positing of a “lower” (and underivable) determination— the determination of the I as divisible— a division which is not-other than the determinate95 positing of an opposed principle. He writes, “I and not-I, as equated and opposed through the concept of their capacity of mutual limitation, are themselves both something (etwas) in the I as divisible substance; posited by the I as absolute, illimitable subject, to which nothing is either equated or opposed” (119). This must mean that the “lower” determination is the product of the “special law” considered earlier— the product of an absolute decree of reason. The final ground of all distinctness and divisibility is the non-ground of absolute freedom. The third principle thus expresses an “absolute synthesis.” Only then is the widest sphere of the Satz vom Grund delimited; all other synthetic judgments “must lie in these,” but it, itself, has no further ground than that freedom (113). The only exigency, then, prior to this absolute act is the absolute antithesis of the 2nd fundamental principle, an antithesis that cannot be contained by anything higher, and must be subordinated to the highest synthetic act. The decree of reason isn’t the arbitrary glossing over of a fundamental contradiction, but the only remaining possibility given the fundamental, qualitative opposition of I and not-I. Dogmatic idealism consists

95 Though the second principle expresses the indeterminate positing of the not-I, and arguably an indeterminate opposition, the third allows opposition to be posited according to a determinate “quantity” in divisibility, and thus allows for the mediation of opposition through “higher” terms which unite these quantities in unity preceding that division.
in making recourse to such a principle (as, for instance, establishing a “pre-established harmony”) before it has been demonstrated in its necessity.

Returning to the figure of height, the descent from the high is preconditioned by the impossibility of an ascent which would synthesize absolutely opposed principles. The I is posited as divisible, and this is actually the first step down from the latter, a step where it is posited in opposition to nothing. Unlike in the case of every other determination, the divisible I, as a determination, is only determined with respect to what is above it, and which itself cannot be opposed. There is, then, a strange asymmetry in this determinacy, as it only works one way. The limitable is opposed to the unlimited I, but the unlimited I is not opposable. The figure of height brings with it a kind of vertigo with respect to determination. The limitable is, it seems, absolutely limited, but, as we will see in a different context, this implies a contradiction, so it cannot be absolutely limited. How it can both be the product of an absolute decree, and also be determined by an exigency alien to it, will become a crucial question.

In terms of the progression of the Wissenschaftlehre, this most fundamental synthesis is, at best, only indeterminately established as a condition for the dialectic of analysis and synthesis. The exact conditions of this synthesis must be made determinate through an analysis of the opposition it contains. This further determination will all us to return to this synthesis from the consciousness it ultimately conditions. In other words, though positing an absolute decree of reason was necessary, we do not know how this fundamental synthesis is connected to the determinate forms of consciousness which we must explain.

Progress is made through the analyses of syntheses which are already posited as contained within this higher synthesis. We must return to the point that the combination in synthesis is not an indeterminate fusion of two opposed halves by ignoring their real, qualitative opposition; the characteristic, as differentiation-ground opposing these parts, must itself be determined by a new
relation-ground making their unity thinkable. Though the characteristic, as differentiation-ground, is ultimately “abstracted from” in the synthesis, this abstraction only occurs on the basis of making the apparent indeterminacy of the contradictory characteristic determinate. The characteristic would thus no longer mark a brute opposition, but a distinction internal to a higher unity. No longer decisive as a disjoining principle, it can be “abstracted from” (not annihilated) in the development of a new opposition. Thus, the combination effected in the synthesis arises from making the differentiation-ground- heretofore experienced as marking an indeterminate conflict or mere opposedness- determinate through the articulation of an already present relation-ground. This “relation-ground” demonstrates the inherent unity of both terms as moments of a higher unity, a unity which renders that differentiation-ground a distinction internal to or mediating self-identity. As such, synthesis is not arbitrary construction, but rather a rigorous grounding of the characteristic which grounds the opposition. The very movement of synthesis is the rendering of the apparently indeterminate “mere opposedness” of the opposed terms determinate, much in the way that the opposedness of I and not-I was rendered determinate with the notion of divisibility.

To turn to the development of the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself, every new synthesis establishes the ground for a new division. Through analysis, a new apparently indeterminate opposition is disclosed in the new unity. On the one hand, the new unity of the I is to be established as identical with itself (or should be self-determining); on the other hand, this generates a “remainder” (i.e. negative quantity) which is opposed to this new self-identity- a remainder which should be part of it. The opposed, estranged terms become a new antithesis. The “characteristic” (*Merkmal*) which grounds the apparent indeterminate opposedness, or differentiation-ground, must be shown to be determinate according to a new relation-ground; in this way, the opposition is shown to no longer be indeterminate, but grounds a new unity. For the progress of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the most basic of oppositions- the opposedness of the I and not-I, with their ungrounded yet grounding synthesis in
the third fundamental principle, discloses a new opposition, from which begins the chain of syntheses. Fichte notes that this process continues “until we arrive at opposed terms that are no longer fully combinable, and through this we have gone over into the domain of the practical part” (115). Practical philosophy begins with the impasse of theory even as theoretical philosophy begins in a practical demand. Indeed, the frequent use of the word “should” (for soll) is not accidental. To understand the progress of Fichte’s dialectic, we have to understand the imperative that motivates it, and its connection to a third kind of judgment.

**Thetic Judgment and the “Should”**

We have seen how analysis and synthesis provide the key to understanding how likeness mediates distinction, and how distinction mediates likeness; in this way, they supply the warp and woof that forms the fabric of the system. But the reciprocally dependent synthetic and analytic judgments presuppose the positing of the subject of the judgment in the first place—this requires a thetic judgment which is neither synthetic nor analytic, and, in a rather startling way, is not continuous with the logic of ground underlying the first two forms of judgment. This type of judgment precedes any distinction or similarity in judgment; it ultimately affirms the positing of the positing itself—the ultimate “object” (Gegenstand) of the thetic judgment being the Absolute I (116). But what determinate forms could such judgment take for the limited intellect?

Fichte’s first example consists of the judgment, “the human is free [der Mensch ist frei]” (116); we might first suppose that this is a synthetic judgment involving the articulation of a relation-ground between humanity and freedom. But what would this common characteristic be? In the above judgment, freedom is not predicated of humanity—rather, positing humanity is judged to be no different than positing freedom. In other words, humanity is identical with its freedom, not “like” this freedom with respect to some ‘X.’ Such freedom is nothing other than the I’s spontaneous self-positing. What is of decisive important at this point is not some content over and against the
positing, but the positing as such (hence, *thetic*- placing, setting- analogous to *Setzen*); the I is the very existence of the “site of predication” (*die Stelle des Predikäts*) in its infinite fullness (i.e. as the abundance of infinite determination) and emptiness (i.e. nothing can be predicated of the *unlimited as such*). In other words, this *thetic* judgment does not appeal to a ground which would determine the essence of humanity, but indicates that no such ground could exist beyond the self-determination of self-positing. But we are accustomed to thinking of all judgments as ideally “well-grounded.” Can their be any relation between self-positing and the logic of ground? Fichte notes that there cannot be a ground for the unification of humanity and freedom; there is no relation-ground between the two. Not only is the now relation-ground, but the unity would entail that human intellect becomes the determining principle of everything outside of it, for, if it were not, then a remainder of undetermined reality would exist to determine it. It must, as representing intellect, both posit the not-I and posit the not-I as fully determined by the unconditioned activity of the I, but the later fully negates any meaningful “opposition” of the not-I. In other words, the intellect must be both finite and infinite; both opposed by the not-I, and without anything to oppose it. But the logical form of this proposition demands that the terms be unified. Since this unification is a contradiction, it exists as an *Idea*– both necessary and impossible. “And yet, however, is it [the proposition] set forth as the highest practical aim. Humanity should ever grow nearer to an unobtainable freedom, *ad infinitum*” (117). But if there is no “common ground” between the two, how can the system of the *Wissenschaftslehre* span the first and third principle? For the first becomes the task for this perfect self-identity in self-positing, and the second the method through which it endless brought closer but never achieved.

Already in the above judgment, there is a sense in which the *thetic* judgment *is* oriented toward a ground; it simply isn’t a ground which is found in anything prior or higher. In this judgment; it is evident that humanity as not realized its freedom, but continues to subordinate its
actions and aims to the chains of necessity. It is not enough that the essence of humanity is to be undetermined by any ground other than the self-positing of the I, it must fulfill this freedom through its own activity. The ground of the thetic judgment has the form of a task or project (Aufgabe). This task takes the form of a normative demand— that the I should absolutely ground itself, and that all finite determinations should ultimately be derived from the fundamental spontaneity of the absolute I (117). We now see that though Fichte’s task is explicitly oriented toward a doctrine of science, this doctrine is fundamentally oriented by a normative, practical task. Practical action arises in the tension between the is and the ought. Here, the is (nature, extrinsic necessity, etc.) becomes what is most readily apparent, what one attributes existence to. The ought (self-determination, freedom of spontaneity) is the demand that that which is most readily apparent can be understood intelligibly. One must be able to account for, in terms of certainty, the ground of this is in terms which do not subordinate the practical to the theoretical, the freedom of the I to the necessity of the not-I. The ground of the is must be entirely accountable in terms of the spontaneity of the I— the founding moment of the Grundlage. In other words, it cannot be a matter of positing a disowned “something” external to the effectuation of knowing, but in terms internal to the effectuation of knowing as such. If it were in external terms- in the positing of a being which is beyond positing, we would lapse into the self-contradictory dogmatism explored in earlier chapters. The withdrawal from determinacy must be experienced as a normative demand to think this withdrawal— to render intelligible what appears to be alien.

We can now see that the Absolute I is present at both the beginning and end of Fichte’s project. We find it at the beginning, as the condition of the possibility of any predication (and thus any intelligibility) whatsoever. Here, it is purely formal; we derive it through abstraction— attending to the self-positing of the Absolute I, abstracting from any posited object; it is the Kantian “I think” which accompanies any judgment of identity. It also exists as the end (in the sense of telos) of the
project— it is the *Idee* toward which the finite I tends, the ideal that the I should be fully self-determining. This drives the dialectical progress of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and, with the securing of this ground, of all spiritual progress and all practical activity (118).

Fichte observes that if we abstract from analytic and synthetic judgments and their grounds, leaving only the form of this basic type of action (*Handlungsart*)— we arrive at the concept of limitation (*begrenzen*). In each case, one limit is both related and distinguished from the other; all connection is mediated by the spacing manifest in the differentiation-ground between its terms. If we attend to the more form of this mutual limitation of terms, we are left with the category of determination (determinacy)— “a positing of quantity in general” (122). The very notion of quantity implies divisibility, and the very notion of divisibility implies a quantity to be divided. Determinacy amounts to the reciprocal positing of limitation and excess, affirmation and negation, division and opposed terms. But which term limits the other?

Given the understanding of divisibility developed in this section, it is clear that one part cannot be limiting principle of the other part, or vice versa. To do so would be to suspend the very limitation we are attempting to understand. Grounded in one part or the other, the limit ceases to be a limit; the opposition between terms would be canceled, one term surpassing and thus negating the limit precisely in acting as its ground. If divisibility (according to limit) and opposition form a unity, this unity cannot be derived from one of the terms derivative of that unity. When we are concerned with the most basic limitation of the I and not-I, we may abstract from one term or another, and understand the other term as derivative of the first. However, as we have just seen, each form of this determination (the not-I as determining the I; the I as determining the not-I) ultimately cancels the limit, and we are left with an impasse. Despite this, we are compelled to begin with one term or the other given our standpoint as finite intellect. Being in the wake of a
fundamental limitation, we must begin with the limited if we are attempting to understand it. This is the demand of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and its point of impossibility.

We are left at a decisive point: a new antithesis has arisen, between the I positing the I as limited by the not-I, and the I positing the not-I as limited by the I (126). The dialectical method, and the normative end, will draw us from there into the enigmas of the second section.
Chapter 6
Efficacy and Substantiality

Before we can progress to our discussion of the theoretical section of the Grundlage, there are a few points worth pausing with at the endpoint of our exposition of the Wissenschaftslehre’s fundamental principles. First, we have been “compelled” to the concept of divisibility through an experiment, even a bald assertion\(^96\). Divisibility was not discovered through analysis, but through a thought experiment which cast about for the only way in which these oppositions can be made sense of without immediate contradiction and incoherence. The fundamental synthesis of the third principle does not simply result from the analytic unpacking of the prior principle. One might say that there is always a surprise in synthesis. Secondly, the synthesis expressed by the third principle is not the achievement of an empty, unvariegated identity, but can be thought of as the form any intelligible mediation between opposed principles must take. Given the insurmountable impasse of mutual annihilation, this opposition can only be made intelligible if its terms can be brought into relation through mutual limitation; as each is part of this fundamental synthesis, the scope of each excludes and restricts that of the other, insuring that their immediate conflict is suspended. This must not be taken to mean that there is no opposition remaining between the principles; the synthesis is the condition of opposition, not its resolution. What is resolved is the immediate contradiction of indeterminately opposed terms. Finally, when one isolates the sheer form of this synthesis, the resultant principle of determination through partition allows for determinate analytic and synthetic judgments to be made in reference to a ground which relates or opposes its terms. As yielding the “principle of ground,” it is not only an experimental “discovery,” but also a methodological insight which will structure all forms of knowledge, including the remaining development of the Wissenschaftslehre. As Fichte pointed out earlier, that there should be a system at all is based on the absolute thesis of the first principle, but the form of the system is based on the

\(^{96}\) Heidegger has much to say on this.
synthesis of the third (115). Our point of departure must be through this conception of the grounding-principle.

Why is it necessary to go further? One might think that the articulation of these principles already provides the ground which the *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to provide. Though we know the fundamental “how” of determination and mutual limitation, it is not at all clear how we are to relate this methodological orientation to the actual constitution of concrete human knowledge. We only have an indeterminate opposition and a general method for reconciling them. What might ask, under what conditions can divisibility be *determinately* applied? What conceptuality is required for these principles to have *concrete* applicability? The *Grundlage* is supposed to establish, not the possibility of knowing three apodictic principles, but the possibility of grounding human knowledge in these most basic and apodictic principles. It is laying the groundwork for the disciplined *knowledge* of knowledge. In particular, the basic form of human knowledge – representation is only fully understood when one comes to know how it is possible; when one comes to know its conditioning principles from the beginning. For the *Wissenschaftslehre* to be possible, those principles must be intelligible according to concepts which do not mutually invalidate each other. In other words, the principles may be supposed as valid, but the applicability of those principles needs to be determined. If these principles cannot be known, all forms of knowledge are unmoored from the source of their validity.

In particular, the constant threat to the applicability of the principles is one of *indeterminate* contradiction—one which cannot be maintained, in the immediate self-cancelation of its terms, in representation or unified consciousness. It’s not so much that we cannot consciously entertain contradictory ideas (we can, and, as we will see, we must) but that the principles *conditioning* consciousness, as noted earlier, is not to be understood as the “bare awareness” of an indeterminate something, but in full connection with its cognate, *Wissen*. It is *knowing* as representational activity, and, as such, is itself bound up with the conditions of *representation*. 
consciousness cannot cancel each other. Consciousness is already unified. In light of the fact that it has been shown to be conditioned by the fundamental principles, it must be supposed that any indeterminate contradictions have already been resolved through the non-conscious actions (i.e. syntheses) of the I, and the task of the philosopher is to follow the traces of these acts in her deduction of the conditions of the unity of consciousness in light of these principles. Insofar as an indeterminate conflict exists between our reflective (i.e. conceptual) grasp of these principles, this conflict must be resolved under the supposition that it has already be resolved through the actual synthetic activity of the I. If such concepts are to express the fundamental determinations enacted by these non-conscious syntheses, and they are in contradiction, then they must be refined (i.e. further determined) as far as possible, and, in this way, made adequate to the syntheses they make intelligible. The principles of knowing are only knowable insofar as such progress can be made.

The Fundamental Synthesis as a point of departure

We must remember that the 3rd fundamental principle isn’t simply the “grounding-principle” as intelligibility of opposed terms through divisibility. The formulation of the principle of ground is derived through an abstraction from the proper content of the third principle. Recalling that the first principle expresses the absolute self-positing of the I, and the second the absolute positing of opposition to the I in the form of the ~I, the third expresses the intelligibility of the absolute opposedness of I and ~I in terms of divisibility. Combining the first two principle thus must take the following form: “I posit in the divisible I a divisible not-I opposed to the divisible I” (110). This divisibility conditions the mutual limitation of their reality. Each, to a degree, cancels the reality of the other. Each is also posited as a part of the “divisible I as substance,” a part which limits and is limited by the opposed part. But this limitation has its limits. In connection with the pure activity

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98 Such an action “as action [Handlung] can no more attain empirical consciousness than can the prior ones”—these actions, being the conditions of consciousness, cannot be immediate objects for consciousness in their conditioning activity.
of the I, it is the absolute I which posits this limitation. The I, as purethetic principle, cannot be
posited as limited in this activity, but only as effecting the mutual limitation of the limited I and limited
not-I. In abstraction from this activity, however, each is posited as limiting and being limited by the
other.

In reflection, one can analytically tease apart this mutuality into two opposed priorities,
namely the priority of I as limiting principle of the reality of the not-I, and the priority of the not-I
as limiting principle of the I. To avoid contradiction, if one is limiting the reality of the other in
some respect, the other must be limited in that respect. In other words, the determination of priority
is the determination of one term as limiting and the other as limited. It follows that the two
propositions analyzed\(^9\) from the above principle have the following form: “The I posits the not-I as
limited by the I.”\(^{100}\) and “[t]he I posits itself, as limited by the not-I. “\(^{101}\) (125-6). In each case, the I
remains the highest principle—the pure activity which enacts the mutually determined limitation.

One may think that the significance and use of the two principles derived above is
guaranteed by the evident necessity and certainty of the principle from which they derive. Shouldn’t
the principle which we have analyzed from the 3\(^{rd}\) fundamental principle be just as
certain as that principle? But the applicability of the derived principles is also conditioned by the
extent to which the term to which the relation is applied can be accorded with reality. At the level
of the 3\(^{rd}\) fundamental principle, we are only articulating what must be the case if one term or the
other is to be accorded with reality—namely, that the other has reality negated to the same degree
that reality is posited in the first. Thus, it is perfectly possible that one or both of the derived

\(^9\) Note that the fundamental synthesis is now subject to analysis, and that this does not simply yield the
original terms of the synthesis. This is because those terms have now been transformed with the notion of
Teilbarkeit, a principle which was not found in the analysis of the first two principles. After all, the third
principle is unconditioned with respect to content, involving us a new concept and transforming the character of
the opposition between principle.

\(^{100}\) “Das Ich setzt das Nicht-Ich, als beschränkt [not beschränkbar] durch das Ich” (125).

\(^{101}\) “das Ich setzt sich selbst, als beschränkt durch das Nicht-Ich”
principles have no application because it is not yet clear how it comes to be that the I posits the term in question.

It is precisely for this reason that the first of these principles cannot yet be of meaningful use— the term which it is applied to has not yet been posited for the I. “at this point the not-I is nothing”–it is not yet intelligible how and to what degree the not-I is attributed with reality at all. As we have seen, though the third fundamental principle, from which this proposition was obtained, appears to contain this proposition, it is only part of a relation of mutual limitability. When isolated from that relation, the issue of its applicability will have to remain in question until the ‘subject’ (i.e. the posited term) of that relation– the not-I– is thinkable in (even relative) independence from the I. We know that, if the I posits the not-I, that is must posit it as limited by the I, but we do not know how it comes to be that the I posits the not-I as something real in the first place. The not-I has not yet been deduced to have determinate reality for the I. For this reason, this first derivative principle is “entirely problematic,” the reality of the not-I being an empty hypothesis.

In the case of our second derivative proposition, the situation is quite different. Fichte thinks that it can be directly derived from the 3rd fundamental principle, and thus just as certain as that principle. To understand why this is the case with the second derivative principle and not the first, we must attend to what is most crucially different about it– the reality of the ‘subject’ of the expressed relation. In this case, it is the I which is posited (albeit as limited) and it is posited by the I itself; furthermore, the reality of the I is nothing other than its own self-positing. In this way, the

102 Though the second fundamental principle states that the I opposes the not-I to itself as a “fact (Tatsache) of empirical consciousness”(101), it does not express how this necessarily comes to be, and how the imputation of determinate reality to the not-I is in any way thinkable. Though fundamental principles do express what must be the case for disciplined knowledge, they do not express how it comes to be that the I is able to posit these principles for itself. This requires a deduction of the conditions of such positing, a deduction which must follow the order of thinkability. Ultimately, it must be shown how the conditions of thinkability, expressed by the fundamental principles, are themselves thinkable. In any case, the determinate positing of a not-I must be demonstrated in its accordance with this deduction, and it has not yet been shown how it necessarily comes to be that the I posits the not-I as something real.
reality of the I is as certain as the reality which posits this principle in the first place— all that remains uncertain is the not-I. Thus, the advantage of this principle is found in the extent to which the I is both the reality which posits this relation and the subject of the posited relation. Given that the third fundamental principle has been shown to be necessary, and the subject of the expressed relation must be accorded with reality, it must be the case that this derived principle has actual validity, even if it is entirely unclear how this is possible (given the uncertain status of the not-I). It is not the case that the advantage of the second derivative principle over the first has to do with the intelligibility of the principle, but rather has to do with the actuality of its application.

Given the indubitable nature of the third fundamental principle and the equally indubitable reality of the I, we know that the second derived principle expresses an actual relation. Though the form of the relation refers to not-I, the not-I is not necessarily accorded with independent reality; on the contrary, it is the I which posits itself as limited by the not-I. Given the “as”, it is perfectly possible that the not-I not have any reality of its own, but merely be the formal “stamp” of the I’s limitation of itself, but the reality of that which posits this relation is an entirely different matter. But we must still ask, as we did with the first derivative principle, how this is actually possible. The impasse of the first derived principle forces us to defer consideration of it, since it is not yet clear how it is even thinkable in general, but the second principle forces us to deduce how it is the case that the I posits itself as limited, and, at the same time, why this necessitates conceiving of the not-I to be the limiting principle. Only then will the not-I become thinkable as having reality which can be limited as well as limiting. Given its unproblematic applicability, the second proposition is the basis of the first part of Wissenschaftslehre. It is conceived to be the theoretical portion, laying the groundwork for the intelligibility (Denkbarkeit) of the second, practical, part.\(^\text{103}\)

\(^{103}\) Which is, for the reasons discussed above, as yet unintelligible, and only becomes intelligible through an analysis of the first. But it will also become clear that the practical portion precedes the theoretical—only on the basis of a practical demand does the theoretical self-positing become possible.
The Theoretical Principle of the Wissenschaftslehre

Fichte must now demonstrate, in accordance with his methodology, how it is possible for the I to posit itself as limited by the not-I, given that this state of affairs strictly follows from the prior principles of the *Grundlage.* Though we know that this state of affairs must hold if the prior principles are to remain valid, we do not yet know how it is conceivable for the opposition between I and not-I to become determinate, that is, how the relation between these principles does not generate a fatal contradiction; the theoretical principle seems to express a synthesis, but this synthesis is not yet determinate. For Fichte, the determinacy which would mediate this contradiction must be developed through the synthesis of opposed principles which are found within the fundamental theoretical principle. How is one to proceed?

*Synthesis of Interdetermination*

The fundamental theoretical principle, for all its indubitability, only expresses an indeterminate unity of conflicting principles. For the principle to be of any use, we have to deduce to conditions through which the synthesis the principle expresses is possible. These conditions require the development of a more determinate conceptuality for their expression.

For Fichte, the essence of conceptuality is found in the principle of ground. We recall that a concept delimits part of a wider scope of applicability; the determinacy of a concept is found in the scope of its inclusion and exclusion. It accomplishes this by isolating a characteristic which is ground for what it includes (as relation-ground) and excludes (as differentiation-ground between it and that which does not share the characteristic). Furthermore, the applicability of a concept requires a un-divided sphere for it to divide; more often than not, that undivided sphere is, itself, delimited by a higher concept. Thus, with the articulation of any opposition, one frames the opposition in terms of a characteristic which grounds the partition of the applicable domain.
When the unity expressed is indeterminate, the relation-ground and differentiation-ground have not been adequately articulated. If opposed terms can be opposed determinately, there must already be a relation-ground which allows that opposition to be thinkable (delimiting the domain to be partitioned according to a higher concept), just as there must be an differentiation-ground which establishes the opposition as such (a characteristic which grounds the partition of that domain). Given an apparently indeterminate synthesis, the task would be to articulate these characteristics in terms of concepts which isolate their relation-ground (thus taking the form of synthesis) with increasing determinacy, necessitating that the initially indeterminate differentiation-ground itself becomes determinate. In the case of the theoretical principle, this synthesis has already been established as a fact; thus, the deduction developing from this synthesis would progress by the articulation of concepts which already make the synthesis possible\textsuperscript{104}. Within the indeterminate synthesis expressed in the fundamental theoretical principle, there should already be the concepts which allow that opposition to exist without the ruin of the system (i.e. its collapse into self-annihilation through the indeterminate identity of contradictories).

Again, the path ahead, just as the path heretofore, is one of further determination. Just as the concept of partitive determination was found to be the condition of the co-thinkability of absolutely opposed principles, so too must further determinations of the concept of ‘determination’ itself be discursively articulated as the condition of the possibility of this mutuality of negation and reality in the interplay of I and not-I. The concept of ‘determination’ delimits the scope which must be partitioning by further determinations, determinations which suspend or defer the immediate annihilation of I and not-I through an increasingly subtle interdetermination of their domains. But with each synthetic ‘discovery’ of further concepts making the seemingly indeterminate antitheses

\textsuperscript{104} Recall that Fichte does not regard synthesis as an artificial construction which joins disparate terms, but the discursive articulation of grounds of their presupposed co-thinkability. The concepts which allow the unity of the opposed principles are not understood to be crafted \textit{ad hoc}, but condition the opposition in the first place.
more determinate, there may remain a new frontier of indeterminacy which, once again, threatens the system with ruin. In this way, each new synthesis will create the exigency out of which a new concept is to emerge.

In the Grundlage, where there is indeterminacy in opposition, there is yet another indeterminate conflict of principles which must be suspended if the absolutely opposed principles are not to suspend each other. This is because, without this further determination, the governing concept of determination can only be applied indeterminately to the impasse at hand, and this indeterminate application of the concept will yield both ambiguity (Zweideutigkeit) and contradiction (Widerspruch). Ambiguity, in that the terms opposed in light of the concept cannot be distinguished from one another beyond the vicious circle of their mutual determinacy— that is, without the ground of a decisive characteristic; contradiction, in that the application of a single principle in one sense to both terms will inevitably lead to their immediate, conflicting application to the same, unpartitioned domain. Though each synthetic concept is a refinement of the concept of determination, one which restricts the scope of the later, each new concept may only reframe the fatal indeterminacy, isolating in narrower confines a conflict which will not dissolve into unity. We will see whether or not this progress is indefinite, and, if it has a definite end, how it will be distinguished from simply abandoning an endless task.

We must first frame the indeterminate opposition at issue. Given that, at this point, we have a single, indeterminately synthetic principle, we must analyze that principle to isolate the key indeterminacy. The first step would be to tease apart this principle into two opposed sub-principles; this would amount to the isolation of the contradiction which our theoretical principle presupposes as surmounted, but without articulating how. Only then will the application of the concept to each of these sub-principles drive us to a further determination of the concept (and hence a new concept, not analytically derived from prior concepts) which is already at work as the possibility of that sub-
principle. This becomes necessary because each sub-principle contains a fatal indeterminacy of its own, one which requires a new determination of the concept of determination itself. For this reason, each sub-principle must yield a new concept; it will do so through the deduction of the possibility of the governing concepts applicability with respect to it in a way that does not yield ambiguity and contradiction. We must first recall the problem that arises in and through this indeterminacy.

The key problem of the theoretical principle as a whole is the limitation of the I. On the one hand, I, as absolute principle of reality, is necessarily unlimited. But, as we have seen in the third fundamental principle, there must be some sense in which the I is limited, namely, in such a way as to not annihilate its opposed principle. There must be limits (Grenze) on the I, limits which restrict it to its proper domain, allowing its opposed principle to prevail within its own proper limits. This amounts to saying that the I must be limited; its initially indeterminate scope “must become determinate” (es soll bestimmt werden). Recall from our earlier discussion that limitation at work in determination involves the establishing of a limit in accordance with a determining ground. How is the I supposed to be the ground of its own limitation without transgressing that limitation ipso facto? But the alternative—grounding this limitation in something opposed to the I, i.e. the not-I—provokes another problem. How can there be any ground for the relation (Beziehungsground) between principles which are supposed to be mutually exclusive?

Fichte reformulates the fundamental theoretical principle in terms of the determination problematic, obtaining the following: “The I posits itself as determined by the not-I.” There are two determinations indeterminately synthesized in this principle: the determination of the I through the not-I (“determined by”) and the self-determinacy of the I (“the I posits itself”). Fichte provisionally couches the conflict of these two moments in the terms of passivity (Leiden) and activity (Tätigkeit), at this point merely using those terms to articulate an opposition without the deeper technical sense he will develop later. The I is supposed to be both active and passive, both self-determinant and
determined by another. Because this contradiction must be suspend for the system to avoid self-annihilation and collapse, we must treat this contradiction as already resolved, and seek the concept (once again, “X”) which allows both moments to remain determinately valid. As before (with the discussion of the third fundamental principle), the mediating power of X is understood through limitation, that is, quantitatively.

From the most basic standpoint with respect to reality, the I is understood to spontaneously posit an “absolute Quantum”– an absolute totality of reality without higher measure; the limitation of the I would then be expressed as a restriction or partitioning of that fundamental abundance\(^\text{105}\) (“The I is accordingly determined insofar as the [respective degree of] reality is determined”). This self-restriction is unintelligible without the positing of an opposed term– the not-I– for how would an absolute abundance of activity come to limit its own infinite activity? If we understand the I as the absolute positing of the totality of reality, the not-I, as the pure and simple negation of that positing, becomes the absolute negation of the totality of reality. The totality of reality is now opposed to a totality of negation. To make this opposition determinate, these opposed totalities must be united through a partitioning determination: “Both the absolute totality of reality in the I and the totality of negation in the not-I must be united through determination. Accordingly, the I partly determines itself and is partly determined [by the not-I]” (129). But both cannot be sustained in their pure opposition to each other; both totalities (of reality and negation) “should” ultimately be “one and the same.”

To sustain the unity which “should” prevail in this clash of totalities, it must be shown that the partial self-determination is also a partial determination of (or by) the other, and that the partial

\(^{105}\) One must note that this absolute, self-positing of the I in terms of quantity, as an application of the concept of quantity, is itself conditioned by a restriction of that quantity. The absolute activity of the I is only absolute “quantity” as reflected by the already partitioning of relative parts of this quantity in the form of determination. Absolute activity is not in itself quantity; in fact, absolute activity only is posited as quantity out of the spontaneity of absolute activity. A condition of positing itself as quantity is restriction– the determination of its unbounded reality as a divisible quantity.
other-determination (the negation of the not-I) is also a partial self-determination. This is shown quantitatively—given the identity of absolute quantum, any partial positing of reality in the (limited) I is, at the same time, a positing of the remaining part of reality in the not-I and vice versa. At the level of the limited I, there “is” neither the absolute quantum of the purely active I nor “is”106 there an absolute totality of negation; there is the doubled determination of reality and negation. It is in this way that the not-I is granted a (restricted) reality—to the degree (Grad) that the I is negated, the not-I is attributed reality, and to the degree that the I is posited a part of the totality of reality, the not-I is negated. At the level of the pure activity of the I, there isn’t even the simple totality of the absolute quantum, as this is already a determination of reality; and yet, at the level of the opposed I and not-I, there is a mutual partitioning of reality and negation, and the absolute quantum is the hidden fulcrum of their determinate opposition—neither existing in itself nor existing as the simple sum of the two parts.

Fichte discovers a new synthesis in this peculiar interplay of reality and negation; a concept which was not found through the simple analysis of determination is now manifest. On the one hand, it is a type of determination; on the other, it is distinct from determination-in-general through its own specific characteristic. Fichte points out that, whereas determination-in-general articulates mere quantity, this form of determination is effectuated through the interplay of opposed terms. In this co-determination, it makes no difference107 whether one begins with the I or the not-I, each is determined through the other (130). He dubs this “interdetermination” (exchangebestimmung), identifying it with Kant’s category of Relation. We must see how the principle of interdetermination can be applied to the impasse which led us to determine it in the first place. In other words, we must further determine interdetermination with respect to the conflict implicit in the fundamental

106 The scare quotes indicate that the conditions of predication do not obtain for either absolute, so a copulatory use of “is” is merely for clarity.
107 This presents something of a problem, as we will soon see.
theoretical principle. Fichte does this by applying this concept to the analytically derived “sub-principles” of the fundamental theoretical principle: the “not-I determines the I” and the “I posits itself as determined.”

*The Synthesis of efficacy*

“The not-I determines the I.” Insofar as the not-I determines the I, it must be attributed with reality. But, given that the I, in its pure activity, is to be understood as the ultimate principle of reality, it seems, *prima facie*, that the not-I is only thinkable in terms of the negation of reality. The not-I is supposed to both have and lack reality, and the terms of a new contradiction threaten to cancel each other. The concept of interdetermination alone does not solve the problem. This is because the application of the concept *presupposes*, on the one hand, that an exchange between I and not-I is intelligible, and also (this will be shown to be of a piece with the first presupposition) that there is some sense in which the reality of the not-I can be qualitatively distinguished from the I outside of interdetermination. Otherwise, one arbitrarily defines one what the other is not, and the meaning of “the not-I determines the I” is itself arbitrary. What we are looking for is not a purely quantitative reciprocity, but a *qualitative* distinction between the terms. With the 3rd fundamental principle, both the not-I and the I are thought to be *quantities*—as *parts* (*Teilen*) of the “I as divisible substance” (119), only with the divisibility effected in that principle can the I and not-I be *something* (*Etwas*, 109), both determinations of quantity must be attributed with some degree of reality. The problem is that the *distinctness* of the terms is not thinkable in terms of quantity. The applicability of the presently considered subordinate proposition presupposes this distinction, as it does not state “one term determines the other” but that “the not-I determines the I.” Interdetermination is not enough, as it is indifferent to qualitative distinctness of the terms it mediates—it simply allows that, given the quantity of one, one can determine the quantity of the other. It does not determine what

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108 I.e. determinate being.
makes the quantities different in kind. The only way out of this impasse would require demonstrating how the not-I, in some distinct, qualitative sense, has reality—i.e. how it both has reality and how that reality is distinct from that of the I. If the I and not-I were real in the same sense, the not-I would have reality for the I and completely independent of the I, negating the first fundamental principle and its implication, that the I be the sole principle of reality.

The task is to put the indeterminate (and hence ambiguous or even contradictory) terms in determinate opposition. In other words, we must understand how the not-I can be attributed with reality such that it can be posited as determining the I, and how the reality of the not-I is qualitatively different than that of the I, yet not in such a way that it makes a determining relation with it unthinkable. More concisely, it must be thinkable both in terms of its quantitative determination of the I’s representations, but also in its qualitative distinctness from the I. It must be opposed in its relation, but related in its opposition. Only then can subordinate proposition at hand be applicable without contradiction.

To begin, Fichte further determines the meaning of ‘reality’ according to the first two fundamental principles of the Grundlage. reality is understood in terms of the self-positing of the I—something is real insofar as it can be posited as identical to itself (schematically, in accordance with the form $A = A$, 99). The I is constitutively that which posits itself as identical with itself—recall that “Ich bin” is the same as “$I = I$” —the being of the I is its self-positing. Fichte extrapolates from this to a universal identification of being and self-positing: “Accordingly, self-positing and being [Sein] are one and the same”—not merely for the I, but tout court. This cannot mean that the being of a stone consists in its self-positing, but that the stone only is insofar as it is posited as self-identical in the I. Its existence cannot be isolated from the self-positing of the I. Very early in the Grundlage, this absolute self-positing is identified with pure activity (96), and thus he concludes that “all reality
is active” and that “everything active is reality.” This yields a determination of activity independent from its interdetermination with passivity: “Activity is positive, absolute … reality.”

If activity can thus be understood apart from its relation in interdetermination with an arbitrarily chosen counter-part of passivity, this “absolute” determination of activity can determine the otherwise indeterminate (i.e. arbitrary) interdetermination, proving a correspondingly “absolute” (or absolutely ground) determination of passivity. The consequence for something not-I—our stone from above, for example—would be that it has no reality in itself, but only reality in relation to the self-positing of the I. However, there are some ambiguities here. If the self-positing of the I is indeed identified with the source of all being (Sein) (134), we also have to recall that there is no reality before the 3rd fundamental principles. Recall that neither the I nor the not-I can be something (etwas) before the 3rd principle (109), for there is no reality without limitation. The I is not real “in itself,” even if its being is its own constitutive self-positing. Though it is indeed the “source” (quelle) of all reality in its being, the not-I (and the synthesis demanded by it, as realized in the 3rd principle) could be considered the source of the determinacy of reality. Furthermore, the identification of the being (Sein) of the I with self-positing is present from the beginning (97, et passim), without the fundamental determinacy of the second two principles, it is certainly not a being nor distinguishable from nothing. As absolute positing principle, it is not a being among beings, but beyond being.109

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109 It is in consideration of this point that John Sallis writes, “One would need again to say: the I is act and absolutely nothing more. One would need to say it more explicitly: the I is act and absolutely nothing more, not even being. And one would need then to be attentive to the recoil of the said upon the saying, crossing out the ‘is,’ writing it under erasure. One would need to write: the I is beyond being—thereby contesting while also confirming what Fichte says about the word ‘being,’ that without it “no language would be possible’ (8:320)” (Sallis, Spacings 49). Indeed, Fichte writes in the passage of the Origin of Language which Sallis cites that “we must relate all change to something enduring—to an enduring substrate which is, however, only a product of the imagination. It is to this substrate that the word sein or ist is applied. Without such a substrate, no mental action would be possible, and without a signification for it, no language would be possible” (translation of FW 8:320 from Surber, Language 131). The I, in this sense, has no reality even and precisely as it conditions, through imagination, all language and any sense which might be given to the word “being.”
Given that the pure activity of the I is to be determined, and hence partially negated, one must still be able to think of a contrary for activity, even given its absolute aspect. In terms of the now grounded inter-determinacy, just as pure reality is thought in terms of activity, pure negation must be thought of as passivity (Leiden) as the counterpart (Gegenteil) of pure activity. “Everything in the I which is not immediately contained in “I am”—i.e. that isn’t immediately posited in the positing of the I through itself—is passivity for it” (135). Thus, once again, this pure passivity is understood as absolute and “positive” in distinction to the merely negatively defined “relative” passivity which we have already encountered through interdetermination. Both absolute forms are opposed to their relative forms.

We might wonder at this point why this way of understanding reality and negation in terms of activity and passivity doesn’t already afford us a secure basis for the distinction between I and not-I. But the problem isn’t solved by simply stating that the “I” is simply the part of an interdetermination which is active and the not-I is simply the passive part. Both the (opposed) I and the not-I have moments of activity and passivity. We have to determine how to mediate between these absolute notions of activity and passivity and the relative forms to which they are opposed. Without delineating how the absolute and relative forms of activity and passivity are determinately related, there is no hope of making the transition upon which the entire enterprise depends intelligible.

Applying these “absolute” definitions of activity and passivity to the relative interplay of interdetermination, we would thus note that the transfer of “reality” from one term to the other can be understood as the transfer of “activity” from one term to the other. In this way, the passivity of one term is an indication of the activity of the other term, without which that passivity would not be thinkable. We must pause with a subtle asymmetry here. Given the absolute definitions of activity and passivity found above, it would be tempting to regard activity as having priority over passivity
when we conceive of their relation in terms of transference. But, precisely because of the nature of this transference, as the transference of reality to the not-I implicit in the principle, “the not-I determines the I,” that passivity must be understood as the ground for the attribution of reality. This is because the not-I can only be conceived of as active insofar as the I is passive, and the not-I is only active insofar as the I is passive\(^\text{110}\). This allows us to begin to discriminate between the two forms of “reality” (that of the I and that of the not-I), developed through a consideration of how it is possible to attribute the not-I with reality as activity.

Fichte discovers this to be a new synthesis— a new concept, already at work, which makes our previous opposition possible; not only are we employing a concept where the determination of one term occurs through that of an opposed term, but we are understanding this interdetermination as an passivity which determines an activity. In other words, there is a basis to distinguish between the two terms; one distinguishes negation of one as a passivity which must be understood as the transference of reality (as activity) to the other. As the new concept relates passivity to activity, Fichte labels it “efficacy” (Wirksamkeit). That term which is active (hence effective) is the ‘cause’ (Ursache), with respect to which the passive term is the ‘affected’ (Bewirkte). Importantly, the verbal form, Wirkung, is reserved for the effectuation of this relation as a whole (136); we might thus say that both the effecting and the effected principles are part of an effectuated interplay.

Returning to the complete formulation of the fundamental theoretical principle, we can see that the I is both effecting (“it determines itself” as the determining, hence active principle) and affected (it is “determined by the not-I”; it is the determined, hence passive principle) with respect to the not-I; but we might wonder at this third term receiving this transference of reality as activity only to return it to the (now “pacified”) I. The I attributes activity to the third term (the not-I), but this transference is ultimately understood in terms of the efficacy of that activity on the (now to some

\(^{110}\) It is this asymmetry which distinguishes it from interdetermination in general, and which opposes it to another sub-determination of interdetermination to be deduced below.
degree “passive”) I– we have a peculiar circulation of activity from the I, through the not-I, and back to the I. Why this detour? This detour indicates the basic impasse of the theoretical principle: how can the I be both passive and active? Only through this strange intermediary. But how is any determination of the I possible through this detour? Nothing absolutely active exists outside the I, yet the I cannot restrict its own determinacy without restricting it as restricted by the not-I, without, at least provisionally, attributing reality to the not-I. For this system to be methodologically coherent, the I must somehow be shown to be the ground for its own passivity and activity, which would amount to showing that the apparent opposition of I and not-I (as ground for the determinacy of the I’s passivity and activity) does not ultimately indicate a real, qualitative opposition of principles, and that the detour through the not-I can finally be fully determined with the I as its principle. In other words, their must be a single ground for the determinacy of activity and passivity, which can, of course, be nothing other than the I. This re-turn, this echo from the not-I, must be the turning of one principle. The shape of this problematic becomes unmistakable in the application of the concept of interdetermination to our second subordinate proposition.

*Synthesis of substantiality*

In the second sub-proposition (“the I posits itself as determined”), the I is supposed to be both determining and determined. Once again, we have an impasse; the I is somehow conceived as both determining and determined. This ambiguity entails a contradiction: as determining, the I is active; as determined, the I is passive. Thus, the I is both active and passive at the same time, “a clear contradiction” (137). The task at hand becomes one of demonstrating how the above contradiction can be expressed adequately as “the I determines an activity through its passivity, or passivity through its activity” (ibid.)– this subjects the active and passive senses of the I’s activity to a mutual restriction which avoids contradiction. The task would be to show how one would be able to express the latter principle in a determinate way, and since, once again, interdetermination alone
does not supply the required determinacy, there must be a further determination of that concept which makes this mutual restriction possible. Because it is not yet clear how the non-contradictory proposition can be at all thinkable, it holds the status of a goal and not a \textit{fait accompli}. “It is only the question: if and how the above proposition is thinkable.”

The problem of self-determination requires a further discussion of the concept of determination in general. For Fichte, the concept of measure (\textit{Maßstab}) is indissolubly linked with determination; this is because determination is a form of measuring. “A measure must be set in order for determination in general (as measurement) to be possible.” This conception of determination as measurement, and the consequent importance of a pertinent \textit{Maßstab}, should not surprise us, as we are dealing with a \textit{quantitative} determination of the opposition of I and not-I. If efficacy is understood through the transfer of reality qua activity, how does one measure the a \textit{determinate} amount of activity? What is the common measure of activity that allows for this determination? Recalling our discussing of a related issue with the 3\textsuperscript{rd} fundamental principle, we might note that all partitioning determinations are partitioned in light of what they partition— the partitioned is the ground for the determinacy of the parts-qua-parts— it is the whole that is not other to either part but not simply a \textit{post facto} combination of the parts. Again, this is because all such combination or addition already implies the partition of what is to be combined, a partition which, in turn, is only thinkable in terms of the whole which is divide. With respect to the problematic of the divided whole, the chief question becomes, how is this whole both the ground of its unity and its partition? Whence this self-partitioning of the whole? For there is not determinacy without partition, and no partition without unity. What is this measure?

“This measure could be nothing other than the I itself because originally only the I is absolutely posited” (ibid.). The I is thus posited as the whole, the “absolute totality” which underlies
the possibility of our above proposition, an ungrounded whole\textsuperscript{111} which forms the “quantum in which all quanta are contained, and which can [thus] act as a measure for all [of them].” At this point, Fichte launches a fourteen point deduction which deduces a new concept from the I’s role in measurement.

First, this totality is the “absolute maximum of reality”\textsuperscript{112}. Given that maximum, how are we to measure the gap between the maximum and all other quanta? This gap cannot “be” anything, even as it is necessary for determinate measure. This gap must be determined as “remainder of reality,” but a remainder which “is nothing.” In this peculiar moment, the totality of reality, as absolute quantum, can only be opposed to a non-existent remainder. For determinate self-positing to be possible, there must be some degree of limitation, and thus a quantity of negation is inevitably opposed to reality through interdetermination, his second point (138).

For this reason, any determination, qua limitation, of reality is the same as a negation of totality, it must, in opposition to totality, be determined as “non-totality” (his 3\textsuperscript{rd} point). But, given the principle of ground, opposition is only possible on the basis of a relation-ground, which could only be divisibility (Teilbarkeit) (point 4). Divisibility allows for the comparison between the undivided whole and the divisions or parts to which it is opposed\textsuperscript{113}; totality it is thus both the condition of the possibility of parts what remains fundamentally undivided. The partitioning of reality through negation allows the interdetermination of reality and negation to be understood in terms of I and not-I. reality is pure activity, and, as such, must be identified with the I; that which is not active must consequently be identified with the not-I. Furthermore, passivity is only thinkable given the restriction of activity— all passivity is “non-activity” (his 5\textsuperscript{th} point). Passivity, if it is

\textsuperscript{111} Recall that, in Fichte’s logic, what grounds something else must “contain” the thing which it grounds, the grounded being the result of the ground’s limitation.

\textsuperscript{112} Fichte owes this terminology to Nicholas of Cusa, who equates the absolute maximum with God.

\textsuperscript{113} Insofar as totality is opposed to a part, there must already be a minimal degree of determination. This is why the absolute quantum is an ungrounded posit rather than simply the “same” as the absolute I. The “one,” as absolute quantum, “is” still not the absolute I.
opposed to activity, must have a relation-ground with activity—this relation-ground can be nothing other than quantity, for what is not active is a determinate remainder of a quantity of reality.

It follows that passivity can now be given a measure: “passivity is a quantity of activity.” All determination entails limitation, and thus a restriction of the total quantum of activity, and thus, as the remainder of this limitation of reality, a determinate quantity of passivity. But one might wonder, at this point, why passivity is identified with activity and not opposed to it. Why does Fichte state that ‘passivity is a quantum of activity,’ and not that ‘determinate activity is always opposed to a quantum of passivity’? To understand Fichte’s rather terse formulation, one must remember that determinate activity, as such, is restricted activity; it is activity that has undergone limitation. It can only be limited if it has been opposed to a principle which determines it; hence, it is, to this degree, passive. Furthermore, given the same opposition, the passive activity is opposed to something which is itself, to a degree, passive, even as it is, in another sense, opposed to pure activity as totality. According to the concept of interdetermination, that which is opposed to limited activity, as its remainder, is active to the degree that this first term is passive— it is a determinate quantum of activity, and thus (as we have just seen with point 6) a quantum of passivity. Any part, as partition of totality, is, to that degree, passivity. It is only with respect to another part that it can be conceived as, in some respect, active.

Consequently the measure (Maßstab) is activity-in-general (Tätigkeit überhaupt) as the absolute quantum; the measured (Maß) is quantity-in-general (Quantum in general, which applies, as we have seen, to activity and passivity as degrees of activity in general) (his 7th point). Though, in itself (an sich) any restriction of activity is activity, insofar as it is not all activity, all posited degrees of activity are forms of passivity (his 8th point). Furthermore, it is through opposing a degree of activity to the entirety (alle) of activity that one determines it as passivity, not through the extent to which it is a form of activity in general. Insofar as it is the latter, it is activity, insofar as it is opposed to the
totality of activity, it is the former (his 9th point). This somewhat convoluted language indicates that, according to the relation-ground of quantity, there is no qualitative difference between forms of activity (they are all within the “sphere” of activity); only with reference to the differentiation-ground of limiting exclusion (a particular degree of activity is not the totality of activity) is a quantum of activity determined to be passivity. In other words, as a form of activity-in-general, all forms of activity are included in the totality of activity; as a negation of part of the totality of activity, any determinate degree of activity is a form of passivity.

Thus, with respect to the not-I, any posited X is a form of activity (in contrast to the passive not-I). With respect to the totality of action (des Handelns), any form of activity, as a determination (and hence limitation) of that totality, is a form of passivity. Thus, any determinate predication of the I is a restriction of the same, and entails passivity on the part of the I (his 10th point). It is in this way that the I can be considered both active and passive: it is posited as activity insofar as one abstracts from the limitation of the I and attends the extent to which it is a form of activity-in-general (an aspect of the pure positing of the I); it is posited as passivity to the degree that one abstracts from that inceptive spontaneity and reflects upon the extent to which the I is necessarily bound up with determinate limitation. It is at this point that Fichte constructs a figure of how there could be two conflicting determinations for a single point X. Consider the following diagram:

![Diagram](image-url)
This figure presents some of the most fundamental ambiguities of the Grundlage, and a consideration of it will help prepare us for even more peculiar geometries later in the work. To make sense of this figure with its circles, area, and plane, to draw it into connection with the prior presentation, let us recall Fichte’s interpretation of the principle of reason (Satz vom Grun). Recall that every determination requires a relation-ground and a differentiation-ground. The relation-ground determines the quantitative unity which the differentiation-ground qualitatively divides. From a different standpoint, then, a relation-ground is a differentiation-ground with respect to the limit of that unity, and a differentiation-ground can serve as a relation-ground of a finer determination. It seems clear that the circles are a geometrical figuration of such distinctions. But what then, is the plane, in abstraction from the circles?

A few initial observations: 1.) on an infinite plane, with no points of reference, the position of a single shape will be solely determined with respect to itself. Given the presence of a single shape within it, any other point on the plane now becomes determinate, but only with reference to it. There is no further determinacy to this point of reference in itself. 2.) We might ask, what would be the most fundamental way of partitioning this plane? Bisect the plane with an infinite line, and we have two indeterminate infinities, neither “summable” as a determinate quantum. Furthermore, the determinacy of each would consist solely in not being the opposed infinity. 3.) Now consider the figure of a single circle as different from an infinite line. The area inside and outside of the circle would come to determine each other in a new way. There is now an opposition of enclosure and exclusion. What is included in the circle excludes the remainder of the infinite plane. The figure of a closed circle also suggests an area that is summable, but that area would also be “absolute” in the sense that there is no greater determinate area which could serve as its measure; and yet, the very presence of the plane beyond the limit suggests that the “maximum” determinacy of that area could itself be determined through the exorbitant excursion beyond it. 4.) Following this thought,
consider the distinction between the *area* enclosed by the circle and the circle as its circumference. The circumference determining the unified quantum of the enclosed area is *nothing* in comparison with that area—at the limit, there is no distance between the area within the circled and the area immediately outside of it. Is the circumference itself within or outside of the *area* of the circle? Can quality of the circumference (being inside or outside of the area) itself become determinate? If not, was does this figure about the nature of determinacy? 5.) With one circle alone, the “center” of the circle (and of the otherwise uncentered plane) suggests itself as the point toward which the line of the circle curves to but never reaches. Only with respect to that curve is the center centered, and can a point present itself as determinable on the plane. In this way, the point is both contained in and absent from the circumference. Furthermore, the radius of the circle, as the distance between curve and point is against a form of determinate indeterminacy—only determined as limited with respect to the unlimited extension of that line beyond the circle. 6.) But can we forget that this is an infinite plane in infinite space? Must we not suppose that the plane itself bisects infinite space? What determines this original determination?

Let us know struggle to connect this figure to the earlier discussion (points 1 through 10). To return to the circles, if the circle, A, is to be a relation-ground for B (in turn serving as the differentiation-ground), then Y would be determined by B to be in opposition to the remainder of X which is not B. The remainder in circle A would not be the whole of X, for the determinacy of that whole is established through its interdetermination with the excluded infinity (excluded as ~A). Instead, circle A is composed of Y (determined as B) and the part of X which is not-Y (determined as not-B). Y is determined on the grounds of characteristic B, the characteristic which distinguishes it from the rest of X. In this way, B is the *limit* of Y\(^\text{114}\), and a mere part of X considered as totality. Y is in interdetermination with that remainder of X which is not ~Y. On the basis of Y, one could

\(^{114}\) Note, further, that this limit doesn’t exist on its own, but, is the product of *Gegen-setzen*, the product of positing. On a fundamental level, the characteristic in question only comes to be *as such* in this positing.
determine the remainder of X as \( \sim Y \); on the basis of X as \( \sim Y \), one could determine Y. However, now consider the situation of X. X is determined through the differentiation-ground A. What would the relation-ground be between X and the infinity excluded as \( \sim X \)? Are X and this infinite remainder parts of a greater totality? If so, they are parts of a totality which cannot be totaled. Given that the area beyond X is not itself a determinate quantum, but infinite and thus, in itself, wholly indeterminate, the remainder of the infinite which is not X is only determinate in relation to X, and (at best) only partially determinate. More precisely, the determinacy of excluded infinity’s quantitative scope is solely found in the fact that, considered on its own, it is missing the quantity of X as a remainder. As a determination of infinity, there is no greater “measure” than X. X, not the infinite plane, has to be considered the quantum in question; measurement, as determination, requires a measure (Maßstab)—it is the ground for the possibility of determinacy in its determinateness. So X, not infinity, would have to be the maximum, the “absolute totality of reality.”

We have a fundamental instability here, for the language of quantum and certainly totality implies completeness, determinacy. But the I, as principle of all reality, cannot be thought as limited. The circle enclosed by A figures a completed infinity. We should not lose sight of how strange this is, how peculiar, for there indeed is no measure for the measure itself, there is no completeness to the determination of the limit of X through inter-determinacy. In other words, X, as the highest determination, is not determined by a higher determinacy, nor by the determinacy of its opposed term. As ground for determination, as absolute measure, as without any higher reference point, its determinacy is established through the pure act of the I. But if it is indeed supposed to be the absolute totality of reality, what could possibly be excluded from it? What is not-X, the infinity beyond the circle? This most basic partitioning must be the a figuration of the partition between I and not-I. The not-I is the excluded, indeterminate beyond. Its infinity is not the infinite of the

\[115\] “If determination (or measurement) of any kind is to be possible, we must establish a scale [Maßstab] of measure”
posited circle of reality, of the totality of activity with its source in self-positing. Its infinity is entirely negative—the indeterminacy of infinity not figuring an abundance, but an abysmal poverty. Beyond the X, not principle of determinacy, no power of determining reality; considered “in itself,” “simply nothing.” As we saw in our discussion of the 3rd fundamental principle, there is no higher principle of determinacy between I and not-I. The I is both figured (the inclusion of circle A) and that which enacts this figure; it is both limiting and limited—the fundamental problem of addressed by a new concept: “substantiality.”

Indeed, it is at this point that we uncover a new synthesis, a new activity which allows us to make sense of the duality of activity and passivity with respect to inclusion and exclusion. Fichte understands this to be a further determination of interdetermination, but not a determination of the concept of efficacy. To understand this, one must recall that this entire problematic occurs “in parallel” to the problematic of efficacy. Efficacy presupposes the independence of two opposed terms, which relate to each other in terms of efficacy. Here, this independence is not presupposed, but bracketed in favor of the determination of an inclusive unity (the totality of reality or activity). The first approach encounters an impasse to the extent in which the I is supposed to be determining and determined, given that the not-I seems both necessary for the concept of efficacy to be applicable, and an obstruction to the overall unity of the system. But, in presupposing duality, efficacy forecloses the sphere in which the analysis of passivity and activity in terms of inclusivity and exclusivity is possible. Similarly, in determining activity and passivity in the latter way, this new sphere forecloses the sphere of efficacy’s applicability, but not without (as we will soon see) encountering its own impasse (one which necessitates the first sphere).

Once again, as with any further determination of a more general concept, one must isolate the differentiation-ground that distinguishes it from that more general sphere of applicability as well as the relation-ground which allows its distinction from the more general sense to be possible as a
form of that sense. Furthermore, it must also be distinguished from its counterpart (which can be conceived as including the excluded remainder of the more general concept’s scope), which is, in this case, identified with the sphere of efficacy’s applicability, for both efficacy and this new concept are counter-parts which are embraced within the wider scope of interdetermination. For this reason, both efficacy and its counterpart must be determined according to their relation-ground with the higher concept of interdetermination, their relation-ground with respect to each other, their differentiation-ground with respect to interdetermination, and their differentiation-ground with respect to each other. Both share with interdetermination in general the determination of one quality’s degree by the opposed quality (passivity determined through activity, and vice versa). Both are different from mere interdetermination in the priority of one quality over the other with respect to original determinacy. They share this character of prioritizing with each other, but they are, in turn, distinguished by which term receives the priority (141). It is worth pausing to consider why this is so.

With efficacy, passivity has the priority over activity; with this new form of interdetermination, activity has priority over passivity (142). We recall, with efficacy, that the condition of one term’s activity was the determination of the other’s passivity. Only given a Bewirkte is there an Ursache. Contrariwise, it is the very determination (qua limitation) of activity which necessitates the exclusion of some part of the totality of activity, and passivity is only thinkable, in these terms, as that remainder.

It is finally the demand for the unity of the totality of activity, which is precisely that necessity which compels us to posit a remainder of activity for every determination of the same, which allows us to give this new synthesis a name: substantiality. Thus, this unity of the totality of the I’s activity is determined to be substance; the partial determinations of this activity, which are in
turned opposed by other parts, are the accidents of this one substance\textsuperscript{116}. The boundary between the two is precisely the differentiation-ground between substance and accident, whereas (presumably) the relation-ground is the extent to which both part and whole express activity in general (the 13th point).

Fichte points out that substance requires accidents in order to be thinkable; only through accidents do thinkable realities emerge. Without such accidents, “all reality would simply be one” (ibid.). But the thinkability of accident depends just as much on the notion of substance—only given “reality in general” does “determinate reality” become thinkable. Moreover, whereas substance is the exchange (exchange) of reality in general, accidents always name an individual term of exchange opposed by another accident (the final point).

Fichte acknowledges that, in both determinations of interdetermination, origin of the boundary which opposes the terms remains unexplained. The nature of the activity which effects the differentiation, along with that which provokes this activity in the first place, remain “uninvestigated and entirely in the dark.”

However, we are now able to observe a particular problematic emerging in the co-thinkability of efficacy and substantiality. The first concept presupposes differentiated terms which must be understood to be in a causal relation with each other; the second presupposes a unified substance where the opposition of the parts is only thinkable in terms of the whole. One begins with duality, the other, with unity. As we will see, the first risks collapse into realist dogmatism of the thing-in-itself (the terms which pre-exist the relations), the second risks an idealist dogmatism which prematurely regards the inception of the limiting boundary to be thinkable in terms of an I which is somehow supposed to be both limiting and limited at once. It is the problem of the limiting boundary which is decisive, here, for if one simply thinks of it as the spontaneity of the I, it

\textsuperscript{116} One might note, in connection with this, that it is substance which is free, and the accident which is bound up in a chain of necessity.
is not clear how it can be a limit; on the other hand, if the boundary cannot ultimately be thought in those terms, it would appear that the unity of I as substance must be shattered into a duality of principles— I and not-I, the first as the site of freedom of spontaneity, the second as the principle which makes the boundary determinate.

In this way, we can see in the concept of substantiality the goal and driving engine of the Grundlage. If the boundary which opposes substance and accident can be thought from the unity of substance, the not-I would no longer threaten the annihilation of the system.

Figurations of Impasse and Shift

It is not accidental that Fichte provides two peculiar figurations at the end of this section to show something about this drive for synthesis. With the first, he explains that the synthesis seeking to mediate I and not-I would progress infinitely “if it were not for an absolute decree of reason, one which the philosopher doesn’t enact, but demonstrates; through this: to the extent that the not-I cannot be united with the I in any way, there should be no not-I. The knot would not be untied, but sliced apart.” (144). The translation of soll as should seems entirely merited by the fundamentally practical nature of reason (a practical dimension which is, indeed, at work here), and is certainly merited in other contexts. In the current context (with the zerschnitten of a knot), it suggests an act of violence or even extermination. That the not-I would indeed by recognized as existing, and, because it is, that it should not be. The translation of aufzeigt as “demonstrates” pushes the sense of this passage in a different direction. Indeed, it suggests that the “should” does not indicate an act to be accomplished—the excision of the not-I—but that the not-I should already be posited as something which is not. Indeed, one should not, in principle, posit something which has no ultimately connection to the conditions of intelligibility. The scission here is equivalent to the peculiar movement from the highest “rung” on the ladder of synthesis and antithesis—not up into the indivisible I (that is impossible), but already again down from it in the positing of I and not-I as
divisions in the I through the determination of divisibility. To posit them as divisions in the I is to posit the ultimate non-being of the not-I; it does not “ascend” to the highest reality. In other words, this “non-ascending” is the inverted form of the above “slicing” of a knot. It is the same decree of reason\textsuperscript{117} in two different contexts.

With his other figuration, one which will be returned to at another key point in the Grundlage, the emphasis is on the continuity of difference. Relative to its opposition to the not-I, the I is finite; considered from the standpoint of its absolute activity, the I is unlimited. The task of mediating between these two aspects of the I, as the attempt to unify the relative and absolute, must at some point show itself to be impossible. Once again, when it becomes clear that no further mediation is possible, “if the finitude is completely canceled, all limits must vanish, and the only the infinite I must remain left as one and everything.” Here, one is not only abandoning the not-I, but the finite I as well. Fichte now paints the I as a sphere of light emanating into darkness, the distinction between light and shadow is nowhere to be found in the infinitely subtle gradations of dimming shadow; the not-I is now portrayed as “a very low quantity of light.”

In both portrayals of impasse, there arises the necessity of an abrupt, fundamental change of standpoint. But how close are these two figures—on of a knot to be sliced, the other of an endlessly inclusive sphere? The one, almost a “dismissal” of the not-I, the other, a change of perspective entailing an all inclusive unity. Fichte introduces the second figure as a view of the issue (\textit{Sache}) from “another side.” One might presume that this other side approaches the question from an

\textsuperscript{117} In his lectures on the \textit{Grundlage}, Heidegger zeroes in on this term. He writes, “Alle Philosophie ist Offenbarmachen, Verbindungen[?] und Vermittelung eines Machtspruchs der Vernunft” (Heidegger, GA28 161). Given the ascension of the Cartesian concept of human existence, and its corresponding eclipse of an analysis of human existence in terms of \textit{Dasein}, the finitude of human existence cannot be thought otherwise than through this strange demand that the fundamental ambiguities of human existence be collapsed in favor of the pure identity of the I. In other words, the decree only has its necessity out of the irresolvable conflict between the I’s intended absolute character (and existence above all factual conditions) and the ineluctable necessity of positing a limitation, indeed, of something not-I which would determine it (see also Strube, 1994).
orientation toward the absolute. As a figure of the absolute, this inclusive totality of light and shadow is more of a shift in perspective than a violent excision; in accordance with the concept of substantiality, the distinctions are merely quantitative—without real (i.e. qualitative) distinction.

What, then, is the orientation of the first side? Here, the orientation affirms the a basic qualitative duality, one at work in the concept of efficacy. The centrality of efficacy in the constitution of this figuration is unmistakable: “The authentic, highest, most totally inclusive task is this: [to determine] how the I is able to act upon the I, given that they are supposed to be entirely opposed to each other” (143). From this standpoint, the shift in question appears as an exclusion rather than inclusion. Furthermore, this orientation does not explicitly maintain the distinction between the limited I and the I as absolute. Arguably, between the inclusive sphere of light and shadow and the sliced knot of qualitative opposition, the difference is something subtly more than two perspectives on the same issue, but the strange distance between the two conceptualities discussed above. In the sections to be examined ahead, the co-thinkability of these two orientations will prove decisive for understanding what is truly dangerous in Fichtean thought.

In light of this task, we must now inquire how these distinct concepts of efficacy and substantiality can be brought into relation. This task will bring us to the very site of the Gordian incision — the opening of an abyss between light and darkness — as we attempt to think the elusive between of efficacy and substantiality.
Chapter 7
Inter-active and Independent Activities

Neither efficacy nor substantiality is able to establish 1) the determinacy of interdetermination or 2) their own applicability in isolation from an activity constitutive of their content. We must show why neither, when taken alone, can fully satisfy the demand which the task of the Wissenschaftslehre makes of them, and why, even if we see one as conditioning the other, we are left in a circle which cannot be grounded.

Let us begin with the concept of efficacy. Fichte illustrates the determinative insufficiency of efficacy when he hypothetically posits the not-I as the determining ground of the I in the absence of the I’s positing of itself as limited (146). Efficacy is applicable under the condition of the I’s positing of itself as passive. How, in this case, can the I know itself to be limited? For, to posit this reduction for itself, it must be able to compare its current activity with its past degree of activity. Even given that it is determined to be undiminished at time A, and diminished at time B, it cannot yet posit this diminishment for itself; “For this [to be possible], it is necessary that it be able to compare its condition in moment A with its condition in Moment B, and that it could distinguish the different quanta of its activity in both moments—and how this is possible has not yet been shown” (146-7). The I is unable to determinately posit itself as restricted, and thus passive. But it must be able to posit itself to be passive if it is to ascribe reality (that is, activity) to the not-I.

The problem becomes more explicit when one recalls how judgments of comparison are supposed to take place. For such a judgment to be possible, there must be some way of determinately opposing the prior, relatively unrestricted activity of the I and the current restriction. If we apply the Fichtean version of the principle of sufficient reason, this would require a common relation-ground— presumably the absolute quantum of activity— but also some basis for distinguishing, (within the I) its degrees of activity according to an differentiation-ground. Without
this, the I could indeed be thought to be determined *from a hypothetical, external point of view;* it could, indeed, have its activity restricted according to a differentiation-ground fixed by an *external* measure. This is because an external measure would be able to gauge the restriction of the I’s activity according to a determination of the limiting principle’s activity. Within its own economy, however, it would be utterly unclear how it could be determined *for itself*—i.e. how it could know itself to be determined. Thus, given the very structure of the concept of efficacy, the positing of the not-I (as the basis for positing passivity of the I) is required for the positing of the not-I. Without some sense of how the I could initially posit itself as limited, the concept of efficacy simply as no application. A complimentary problem can be seen to arise with substantiality.

The advantage substantiality has over efficacy is that it is not required, originally, to posit an active principle (the I) as passive. However, the problem of the determination (i.e. limitation and restriction) of the I remains. For even if the I *were* somehow able to immediately posit itself to be diminished in its activity (i.e. to partially negate itself) and thus determine itself as passive, it would, as the immediate ground of this positing, be unable to attribute this restriction to the not-I (147). “It is absolutely unclear how this limitation could be related to anything in the not-I that would serve as its cause” (ibid.). The absence of a ground for this ascription of causality to the not-I leaves what must be explained, the “fact of the relation [with the not-I]” as expressed by the fundamental theoretical principle, unexplained and inexplicable. The now merely posited self-relation, given the lack of determining ground, becomes a baldly dogmatic supposition obstructing the course of the *Grundlage* in its aspirations as a form of disciplined knowledge. For if the not-I is *immediately* taken to be merely an illusion, the determinate limitation of the I becomes wholly unthinkable, and it simply becomes an ungrounded presupposition. Without the supplement of an alternative principle of interdetermination, substantiality fails to provide an explanation of what is given as a most basic
fact—the I’s encounter with an opposed principle. There must be a place for the not-I as determining ground. Without such a place, substantiality is of no use to disciplined knowledge.

For the complete theoretical principle to be realized, that is, for the I to be able to posit itself as limited by the not-I, the concepts of substantiality and efficacy must be put into a mutually determinative relation. Efficacy could then provide resources for understanding how a relation to a not-I is possible, thus allowing for the determinate application of substantiality. In turn, substantiality could provide resources for determining the way in which the I is able to posit itself as somehow restricted, thus allowing for the determinate application of efficacy. But it is not enough to say that we need both. The very applicability of each presupposes the other. The application of efficacy presupposes that the I is able to determine itself (via the concept of substantiality); the application of the concept of substantiality presupposes that the I is able to mediate its self-limitation via the not-I (as possible via the concept of efficacy).

In other words, the interdependency of the notions simply leaves us in another ungrounded circle. Fichte expresses the implications of vicious circle in this way: “The I cannot posit passivity in itself without positing activity in the not-I, but it cannot posit activity in the not-I without positing a passivity within itself: it cannot do one without doing the other, so it is simply unable to do anything, and so can do neither” (148). The inapplicability of each without the other seems to condemn us to non-application of both. But the two concepts must have application as they appear to be derived directly from the fundamental theoretical principle; if they can have no validity, then neither can that principle, and consciousness itself becomes wholly inexplicable. On the one hand, they cannot be applied, on the other, they must be applied: we have arrived at another impasse. Given Fichte’s method, it is necessary to articulate the contradiction at the root of this impasse, and, on these grounds, see a synthesis.
What could the terms of the relevant contradiction be? On the one hand, though the rule of interdetermination remains thinkable, it is not clear how it can actually be applied, given the indeterminate circle of conditioned positing. As ultimately ungrounded, one must conclude that the positing of terms in mutual relation simply fails to occur in accordance with the 3rd principle. The first assertion would thus be: “The I does not posit passivity within itself insofar as it posits activity in the not-I, nor does it posit activity in the not-I, insofar as it posits passivity in itself: it posits nothing whatsoever” (148). But the theoretical fundamental principle only operates through interdetermination— if this concept is inapplicable, we are unable to posit activity or negation in either the I or not-I, and thus unable to assert that the I posits itself as determined (i.e. passive) by the not-I (which would be, to this extent, active). Interdetermination must both apply and not apply to the terms of exchange.

As with any unavoidable contradiction, Fichte attempts to find the solution in a further determination of the conflict. Once again, Fichte understands this contradiction in terms of negation, limitation, and reality. What the first assertion negates, the other affirms. The task is to determine their mutual restriction of application without eliminating one or the other; to do this, he must restrict each principle to its own scope relative validity. This implies that interdetermination does and does not apply, and that activity of one in some sense does and in some other sense does not entail passivity in the other. Given the partial applicability of interdetermination, the I only partly posits passivity in itself insofar as it posits activity in the not-I, thus it also partly does not posit passivity in itself in this way. Similarly, it only partly posits activity in the itself insofar as it posits passivity in itself, and also partly does not do so. This is also true with respect to what the I posits of the not-I: “The I only partly posits passivity in the not-I insofar as it posits activity in the I, and only partly does not posit passivity in the not-I insofar as it posits activity in the I, and vice versa.”
In other words, there remains to some extent an independent activity in both the I and not-I which is not opposed by any passivity in the other term. But what does this actually mean?

If interdetermination does not have complete applicability, this entails that there is a remainder of the activity\textsuperscript{118} of both I and not-I which is posited \textit{without} being opposed to a passivity in the other term—activity independent of (not, “in itself,” conditioned by) interdetermination. This means that there is activity in the I and not-I which is, in some respect, not opposed by a counter-activity, but is posited independently of interdetermination as “independent activity.” Because this independent activity is not conditioned by interdetermination, it could serve as the ungrounded ground which allows the above impasse to be resolved—providing a ground beyond the otherwise vicious circle of interdetermination. For this reason, it can serve as the ground of interdetermination’s applicability—without something acting independently of interdetermination, there couldn’t be interdetermination.

And yet the extent to which this activity is independent must be carefully delimited if the validity of interdetermination is to be preserved; the limitation of independent activity and interdetermination must be determined in such a way as to forestall an indeterminate conflict in their respective spheres of applicability. That is, it must be shown that this activity is only independent “\textit{in some limited sense}” (\textit{nur in einem gewissen Sinne}, 149), and in another, complimentary sense that such activities are still interdeterminate with the sphere of interdeterminate activity.

Fichte describes the interdetermination of activity and passivity as \textit{inter-activity} and passivity\textsuperscript{119} (\textit{Tun und Leiden}). In these terms, it must be shown how the independent activity is itself interdependent with \textit{inter-activity} (i.e. in a relation of interdetermination, each is determined through the other) and in some other sense is \textit{not} interdependent. In one carefully

\textsuperscript{118} One might wonder if there is also an “independent passivity”; but this would simply be independent \textit{activity}, since passivity is only passivity in relation to an activity to which it is subordinate. Without the opposed activity, it is, in itself, activity.

\textsuperscript{119} Henceforth abbreviated and translated as ‘\textit{inter-activity}.’
delimited sense, the activity understood to be independent is only determined to be independent in
*interdetermination* with the dependency of inter-activity, and, in an opposed sense, the independent
activity is independent irrespective of any consideration of inter-activity ("unabhängige Tätigkeit *an
sich,*" italics mine, 150). In the course of his analysis, Fichte will conceive of the former as
independent activity determined through inter-activity\(^{120}\), and the latter as independent activity
determining inter-activity\(^{121}\) (and to that extent completely independent of it). Here, we must
remember that we are not (yet) talking of two separate activities, but two senses of a single
independent activity— as inter-determinant and as determinate.

But here a further complication arises. As we will see, the limitation of interdetermination
does require two opposed independent activities— the independent activity posited in the I (as
required by the concept of substantiality) and the independent activity posited\(^{122}\) in the not-I (as
required by the concept of efficacy). Each of these has a sense of independent activity determined
through inter-activity, and a sense of independent activity "in itself" (*an sich*) which is entirely
undetermined through (though determining of) interdetermination. The latter, as the *aspect* of
independent activity which is entirely independent, cannot be thought to be interdeterminate with
the opposed form any more than it can be thought of as are interdeterminate with the inter-activity
they make possible. But with respect to the interdeterminate independent activity, Fichte requires
that the activity be only *mediately* interdeterminate with its opposed form; "They [the independent
activities] do not determine each other *immediately*, but they do determine each other mediately,
through the activity [Tun] and passivity grasped as being in exchange" (150). However, given the
aspect of each independent activity "in itself," it is clear that this mediated determination cannot

\(^{120}\) As will be shown, with respect to the material of inter-activity.
\(^{121}\) With respect to the *form* of inter-activity.
\(^{122}\) Though this activity is posited in the not-I, this is very different than suggesting that the not-I is *ultimately
independently* active. Given the methodological commitments of the *Grundlage*, this independence must
ultimately be shown to be dependent on the activity o the I. Though posited in the not-I, it is the I which
posits.
simply be a single, deferred step away from immediacy or total interdetermination via synthesis. This mediated interdetermination requires that the principles which mediate the opposed independent activities maintain their ultimate independence in some way. That is, this mediation must preserve a sense of the absolute opposition between activities in order to prevent the collapse into an empty circle of pure interdetermination—a collapse which would leave us at the impasse we began with. Though “exchange and independent activity stand under it [the principle of interdetermination],” “independent activity and independent activity in itself” do not (ibid.)— in some sense, these forms of independent activity intrinsically do not permit the application of the principle of interdetermination. Indeed, it is the need for this intrinsic independence which will drive the Grundlage to its most decisive impasse.

The task, at this point, is to show how interactivity and independent activity each form the determining ground of the other. Fichte must demonstrate how the first determines the latter, how the latter determines the first, and how each is thus in a relation of mutual determination. We must again attend to Fichte’s understanding of determination to make sense of this strategy.

If we bring this wider issue to the narrower problem at hand, it becomes clear that each opposed term conditions the other in some respect. Once again, this amounts to saying that the determinate positing of one term necessarily entails the determinate positing of the other, without insisting that one term has absolute priority over the other (the road to dogmatism). Of course, it may be that one term has priority on the order of thinkability, and the other has priority on the order of reality, but the task is realized in unifying these senses in a way which prevents the indeterminate conflict of both orders. Not only must the mere co-thinkability of the terms be demonstrated, but, much more strongly, it must be shown that each term requires the other. This follows from the demand to think the synthetic unity of the principles; the indifferent co-existence of two principles would be an obstacle to this unification and the ruin of the system. At the same
time, the indeterminate identity of both principles (in complete oblivion to the essential, constitutive
distinction expressed in the differentiation-ground between them) amounts to premature foreclosure
of rigorous demonstration. Without preserving negativity, the system collapses into dogmatic
idealism. For this reason, there must always be a characteristic (Merkmal) which prevents the
interdetermination from collapsing into an empty circle of indeterminate identity. One might show
that, in positing A, I posit B, in positing B, I posit A, and thus A=B; but A and B have become
entirely empty and indeterminate. The synthetic unity of A and B must be established in light of
their constitutive distinction, a distinction which grounds the determinacy of an otherwise
indeterminate circle.

For this reason, the demonstration of the interdetermination of two terms is only part of the
task; one must advance until the determinacy of that otherwise empty circle is established on a basis
which somehow transcends that circle. Ironically, it is only through the demonstration of this
differentiation-ground what the unity of the two terms (as “one and the same,” cf. 176-7) becomes
thinkable. This synthetic unity is only what it is through a constitutive negativity—a negativity that
diversifies the moments even as it gathers them together; but this negativity is only such with respect
to the moments taken in isolation—as they are necessarily presented in reflection (recall that
reflection is taken to be a faculty which ‘abstracts’ from the unity of form a diversity of content). In
terms of the whole, there is only the pure, ungrounded positing without opposition and thus without
negativity. “The whole, however, is absolutely posited; it grounds itself on itself” (169). As
moments, the terms are opposed; through this opposition, they prevail in their unity. The sameness
of the moments is not a matter of indifferent identity, but the conflict which establishes the
determinacy of their unity.

*The Determination of Independent Activity through Inter-activity*
To begin, he must first demonstrate how inter-activity determines independent activity (151); or, more precisely, how inter-activity determines (or delimits) a bounded sphere of activity which is not, in itself, interdeterminate with it but is nonetheless posited through the positing of the interdetermination characteristic of inter-activity. Note that this priority of inter-activity (and, hence, interdetermination) does not imply that independent activity depends on inter-activity, but that it entails it, even if latter actually depends upon (i.e. is conditioned by) the former (153). Independent activity is determined through interdetermination, but as independent of it: “In reflection, it is indeed accordingly posited through interdetermination, but as independent of it and what is in exchange by means of it” (152). Though such positing only happens in reflection, because the positing and delimitation of the former occurs through the latter, we would indeed say that the latter determines the former.\textsuperscript{123}

The activity in question must be that which allows for a comparison or relation to occur between the opposed terms—the determination through relation-ground which underlies the relation of opposed terms. Without such a relation-ground, there would be indeterminate discontinuity between the terms which are to be related in exchange, a “hiatus” shattering the unity of consciousness (152). What is this commonality between activity and passivity?

This conditioning ground, as the possibility of exchange, must be independent of it. It must be conceived of as a reality underlying the possibility of exchange. According to the first fundamental principle, reality is to be conceived of as activity (\textit{Tätigkeit}); the pure positing of such activity, without determinate restriction, is conceived of as “an absolute totality of reality” (137). This is the ‘X’ which must be posited independently of the terms it mediates. We recall that this absolute quantum must be posited in order for interdetermination to occur; there must be an initial quantitative positing which is not opposed by another, but which allows such a determinate,

\textsuperscript{123} We might say that inter-activity has priority over independent activity but only in reflection, because it is through initially positing inter-activity that we are compelled to posit an independent activity as prior.
quantitative opposition to exist in the first place\textsuperscript{124}. Specifically, this totality of reality/activity must be posited as prior to its determinate division; it is the ground for (partitive) determination of activity in general, and thus also of inter-activity in particular. As activity, it is independent of the activity it conditions; it is a the independent activity determined through the positing of inter-activity. The relation-ground between this (qua Total) independent activity and exchange is their status as quantities of activity; the differentiation-ground between absolute totality and inter-activity is clearly the limitation of activity which occurs in the latter. In this way, through positing interdetermination, one is also compelled to determine an independent activity for which interdetermination is not applicable. But this has not yet shown us how efficacy and substantiality relate to independent activity.

That is, we have not yet established the particular applicability of the sub-determinations of interdetermination, the concepts of efficacy and substantiality. Only when conceived as forms of exchange \textit{überhaupt} can we see them as determining independent activity, but, when we consider their respective differentiation-ground from interdetermination, we must determine the relation-ground between the sub-determination and independent activity, and the differentiation-ground makes it determinately opposed to the same activity. If we merely establish that the relation-ground is, once again, quantity, and the differentiation-ground is, once again, limitation, we are merely investigating them in terms of inter-activity in general, and losing their status as determinations of inter-activity. How, then, will a more specific determination occur? As determinations of interdetermination, each form (both efficacy and substantiality) must determine independent activity not as the absolute totality of reality, but as a restricted, delimited kind of independent activity. Furthermore, in both cases, only one term of the exchange will have an immediate relation-ground with this independent activity, and this relation-ground will thus serve as an differentiation-ground with respect to the

\textsuperscript{124} Recall the absolute quantum in relation to the opposed quantities of determinate activity in our earlier discussion of quantitative relations.
remaining term (the relation-ground between the terms being, once again, the quantity of activity/passivity in the exchange). How will this help us with our current task? Recall that the impasse which drove us to posit independent activity in the first place was the problem of grounding the determinacy of interdetermination. The relation-ground of one term with an independent activity, the characteristic which distinguishes it from the other term, allows one term to have grounding priority. This is because the independent activity, as *independent*, does not require a further ground. In this way, the independent activity determined by each form of inter-determinacy will supply the ground for the actual *applicability* of that form.

To begin, efficacy posits activity in the not-I *through* passivity of the I. It becomes clear that the ground for this positing cannot be found in the I’s own activity, for then it would not be passivity. It must somehow be posited in something else, something opposed to the I which restricts its activity. But how could the I do this, and what character must this opposed principle have in order to be properly alien to the I’s activity? In other words, what establishes the fundamental, *qualitative* difference between the I and its other (the not-I)? As we have already determined, the common ground between the two is a quantity of activity; the quantity of activity negated as the passivity in the I equals the quantity of activity posited in the not-I. Fichte writes that quantity can thus be understood as the relation-ground or “ideal-ground” between I and not-I. It is an *ideal*-ground because it establishes the determinacy of this relation *in reflection* (establishing the thinkability of this relation for the reflective I); however, it does not establish the possibility of this relation in terms of its qualitative opposition in the first place. All determination requires negation; without a restrictive principle which qualitatively opposes the terms of the relation, it is not yet clear how this determining intelligibility is possible in the first place. Consequently, the ungrounded circle of *interdetermination* is left entirely indeterminate; this ideal-ground of quantity presupposes a yet-to-be determined principle which would establish the qualitative differentiation-ground making such
“transference” possible. We are now seeking the ground of this distinction, the ground which breaks the fatal, indifferent circularity of the exchange; we seek a real-ground for this relation.

Whereas the ideal-ground establishes the posited determinacy of a qualitatively opposed principle for the reflective I, the real-ground is deduced as that prior, real activity which is provisionally posited as existing in-itself (independent of the reflective I’s passivity), in order to supply the separate, determining ground for the I’s passivity. In other words, if the not-I were not posited as, in some sense, independently active, the experience of the passivity of the I with respect to it would be completely unaccountable.\(^{125}\)

Notice that, if the real-ground is granted complete autonomy from the I (not just with respect to efficacy), it becomes a Ding-an-sich, the cornerstone of dogmatic realism but also an unavoidable “deception” on the part of the imagination. Fichte warns that this autonomy is to “go no further” than the extent to which the I is conceivable passive (157). In fact, as a sub-determination of interdetermination, one must conceive of the independent activity of the not-I as a further determination of the independent activity determined for interdetermination in general, that is, of the “absolute totality of reality.” With respect to efficacy, it is indeed independent; but, for absolute totality, it must be conceived as a partitioning of the absolute quantum. Thus, only with respect to the particular limitation of efficacy is the not-I independent. This independent activity is the differentiation-ground between I and not-I in the relation of efficacy, grounding the opposition of I and not-I through this posited independent activity of the not-I.\(^{126}\)

\(^{125}\) For example, how could one conceive of oneself as passive and restricted by a figment of the imagination?

\(^{126}\) We will set aside, for now, Fichte’s lengthy discussion of the forms of realism and idealism which emerge with respect to this notion of real-ground. Let it suffice to say that realism wants to posit this real-ground as absolutely autonomous from the I, and dogmatic idealism fails to demonstrate why the notion of a real-ground is inevitable. Transcendental idealism demonstrates how the notion is unavoidable, creating a conflict within Vernunft (Reason is compelled to posit its emergence as absolutely opposed to itself); Fichte’s “practical idealism” deducing the emergence of a “real-ground,” even as it understands it as something which should not be posited as autonomous, necessitating an infinite task of overcoming its recalcitrant opposition.
The concept of substantiality requires that we develop and maintain a distinction which has not been of central importance heretofore. That is, one must make a distinction between two “totalities”: the “totality of actions” and the “absolute totality of reality.” The former refers to the totality of possible determinate actions of the I— the sum over “all” the individual possibilities for action; the second, the totality is identified with “activity in general” (139)— the whole, unlimited positing of the I in its pure activity, without respect to its positing in its determinacy. Any determinate action of the I (as acting in opposition to the not-I) involves both an instance of action and the restriction of action to one kind of action among many. In this way, both the activity of the I and activity imputed to the not-I can be conceived in relation to absolute totality, whereas the only the former can be posited within the sphere of the totality of actions. Recall that it is in reference to the latter that the activity of the I can be conceived of as passive; it is active in relation to the not-I (140).

But, when it is in relation to the not-I (as passivity subordinate to its activity), it cannot be the case that it somehow identifies with the totality of possible, determinate actions which are not realized by the not-I (it is not even clear that the activity attributed to the not-I can be conceived of in terms of action at all); the I is not active as the remaining, excluded set of possible determinations not realized by the not-I\(^\text{127}\), but insofar as it can be identified with activity in general in its pure spontaneity. In these terms, the problem becomes how the limited (Vermindert) activity of the I can be related to absolute activity of activity in general (that is, with the absolute totality of reality) in such a way that it excludes the not-I. In other words, there must be some differentiation-ground between the two forms of restricted activity (that of the I and the not-I) which allows the first to be related to and the second to be excluded from the sphere of absolute activity.

\(^{127}\) In any case, there must be a qualitative, absolute distinction between them, even if the not-I is to, finally, have no absolute standing of its own.
As we have already seen, the concept of substantiality alone does not afford us an explanation of the qualitative opposition at work in the I positing itself as determined by the not-I. Both the (opposed) I and the not-I are accidents of the absolute activity’s substance. How are they to be understood as distinct from each other, given that there is no qualitative opposition between them? There must be some basis, in the activity of the I itself, for the basic qualitative opposition between the limited I (in its opposition to the not-I) and the not-I. This cannot be activity in general, as this would beg the question of how diminished activity can be conceived of in terms of activity which is absolute, and, as such, undiminished. It follows that the sought after differentiation-ground between the two forms of diminished activity must be the relation-ground which somehow allows the reduced activity of the I to be conceived in relation to activity in general while maintaining the exclusive opposition of the activity imputed to the not-I. What could the nature of this activity possibly be, given the restriction of the opposed I?

Fichte writes, “this character of the I, however, which cannot be attributed to the not-I, is its positing and being posited absolutely without any ground... that activity must be absolute” (ibid.). But how could something absolute, and necessarily unconditioned and unlimited by an opposed term, also be thought of as a limitation or restriction of the totality of activity (something which would seem to be required if the activity is supposed to be reduced—the limited I’s differentiation-ground with respect to the absolute I)? This ambiguity of the I’s reduced activity is telling, for it illustrates, once again, a peculiar ambiguity in the I’s nature. Here, the ambiguity arises in respect to two domains; one can understand this activity with respect to the limited sphere of objectivity necessarily opposed to it, or with respect to the absolute spontaneity through which it is posited. But, as we have seen, the limited I can only be conceived of as active in relation to the opposed not-I. This can only be because, in the very opposition to the not-I (as grounded in a differentiation-ground), we find the relation-ground which makes a rapprochement with the absolute possible. It is
through its opposition to the not-I that we can distinguish it as spontaneous, undetermined, and ungrounded. However, as Fichte puts it, if we abstract from the pure spontaneity which is the ground for the distinction between I and not-I, and solely attend to the necessary restriction of its actions that must also occur in its relation to the not-I, we can conceive of the activity as reduced and not absolute.

We have here a strange situation: the limited I can only conceive of itself as absolute through its limitation, and it is only when that limitation is severed from its ground that the I appears to be limited. Thus, with respect to the spontaneity of its positing, it is conceivable as absolute activity, with respect to its limitation purely as such, it is reduced and determinate (a restriction of the essentially in-determinate). In slightly more concrete terms, Fichte notes that the I is free insofar as it must choose to act determinately at all, but, with respect to the exclusionary determination of any individual act, it is necessarily diminished (as a restriction of the totality of actions, always ‘co-emergent’ with the counter-positing of the not-I). Insofar as it is caught in the inter-change of activity with the not-I, it is limited; insofar as it occurs through the pure spontaneity of ungrounded positing, it is (qua absolute) independent of this exchange, and we have the independent activity of the I. Notice that we do not have two different activities, but the same activity conceived in different contexts: “they are to be regarded in a double sense” (160).

Fichte further determines this activity in light of the extent to which it conditions the exchange that it takes part in as diminished. Considered in itself (i.e. according to the ground of its activity), it is absolute activity in general (or the absolute totality of reality), considered within the exchange, it is reduced activity— but between these two aspects, as the possibility of that duplicity, hovering, as it were, between them, it is “absolute activity which determines an exchange” (160) which, as Fichte provisionally notes, is nothing other than imagination (Einbildungskraft). It is both
the limitation which effectuates the co-emergence of I and not-I, and the pure transpiring of absolute activity itself.

The Determination of the exchange of Action and Passion through Independent Activity

Fichte asserts that, in the determination of exchange through independent activity, the form of exchange will be determined through independent activity, whereas, before, it was the “matter” (Materie) of exchanging terms that was the starting point in the determination of an independent activity (160). This is because matter, as content, indicates the product of an activity— the concrete manifestation of that activity as already produced and contained in one term or the other. Fichte illustrates this distinction with two reciprocally related propositions concerning iron and magnetism. “The magnet pulls the iron; the iron is pulled by the magnet.” Here we have a relation of activity and passivity—the magnet pulls and the iron is pulled. The almost tautological meaning of these propositions should not make one lose sight of the fact that something is predicated of a magnet in the first, and of piece of iron in the second. Fichte understands these propositions to “exchange for each other” (“[sie] sind zwei Sätze, die mit einander wechseln,”) and that this specific exchangeability is unique to these two (even considered under the total “sphere of propositions”). The question of materiality seeks that which both contain (enthält) or which “lies in” the two propositions and establishes them as mutually exchangeable.

Within the most recent division of the Grundlage, the “independent activity” which was sought out was precisely that which both propositions contain— for instance, that which allowed the mutual convertibility of “the I is passive” and “the not-I is active.” Implicit (i.e. “contained”) in the passivity of the I is the activity of an opposed principle; activity of the not-I “contains” the

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128 Presumably this is because the magnet is being held and positioned in this experiment whereas the iron is resting free on some surface. One might also have posited the magnet as active because magnetism was thought to inhere, as a force, in the magnet. In other words, if I pulled a magnet across a table with a piece of iron, which would be active? This ambiguities of this illustration will be returned to in the final syntheses of substantiality.

129 For simplicity, I will refer to pairs such as this as a “propositional doublet.”
passivity of that which undergoes that activity. Because the concept of efficacy is only applicable through the passivity of the I, an activity independent of this form of exchange had to be posited to establish this convertibility. This activity is contained in both and establishes their specific mutual convertibility. Because the form of this exchange was presupposed in order to find this “material” (Materiale), the specific relation of exchange presented in the concept of efficacy is left ungrounded.

The task, at this point, is to precisely the determination of the form of activity which effects the specific form of exchange in the first place. Here, the “occurrence [Geschehen] of the exchange is reflected upon” in abstraction from the propositions which are in a relation of exchange. Returning to the example of the magnet and the piece of iron, Fichte notes that even this form of exchange requires “that, beyond the iron and the magnet, an intelligent being must be present who observes [beobachte] both, unites the concept of both in his consciousness, and is compelled to give one the predicate (pull, pulled by) opposed to the predicate of the other.” The first case (“the magnet pulls the iron, the iron is pulled by the magnet”) arises from the “simple reflection [of the observer] regarding the appearance [of the magnet and iron in relation.” The form of exchange is presumably determined through the activity of a reflective observation. The second consists of a double reflection—the reflection of the philosopher regarding the form [Art] of observation. We see a number of crucial points intertwined in this passage. First, the event effective of the exchange of the magnet/iron propositions isn’t a physical exchange of forces, but the event of reflection on the part of an observing intelligence. We must suppose that the positing of content in the terms (including the positing of “independent activity” in the not-I) is conditioned by this event. The supposed activity of the magnetic force “in itself” isn’t the “real ground” of the relation, but is posited to be this through this “occurrence,” it is posited as the real ground of the I’s passivity in order to isolate the propositional doublet’s shared content. Secondly, Fichte distinguishes the questioning of the philosopher from that of the observer on the basis of the formers reflection upon
the latter’s reflection. We have, here, one of several qualitative shifts in the Grundlage’s standpoint of reflection. Let us further consider this new level of inquiry.

Because the activities to be sought out first effect the very form of exchange in question, such activities must be conceivable apart from the general and determinate forms of exchange as their conditions. These are, once again, the determinations of a form of independent activity. Furthermore, the shift in reflection is also a shift in the order of determination—the independent activity is now to be determinant. What is most peculiar, here, is that it isn’t yet clear that the independent activity with respect to the “occurrence” effective of a form of exchange has anything to do with the materially independent activity considered earlier. Indeed, as we will see, the distinction between them (the spacing of their synthetic jointure) presents another figuration of the opposed tendencies of realism and idealism.

The Independent Activity determinant of exchange in General

But there is also a second peculiarity to note. Quite early in this discussion of form and matter, Fichte identified the form of exchange in general (exchange in general) as a “crossing”\textsuperscript{130} (Übergehen) from “one to the other” term (160). In light of this, the independent activity in itself must be conceived of as the activity which realizes this crossing. Though he says nothing further about the nature of this activity itself in the current context, it is itself also dubbed “crossing” (Übergehen) in a further discussion (167) and referred to the activity of an “observing intelligence” in the immediately subsequent section (168). Regarding the form of “crossing,” the suggestion here cannot be that the form of the exchange is immediately identical to the activity which effects it; this is because Fichte later characterizes the general form of exchange (in abstraction from the activity effective of it) as “intervention” (Eingreifen). The most important clue to this puzzle is found in his characterization—in the very passage where he labels it (and not just its form) “crossing” -- of the

\textsuperscript{130} This activity will later be identified with consciousness (Bewusstsein) itself (167).
independent activity in question as consciousness (167). Recall that the observing intelligence in the above discussion of the iron/magnet propositional doublet “unites the concept of both in his consciousness”—the activity here must be consciousness as the activity which crosses between these terms. Consciousness doesn’t cross a pre-established “crossing,” it is itself the activity of crossing.

To prospectively use terms Fichte deploys below, crossing names both the “formal character” of the exchange in general and the “material character” of the activity which effectuates the exchange. The latter activity is the activity which exchanges (as opposed to the activity which is passively exchanged). For this reason, the “material character” of exchanging activity must be sharply distinguished from the “material” posited as common in a propositional doublet. It was precisely through an abstraction from the latter that the former was isolated. In terms of the above shift from observation to philosophical reflection, the material character of this activity consists of what it is for philosophical reflection. In such reflection, the form of the prior reflection has become content. The “formal character” presupposed in reflective observation is enacted through an (independent) activity with a specific “material character.” That character is a form of “subject matter” for the philosopher and distinguishes the form of exchange determinant activity under consideration from the other forms (i.e. those of substantiality and of exchange in general). The enacted form and enacting activity are distinguishable in reflection, and the latter is determined (again, only for reflection) on the basis of the former. However, because the activity in question effectuates (vollzieht) this form in the first place, the activity is posited as conditioning (and determining) the form and is thus independent of it. For reasons we will further explore, only in abstraction from this effectuating activity is the formal character of Übergeben determined as an intervention.

131 We will explore the further ramifications of this when we return to the section in its proper context.
Thus, when Fichte proposes a “heuristic method” of abstracting from the content of these forms of exchange to examine the effected form of these syntheses (162) he is referring to the method of abstracting the formal character of the determinate forms of exchange from its material components, and using the “formal character” thus isolated to determine the “material character” of the activity effective of it.

The Independent Activity determinant of efficacy

The exchange of efficacy involves the positing of activity in the not-I on the basis of the passivity of the I. If we follow the above “heuristic” method and abstract from the components (Glieder) of efficacy’s exchange (I, not-I, passivity, activity), we are left with the pure (Reine) form of a “positing through a non-positing or a transference [Übertragen]” (162). It is here that he introduces the distinction between the “formal character” of a determinate form of exchange and the “material character” of the activity which effectuates it: “this is thus the formal character of the exchange in the synthesis of efficacy and consequently the material character of the activity which exchanges (in the active sense of that which effectuates the exchange).” Fichte is quick to note the determinative priority of the activity: “this activity is independent of the exchange which is possible and effectuated through it, and does not first become possible through it [i.e. the exchange]” (162). In connection to this independence, we must attend to the fact that this “positing through a not-positing” remains a form of positing—one which is independent of the I and not-I as posited in determinate relate the exchange of efficacy.

As Fichte points out, if we agree with him that “all positing is the prerogative of the I,” then “this activity of transference—[required] to make possible [any] determination through the concept of efficacy—is to be attributed to the I“ (163). This means that the I is active in positing itself as passive, and the not-I is passive in being posited as active. The not-I receives the activity of the I.

The Independent Activity determinant of substantiality
Recall, first, that the concept of substantiality developed out of the impasse resulting from double aspect of one part of the fundamental theoretical principle. If the “I posits itself to be determined through the not-I,” it must somehow both posit itself as determining and determined. The concept of substantiality determines the indeterminate conflict between the I as determining and the I as determined; just as the fundamental synthesis posits the I and not-I within the divisible I, the synthesis of substantiality posits the determining and determined I as “exchanging” accidents within one substance. Hence, whereas the synthesis of efficacy concerns the exchange of I and not-I, the exchange of substantiality occurs between the I (as determining) and the I (as determined). In connection with this, recall that “substance is all exchange conceived in general; an Accident is something determinate which exchanges with another exchanging [determinate]” (142). Furthermore, as the “absolute totality of the real,” the I is fundamentally [ürsprunglich] the “one substance” within which “all possible accidents, and so all possible realities, are posited.” Such accidents are determinations of the divisible self as absolute totality of the real or the “absolute quantum.”

Accordingly, “In the exchange of substantiality, activity must be posited as bounded through the mediation of absolute totality” (italics mine, 164). But we must consider the mediation of this positing of a bounded activity not simply in terms of “absolute totality” but in the strange duplicity of the positing of the “non-posited” (i.e. the positing of the latter as excluded); the “formal character” of the exchange of substantiality is not a ‘positing through an absolute positing of totality,’ but determined to be “non-positing by means of a positing.” This is because every limitation is also an exclusion; “that [part] within absolute totality which is to be excluded by the boundary is to be posited as not posited through the positing of the bounded activity, as that which is absent in the same” If every determination is effected through a restricting (Einschränken) or de-limitating (Begrenzen), then every determinate positing must also be the “not-positing” of the unrestricted remainder. Hence,
“[t]he absent remainder [Das Mangelnde] is posited in the absolute totality; it is posited as not posited in the exchange” (164). Note, in this passage, that absent remainder isn’t simply excluded from the bounded, but from the exchange itself. Furthermore, note that absolute totality is referred to as “the absolute totality” and not either “absolute totality” or “the absolute totality of reality.” How could the absent remainder be excluded from this exchange if it effects it? Why “the” absolute totality? What are the terms of this exchange?

In his consideration of the “material character” (discussed below) of the activity positing and effectuating the exchange, he notes that “[w]e are merely enquiring how it [the bounded activity] can exchange with the unbounded” entirely abstracting from (i.e. excluding any consideration of) what is “not-being-posited [Nicht-Gesetzt-Sein] in the bounded activity” and which is, though necessarily considered as “already given [schon gegeben]” insofar as its very exclusion implies its pre-giveness, presumably would distract us from the consideration of the pure form of substantiality’s exchange. Even so, if the terms of exchange are thus the bounded and unbounded, the absent remainder both mediates this exchange and is found nowhere within it because it cannot be part of it. The exchange itself is constituted through its exclusion. To see this more clearly, again consider the definite article, “the.” If the totality posited in exchange were considered to be the “whole, purely and simply determined sphere [Umkreis] comprehending all reality,” (143) i.e. substance, the very fact of positing it as a term in exchange with another term would determine (and necessarily limit) it through that exchange, make it an accident of a higher substance. It would no longer be determined absolutely. Though the “absent remainder” is indeed posited in “the absolute totality,” its exclusion from the exchange between that totality and the restricted activity suggests—by the very logic of substantiality— that it is excluded from a “pre-given” (cf. schon gegeben, above) and (relative to the exclusion) unlimited totality. If the absolute totality of reality is indeed to be identified with

132 This strange double exclusion—the exclusion of das Mangelnde and the exclusion of any consideration of it—will return in a decisive way in our further discussions of substantiality.
substance, it must be posited as including the absent remainder—not merely as an undifferentiated remainder somehow posited in “the” totality, but as an accident within a total system of accidents (substance). But what could absolute mean if it doesn’t mean the absolute maximum (cf. 137)? Let us further consider some ramifications of this in his discussion of the material character of the independent activity effectuating this exchange.

“The material character of the action [Handlung] which itself posits this exchange must accordingly also be a non-positing through a positing, and indeed through an absolute positing.” Here again, Fichte determines the “material” character of the independent activity in question through the formal character of the exchange in its “pure form”—i.e., through a consideration of the exchange in isolation from its contents. However, now we are treating the character of a kind of activity—a form of positing which is, as positing, necessarily referred to the I. This independent activity of the I “itself purely and simply posits a part [eine Glied] of the exchange—absolute totality—and first by means of this [vermittelt dieses] it posits the other part of the same [exchange] as reduced [verminderte] totality—as smaller than the totality” (164). The terms of the exchange—the absolute totality and the limited activity—are posited through this activity in this two-staged way: the reduction is only posited through the totality which is also its measure. As the exclusion of the activity from the bounded sphere, the activity takes the form of an divesting [Entäußern]—an renunciation (or “emptying out”) of the excluded activity which is also an self-exteriorizing (165).

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133 totality, though having priority over diminished activity, remains dependent upon this independent activity; as posited, it is still derivative of absolute positing.

134 One must mention that this word was also Luther’s translation of the Greek word, ekéνosis, found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians: “Er, der in göttlicher Gestalt war, hielt es nicht für einen Raub, Gott gleich zu sein, sondern entäußerte sich selbst und nahm Knechtgestalt an, ward den Menschen gleich und der Erscheinung nach als Mensch erkannt” (Luther Bibel, Phil 2, 7). This word was also prominent in the early Lutheran hymns of Nikolaus Herman, was used in a Christmas hymn to indicate, once again, the descent of God into the most humble of forms, and the concomitant ‘relinquishing’ of His divine power. Here is the third verse of the hymn:

_Er äußert sich all seiner G’walt,_
_und wird ein Kindlein klein;_
As before, one must also think of a passive counterpart of this activity; the passivity opposed to the activity of exclusion is nothing other than the excluded activity forming its object. But this exclusion is not an exclusion “to”—it has no determinate term which would receive the excluded activity. In this way, we do not have (as in the case of efficacy) the transference of an activity from one domain to an opposed term, but the exclusion of a part of totality from a diminished activity. There is, then, a strange indeterminacy in the ‘destination’ of the excluded activity. Whereas the transference of efficacy always has a determinate object (which “receives,” as it were, the activity transferred), “[h]ere, on the other hand, there is merely exclusion. It isn’t of any concern, here, whether the excluded is posited in some other thing and what this other thing might be” (165). This indeterminacy is not somehow accidental in addition to the structure of substantial exchange, but, for Fichte, the very form it must take. We will see that this unavoidable indeterminacy will destabilize any straightforward determination of a definitive, “total” sphere of reality.

What, then, of “the absolute” totality discussed above? Fichte’s final point in the discussion of substantiality’s formative activity concerns the distinction between substance and accident:

“Every thing is what it is. It has those realities which are posited as they are posited: \( A = A \) (§ 1). For something to be an accident of such a thing means this: that something is not posited through the positing of that thing. It does not belong to the essence \([\text{Wesen}]\) of that thing and is to be excluded from its fundamental concept \([\text{Urbegriff}]\). This determination of the accident is what we have just explained. In a certain sense, however, the accident is to be attributed to the thing and posited within it. In light of this, the absolute totality is always an absolute totality of something; it refers to the totality of the thing as including both essence and accident, the substance of a specific

\[\text{er liegt dort elend, nackt und bloß in einem Krippelein.}\]

Fichte inaugurates its philosophical usage.
thing among other things. It is when this “thing” under consideration is the I that the fundamental instability of an absolute totality becomes manifest.
Chapter 8
Consciousness as Crossing

The Synthetic Unity of Exchange and Independent Activity in General

In the Fichtean dialectic, synthesis must come after analysis. Now that a form of independent activity has been determined through the presupposition of each of the forms of exchange (namely, exchange in general, and exchange as determined through the synthesis of efficacy and substantiality), and three forms of independent activity were characterized and shown to effectuate (i.e. determine) each of those forms, Fichte needs to demonstrate the synthetic unity of each activity-exchange doublet. Unfortunately, the task is even more difficult and convoluted than it first appears. Given the distinction between formal and material independent activities, it isn’t clear how the two, apparently distinct forms of activity relate to one another.

Furthermore, in order for a synthesis between independent activity and the three forms exchange to occur, the forms of exchange must be determined in abstraction from those activities. The required synthesis can’t occur between the various forms of independent activity and the forms of exchange already determined through them, for the latter would already be determined by the former, and it would make no sense to posit the former as determined by the latter (a necessary stage in the Fichtean synthesis). But, when isolated from the forms of activity which effectuate them and establish their shared content, the three forms of exchange themselves have a double character. In isolation from the effectuating (“formal”) activity and content constitutive (“material) activities, the effected form of the exchange necessarily becomes determinate in opposition to its content and vice versa.

Fortunately, the syntheses required have a familiar and characteristic pattern: At each stage, the opposed terms of a doublet will be shown to be parts of “one and the same” synthetic unity.
What were initially encountered through analysis as discrete moments for reflection will be shown to mutually presuppose each other; this is achieved through the demonstration of the impossibility of positing either term in isolation. The “sameness” of the terms does not indicate their identity for reflection—far less that they “mean” the same thing (if this were the case, it would not be possible for them to be opposed at all)—but that the terms articulate the jointure of a unity which determines the *necessity* of their opposition when one abstracts from the principle of their synthesis. Structurally, the three syntheses share this pattern: Each form of exchange will require three discrete stages of synthesis. The first (α) establishes the synthetic unity of the respective forms of independent activity. The second (β) establishes the synthetic unity of the form and content of exchange as determined in abstraction from these activities. The last (γ) establishes the synthetic unity of the two activity and exchange. It should come as no surprise that each of the three stages has three stages which also have a similar pattern: If the terms of a given doublet are A and B, A is shown to determine B, B is shown to determine A, and, on the basis of these two demonstrations, A and B are shown to form a synthetic unity, C, which presents the determinate form of their synthetic unity.

In our progress, we will find further evidence that the order of the three forms of exchange is not accidental. Each of the forms of exchange reflects one of the three fundamental principles. The synthesis of substantiality will, once again, echo back to the fundamental synthesis. Through the peculiar logic of the *Grundlage*, it is the “expansively self-enclosing” figure of *Substance* which drives us to the brink of the theoretical section’s central impasse, a point which is, at once, the possibility and impossibility of the system of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and a point which will present the commencement of a very different order of closure.

*The Synthetic Unity of the independent activity of exchange in general*
With the first of the three moments, we must determine the relation between the independent activity determined as effectuating the form of the exchange and the independent activity determined to be the condition of the applicability of each form of exchange as the common content of each doublet. Earlier, Fichte observed that the activity conditioning form is Übergehen or crossing from one term to the other (161). There is no interdetermination without crossing. Now, at this point, he identifies it with consciousness (Bewußtsein); the movement of Übergehen can be nothing other than the definitive activity of consciousness itself (167). This is because consciousness is the immediate knowing (Bewußt-sein) of the I as an intellect (Intelligenz)—a knowing which knows itself as knowing the known. These moments of self-knowing and other-knowing constitute the life of consciousness, and in this we see the necessity of constant crossing (übergehung). As knowing of, it must synthesize variegated content (the known) in a unified form; as knowing itself to be identical with itself in the knowing (compare this to the sought after ‘X’ mediating the judgment A=A on p. 93) even as it knows something which is taken to be different than itself. Were the known completely reducible to the knower within the act of consciousness, consciousness would vanish into indeterminate self-identity. Were the known absolutely foreign to consciousness, it wouldn’t be known. Consciousness must, in its constant activity, both maintain itself as a unity and render determinate the plurality it knows; in fact, it does one through the other—it unifies itself through its knowing of diverse content, and determinately knows diverse content by bringing them into synthetic unity within the consciousness of the I.

Given this manifold content of the known, this activity cannot be conceived of as the “mirroring” of an already determinate unity of cohesive material, but as the continuous interweaving of elements potentially at odds with each other. The unity of the manifold is the product of consciousness. In this context, the unification produced by consciousness must occur through the constant suspending of any hiatus—any breach in continuity occurring through a breach in the total
quantity of activity. We recall that one cannot posit passivity in the I without positing activity in the not-I; nor can the I determinately posit its own activity without positing passivity in the not-I. Any hiatus would be an interruption of this reciprocity, where the total activity is lost among indeterminately conflicting parts. Should passivity occur without a corresponding activity occurring somewhere else, the I would somehow have to posit a pure passivity: the negation of activity without ground in another form of activity. We are once again brought to the impasse of how consciousness could both be unlimited (as the principle which limits itself) and limited at the same time in the same sense. For this reason, if such a hiatus threatens to emerge with respect to the passivity of one term and the activity of the other, consciousness must “go over” to the qualitatively opposed element and posit, in it, the activity corresponding to the passivity of the first.

Consciousness must be a unity; it is not a static, passively unified structure in which its contents are housed, but the constant, recurrent activity of unification which is endlessly striving for self-determination. Encountering a passivity within the I, it posits an activity in the not-I and vice versa. In this way, the crossing of consciousness is always a movement between and beyond its terms— between as positing transference of reality/activity from one term to the other; beyond in its aspiration for the ultimate unity of those terms in light of a posited ‘X.’ It is in this inter-weaving activity that consciousness prevails as the activity independent of the form of inter-change— it conditions those terms in their reciprocal opposition, even and precisely as it seeks to overcome that opposition.

But, if consciousness is produced through a demand for unity, it cannot also be the activity which distinguishes the terms it crosses and seeks to unify. In positing these terms as “to-be-unified,” it also establishes the condition of their opposition; it cannot also be the activity which posits in the terms of contradiction that which necessitates the drive toward unity. If it were posited to do this as well, a fall into dogmatic idealism would be unavoidable. In other words, it would be
completely inexplicable how consciousness, in its essential drive toward unity, would ever come to posit itself at odds with itself. The opposition would have the form of an absolute positing of limitation on the part of an unlimited principle, a contradiction in terms and an obstacle to the progress of the Wissenschaftslehre. One must conceive an activity opposed to consciousness which posits, in its terms, that which opposes them; in other words, one must posit an activity which conditions the material of exchange.

For crossing (Übergehen) to be possible, even necessary, there must be an activity which establishes the discordance of what must be unified; it must be understood to posit, in the terms of exchange (not in its mere form, but in the material content of the opposed terms) that which demands a movement between the terms, that is, something “in” each of the terms which drives consciousness to posit it in opposition to the other. An incompleteness of reality is posited in each term, which, in its incompleteness, necessitates the positing of an opposed principle. But how is this reality found to be incomplete? According to what measure does it fall short? A trace indicating both the incompleteness of that term and the ground of that incompleteness in the other term. It is not as if we have two perfectly complementary portions of one totality, each, as it were, dovetailing with the other as seamlessly coexisting parts of an inert whole. What we have is the simultaneous positing of limited reality in each term, and also, in the same act, a positing of the basis of that limitation in an opposed term. The limitation of one is found in the reality of the other; each term is posited in opposition to the other on the basis of their mutual restriction. Were the terms indifferently co-existent portions of reality, there would be no drive toward unity; were the terms absolutely independent of each other, there would not be a basis to move from one term to the other. They both “fall short” of the absolute totality of reality, even as the reality of each term derives from it. Because the limitation of the claim of each is found in the claim of the other, the terms are opposed. In the mutually limiting positing of reality in each term, such an activity would
serve as the guide (*Leiter*) of consciousness, driving consciousness to unify the terms that the material activity sets in opposition.

Note that, because they stem from two different sub-principles of the theoretical fundamental principle, the terms to be united via the two synthesis are different from each other. But they both attempt to synthesize activity and passivity (with respect to substantiality, the activity and passivity of the I as determining and the I as determined, and, with respect to efficacy, the passivity of the I as determined and the activity of the not-I as determining). The synthesis of efficacy unites the I, as passive, with the not-I as determining principle. We must deduce an independent activity of the I to account for the applicability of that concept—this activity provides the ground for the diminution of the I (the quantum of activity in the not-I determines the quantum of activity in the not-I). With respect to the synthesis of substantiality, the terms to be united are the I as unrestricted, determining activity (identified, in this respect, with the absolute totality of reality) and the I as restricted, determinate activity (identified with a determinate quantum of activity as opposed to the whole [*alle*] of activity). One might, for reasons which will become even more apparent as we proceed, refer to the first synthesis as the synthesis of reality, and the second synthesis as the synthesis of ideality. Each synthesis needs the other. We recall that the synthesis of efficacy is unable to account for how the I is able to determine *for itself* that it is determined (i.e. that it is able to *posit itself as determined*); the synthesis of substantiality is unable to account for how the I might posit the not-I as determining the I. Efficacy needs the possibility of the I’s self-determination (that is, the possibility that the I posit itself as determined)—without a posited passivity in the self, one cannot posit activity in the I. Substantiality needs a principle which would render intelligible how the I could be determined by the not I (i.e. the synthesis of efficacy); this is because it is unthinkable that the I (as a purely positive principle) could limit itself without mediation. Without an independent activity being posited through one or the other synthesis, the
two syntheses would be absolutely dependent upon one another, meaning that it would be inexplicable how either could be applied in the first place.

The independent activity with respect to the matter of exchange (as derived through the presupposition of exchange) “gives” (gibt) the X which is sought as the mediating principle—the relation-ground between activity and passivity (152) which is identified with the absolute totality of reality. Above, we discovered that this activity, with respect to efficacy, is an independent activity of the not-I. With respect to the synthesis of substantiality, this activity was the spontaneity of the I qua activity (as opposed to the I opposed to the whole [alle] of activity) as opposed to the object-directed activity of the I (which is passive and constrained in this respect). In each case, we have an activity which is understood to be independent, and thus the contrary activity (i.e. the passivity of the I as determined by the not-I in the case of efficacy, and the passivity of the I qua restricted, object-directed activity with respect to the synthesis of substantiality) is understood to be dependent on that opposed activity. With efficacy, the I is restricted or determined by the not-I; with substantiality, the I is restricted or determined by the free activity of the I itself, as positing a determinate quantum of its activity in opposition to the totality of activity. The independent activity is held to posit, in each term of the synthesis, that which makes possible to move from one term to the other. We have seen that, in each case, the independent activity directs us to the other principle (I or not-I). The not-I is independent only with respect to its determination of the I; without the I, the independence of this activity (which was only posited due to the I’s passivity) is meaningless. With respect to substantiality, we again see that independence only in determining the dependence of the second principle—as the ground of the positing of self-limitation; as we have seen and will see again in more detail, the I is unable to posit itself without positing itself as determined, and the spontaneity of the I is unintelligible apart from such determinacy. The activity independent of the

135 If one principle (I or not-I) were understood to be independent with respect to both syntheses, one would presumably have either dogmatic idealism or dogmatic realism.
material of exchange is thus that activity which posits activity in one term and passivity in the other— for, with respect to limitation (as opposed to the activity of the I as absolute principle), there is no activity (determining) without passivity (determined). With efficacy, the activity of the not-I leads us to the passivity of the I. With substantiality, the activity of the I leads us to the passivity of the determined and thus determinate I.

However, as independent (even if that independence is “dependent,” for reflection, on the prior positing of interdetermination) each becomes, as it were, a reference point with respect to the absolute totality of reality. Substantiality operates explicitly with respect to this totality— the I as restricted is a restriction only with respect to this totality. With efficacy, the independent reality of the not-I is the reference point for the I’s restriction; the not-I is what is real in opposition to the I’s ideality. For efficacy, the totality of the real is the independent not-I (an independence which is only dissolved with respect to a higher synthesis). Though X, the relation-ground which makes the synthesis of the opposed principles (passivity and activity) possible, is in some fashion posited in both terms (as activity and passivity) and can only be contained in both, it is not a matter of breaking a homogenous unity in half; that is, the trace (Spur) of this totality is posited in each term, but differentially. The material activity\(^\text{136}\) only posits activity or reality in one of the terms. Given passivity, one is lead back to that activity; given activity, one must think of what is passive to that activity. It is for this reason that this X is a guiding principle for consciousness. Given the unthinkability of each principle in isolation from the other, consciousness must constantly attempt to determine one with respect to the other. This entails that consciousness (as the activity independent of the form of exchange) is itself only thinkable with respect to the activity which determines its content. This is to say that consciousness, far from being the conditioning principle of everything (as it would be is the

\(^{136}\) This abbreviates the activity effective of the material of interchange.
case of “dogmatic idealism”) must be understood in its interdetermination with the material principle.

For this reason, the formal and material kinds of independent activity can be shown to be interdependent, for there is no crossing-over without the trace which distinguishes and opposes the terms which are “gone” over, and there is no opposition between the terms without the commonality which conditions their opposition, a commonality at work in the crossing between them. Though the concretely opposed terms are required for crossing to prevail as such, the movement of crossing, as independent activity, must be conceived of as occurring through its own spontaneity, according, that is, to a ground within consciousness itself. Only because consciousness, as consciousness (that is, as crossing), must constantly cross between terms, is there the necessity of positing the activity which concretely distinguishes the terms of that crossing (167). Once again, the seemingly pure reciprocity of interdetermination does not indicate that absence of a priority of one over the other. Both with respect to the order of emergence and the order of knowing, one term is prior and the other subordinate. Crossing transpires without ground; it is only dependent upon the materially independent activity to the extent that it must be thought in relation to it. Once again, we have an activity which, “in itself,” is unlimited, but limited with respect to the essentially limited.

The Synthetic Unity of the Form and Material of exchange

With respect to the conditioning, independent activity, the form and material of inter-activity can both be thought of as produced, and, to that extent, as material resulting from the form of their production. To be able to distinguish form and material in inter-activity, one must first suspend any interest in the independent activity which conditions them. In doing this, we are able to attend to the structure of inter-change as such (i.e. considered in the form of its transpiring) as well as with respect to the determinate components of the inter-change. Formally, the inter-change is an “intervention” (Eingreifen) of the opposed terms; in the relation of intervening, the terms are defined
through the activity of one and passivity of the other. The determinate relation of activity and passivity can be thought of as the relationship of the terms, the concrete configuration of activity and passivity effectuated by intervention. Notice that, with the bracketing of the conditioning activity, the formal term is understood to be the *active* term, and the material term is the concrete, determinate *result*, as it were, the *enacted* configuration.

Unsurprisingly, the form and matter of inter-activity are interdeterminate, once again asymmetrically with respect to the orders of emergence and knowing. The specific relationship of activity and passivity can only be effected if there is an engagement through which one term can be active and the other passive (without such an engagement, neither activity nor passivity are *thinkable*). To posit the relationship of the terms is thus already to determine the activity of engagement. In this way, “intervention” is determined *through* the relationship of the terms. The reverse is true as well, but with a strange shifting of priority. To posit an activity of intervention is always to posit an *actual* activity, and thus a determinate activity. Though one can speak of “possible” intervention, and even of intervention in general, it is not possible for an instance of intervention to exist merely as an indeterminate, “general” activity. Just as one can discuss various ways in which one might spin a wheel, the actual occurrence of spinning a wheel must have a determinate form; it is impossible to spin a wheel “in general” except through a singular, determinate instance of doing so. Similarly, intervention is only enacted as *such* through an actual instance of activity, and thus as determinate activity. Fichte writes, “Since, in mere *form*, an exchange in general is posited between them, the matter of this exchange, i.e. its type, the quantity of action and passivity, etc. posited thereby, is simultaneously *determined* completely without any further ado. They necessarily exchange, and do so only in one possible way, determined absolutely by the fact *that* they exchange” (169). The concreteness of any instance of inter-activity (“*daß sie wechseln*”) brings with it the necessity of
positing the determinacy of that relationship. To posit intervention is thus to posit a singular relationship of engaged terms; relationship is posited through intervention.

The Synthetic Unity of Independent Activity and exchange

In each case, the formal aspect of the activity in question is the form they have as activity, the material aspect is merely the concreteness of the form with respect to the exigency of determination. Thus, the synthetic unity of each activity is defined (is what it is as such) by the formal character as activity; now, when the forms of the respective activities are conceived in their interdependence with the material concreteness of their actual occurrence, they are no longer merely formal but “absolute.” Thus, the synthetic unity of independent activity is to be understood as “an absolute crossing” and the synthetic unity of inter-activity is to be understood as “an absolute intervention, entirely determined through itself” (169). The interdetermination of the two, once again, is asymmetrical in form.137

At the level of the whole “circulation” (Kreislauf) the activities are “one and the same.” But this cannot mean that the activities are to be construed as identical with each other without regard to their constitutive differences, rather that the unity of these activities is manifest precisely through those differences. When one treats each moment in isolation, one is ineluctably drawn into positing the remaining three; the result is thus a fourfold unity of interdeterminate activities. Each of the Momente138 requires the other, as distinct from it; in positing each one, one must inevitably posit the remaining three. The illusion of their separateness arises through the distinctions fixated through reflection (which “abstracts” from their formal unity in order to reflect on the diversity of their content); only “in reflection” can they be conceived in isolation from one another.

137 In fact, the independent activity can be thought of as the pure, effectuating form which entails the material concreteness of inter-activity.
138 Moment is Fichte’s term for a determinative component understood with respect to its inclusion in the complete “circulation” of determinacy; the unity of this determining circulation is what Fichte means in calling the various moments “Eins und Ebendasselbe.”
For instance, the components of the relationship found in inter-activity can only be distinguished according to their incompleteness with respect to each other, but the distinguishing incompleteness in question occurs through the activity which posits, in each term, a trace of their dependence on the other. And, as we have already seen, the terms, as opposed in exchange, require intervention to make the relation between them possible. Finally, this intervention is only possible given a crossing which constantly goes between the opposed terms—there is no engagement without the activity effectuating the mediation of the engaged terms. Just as one may say that the branches and the roots of a tree are not distinct entities, but parts of one and the same organism, so too are these terms not independent of each other, but in a fourfold relation of reciprocal interdetermination. This is not to say that the parts are equal, or even have the same priority with respect to knowing or emergence (consider the place of crossing with respect to relationship, for example), but that, precisely as unequal and opposed to one another, and only as such, are they part of a whole—unthinkable, that is, in isolation from each other. “Yet the whole circulation is absolutely posited. It is because it is, and no higher ground can be given for this” (ibid.). The manifold unity is posited all at once; it is only because of a limitation of reflection that we must determine them piece by piece.

139 It is telling that Fichte is much more predisposed to use figures drawn from mechanics.
140 The apparent “serial ordering” of the emergent order is, thus, the counter-image of the order of reflection. “In itself,” there is no “order” but the simultaneous co-inception of the elements in the whole; against the order of reflection, the co-emergence of terms is determined according to a first moment— the indeterminate determination of absolute positing. We will have to investigate to what extent this conflict of direction recapitulates the conflict between substantiality (as the “all at once” synthesis) and efficacy (in its presupposition of opposed terms).
Chapter 9:  
Ideal and Real Ground

The Synthesis of efficacy

Excursus on the determinate ordering of the forms of exchange

One might wonder why the analysis does not begin with the more determinate forms of exchange (substantiality or efficacy) and then work its way up to the general form, for it seems that we would begin with each as a term of synthesis, and establish the concept of exchange in general as that synthesis. But we have seen this ordering from the beginning: the positing of exchange in general (as the concept of the synthesis of the mutual limitation discussed with respect to the third fundamental principle) and the positing of its determinate forms, first with efficacy, and finally with substantiality. This accords with the way we must originally “work ourselves down” from the highest theoretical synthesis to the determinate syntheses which make it possible (see our discussion of this at the beginning of this section). That we have the same order here is no accident—we see how exchange in general already exists as a synthetic unity; now, we are in a position to see how the sub-determinations of this concept, which are required if exchange is to apply at all, themselves form synthetic unities. But this is not the whole story. In fact, we can understand the ordering of the stages of exchange in general, efficacy, and substantiality from the original analysis of the theoretical fundamental principle and, not coincidentally, from the progress of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis already in play with the three fundamental principles.

The I posits itself to be determined by the not-I. Examining the structure of this principle, there is, indeed, a priority of terms which can be analyzed in terms of this threefold determination. The I posits itself absolutely, that is, thetically. And yet, insofar as a synthesis may condition this thesis for the understanding, this thetic positing must be understood (again, for the understanding) in terms of the possibility of a most basic synthesis which allows the I to posit itself in and through an antithesis—the possibility, in other words, of a basic interdetermination of I and not-I which makes
this self-positing intelligible for the I as an intellect. With respect to absolute activity, there is no higher ground for the I’s positing of itself, and it does so absolutely out of its own unrestricted activity. However, if we investigate this basic synthesis as it pertains to the theoretical intellect, we note, at first, a basic antithesis. The I posits itself as determined by the not-I – this part of the statement contains a fundamental antithesis, and thus there is, most basically, an antithetic positing which must be understood in terms of both the basic antithesis it contains and the nature of the synthesis effectuate through the concept of efficacy. We can consider this to be the matter or content of the theoretical fundamental principle for it accounts for what the I posits itself to be in relation to—the I, that is, as an intellect (Intelligenz) which represents to itself an object opposed to it. Finally, we consider the form of the principle: the I posits itself as determined by the not-I – the principle, as a whole, describes the positing of the I with respect to itself as a unity, and it is, in this respect, as synthetic positing. The I returns to itself despite this antithetic (and ultimately representative) activity. There must be a synthetic unification of the I with itself, a unification mediated by a fundamental antithesis, which allows us to come full circle and understand the absolute self-positing of I from the standpoint of the conditions of the emergence of the intellect.

Now, if we narrow our investigation to the analysis of the concept of exchange, we have 1.) the pure positing of the most basic synthesis itself which is a simple unity with respect to absolute positing, but a fourfold synthetic indetermination with respect to reflection. Then, 2.) we the analysis of this synthesis in terms of the opposition of two opposed principles and the thinkability of this relation (efficacy), and, finally, 3.) the synthesis which establishes the I’s basic task of self-determination in light of this basic antithesis (substantiality). Thus, the progress from interdetermination in general to interdetermination as it pertains to a basic antithesis, to interdetermination in the form of a basic self-relation is far from arbitrary. The accomplishment of

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141 In fact, the I must represent in order to return to itself as I, as we shall see below.
the synthesis of substantiality is the culmination of the theoretical section of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, not a minor subsection of a complete table of categories.

But within each of these syntheses, we should recall that we have, again, a threefold structure to the synthesis. The first establishes the unity of the activity effective of the type of exchange in consideration (in general, as efficacy, as substantiality); the second establishes the unity of the formal and material aspects of that type in abstraction from the (independent) activity which effectuates it; the third unites the synthetic unity of the effectuating activity with that of the effectuated activity. But pure, independent activity is only *ultimately* thinkable as the activity of the I; something which is posited through activity in abstraction from the activity producing it could only be identified with the not-I; and the synthetic unity of the two is, once again, understandable as the I’s striving to posit only itself through the positing of the not-I.

*Synthetic unity of the activities of efficacy*

142) We have already seen that the independent activity which effectuates the form of efficacy is “a transference, a positing through a not-positing” (171, cf. 162). Through an original passivity in the I, an activity in the not-I is posited. Formally, then, through a *not-positing* in the I, something is *posited* in the not-I. The activity grounding its content is the one which establishes independent activity in the not-I; this is the activity which makes the not-I the ground of the I’s passivity. The not-I is thus posited as having reality independent of the I. We must now see how each of these activities is unthinkable without the other and are only separable in reflection.

142 Once again, we will be using the first three letters of the Greek alphabet to indicate the three stages of these complex syntheses: α for the determination of the synthesis of the activity effectuating the synthesis at issue, β for the synthesis of the terms in isolation from that activity (i.e. as produced, not as being produced), and γ for the synthesis of effective activity and the particular form of exchange effectuated through that activity (see 171).

143 The hyphenation of *not-positing* is reluctantly introduced to distinguish it from the simple absence of a positing. The act of not-positing is “one and the same” as the act of positing in the opposed term. Similarly, the hyphenation of “opposing” is an attempt to isolate a sense of this word— as a “placing contrary to”— from the sense of conflict and mutual antagonism. Though every antagonism involves opposition, not every opposition is antagonistic.
First of all, the activity of the not-I is only conceivable through the passivity of the I. Thus, the independent activity of the not-I occupies a “bounded sphere” (begrenzte Sphäre)—the limitation of the sphere subordinated to the activity effective of form (i.e. transference) which posits passivity in the I. But what could motivate this positing of passivity of the I, the passivity which indicates the insufficiency of the activity of the I alone in accounting for the degree of activity posited in the I? The transference only occurs when guided by a posited insufficiency in the I—that is, a non-positing of activity in the I. Such a non-positing could only occur on the basis of an activity independent of the purely positive I. In other words, there is no transference without a “direction” from which one transfers, a direction indicated by that X which posits in each term the trace of its insufficiency; that is, something must “guide” this transference (recall 167).

So far, we have merely re-trodden the paths already walked in the prior sections (I, 153-7; and II, 162-3) which derived an independent activity from inter-activity and vice versa. But it is one thing to walk back and forth between two locations, and another to recognize that these two locations are actually one place. The first is supposed to exist in a subordinate sphere to the second; the second is supposed to exist in a subordinate sphere to the first. These cannot both be true without contradiction, unless these spheres are identical—that is, unless they are the same sphere. “Combining” these activities in a single synthesis (which is, once again, less a “glueing” together of separate parts than a moment of seeing the sameness of something singular), we will see that “in the concept of efficacy the passivity of the I, the activity of the same, not-positing, and positing are entirely one and the same. In the case of this concept, the propositions, ‘the I posits something as not in itself’ and ‘the I posits something in the not-I,’ say entirely the same thing. They refer not to different activities, but to one and the same [activity]. Neither grounds the other, nor is one grounded through the other, for the two are one” (173).
However, Fichte recognizes that, for common sense ("der gemeiner Menschenverstand") the assertion that "The I does not posit something in itself" does not appear to say the same thing as "The I posits something in the not-I." It certainly does not seem to recognize that the "something" is exactly the same thing in each assertion. Furthermore, the I is constitutively that which posits itself; to the degree that it does not posit (something in) itself, it is not-I (173, cf. 138) but it must do so—it must posit something in the not-I (to determinately posit itself as I, as we will see later).

Fichte notes that the difficulty stems from a real and ideal sense of *posit*. The not-I is supposed to be the real-ground (that is, the qualitatively/essentially opposed principle) of the I’s self-limitation—not because it posits a limitation within the I, but solely because it has a cancelling (*aufhebend*) effect on that activity; the I is supposed to be the ideal-ground (a ground which is not qualitatively opposed, that is, the ground for a quantitative determination of the I from within the I) of its own self-limitation insofar as it is the being which does posit a restriction of its activity in itself (for common sense, on the basis of the not-I’s determination of it). The ground of a restricted *positing* is in the I; the ground of that *restriction* is in the not-I. But if not-positing something in the I and positing something in the not-I "one and the same," then the distinction between real-ground and ideal-ground cannot hold.

This is because it must be the same thing to for there to be cancelling activity in the not-I and for there to be the positing of limitation in the I; the I, as ground of its restricted self-positing, must also be the ground of that activity which is posited in the not-I—the not-I’s cancelling is none-other than the I’s positing.

Thus, for common sense, the chief difficulty lies in the fact that "What is now merely posited *idealiter* in the not-I must become *realiter* the ground of a passivity in the I; the ideal-ground

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144 We must pause with yet another instance of the word *Aufheben*. Of all German philosophical terms, this one is the most difficult to pry out of the Hegelian edifice. Needless to say, we must set aside the nuances which Hegel has given the term, despite (and precisely because of) Fichte's influence on his thought. Here, the word is explicitly paired with *Vergeben*, and the sense of *posited* (or even decreed) cessation which the word "cancel" brings justly reflect the centrality of positing in Fichtean thought.
must become a real one; and this is something human common sense is unable to grasp” (174). On the one hand, the I posits the ground for its determinacy in the not-I. On the other hand, for common sense, it seems that it is not through this positing that the real-ground derives its efficacy. From the ordinary point of view, it seems that the I posits this ground in the not-I because it has been constrained to do so by the independent efficacy of a real ground.

Yet the intellect faces an impasse if it posits these “grounds” as distinct; it must show how one can determine the other. For there must be some form of relation between the two if the thinker hoping to maintain their distinctness is to avoid the complete inexplicability of the representations of the I (ibid.). Fichte notes that, even if it is allowed that the not-I is able to act upon the I without any assistance (Zutun) of the I (as if the I were merely passive modeling clay awaiting the not-I’s imprint), the question remains as to how is this alien influence (as Real-ground) is to become the basis (i.e. ideal-ground) of the I’s self-limitation, as self-limitation that is the basis of representation as such. If fundamentally opposed principles are to relate, they must have a relation-ground which relates them; however, such a relation-ground would cancel their status as absolutely opposed—the qualitative real-ground would indeed have to become an ideal-ground.

The consequences are quite straightforward: “Accordingly, the deeper sense of the above synthesis is the following: Ideal and real ground are, in the concept of efficacy (and consequently in all cases, as only the concept of efficacy affords one with a real-ground) one and the same. This proposition, which establishes critical idealism and which unites idealism and realism, is unacceptable for [ordinary] people, and the reason for this is a lack of [an aptitude for] abstraction.” (175). For the I itself, this is quite straightforward. The I is constitutively self-positing, and has no more being that that which it posits in itself: “But the I is nothing outside the I, for it is simply the

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145 As we will see, this is not to say that one should reduce the real-ground to ideal-ground or vice versa (this would result in dogmatic forms of idealism or realism), but that the living ambiguity of this unity of ground must be preserved: one must neither collapse into one or the other, or split them into two separate grounds.
I. Now, if the nature of the I consists solely and simply in the fact that it posits itself, then, for it, self-positing and existence are one and the same. In it, real-ground and ideal-ground are at one. Conversely, non-self-positing and nonexistence are equally one for the I; the real and ideal grounds of negation are also one. If this is spelled out in part, the propositions, ‘the I does not posit something in itself, and ‘the I is not something,’ are equally one and the same” (176). It is nothing more than what it posits itself to be, and to the extent that it does not posit something in itself, it is not that thing. From this, it follows that if the I does not-posit something in itself, it posits it as outside of itself (i.e. in the sphere of the not-I); and if the I posits something outside of itself, it is not-positing it in itself (ibid.) If one accepts the connection between positing and being developed in the Grundlage, it is unintelligible what “reality” would mean for the I if one abstracts from it any concept of positing.

This allows us to identify the activity and passivity of the I and not-I— for the “real” activity of the not-I is nothing aside from what the I posits it to be. The activity of the I and that of the not-I are one and the same, as are the passivity of the I and activity of the I, as are the activity of the I and that passivity of the not-I, as are the passivity of the not-I and passivity of the I. But this is not a homogenous, indeterminate mish-mash of confusion, it is not the same as saying that the I and not-I are both and to each other active and passive in the same sense, but that the determinations of activity and passivity of either are all of one piece. For the not-I is active only as the passive recipient the I’s positing (only through the I’s positing of activity as not in itself is the not-I posited as active), but this is also the condition of the I’s passivity — that is, it actively posits itself as passive. To consider it passive, we merely have to abstract from the original activity of positing and consider the result: diminishment of activity posited in the sphere of the I. Abstracting from its status as passively “receiving” the activity posited within it by the I, the not-I is active. In

146 But not the I qua Intelligenz— this would reduce the current standpoint to dogmatic idealism. The identity of ideal and real-ground is not immediately evident to natural consciousness, but only to the standpoint of philosophical reflection. See a discussion of this in Zöller 1998 (p. 86).
determining the activity or passivity of either, one is simply abstracting from either the activity of positing or the degree (or privation) of activity being posited. Taken as a whole, there is only a single activity. As soon as we understand there to be the limitation (any limitation) of the I’s activity, we understand that this is one and the same as the positing of a not-I as the determining principle of this limitation. Every act of limitation is thus an “objective action” (178)— the self-limitation of the I is the positing of not-I— one does not ground the other, they are the same action. Consequently, the question “which is the ground of the passivity in the I?” involves the mistaken presupposition of a real distinction between the ground of the passivity of the I and the ground of the activity of the not-I. But it is a different question to ask what the ground of this variegated, synthetic unity of interdeterminate activity and passivity is— that is, the ground of the “the whole of these established exchanges” (177). In other words, it is one thing to say that it is all the “same” activity, but it is another to ask why is it this variegated activity — why this particular interplay of activity and passivity and not just pure, indeterminate activity?

This question address a basic limitation of the whole theoretical Wissenschaftslehre— when we ask “what grounds this interplay?” we are asking how is it that an undifferentiated, absolute activity of the I is determinately reflected upon itself such that it posits an alien principle as the cause of a determinate effect within the I (cf. 136). In other words, why does the I limit itself, a self-limitation that is nothing other than the positing of the not-I? The temptation is to appeal to an act of absolute positing and cut short the whole inquiry (such as we might see in the “dogmatic idealist” doctrine of a pre-established harmony). We might say, the I absolutely posits this interplay out of pure spontaneity. But Fichte points out that it is only the I which is posited absolutely without further ground147. We are left with the requirement for the grounding of a ground (a basic determination of the I), but without the resources (within the theoretical) to further determine that

147 Though he asserts that the I is the only thetic posit here, the positing of the not-I is also, in a formal sense, absolute.
ground: “but it is at once clear that, in the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre, such a ground is incomprehensible as it is not contained under the fundamental theoretical principle, ‘the I posits itself as determined by the not-I,’ but is rather presupposed by that principle” (177). Let us consider the reasons for this in more detail.

Given that the theoretical portion of the Wissenschaftslehre presupposes the determination (i.e. limitation) we are called on to explain, it is itself grounded by the ground we are seeking. To be sure, in the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre we are indeed asking how the most fundamental theoretical principle is possible; we are deducing the syntheses which make the most basic synthesis of the apparently contradictory moments\[148\] in the basic theoretical principle possible, but this task only occurs as the result of a basic determination (or, as will be seen, call for determination) which, though setting the task in motion, simply cannot be understood in terms of that task. Such a determination commences the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre and leads us to the highest theoretical synthesis, but the most basic antithesis presupposed by this synthesis cannot be understood within the sphere of the I’s theoretical self-determinations. Recall that the “theoretical” is identified with I’s more or less passive circumspection of a “reality” opposed to it; the immediacy of this activity, with respect to the I, is nothing other than consciousness (Bewußtsein\[149\]) itself. The I can indeed determine itself to be determined—i.e. to be limited with respect to something opposed to it, but not determine the ground of this most basic determination. We can only be led as far as the fact\[150\] of a determination which is also a determining (Bestimmen) (ibid.) because “there is nothing

\[148\] πίστη: the I both determinately positing itself and positing itself as being determined by the not-I

\[149\] Recall that Bewußtsein is identified with the activity effective of the form of inter-activity in general (167). This activity was determined to be nothing more than a crossing between I and not-I, and thus one which presupposes this opposition and the above, most basic determination. The activity of consciousness is thus also understood in terms of Vorstellung — the representation, effectuated through the activity of consciousness, of the not-I which determines consciousness. The sphere of the theoretical is thus identifiable with the sphere of representation.

\[150\] This word will see more use below, but it already serves its purpose here. It indicates a basic determination which is given but not yet grounded.
immediately contained in consciousness [with respect to this ground] nor could there be.”

Consciousness, presupposing this determinate limitation, lives its life in the wake of an event of limitation which is its own possibility but which, itself, cannot be brought within its sphere as such. Further determining the ground of this basic determination outstrips the resources of theoretical thought: “What this determination would again determine remains entirely undecided in theory, and through this incompleteness we are driven beyond theory into the practical part of the Wissenschaftslehre” (ibid.). In showing how the most basic theoretical proposition is possible, we are also following a trajectory beyond the sphere of the “theoretical” to its exorbitant inception— the emergence of intellect exceeds the scope of theoretical understanding. For Fichte, this recognition of the inability of the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre (or theoretical thought in general) to ground itself on its own terms is precisely what distinguishes the Wissenschaftslehre as critical philosophy from dogmatic thought. It is critical because it recognizes the limit of the theoretical.

The synthetic unity of efficacy as isolated from formative and material activities

β). In abstracting from its formative and material activities, the reflection on efficacy becomes a reflection on the meaning of absolute opposition. What does it mean for two terms to be absolutely and essentially opposed to one another? Abstracted from the activity which makes it possible, the form of efficacy consists of an “emergence through a passing away” (Entstehen durch ein Vergehen) and the content of this interdetermination is “essential opposition” (179). This is because, in abstracting from the effective activity examined in α, we are setting aside any consideration of what is emerging or being destroyed in this event, or what these terms are apart from their emergence or passing away. We are only looking at the bare relation effected between these terms, and what there content is with respect to the other merely in terms of that relation. One comes into being through the a passing away of the other; the terms of essentially opposed to each other. To see this, we must consider what (with respect to the I and not-I’s mutual spheres of activity) actually occurs in the
relation of efficacy before we abstract from the effective activity. In positing passivity in the I, I am positing activity in the I. The latter does not come as the result of the former, but is a single activity (179). This means that the positing of one is the same as the limitation of the other. The activity of the first happens as (and to the extent of) the extinction of the other; to posit one is to negate the other. Abstracting from the form of the relation in consideration of their “content” (in terms of what they “are” for each other if not thought of in the above relation), each must be thought of as the essential opposite of the other; this means that they are not co-thinkable, for one to be is the same as for the other not to be. The activity or reality in one cannot be consistently thought together with the activity or reality of the other. Each “is” the impossibility of the other—they are absolutely opposed. The formal relation of “emergence through passing away” and their “material” status as absolute opposites follows straightforwardly. They are absolutely opposed because the positing of one is the negation of the other; the positing of one is the negation of the other because they are absolutely opposed. These are not separate facts, but two facets a synthetic unity. Only mutually cancelling terms are absolutely opposed; only absolutely opposed terms mutually cancel each other. Here, we clearly see the significance of the X which posits in both terms a trace which drives us from one to the other—the passing away of one is unthinkable apart from the coming to be of the other. This is because the very being (and passing away) of the terms cannot be separated from this relation of reciprocity (181)—the real cancellation of one term is the posited reality of the other; in other words, we again find the identity of ideality and reality: “real and ideal opposition are one and the same” (ibid.). The order of ideality is that of immanence to the positing principle (i.e. the I), that of reality of a qualitatively opposed principle—in effectuated efficacy, the reality of the opposed term is one and the same with the (ideally posited) passing away of the other. Again, one is not reducible to the other—they are the same. Fichte notes that this is fully in line for common

151 Or, more precisely, the principle which grounds the qualitative opposition between I and not-I.
sense; the only reality that is for the I is that which is posited by the I; the ground of that positing is not consciously evident to the I (qua Intelligenz) for whom the opposed term is real, nor is it distinct from the positing of that I.

*The Synthetic Unity of efficacy*

γ.) In considering the synthetic unity of the activity effectuating efficacy (i.e. independent activity) and efficacy as exchange (i.e. considered apart from that activity), we are further driven past the shallow forms of realism and dogmatism toward a true, critical idealism. The synthetic unity of effective activity is understood as a mediately posited (“mittlebares Setzen”) (181) for the activity of one is posited through the passivity of the other. The unity of form and content abstracted from the effective activity is expressed as the “identity of essential opposition and real cancellation” (181-2) because essential opposites abolish the reality of their opposite, and their “material” status as opposites is the same as their mutual cancellation.

1. Mediacy of Positing determining the Identity of Essential Opposition and Real Cancellation

Fichte first seeks to show that the mediacy of positing determines the identity of opposition and cancellation. One might think that such mediacy of positing would suggest that there is a difference between two events of positing, one happens after the other. But this mediacy simply reflects the unity of an event which is understood in dual terms in (and only in) reflection. For an immediacy of positing would suggest that one term is immediately posited as passive, and the other term is immediately posited as active, and this immediacy would force us to conclude that there were two separate events. As we will see, from an absolute standpoint, there is indeed one (and hence immediate) act (184). But for reflection, and in terms of the theoretical principle, this unity is expressed a mediated positing which relates the activity of one to the passivity of the other. This
relation, like any of Fichte’s basic syntheses\(^{152}\), is not the gluing together of mutual extrinsic events, but the transpiring of one event. For reflection, which is already confronted with a duality of opposed terms, the event is of two moments—posing the activity of one through the passivity of the other, but, from an absolute standpoint, the immediacy of both events would imply a duality of positings from an absolute standpoint—two immediate events without an intelligible relation between them. Only because of this mediate positing is the identity of opposition and cancellation possible. If we were forced to posit two distinct, immediate acts, one would be able to think of the coexistence of opposites—they would be able to coexist after the actualization of one and before the cancellation of the other. One would thus be able to isolate the reality of each from the relation of reciprocity (182), and the sought-after character of transference (übertragen) would lack the ‘X’ to guide it—each term would be sufficient unto itself, making the concept of efficacy unintelligible; if the term to which reality (qua activity) is transferred is already thinkable as independently real, the necessity and meaning of such transference would be unintelligible. Furthermore, this would result in the absolute negation of the activity of the I rather than the transference of it to a posited opposed principle.

The ground for this positing must not be taken to be in the putative pre-existence of either (mutually incomplete) term, but in a positing which precedes either—“It must thus lie within the absolute I, and this mediacy must itself be absolute, i.e. established through itself” (184). This mediation allows for “higher” and “more abstract” idealism—one which does not unintelligibly (presumably because it involves a biatus in the posited activity) posit an absolute limitation of the I’s activity on the part of the I, but which involves, not the cancellation of activity, but the positing of absolute activity as mediate. “There is, accordingly, no activity in the I which is cancelled” — the

\(^{152}\) Here is one of the clearest cases where we see that mediation is simply another word for synthesis. For Fichte, mediation (qua synthesis) is the key to intelligibility.
continuity (not cancellation) of activity in mediate positing is also its intelligibility: “Everything remaining can be explained … via the mediacy of this activity. Here, representations are developed out of the I according to a determinate and knowable law of its nature” (ibid.). Only (as before) the actual mediate positing as factum remains ungrounded: “For them [i.e. representations] a ground can be sought out, but not for the law itself” (184). Given mediate positing, the relation between the activities of I and not-I (and thus representation) becomes thinkable according to a law- a fundamental positing on the part of the I (the etymological connection between *positing* [*Setzen*] and law [*Gesetz*] is never lost on Fichte). For reasons already considered in connection to the activity effective of positing, the ground of this law is not thinkable within the scope of the *theoretical Wissenschaftslehre*. The mediacy of positing, as establishing the quantitative degrees of activity (hence reality) in I and not-I supplants a qualitative\textsuperscript{153} idealism with a quantitative one. However, this quantitative idealism is still insufficient because the original (albeit transferring) limitation is taken to be absolute, and, as Fichte points out, an absolute limitation is a “self-refuting” concept\textsuperscript{154} (185). The unconditioned precedence of limitation drives one to a form of realism. Because of the problem of “absolute limitation,” we must consider the extent to which limitation itself conditions the mediate positing considered above, a problem which can be more precisely articulated if we consider the extent to which the identity of opposition and cancellation itself determines mediate positing.

\textsuperscript{153} This is because, in *immediately* positing a restriction of activity in the I, the first form of idealism makes the positing of activity in the not-I equally immediate. Thus the unintelligibility to the law through which *Vorstellungen* of the not-I we developed. This immediate positing severs the link of intelligibility between the activity of *Vorstellen* (as positing) and the *Vorgestellte* (as posited) effectively making the *qualitative* distinction between the two absolute. The second form of idealism, as *quantitative*, grounds the mutual restriction of I and not-I in a single, mediated positing— one which simultaneously posits negated reality in the I and actualized reality of the not-I through *transference*. This limitation of a quantity of activity through transference maintains the thinkability of the mutual relation of activity of I and not-I according to a single principle. Because activity is not simply canceled but mediated through transference, we have the restriction of a single activity in terms of quantity and not two qualitatively opposed activities— hence *quantitative* idealism.

\textsuperscript{154} All limitation implies a limiting principle to which that limitation is *relative*. Since all limitation is relative, it can’t be absolute.
2. The Identity of Essential Opposition and Real Cancellation as Determining Mediate Positing

The task is now to show how efficacy as effected (i.e. the identity of essential opposition and real cancellation) determines the activity which is effective of efficacy. Mediate positing, as an independent activity, determines the form and content of the ‘exchange’ (Wechsel) in efficacy. This activity, as a synthetic unity, both establishes the form of efficacy, and posits in the terms of efficacy that ‘X’ which drives one from one term to the other. One would think that, as the activity which effects the exchange at issue, this activity would fully determine that exchange and not be determined by it. But this activity is conditioned by something, something which is isolated in its pure form once we abstract from that activity— the essential opposition of the terms. Mediate positing may allow for both the form of efficacy and the transference of independent activity to one of its terms as its content, but it requires the opposing traversed in the transference. The mediate positing of efficacy occurs through the transference which necessarily posits reality in the not-I on the basis of canceled activity (passivity) in the I; this means that the positing of reality in the not-I is necessarily the transference of that reality (as activity) from the reality of the I. But this necessity is only possible if the reality of one was the same (unthinkable apart from) the cancellation of the other. If they were independent of each other, it wouldn’t be the case that mediation (as transference) must happen. The cancellation of one and actualization of the other are the same; they are only thought apart in reflection. Thus, the opposition between the two isn’t derived from the mediacy of positing, but is posited absolutely. This opposition, as an “opposition in itself”, is underivable, and “cannot be further explained.” Without such opposition— without the essential opposition between terms— there is simply no exigency to the turn from one term to the other. If these relata

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155 Once again, the reversal of the determination would generate a contradiction if the point were not to finally show that each determines the other as part of a single activity. Here, the reversal shows us that mediate positing is not fully thinkable on its own terms, just as it was previously shown that the “identity of essential opposition and real cancellation” wasn’t thinkable on its own terms. Opposition requires mediate positing; mediate positing requires opposition.

156 As Schlechthin, this must ultimately be an expression of the 2nd fundamental principle in terms of efficacy.
are only accidentally and extrinsically related, the mediacy of positing of one event becomes two events of positing in two separate terms.

Fichte understands this priority of absolute, qualitative opposition with respect to the possibility of mediate positing to be the basis of a form of realism. This is because the quantitative idealism previously considered remains understood, as positing, as an activity of the I. But if this positing is conditioned by an essential limitation (in the form of essential opposition), then it seems to follow that this limitation could not be a product of the I’s positing because it conditions it. The quantitative realist asserts the “real presence of a limitation of the I” (ibid.) which is irreducible to the I’s activity. The I already finds itself limited, and it is only on the basis of this limitation that the mediacy positing of transference occurs. But this is a quantitative realism, beginning with a real restriction of the I’s activity, and is thus a “higher” and “more abstract” form of realism than qualitative realism. Qualitative realism would require the assertion of the existence of an independently existing not-I as determining principle, and is left with the problem of reconciling such an independently existing “something” with the positing of the I. Quantitative idealism has shown that the positing of an independently existing being is conditioned by mediately positing, for only given the transference of activity to it can the not-I be thought of as actively determining. However, this mediacy positing is in turn conditioned upon a prior restriction (i.e. determination) of the I as opposed to the not-I, and this restriction— because it cannot be conceived to be intrinsic to the I as already limited (hence conditioned by this restriction)— is indeed posited as extrinsic to the restricted I. The assertion of such a real restriction is the natural consequence of this.

The quantitative realist admits that it is unintelligible and dogmatic to assert a determinative not-I independently of the positing thereof, but is nonetheless compelled to posit an independent (i.e. real) determination (i.e. restriction) of the I. It is indeed the I which posits the not-I on the basis of this, but the determination itself is held by the quantitative realist to precede the activity of the I. In
other words, the positing of the not-I as the ground of the restriction of the I is explicable on (quantitative) idealist grounds, but the original “real” determination which conditions this is not. Fichte associates this quantitative realism with Kant (186) and quantitative realism is taken to be the same as critical idealism. The I necessarily posits a thing—in-itself on the basis of a ground which is cut off from it. The quantitative realist must, on idealist grounds, posit the not-I as the cause of her representations, for the determination which drives this necessity cannot be traced to anything intrinsic to the I. As was the case with quantitative idealism, however, Fichte notes that we are left with a seemingly untenable position. For how does a real determination of the I become an ideal one? We still need to show “how determination present ‘in itself’ could become a determination for the positing I” (italics mine, 187).

Note that this was already determined to be a basic problem for the concept of efficacy even before the deduction of independent activity (see, for instance, 147). Here, the basic problems is made more complex: positing itself must be thought as an unconditioned activity of the I, but in the case of efficacy, this positing is conditioned by an essential opposition and thus a restriction of the I’s activity. Fichte is very quick and terse here, and there actually appear to be two problems: how could one understand an unconditioned activity to be conditioned by a mere limitation (and thus move from the bounded condition of real restriction to an unbounded act of positing) and how could something utterly extrinsic to the I (as real “in itself”) become a restriction for the I. In the synthetic unity between the effective activity and the exchange effected therein, Fichte hopes to delineate a “critical quantitative idealism” which would address the shortcomings of both quantitative approaches.

3. The Identity of Essential Opposition and Real Cancellation and Mediate Positing as a Synthetic Unity

The quantitative varieties of idealism and realism emerge in the analysis of the synthetic unities of efficacy’s effective activity and its activity as the effectuated exchange. When precedence is given
to the effective activity (as mediate positing) we are lead to a form of idealism; when it is given to the established exchange in isolation from that positing, we are led to realism. But we must not overlook the extent to which each of these unities contain idealist and realist moments. In the case of mediate positing, we had ‘ideal’ transference and the ‘real’ independent activity of the not-I. With effectuated activity, we had ‘real’ cancellation on the one hand, and the ‘ideal’ determination of essence on the other. However, mediate positing, as positing, still presents the ambiguous unity of ideal and real in ideal terms, and thus, grounding the effectuated exchange in mediate positing, we are presented with a quantitative idealism. In turn, through its abstraction from positing (as effectuating activity), the united of the enacted exchange presents the ambiguity of ideal-real unity in terms of an already produced essentiality which is the same as a real cancellation of one by the other. Here, we simply find the cancellation of one term and the actualization of the other, setting aside any interest in the intellect for whom one is canceled and the other is real. In understanding mediate positing on the basis of this relation one begins with a limitation which is already somehow at hand, independently of the positing thereof.

The attempt to make one or the other the sole determining principle leads to contradiction and impasse. If the first is to be the sole determining principle, we are led to the contradictory notion of absolute limitation. Were the second to be the sole determining principle, we would be brought to an impasse in attempting to show how a real determination becomes a determination for the I. As separate, each determines the other, and, to employ a Fichte figure, each must be thought to be subordinate to the sphere of the other’s determinacy. But, if they are separate principles, we have either a flat out contradiction or an empty, circular determinacy. In other words, we have a

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157 We recall from our discussion of the first fundamental principle that the determination of essence is a determination of what follows for and in the I from the positing of something in the I. Hence, the essentiality of opposition is arguably the ideal aspect of this unity.

158 If the determination is not empty circularity, then A and B have some ground of distinction between them. But if each is both determining and determined by the other, that ground would have to be both shared and
synthesis—each is an aspect of an inclusive unity; each is only thinkable in isolation from one another in reflection. “The mediacy of positing and the essential opposition mutually determine each other; both occupy one and the same sphere and are one” (187-8). But, as the opposition between the terms of this synthesis is also the apparent opposition between realism and idealism, “Being and being-posed, ideal and real relationship, counter-posing and being-opposed must be one and the same” (188)—here again, Fichtean idealism is presented not so much as a straightforward idealism as a “middle way” between idealism and realism. The resolution of the impasse between these idealist and realist tendencies is only possible “if the posited and positing principle in the relationship are one and the same, that is, when what is posited in relationship is the I” (ibid.). Only when it is the I alone which is posited in relation can the identity of ideal and real relation be thought.

The “real” moment, here, is that of being posited in relation; the ideal moment is that of positing the relation (ibid.). We recall that, the not-I, insofar as it is posited, is posited in the I as a determination of the I; all “predicates” posited of something which is not the I are ultimately determinations of what the I finds in itself. But this is not a final, dogmatically idealist assertion that the not-I is the product of the I’s arbitrary activity. On the one hand, the I “can only be placed therein (realiter) insofar as it posits itself therein (idealiter)” and this is indeed a strongly idealist claim, but “it can only posit itself therein insofar as it is placed therein”—only by already being posited in the relationship can the I posit itself in the relationship. The I, as pure positing principle, is not itself not shared by each term. If there is no basis for distinction between the two, then their mutual determination is empty. For, what would A be? A would be a determination of B. But what is B? B is a determination of A. There is no basis for distinction between them, they are part of a single determinative sphere.

159 Recall the Mittelweg mentioned on 173.

160 “Das urteilende Ich prädiziert etwas, nicht eigentlich von A [i.e. something not-I], sondern von sich selbst, daß es nämlich in sich ein A forfinde: und daher heißt daß zweite A das Prädikat” (96).
in the relationship to that extent, “because such a relationship isn’t posited through the merely and absolutely positing I, but rather is contradicted by this” (ibid.).

This once again indicates an essential ambiguity in the nature of the I itself. On the one hand, it both posits itself in relation and is a term of that relation. As a term in relation with the not-I, it is not absolute. On the other, it is nothing other than the principle which posits the relation; insofar as it itself is the principle that sets it into relation with the not-I, it is not a term in the relation but the relating itself. The ambiguous identity of being both the posited and the positing principle reflects this ambiguity in the unity of idealism and realism, for the I must posit itself in connection to something ‘real’ (i.e. posited as independent of the I) in order to posit itself at all.

With regard to the I as posited, it is always posited in relation to the not-I because, only through such opposition, is its self-positing determinate and thence intelligible\(^\text{161}\). Without the not-I, no consciousness of itself as distinct from the not-I, i.e. no self-consciousness, no I\(^\text{162}\). Hence, if the I is to posit itself, it is to do so in relation; it is that which is related, and that which posits the relation. As posited in relation, it is passive; as positing itself in relation, it is active. But as a determinate positing, it is necessarily opposed to that which is excluded from its sphere. That is, “the I as it is regarded here is but the opposite of the not-I and nothing more; and the not-I is but the opposite of the I and nothing more. No you, no I; no I, no you.”\(^\text{163}\) (188-9). On the one hand, this is nothing new: already with the third fundamental principle, the I and not-I are understood as posited in a single divisible sphere and would thus be opposites. But now we are in the more determinate sphere of efficacy, and these counterparts are now thought in relation to one another according to that

\(^{161}\) The absolute self-positing of the I without opposition is equated with the “undenkbare Idee der Gottheit”(254). Because the task and meaning of the Wissenschaftslehre is circumscribed by the Denkbar, it quite rightly limits itself to the thinkable self-positing of the intellect (Intelligenz).

\(^{162}\) Recall the connection between the I and self-consciousness in the discussion of the first fundamental principle (97).

\(^{163}\) What is astonishing here is that Du—the familiar You—is used to refer to the Nicht-Ich; the temptation, entirely up to this point, was to think of the Nicht-Ich as an inert thing.
concept, i.e. in terms of mediate positing and absolute opposition. In terms of this, we now see that the I is only posited through not-positing of the not-I; the I is only posited through the not-positing of the not-I (188). With the third fundamental principle, we merely had the task of positing them in the same sphere, the bare condition of that task being their mutual delimitation through divisibility.

With the synthetic unity of efficacy thought in terms of the unity of absolute opposition and mediate positing, the I can be understood not as positing due to a ‘real’ restriction (which, as passivity, drives it to posit a real active principle opposed to it) but as an active positing which is only constrained by the necessity of positing one term through the not-positing of the other. That is, only as posited in relation to the not-I is the I necessarily posited as passive to the not-I’s activity, and the problem that the quantitative systems faced— the problem of a prior determinacy (either absolutely posited by the I or found as something ‘real’) — is now simply conceived as the necessary positing through not-positing required in the positing of either term of a relation. Here, each must be posited through the not-positing of the other, and the determinate positing of either necessitates a counter-positing of an equal restriction in the other.

Taken in isolation, we have a merely circular determinacy— each is what the other is not, each is through the posited not being of the other, but this intertwined, helical positing captures, in form, the distinction between subject and object (introduced here prospectively). As will become clear, the subject is to be the subject of representation, the I for whom something is represented. The object is to be that which is represented for and by the subject. At this point, however, in this prospective use of the terms subject and object (representation has not yet been ‘deduced’), each is merely predicated as being what the other is not. The subject is the I insofar as (and not beyond this) it is in this relation; equally, the object is the not-I insofar as is as the other term of this relation. To illuminate this in (again, prospective) connection with the possibility of the presentation of something opposed to the I, Fichte hypothetical considers the possibility that the I must, by its very
nature, posit in general (ibid.). In positing either subject or object, it must do so mediately through the other’s determinate cancellation. If it posits the object, “then it necessarily cancels the subject and so I passivity arises in it, and it necessarily connects this passivity to a real-ground in the not-I, and so emerges the representation of a not-I existing independently of the I” (ibid.). It posits the object through not-positing activity in the subject, and there is not the mere absence of subject, but a determinate cancelling of its activity (a quantitative negation characterized as passivity and not qualitative cancellation of the subject); the act of cancelling subjective activity is, according to the principle of efficacy, necessarily the same act which posits the ground of that cancellation in the not-I.

On the one hand, this passivity in the subject is nothing other than the representation of something opposed to it which is the ground of the cancellation of its activity. On the other hand, in positing the subject, it would posit the subject as to some degree cancelling the activity of the object and to that extent, free and active with respect to its relation thereto, culminating in a representation of the I as free. The I, as mediately positing the relation of subject and object, would not be passive in this at all— only the subject or object would be (to some degree) passive. To be sure, for activity to be posited in the not-I, the I would be cancelling activity in the representative subject, but not in the I which posits the relation in the first place.

The quantitative forms of idealism and realism arise when either the I (as subject) or not-I (as object) is taken to be the ground of the law (Gesetz) which holds that one must posit one through (or as) the not-positing of the other. But the “affection” (or ‘real’ restriction) of the I which would drive one to posit a ground in the not-I only does so by a law (Gesetz) in the I; and, as we have seen, the positing of this affection as the immediate product of the I’s activity drives on to the absurd notion of absolute limitation. Consequently, it is the case “that this law is neither merely subjective and ideal nor objective real, but rather that its ground lies equally in subject and object” (190).
However, the question of how this ground could be in both subject and object outstrips the resources of the analysis of efficacy and arguably (for reasons we’ve considered in connection with the independent activity effective of efficacy) entirely beyond the scope of the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre as a whole. Though it is unlikely that the analysis of substantiality will provide this ground, Fichte notes that such further syntheses may further determine the character of the grounding, even if the actual ground at play in this grounding is beyond the scope of the theoretical. I again suggest that it is the synthesis of substantiality which folds the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre back upon itself, and, in doing so, presents most forcefully both the condition of its possibility and the impossibility of those conditions yielding to intelligible clarification on the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre’s own terms. The completion of the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre’s circle is also determination of the trajectory beyond it.
Chapter 10

The Determination of Totality

To understand the importance of substantiality in the *Grundlage*, it helps to recall Fichte’s initial determination of substance and accident: “Substance is all exchange thought in general; accident is a determinate [component] exchanging with another [determinate component]” (142). Substance unifies all exchange as a synthesis of its determinate, exchanging accidents. For the theoretical fundamental principle to be thinkable, the “accidental” oppositions and divergences which drive the determinations of I and not-I apart must be thought together. It must be thinkable how the I can posit itself as passive with respect to an active not-I, but also *actively* posit itself as passive. There are two conflicts here— that between the passivity of the I and activity of the not-I, and that between the activity and passivity of the I. In thinking together the absolute activity of the I and its posited passivity with respect to the not-I, substantiality provides the synthesis for efficacy’s antithesis; the possibility of this synthesis is the possibility of the theoretical principle in general. Though efficacy names the synthesis through which the determinate passivity of the I is posited *through* and *as* the determinant activity of the not-I, and thus makes possible representation and the theoretical position of the I, the I has not yet become determinate for itself. This requires a new synthesis, one which relates the positing I to the I as posited (i.e. as posited in relation to the not-I). Substantiality, in relating the pure activity of the I with its passive, objective activity, allows the transference of activity to the not-I to be understood as a product of its own activity; it does this, we recall, by conceiving both forms of determinate activity as restrictions of the totality of activity.

Indeed, the problem of substantiality in its final theoretical synthesis is the problem of totality. The *material* activity posited through the positing of exchange is ultimately die absolute totality of reality (152)— an absolute quantum of activity identified with the totality of the real. Note that the notion of “absolute quantum” already seems paradoxical. It suggests a *determinate* totality, but, given the very nature of determination as limitation, any determination must be a
restriction of a higher, indeterminate whole. A key instability to be explored below is that between the determination of an absolute quantity and the (indeterminate) ground of that determination.

*The Synthetic Unity of Material and Formal Activity*

For a synthesis to be effected between them, formal and material activity must be shown to be interdeterminate. True to his method, he first shows that the first determines the second, then that the second determines the first. As mutually determinate, they are “one and the same”—a synthetic unity. Before this can be accomplished, we must characterize both formal and material activity in a new context—opposed to each other and apart from the exchange they condition.

In this new context, formal activity is characterized as a non-positing through an absolute positing (191)—in the determinate positing of a degree of activity, a degree of activity is necessarily excluded. And yet this does not seem to capture the complete character of this act. Earlier, this was referred to as a divesting (*Entäusserung*, 165)—an act whereby the I “absolutely posits a part of this exchange—absolute totality—and, primarily by means of this, posits the other part of this exchange as reduced activity” (164). It must not be forgotten that, at this most basic level, the absolute positing is the positing of the total *and* restricted activity of the I; as such, the I is *both* passive and active in the act—the total and restricted parts are the components of substantiality’s exchange. This act of determination excludes a portion of the total activity *through* positing the total quantum of activity. In positing a restricted “quantity” of activity, the remainder, which is not-posed within the total component, is nonetheless posited as excluded (*ausgeschlossen*) from that sphere of activity: “it happens that a determinate quantum of absolute totality is excluded from the activity posited as reduced” (ibid.). Note that the activity is not excluded from totality, but from the restricted portion of it. Substantiality begins with an absolute positing of activity, and only through this does it exclude some degree of activity from that activity posited as restricted. As an absolute positing, no higher ground determines this positing—it is absolutely spontaneous. But the activity
excluded thereby is not “annihilated” (*vernichtet*) for it is not held in opposition to positing in general (which would make it absolutely not-posed), but only negated (*negiert*) by a determinate positing (191)— only with respect to a determinate restriction of activity is the excluded quantum negated. The formal activity is thus “an exclusion from a determinate, completely filled, and, to this extent, totality possessing (with respect to what it contains) sphere” (192).

We must remember from its earlier formulation (163) that this second totality is only posited through the absolute positing of an unrestricted, absolute totality. The former is restricted with respect to the latter. What, then, of the remainder between them, the excluded activity missing from the posited activity? We recall that “the missing remainder is to be posited in the absolute totality; it is to be not-posed in the bounded; it is posited *as not* posited in the exchange” (164). If this missing activity is only posited negatively as not part of the determinate quantum, the sphere of excluded reality is thus indeed posited, but predicated purely negatively with respect to the predicate delimiting the posited totality of reality. The excluded sphere remains *in*determinate. In other words, if we understand the above positing in terms of a *concept* which determines the totality posited, then if a predicate is not included in the applicable concept (“*A*”), this neither entails that the negation of the excluded predicate *is* included in that concept, nor that the sphere of the excluded is determined by that predicate. If B is the sphere of what is excluded from A, then B “includes” everything essentially excluded from A, including contradictory predicates (those predicates which are not posited in positing A). Fichte will illustrate the importance of this through an analogy with a magnet and a piece of iron.

But what if absolute totality is to be posited? In its earlier formulation, the restricted activity is posited *through* the positing of an absolute totality. This restriction recoils upon itself: this is not an idle moment of speculation, but an implication of the very structure of substantiality with respect to its possibility. The first moment is indeed the absolute *positing* of totality, and the totality must be
posited as an absolute quantum of reality (129). This suggests that substantiality necessarily involves the determinate positing of totality. But, given that all determination is limitation (122), such a determinate positing of totality leads to a fundamental impasse. Specifically with respect to substantiality, something must be excluded from a quantum which is supposed to be absolute. We must first note what the concept of A is— it can be nothing other than the I as the sole principle of activity. We recall that, because the activity of the I is the ultimate measure (Maßstab) of all activity, it is necessary to posit the I as the “absolute totality of reality” and, “consequently as a quantum in which all quanta are contained and which can thus act as a measure for all [of them].” Further recall that “the concept of reality is equal to the concept of activity” (138).

Hence, the concept of A is nothing other than the concept of the I as absolute activity. If A is the posited totality, then, in relation simply to A, A indeed is an absolute totality of the reality it contains. But, in relation to the excluded and thus indirectly posited B (which includes all the determinations — even contraries— not included in A), it is not absolute totality (192). However, of these two spheres, only A is determinate, and the limited determinacy of B consists entirely in it being excluded from A. As determinate, A has a completeness (Vollständigkeit) which the remainder lacks, for it is indeed the total sphere of the principle which determined it. Because this determinate completeness was only possible via the indirect positing of a higher sphere of which B is the remainder, A is posited as a “determinate and, to this extent, total and complete part of an indeterminate and, to that extent, incomplete whole”\(^\text{164}\) (192). Thus, the activity of positing a determinate totality, as a determination, also implicitly posits the indeterminate whole which includes the determinate sphere along with what is excluded thereby. The positing of this sphere, if abstracted

\(^{164}\) Note Fichte’s use of Ganzen and not Totalität, here. The distinction seems to lie in the fact that a totality is always ‘totaled”— it is fully determined and ‘accounted for’ on the basis of a single principle. A whole (Ganze), on the other hand, may be determinable, but is not (yet) necessarily determined and completed according to a principle.
and isolated from the positing of the determinate total sphere, is equated with the material activity considered earlier (160)—the absolutely spontaneous activity of the I. We recall that this activity was deduced to be absolute in itself but necessarily limited when oriented toward an object. It was prospectively termed imagination (Einbildungskraft).

Imagination was earlier characterized as an “absolute activity which determines an exchange” (ibid.)—it determines (i.e. conditions) the opposition between I and not-I by providing a differentiation-ground between the two. In our current context, the material activity posits a “higher sphere, inclusive of both the determinate and indeterminate” (192). Determining an exchange and positing this inclusive sphere are not different activities. What was first conceived as determining an exchange is now framed as an inclusive positing. The inclusive sphere is the sphere of the determinable opposition of I and not-I, subject and object. We now have two totalities: the qualified, determinate totality posited above and the indeterminate, inclusive totality it presupposes. We are left with a difficult question: what would truly count as the ultimate ground of all interdetermination, as “the absolute totality of reality” (152)?

In order to determine this, we must explore Fichte’s idiosyncratic use of the concepts substance and accident even further. To do so, we need to consider Fichte’s illustration of these concepts through the figure of a piece of iron. In this example, ‘C’ refers to a determinate, moving piece of iron, ‘A’ refers to the determinate concept of iron (der bloßen Begriff), and ‘B’ refers to the predicate “moving.” In the mere positing of iron (A = A), one does not necessarily posit the iron as

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165 Prospectively termed Einbildungskraft—a word which we will spend some time with later.
166 This activity was initially determined through the Wechsel as that which ‘provides’ (gibt) the X indicating the Beziehunggrund betwixt the terms of Wechsel; in this light, it was identified with the absolute Totalität der Realität. However, especially in the determinate forms of Wechselbestimmung, the trace of this absolute totality is differentially present in both terms. As absolute totality, it indeed mediates the terms as their Beziehunggrund; as differentially posited in each term, however, its presence indicates the insufficiency of either term in isolation, and thence also the ground of the distinction between the terms. Recall that, if the terms are indistinguishable, then there would be no ground for supposing that positing one term would be insufficient, for what property would it need which it does not already possess.
167 Recall that these terms are used to refer to I and not-I in determinate inter-relation, cf. 189.
moving (one does not posit $A = B$). $B$ is thus not included with that which follows from the mere positing of $A$—it is excluded from $A$. It is important to observe that for a predicate to be posited outside of $A$ is not the same as having the contrary predicate posited within the sphere of $A$ (i.e. $A = \sim B$ is also not posited). In positing the predicate $B$ outside of $A$, we are not saying that $A$ necessarily does not move, but merely that movement doesn’t follow from the mere positing of $A$. If $B$ were not excluded from $A$, it would mean that our concept of iron entails movement, and that everything stationary would be judged to be not iron. The totality of things which are necessarily in a state of motion ($B = B$) and the totality of things which are necessarily immobile ($\sim B = \sim B$) are both excluded from $A$, which does not necessarily move nor is necessarily stationary. $A$, as $A$, is neither essentially $B$ nor $\sim B$, and, in applying the concept of iron to a particular piece of iron, $C$ (thus, in saying $C = A$), we are neither saying it moves ($C = B$) or that it does not move ($C = \sim B$). This shows us something crucial to the general concept of substantiality.

In the determinate positing of a totality, what is excluded from that sphere is not simply the negation of $A$ as a determinate concept (be it iron or I) for this would create two determinate spheres, that of $A$ and that of $\sim A$ (delimited by the negation of all the predicates in the concept of $A$). What is excluded from $A$ is every predicate which does not essentially pertain to $A$ as such—every predicate which does not simply follow in virtue of positing $A$. The determinate totality delimited by $A$ is thus both the totality of iron (as everything which is iron is necessarily included in its sphere) and not the totality of iron (since it does not include every predicate, such as motion, which may contingently pertain to a determinate piece of iron such as $C$). $A$, referring to the mere concept of iron, refers to the possibility of positing it as the subject of predication at all; everything contained in $A$ as a predicate is simply that which follows from the essential positing of $A$ as subject. The substance of iron is not found merely in its possibility as the subject of predication, but in all of the predicates that pertain to $A$ in a variety of conditions. In positing the substance of iron, one
posits a “higher” totality which includes all possible predications of what can be, though are not necessarily, predicated of a piece of iron. Fichte identifies this higher sphere with the substance of iron. B and ¬B (movement and the lack thereof) are accidents\(^{168}\) of this substance. Substance thus includes, in addition to everything which follows from the mere positing of A, everything which conditionally pertains to iron as a substance.

Fichte lets A refer, then, not to the substance of iron, but iron as a “thing in itself”; but one must resist the immediate temptation to identify it with the same term as used by Kant. A is not a thing, but a concept (192). In considering the concept, we think of it in isolation from conditions which would give it concrete determinacy (e.g. as moving or unmoving), or the “mere” concept of iron as subject of predication\(^{169}\); what we have is iron “determined through its mere concept, according to the principle, A=Λ” (193). But, what could this be other than the most basic, delimiting predicate of all things iron, in isolation from all further (accidental) predicates? In other words, A circumscribes the applicability of the concept of iron. C is thus both included and not included in A. It is included insofar as the bare concept of iron is applicable to it; it is excluded insofar as one of its properties, B, is excluded from it. In one respect (i.e. that of the applicability of the concept) A is the totality of iron; in another, it is merely the (formal) condition of its concrete application, and the substance of iron is the totality. If we recall the connection between the applicability of A = A and the category of reality (99), the first totality conditions the second by qualifying the application of reality to it. Only given the applicability of the concept of iron can it be further determined as substance. The second totality involves the determination of what remains indeterminate with the first.

\(^{168}\) Note the earlier discussion of Akzidens on 165: “Jedes Ding ist, was es ist; es hat diejenigen Realitäten, welche gesetzt sind, so wie dasselbe gesetzt ist. A = Λ (§1). Es ist irgend etwas ein Akzidens desselben heißt zuvörderst: dieses Erwas ist [als solches] durch das Setzen desselben nicht gesetzt; es gehört nicht zu dem Wesen desselben, und ist von seinem Urbegriffe auszuschließen.”

\(^{169}\) In the 1802 edition of the text, Fichte changes the language to read “Ding für sich bestimmt durch seinen bloßen Begriff, nach dem Satze A = A” (193). For the connection between isolation and ‘an sich’ see 196.
Equipped with this understanding of substance and accident, Fichte now seeks to show how material and formal activity determine each other and how both are thus “one and the same.” What, then, would it mean for the activity of form to determine the activity of matter?

The formal activity is a positing which is at once absolute and exclusive. The I is posited as absolute totality. Unlike iron, the I is that which posits itself—it is, as the A in \( A = A \), both subject and predicate of its self-positing. All other predicates (such as, most importantly, other-positing) are excluded from the sphere of A. This is not to say that other-positing is inapplicable to the I as subject of predication, but simply that other-positing does not follow from the mere positing of the I. However, through this very exclusion, other-positing is indeed posited, even if posited as excluded from the I’s mere concept. However, given the priority of absolute positing as exclusion, the positing of that excluded sphere is understood to occur through the I’s own free act, almost as if the positing of a totality were possible without exclusion; that sphere is held to be in no way prior to the self-positing of the I and, in fact, is understood to be conditioned by and the product of the I’s free positing. As we have seen with the synthesis of efficacy, the positing of an object opposed to the I is “one and the same” as not-self-positing, and not–positing an object is the same as self-positing. Not-self-positing is the positing of something which is not the I. Cast in terms of the essential determination of the I as self-positing, not-self-positing would refer to the positing of something which does not posit itself (or, at least, does not posit itself for the I)—i.e., the positing of something to which the concept of the I is not applicable.

Herein lies a crucial distinction: the act of positing of this something can accidentally be posited of the I, but what is posited must be absolutely excluded from the I; the concept of the I cannot pertain to it. Should the I posit something as other (i.e. an object), it would indeed be excluding the posited from the sphere of its self-identity; the thing in question would indeed be posited as excluded from the substance of the I and in absolute opposition to it (i.e., the ‘something’
would be posited as not-I). However, the positing itself, as product of the I’s free activity, is included in the substance of the I as an accident. We must thus distinguish between what is excluded from the concept of the I from that which is excluded from the substance of the I. The first names a quantitative (cf. ‘modal’) opposition and the second a qualitative opposition. In the first, the I determinately predicates restriction of itself, and attributes the remainder of the restricted activity to a posited other. In the second, the I (constitutively) excludes something from itself as fundamentally alien. Furthermore, in parallel to the example of the piece of iron, the exclusion of not-self-positing from the essentiality of the I is not the same as positing the I as essentially not-not-self-positing (or, more clearly, is not the same as saying that the I essentially and necessarily does not posit an object). Just as the piece of iron is neither posited as moving nor as not moving (both of these predicates are excluded from the sphere of A), the I is neither posited as object-positing nor as not-object-positing. Through the I’s absolute exclusion, the I is posited both as a quantitative totality with respect to its essentiality and as a part of a higher, inclusive whole which only comes to be through that act (194).

But what is this indeterminate whole? Is there any determinacy to it which can be found in the relation-ground between self- and other-positing? In other words, what “higher” sphere contains both self-positing and not-self (or object)-positing? Nothing other than the sphere of positing in general (setzen überhaupt). The substance of the I becomes, not self-positing, but positing in general; the essentiality of the I (in and for itself) remains self-positing, and the accidents of the I are instances of objective positing. This positing of a higher sphere, then, depends upon the absolute and exclusionary positing of the I, and this determinative priority of the higher sphere through that positing is yet another quantitative idealist moment. This is because the act of absolute positing can only be ascribed to the I; the I freely posits itself with respect to its essence and, through this self-positing, necessarily posits the excluded sphere of objective positing as well. Objectivity, then,
depends upon the basic action of exclusion effected by the I’s positing of itself. The positing of a higher sphere is thus a (perhaps unavoidable) consequence of the I’s exclusion.

In reversing the determinative priority of material activity and formal activity, one would hold that the absolute act of positing was not, indeed, the self-positing of the I, but the positing of a sphere of positing in general. In this case, the self-positing of the I must somehow be grounded as a not-positing of the not-I. But where would this ground lie? Certainly not in the I as posited in opposition to the not-I; furthermore, though the I remains the general principle of positing, nothing within this sphere itself could serve as the ground of the not-positing of the not-I for, as merely positing in general, it is itself indeterminate. In other words, because positing-in-general isn’t first determined through the I’s self-positing, the ground which determines positing-in-general to self-positing must supply the determinacy absent in the otherwise indeterminate positing principle. The ground supplying this determinacy must be somehow be outside the sphere of the self, and one would thus be driven to a form of realism: “The I is, in this analysis, a representing being that must orient itself according to the constitution of things” (194). Furthermore, this is a qualitative form of realism, as it posits a qualitatively opposed not-I as the ground of the I’s determinacy.

Unsurprisingly, both determinative prioritizations are only partial views. Given the character of an absolute positing of totality, the absolute, exclusive positing of the formal activity is only possible if a higher, indeterminate sphere somehow pre-exists this positing and includes what is excluded in that positing (192). But that pre-existence is only posited through the I’s self-positing. If held as separate acts of positing, the first (absolutely exclusive positing) must be prior to the second (positing of a higher sphere of positing in general), and the second must be prior to the first. For this reason, they cannot be held as separate acts, but only as two aspects (separate in reflection) of one fundamental act. The absolute, exclusive positing of the I is one and the same as the positing of

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170 That is, not simply a “real restriction” or determination in the I.
a higher unity containing both the excluded B and the included A. In this respect, the synthetic unity of will be termed a “combining” (Zusammenfassen)—the positing of a unity through opposition which is at once the positing of an opposition through unity.

*The Synthetic Unity of the form and Matter of exchange*

If we isolate the character of substantiality from the activity which effectuates it, attending only to the effectuated exchange, we are left with the form of “mutual exclusion of the exchanging components from absolute totality” (195). If A is posited as totality, then B is excluded from totality in an indeterminate sphere. If B is indeed reflected upon, then A cannot be understood to constitute totality, but is only part of an indeterminate whole; the reflection upon B is the exclusion of A as totality (not from totality) through its inclusion in a higher unity: “the Sphere, A, is now no longer absolute totality, but is rather, with B, a part of an indeterminate yet determinable sphere” (ibid.). Note that the sphere it occupies is now not a determinate totality, nor simply indeterminate, but a determinable sphere. Fichte once again uses the figure of a piece of iron to explain why. If A (as the determinate concept hence totality of iron) is posited, then movement (B) or indeed lack of movement, which do not follow the mere positing of A, are excluded from that sphere. Fichte notes that, should a piece of iron be posited as moving, the putative totality delimited through A alone is no longer complete— A is now determinable. Why would he think this? We have moved from the ‘in itself’ of A (or what is posited of it according to A = A) to an accident of the substance of iron (an instance of A = B). This relates iron to what is excluded from its sphere; the concept of iron is now in relation to predicates which are attached to conditions not included in the mere concept of iron. To posit iron in relation is to determine \(^1\) it. In relation to these conditions, A\(^2\) now appears to be incomplete, merely part of a sphere composed of A and B.

\(^1\) A no longer is posited as totality or as “filling the sphere” delimited by the concept of totality.

\(^2\) In Fichtean terms, to relate something to something else is to subordinate both terms to a relation which is the Beziehungsgrund between them.
But the matter of interplay presents a different question. In the above analysis, we are given two totalities, the determinate totality of A and the determinable totality of A + B. But what differentiation-ground between these totalities? Fichte points out that, if they lack such a distinction, then they must be taken as a indistinguishable and thence a unity, canceling the very condition of exchange. One or the other must be determined as totality, and the positing of one as totality would exclude the status of the other as totality. It is not the case that one of the terms simple is totality, but that its determination as totality exists in relation to the determination as non-totality of the other term. For this reason, Fichte determines the material content of this relation to be the determinability (Bestimmbarkeit) of the terms in relation (196). The significance of this relatively empty differentiation-ground is illustrated by yet another return to the piece of iron.

Fichte notes that, if the concept of iron, as it exists “in itself,” is fixedly determined to include the predicate ‘remaining in its place,’ then, should a piece of iron be posited as moving, one must posit something extrinsic to the essence of iron as the principle of its motion (197). One’s initial, determinate concept, alone, determines the totality of iron, and predicates not already found in the scope of that totality must be adventitious. If the totality of iron is A with respect to its fixed essentiality, then this motion must be attributed to something else— some opposed B which would serve as the real ground for its motion. The accidental element of B in A+B (for it remains an

173 Specifically, in Fichte’s example, the concept of iron is incomplete with respect to the condition of magnetic attraction and the movement resulting from— a determination not present in the mere (an sich) concept of iron
174 A layer of confusion is added here, for the word determinable (Bestimmbar) refers both to the possibility of determining either A or A+B to be totality, and to the character of A + B as as indeterminate but determinable (as opposed to A which is simply determinate).
175 Note that, in the earliest example, iron is neither posited as moving or as unmoving (192-3)— both predicates are excluded from the sphere of its essentiality. Even here, if the iron were posited as essentially (a unconditionally) unmoving, it would simply be impossible to posit it as moving without thereby negating it as iron. Fichte’s point here is that, given the fixity of one’s initial concept of iron, if it is indeed posited as moving, that movement must be posited in an extrinsic principle (and not that one must reject the fixed principle of iron). Thus, this passage can only be consistent with the prior example if we take the predicate, Beharrlichkeit, not as indicating that iron is immovable, but that (quite consistent with the word’s meaning), left to its own devices, it persists in its current position.
accidental possibility for iron to move) must be derived from the presence or absence of some B ('in-itself') which occasions that accident. However, one might with equal (though not superior\textsuperscript{176}) justification conclude that the determination of iron as inert is incomplete, and that it must further be determined to include a capacity \textit{intrinsic} to iron to respond to magnetic attraction and \textit{move itself} accordingly. Here, the concept is not fixed, and its initial determinacy (A \textit{as A}) is not taken to be the totality of iron. The concept itself must be determined with respect that which was initially excluded from its essential sphere; this further determination no longer posits the iron \textit{in itself}, but in terms of its relation to something beyond it (magnetism) which would determine it. Here, A as subject of predication, \textit{would indeed} be appealed to as the ground of its movement, B. A as the mere concept of iron would be subject to further determination by B; in other words, A, taken in isolation, is now taken to be partly indeterminate and determinable. Certainly some aspect of the concept must be held as determinate, but this determinacy is now simply the occasion for further determination. A now takes the form of determinate determinability.

Hence, there are two totalities here, the first delimited by a fixed and isolated concept of iron, and for which its motion must appeal to an alien ground; in this case, motion isn’t even an accident of the substance of iron. The second totality is an incomplete, open concept of iron which must further be determined in connection to what was initially excluded from its initial determinacy. Each concept (determinate and determinately determinable) \textit{can be} taken to grasp the totality of iron with equal validity, and, at this point, there is no ground for taking one or the other as the ‘real’ totality. Fichte it trying to show, not that one or the other is immediately to be taken as totality, but that one or the other is supposed to be \textit{determinable} as totality and the other is not; one excludes the other in its determination as totality. The ‘something’ distinguishing one from the other is the material content of the terms: the \textit{determinability} of one or the other as totality and the determination

\textsuperscript{176} This would defeat the point by giving the determinable totality priority.
of the other, on the basis of this, as excluded from totality. The equal validity given to the fixed and
determinable concepts of iron shows us that this quality of determinability as totality is itself
essentially relational—only given the determinability of one as totality is the other excluded.

One should not overlook the fact that this determination of the material content is almost
entirely empty. The differentiation-ground which is posited in one term is merely the
determinability of that term as totality; it is only so determinable because the other term is simply not
so determinable as totality. Only because one is, the other isn’t. In other words, we have the
problem of circular (and thus empty) determinacy. But there is an interesting complication, here. If
either is to truly count as totality, it must not merely be determinable as such, for the very character of
determinability (and the higher principle which would determine it) contradicts the concept of
totality. If one of the terms is determinable as totality, this indicates that it is subject to the
determination as (or exclusion from) totality. Determination is a matter of limitation; the
determinable is limitable, something totality cannot be. Totality must not be found in one or the
other putative “totalities,” but in the relation between them.

With respect to the schema in play, the sphere of A + B is the determinable sphere including
both subject and object; one would be tempted to think that it totality in question. But, given that
this sphere is only determinable as A + B, and given that the sphere of B is delimited through its
exclusion from the determinate sphere of A, it appears that A + B must in some sense be
determined by A and consequently not totality. But A, as determinate, must itself be thought of as a
limitation, and thus a limitation of a more inclusive whole, one which includes A but also that which
is excluded from it. One may again be tempted to think of this new sphere as A + B. If A is, as
determinate, is to be determinable as totality, this would imply that it somehow, paradoxically
includes the principles of its determination as totality as well as the unrestricted whole (A + B) in
which it occupies a restricted sphere. In other words, A is a totality insofar as it contains what it is
contained in—A + B. A + B is totality insofar as it contains the principle of its partial determinacy, A, the very principle which conditions it. Each must be thought as prior; if we are to avoid impasse, there must be synthesis.

In accordance with Fichte’s method, we must now see how the form of this exchange determines its matter, and how the matter of the exchange determines its form. If the form of mutual exclusion is held to determine the material character of the components as determinability, one would ground the determinability of one or the other term as totality through the exclusion of the other from totality; the relation of exclusion would precede the determination of one or the other as totality. A would be determined as totality through the exclusion of B, and A+B would be determined as totality through the inclusion of B (or exclusion of A as totality). But this is to ground the status of one or the other term through a mere relation to the other term, and thus the determination of one term as totality would be entirely ungrounded if this relation itself wasn’t grounded. The determination of matter through form presents a special kind of determination (Bestimmungsarten); determination through relation.

The determination of form through matter presents the other: absolute determination. If determinability (as the material content of the related terms) is taken to determine mutual exclusion (as the form), then one would ground the exclusion from totality of one term through the other term by means of the determination of one of the terms (the determinate or determinable totality) as determinable. Given (according to some yet to be determined ground) the determinability of one or the other as totality, the form of exclusion itself would follow with respect to the posited absolute totality; if one is the absolute, it follows that the other is absolutely excluded as totality. This allows the determination of totality to be absolute, but the ground which determines one or the other as totality prior to the relation of mutual exclusion remains to be determined (198). But neither
determinability of one as totality nor the form of exclusion must be taken as prior\textsuperscript{177}. In consequence: “the absolute and relative ground for the determination of totality must be one and the same; die relation must be absolute, and the absolute must be nothing more than a relation” (199). The significance of the material principle’s emptiness becomes clear: the relation is not first and absolutely determined by something present in one or the other term, the relation itself, in all of its aspects, is itself the absolute.

However, given that the synthesis merely presupposes the fact that “the excluding principle is at once determined through the determination of totality and vice versa” (ibid.) we are still left with the impasse of indeterminacy. For even given the unity of the determination of totality and the exclusion of something from totality, we might still ask which term is to be determined to be totality and why? By what rule (Regel) are we to decide between the determinate and determinable in our determination of totality? Given the relativity of this distinction, it is tempting to say that there is no final rule, merely the arbitrary supposition of one as totality and the other as excluded from it. It is equally tempting to suggest that there is indeed a rule for determining which is totality, but we lack sufficient ground for determining exactly what this rule would be. For, “what this rule would be must naturally remain undecided because determinability, but not determination, is to be the ground for the determination of the exclusion” (ibid.). If the rule were to be fixed and established, it would ‘rule out’ the extent to which the character of this relation necessarily involves determination of something incompletely determined and not a pre-given, complete determination; in ruling out the activity of determination (a process which involves the restricted positing of both terms), the reciprocity essential to the exchange would collapse into an absolute priority of one over the other. One is thus left with two incomplete rules or principles, one expressing the relative and arbitrary

\textsuperscript{177} How could one be excluded the other if there is no basis of distinction between them? If there is a basis for distinction, how could they relate to one another at all even as excluding the other from the determination of totality?
oscillation between terms, the other the absolute but undecidable requirement for a rule. Just as form and matter were synthetically united, the two types of determination (Bestimmungsarten) expressed in these principles must be united:

[T]here is certainly a rule, though not one which sets up either of the two modes of determination, but rather both, as mutually determinant by way of each other. No single one of the totalities hitherto considered as such is the one we are in search of; the latter is first constituted by both totalities mutually determined by one another. That which we are speaking of is a relation of the two modes of determination, the relational and the absolute; and by this relation the desired totality is first established. The absolute totality is to be neither A, nor A + B, but A determined by A + B. The determinable is to be determined by the determinate, and the determinate by the determinable; and the resultant unity is the totality we seek. [199-200]

The interdetermination of absolute and relative determination is at once an absolutizing of relationality and the relativizing of the absolute; only the reciprocal determination of the determinate and determinable spheres finally counts as totality.

To explore the implications of this for the task of the Grundlage, let us further consider this mutual determination of the determinate and determinable. Fichte notes that “the determinate and the determinable must mutually determine each other; this means that the determination of that which is to be determined emerges precisely from the fact that it is determinable. It is determinable and nothing more, its entire essence consists in that” (200). In this way, the determination of what is to be determined arises as itself an essentially and purely determinable unity. With respect to the determinate, the determinability (as one, as a unity) is understood as limited; for without the determination through the determinate there would be no quantity to restrict. Hence, in terms of the determinable, the determinable is only thinkable as determinable with respect to the determinate. The determinability, then, is not found in the isolated A nor in A + B thought in abstraction from A, but as a determinable unity bounded through the positing of A, and only then determinable in terms of quantitative opposition within its scope between its Teilen, A and B. “This determinability is now the sought after totality, that is, the determinability of a determinate quantum; it has its
boundaries beyond which no further determination occurs; and within these boundaries lies all possible determinability” — we have, then, an absolute quantum of determinability; the qualitative delimitation of a totality within which quantitative determinations further determine this determinate determinability.

Fichte brings this rather abstract and convoluted schema to the basic matter at hand. The I, in positing itself, posits an absolute sphere of reality within itself. Here, we have an absolute limitation of the sphere, A, but without any further determinacy. We have, as it were, the qualitative positing of A as such but without quantitative determinations of that quality. But we are not thinking here, of a determinate indeterminacy, but a determinate determinability. The determinable is only thinkable as determinable given determinate (i.e. quantitative) restrictions of this determinate determinability. This implies the restriction of the unrestricted totality of the I’s self-positing, and the quantitative (restricted) positing of A. A as determinate qualitative demarcates a quantum of determinable; A as determinable (and, as such, subject to quantitative determination) is posited within that sphere.

Now, though Fichte is not explicit on this here\textsuperscript{178}, the A as the limit of determinability and A as a determination within that determinability have different senses which can be understood in terms of the structure of the copula. The first refers to the A as subject of predication — that which is posited in the I and serves as the absolute basis of further limitation. The second refers to A as predicate, what the I is posited as (self-positing). This second, quantitative positing of A can be identified as a determinate predicate of A as subject. Such restriction occurs through opposition of what are, from the perspective of the absolute, self-positing of the I, quantitative restrictions of its activity, and, with respect to the restricted sphere’s relation to the opposed, excluded sphere, qualitative opposition between the included and excluded. In other words, the I either determinately

\textsuperscript{178} Though this does become quite explicit in a passage to follow shortly.
posits itself or an object— in each case, what is determined (and hence determinable) is the
determinate quantum posited though A as subject. In positing an object, it is certainly not positing
the object as within the sphere of its reality (that is, as something self-positing) but the positing of the
object is indeed something which is ascribed to the I and thus indeed posited within its sphere.
Thus, within the sphere of A, we have both A (the I’s determinate positing itself) and B (the I’s
determinate positing the object). In positing of itself, we have $A = A$; in positing the object, $A = B$.
The totality contained within the sphere of A is $A + B$. It is this totality, as unified determinability,
which constitutes substance (201). Once again, substance is not identified with the mere essentiality
of the I as self positing ($A = A$), but with the unity that exists between what is included and
excluded from that essentiality.

Fichte thus identifies two moments in the positing of substance, one providing the absolute,
qualitative limit of determinability (and even this, must, as the setting of limit, posit a qualitatively
opposed principle in the act of limitation— the not-I as excluded in general, as posited absolutely
outside of the I) and the other through a determinate self-positing or a determinate not-self-positing
(objective positing). “Self-positing occurs here twice over, but in different senses. Through the first
an unconditioned posited is indicated, through the second a conditioned positing is indicated, one
which is determinable through the exclusion of the not-I.” One might thus, likewise, identify two
moments of counter-positing of the not-I. One as absolute and qualitative (identifiable as the
expression of the second fundamental principle) and the other as relative and quantitative (the I
posing its activity as restricted by the not-I, which is the same as the positing of the object which,
as positing, is posited in the sphere of the I’s activity).

But why would this unity be expressed as $A$ determined through $A$ and $B$? In merely
posing $A$, one is positing the fixed, “in itself” essentiality of $A$. Only through its possible, accidental
determinations do we move from this abstract totality to a substance unifying accidents. Now $A +$
B is already determined through A: only given the exclusive positing of A does the excluded, B, achieve a degree of determinacy. But A, in isolation, is indeterminate to the extent that it merely contains what generally follows from the mere positing of A. Within the qualitative scope delimited through its positing, there is a “determinate quantum” subject to further determination. Only through the determination of this determinate but determinable quantum is the determinacy of A fully realized. The determinable quantum delimited through the positing of A is a totality which unites A and A+B. A alone, without further determination, is not yet totality, or is merely the form of totality and not the substance thereof; A+B, as delimited by the positing of A as subject of predication, is only posited through A. Only through the determination of the determinable quantum posited through A is totality realized. A, as conditioning A + B, is A as the subject of predication. A, as part of A + B, is a determinate (self)positing in opposition to an excluded B, which (along with B, considered as the not-self-positing of the I) is predicated of A as subject.

For the sphere of A to include the predicate B, A must indeed posit B as other, and fundamentally grounded in something opposed to itself. In positing B, it is not-positing itself. So, in positing B, it is positing B ‘in itself’ as fundamentally excluded from its sphere. As the positing principle, A is indeed the ground of A (predicate of self-positing) and B (predicate of other-positing). But consider the reciprocal exclusion of A and B as quantitatively opposed predicates; one might, given the ambiguity of not-I/other positing, determine B through A, but it is also possible, even necessary, to determine A through B:

Just as A+B is determined by A, so is B also determined, for it falls within the scope of the determinable now determined; and A itself, as has just been shown, is now determinable. Now to the extent that B itself is determined, A+B can also be determined thereby, and an absolute relation established—since it alone can fill out the desired totality, it must be determined thereby. Hence, if A+B is posited, and to that extent A is set within the sphere of the determinable, A+B is determined in return by B. (202)

The determinability of A as part of A + B can thus also be conceived as delimited through the positing of B ‘in-itself.’ If the quantitative restriction of activity found in the positing of B is taken
as the determinative ground of the determinate self-positing of the I (which is, again, A as predicate) then the ground of that restriction (given its positing as other to A) must be found in a qualitatively opposed principle— B considered as itself a qualitatively opposed ground of determination. A, as ground of positing, is the ideal-ground of A + B, but B, as something posited as alien to the I (as something which is not posited through itself) must be understood as the real-ground of B’s (and the determinable A’s) determinacy as a determinable part of A + B. It isn’t enough to consider A ‘in itself,’ A as the subject of predication; one must now consider B as something which would precede the positing of B. But this consideration of B as preceding the positing of A+B is only motivated by the fact that the I posits the not-I as absolutely opposed to itself. That is, the I excludes the not-I in positing itself, and thus presupposes it. In doing so, it posits the not-I as independent of its positing, even if it is only through this positing that B is posited as preceding the positing of A+B. Just as was the case with A, there is a double positing of B. B is posited as the subject of predication, and, in this fashion (given that the B considered here is the not-I) it is qualitatively opposed to the positing of A. This is to say, then, that the synthesis of the exchange of substantiality is not a stable unity, for the terms which are taken in their absolute, qualitatively opposed postings are not seamlessly unified, but are conflictingly taken as determining spheres of determinability. The quantitative, determinable sphere is not a point of unity, but of contestation.

If we bring this fundamental instability to the concept of substance as totality, considered above, we have the highest synthesis of the effected exchange. On its own terms, substantiality, as the totality which emerges through the determinate positing of a determinable quantum, and the determination of that determinable quantum as conditioning that initial, determinate positing, establishes the relation itself as prior to its terms. “The totality consists purely in the complete relation, and there isn’t anything fixed in itself which determines it. The totality consists in the

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179 One should note the parallel to the material activity discussed in connection with the activity effective of this Wechsel.
completeness of a relation, but not in a reality” (203-4). Totality is thus not a term in relation, but the relation itself. For the terms—A as determining A+B or B as determining B+A, presuppose one another. Only given A do we have A + B, but A + B is the condition of A’s exclusive self-positing. Substance emerges, not from A alone nor from a unity somehow conceived as separable from and preceding its determination of A+B, but from the unity of both. As synthesizing the determinations of A and B (as qualitatively distinct, determinative grounds) it is inherently unstable; it is thus not a fixed unity, but emerges in a dissonance of fundamentally contradictory terms. As the unity of fundamentally conflicting accidents, it has unity only through “the most wonderful of its [the I’s] faculties” which holds “the vanishing accidents just so long as to compare it with that which supplants it. This power is — almost always misunderstood— which from inveterate opposites knits together a unity” (204). This faculty has already been dubbed imagination, and only through it “are life and consciousness possible.”
Chapter 11
Imagination and Anstoß

The unity of the form and matter of exchange in the concept of Encounter (Zusammentreffen) and the role of productive imagination

Recall the instability of “totality” with respect to the form and matter of exchange: “totality consists merely in the complete relation, and there is absolutely nothing fixed which determines it” (204). The form (mutual exclusion) and matter (determinability as totality) of the exchange itself are, in their synthetic unity, understood as a single moment of “encounter” (Zusammentreffen) between opposed terms. The (material) totality which is posited here is merely the accidental totality of exclusive parts. In abstracting from the activity effective of the exchange, one is also abstracting from their principle of unity. As there is no principle to the connection among the parts, the unification is merely the encounter between them. All that is left is the mere encounter of opposed terms. The exclusive parts are the contesting “totalities”—the unstable encounter exists between A (as would-be determinant of A+B) and B (as itself a would-be determinant of A + B (207); the concept of “encounter” doesn’t point to a unity between these grounds, but a bare point of mutual exposure: “A isn’t to be thought and B isn’t to be thought, but the Encounter—the engaging of both is what must be thought, and just this is their point of unification” (italics mine). Nothing masters and unifies the principles, there is merely the point of engagement and it must be thought in the impossible boundary common to both terms.

Fichte returns to his figure of light and darkness to illustrate this point of encounter and the activity which effectuates it. At a “physical” point X, he imagines two immediately successive moments in time, A and B. At time A, there is light; at time B, darkness. As they are immediately subsequent, there exists an impossibly sharp boundary between them, Z. Fichte points out the Z is neither light or dark (existing as it does between them) but also both light and dark (as there is no moment between A and Z nor between Z and B). Fichte notes that one could argue that this
(non)point of encounter between light and darkness is only made into an actual moment through the Imagination, but that is precisely his point. Even A and B are products of the imagination's “stretching out” (ausdehnen\(^{180}\)) of an impossible point.

The Determination of Encounter through Combining

The determinative priority subordinating “encounter” to combining (Zusammenfassen) is expressed in the following proposition: “the encounter of the components of exchange as such stands under the condition of an absolute activity of the I through which it opposes an objectivity to a subjectivity and joins them together.” As before, a proposition asserting the determinative priority of activity with respect to exchange is taken to be a characteristically idealist.

The Determination of Combining through Encounter

The exchange itself is thus a mere encounter; the activity which produces it, a “combining” effectuated through the imagination. In one respect, the pure activity of the I—the absolute spontaneity of the imagination—must be seen as conditioning the encounter (209). As we have just seen, encounter is only possible given the drawing out of the (non)point between mutually annihilating terms. Furthermore, in positing them together, the components are posited by the I as in the I. In fact, this activity must, “with some restrictions,”\(^{181}\) be seen as exhaustively constituting the essential nature of the I qua intellect (ibid.). The I as intellect is the theoretical I—the I understood as positing itself as determined by the not-I (211). If we recall that representation is the representating of an opposed object (104-105); in the language of the I, representation is the determinate positing of an object over and against the I as the representing principle. The I as

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\(^{180}\) This verb, ausdehnen, which also has connotations of extending and expanding, is here associated with “productive” imagination. Productive imagination is that “without which nothing in the human spirit would be explicable—and upon which the whole mechanism of the human spirit can be grounded” (208). The connection between imagination in its originary function and ausdehnen is indeed crucial, for it is precisely out-stretching activity of the I which encounters Anstoß.

\(^{181}\) The restrictions here presumably involve the extent to which the I as Intelligenz is itself conditioned by the practical activity of the I.
intellect, the theoretical I, is the both the presenting I and the subject—that is the I for whom something is presented. The activity here is the activity of representation, the I as principle of productive imagination. But asserting the priority of this activity with respect to both for whom something is presented (subject) and what is presented (object, and the duality of subject and object is the effectuated exchange in this context) is an idealist supposition. Representing activity emerges through the fact that “the I posits a subjectivity, and opposes to this subjectivity another [thing] as an objectivity”— in this we see the inception of “a series of presentations in empirical consciousness” (ibid.). Both subjectivity and objectivity, whose mutual dependence and mediate positing were established in the synthesis of efficacy, are posited through the same act, and this is only established with any determinacy through the activity effective of substantiality. The idealism of this determination is apparent: “And in this way one would have an intelligence with all of its possible determinations purely and simply through absolute spontaneity” (ibid.). The problem here is thus the problem of all purely idealist systems. Fichte notes that if we follow the row of presentations back, we always find the opposition of subject and object; it remains unclear how it would come to pass that an object is posited through the pure self-positing of the I (ibid.).

But how, in turn, could the exchange as the mere encounter of opposed terms be thought as prior with respect to the above activity? It is not the terms of the exchange (subject and object somehow conceived independently from their exchange) which are to be thought as prior, but what is essential to the exchange between them—the mere encounter or touch of each other (Sichberühren) as already present in consciousness. Because the priority is not of the terms, but of the point of mere encounter or touch, it isn’t necessary to explain how an object is posited in the I:

The excluded objectivity doesn’t at all need to be present; one only requires-- if I may put it this way—is for there to be the presence of a check [Anstoß] for the I—that is, the subjective must be extendible no further for a reason [Grund] which lies just outside the activity of the I. This kind of impossibility of further extension would accordingly constitute the described
mere interplay or the mere intervening [Eingreifen]. It would not actively delimit the I, but would give it the task of delimiting itself\textsuperscript{182}. (italics mine, 210)

There are three crucial points to note here: first, nothing objective is posited, only on the basis of a “check” to the I’s extending [ausdehnung] of subjectivity is an objectivity posited— it isn’t the extending of the I’s activity as such, but the extending of subjectivity which is deflected. Secondly, this check occurs on the basis of a ground “just” (nur) outside the I’s activity. Fichte seeks to isolate the minimal quantum of reality required to account for the limitation of the subject. Finally, it is the I which is active in the determination of its own (subjective) limits. This Anstoß is only subsequently referred to an object, the I posits it (something not-I) as a structural requirement in positing a limit to the subjective. Even here there is a priority of ideal activity with respect to the form— the I is that which posits each term in a single synthetic act of representation.

Indeed, Fichte takes pains to point out that there is no actual determination, only the task (Aufgabe) is given to the I in the form of its mere determinability (“bloße Bestimmbarkeit,” 211), its call for further determination. The limitation of the I, which must be determined through the duality of subject and object, is to be determined by the I through absolute spontaneity; as we have seen and will see more clearly in another context, the I as subject of representation is to be determined through the productive imagination. For the I, this determinability isn’t nothing, but is at most a feeling (Gefühl)— he grants that even a feeling is a “determination des Ich,” but not of the I qua intellect\textsuperscript{183}. In other words, it is not a determination for the I, or presented as such for itself— only through this task does the I become an intellect in the first place. The I as intellect is the

\textsuperscript{182}[D]as auszuschließende Objektive braucht gar nicht vorhanden zu sein; es darf nur bloß, daß ich mich so ausdrücke, ein Anstoß für das Ich vorhanden sein, d.h. das Subjective muß, aus irgendeinem nur außer der Tätigkeit des Ich liegenden Grund, nicht weiter ausgedehnt werden können. Eine solche Unmöglichkeit des weiteren Ausdehnens machte denn aus — den beschriebenen bloßen Wechsel, oder das bloße Eingreifen; er begrenzte nicht, als tätig, das Ich; aber er gäbe ihm die Aufgabe, sich selbst zu begrenzen.

\textsuperscript{183}Presumably, it would be a determinate presentation if it were a determination of the intellect.
representative I; the representation of the I, as a determination of this determinability, only occurs due to this pre-theoretical determination of feeling which can only take the form of a task for it\(^{184}\).

Though the most “abstract” of all realisms, the difficulty with this priority of *Encounter* (and thus of *Anstoß*) is that it yet another form of realism and falls prey to the “error of all realism” (211). Once again, the “error” is found in the lack of connection between what happens to the I and what happens for the I. The outward extension of the subjective I is deflected by something alien to the I. How could the I, in its absolute spontaneity, posit such a deflection for itself? In order for it to do so, it must already posit itself to be determinable in this way and, to do that, there must be a principle of limitation already present in the I’s purely and simply “positive” nature.

*The Synthesis of substantiality through the Encounter and Comprehending*

Once again, Fichte must navigate between the twin forms of dogmatism. It must be able to account for the alien and impinging aspect of our representations but also account for the fact that the limitation required for such representations must exist for the I. These two characterizations of idealism and realism present them at the level of their highest abstraction, and if a synthesis were to be effected, the resulting position would be the culminating form of c Fichte points out that it is only through a presupposed “outwardly striving activity” (*hinausstrebende Tätigkeit*, 212) is that activity driven back or reflected: “no activity of the I, no check” (ibid.). Indeed, the verb referring to the expansion of that activity is now a striving, a striving *hinaus*. Though the *aus* of *ausdehnen* suggests the stretching *out* of something into an encompassing space, it lacks the suggestion of a definitive center which would count as the point of origin for that expansion. The *hinaus* carries with it the differentiation of inner and outer—there is a striving from here (*bin as von hier innen*), toward something away from here (*aus*). There is, in other words, the suggestion of directionality, even of center and periphery.

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\(^{184}\) This is one site among many where we note the priority of the practical to the theoretical.
One wonders how this could be identified with the activity of “combining”; there is nothing to grasp together or unite if we consider this activity in isolation. Only given an Anstoß could the activity be conceived as involving opposition; Fichte indeed notes that, though the activity itself is not conditioned by the Anstoß which presupposes it, the determination of that activity for the I is only possible due to an Anstoß. Only given the determinacy of this activity for the I can it be held in absolute opposition to the alien event\textsuperscript{185} which induces the task of self-determination for the I. In this way, the posited Anstoß has determinative priority for the I, and, in fact, conditions the emergence of an I for whom anything can be intelligibly determinate at all: “no Anstoß, no self-determination” (ibid.). Without this self-determination, there is no objective element, and the entire train of representations has no inception. For both impasses to be avoided, Comprehension and Encounter must be determined to be “one and the same.”

Only through “combination” is there an “encountering.” In order for opposites to encounter each other, they must be posited as such through the positing of the boundary (Grenze) between them— the mere point of encounter. The positing of the boundary must precede the positing of each term of opposition, as they are only opposed given the real encounter between them\textsuperscript{186}. But this point of encounter, as such, must thus be common to both terms— there is only encounter if they share a boundary. The imaginative positing (or, in the above figure, “drawing out”) of this boundary is thus the comprehending of the opposed terms and vice versa. The possibility of encounter is the bare point of encounter, the site of an impossible commonality, where mutual annihilation is suspended.

\textsuperscript{185} Note that Anstoß, an event of deflection, is used without reference to an agent or principle which caused the event.

\textsuperscript{186} Cf. the discussion of the identity of essential opposition and real annihilation on pp. 178-81.
In turn, only given an encountering can combination as the activity of boundary-positing be possible. Combining is now identified with the drawing out of the limit as the common point of exclusion and contact. Encountering is now identified with the event of Anstoß.

If we consider combining as the activity of bounding (or limit positing) in general, we note that, on its own terms, there is no determinacy to this limitation— that which is to be limited could be limited at any number of points. Where does one draw the distinction between light and shadow? For there to be determinate limitation, this activity must itself become determinate. That is, in some respect, we must consider this activity as itself determinable, precisely so that it might determine a limit. For the limiting activity to limit itself it would need to be both within and beyond the limit; as determining itself, it must transcend the determination it sets for itself. There are two aspects, then, to this activity: the limitable and the limiting. The ground of the limitation of the limiting activity cannot be in a higher limiting principle, but must ultimately be shown to be a product of the I's simple spontaneity. It is the activity of the I which is limited, and the activity of the I which limits. The active principle of bounding must itself be one of the terms of encounter, for the I must (should) be the ultimate principle of activity. However, as a term of encounter, it must be limitable. The active term in the bounding (what is expanding), considered solely in its activity, must be “one of the components of the encounter” and can only be so under the condition of an Anstoß to this activity (213). Recalling the discussion of the activity independent of the material of substantiality, the activity is simultaneously a term of opposition (cf. objective activity) and principle of limitation conditioning that opposition (simple spontaneity). It is somehow both the limitable and limiting activity. Fichte notes that this most basic limitation is only possible if that (mere) activity essentially progresses toward the “unbounded, indeterminate, and indeterminable” (ibid.). If it merely progressed to the limit it set for itself and stopped, it would be the “absolute positing of a

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187 Or, we might say, the subjective and the absolute.
188 Otherwise, no encounter.
finite I” of contradictory and dogmatic idealism (ibid.)—what posits its own limit cannot be limited. But this means we have another contradiction, for it must then simultaneously be limited and extend to infinity. For the activity to be limited, it must be in some sense unlimited, for it to be unlimited, it must be limited. The two aspects of this activity (the very aspects synthesized in the concept of substantiality) are only opposable at the point of bare encounter, through the provocation of an Anstoß. For these are the terms of an absolute contradiction, the terms of an encounter between absolutely, mutually negating terms.

The only absolute contradiction thinkable for Fichte is that between the finite and infinite. All finite opposed terms have at least one thing which can serve as a relation-ground between them—their mutual determinability (ibid.). But Fichte needs this encounter to involve absolute opposition, where the suspension of mutual annihilation is only achieved through the imagination. Otherwise, the concept serving as a relation-ground would again bound the activity, and the I would limit itself according to its own concept, and no distinction could be made between the I as limiting and the I as limited. The terms of encounter are thus, quite simply, the infinite and finite, the unlimited and the limited:

\[N\]
o infinity, no limiting; no limiting, no infinity; infinity and limitation are united in one and the same synthetic partition.—If the activity of the I did not go into infinity, it would not be able to limit its own activity; it would not be able to posit a limit to this activity, as it must be able to do. The activity of the I occurs as unlimited self-positing: the same activity encounters resistance. If it yielded to this resistance, the activity which lies beyond the limit of the resistance would be entirely annihilated and canceled; the I would, to this extent, be unable to posit itself. But it must indeed also posit beyond this line. It must limit itself, that is, it must to this extent posit itself as not positing itself. It must posit the indeterminate, unlimited, and infinite limit (that which was above posited as B) in this sphere; and, insofar as it does so, it must be infinite. (214)

Notice that the limit is set within the scope (Umfang) of its self-positing, even and precisely in positing itself to be not-self positing. That which is posited beyond this limit it, of course, the not-I, but the actual contradiction is between the I as limited and the I as unlimited but limiting. It must,
itself, posit the beyond if its limitation, and thus be infinite. The opposed terms are, of course, the terms of substantiality—not the I and not-I, but the I as finite and the I as infinite. The absolute contradiction emerges because the I must be both: for the I must limit itself in order to be infinite, and be infinite in order to limit itself. We can make further sense of this through Fichte’s assertion that “[t]he I is only what it posits itself to be” (214). This is not a wildly arbitrary principle of a godlike, protean I which can change its nature on a whim. Recalling our earliest discussions of this matter, the I is, ultimately, nothing other than its own self-positing. It is the principle which posits, and it is that in which something is posited. Furthermore, it posits itself, necessarily, as that which posits itself (94)—for it to posit itself (and not a tree, sparrow, or stream) it must posit itself according to the predicate (or concept) of I. It is thus both subject and predicate of an fundamental judgment. But it is not the I as posited (and thus predicated and determined) which posits itself to be something, and certainly not the I considered as empirical personality. In light, then, of the earlier discussion, we could thus entitled to reverse the above quote: “The I only posits itself to be what it is”— the I is constitutively self-positing, for it to posit itself, it must posit itself as such. Given the above, for the I to be limited, it must in some sense be unlimited or infinite, but for the I to be infinite, it must posit itself as such189. As we shall see, this is not the megalomaniacal delusion of an empirical I, but the necessity that the I posit itself to be in some way spontaneous or free (in positing) in order to posit itself as constrained or restricted (as posited). Even in positing itself to be infinite, it is still predicating something of itself, and the I is thus divided according to the structure of predication. “[I]t determines itself through the predicate of Infinity: thus it limits itself (the I) as substratum of infinity; it distinguishes itself from its infinite activity (which are both are one and the same in themselves)” (214-5). But for this activity to be posited of it, it must be posited as its

189 It would also follow that, for the I to posit itself as infinite, it must be infinite. This would give priority to the freedom of the I, not I as reflectively determined. Of course, neither priority holds absolutely, for it is at just this point that the freedom and (reflective) positing are joined.
activity. To posit infinite activity as activity of the I, however, is to determine it. It is thus posited within the sphere of the I’s activity. In terms of the above schema, \( A + B \) is determined by \( A \). But, if the activity is determined (i.e. subordinated to the sphere of \( A \)) is it not infinite, and the I becomes the contradictory principle of its own limitation. For this reason, the infinite must then be posited beyond the I (215). We have, here, a fundamental instability which Fichte understands in terms of the imagination:

The exchange of the I in and with itself, where it simultaneously posits itself to be finite and infinite— an exchange, which, so to speak, consisting of a conflict with itself, and through which it reproduces itself, in which the I seeks to unify the non-unifiable, at one moment attempting to contain the infinite in the form of the finite, at another moment, driven back, positing the infinite beyond the same, and in the same moment once again attempting to contain it in the form of finitude— is the faculty of imagination (215).

Imagination is this exchange of the I with itself. Recall that this activity is to effect the synthesis of substantiality. This means that it must make possible the positing of the I as both determinant and determined. To posit itself as determinant, it must posit itself as unlimited with respect to the determination (qua limitation) it effects. It can only determine the limit if it exceeds that limit. To posit itself as determinate or limited, it must oppose a limited activity to an activity existing beyond the limit. It must, therefore, effect an absolute opposition between the limited sphere of the I’s activity and the infinite activity beyond that sphere. But because the I is to be both determinant and determinate, the infinite activity of the I must be again ascribed to the I—a contradictory act, to be sure, but necessary for the synthesis of substantiality to be thinkable. Imagination, then, involves a thetic, anti-thetic, and synthetic activity— distinctions which allow a distinction to be drawn between the imagination as productive and the imagination as reproductive.

The absolute “thesis” of the imagination (as purely productive) thus consists in “the encounter, or limit, is itself a product of the apprehending\(^{190}\) principle [des Auffassenden], in, and for the purpose of apprehending [the terms]”. The limit, as encounter, is produced by the activity of

\(^{190}\) I’m translating this in parallel to Zusammenfassen as com-prehenending.
imagination. The apprehension effective in the absolute thesis of imagination is none other than the production of the limit opposing the apprehended terms, for the sake of their apprehension. It conditions the terms as terms of exchange. There is, then, a corresponding antithesis of the imagination: “To the extent that the I and this product of its activity [i.e. the limit or encounter] are opposed, the countering terms are themselves opposed, and neither of the two are posited in the limit [opposing them]” (ibid.). Here, the I is distinguished from the limit it effects, and in fact becomes a term within a relation of mutual limitation. It becomes opposed, as determined and hence limited principle, to a infinity which opposes it and yet which it must subsume. In their mutual annihilation of the limit, we see that, in antithesis, encounter has priority over combining. Finally, the synthesis of imagination: “However, to the extent that both are unified again—the productive activity being attributed to the I—the limiting [terms] are themselves grasped together in the limit.” The opposed terms—determinate I and infinite activity — must be united within the I as active principle. “A + B” must be subordinated to “A.” But each moment—thesis, antithesis, and synthesis—lacks finality, as the synthesis itself sets demands a new antithesis, a new encounter (hence also a thesis) which would allow the determination of the I via exclusion of the indeterminate. Without the excluded B, A cannot be determined to contain the activity it must contain.

*The Hovering of the Imagination and the Fixity of Reason*

This instability is reflected in the priority of the concept of determinability over determination. The subordination of “A + B” (subject and object in exchange) to “A” (I as determinate subject) is the subordination of indeterminate, infinite activity to a determinate unity. But the necessity of an excluded B is left out, and A determining A + B is consequently incomplete with respect to the “demanded totality” (216); i.e., the essential moment of exclusion in determination would be left out, making the described act partial at best. The activity of determination is conditioned
by the determinable as the limitation of a partially determinate sphere. There is, consequently, a peculiarly indeterminate character to the determinations of imagination: the imagination “posits, as the product of its activity which progresses into the infinite, an infinite boundary in order to determine the subject.” We might note that an “infinite boundary” is no boundary, and so “[t]he imagination doesn’t posit a firm limit at all, for it doesn’t itself have a firm standpoint; only reason posits something firm, in that it itself first fixes [fixiert] Imagination.” The determinations of imagination are unstable, provisional, and constantly shifting. It is reason which fixes these determinations to a determinate consistency. On its own, imagination is a faculty which “hovers [schwebt] in the middle between determination and non-determination, between the finite and the infinite.” Only through such hovering between the determinate and indeterminate, can it “simultaneously determines A + B through the determinate A and the indeterminate B” (217) and effect the synthesis of substantiality, but this power comes at the cost of any finality in its determinacy. For it to “fix” A + B would be for it to subsume them to A, but this would reduce it to a term in synthesis and not the power effective of the synthesis itself.

If reason indeed puts a halt to this hovering and “posits something stable” and this definitively subordinates of A + B to A, then, for the very logic of determination considered above, imagination would be driven to once again posit activity (a new B) beyond the limit of A, an activity which reason would again seek to subordinate to A. Again, given the logic of determination, which requires every determination as limitation to constitutively posit a “beyond” to the effected limit, the enclosure or bounding of the subject and its accidental determinations (A+B) through the identity of

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191 In Luther's translation of the Bible, the spirit of God 'hovers' over the water: “Und die Erde war wüst und leer, und es war finster auf der Tiefe; und der Geist Gottes schwebte auf dem Wasser.” (Genesis 1.2) Compare the divine creativity to the creativity of imagination which, as possibility of determinacy, hovers between the determinate and indeterminate.

192 Imagination itself constantly attempts to appropriate its infinite activity to the finite determination of the I—but this appropriation is never fixed definitely—it is rather one moment of an unstable hovering between determinacy and the indeterminate. It is reason which determinately fixes this appropriation.
the subject \((A \text{ as self-identical, } A=A)\) will always make posit a beyond to that limitation. But if \((A+B)\) is determined by that indeterminate \(B\), this would violate the self-identity or self-determination of the subject.

However, there is a sense in which this progress is actually *completable*—where reason is fully determined through itself. One might wonder how this is possible, given the above observation that the very structure of determination requires an indeterminate beyond. Fichte notes that this seemingly infinite progress “goes on, to the point where (here theoretical) reason is determined through itself, where there is no further \(B\) beyond Reason is required in the imagination—that is to say, [it progresses unto] the representation of the representing [subject]” (italics mine, 217). Fichte makes a rather startling point here. On the one hand, there is indeed a completion possible for the determination of theoretical reason. One must presume that this is exactly what the *Wissenschaftslehre* strives to accomplish, and indeed accounts for the closure of the theoretical section of the *Grundlage*. What is startling is the way in which this passage suggests that Reason itself is found in the indeterminate beyond. This is presumably because reason, like the imagination, is the product of the simple spontaneity of the I and cannot be fixed within limits. Insofar as it can be, it is merely theoretical reason. One must presume that it is practical to the extent that it can’t be bounded. Reason itself is posited as the limiting “\(B\)”—it is, itself, constantly transgressing the limit it establishes. Theoretical reason is determined when the limiting principle ceases to be posited in the not-I, when an alien *Anstoß* Indeed, Fichte observes that “in the practical field, imagination [and presumably reason] goes beyond into the infinite, toward the absolutely indeterminable idea of the highest unity, which is only possible through a completed infinity, itself impossible” (217). We might presume that reason, in this sense, is practical\(^{193}\).

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\(^{193}\) Fichte has already prospectively stated that “Reason in itself is purely practical, and that it first becomes theoretical through the application of its laws upon a limiting not-I” (126).
Chapter 12
the Deduction of Representation

The problem of theoretical completion

The final synthesis of substantiality—mediating, as it does, the I as determining and the I as determined—is nothing other than the determination of the condition of the fundamental theoretical proposition. We have seen that this condition is not the seamless synthesis of reconcilable terms, but a constant activity where the instability of the terms is suspended and fixated by reason. Fichte understands this to be a process which leads back to a primordial fact taking place in our spirit ("ein ursprünglich in unserm Geiste vorkommendes Factum"). We are now at a limit, a limit which calls for a peculiar turning—even a break or leap—with respect to or progress. The limit of the theoretical is the point at which "theoretical reason" is completely determined through itself—the point at which no "limiting B beyond reason is needed in the imagination." This amounts to the closure of the theoretical upon itself, a closure realized as the "representation of the representing [one]" (Vorstellung des Vorstellende). In other words, we must, in the very medium of representation, represent the representing agent (the I) of the activity constitutive of representation itself.

We must note once again that the Wissenschaftslehre cannot leave the theoretical insofar as it must itself (qua Wissenschaft) be a system of propositions and, a fortiori, a system of representations. However, in order to present such a system, it must also make reference to the beyond of representation, it must think the beyond and—to avoid the dogmatism it so strongly disclaims-- do

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194 Please recall our earlier discussion as to why the synthesis of substantiality is not on “equal footing” with that of Efficacy. substantiality establishes reality is a quantitative unity over and above the qualitative opposition of efficacy.

195 Fact translates Faktum. Though Tatsache is also translated as fact, it should be noted that there is a fundamental distinction of the terms. In Fichte’s use of Tatsache, there is usually a sense of the immediacy of these facts with respect to empirical consciousness—in other words, they do not have to be established as facts, but constitute the evidence through which the sought after "facts" are deduced. Faktum, then, is used to refer to the outcome of a deduction originally founded on the Tatsachen of empirical consciousness. Generally speaking, Tatsachen are given, Fakta are established.
so out of an exigency that develops within it. In this sense, the limit of representation must be drawn within representation even if it must determine “facts” beyond representation to do so. The opposition of the theoretical and the practical occurs and must occur in theoretical terms. The entire construction of the practical section of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is driven by an exigency developed within the theoretical. For this reason, we must inceptually think *Anstoß* as the *minimal* figuration of the excess to representation and not *already* as the product of a thing in itself. By *minimal*, I mean that is the narrowest isolation (*Absonderung*) of an aspect of negativity which resists reduction to the posited self identity of the I. In this way it is, as it were, the imprint of a negativity absolutely resistant to representation even as it conditions the task (*aufgabe*) through which the theoretical is constituted. *Anstoß* is not originally posited as a thing-in-itself, nor is it ever present *as* an event for consciousness. For Fichte, a thing can only be posited as real through its posited self-identity, and the I must indeed posit a thing-in-itself to account for its limitation. But the task which drives the positing of the thing is conditioned by the event of *Anstoß*. The temptation to read *Anstoß* as a product of such a thing must be resisted if we are to avoid falling into dogmatic realism.

What follows is a transition between two orders within the theoretical on the basis of a consideration of the *Anstoß* mediated fact of synthesis. The first order was found in the prior pages. On the basis of the analysis of the principle of identity, contradiction, and sufficient reason as expressed among the facts of empirical consciousness, we were led the a proposition expressing the fundamental character of theoretical activity. This movement occurs through the spontaneous (but not arbitrary) movement of philosophical thought. For the theoretical circle to close upon itself, we must now return to our point of origin. The progress of the *Grundlage* can no longer develop from on the presupposed validity of such facts of consciousness, but must now be motivated through the consideration of a “primordial and independent fact” that was isolated on the basis of

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196 That such a movement should occur at all is determined through freedom; the progress it makes on the basis of that free beginning is determined by the presupposed validity of the rules of logic.
that presupposition. What follows is thus a third order between the other two, one which seeks to express the peculiar necessity and form of this transition. This third order is developed through thirteen points.

“Without the infinity of the I, without an absolute productive faculty [Productions-Vermögen] of the same which into the unlimited and unlimitable, one isn’t even able to account for the possibility of representation” (218). Though Fichte does not name this faculty, it could only be the imagination which, we recall, Fichte identifies the expansive activity introduced in connection with earlier Fichte suggests that the theoretical proposition (here stated in the form: “the I posits itself as determined through the not-I”) entails that “a representation must exist.” A representation is nothing other than a determinate form of this positing.

And we have, with ever narrowing “circles” (219), determined the “one form” in which the theoretical proposition could be possible. This inward circling occurred through the isolation (Absonderung) of the thinkable from the “untenable and unthinkable.” This inward spiral has halted, presumably because the last point of thinkability admitted of no further isolation, no further unthinkable counter-possibility from which it could be distinguished as thinkable. Fichte distinguishes the fact in question as being “originally [ursprünglich] present in our spirit” and “independent of our reflection.” Though the consciousness of the fact is indeed the artificial (künstlich) product of philosophical reflection, and is itself a fact, the fact understood in this more basic sense is not itself artificial, but rather something independent of arbitrary thought. We apparently have two orders of fact—the primordial, independent fact and the reflectively conditioned fact which is the consciousness of an independent, primordial Factum. Again, Fichte

197 “nur auf diese eine Art wahr” (219)
198 Given the extent to which the “something” of this factum conditions consciousness, only thinking can be “conscious” of this primordial factum. Thinking is lead, through reflection, from the facts available to consciousness to that facts which are not beyond consciousness nor evident to it in its immediacy. In a different respect, feeling (Gefühl) is itself a determination of this factum, but not for consciousness.
points out that all thought-possibilities (*Denkmöglichkeiten*) which were considered on the way to this fact are “facts” insofar as they are products of our reflective spontaneity. But the fact under consideration—the consciousness of On the one hand, the consciousness of the “one form” a fact is indeed the extent to which it was also a product of the reflective spontaneity of the thinker. On the other, it is distinguished from these other arbitrary constructions in that it is supposed to be true. What makes the latter thought properly a fact is not merely its presence as an artificial construction of philosophical thought, but its “correspondence” (*Entsprechung*) to something originarily present in our spirit— the “fact” of the synthesis of the fundamental theoretical proposition. All of the other thoughts are themselves only possible given that synthesis.

Yet this primordial, independent fact of synthesis can only come to be a fact for thought; we should be careful to observe that the two facts (the fact of synthesis and the fact of the consciousness of this synthesis) are not isolable from each other. Without the accordance with “something” more fundamental in the “human spirit,” a thought is not a fact. Without the possibility of being elevated, in some way, to consciousness, the “something” is fundamentally beyond the scope of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and cannot be demonstrated to be a fact. In accordance with the *Wissenschaftslehre’s* methodological norms, we may neither rest easy with the putative “facts” of ordinary consciousness (cf. “[the] facts of empirical consciousness,” 91) nor wildly speculate without reference to such facts. In the first case, one shuffles around truisms but does not demonstrate the factuality of them; in the second, one dogmatically breaks with the only evidence allowing access to such factuality. The point is neither to pretend to have some other access to truth apart from the facts of consciousness, nor to presume that the facts of consciousness already contain the required determinacy of such truth. Rather, on the basis of such “facts”, thinking must driven beyond them (cf. 91).
He distinguishes *Wissenschaftslehre* from “empty, formulaic philosophy” (FW 1:220) through the need to demonstrate facts as facts. In Fichte’s usage of such terms, this demonstration distinguishes the true *Factum* from a mere *Tatsache* (the so-called “facts of consciousness” discussed in the first section); one might say the properly factual from the merely evident. But if such facts lie beyond the scope of ordinary consciousness, we must seek proof “that these supposed facts are facts” (*dass jene Facta Facta sind*). How are we to do this? Through knowing how one came to be convinced of the factuality of these facts, and through one’s ability to convey one’s conviction (*Überzeugung*) that a given fact is a fact (FW 1:221). The factuality of the fact is something which circulates between the two essential moments—the represented thought and the primordial fact (which “validates” the *factum as factum*).

Again, the primordial, independent fact, as distinguishing truly “factual” thought from empty or mistaken thoughts, must not itself be a mere thought, but *that* which is thought, that with which thought accords in particular, the fact as the *one way* in which the fundamental synthesis of the theoretical proposition can occur. On the other hand, it cannot be something utterly opposed to consciousness, as it is the condition of consciousness as representative activity. For the philosopher, the factuality of a thought was shown when it was demonstrated—on the basis of certain facts of consciousness and through the laws of reflective thought—*that no other fact could be considered*.

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199 Fichte’s choice of “conviction “*Überzeugung*” reflects the extent to which the fundamental fact is not immediately evident within ordinary consciousness. To be sure, philosophical reflection develops within consciousness, but that which it seeks to *think* lies beyond it (recall that this ambiguity – that of a thinking within and beyond representation— touches on the fundamental problematic of this dissertation). One must be convinced, and this conviction can neither be *dogmatically* presupposed nor can it immediately yield to the presence of consciousness. The passing on of this conviction is the rigorous demonstration of the fact.

200 Note that this is precisely what the farmer and craftsman of chapter 2 are unable to do. But this emphasis on the ability to communicate such conviction emerges from the point that these facts, though present within consciousness, are not immediately available to consciousness in their full, reflective determinacy. In absence of the capacity to convey these facts as facts, the *Wissenschaftslehre* would also be unable to convey the factuality of this fact to the other sciences, and its fundamental aim (i.e. grounding the fundamental principles of the specific knowledge disciplines) would be impossible. Indeed, it would be indistinguishable from dogmatism.

201 One might add that, if it were indeed a mere thought, we would look for the factum to distinguish it as factual, and we would have an infinite regress.
without contradiction\textsuperscript{202}. On the other hand, philosophical reflection \textit{presupposes} this fact, not in its determinacy for consciousness, but to the extent that it establishes the possibility of reflective thought in general; only given the \textit{fact} of the fundamental theoretical synthesis is reflection possible. Not only is it a general condition of philosophical thought, but the path followed by philosophical reflection back to this fact is \textit{structured} by this fact; the synthetic jointure of the Fichtean dialectic is, in its specificity, the outcome of the determinate character of the fact of this basic synthesis. If the theoretical proposition is not to be a castle floating in the air, the fact cannot simply be thought from the standpoint of reflection, but must also somehow be thought on its own terms—posited in its independence of reflection. But if it is also to be available as a fact for philosophical thought, it must also somehow already be present in consciousness, and, \textit{a fortiori}, in reflection as a determination of conscious activity.

Fichte indeed states that we would expect this \textit{factum} to have “consequences” (\textit{Folgen}) in our consciousness (221). Note that the word \textit{Folgen} suggests that such consequences follow something, stem from some kind of inceptive \textit{event}. Given that the fact \textit{conditions} consciousness, this would be a colossal understatement unless he meant that it is the \textit{particular character} of this fact which has consequences for consciousness; that is to say, it has consequences, not simply insofar as it is a general condition for consciousness, but insofar as it is the “one way” in which consciousness is possible. The \textit{specific} character of this fact must have implications for consciousness that reflect that specificity. Whatever they may be, such consequences must be available for reflection, even if the commencement of the series of consequences cannot be for consciousness as such.

The fact, as the specific form through which the fundamental theoretical synthesis takes place, is not something beyond consciousness, but must be “posited as present in consciousness” (221). But it cannot be first present in consciousness as the product of philosophical reflection, for

\textsuperscript{202} Fichte’s dialectical progress up to this point was to accomplish just this, as is evinced in his example of the non-factum of realism.
it is the condition of that reflection. If the I, as we have seen again quite recently in the context of its self-limitation, is “only that which it posits itself to be” (214), then this fact must have been posited as present, not by the not-I, but through its own activity—prior to its deductive determination. It is thus not surprising that Fichte notes that this positing carries with it “difficulties, and only is possible in a certain way [gewisse Art]” though it may be possible to “demonstrate the way [Art] in which this positing takes place” (221). In light of the above, these “difficulties” must arise for the philosopher because the I itself must posit the fact as present within consciousness, but not as present for consciousness as that specific fact. If the “as” cannot refer to the positing of the fact as this specific fact for consciousness, then the I’s positing of the fact as present in consciousness must have a form different from that of reflective predication.

To make sense of this, we must recall Fichte’s understanding of the distinction between the subject and predicate of copular judgment; the subject is what is fundamentally posited in the I, the predicate is “what is already encounter as posited” (FW 1:97). Only on a prior positing within the I does the reflective determination of something as something for consciousness become possible. This distinction roughly corresponds to the distinction between the subject and predicate of copular judgment—that which is “in itself” is posited within the I; that which is predicated of it, what it comes to be “as something” for reflective determination, is a consequence of a second, conditioned determination. On the basis of what was already determinate before reflection, I posit it to have determinacy in itself. What makes this Fichtean is that the determinacy, though not present for consciousness, was already present in consciousness; the “in itself” of the determinacy is posited to be pre-reflectively present within consciousness. In a similar way, philosophical reflection determined the fundamental fact of theoretical synthesis to be present in consciousness before it became

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203 Indeed, the determinacy of this “certain way” (gewisse Art) suggests a connection to the one way (eine Art) in which the theoretical proposition is possible. It suggests that the specificity of this “certain way” of positing consists in the specificity of the aforementioned Folgen of the fact.
determined for consciousness. It was initially for consciousness in the form of the given facts of empirical consciousness and the laws of reflection, its “buzzing.” Through deduction, it was posited in its determinate factuality. In the order of reflection, just as an indeterminate insect was posited before positing of the bee (and the positing of the bee was grounded by the insects buzzing), an indeterminate “factual activity” was posited before the basic Factum of consciousness was posited with full determinacy.

Recall that the fact is the fact of the “one way” the fundamental theoretical synthesis occurs: the I’s self-limitation as solicited by an Anstoß to its infinitely outreaching activity (cf. 212). In other words, the fact of the fundamental theoretical synthesis is nothing other than the fact of a fundamental check to its activity. The initial positing of this fact as present in consciousness must emerge as a consequence of this event. “The I must explain this fact to itself” (221). It must do this because such “explanation” is precisely the same as this activity of self-limitation. For the I to limit itself, it must posit itself to be limited. To posit itself to be limited, it must, in some sense, become limited for itself. For it to become limited for itself, it must posit something in opposition to itself as the principle of that limitation, and be able to distinguish that opposed ground from itself. In other words, explanation is the activity of self-limitation considered from the standpoint of the I as intellect. Indeed, its infinite activity and the Anstoß which it encounter (and the concomitant task of self-limitation), are only necessary (only “must” be posited) given the intellect as an explanandum.

Note the connection made to the laws of reflection: “it cannot [explain this fact of limitation] otherwise than in accordance with the laws [Gesetzen] of its own nature, which are the same laws which were employed in our prior reflections” (221). Though Fichte isn’t clear on this point, it seems we must think of these laws in connection with the “decree of reason” first

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204 Recall that Fichte’s idiosyncratic use of the verb setzen suggests an affinity with the cognate Gesetz. The “laws of its nature” must themselves be products of its own positing, as the I is nothing more than what it posits itself to be (214). The necessity of these laws must therefore emerge from the (ultimately practical) demand that the I posit itself as itself, and not be received from some external source.
mentioned in connection with the 3rd fundamental principle; just as the decree of reason arose in connection to the “special law” of the mind through which the mutual limitation of I and not-I could be possible, the “laws of reflection” must first be posited by reason as conditions of its self-limitation. These laws would then not only be those conditioning reflective thought in general, but are now developed from their point of origin as the condition of this fundamental explanation (this self-limitation).

“The way in which the I shapes, modifies, and determines this fact within itself—the whole of its proceedings with it—is from now on the object of our philosophical reflection. It is clear that from this point on all of reflection attains a very different level and has a very different significance” (221). There is, then, a fundamental shift with respect to the object (Gegenstand) of reflection, and consequently a shift between two series (Reihen) of reflections—one which began with the facts of empirical consciousness and culminated in the deduction of a primordial fact in the human spirit, and another which begins with the fact of fundamental limitation. The primordial fact has already been determined for the philosopher; now it must be shown the way in which that the primordial fact marks the commencement of a new series, one which culminates in the validation of the principles with which we began. The object of reflection, at this second beginning, is not the primordial fact, but the original reflection of the human spirit upon it; the way in which the I comes to “explain” this fact to itself according to its own laws. The new object (Gegenstand) of reflection is “itself a reflection, namely the human spirit’s reflection on the datum established to be within it” (222). The primordial fact is, as the condition of philosophical reflection, only indirectly an object for it. There is some sense, then, in which the fact must have already become an object for our spirit, not in all of its deductive determinacy, but as a fundamental experience of limitation. It is indeed posited as an object (Gegenstand) of reflection, but not for consciousness. In a parenthetical note,

205 It certainly could not be an object (Objekt), as it is the fact which conditions representation and hence objectivity.
Fichte writes that this datum is “admittedly to be called a datum [only] insofar as it is the object [Gegenstand] of the mind’s [Gemüt] reflection on it, since, beyond that, it is [merely] a fact.” The use of Gemüt as opposed to Bewußtsein or Intelligenz is telling. Though often translated as “mind,” Gemüt has a broader sense than this, expressing the mind, not only as thinking, but also insofar as it is receptive to feeling, to affect206. Recall the previous discussion of feeling, where it was understood to be a determination of the I, but not the I as intellect (211). Here, we might wonder if what is a “datum” with respect to the I as subjected to a pre-reflective limitation could simultaneously be (at best) a fact with respect to the I as subject of representation; i.e. what is datum in the new series is, at best, a mere fact for the old series. In the distinction between the I as Gemüt and the I as intellect, we also find the distinction between the fundamental reflection which is the object of our current reflection, and the intellect reflecting upon this reflection. The first reflection would begin with the I’s aforementioned “proceedings” with this fact, and the other would merely “observe” the unfolding of these proceedings. Of particular interest, here, is that we, as thinkers, are still within the order of reflection—the shift took place with respect to content, not form. Our initial, deductive series has given way to a double series—reflection has given way to a reflection upon a reflection. We might justly wonder what kind of access reflection has truly gained to such a fundamental series, commencing, as it does, in the spirit’s dealing with the fundamental fact of limitation. If anything, the new object of reflection is even less graspable than the first.

The fact, then, would not first need to be “established” or “proven” for the first reflection (for which it is already a datum), but for the second. It is established for the second reflection

206 Compare to the use in §29 of Kant’s Kritik der Urteilskraft, where a passage connects Gefühl with Gemüt on the axis of bodily feeling: “weil das Leben ohne das Gefühl des körperlichen Organs bloß Bewußtsein seiner Existenz, aber kein Gefühl des Wohl- oder Übelbefindens, d.i. der Beförderung oder Hemmung der Lebenskräfte, sei; weil das Gemüt für sich allein ganz Leben (das Lebensprinzip selbst) ist, und Hindernisse oder Beförderungen außer demselben und doch im Menschen selbst, mithin in der Verbindung mit seinem Körper, gesucht werden müssen.” (Kritik der Urteilskraft, §29). Note also Heidegger’s discussion of the Cartesian foreclosure of an ontological analysis of Gemüt (Sein und Zeit §6, 25). Cf. Derrida’s discussion (in terms of Heidegger) in De l’esprit. Here, Gemüt is opposed, not to Intelligenz, but to Geist.
through philosophical deduction. It was established, not as a new product, but as already within the I’s activity. The first reflection is always presupposed in consciousness as its condition, so the task is not one of “artificially” producing the *Gegenstand*, but “raising” it into consciousness. The object is considered to have a “reality” independent of the (secondary) reflection which “perceives” it; the second reflection merely a matter of the perception (*Wahrnehmung*) of this first “series” (*Reihe*) as it unfolds.

As a series of consequences, it has a course, a necessity, an *ordinal* character. There is, then, a kind of “history” in this movement, “The *Wissenschaftslehre* must be a pragmatic history of human spirit” (ibid.). Would does the choice of this figure imply? History outwardly consists in a series of events; as ordered, each moment of that history would have immediate priority over one at least event, and condition another, with one exception—the fundamental event, the factuality of which permitted reflection an entrance (*Eingang*) to that history. The series of events is not a chain of necessity, as each moment, though conditioned by a prior event, is a product of freedom. Only given a point along the series do the prior moments take on a retrospective necessity as conditions of that point. In other words, there is indeed spontaneous activity here, but the activity at issue is not the spontaneous activity of the philosopher as she artificially develops her reflections—it is not the spontaneous activity of the conscious I. Rather, the activity at the root of this reflection is pre-reflective\(^{207}\), and the reflecting philosopher is constrained to follow its course.

In the determination of this *factum* through philosophical reflection, the presentation (*Darstellung*) of this system moved from the conditioned to the conditions. The fundamental theoretical principle, as analyzed from the 3\(^{rd}\) fundamental principle, had to be true, but it was not clear how it could be true given the indeterminate contradiction it contained. Indeed, it will not be confirmed as factual until we’ve returned from the deduced *factum* to this principle (223). Recall that

\(^{207}\) This is the true sense in which we are at the limit of the theoretical. The activity ultimately in question is only theoretical in terms of what it conditions.
the three fundamental principles themselves were derived on the basis of the facts of empirical consciousness. The facts of empirical consciousness conditioned the presentation of the system, but empirical consciousness is itself conditioned by the factum determined in the culminating synthesis. In other words, the order of presentation was opposed to the order of original factual action. At this point, the order of presentation (Darstellung) is reversed, and we now follow the order of factual action (Tathandlung). It is not as simple as merely making the same determinations in reverse, however. Recall that the transition effected in this interlude moves from the reflectively determined thought of the factum to the conditions of representation itself.

Fichte notes that the object of reflection (the factum) was not produced by reflection, but merely raised into consciousness by the latter through this process of winnowing away the empty and irrelevant. Now that the factum has been made determinate for reflection, it ceases to be a matter of hypothetical speculation but has been determined as a “reality.” Fichte notes that the Wissenschaftslehre must now consist of a “pragmatic history of the human spirit” (222). Importantly, despite this elevation of standpoint, the form of “perception” (Wahrnehmung) this history makes use of remains “experimental,” if no longer “blind.” Even this new series, then, is not a matter of proceeding with calculable certainty. This is because this transition between the factum as hypothetical to the factum as real doesn’t simply refer to the fact that we have successfully deduced and determined this factum. The factum is a “point of return” (Punkt der Rückkehr) but also a point in which a new series begins. What, then, distinguishes the factum as real from the factum as merely ideal (merely hypothesized)? In other words, how did it emerge as real in first place?

As before, consciousness contains absolute opposites—something subject and something objective (224)—which threaten to annihilate one another. These opposites are present in the human spirit on the basis of the absolute positing of the I. For Fichte, they are as certain as the laws of identity and contradiction. Despite this mutual annihilation, the human spirit must think of them
as one but also must think of them as fundamentally opposed. In “touching them, and being repulsed, and touching them again, it gives them, in relation to itself, a certain content and a certain extension (which will reveal itself in due course as a manifold of time and space). This condition is called the state of intuition. The power active therein has already been denominated earlier the productive imagination” (225, cf. 217). Intuition effects the stabilization of an impossibility. Indeed, only such an absolute contradiction can explain the human spirits activity: “From the very fact of absolute opposition there follows the entire mechanism of the human mind; and this entire mechanism can be explained in no other way than by the fact of absolute opposition.” Without absolute opposition, the synthesis of opposed terms would not require intuition, leaving consciousness an empty nothing. Ideality and reality thus amount to “one and the same” and “differ only in the different manner of regarding them. Prior to the basic synthesis (the factum) the absolute opposites “are merely creatures of thought and ideal things”— as the “power of thought” cannot unite them, the “hovering of mind” (das Schweben des Gemüts), i.e. imagination, confers them with intuitable reality. Since the only meaningful reality is that derived from intuition, it follows that all reality is “brought forth solely by imagination.” Fichte cites Kant’s reference to this as the “deception” of the imagination. The imagination presents a reality as if it existed independently of its work. For Fichte, this is no deception as it could not be otherwise.

The Deduction of Presentation

Figures of Points on a Line

With the commencement of the actually deduction, the aforementioned conflict is schematized somewhat differently.

Picture the infinitely outreaching activity as a straight line stretching from A through B to C, etc. It may have been checked short of C, or beyond it; but let us suppose it to be checked precisely at C; and, by the foregoing, the ground of this lies, not in the I, but in the not-I. Under the condition postulated, the direction of the I’s activity from A to C is reflected from C to A.
But so long as it is to be purely an I, no influence at all can be exerted on it without it reacting accordingly. Nothing in the I can be canceled, so the direction of its activity cannot be either. Hence the activity reflected towards A, *insofar as it is reflected*, must simultaneously react towards C.

And thus we obtain between A and C a twofold direction of the I’s activity, at variance with itself [*mit sich selbst streitende*], wherein the direction from C to A may be regarded as a passivity, and that from A to C as an activity; both being one and the same state of the I.

One must conceive of the activity progressing from A as both reflected and not reflected. At the point of reflection, the activity at C must be thought to both return to A and yet maintain its direction beyond C. The activity reflected thus appears contradictory—it is both progressing beyond C but it is also returning to A. This instability should be familiar—it recalls the instability of grasping/repulsing referred to above. There isn’t a stable, conceptually unified state here, but *precisely* a conflicted state which does not resolve cleanly into one or the other directions. Once again, the Fichtean system doesn’t so much resolve such contradictions as it puts them to work. But what work does this contradiction do?

The conflicted, one might say “turbulent,” state between A and C is the imagination exactly as the hovering (*Schweben*) of the mind (*Gemüts*), the conflicted unstable unity determinable as “an activity possible only through a passivity, and a passivity possible only through an activity” (228). Though it is clearly the case that the passivity is conditioned by the activity, how is the activity conditioned through the passivity? It is the reactive activity (resistant to the C→A direction) which is made possible through such passivity. Such a unity is nothing other than intuition, but without any determinate reference to either subject or object. The task remains to determine how this indeterminate intuition can exist, not simply for philosophical reflection, but for the pre-reflective, emergent\textsuperscript{208} I. That is, given that the I must posit itself as intuiting (i.e. determine the indeterminate intuition as its own intuition) in order to posit itself to be limited (which we see in the *factum* of the

\textsuperscript{208} I refer to this as the emergent I to distinguish it from the philosophical standpoint. In the new series, recall, the reflection of activity is fundamental, and the reflective positing of the I as determined by the not-I (the basic principle of representation) is to be “deduced.”
third synthesis), there must be some way in which it can distinguish the directions for itself. Though A→C and C→A are clear for philosophical reflection, they are not yet clear for the I.

From the standpoint of philosophical reflection, the activity from A→C is one which produces what is to be the intuited object (as yet, merely an “indeterminate something”). Fichte refers to it as an “extuiting” [hinschauen]. This activity isn’t yet predicated of the I by the I, however. It does not recognize the “production” of the intuited as its own activity, presumably because, if it did, the I wouldn’t eventually (but not yet) posit the intuited as not-I. For this reason, there has to be a second reflection—one which the I does recognize as its own act. For Fichte, even though one does not recognize the intuited object as one’s own production, one does recognize the intuition (or perception) of it to be one’s own. This second reflection must be ascribed to the I’s perfect spontaneity and not to an alien check to its activity. This need to differentiate the two activities drives the entire deduction. There must be some way for the pre-reflective I to be able to distinguish its own activity from activity which is attributed to the not-I.

The understanding as a receptacle, bringing imagination to a stand

For this to be possible, the indeterminate, conflicted and unstable intuition between A and C must “be stabilized” (soll fixiert werden, 232) in order to avoid “confusion or mutual elimination” of the opposed directions. In other words, the hovering of the imagination must be limited through the spontaneity of reflection, identified as reason (Vernunft). But the determining power of reason is not enough. Fichte notes, “[c]learly, if the required stabilization is to be possible, there must be a capacity … whereby a transiency is arrested, settled, as it were, or brought to a stand, and is thus rightly termed understanding” (233). However, understanding isn’t so much a capacity as it is a product, for though it is described as a “dormant, inactive power of the mind” it is only “the mere receptacle [Behälter] of what imagination brings forth, and what reason determines or has yet to determine,” it “might be described either as the imagination stabilized by reason or as reason furnished with
objects by the imagination.” But it is only when the products of the imagination are thus “brought to a stand” in the understanding that one may speak of “the actual.” The metaphoric hear is quite revealing: only through “apprehension and comprehension” (die Auffassung und das Begreifen) can be the products of imagination be attributed with reality. Of course, this operation of production and fixation is wholly unreflected for the I at this stage—only from the standpoint of the philosopher could this appear to be the aforementioned deception of the imagination.

*Figuring the reflection from the infinite*

Now that the fixative power of the stabilized imagination has been “deduced,” the question remains of how the I can posit itself as the intuitant (das anschauende) of an opposed, intuited not-I. Though the first reflection through Anstoß effects the productive imagining of an opposed something, it is not yet an intuited object for the I. It is necessary that there be some form of intuition, however obscure, of something beyond C. “Into the infinite beyond C there is projected a determinate product of the absolutely productive imagination, by means of a dark, unreflected intuition that does not reach determinate consciousness; and this product sets limits to the power of reflected intuition”—the product of this absolutely productive power is the not-I (235). However, we might recall that intuition requires opposed, contradictory activities. What opposes the endlessly outreaching activity beyond C? Not the original Anstoß, as that occurs at C. But only given this “dark” intuition is it conceivable that the emergent I posit that a not-I opposes it. This requires a most peculiar moment in Fichte’s discussion of these figures of points and line.

Note that it is still not clear how the I can posit intuited activity of itself given that the original A→C activity and its C→A reflection were necessarily pre-reflective. This requires the aforementioned stabilization of that activity, but also that the opposed tendency also be intuited as an activity so that each activity may be determined through the other. If this were accomplished, the I would be able to posit itself as actively intuited and the object as actively opposed to its intuiting
activity (i.e. real). If the I spontaneously reflects its own activity at C (as discussed above) this still does not provide a reflectively opposed activity which would allow it to be determined as an intuition. For this, Fichte requires that the activity beyond C not simply be conceived of as infinitely outreaching, but that “this activity be reflected from infinity through C back to A”\(^3\) (236). Only on the basis of the trace (Spur) of the first resistant activity (C→A as resisting the initial A→C) preserved in the understanding can the I posit this infinitely reflected, dark intuition as belonging to the not-I. This trace is important, as it will allow the intuited to be identified with only darkly intuited not-I.

Though this appears to allow for the determinate activity (C→A) to be determined as the intuited, it remains unclear how activity could be reflected from infinity. The geometrical figure which Fichte is using has no point which would reflect such an activity. If these points existed on a circle, the activity would return, but return from A→C. The Fichtean answer would presumably be that the reflection is simply deduced from its necessity. In any case, as not reflected from a determinate point, the returning activity would be wholly indeterminate.

Compulsion and Freedom

A further problem remains, though there are now, once again, two forms of activity which determine each other, they do so through interdetermination. Though this allows one to determine one as distinct from the other, it does not allow for a qualitative distinction to be made between them such that one could be determined as intuitant (i.e. predicated of the I) and the other as intuited (predicated of the not-I). One of the two terms must not only be determined through interdetermination, but through self-determination (the only other form possible, as there is no further determining principle). Fichte refers to the activity of the intuitant as an “objective activity” as it corresponds to a passivity in the intuited\(^2\) (just as an activity in the intuited corresponds to a passivity of the intuitant). But this determination as “objective activity” doesn’t simply require that

\(^3\) Diese Tätigkeit wird aus der Unendlichkeit über C nach A reflectirt.

\(^2\) Just as an activity in the intuited corresponds to a passivity of the intuitant.
it be opposed by another objective activity (as the opposed, intuited activity would appear to be) but that it also be determined by non-objective activity. Fichte refers to this non-objective activity as “pure,” “absolute,” “activity in general” (237). Once again, these determine each other through interdetermination. Activity in general is the “real ground”\footnote{Recall our earlier discussion between real ground and ideal ground. The real ground determines a qualitative limitation within a greater sphere of activity. The ideal ground refers to the principle determining the quantity of limitation \textit{given} a prior, qualitative limitation.} of “all objective activity,” and objective activity is the “ideal ground” for activity in general. In the synthesis between the two, the boundary is conceived as the condition which determines activity in general as objective (i.e. as oriented toward a passivity, an opposed object). From this, Fichte concludes that “[i]ntuition is objective activity under a certain \textit{condition}. If unconditioned, it would not be objective, but pure activity.” This strongly recalls the first synthesis of substantiality (144)—the opposition exists, not between opposed principles, but between unlimited and limited determinations of a quantum of activity. But what would become of the intuited if one abstracts from these “certain conditions”? On the side of the intuited, the counterpart of absolute activity is the non-intuited, absolutely posited “thing-in-itself: an absolute passivity.”

If absolute activity becomes objective activity under certain conditions, this also amounts to the cancellation of the determination of absolute activity \textit{as} absolute. Absolute activity ceases to be absolute if some degree of activity is determined as passivity. For this reason, “the condition of all objective activity is a passivity”—in other words, objective activity is only \textit{objective} if it is to some degree determined by an opposed activity. For this determination to be possible for the emergent I, it must be intuited as such. Only then could the I (and not just the philosopher) posit itself as passive with respect to an opposed activity. Fichte writes that passivity “can only be intuited as an impossibility of the opposed activity; a feeling of being \textit{compelled} to a specific act” (italics mine, 239). This “\textit{Gefühl des Zwanges}” is fixed as “necessity” in the understanding. The counterpart to this feeling
of unfreedom is the familiar figure of the hovering (Schwebende) imagination, now hovering between “the performance and nonperformance of one and the same act” — fixed as “possibility” within the understanding. We thus have a new opposition, now characterized as that between compulsion (Zwang) and Freedom (Freiheit). Freedom, as “self-affection,” is only freedom given certain constraints, and compulsion is only present through the free self-determination to a specific action (which is, of course, resisted). Through synthesis, the condition is now determined to be interaction between “the self-affection of the intuitant and an affection from without.” However, since all of these determinations are still only determined through interdetermination, the sought after self-determination isn’t yet determined for itself. Though it is clear that an intuition is to be thought of as freedom or compulsion for the philosopher, it is unclear how these can be determinately opposed by the emergent I.

*Thinking and efficacy, Judgment and Understanding*

Just as in the much earlier discussion of independent activity (151), where there is a respect to which an activity is opposed to passivity, there is a respect to which it is independent of passivity. But this is nothing other than the self-affection at work in freedom — affection which “reverts into itself” as opposed to being directed toward an opposed object. We recall that reason is conceived of as a determinative principle (233), so the self-determination of the intuitant must be conceived of in terms of a rational self-determination, and, as we see immediately above, it is the hovering of the imagination which is determined. Presumably, this is why Fichte claims that “the activity proper to self-determination is the determination, by reason, of an imaginative product fixated in the understanding: hence an act of thought.” Insofar as an object is determined by such an act, it is “something thought” (ein gedachtes). This is opposed to the hypothesized independent activity of the object — an independent activity which was much earlier determined as efficacy, an “inner activity of
the object” which is a “mere matter of thought” or (“noumenon” when given a “substrate for this activity” by the imagination).

But thought, as an activity which determines an object of thought, must also be opposed to an activity of the intuitant which is not opposed to a determinate object of thought but to an object in general (241). This is required as there is still no escape from the circle of interdetermination; consequently, activity directed toward determinate objects must be determined by an activity which has no determinate object. This is presumably because the prior activity (thinking of determinate objects) is determined by the objects which are thought. And thought free of a specific object is thus necessary, one which is able to abstract or reflect upon a given determinate object. The capacity to waver between abstraction and reflection (or even determinative options schematized as A and ~A) is, of course, suggestive of imagination. However, given that this activity must hover between pre-given possibilities, it must also involve the understanding (241-2). This activity is intuited as judgment. Judgment, then, is a kind of hovering above the objects of the understanding— a freedom to consider or to rule out the possibilities contained therein. For this reason, Fichte puts it into a relation of interdetermination with the understanding itself, but, more importantly, places the object thought in interdetermination with the object which is merely thinkable (242).

At the limit of the thinkable— the final, obscure intuition of the theoretical Grundlage

The thought and the thinkable are both directed to objects. A specific object may be determined as an object of thought or as something which could be thought. We are still caught in interdetermination with the object in both cases, and the need is to venture beyond the thinkable to an activity of the intuitant which would have no object at all. This activity is required for there to be an escape from viscous interdetermination with the object. Only given that escape will a determinate distinction be possible between intuited and intuitant in a way which allows the intuitant
to become an intuitant for itself— only then can there be a “firm point of distinction between object and subject” (244).

Once again, the wavering of the imagination is called into play. As we see immediately above in the case of judgment, imagination plays the role of hovering between various possibilities of thinkability. But, if we consider the capacity of abstraction, we see that it has the capacity to consider a specific object or to not consider it. This can, of course, be applied to the various grades of generality in which an object is considered, and can thus be negatively considered as a capacity to, as Fichte puts it, hover between “object and non-object” (243). At the limit of this capacity is the conception of an activity which would have no object— the “possibility of abstracting from all objects in general.” This would require an absolute abstraction of the imagination, amount to its extinction:

That it [imagination] should be pinned down [fixirt] to having no object would imply a total destruction of the (reflected) imagination, and this destruction or nonexistence [Nicht-seyn] of the imagination will itself be intuited by the imagination (nonreflected, and thus not attainting to clear consciousness). (The obscure presentation occurring in us, when, for the purposes of pure thought, we are bidden to abstract from all admixture of the imagination, is the intuition in question, familiar enough to those who think.) The product of such a (nonreflected) intuition has to be fixated in the understanding; but it is supposed to be nothing [Nichts], no object at all, so it cannot be fixated. (The obscure presentation of the thought of a mere relation, without any terms, is something of this kind). So nothing remains beyond the mere rule of reason in general, telling us to abstract; the mere law of an unrealizable determination (through imagination, and for clear consciousness, through understanding);— and hence this absolute power of abstraction is simply reason itself.

This is a fixation of imagination at its limit, at its point of impossibility. It is also the point where the activity of the intuitant is finally severed from objectivity, giving it a foothold beyond vicious indeterminacy. The I is determined as that which cannot be abstracted from. Presumably, Fichte would be able to account for the fact that one abstracts from the I every time one considers something opposed to the I. However, he would be able to reply that, though one can certainly abstract from the I as the content of thought, all abstraction still entails the activity of the I. Even in abstracting from the thought of I as object, one remains within the scope of the I’s activity which,
now empty of content, is formally the self-determination of the I. Correspondingly, the not-I is determined purely through the I as that which can be abstracted from.

However, because this determination of the I is a determination (and thus, according to the third principle, the limitation of something unlimited), the question remains as to what determines this determination. Fichte notes that the “faculty of absolute determination” (Vermögen des schlechthin unbestimmten, 245) was shown to be the imagination, apparently because it is, in its hovering, fundamentally indeterminate. In consequence, Fichte observes that, if the I determines (i.e. reflect upon) itself, the not-I would be indeterminate and unbounded. If the I were to reflect upon the not-I, the I would be the corresponding indeterminate infinite. But, in each case, because it is the I which determines which (I or not-I) is determinate and which is indeterminate, it has a determinative priority over the not-I and may be considered to be “reciprocally related merely to itself: a reciprocity in which it is perfectly united with itself, and beyond which no theoretical philosophy advances any further.” This reciprocity, however, only exists for the philosopher. For the emergent I, it entails an infinity of practical striving.
Conclusion
The Role of liminal figurativity in the Grundlage

For each of the two series of propositions in the theoretical portion of the Grundlage, there is a motivating question and enduring impasse. The impasse which is initially faced in the first series concerns the need to think together this self-identity with the basic fact of negation. From the logical certainty of the law of identity (A=A) and negation, Fichte evolves the counter-positing of I and not-I. From this point, reflection is driven backwards to determine the syntheses—already presupposed as having occurred for reflection to be possible—which allow the identity and contradiction, I and not-I, to be posited in that self-identical I. In order to think these syntheses—to articulate them conceptually—the reflection of the philosopher is compelled to figure this opposition in terms of parts of a totality. The problem of I and not-I becomes one of the division of mutually limiting parts within a unity. The key opposition, however, isn’t between the I and not-I, but between the I as undivided (absolute) and the I as limited by the not-I.

Driven back to the factum of an original synthesis, we are led to conclude that this synthesis (determined to be that between the infinite and the finite) is the work of the imagination. The imagination is what allows us to draw forth the impossible line between light and darkness, and is what allows us to prolong and extend an impossible encounter between mutually annihilating principles. However, also at work in the Grundlage (though not usually emphasized as such) was the reproductive imagination of the philosopher. As just mentioned, in his presentation of the third fundamental principle, the opposed I and not-I, posited within the I, are thought of as mutually limiting (einschränken) parts (Teilen). But Fichte would readily admit that such parts are not given to sensibility—they are constructions of the reproductive imagination which allow the investigation to proceed. The image of a divided totality remains, in various forms, with us right until the point at
which the first series of deductions leads us to the beginning of the second. The problem of the excluded remainder of determinate spheres of activity is yet another schematization of this basic impasse. In the attempt to unite the idealist and realist positions (the prior giving determinative priority to the I and the latter giving determinative priority to the not-I), the reproductive imagination must present, not only the figure of a Anstoß to the I’s activity, but various figures of touching and encounter. Again, such figures are drawn from sensibility, but sensibility, itself, is conditioned by the encounters reproductively depicted.

Similarly, if we consider the second series—the series in which the intelligence (limited, representational I) emerges—the not-I, though indeed posited by the I, is posited on the basis of an Anstoß as schematized by a line progress from A to C. Here, the impasse involves the need for a double reflection that would allow the I to posit itself as intuitant—one which would give it some “firm basis” to distinguish subject and object. What is first in the order of factual action (Tathandlung) is this Anstoß with respect to the I’s incipient outreaching activity, and Anstoß presented as a determinate point on a line. The deduction (presented as a second series of propositions) that unfolds on the basis of this Anstoß does not follow naturally from the mere fact of this limitation. There is nothing in the schema of a line and two points which would suggest the double reflection from C, nor which would suggest activity reflected from infinity, the positing of Understanding, Judgment, Possibility, Necessity, etc. These are deduced on the basis of the fundamental synthesis as a factum for an intellect. In other words, the synthesis, as presented in the form of the third principle, can only attain such a presentation on the basis of the faculties of reason, imagination, understanding, thought, and judgment along with the concepts of necessity (or compulsion) and possibility (or freedom). In this way, philosophical reflection is compelled to deduce the faculties which make it possible. Even here, there is something necessarily retrospective about the course of
the investigation—only given the understanding can the understanding be deduced. This is also true of sensibility.

In terms of Fichte’s *Origin of Language*, *Anstoß* and terms like it (“encountering,” “intervening,” etc.) are certainly supersensible concepts, and must be conceived as arising through the aforementioned “unification of sensible and spiritual representations through produced by the imagination,” schemata which were originally at work for sensible concepts. Presumably, the familiar, sensible experience pushing or thrusting may, in connection with the sense of penetration (*An*), prove one with a sense of check, impetus, or impact. That experience is only possible, of course, on the basis of the more fundamental incursion that is at the basis of any feeling (*Gefühl*) of resistance of opposition. Indeed, this is true of all sensible concepts—they all require (because sensibility requires) a sense of opposition, resistance, or (at the very least) otherness. But there is something about this inceptive experience of resistance which is not quite captured in the same way as, for instance, by images of gliding or dancing. The sensible experience of *Anstoß* (as a kind of inceptive impact) fits both the elemental sense of resistance and the way in which this deflection initiates the self-determination of the I as intelligence.

As we have seen, Fichte considers thinking to be possible independently of language, but he has not explicitly committed to the notion that it be conceivable apart from sensibility. However, sensibility, given its essential connection to objectivity and hence the not-I, must be overcome. As a foil to the perfect, rational, autonomous self-determination of the I, it is our ethical obligation to free ourselves from its alien influence. But the perfect experience of self-determination for theoretical thought—the abstraction from all objectivity, all imaginative content—lead us to the “dark presentation” of a “relation without relata” (244), or the mere rule of abstraction. That is the limit of representation, and equally the limit of thought (the thinkable still requires a possible object of thought). Given that thinkability requires determination, the thinkable must indeed be regarded...
to be conditioned by sensibility. Even though the progress of philosophy is the progress away from sensibility, that progress must still be made in terms of sensibility.

The fact remains that there will never be an unmediated experience (i.e. empirical consciousness) of Anstoß precisely because all experience is the mediated experience of Anstoß. Consciousness, conditioned by Anstoß, will always be too late. In this way, it occupies the same dangerous terrain as the Kantian thing-in-itself. However, what is fascinating about the Anstoß is that it is an event and not a thing. Though the I is necessarily led to posit the not-I on the basis of such an Anstoß (and posit the not-I as the grounds for all resistance to its activity), the Anstoß is not initially presented as the product of something which would impact or inhibit our activity. Nor is it the case that the Anstoß—as the onset of a difference or inequality within the perfect identity of the I—can be predicted or determined *a priori* (265). It serves as a marker for the ineluctably alien aspect of our self-constitution—the limit which establishes the intellect from within.

One must, then, resist referring to Anstoß as a concept in the usual sense. It has no object, for it conditions objectivity. Nor is it an arbitrary, as he is driven to it by a specific philosophical exigency. Neither thing nor possession, it is a marker of the incompletable nature of finite spirit. The task is not to enshrine such figures as idols nor to take them as emblems of futility, but to allow them to spur thinking into an every deeper investigation of the most intimate mystery—the strangeness of our own being.
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Though the Heath and Lachs translation has served as my primary guide to Fichte’s *Grundlage*, I have changed their translation in almost every quoted circumstance to preserve the language of “the I” and my own translations of Fichte’s key concepts. All references to Fichte’s works use the pagination of the *Sämtliche Werke* (cited FW for *Fichtes Werke*) unless otherwise noted.


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