

**The nature of consciousness in Fichte's philosophy of religion (1804-1806): a
blessed life as the vocation of humankind**

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Abstract

This thesis provides a systematic interpretation of Johann Gottlieb Fichte's theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804), and the so-called "popular works" of *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben, oder auch die Religionslehre* (1806) and *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1805). These works constitute a middle period in Fichte's philosophical writings that has been neglected in academic scholarship, particularly in the Anglophone world. This thesis argues that they are, on the contrary, indispensable for a reading of Fichte's philosophy of religion in his maturing works as independent of the Kantian and Hegelian philosophies and presumptions. In such a reading, the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804) provides the necessary theoretical foundation for understanding the subsequent popular works. The structure of consciousness as an "*Als*" characterizes this foundation. This structure of consciousness is utilized by Fichte in the *Anweisung* to provide individuals with an insight into his doctrine of religion concerning a blessed life. In the *Grundzüge*, this theory is connected to the notion of history, indicating how humanity as a whole can attain a blessed life, which is at the same time the purpose or vocation of humankind. An exegesis of the three aforementioned works thus demonstrates Fichte's aim to establish through his advanced delineation of the theory of knowledge that the attainment of a blessed life is the purpose of humankind, as well as to express the social and cultural implications of this vocation.

Résumé

Cette thèse propose une interprétation systématique des œuvres suivantes de Johann Gottlieb Fichte : le *Wissenschaftslehre* théorique (1804), et des soi-disant « conférences populaires », *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben, oder auch die Religionslehre* (1806) et *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1805). Ces œuvres constituent une période médiane dans les écrits philosophiques fichtéennes peu discutés dans la littérature scientifique, particulièrement dans le monde Anglophone. Cette thèse affirme que ces textes sont, au contraire, indispensable pour une exposition de la philosophie de la religion tardive de Fichte, indépendamment des présuppositions Kantiens et Hégéliens. En l'occurrence, le *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804) fournirait la fondation théorique pour des écrits populaires subséquents. La structure de la conscience comme « *Als* » caractérise cette fondation. Dans l'*Anweisung*, Fichte se sert de cette structure de conscience afin d'introduire la subjectivité à sa doctrine de la religion concernant la vie bienheureuse. Dans le *Grundzüge*, cette théorie est connectée à l'idée de l'histoire, ce qui indique la façon dont l'humanité entière peut répondre à sa vocation première, l'obtention d'une vie « bienheureuse ». Ainsi, une exégèse des trois textes susmentionnés démontre que l'objectif de Fichte est d'établir, à partir des structures de la connaissance, que la vie bienheureuse doit être entendue comme la vocation de l'humanité, aussi bien que d'en tirer les conséquences sociales et culturelles de ce constat.

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Second, I would like to thank Matthew Nini for his editorial help with the abstract in French and for reading various drafts of my chapters. I also want to appreciate my other colleagues and friends in McGill University's School of Religious Studies, as daily formal and informal conversations with these people have steered me towards new understandings and have helped me develop my insights into the subject matter of this thesis. They also made the countless hours spent writing in the basement office worthwhile.

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Introduction

Scholarship on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's (1762-1814) theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804) and the so-called "popular works" of *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1805) and *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben, oder auch die Religionslehre* (1806) is scarce.¹ These works, however, are essential to any comprehension of the character of Fichte's philosophy of religion that exemplifies the center of his middle period (1800-1809). Fichte's philosophy of religion has often been perceived as a transitional system between those of Kant and Hegel. Yet, while the writings from his middle and late period have been long-ignored in favour of his earlier works, they demonstrate that Fichte's philosophy can serve as a unique theory independent of the Kantian or Hegelian philosophies, their presuppositions or defining propositions.²

As a transcendental philosopher, Fichte construes his philosophy of religion by means of a theory of knowledge. Although his earlier theory of knowledge from the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo* has been addressed extensively in Anglophone scholarship, a systematic discussion of this philosophical project in Fichte's later versions of the project has been neglected. Particularly, the structure of consciousness that forms

¹ For the purpose of this thesis, a specific development in Fichte's middle period is identified within the 1804-1806 writings. Zöller states that Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* indicates a clear step in a new direction for his Science of Knowing, which justifies the determination of this work as the starting point of a trilogy within his middle period. This thesis will argue that the *Grundzüge* (1805) and the *Anweisung* (1806) make use of the theoretical background of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804) (Günter Zöller, "Fichte (1762-1814)" in Forster, Michael N., and Kristin Gjesdal, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*. OUP Oxford, 2015.) Additionally, in a footnote in another work, Zöller refers to Hartmut Traub's dissertation as a clear rendition of the "middle Fichte," comprising the 1804-1806 period. (Günter Zöller, "Popular Method: On Truth and Falsehood in Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy," in *Fichte and Transcendental Philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan UK : London, 2014), 175.) Although Traub considers both the 1805 *Grundzüge* and the 1806 *Anweisung* as well as a third popular work, *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten* (1805-06), he does not consider in detail the influence of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* on these popular works, which is what this thesis aims to achieve. Moreover, while Traub's dissertation is indispensable for scholarship on the popular works, this thesis aspires to add to Traub's research by leaving out of consideration the third popular text, *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten*, in order to make the point instead that the works analyzed in this thesis form a coherent trilogy together. Thereby, this thesis will highlight a novel insight into Fichte's maturing philosophy of religion in particular.

² Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowing: JG Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. Walter E. Wright (SUNY Press, 2012), 4–5.

the key philosophical element of the later versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the corresponding popular works has not been examined explicitly in those studies. This thesis aims to examine how the *Als*-structure of consciousness—explained by Fichte in his middle period as the condition for understanding the mind—contributes to an enhanced conception of his philosophy of religion, and thus to his definition of the vocation of humankind as he articulated this in the aforementioned 1804-1806 works.

My approach to achieving this objective is to commence with a short review of the development of German idealism and Fichte's position therein, as well as with an evaluation of the general interpretations of his transcendental project. This provides the essential justification for designating the structure of knowledge as the leading principle for a systematic reading of the abovementioned works. Chapter 1 explores the theoretical delineation of the structure of consciousness as an "*Als*" that Fichte advances in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, by discussing its indispensable and foundational concepts. This forms the necessary background to understanding the popular work of 1806, *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, which is the focus of chapter 2. The reason for leaving the 1805 *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* for chapter 3 in this exegesis—hence, to follow a non-chronological structure—is that the 1804 and 1806 works are composed as a guide for individuals to achieve an insight into consciousness and to attain a blessed life, which paves the way for Fichte's characterization of the unfolding of history and the purpose or vocation of humankind as a whole. The exegeses of chapters 1-3 will establish that Fichte's notion of consciousness underlying these popular works leads to a novel understanding of his philosophy of religion, and its implications will be discussed in chapter 4. This thesis will thereby contribute to the nascent scholarship on Fichte's works from his middle period, since a

demonstration of the interconnection between the aforementioned works provides a complete picture of how human existence should be perceived, valued and organized.

Literature review and historical background

Since Fichte greatly contributed to the historical development of German idealism, it is necessary to consider the core characteristics of this movement and the corresponding philosophical presuppositions and concepts that its defining figures explored. Such a survey is naturally non-exhaustive considering the entanglement of events and the number of contributors involved in the development of German idealism. Hence, the following overview discusses only the historical events and individuals associated with the movement that were most influential for the development of Fichte's thought. This outline also provides a review of the scholarly literature interpreting Fichte's maturing theory of knowledge.

This review starts with a consideration of the critical events that triggered the emergence of the movement of German idealism, specifically the influence of Kant's critical philosophy and the responses that he evoked from the most prominent German idealists. The next section explores the position of Fichte's philosophy as a theory of knowledge in the scholarly debate regarding his transcendental idealism, and addresses the context in which the structure of consciousness must be understood. The following two sections briefly evaluate the various stages that Fichte's project of the *Wissenschaftslehre* succeeded through and assesses why it is important to discuss the 1804-1806 works. The subsequent paragraph reviews how the religious and moral aspects of Fichte's philosophy are regarded in academic literature, specifically his developed concept of God as the Absolute, and the relation of the notions of love and freedom to the theory of knowledge. This necessarily includes a discussion of the concept of the vocation of humankind as it is employed in the advanced versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, since it is this notion that ultimately inspired the philosophical projects of all the German idealists.

In brief: German idealism

The movement of German idealism emerged around 1780, in a time that is generally portrayed as the age of the Enlightenment, and came to an end around 1840 at the dawn of Romanticism. This turbulent philosophical period is characterized by a variety of responses to the critical works of Immanuel Kant by the “tremendous trio” of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, who all aim to understand reality in a systematic and philosophical manner.³ This new critical philosophy opposed a traditional notion of metaphysics and science by questioning the subjective involvement of human consciousness in experience.⁴ Aside from the issue of the nature of knowledge, one of the most important issues at stake for these philosophers was freedom; do individuals have any agency in attaining their purpose, or is everything predestined by providence? Inevitably, the role and meaning of religion were in dispute, reaching its climax in controversies such as the *Pantheismusstreit* and the *Atheismusstreit* and in the discussion surrounding the notion of the vocation of humankind.

The subject matter that occupied all German idealists is knowledge, and in particular how claims for knowledge about existence could be justified considering the nature of human subjectivity. This is a response to the Enlightenment assertion that we can find the truth about the nature of existence through experiences. The German idealists argue instead that humanity itself has to create a meaning for their existence.⁵ Idealism in this context, as per Dieter Henrich, reflects a philosophy of mind where the mind is the object of philosophical analysis. The overall aim of idealism is to connect “philosophical theory” with the “internal experience of human

³ David James and Günter Zöller, *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte* (Cambridge University Press, 2016)., 1-2

⁴ Matthew C. Altman, *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)., 1

⁵ George Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge, UNITED KINGDOM: Cambridge University Press, 2005), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mcgill/detail.action?docID=228248>., 2

life.”⁶ To add to this, Ernst-Otto Onnasch explains that the project of German idealism was to find a theory of knowing or epistemology of existence as opposed to an ontology. Instead of discussing the meaning of existence or being, the German idealists question what we can know about this existence. More explicitly, this means that philosophy should not merely explain the conditions for experience, but must examine how we can obtain knowledge about experience. Most significantly, it should establish the conditions for knowledge itself.⁷

Matthew C. Altman rightly highlights that there is not one determinate definition of German idealism, as the philosophers involved in this movement define the notion of idealism in a variety of ways, such as absolute idealism, transcendental idealism, critical idealism and so on.⁸ Nevertheless, what unites the projects of the German idealists is that they all reply to Immanuel Kant’s “Copernican revolution in philosophy.”⁹ Kant is considered to be the founder of transcendental idealism and his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) tackles the issue of the nature and the limits of knowledge. According to George di Giovanni, the true importance of Kant is not that he demonstrated the limits of reason, but that he revealed the “involvement of reason in human experience.”¹⁰ Another important aspect of Kant’s philosophy is highlighted by Henrich, who explains Kant’s philosophical project as solving the “riddle of metaphysics.”¹¹ He argues that Kant’s objective is to uncover the systematic structure of reason, in order to justify science and to dismiss metaphysics as illusionary.¹²

⁶ Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 29.

⁷ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Over het begrip van de wetenschapsleer of de zogenoemde filosofie*, trans. Ernst-Otto Onnasch (Boom, 1995), 25.

⁸ Altman, *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*, 4–5.

⁹ Altman, *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*.

¹⁰ Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors*, 33.

¹¹ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 25

¹² Henrich, 32.

Kant's innovative transcendental philosophy generated many responses, questions and interpretations of its nature. A few important figures in the reception of Kant's philosophy such as F.H. Jacobi, Karl Leonhard Reinhold and G.E. Schulze (alias Aenesidemus) claimed that Kant's philosophy was not properly grounded, meaning that the foundation of knowledge itself needed to be uncovered. For this, a more radical idealism was needed.¹³ Fichte takes issue with most of these responses to Kant because they misconstrue Kant's transcendental philosophy. In particular, how they deny that any knowledge about the Absolute, or God, is possible. According to Fichte, their approach of questioning the mode of perception with which humans apprehend objects in experience rather than exploring these objects of experience itself overlooks the overarching question of *how* the mind creates representations.¹⁴ Hence, Fichte aims to "escape the circular regress" that occurs when one tries to explain the structure of mental faculties by using these same mental faculties.¹⁵ He shows that the idealist has to perceive a higher unity of subject and object as the source of consciousness.¹⁶ Therefore, Fichte's philosophical objective is to search for the foundation of consciousness within consciousness itself, within the Absolute.

Disputes about Fichte's idealism

The scholarly interpretation of Fichte's understanding of the nature of existence depends on how his transcendental idealism is construed. Within the debate about Fichte's idealism three different interpretations of his idealism can be identified, ranging from a radical subjective view to an essentially objective perspective of consciousness. Yet, his idealism is best described as a

¹³ Wayne M. Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 9–12. Fichte, *Over het begrip van de wetenschapsleer of de zogenoemde filosofie*, 22.

¹⁴ Kien-how Goh, "The Ideality of Idealism: Fichte's Battle against Kantian Dogmatism," in *Fichte and Transcendental Philosophy*, ed. Tom Rockmore and Daniel Breazale (Springer, 2014), 129.

¹⁵ Goh, 136.

¹⁶ Goh, 137–38.

theory of knowledge, whereby knowledge itself is used to examine its foundation. The construal of Fichte's idealism also requires a discussion of his understanding of metaphysics. Although it was Kant's aim to overthrow classical metaphysics, Fichte's approach is more complex.

On one side of this debate, Fichte's idealism is described as a form of radical subjectivity. In this interpretation, Fichte's philosophy is criticized as leading to solipsism because it seems to indicate that no reality exists outside of individual consciousness. Advocates of this view consider that while Kant's argument "bordered on solipsism," Fichte "plunged into it."¹⁷ Many contemporaries of Fichte, including Schelling and Hegel, understood his philosophy in this way. For example, novelist and essayist Madame de Staël wrote that Fichte's speculative philosophy reminded her of the story of Baron von Munchhausen who dragged himself up from a swamp by pulling his own hair.¹⁸ As witty as this comparison is, it does not do justice to the depth of Fichte's transcendental philosophy, which is not an exaltation of the self to the position of divine creator.

Another interpretation comes from Wayne M. Martin, who characterizes Fichte's idealism as containing an "ideal perspective on human beings" that shows how individuals are subjected to the order of the world. This leads to a theory of the objectivity of consciousness that denies all speculation or any "superphysical domain of ideas."¹⁹ Likewise, Altman argues that, instead of merely denying the existence of a world independent of consciousness, Fichte declares that we cannot know anything about this world because we are confined to finite consciousness.²⁰ Although these points of view rightfully indicate that Fichte did not deny the

¹⁷ Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 69.

¹⁸ Ives Radrizzani, "The Wissenschaftslehre and Historical Engagement," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, ed. David James and Günter Zöller (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 229.

¹⁹ Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity*, 144–45.

²⁰ Altman, *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*, 324

existence of a world outside of the subject by emphasizing the moral aspect of humanity, they do not recognize the particular character of Fichte's epistemic project and thereby they overlook the speculative nature of his middle period works.

Fichte's transcendental philosophy must instead be explained as a theory of knowing that aims to find the conditions and limits of knowing itself. As a representative of this view, Günter Zöller explains Fichte's idealism as an approach to understanding appearances in human consciousness by means of the "a priori conditions of human mental activity."²¹ Similarly, Henrich emphasizes that Fichte's philosophical project must be perceived as an improvement of the notion of the self that adds to the "theory of self-consciousness."²² In this process, he identified a gap between the self in experience and the question of what we can know about this self, which in Fichte's middle period will be bridged by its unity with the Absolute or God.²³ Therefore, Fichte's philosophy should not be perceived as subjective idealism, but as transcendental idealism that indicates how human consciousness is grounded in itself.

Furthermore, while it was Kant's objective to overthrow the traditional understanding of metaphysics, Fichte does not clearly reject metaphysics but approaches it in a different way. Zöller, for instance, claims that Fichte did not merely advance a new classical metaphysics in his use of the concepts of life, absolute and faith. Such a view would overlook how minutely Fichte has adopted and assimilated ideas that he adopted from Spinoza, Plato, Jacobi and Schelling in the incessant renewal of his philosophy.²⁴ Here, Zöller disagrees with Di Giovanni's claim that

²¹ Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 27–28.

²² Dieter Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight," in *Debates in Nineteenth-Century European Philosophy*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal (Routledge, 2015), 18.

²³ Henrich, 23.

²⁴ Günter Zöller, "Fichte's Later Presentations of the Wissenschaftslehre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, ed. David James and Günter Zöller (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 144.

Fichte maintains the presuppositions of ancient metaphysics.²⁵ The complexity of Fichte's understanding of metaphysics in the developing works is addressed in this thesis.

Although this overview roughly sums up the current topics in Fichte scholarship, it does not reflect how the notion of idealism and metaphysics are construed in the works of the middle period, only how they are conceived in Fichte's early philosophy. This thesis will situate Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, the *Anweisung* and the *Grundzüge* in the context of this debate about the nature of transcendental idealism, by showing that Fichte's advancement of his philosophy of religion in the middle period requires a theory of knowledge that provides the conditions of human experience in consciousness as grounded *a priori* in the Absolute.

Fichte's idealism and the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*

Fichte's academic career started in 1793 at the University of Jena, where he took over Reinhold's chair in Kantian philosophy after his publication of *An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792). During his time at Jena, Fichte developed his own philosophy named the *Wissenschaftslehre* or Science of Knowing, which has been considered Fichte's main philosophical project. With this project, Fichte became the first of the German idealists to attempt a systematic development of a structure of reason.²⁶

Except for the first publication of the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* in 1794 and its second edition in 1795, Fichte never published any of the versions of the work in his lifetime. While he kept revising his philosophical project until he died in 1814, most of Fichte's works were published posthumously.²⁷ In the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, he lays out the objectives

²⁵ George Di Giovanni, "The Kantian Legacy: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Hegel's Logic.," *Kenkyu*, (*Journal of the Japan Fichte Association*), 2014, 19.

²⁶ Fichte, *Over het begrip van de wetenschapsleer of de zogenoemde filosofie*, 21.

²⁷ Fichte, 3.

of his philosophy, which is to find a foundation for all of science and to establish what we as human beings are able to know. Meanwhile, Fichte's time at the university was short-lived: In 1798-99 he was accused of being an atheist, and the *Atheismusstreit* that unfolded forced him to resign from his position.²⁸ The cause for this dispute was his concept of God, which was not a personal deity, but an idea of a moral world order.²⁹ After his resignation, Fichte moved to Berlin to make a living as a writer. The popular lectures stem from this middle period.³⁰ In 1809, when the University of Berlin was founded, Fichte started another academic career while continuously rewriting his later versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* until his death.

As mentioned before, most Anglophone scholarship on Fichte's works focusses on the early Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, leaving out a discussion of the notion of vocation as it relates to Fichte's comprehension of the mind and religion in the post-Jena works. Daniel Breazeale is a clear example of this tendency to focus merely on Fichte's early works. For Breazeale, there are no significant differences between the earlier and later versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.³¹ While acknowledging the importance of Fichte's post-1800 writings for their "purely biographical interest," he justifies leaving these works out from his research by arguing that the Jena-works have had most influence on the unfolding of the history of German idealism.³² Benjamin Crowe, who shares this tendency, argues that the Jena works constitute the best understood period of Fichte's philosophy since there is a lot of scholarship on it, while adding that Fichte's later writings on religion are generally "equivocal."³³

²⁸ Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 73.

²⁹ Dorrien, 71.

³⁰ Among the popular lectures are counted the 1805-1807 works, see Zöller, "Popular Method."

³¹ Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte and Schelling: The Jena Period," in *The Age of German Idealism*, ed. Robert S. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (Routledge History of Philosophy Volume VI, 1993), 172.

³² Breazeale, 173-74.

³³ Benjamin Crowe, "Fact and Fiction in Fichte's Theory of Religion," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2009): 597-98.

While current Fichte scholars have generally accepted the significance of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* for Fichte's philosophy as a whole, most texts that do so are in German, such as the works of Wolfgang Janke and the dissertation of Christoph Asmuth.³⁴ An important exception to this inclination is the research of George di Giovanni. His interpretation of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* contributes to the study of Fichte's transcendental philosophy in English scholarship by putting the work in the context of the development of German idealism.³⁵ According to Di Giovanni, Fichte's first principle of the Science of Knowing in 1804 is the Absolute.³⁶ In order to solve the issue that we cannot make determinate claims about the Absolute, Fichte developed a "language of attribution" that has the Absolute as its object. Subjectively, this language is true to its object only "by negating itself before it."³⁷ Hereby, Fichte constructed a space for interpretation, only to negate it later as an illusion (*Schein*) in order to emphasize the inconceivability of the Absolute.³⁸

Gaetano Rametta also draws to this reading of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, but a main distinction is that Rametta's emphasizes Fichte's idea of the "as" or *Als*-structure of consciousness, which is the structure that characterizes Fichte's mature theory of knowledge as a whole.³⁹ Most significant is that Rametta identifies an isomorphism between the genetic demonstration of philosophy and the genetic movement of reflection, and that both find their

³⁴ For the specific texts, refer to: Wolfgang Janke, *Fichte; Sein Und Reflexion, Grundlagen Der Kritischen Vernunft*. (Berlin,: De Gruyter, 1970)., Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Wolfgang Janke, *Wissenschaftslehre 1804 : Wahrheits-Und Vernunftlehre, I.-XV. Vortrag* (Frankfurt am Main, 1966)., Ingeborg. Schüssler, *Die Auseinandersetzung von Idealismus Und Realismus in Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre; Grundlage Der Gesamten Wissenschaftslehre 1794/5, Zweite Darstellung Der Wissenschaftslehre 1804*. (Frankfurt am Main,: V. Klostermann, 1972)., Christoph Asmuth, *Das Begreifen Des Unbegreiflichen Philosophie Und Religion Bei Johann Gottlieb Fichte 1800-1806* (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 1999).

³⁵ Di Giovanni, "The Kantian Legacy: Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre and Hegel's Logic." George Di Giovanni, "The Spinozism of Fichte's Transcendental Argument in the Lecture Notes of 1804," *Fichte-Studien* 44 (2017): 49–63.

³⁶ Di Giovanni, "The Kantian Legacy: Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre and Hegel's Logic.," 5.

³⁷ Di Giovanni, 5–6.

³⁸ Di Giovanni, 6.

³⁹ Gaetano Rametta, "The Speculative Structures of Fichte's 1807 Wissenschaftslehre," trans. Garth Green, *Idealistic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2007): 129.

source in the Absolute.⁴⁰ Zöllner and Henrich concur with this emphasis on the *Als*, and show that Fichte introduces the idea of understanding knowing *as* knowing in order to avoid his failure to provide the origin of self-consciousness.⁴¹ The “as” refers here to the Greek particle of representation, which designates the perception of “being *qua* being.”⁴² This notion therefore sets out both the nature and the delimitation of conceptuality, and it plays a huge role in the mature versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This thesis will utilize this “as” as the philosophical element that characterizes the theory of knowledge in Fichte’s advancing and popular articulations of the project between 1804-1806.

A substantial question that arises in academic discussions about both Fichte’s early and middle period works is how the inconceivable and infinite Absolute ground connects to finite existence without violating the nature of both concepts. That is to say, without raising human beings to a godlike state, and without diminishing God to a finite being. Ernst-Otto Onnasch is skeptical about Fichte’s attempt to apprehend this “how” in the *Anweisung*.⁴³ Considering that this structure is important for understanding the subsequent works, this question must be considered through an exegesis of the 1804-1806 works. Moreover, both Hansjürgen Verweyen and Onnasch maintain that the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* must provide the critical proof for the presuppositions on which Fichte’s explanation of a blessed life is established in the 1806 *Anweisung*. Knowledge is a presentation of the Absolute, and the structure of consciousness is the condition for this image-creating.⁴⁴ The *Anweisung* is presented as a *Religionslehre*, as

⁴⁰ Rametta, 130.

⁴¹ Henrich, “Fichte’s Original Insight,” 28.

⁴² Henrich, 28.

⁴³ Ernst-Otto Onnasch, “De Standpuntenleer En Hun Systematische Relevantie Voor Fichtes Late Systeem,” in *Studies van Het Centrum Voor Duits Idealisme*, ed. William Desmond, Ludwig Heyde, and Ernst-Otto Onnasch (Uitgeverij KU Nijmegen / Nijmegen University Press, 2000), 93.

⁴⁴ Hansjürgen Verweyen, “Fichte’s Philosophy of Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, ed. David James and Günter Zöllner (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 287. Onnasch, “De Standpuntenleer,” 90.

opposed to a *Wissenschaftslehre*, and does provide the philosophical background explicitly.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, both the *Anweisung* and the *Grundzüge* essentially explain a way of living that is built on the presuppositions of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, as this thesis aims to elucidate.

Religion and ethics in Fichte's popular works

The German idealist approach to human knowledge evoked a new concept of religious faith, which is that religion can only be justified when it expresses ethical values and duties that are accepted by rational reflection.⁴⁶ Fichte articulates his sophisticated views on religion and ethics in the popular works, especially in the 1806 *Anweisung* and the 1805 *Grundzüge*, which he presented in the form of lectures to an uneducated audience. A philosophical reading of these works requires knowledge about the structure of consciousness in the theory of knowledge of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. This implies that Fichte's theoretical delineation of knowledge and consciousness must be sufficiently argued in order to demonstrate the validity of the popular works, to show that Fichte's philosophy has taken a speculative turn.⁴⁷

Dieter Henrich reflects on this speculative turn in two ways. First, since Fichte aims to find a ground for consciousness, Henrich states that he has to move from an epistemic structure of self-reference to an ontological one, where the self is "activity that constitutes self-consciousness."⁴⁸ In order to justify this turn, a third type of self-reference is developed by Fichte. In this third structure, self-knowledge is explained as an ontological relation between the self and its origin by means of the mind.⁴⁹ Another concept is required to connect the self to its

⁴⁵ Verweyen, "Fichte's Philosophy of Religion," 288. Onnasch, "De Standpuntenleer," 90.

⁴⁶ Altman, *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*.

⁴⁷ This is argued by various scholars, e.g. Luc Langlois, "Le Savoir Comme Image de l'Absolu Dans La Philosophie de La Religion de Fichte (1804-1806)," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 72, no. 1 (2016): 27.

⁴⁸ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 269.

⁴⁹ Henrich, 270.

ground, which is the concept of God, hence the speculative nature.⁵⁰ Second, Henrich also claims that Fichte creates the “first *modern* theology and perhaps the only one.”⁵¹ Therefore, an identification of the speculative elements in his philosophy is important for the establishment of his mature philosophy of religion. Henrich describes Fichte’s speculative theology as a *docta ignorantia*, a learned ignorance concerning the idea that God is the ground for self-consciousness.⁵² This means that we can only define what God’s essence as that which we cannot conceptualize, and also that God is not a being that exists outside of knowledge.⁵³

Hansjürgen Verweyen is one of the few scholars who provides a detailed overview of Fichte’s philosophy of religion that includes the popular works. He argues that the central role of religion in Fichte’s work is the basis for popularizing his philosophical project.⁵⁴ Also, Verweyen acknowledges that the strength of Fichte’s philosophy of religion lies in the claim that “whoever really rests in God’s will, will create from that basis the strength and infinite patience which does not allow despair over the world’s meaning.”⁵⁵ The significance of this claim that religion eventually provides individuals with blessedness will be considered in the exegeses of the popular works.

With Verweyen’s article as an important exception, most academic scholarship on Fichte’s 1805 and 1806 “popular” post-Jena works has been published only in French, Italian, Dutch and German. Additionally, most articles about the popular works only interpret one text at a time without showing their interrelation. Regarding the 1806 *Anweisung*, Luc Langlois, Emmanuel Cattin and Gaetano Rametta exemplify the view that this work expresses Fichte’s

⁵⁰ Henrich, 270.

⁵¹ Henrich, 273.

⁵² Henrich, 274. Henrich also calls it a “Spinozism of freedom,” yet this is less relevant for the current project.

⁵³ Henrich, 274–75.

⁵⁴ Verweyen, “Fichte’s Philosophy of Religion,” 288.

⁵⁵ Verweyen, 292.

mature philosophy of religion, which indicates that the divine necessarily manifests itself in knowledge.⁵⁶ The idea that images must be understood as images shows individuals that the Absolute appears in knowledge, and since existence is knowledge, that humanity itself is the manifestation of the divine.⁵⁷ Although this truth has already been articulated in Christianity—specifically in the gospel of John—*how* this happens can only be explained by the Science of Knowing.⁵⁸

The 1805 *Grundzüge* provides an overview of Fichte’s idea of the philosophy of history. According to Quentin Landenne, the philosophical foundation underlying this work prepares the audience of the lectures for the realization of the world-plan (*Weltplan*) that Fichte outlines as the purpose of humankind, the attainment of which is conditioned by the interplay of freedom and necessity.⁵⁹ Its speculative nature is to find a knowledge of knowledge itself in order to identify an essential unconsciousness or inconceivability at the heart of our cultural self-understanding as a historical-developmental principle.⁶⁰ Ives Radrizzani criticizes the *Grundzüge* by arguing that Fichte fails to deduce the structure of history, that “the interpreter finds himself forced to reconstruct a scientific exposition that Fichte never wrote.”⁶¹ This thesis will demonstrate that, on the contrary, Fichte grounds the theory of history in a similar manner as the theory of knowledge in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Such a reading of the work will provide a

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Cattin, “Fichte: La Philosophie de La Maturité,” in *Fichte: La Philosophie de La Maturité (1804-1814): Réflexivité, Phénoménologie et Philosophie*, ed. Jean-Christophe Goddard and Marc Maesschalck (Vrin, 2003). Langlois, “Le Savoir Comme Image de l’Absolu Dans La Philosophie de La Religion de Fichte (1804-1806).” Gaetano Rametta, “La Philosophie Fichtéenne de La Religion,” trans. Roberto Formisano, *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 72, no. 1 (2016): 7–20.

⁵⁷ Rametta, “La Philosophie Fichtéenne de La Religion,” 9–10. Cattin, “Fichte: La Philosophie de La Maturité,” 139.

⁵⁸ Cattin, “Fichte: La Philosophie de La Maturité,” 127. Langlois, “Le Savoir Comme Image de l’Absolu Dans La Philosophie de La Religion de Fichte (1804-1806),” 22.

⁵⁹ Quentin Landenne, “Spéculation et Liberté Dans La Philosophie de l’histoire Du Caractère de l’époque Actuelle de J. G. Fichte (1804-1805),” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 64, no. 4 (2009): 470.

⁶⁰ Landenne, 482.

⁶¹ Radrizzani, “The Wissenschaftslehre and Historical Engagement,” 223.

renewed insight into Fichte's explanation of the structure of knowledge as it is involved in a theory of culture and history.

Not much has been said yet about Fichte's popular method, how it is distinct from his theoretical approach to the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The main difference is that the audience of the popular lectures does not have an extensive background in philosophy. Therefore, in the popular lectures, Fichte often appeals to religious and cultural examples to convince his listeners of his objectives, and foregoes its philosophical foundation—yet this foundation must be presupposed if one is to understand the lectures completely. Hartmut Traub, who wrote a systematic interpretation of three of Fichte's popular works in German—explicitly of the *Grundzüge* (1805), *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten und seine Erscheinungen im Gebiete der Freiheit* (1805) and the *Anweisung* (1806)—provides a definition of “popular” in the context of Fichte's middle period (1804-1806). While his focus is slightly different than that of this thesis, Traub's conclusion that the transition from the theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre* to applied philosophy must be through activity, through a negation of consciousness as image-creating in order to have an influence on life, will be relevant for my interpretation of the popular works.⁶² In order to leave a mark on their existence, individuals have to become conscious of the conditions of their experiences, which happens through the impulses of empirical existence that spark this insight.⁶³

Günter Zöller introduces a different understanding of the popular method. He argues that the popular method is rooted in ancient Greek tradition, in which philosophical education was divided both into an esoteric branch aimed at an inner circle of philosophers, and into an exoteric division as philosophy for the masses.⁶⁴ The popular lecture presuppose the esoteric philosophy

⁶² Hartmut Traub, *J. G. Fichtes Popularphilosophie 1804-1806* (Fromman-Holzboog, 1992), 291.

⁶³ Traub, 293.

⁶⁴ Zöller, “Popular Method,” 166.

theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre*, but are presented in the form of exoteric philosophy as Fichte appeals to “common beliefs” and “faith” of his audience.⁶⁵ Zöller argues that this approach is suitable for the exoteric philosophy about the “elusive” topic of truth and certainty in Fichte’s philosophy, considering that it could not be explained without the use of religious imagery and prose.⁶⁶ Hence, while the popular method is a way to share complex truths in a comprehensible way, it also enables all human beings to apprehend the consequences of the new philosophy for their everyday lives, culture and history.⁶⁷

The vocation of humankind

The question of human agency and its relation to divine providence occupied many minds by the end of the Enlightenment era. During the Enlightenment, the idea emerged that human beings are individually responsible for their actions, in accordance with a conception of God that must be found within the individual. This opposes the scholastic and dogmatic view of humanity as part of a reality where God externally determines every part of their existence.⁶⁸ Throughout his lifetime, Fichte grappled with this idea of the vocation of humanity and its relation to the precarious dynamic between necessity and freedom, and he approached this matter from the viewpoint of knowledge.⁶⁹

In 1800, Fichte published his first popular work titled *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*. Although this book will not play a role in this thesis, the idea of vocation (*Bestimmung*) that it

⁶⁵ Zöller, 173.

⁶⁶ Zöller, 174.

⁶⁷ This raises the larger philosophical issue of esoteric and exoteric approaches in philosophy. This debate was popularized by political philosopher Leo Strauss. For more information on this matter: Christopher Craig Brittain, “Leo Strauss and Resourceful Odysseus: Rhetorical Violence and the Holy Middle,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 38, no. 1 (2008): 49–52.

⁶⁸ Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors*, 2–3.

⁶⁹ Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors*, 2

addresses does. The idea of vocation represents the most important issues that were at stake for philosophers at the time.⁷⁰ To contextualize Fichte's occupation with this theme, it must be noted that the 1800 *Bestimmung* carries the same title as a work by Johann Joachim Spalding from 1748, a Lutheran pastor who traced the developments of the Enlightenment notions of the universe and its relation to humanity. Spalding aimed to save religion from materialism, using reason to explain faith. The work advocated for a modern form of protestant piety that could be reconciled with Enlightenment reason and it had a widespread influence on philosophy at the end of the 18th century.⁷¹ Kant, amongst others, adopted these same questions as Spalding concerning what we can know and what we should do with existence.⁷²

Kant, while addressing a similar idea of faith and reason as Spalding, shows instead that faith is merely used as a means to explain certain existential difficulties, while the rest of his universe is morally ordered. In doing so, he changed the definitions of morality and faith. Fichte turned these notions into new philosophical principles that present a harmonious universe like Spalding's, but that had large cultural implications.⁷³ Fichte's idea of the vocation of humankind had consequences for the recognition of the role of philosophy and the place of religion in public life.⁷⁴ His assessment of philosophy and its connections to cultural institutions in modern society is most clearly explained in the *Anweisung* and the *Grundzüge*. This thesis will evaluate how Fichte's conception of the *Als*-structure of consciousness, which gradually leads individuals to an insight into the ground of existence, is necessarily accompanied by a historical and cultural progression, and is conditioned by the particularly dynamic between freedom and necessity.

⁷⁰ Di Giovanni, 9.

⁷¹ Michael Printy, "The Determination of Man: Johann Joachim Spalding and the Protestant Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 2 (2013): 196.

⁷² Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors*, 2.

⁷³ Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors*, 30

⁷⁴ Printy, "The Determination of Man," 210.

According to Wayne M. Martin, in Fichte's earlier works, freedom refers to the concept of a "moral world order," which has to be produced by human beings through knowledge. freedom can be explained as the "task" to rearrange human culture and to control their inclinations for choices that go against the natural world order.⁷⁵ Fichte returns to the idea of vocation in his later works, particularly in the 1805 *Grundzüge*. In his discussion of Fichte's philosophy of history, Radrizzani explains that the vocation of humankind in the *Grundzüge* is the "mediation of knowledge and life as the ultimate goal of history."⁷⁶ Hence, it is the duty of humanity to participate in history in order to bring it towards its destiny.⁷⁷ The concept of vocation connects the popular works, as it is necessarily associated with the structure of consciousness.

Implications for this thesis

I argue, then, that an exegesis of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804) contains the philosophical-theoretical background to examine Fichte's progressive understanding of the structure of consciousness in the selected works from his middle period. This philosophical foundation is requisite to a comprehension of the successive *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1805) and *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben, oder auch die Religionslehre* (1806). Specifically, this involves an evaluation of the so-called *Als*-structure of consciousness that exemplifies Fichte's definition of knowledge in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is applied in the 1805-1806 popular works. Contrary to academic consensus and with the aim to add to existing Anglophone scholarship on the works, this thesis will determine that the popular works are properly grounded

⁷⁵ Wayne M. Martin, "From Kant to Fichte," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, ed. David James and Günter Zöller (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 30.

⁷⁶ Radrizzani, "The Wissenschaftslehre and Historical Engagement," 229.

⁷⁷ Radrizzani, 230–31.

in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. In particular, it discusses how the theory of knowledge connects to Fichte's doctrine of religion and understanding of history.

The reason for discussing the *Anweisung*—which Fichte himself perceives as the culmination of his popular lectures—before going into the *Grundzüge*, is that this approach serves the purpose of this thesis better. Reading the 1805 series of lectures last leads to a theory of history that implements the philosophical and religious concepts of the 1804 and 1806 works, hence defining the purpose or vocation of humankind most clearly. It also follows Fichte's aim in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* to clarify the highest principle of his philosophy before deriving a theory of history and ethics therefrom.⁷⁸

Ultimately, through an exegesis of the 1804-1806 works that evaluates the structure of consciousness as an *Als*, this thesis strives to deliver an interpretation of Fichte's developing and mature philosophy of religion as grounded in a theory of knowledge, independent in its character from either the Kantian or the Hegelian philosophies of religion. Thereby, it highlights the significant implications of Fichte's work for history and culture, and thereby its evolved definition of the purpose of humanity.

⁷⁸ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing (1804)*, 201.

Chapter 1: The *Als*-structure of consciousness in Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*

The twenty-eight lectures that comprise the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* contain the theoretical foundation of Fichte's philosophy of religion in the selected works of his middle period (1804-1806). Fichte presented these lectures to a lay audience at his house in Berlin. His audience did not merely consist of scholars but of a diverse group of people, both men and women.⁷⁹ Hence, considering that the lectures had to be comprehensible for nonprofessional listeners, this work is at the dawn of Fichte's popular philosophy. His objective was to educate his spectators on the new version of the philosophical system that he first introduced in 1794/5, which intends to establish the foundation of the conditions for experience.

Fichte presented this series of lectures on three different occasions during that year. In general, the second presentation is considered to be the clearest articulation and the one that preludes Fichte's mature thinking.⁸⁰ Fichte never published any of his later works during his lifetime, but they were made available posthumously by his son I.H. Fichte. The version of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* that I.H. Fichte published was complete but contained many mistakes.⁸¹ Fortunately, since the early 20th century discovery of a document called the *Copia* in the library of Halle University we are able to study these lectures in more depth, because this document complements the version that I.H. Fichte had published earlier. This thesis interprets Walter Wright's translation of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, which offers a well-defined rendition of the text that combines the transcription of the lectures from the second occasion from both the *Copia* and I.H. Fichte's publication.

⁷⁹ Fichte, 3.

⁸⁰ Fichte, 3.

⁸¹ Fichte, 5.

The series of lectures took place a few years after Fichte lost his professorship in Jena, when he found his published works subjected to the vast criticism of Schelling and Hegel. This discouraged Fichte from publishing more work, and he decided to focus on engaging in philosophical lectures and discussions with groups of students instead.⁸² In these engagements, Fichte employed a specific educational method with which he tried to instigate in his students a new idea of how we should conceive of the truth of existence. He did not ask his audience to reproduce word-for-word every single lecture; he required that they attain insights through “pondering and reflection.”⁸³ In this process, he reasoned, every individual can achieve their own insight that leads to “personal transformation.”⁸⁴ Ultimately, this approach aims to elevate human beings to a higher level of culture and humanity.

To make the exegesis of the most important concept in these lectures apprehensible, it is helpful to make sense of the structure of its contents first. As previously discussed, Fichte’s aim with the *Wissenschaftslehre* is to establish the Absolute as the foundation of knowledge about experiences, which he achieves by means of a discussion of the nature of consciousness. The 1804 lectures form a “double path” that leads the audience to the insight into Absolute oneness, and back to the manifold of existence to perceive it through a newly obtained insight.⁸⁵ Fichte provides an explanation of oneness as the origin from which the manifold of experience emerges, which must be explicated by both a “doctrine of truth” and a “doctrine of appearances.”⁸⁶ An insight into the first doctrine is necessary to find the source or *terminus a quo* of our existence. This requires an abstraction of everything that takes away from the perception of oneness. The

⁸² Fichte, 2.

⁸³ Fichte, 27.

⁸⁴ Fichte, 28.

⁸⁵ Fichte, 19.

⁸⁶ Fichte, 19–20.

second doctrine entails that this understanding of the origin of truth opens the way for an account of the structure of appearances, which demonstrates how disjunctions and manifoldness exist in our minds.⁸⁷ Ultimately, the *Als*-structure of consciousness characterizes Fichte's maturing theory of knowledge, which forms the leading principle that runs through Fichte's arguments in the 1804-1806 works.

This chapter will demonstrate that the undervalued yet fundamental *Als*-structure of consciousness in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* represents Fichte's notion of the Absolute as the ground for the possibility of experience, which is inconceivable to finite knowledge. This structure of consciousness forms the theoretical foundation for the subsequent popular works. The first section discusses the overall aim of Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is to find the truth of the conditions of existence that presupposes the unity of the Absolute. The most important concepts to define are the Absolute and its inconceivability, which are indispensable for the analysis of Fichte's structure of consciousness. The second section addresses this structure of consciousness as an *Als*. Fichte expounds how consciousness produces images, to demonstrate why the Absolute is inconceivable. The third section discusses the relation between realism and idealism to illustrate how the image-creating of consciousness works, in order to understand Fichte's transcendental idealism that coheres with his theory of knowing. The fourth section illuminates a new insight into phenomenology; once the vision into consciousness has been explained, appearances can be perceived through this new insight. The fifth section evaluates the five-fold synthesis that is significant in the subsequent popular works, which is Fichte's schematic explanation of the "dynamic monism" of the theory of the self.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Fichte, 20.

⁸⁸ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 246.

1.1 The concept of the Absolute

Fichte uses the concept of the Absolute—also referred to as Absolute oneness or God—to constitute what he recognizes as the foundation of truth or knowledge, which can be acquired through an insight (*Einsicht*). For Fichte, therefore, establishing the truth of existence requires a discussion of the nature of human knowledge. His philosophy is a form of transcendental idealism, because he attempts to deduce philosophically the conditions for the possibility of experiences, even though he then identifies these as grounded in and limited by an Absolute that is inconceivable to human consciousness.

To prepare for a proper definition of Fichte's notion of the Absolute—or rather, for a demonstration that a positive definition of the concept cannot be provided considering our finite consciousness—it is essential to outline the objectives of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* first. Putting it concisely, the aim of Fichte's philosophical endeavour is to find what qualifies as the unconditional truth about experience.⁸⁹ Fichte argues that each individual can attain this truth as long as he or she works on “applying [his] living spirit to it with all his might,” and then “the insight will happen of itself without any further ado.”⁹⁰ The insight into the foundation of experience cannot be instilled in or imposed on any person; yet, every individual can develop it for themselves, as long as they create the “conditions for insight's self-production.”⁹¹

Fichte identifies the essence of philosophy as the need “to trace all multiplicity [...] back to absolute oneness,” and, vice versa, to conceive “multiplicity through oneness.”⁹² Therefore, absolute oneness is described by Fichte as having its “opposite purely contained in itself.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 22.

⁹⁰ Fichte, 22.

⁹¹ Fichte, 22.

⁹² Fichte, 23.

⁹³ Fichte, 24.

Being always posits a self-consciousness, indicating that being and thinking are united in “pure knowing” or knowing “in itself,” that is to say, knowledge without object.⁹⁴ This oneness is obscured in reflection, because consciousness always supposes being whereby it only considers one half of the unity of being and thinking.⁹⁵ In order to arrive at pure knowing or oneness, Fichte has to determine how reflection conceals oneness. Since there cannot be an infinite regression of insights into the nature of phenomena that succeed each other, there must be a source from which all phenomena emerge, a *terminus a quo*.⁹⁶ In the framework of absolute Oneness, this source cannot be an independent entity, since it remains united with the phenomena that emerge from it as its manifestation.

Fichte’s philosophical project is thus an epistemic project and its purpose is to establish the foundation and boundaries of knowledge in order to make claims about the character of existence. This principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* demands a discussion of its maxim, which is: “To admit absolutely nothing inconceivable and to leave nothing unconceived.”⁹⁷ Fichte nuances this statement: “If it too must finally admit something inconceivable, then at least it will conceive it as just what it is, i.e., absolutely inconceivable, and as nothing more.”⁹⁸ Thus, the *Wissenschaftslehre* rather attempts to demarcate the limits of what can be known, signifying that there must be an inconceivable ground. The concept of the inconceivable will prove to be of great significance for the structure of consciousness and Fichte’s idea of the vocation of humankind.

⁹⁴ Fichte, 25–26.

⁹⁵ Fichte, 26.

⁹⁶ Goh, “The Ideality of Idealism,” 136. See Literature Review and Historical Background, pp. 15

⁹⁷ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 32.

⁹⁸ Fichte, 32.

Consequently, the question about the origin of knowledge that the *Wissenschaftslehre* aims to answer is: “What is it, [i.e. knowing] in its qualitative oneness?” In other words, the question is how can we explain the self-sufficient nature of knowledge with the limited conditions of consciousness.⁹⁹ Eventually, Fichte aims to find “genetic manifestness” (*Evidenz*) in order to deduce all facticity from it.¹⁰⁰ The term “genetic” refers to the transcendental source of manifestness, to the source or “point of oneness” of the phenomena that we perceive through sense experience, as the “self-active process, or unfolding.”¹⁰¹ Hereby, the term genesis should be conceived as an “enactment” (*Tathandlung*) as opposed to a thing in itself or “fact” (*Tatsache*).¹⁰² Fichte defines manifestness as an “immediate grasping” of knowledge, which is the same as knowing *a priori*.¹⁰³ The concept of genetic manifestness therefore refers to the negation of reflection, making place for the inconceivability of the Absolute. The source of knowledge is transcendental, meaning that it is beyond our finite consciousness. Hence, we can only claim *that* there must be such a source.

This chapter, nevertheless, intends to show Fichte’s commitment to explaining *how* consciousness is blind to perceiving its source with which it forms unity, through an evaluation of its structure. In anticipation of the popular works, this dynamic is fundamental; if Fichte’s explanation of the *how* remains obscure, the philosophical claims in the popular works cannot be properly grounded. Ernst-Otto Onnasch expresses this concern that Fichte does not clearly achieve an explanation of our knowledge as it is grounded in the unity of experience in the

⁹⁹ Fichte, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre, Zweiter Vortrag Im Jahre 1804*, trans. R. Lauth and J. Widmann (Meiner, Hamburg, 1986), 29. M189, SW 121-122

¹⁰¹ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing (1804)*, 41., for an explanation of the term *Genesis* see pp. 243

¹⁰² Fichte, 106. This had already been expounded by Fichte in two introductions to the 1797 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings, 1797-1800*, ed. Daniel Breazale (Hackett Publishing, 1994), 48.

¹⁰³ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing (1804)*, 14, 36. Wright justifies his choice of the word “manifestness” in the introduction.

Anweisung.¹⁰⁴ It is the task of this chapter to infer the theoretical claims from the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* that make this grounding possible, in order to disprove Onnasch's accusation. The *Als*-structure of consciousness is indispensable for this undertaking.

The point of unity between Absolute oneness and multiplicity cannot be reconstructed in consciousness since consciousness is necessarily mediated, meaning that it cannot perceive its "intrinsic validity" as oneness.¹⁰⁵ This is where Fichte's maxim of conceiving the "inconceivable *as inconceivable*" becomes relevant, to show that consciousness divides the point of unity into absolute oneness and absolute disjunction, making the unity of the Absolute as such incomprehensible to our finite knowledge.¹⁰⁶ Fichte emphasizes that this does not mean that the Absolute as such is inconceivable; it is only inconceivable when individuals try to conceptualize it. This claim requires an explanation of the structure of consciousness itself.¹⁰⁷ As per Di Giovanni, Fichte underscores the idea that "to conceive critically, one has to conceive it precisely as inconceivable."¹⁰⁸ Here, Fichte has presented the conditions for the creation of the insight, which are the transcendental conditions for experience; namely, that the regular structure of consciousness is not capable of unveiling the truth of the foundation of existence.¹⁰⁹

Because our consciousness cannot conceive of the origin of our conscious activity our intrinsic relation of oneness with the Absolute remains obscured. However, Fichte proves that the truth of consciousness is not a subjective construction, since the insight will appear by itself and requires full attentiveness.¹¹⁰ To explain this, Fichte equates God and Absolute oneness.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Onnasch, "De Standpuntenleer," 93.

¹⁰⁵ Onnasch, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Onnasch, 93.

¹⁰⁷ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 43.

¹⁰⁸ Di Giovanni, "The Kantian Legacy: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Hegel's *Logic*," 8.

¹⁰⁹ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 44.

¹¹⁰ Fichte, 48.

¹¹¹ Fichte, 50.

His concept of God is at the basis of all concepts, as the unity of subject and object, and as that which originally manifests itself. Fichte's idea of God as oneness does not concern a personal being, but forms the condition for our ability to perceive manifestations as referring to a transcendental source, which *is* God. Hence the concept of God forms the foundation of existence, which at the same time conditions and limits our knowledge. We cannot perceive of God, but we can aim to be unified with God as the object of our love.¹¹²

Here, Fichte's philosophy reveals its commitment to religion, since it provides a theory of knowledge to assess the religious concept of God. Fichte refers to the Absolute or oneness as an essence, which means that we cannot "see or conceive" it, but that it remains in what we "are, pursue and live."¹¹³ This does not mean that the Absolute does not exist; on the contrary, its apprehension makes life blessed and worthwhile. It can only be described as what it is not, through a *via negationis*, indicating that the Absolute can only be lived, not conceptualized.¹¹⁴ It must be demonstrated, nevertheless, that the Absolute is both inconceivable and at the same time ingrained in all of experience.

1.2 The *Als*-structure of consciousness

Fichte argues that the Absolute cannot be conceptualized, since our finite consciousness is limited by the principle of division, which he explains with the *Als*-structure of consciousness; this structure is defined as the insight that mental images must be perceived *as (Als)* images or projections from a pre-conceptual source. The significance of the idea of images is that images

¹¹² Di Giovanni, "The Kantian Legacy: Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre and Hegel's Logic.," 6. Di Giovanni call this "*staying with the contradiction*," pp. 28 which allows Fichte to find space outside of the Absolute, which he then negates as *Schein* or appearance. This contradiction, thus, explains the way consciousness conceals the Absolute.

¹¹³ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 56.

¹¹⁴ Rametta refers to it in this way in "The Speculative Structures of Fichte's 1807 Wissenschaftslehre," 135.

represent an original, which cannot appear independent of its origin. Similarly, human consciousness creates images that necessarily refer back to a source, to the Absolute. Once individuals perceive the images that appear in their minds *as* images, they have achieved an insight into the structure of consciousness. Therefore, the structure explains *how* the Absolute forms a unity, through an examination of how consciousness makes sense of the manifold. Christoph Asmuth states that an image must see itself as image in consciousness, and that this establishes knowing exactly as it is, as knowing and as nothing else: “*Das Wissen setzt sich selbst als Wissen, formt sich als Wissen, macht sich in diesem Selbstbezug zu dem, was es ist: Wissen.*”¹¹⁵ This insight into consciousness is the key structure of Fichte’s advancing philosophy and requires a profound explanation.

The significance of the structure of consciousness as an *Als* has been neglected in academic scholarship, and a structural discussion of this structure throughout the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* and the various popular works has not been done before.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, the structure of consciousness as *Als* that characterizes the middle period works has been discussed more extensively in German, French and Italian scholarship.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the structure must be abstracted from the 1804 lectures, and its prominence in Fichte’s philosophy should be highlighted in an English rendition.

Fichte uses the metaphor of the Absolute as “light” in his attempt to arrive at a notion of the foundation of thinking. We cannot perceive light as a unity, since it appears “mediately” to us

¹¹⁵ Christoph Asmuth, “Die Bedeutung J. G. Fichtes Für Eine Theorie Der Bildlichkeit,” in *Bild, Selbstbewusstsein, Einbildung*, ed. Alexander Schnell and Jan Kuneš (Brill, 2015), 10.

¹¹⁶ With exception of Rametta (2007) but he specifically writes about the *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1807.

¹¹⁷ Examples are: Rametta, “The Speculative Structures of Fichte’s 1807 *Wissenschaftslehre*.” Alessandro Bertinetto, “Philosophie de l’Imagination, Philosophie Comme Imagination, La Bildlehre de J.G. Fichte,” in *Fichte: La Philosophie de La Maturité (1804-1814): Réflexivité, Phénoménologie et Philosophie*, ed. Jean-Christophe Goddard and Marc Maesschalck (Vrin, 2003). Asmuth, “Die Bedeutung J. G. Fichtes Für Eine Theorie Der Bildlichkeit.”

in consciousness because of the “principle of division.”¹¹⁸ He explains, however, that this division exists of parts that remain “self-same” within this division, the object remains unchanged.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the division is merely an appearance, which is at once “immanent” as a concept that emerges instantly in consciousness and that is at other times “emanent” as a mediate representation in reason.¹²⁰ Furthermore, Fichte states that “manifestness oscillates between these two perspectives.”¹²¹ The notion of oscillation refers to the capacity of our understanding to move between being and thinking, but also indicates that we cannot remain in either concept, nor that we can reach a proper middle ground. The principle of division, therefore, has an important function in Fichte’s philosophy, as it both indicates the impermeability of the notion of consciousness by consciousness itself, and explains the inconceivability of the Absolute.

The light—or the Absolute—appears to us “through a representative or proxy.”¹²² This idea is at the foundation of what is referred to as Fichte’s *Bildlehre* or theory of images in the late works.¹²³ By this, Fichte means that our consciousness creates an image of light, whereby the light itself is ‘killed’ since the image that we perceive with our finite consciousness does not have any intrinsic value. The mind posits an image of what it perceives with the senses, and forms a conception of what it has imaged as a result.¹²⁴ This shows how the mind forms a disjunction when it perceives something; it conceptualizes the image on the basis of the positing act of the mind and conceptualizes this. This unity between the image and what is imaged is the concept of oneness or the Absolute, which can only be achieved by an “act of thinking.”¹²⁵ In

¹¹⁸ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 45.

¹¹⁹ Fichte, 45.

¹²⁰ Fichte, 45.

¹²¹ Fichte, 45.

¹²² Fichte, 63.

¹²³ See for instance: Asmuth, “Die Bedeutung J. G. Fichtes Für Eine Theorie Der Bildlichkeit.” Langlois, “Le Savoir Comme Image de l’Absolu Dans La Philosophie de La Religion de Fichte (1804-1806),” 32.

¹²⁴ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 63.

¹²⁵ Fichte, 64.

order to apprehend this disjunction, Fichte claims that individuals must view images *as* images, as representations that refer to an original, and reject these images as intrinsic sources of knowledge.¹²⁶

Fichte describes this original concept of Absolute oneness as “the primordial concept” (*Urbegriff*), which signifies the oneness of both the image and our self-consciousness of our perception of this image as “truly original.”¹²⁷ The implicit content of this concept is that it is “self-subsistent, totally unchangeable and undeniable.”¹²⁸ Moreover, the principle of division merely conditions the Absolute’s appearance in a manifold of ways, but the division is not the principle’s essence. Therefore, the appearance exposes an inner being that is the “organic unity of the through-one-another (*Durcheinander*),” or in other words, inner being is exposed through the concept.¹²⁹ This idea of “through-one-another” explains that both the image and original are posited in the unity of the primordial concept, and that they can be constructed through each other; what is imaged constructs an image, and the image constructs its source.¹³⁰ This point is essential to Fichte’s apprehension of *how* the Absolute in its oneness is the origin of existence, since what is self-same in the through-one-another is the notion of Absolute being.

To elaborate on this, Fichte’s notion of “through” (*Durch*) characterizes the permeating of Absolute oneness through the concept and conversely, the permeation of the concept through the unity. According to Walter Wright’s introduction to his translation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804), Fichte defines the idea of the “through” as “the inner essence of the concept, as mediative.”¹³¹ The notion of mediation indicates that the *Urbegriff* requires a concept of itself in

¹²⁶ Fichte, 64.

¹²⁷ Fichte, 64.

¹²⁸ Fichte, 64.

¹²⁹ Fichte, 64.

¹³⁰ Fichte, 64.

¹³¹ Fichte, 15.

its ex-ist-ence, a manifestation of itself, and that this concept can be identified by means of the “through.” In order to arrive at knowledge of existence, the *Urbegriff* needs to exist first as the “basic phenomenon of all knowing.”¹³² Additionally, Di Giovanni claims that the concept of the “through” is a “node” that shows how individuals, in fact, have the ability to obtain self-consciousness, regardless of the abundance of instances where consciousness is described as a mere appearance.¹³³ Fichte himself states that “the existence of a “through” presupposes an original life, grounded not in the through, but entirely in itself.”¹³⁴ Hence, the concept of the through is used to indicate being as an absolute ground, which is the original life or reality that Fichte perceives as the “central point (*Mittelpunkt*) of our entire investigation.”¹³⁵

Hence, knowledge is conditioned by the principle of division. The common element or self-sameness that underlies the division, is pure light. This can be summarized in a schema, which highlights how the insight into oneness occurs, by means of annihilating the disjunction of consciousness. Fichte claims that we must view “the one implicit principle *as* a principle of disjunction.”¹³⁶ This form of self-consciousness negates itself when it views its limited nature, which makes it possible for pure light to appear in pure intuition.¹³⁷ The schema can be described as a five-fold structure, where the light forms the ground for both self-subsisting being and the concept. The concept demonstrates itself simultaneously as negated, where any intrinsic value to the concept is dismissed, and as posited, where it is seen as appearance. At the same time, the Absolute and the point of origin are posited too, as “conditioning appearance,” and must be negated on the premise of this insight.¹³⁸ This schema shows how a manifold can be deduced

¹³² Fichte, 85.

¹³³ Di Giovanni, “The Kantian Legacy: Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre and Hegel’s Logic,” 11.

¹³⁴ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 87.

¹³⁵ Fichte, 87.

¹³⁶ Fichte, 57.

¹³⁷ Fichte, 60.

¹³⁸ Fichte, 61.

from pure light which qualifies as the ground of our experiences, at once also remaining a formal idea for finite consciousness whose contents remain inconceivable.

Fichte argues that this insight into the structure of consciousness “transcends our entire actual knowledge, and a world of error” that is the transient world of multiplicity.¹³⁹ Here, light, concept and being are one, and existence is considered to be “the intuition of God,” which alludes to the religious claims that Fichte will make in the popular works.¹⁴⁰ Since we cannot conceive of light, we can only *live* it according to Fichte, in a divine life.¹⁴¹ What the “inward life of the light itself” is cannot be penetrated with our understanding.¹⁴² I therefore concur with Di Giovanni, who argues that Fichte’s theory of knowing is purposefully founded on a contradiction, where knowledge about oneness necessarily has to annihilate itself as ineffective.¹⁴³ Fichte states that we can only find what exists through itself by “negation of the insight.”¹⁴⁴ Once the dead concept of the Absolute is annihilated, there is space for “reality,” for life.¹⁴⁵

Thus, Fichte’s exploration of the structure of consciousness as image-creating demonstrates the limits of consciousness and shows how the Absolute is inconceivable to human minds. However, although Fichte emphasizes that the Absolute is conceivable in its form in representations, its content remains “ever inconceivable.”¹⁴⁶ Still at this point, the transcendental source of the mind’s ability to create images remains obscure, and to apprehend it in its proper

¹³⁹ Fichte, 68.

¹⁴⁰ Fichte, 68. This will be discussed in Chapter 2: The Doctrine of Knowledge as a Doctrine of Religion, pp. 44.

¹⁴¹ Fichte, 72.

¹⁴² Fichte, 71.

¹⁴³ Di Giovanni, “The Kantian Legacy: Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre and Hegel’s Logic,” 12.

¹⁴⁴ Di Giovanni, 34.

¹⁴⁵ Di Giovanni, 34.

¹⁴⁶ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 71.

nature the relation between realism and idealism must be elucidated to clarify the proper definition of Fichte's transcendental philosophy.

1.3 The relation between realism and idealism

Fichte supports his statements about the theory of knowing, which he defined through the structure of consciousness, with a discussion of the unity of the notions of realism and idealism.¹⁴⁷ One scholar who clearly addressed these notions is Di Giovanni, who emphasizes that Fichte makes use of the image of “striking down” (*erschlagen*) to show the inconsistency in definitions such as realism and idealism as they present themselves in consciousness as things-in-themselves.¹⁴⁸ Fichte himself claims that realism and idealism should not be perceived as “artificial philosophical systems” that are criticized by the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Instead, the two definitions refer to what naturally occurs in “common knowing.”¹⁴⁹ He already introduced this idea of striking down the notions of idealism and realism in his two introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1797. A philosopher has two ways to find the foundation of experience, by using the method of abstraction; she can either start with the intellect from which all experience is abstracted—in idealism—or with the object as thing-in-itself without the intellect—in dogmatism.¹⁵⁰ Yet, only the activity of free thinking in experience that shows a need for a source for this experience leads to a proper understanding of Fichte's idealism. There must be a first experience before ideas can be generated.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Fichte, 95.

¹⁴⁸ Di Giovanni, “The Kantian Legacy: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Hegel's *Logic*,” 10.

¹⁴⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Walter E. Wright. 2005. *Science of Knowing, The: JG Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, 95

¹⁵⁰ Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings, 1797-1800*, 11.

¹⁵¹ Fichte, 33.

The concept of ideality, on the one hand, is the principle of “concept and intuition at one stroke.”¹⁵² Reason exists here “*as* absolute reason,” meaning that it is itself mediated by a “through.” Reason aims to permeate inner being, which it is unable to do.¹⁵³ Hence, Fichte wants to “see into L (light) as the genetic principle of C (concept) and vice versa,” which is reflected in the way he explains the realist and idealist approaches to the Science of Knowing.¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, Fichte states that “the concept of reality [...] is only the negation of insight and arises only from it.”¹⁵⁵ This means that reality is not something that we can perceive. On the contrary, it is something that we “have” and “are,” it is the activity of life.¹⁵⁶ Once we can look past the multiplicity that characterizes our understanding, we can start living and experiencing. This lived experience is already a part of us, and if we negate any concepts that our minds create, Fichte’s philosophy is free of erroneous assumptions.¹⁵⁷

He expounds this by arguing that the idealistic view “locates itself in the standpoint of reflection,” which it turns into an absolute.¹⁵⁸ The Absolute is characterized by the unity of the oneness of being and thinking (A) and the point of disjunction which divides into x, y, z. To attain an insight into this unity, starting with the light as the genetic principle of disjunction will negate all insight. Yet, if one starts with a concept—because only experience can be the starting point of thought—that is understood by a “through,” the insight necessarily remains factual.¹⁵⁹ In the same way, the realistic perspective attained by the negation of the insight finds itself in the “content,” which it turns into an absolute.¹⁶⁰ Both the realistic and idealistic perspective find

¹⁵² Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 89.

¹⁵³ Fichte, 89.

¹⁵⁴ Fichte, 80.

¹⁵⁵ Fichte, 81.

¹⁵⁶ Fichte, 81.

¹⁵⁷ Fichte, 81.

¹⁵⁸ Fichte, 95.

¹⁵⁹ Fichte, 83–85.

¹⁶⁰ Fichte, 96.

themselves stuck in facticity—in consciousness as the principle of division—making them insufficient as individual principles for Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Therefore, Absolute oneness cannot be explained by either realism or idealism alone. Fichte states that: “In the oneness there is in the background a projection of in-itself and not-in-itself.”¹⁶¹ These two notions posit each other for clarification, while they reciprocally negate one another in reality as insufficient.¹⁶² This can only be described as a “projection through an irrational gap,” where the gap signifies how our consciousness cannot attain the truth.¹⁶³ By refuting the perception that reality can be understood as a thing-in-itself and idealism as the proper foundation of knowing, individuals can observe the proper structure of their consciousness as projecting images. The “through” mediates between the concept and light, which makes the necessary manifestation of the divine possible. At the same time, the “through” bridges the irrational gap that appears in human consciousness.¹⁶⁴

After the negation of both the idealist and realist approaches to understanding the Absolute, Fichte designates absolute consciousness as the principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Here, the self becomes the “absolute I,” although it is not the Absolute. From this absolute consciousness a multitude of perspectives is created.¹⁶⁵ However, the question remains how the I, and thereby consciousness itself, have been produced.¹⁶⁶ Fichte introduces the maxim that consciousness will never be free from facticity, but that individuals have the freedom to avert misconceptions.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the all-important question for Fichte remains; what is this in-

¹⁶¹ Fichte, 113.

¹⁶² Fichte, 113.

¹⁶³ Fichte, 113.

¹⁶⁴ Fichte, 97.

¹⁶⁵ Fichte, 105.

¹⁶⁶ Fichte, 106.

¹⁶⁷ Fichte, 111.

itself that produced the absolute I?¹⁶⁸ For human consciousness, the answer is obscured as a projection through an irrational gap; nevertheless, something is left for us, namely the act of living being as *esse in mero actu*.¹⁶⁹ This indicates that we, as living immediately “in the act of living itself,” *are* this being in, for and through itself.¹⁷⁰ Hence, there is no real disjunction within human beings themselves, since they are consciousness and being at the same time. The unity of the source and the concept of the Absolute in human reflection is two-fold, and it needs a “correlative” that can be understood by use of the “through” and a later examined five-fold structure.¹⁷¹ This correlative refers both to what is outside and what is internal to the Absolute, namely the absolute I that *lives*.

The structure of knowing has thus provided an insight into the conditions of existence, that consciousness as image creating is grounded in the Absolute. This designates Fichte’s aim to go beyond the distinction between epistemological and ontological idealism, as he positions himself between those who argue that reality is merely formed by subjective thought, and those who claim that all knowledge is conditioned by the structure of thought.¹⁷² Agreeing with Di Giovanni’s reading, I conclude that after the insight into the inconceivability of the Absolute, individuals are left with mere life.¹⁷³ The truth of the Absolute remains inexpressible, and at first sight this appears as an unsatisfying answer to the question of *how* the Absolute relates to the manifold. But, for Fichte this particular question of the *how* becomes superfluous, since there is no traditional metaphysical notion of a beginning or a first cause in his philosophy. On the contrary, for Fichte there has always only been unity, and the Absolute constitutes this unity. It is

¹⁶⁸ Fichte, 112.

¹⁶⁹ Fichte, 116.

¹⁷⁰ Fichte, 116.

¹⁷¹ Fichte, 120.

¹⁷² Crowe, “Fact and Fiction in Fichte’s Theory of Religion,” 597.

¹⁷³ Di Giovanni, “The Kantian Legacy: Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre and Hegel’s Logic,” 13. Di Giovanni ascribes this insight on his part to Rametta (2007)

the act of being of the Absolute that is represented in consciousness, because it creates images that obscure this truth; in fact, there is only knowledge. We are in the middle of the unity in oscillation, in the “through,” although this is obscured for our consciousness.

While unable to escape the conditions of existence, this answer allows individuals to find a new meaning for their existence. Di Giovanni articulates this idea of a new meaning, arguing that Fichte’s understanding of being and living mirrors the gospel’s claim that there is a life larger than ours.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the structure of consciousness as an *Als*, which reveals the consciousness as creating images that refer back to an inconceivable source, is indispensable in the uncovering of Fichte’s insight that “being exists immediately only in being, or life, and that it exists only as a whole, undivided oneness.”¹⁷⁵ From this insight into unity, Fichte has to deduce the manifold of appearances in experience.

1.4 From unity to manifold: the move towards phenomenology

Once individuals have obtained an insight into consciousness as creating images that must be perceived *as* images referring to a source, they can derive the appearances of existence from this insight. Hereby, they can perceive themselves as knowledge, as manifestations of the Absolute. The theory of knowledge thus provides an explanation of the Absolute as the source of existence, which comprises Fichte’s “doctrine of reason and knowledge.”¹⁷⁶ The fifteenth lecture indicates the transition into what Fichte calls the “doctrine of appearance and illusion, where all manifestations are derived from the insight into oneness.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Di Giovanni, 35.

¹⁷⁵ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 120.

¹⁷⁶ Fichte, 115.

¹⁷⁷ Fichte, 115.

After the genetic insight into absolute being has been achieved, the question arises what the validity of consciousness is, since it cannot provide an understanding of its origin.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, Fichte proposes a genetic deduction of the grounding principle for the notion of consciousness.¹⁷⁹ He aims to search for the “genesis of the genesis,” for the source of consciousness, which explains the emergence of the irrational gap.¹⁸⁰ Fichte argues that the principle of the irrational gap is the projection itself. In existence, the projection is the highest principle available. Thus, the “act” of projecting, the self-construction of being or the manifestation of the Absolute, is the principle of the projections in existence.¹⁸¹

Hence, Fichte has to necessarily draw a connection between God and our own existence as God’s manifestation, whereby a proper distance between the two is maintained. This relation needs to avoid elevating human beings to a godlike state, but where the irrational gap between the two is overcome. In other words, he aims to explain the appearance of Absolute being, which must be grounded in “being *qua* being” and which cannot merely be the construction that appears to us in consciousness.¹⁸² Fichte concludes that we as human beings “are the *primordial appearance* of the inaccessible light in its primordial effect since we are “*ipso facto* pure reason.”¹⁸³ Considering that there is no knowledge outside of absolute knowledge, we are ourselves knowing, because we are the existence of absolute being.¹⁸⁴ The positing and negating of the concepts of being and thinking are thus the “appearance of appearance,” a second level of

¹⁷⁸ Fichte, 122.

¹⁷⁹ Fichte, 123.

¹⁸⁰ Fichte, 123.

¹⁸¹ Fichte, 124.

¹⁸² Fichte, 128.

¹⁸³ Fichte, 145–46.

¹⁸⁴ Fichte, 153.

appearance.¹⁸⁵ Since we are the insight, we are knowing, and therefore “we” are the “unconditionally immediate [term]” or the correlative term, as the living, absolute I.¹⁸⁶

This leads to Fichte’s notion of the “absolute purpose” or vocation, in which our simple existence is grounded: namely, that “absolute knowledge should be.”¹⁸⁷ The *Wissenschaftslehre* is the way (*Weg*) that leads individuals to this purpose.¹⁸⁸ Fichte compares this idea to the teachings of Christianity, which hold that people should follow a way to an “eternal life,” by knowing themselves and to know who sent them to this life.¹⁸⁹ Fichte, thus, claims that his *Wissenschaftslehre* teaches the same content as Christianity, that human beings have to come to knowledge of their existence, which is their vocation. I argue that the idea of the ineffability or inconceivability of the Absolute as the incentive to start living in a true and critical way represents this vocation of humankind. The structure of knowing, which claims that appearances have to be perceived as mere appearances in order to have an insight into the Absolute, forms the condition for living a blessed life.

1.5 The five-fold synthesis

As mentioned before, Fichte’s understanding of the *Als*-structure can be summarized in a schema—also referred to as the five-fold synthesis—that shows the positing and negating of the Absolute and its concept. This synthesis is adapted and developed in the subsequent popular works, and this schema therefore deserves a more elaborate discussion. According to Wright, Fichte “regards the five-fold synthetic process as central to his new science,” although Wright

¹⁸⁵ Fichte, 146.

¹⁸⁶ Fichte, 161.

¹⁸⁷ Fichte, 161.

¹⁸⁸ Fichte, 161.

¹⁸⁹ Fichte, 182.

also calls the nature of this structure “frustratingly obscure.”¹⁹⁰ Di Giovanni agrees that Fichte’s treatment of the schema remains unclear. He characterizes Fichte’s structure as necessarily having to negate itself since it has to show the nature of appearances as appearances, as a form of “*Schein*.”¹⁹¹ This means that the schema in its five-foldness is not its conclusion, as it still depicts experience as standing outside of the Absolute, and Fichte had to “transform it...as a relation lived in actual experience,” where the unity with the Absolute is maintained.¹⁹²

All the particular parts of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that have been emphasized so far can be characterized as a positing and negating of various concepts, to evince that consciousness—defined as the principle of disjunction that shows that images must be perceived *as* images—is unable to conceive of the unity of the Absolute. This led to the insight into the limits of consciousness, which conceives of manifestations of the Absolute in the form of images and of images as manifestations of the Absolute. In short, the five-fold structure refers to the “unity in relation” (=X) of being and thinking, while these notions a (=thinking) and b (=being) posit and negate each other.¹⁹³ In Fichte’s own words: “Strictly speaking, here there is a two-fold view of seeing, from which there follows a two-fold view of being; or perhaps the other way around.”¹⁹⁴

The schema itself, according to Fichte, constitutes the conditions for experience, and teaches that being and thinking are necessarily connected in lived experience, inapprehensible by consciousness as image-creating. At the same time, both a “primordial activity and movement” and a copy or image appear, which is our conceptual reconstruction of the manifestation.¹⁹⁵

Hence, reason exists as self-making, both as being and *as* making itself in the form of a

¹⁹⁰ Fichte, 18.

¹⁹¹ Di Giovanni, “The Kantian Legacy: Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* and Hegel’s *Logic*,” 9.

¹⁹² Di Giovanni, 32.

¹⁹³ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 120.

¹⁹⁴ Fichte, 187.

¹⁹⁵ Fichte, 197.

projection.¹⁹⁶ In turn, these two terms are themselves mediated: In the manifestation of reason, being is posited and negated as non-being. In the reconstruction of manifestation in consciousness, a primordial making of this manifestation is posited (namely, the *terminus a quo*) and a copy, image, of this primordial making is negated. Fichte states that we find ourselves in the mid-point of these four moments, in the unity, which is the fifth position of the schema. These five moments signify various standpoints of the insight into the *Wissenschaftslehre*. They do not pertain to levels of insight, but to different realms altogether as will become clear from the chapters that are to follow.

For now, it is important to repeat once more that Fichte's aim with his new articulation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is to teach his students that "it is just pure ideal seeing, or intuition, permeating itself simply as such" that constitutes the Science of Knowing, making the truth invisible to the regular human eye.¹⁹⁷ This is demonstrated through the *Als*-structure of consciousness which unveils an absolute ground for existence, where the Absolute as inconceivable must instead be lived. From this absolute ground Fichte has derived multiplicity or the mechanism of projection that had to be explained in order to obtain an insight into the dynamic synthesis of thinking and being and its further division into a multiplicity of natural, moral and political spheres of existence. Hence, concurring with Henrich, the epistemological and idealist insight into the images of consciousness as representations of a certain source provides the ontological and realist structure of existence as both grounded in the Absolute.¹⁹⁸

The philosophical foundation from the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* underlies Fichte's philosophical elaborations in the aforementioned popular works. Although Fichte concludes his

¹⁹⁶ Fichte, 197.

¹⁹⁷ Fichte, 185.

¹⁹⁸ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 269–70.

insight with the claim that the truth is inconceivable by consciousness, he uses a clever construction to ground his philosophy on a contradiction where reason justifies its own ground. From this conclusion we can infer that for Fichte the question *how* the Absolute and existence are connected does not lie in a metaphysical first manifestation, but in the idea that there has always been a unity between subject and object, between being and thinking. It is the nature of consciousness—as the ground of existence that is the Absolute—to make projections of this unity. This is what makes Fichte’s philosophy of religion unique; the idea that there is no first beginning or *creatio ex nihilo*, but *esse in mero actu*, the necessary self-making of the Absolute.

Fichte expresses his desire to apply these principles to other aspects of existence, which foreshadows his ideas for a series of popular lectures and it justifies my approach to continue with an exegesis of Fichte’s doctrine of religion first before facing the doctrine of history:

“Perhaps there will be time and opportunity this coming winter for applying these principles to specific standpoints, for example to religion, which always should remain the highest, not only in the partiality and sensible form in which it was grasped previously, but in our science’s inherent spirit, and from there to the doctrine of virtue, and of rights.”¹⁹⁹

Then, how individuals must live this truth as opposed to attaining it by rational knowledge, Fichte explains most clearly in *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben oder auch die Religionslehre* (1806) and this is the topic of the exegesis of the next chapter.

¹⁹⁹ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 201.

Chapter 2: The doctrine of knowledge as a doctrine of religion

The theoretical delineation of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* initiates a discussion of the popular work of 1806, *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben oder auch die Religionslehre*. This work provides a clear perspective on Fichte's definition of religion, as well as a further development of his theory of knowledge and the structure of consciousness. Fichte himself describes these lecture series in the preface as exhibiting the "highest and clearest summit" of all the popular works that he created between 1800 and 1806.²⁰⁰ He states that they are the result of "a process of self-culture," by means of "that philosophy" or the *Wissenschaftslehre*.²⁰¹

The *Anweisung* provides a popular account of how individuals can attain the "highest truth," which leads them to a life of "blessedness" (*seligkeit*).²⁰² The work consists of eleven lectures that express Fichte's search for the truth and purpose of human existence. The first five lectures explain Fichte's metaphysical division of the perceptions of the world by means of the *Als*-structure of consciousness, which explains that consciousness creates our view of the world in the form of representations that refer to a source. Hence, an insight into knowledge is needed to explain the nature of existence. The sixth lecture forms an interlude in which Fichte explains that his Science of Knowing achieves the same insight as the doctrine of religion that is expressed in the Johannine gospel. The last five lectures contain a historical explanation of five modes of viewing the world. Here, Fichte conveys how the development of the individual's perception of the world determines their insight into the conditions and limits of consciousness. Once the inconceivability of the Absolute is established, a blessed life can be attained through a free determination of the object of love in the mind.

²⁰⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Way Towards the Blessed Life; Or, The Doctrine of Religion*, trans. William Smith (John Chapman, 1849), preface.

²⁰¹ Fichte, preface.

²⁰² Fichte, vii.

This chapter discusses Fichte's articulation of the insight into the *Als*-structure of consciousness as the condition for attaining a blessed life, with the aim of disclosing his understanding of religion—that is to say, of Christianity—by looking at his reading of the Johannine Gospel. This allows me to unravel the relation of this insight into consciousness to the discussion of the concept of vocation. First, Fichte's distinction between a perishable and a blessed life is explained, to determine that a true life requires self-consciousness. Second, Fichte's advanced explanation of the structure of consciousness is discussed to elucidate how we perceive multiplicity, while in fact there is only unity. Third, it is necessary to elaborate on the insight into consciousness as the principle of division in the historical structure of the five modes of viewing. Fourth, Fichte's conception of freedom is construed as necessary for the achievement of the higher modes of viewing the world, which is at the same time the vocation of humankind. Fifth, his explanation of the Johannine gospel as containing the same truth as his *Wissenschaftslehre* is addressed, to consider his idea of the religious individual. But before entering into this discussion, a brief delineation of the nature of Fichte's "popular" approach will shed light on his definition of proper thinking that his audience must attain.

Fichte's popular approach intends to show that each individual can achieve the objectives of his philosophy. In the *Anweisung* in particular, Fichte aims to express the "profoundest metaphysics and ontology" in a popular way, and he discusses why this approach will work, responding to individuals who are skeptical about his plan to teach profound truths to people who lack an extensive background in philosophy. First, Fichte appeals to the historical example that even in ancient times, at the dawn of Christianity, unlearned individuals were able to obtain the truth about existence without modern scientific methods.²⁰³ Second, he argues that everyone

²⁰³ Fichte, 24.

can obtain such an insight since we have a “natural sense of truth,” which forms the “starting point” of all philosophical and scientific inquiry, even for those people who are not scientists.²⁰⁴

This idea of a natural sense of truth did not explicitly appear in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Yet, in the popular works it is a means for Fichte to show that all individuals can overcome the issue of the inconceivability of the Absolute because they all have the innate ability to live a blessed life.

2.1 A blessed life in opposition to an apparent life

Again, Fichte’s structure of consciousness is most clear when put in the context of his overarching philosophical project. In the *Anweisung*, the objective of philosophy is not only to attain an insight into the source of existence, but includes the idea that the purpose of humanity is to attain blessedness. Therefore, Fichte identifies two different ways living, a transient life and a true life, to demonstrate what the theory of knowledge can contribute to this purpose.

Fichte commences the lectures with the claim that “life, love, and blessedness, are absolutely one and the same.”²⁰⁵ Life for Fichte is necessarily blessedness and oneness, which comes forth out of love, and *is* love.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, love is the power that divides “an existence that is in itself dead,” into a two-fold being, which can thereby contemplate itself in consciousness and creates an “ego” of itself, in which the root of all life lies. Love in turn also reunites these two parts of being. Fichte calls this a “unity within a duality,” that constitutes “life itself.”²⁰⁷ In this preliminary note, Fichte already reveals the aim of these lectures, to show that it is the individual’s calling to reach the “root of all life” through an insight into consciousness, and

²⁰⁴ Fichte, 27.

²⁰⁵ Fichte, 2.

²⁰⁶ Fichte, 1–2.

²⁰⁷ Fichte, 2.

to find blessedness therein.²⁰⁸ Fichte also makes a metaphysical suggestion here, that the universe came into being and can be understood through love, which will have a particular locus in this developing theory of knowledge.

Furthermore, Fichte states that the “central-point of all life is love,” and that there are two ways of living that have different objects associated with this love.²⁰⁹ The apparent life consists of “a mixture of life and death,” of being and nothingness, illustrated by love for the world.²¹⁰ True life, on the other hand, is a unity of life and absolute Being, characterized by love for God.²¹¹ All beings have an “aspiration towards the eternal.” This is the impulse to be united and “transfused” with the one, eternal Being.²¹² Therefore, comprehension of the root of existence, of the source of consciousness that determines this desire, will point individuals towards a true life. The condition for attaining a true life is thus “self-consciousness” and its “substantial form” is thought.²¹³ This brings us to the most important supposition of the 1806 *Anweisung*, that “a doctrine of blessedness can be nothing else than a doctrine of knowledge.” There is no real existence or life beyond the mind: To live is to think truly.²¹⁴

Hence, the condition for attaining a blessed life is identified as the “return of our love from the many to the one,” as a conscious and free determination of the object of love.²¹⁵ This requires “concentration of the mind.”²¹⁶ Now, the question arises *how* a true life can be accomplished through concentration of the mind, and what the role of consciousness is in this process.

²⁰⁸ Fichte, 2.

²⁰⁹ Fichte, 6.

²¹⁰ Fichte, 4.

²¹¹ Fichte, 6.

²¹² Fichte, 8.

²¹³ Fichte, 11.

²¹⁴ Fichte, 12.

²¹⁵ Fichte, 14.

²¹⁶ Fichte, 14–15.

2.2 The revised *Als*-structure in the *Anweisung*

To establish the object of one's love an individual requires freedom, and this freedom can only be attained through an inward insight into the nature of consciousness. Consciousness explained through the *Als*-structure in the 1806 *Anweisung* clarifies the unity between Being—God or the Absolute—and existence, where the former (*Seyn*) manifests itself in existence (*Daseyn*), to demonstrate why we can only perceive multiplicity instead of oneness. This constitutes what Fichte calls the metaphysical division of existence, which is inevitably connected to a historical division.

Fichte outlines two necessary conditions for attaining the insight into consciousness: First, that absolute Being must be conceived by and through itself, and he clarifies that this notion of being is the same as the Christian “doctrine of divine nature” that most people have learned about in their common religious education.²¹⁷ Second, that we must not think that we are this absolute Being. We are only connected to this being at the root of our existence. Outside of Being there can be merely knowledge, and human beings are this knowledge. The multitude of views that we perceive does therefore only exist in consciousness.²¹⁸ Overlooking this last point would result in what Fichte calls an “immeasurable chasm” between the Absolute and existence.²¹⁹ Here we have Fichte's ameliorated version of the *Als*-structure of consciousness, which does not only refer to the structure of the mind, but also to his novel metaphysical stance, that human existence itself is a manifestation of the Absolute ground.²²⁰

Now that absolute oneness is determined as the only possible determination of the universe, the question remains how reality appears to us as a multiplicity. Fichte adds that this

²¹⁷ Fichte, 60.

²¹⁸ Fichte, 60–61.

²¹⁹ Fichte, 51.

²²⁰ Fichte, 52–53.

question is only relevant to human beings since they are situated in the manifold. The principle of division is therefore beyond the act of divine existence, although it is intrinsically connected to this act of manifestation.²²¹ In order to solve this issue of multiplicity, Fichte derives in three assertions the “principle of multiplicity” from Being.²²² First, he notes that, since absolute Being is in itself, through itself and from itself, the Absolute’s manifestation or existence is necessarily also by, through and from itself. Since Being and existence are united, the second point is that they share the same foundation. However, according to the third point, only in mere existence or finite knowledge is being distinguished from existence and seen as something in itself. In Fichte’s words: “Being may appear *as* Being, and the Absolute *as* Absolute.”²²³ This shows that the nature of the distinction between Being and existence can be found in the “as,” (*Als*), where Being is perceived *qua* Being, and existence *qua* existence. This “as” therefore constitutes the principle of division.

Therefore, the *Als*-structure of consciousness signifies that consciousness only provides a characterization of what something is in its form, as a representation; it cannot determine Being in itself.²²⁴ To describe this determination of representations, Fichte claims that: “Conception is the true world-creator by means of the change arising from its essential character, of the divine life into a fixed substance.”²²⁵ This world of representations only exist in human consciousness, since there is nothing but living Being beyond conception.²²⁶

Existence can understand itself through an act of reflection by means of representations, since reflection always needs an “as” or characterization of existence to attain self-

²²¹ Fichte, 65.

²²² Fichte, 63–65.

²²³ Fichte, 66.

²²⁴ Fichte, 67.

²²⁵ Fichte, 68.

²²⁶ Fichte, 68.

consciousness. In reflection, existence distinguishes itself from Being. This necessary process of distinction is grounded in God's own act of existence, meaning that our freedom and independence are rooted in God.²²⁷ According to Fichte, the "fundamental law of reflection" separates knowledge into two different parts. Within reflection, the object is separated into knowledge itself and knowledge as "this or that."²²⁸ Hence, reflection divides the world created by consciousness into a manifold of representations.²²⁹ Divine oneness remains obscured from consciousness and can only be conceived in thought that raises itself above reflection.²³⁰

Thus, an insight into the structure of consciousness reveals how human beings are trapped in the principle of division, which renders our oneness with the Absolute as the origin of consciousness invisible. Only an image of the divine can enter our representation, we are never able to completely become one with the Absolute in our finite existence.²³¹ But once this representation in reflection is recognized *as* an image, existence is seen as the "manifestation and revelation" of the Absolute, whereby the representation of the insight functions as an *Anweisung* or hint to a blessed life.²³² A hint, because the unity of Being and existence will forever remain inconceivable, which shows the necessity of the notion of love as the only means to arrive at oneness.

Nevertheless, Ernst-Otto Onnasch accuses Fichte of remaining too formal in his explanation of the principle of his transcendental philosophy in the *Anweisung*, which is the relation of the Absolute to the manifold of experience. The principle of unity that underlies diversity has no content since it is a human concept, and *how* the two concepts relate, which the

²²⁷ Fichte, 69.

²²⁸ Fichte, 70.

²²⁹ Fichte, 71.

²³⁰ Fichte, 72–73.

²³¹ Fichte, 73.

²³² Fichte, 78.

Wissenschaftslehre aims to reveal is unclear. *That* the two are related, Fichte has clearly shown according to Onnasch.²³³ However, it is the nature of Fichte's philosophy of religion that there is no real distinction between the Absolute and existence, since the philosophical idea of humanity as the active existence and manifestation of God is grounded in itself. The insight into consciousness as causing the distinctions in the synthesis and the gradual progression towards the insight proves this. Again, what is left after the negation of consciousness as image-creating is Being as *esse in mero actu*, the mere act of being.²³⁴ In essence, there is no difference between the two concepts, making Onnasch's criticism groundless.

2.3 Five stages of world-creating

This metaphysical division of the insight into the truth about Being and existence is accompanied by a historical division that expounds an enhanced version of the five-fold structure that appeared in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. This five-fold structure now refers to modes of viewing or world-creating that characterize an individual's developing insight into consciousness as the principle of division. This historical division does not divide the object of consciousness itself, but it divides human reflection on the object; it deals with our modes of viewing the object of our love, which is the "one, abiding world."²³⁵ The five stages are historical steps of development toward the "inward, spiritual life" by means of an act of the understanding, or as Fichte refers to it, toward seeing.²³⁶

These five modes of viewing reflect human understanding of the external world as a representation of their progressive insight into knowledge or existence. The first mode is that of

²³³ Onnasch, "De Standpuntenleer," 93.

²³⁴ Fichte, *The Science of Knowing* (1804), 116.

²³⁵ Fichte, *Blessed Life* (1806), 80.

²³⁶ Fichte, 81.

“outward sense,” where one takes the appearances in consciousness as true in themselves.²³⁷ In the second view, that of “law,” individuals perceive the world as ordered by laws and equal rights.²³⁸ From these laws, the sciences of jurisprudence, morality and ethics are derived.²³⁹ In both standpoints, individuals remain stuck in reflection, in the manifold of existence. The third standpoint is that of the “true and higher morality.”²⁴⁰ The law of morality in this view is a creative and active law, as opposed to a law that purely maintains order.²⁴¹ The active law seeks to make humanity “the express image, copy, and revelation of the inward essential nature” of the divine.²⁴² At this point, religion, particularly Christianity, and everything else considered “good and venerable” was introduced in the world.²⁴³

The fourth perspective is that of religion, which is the view that the “good” and the “beautiful” are not created by us, but that they are revelations within of the “inward divine nature.”²⁴⁴ Fichte argues that, first of all, only God is. In this view, we should not try to determine what God’s essential nature is by generating an empty conception, a nothing.²⁴⁵ Instead, through the annihilation of any concept of God by perceiving them *as* images, God appears in *life*, in all that an individual does and love.²⁴⁶ The fifth and last mode of viewing is that of the standpoint of “science,” in which humanity comprehends the connection of the Absolute to the manifold of existence and that they must return to the initial state of oneness.²⁴⁷ This view goes beyond the religious insight: “Science supersedes all faith and changes it into

²³⁷ Fichte, 83.

²³⁸ Fichte, 84.

²³⁹ Fichte, 85.

²⁴⁰ Fichte, 87.

²⁴¹ Fichte, 87.

²⁴² Fichte, 87.

²⁴³ Fichte, 88.

²⁴⁴ Fichte, 88.

²⁴⁵ Fichte, 89.

²⁴⁶ Fichte, 89.

²⁴⁷ Fichte, 91.

sight.”²⁴⁸ Fichte adds that attaining the perspective of science is not a condition for a blessed life, but it provides the proper theoretical background to understand it. In the popular lectures, Fichte does not venture further than the fourth standpoint, as this is sufficient for attaining a blessed life.

These modes of viewing together compose a picture of the “religious [hu]man.”²⁴⁹ True religion for Fichte is not merely contemplative but “essentially active,” the conscious determination of true life or God as the object of love.²⁵⁰ Here, Fichte identifies humanity’s highest vocation as recognizing the will of God within.²⁵¹ The religious human being recognizes the limits of consciousness, but knows that this does not render life meaningless. The activity of living that is possible after the revelation of the divine constitutes blessedness. In Fichte’s own words, the religious individual “conceives of his world as action, which, because it is his world, he alone creates, in which alone he can live, and find all enjoyment of himself.”²⁵² This is what it means to follow the will of God discovered inside.

2.4 Moving towards higher modes of viewing

The five-fold, historical description of the modes of viewing the world thus describes the individual’s position vis-à-vis the blessed life. The kind of “world-creating” that an individual engages in is dependent on the free determination of the object of love that is associated with each standing point towards the true or spiritual life. Fichte denotes “spiritual non-existence,” as a state of unblestness.²⁵³ It is the state of nothingness that characterizes the transient life, and

²⁴⁸ Fichte, 91.

²⁴⁹ Fichte, 92.

²⁵⁰ Fichte, 92.

²⁵¹ Fichte, 93.

²⁵² Fichte, 94.

²⁵³ Fichte, 132.

at this stage no enjoyment is possible at all because the object of love is undetermined.²⁵⁴ In the spiritual life, on the other hand, love refers to the “affection (*Affekt*)” of Being, God, and “well-being” indicates our unity with God as the object of our love.²⁵⁵ What propels individuals to determine the object of their love is their dissatisfaction with their outward circumstances that causes their lack of blessedness, motivating them to focus more on their selves in order to decide what they want and need to pursue to attain that spiritual life.²⁵⁶

Spiritual existence can be realized through “concentration, comprehension and contraction” of spirit into the central point and this is where one’s spirit or intellect is “independent.”²⁵⁷ Individuals have to move their attention inward, and focus on the object of love within. This independence or freedom leads individuals to an “apex,” to a higher life, while dependence leaves human beings stuck in their current standing point. The central-point entails that the elements that make up existence—Being, A, and its manifested Form B—are “reciprocally penetrated” by each other.²⁵⁸ This organic middle point, in the 1804 lectures referred to as X, is the genetic point of unity, where the principle of division of the *Als*-structure is located.

Freedom, established by Fichte as rooted in the Absolute, forms the necessary means to attain an insight into the unity of existence by determining the object of love. In the lower viewpoints, the “ego” is the subject of freedom.²⁵⁹ Therefore, only through a “true negation” of the ego a new object of love can be recognized, which leads to a higher life.²⁶⁰ In order to achieve this, all love for the self must be eradicated so that the individual can be filled with love

²⁵⁴ Fichte, 132.

²⁵⁵ Fichte, 133.

²⁵⁶ Fichte, 180.

²⁵⁷ Fichte, 127.

²⁵⁸ Fichte, 147–48.

²⁵⁹ Fichte, 154, 157.

²⁶⁰ Fichte, 159.

for God.²⁶¹ According to Fichte, putting one's ego aside is "an act of the highest freedom," where the individual becomes a "partaker of the only true Being."²⁶² In this standpoint of the higher moral life, a new "super-sensual world" is created by consciousness, that can only be "immediately perceived and experienced" as a revelation within.²⁶³

In a higher moral life, "Being and existence, God and man, are one; wholly transfused and lost in each other."²⁶⁴ It is characterized by the love of God towards himself. Nevertheless, it is "reciprocal love" because human beings have the freedom to focus their love on a specific object.²⁶⁵ Love therefore separates and unites Being and its appearance in existence, and it creates the "abstract conception of a pure Being, or a God" in thought.²⁶⁶ This notion of love is dependent on the rational and free determination of its object. In this, humanity's higher vocation reveals itself as the requirement to live by means of this object of love and thereby to make the will of God our own.

Hence, what Fichte referred to in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* as X, the genetic oneness of A and B, becomes in the 1806 *Anweisung* the concept of love, the "source of all certainty, all truth and all reality."²⁶⁷ Or in other words, it is through feeling only that oneness can be lived, through the negation of reflection once it is recognized as image-creating. This feeling or immediate self-consciousness is the same as religion, or according to Fichte, as Christ in the gospel of John.²⁶⁸

²⁶¹ Fichte, 164.

²⁶² Fichte, 166.

²⁶³ Fichte, 167–68.

²⁶⁴ Fichte, 187.

²⁶⁵ Fichte, 188.

²⁶⁶ Fichte, 188.

²⁶⁷ Fichte, 188.

²⁶⁸ Fichte, 122.

2.5 The gospel of John and Fichte's doctrine of religion

Before moving on to a more profound discussion of the concept of vocation, it is necessary to discuss Fichte's interpretation of the Johannine gospel, which is of the highest significance for his maturing philosophy of religion. In an "interlude," Fichte claims that his doctrine of knowledge propagates the same truth as the doctrine of religion from the gospel of John. He views John as the "only teacher of true Christianity," because he alone respects "reason" and "internal evidence."²⁶⁹ He criticizes the Pauline understanding of Christianity, since it remains faithful to the Judaic notion of creation and the truth appearing externally, in miracles.²⁷⁰ In Fichte's interpretation of the Johannine gospel, the previously outlined metaphysical and historical division of existence represent the Christian dogmas of the origin of existence and the salvation of humanity, contributing to a novel idea of religion as it relates to knowledge.

First, Fichte claims that the Johannine gospel, parallel to the metaphysical division, does not fall into the error of accepting the Jewish convictions of the creation of the world as *creatio ex nihilo* and of the assertion that truths have been emitted through external evidence. On the contrary, Fichte agrees with John that "in the beginning *was* the Word," which is the original source or *terminus a quo*, that always existed.²⁷¹ The Word is God, and the Word was with God, which affirms Fichte's claim that the existence of God is only in, from and through itself.²⁷² Moreover, "Being with God" refers to individuals as God's existence in the *logos*, the "intelligible revelation and manifestation" of God.²⁷³ To illustrate this, the German word that Fichte uses for manifestation, *Äußerung*, can also be translated as utterance, or expression. So the

²⁶⁹ Fichte, 96.

²⁷⁰ Fichte, 97.

²⁷¹ Fichte, 100.

²⁷² Fichte, 101.

²⁷³ Fichte, 102.

expression of the Absolute in knowledge is nothing else than God speaking the Word, where Being manifests and reveals itself in humanity as knowledge. It reveals the origin of existence as a source without a beginning, as Being as *esse in mero actu*.

Second, Fichte states that for John, the world exists only in conception, in the Word. Thereby, “conception, or the Word, is the only creator of the World, and, by means of the principle of separation contained in its very nature, the creator of the manifold and infinite variety of things in the world.”²⁷⁴ Notice how this same construction was advanced by Fichte as the *Als*-structure of consciousness, where reflection creates a world for itself in finite consciousness. This assertion is fundamental for the characterization of Fichte’s philosophy of religion, where the theory of knowledge explains the conditions of experience as grounded in knowledge, which has the Absolute as its source. Fichte, then, considers how human beings are stuck in the world-creating sense of consciousness, and have to understand that their life is grounded in something exceeding their minds.²⁷⁵ Manifestation thus only becomes revelation when human beings overcome their “learned ignorance.”²⁷⁶ And here, the Christian route of salvation forms the way to blessedness for Fichte.

Although by means of other terms, Fichte applies his metaphysical and historical division to the gospel of John. The metaphysical argument represents what is “absolutely and eternally true,” namely, the possibility of being and the way to the blessed life as salvation that he derived from the gospel. Fichte also discusses how we should understand the historical portrayal of Christ in the Johannine gospel. In the latter explanation, the factual and historical aspects of Christ’s life with his disciples provide an example for how one can attain true Being.²⁷⁷ It is the

²⁷⁴ Fichte, 102.

²⁷⁵ Di Giovanni, “The Kantian Legacy: Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre and Hegel’s Logic,” 13.

²⁷⁶ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 273–74.

²⁷⁷ Fichte, *Blessed Life* (1806), 103–4.

responsibility of individuals to understand the structure of knowledge in order to view that their origin cannot be conceptualized, and that they have to live it instead in the same way as Christ. For individuals, it is the consciousness of experience that leads to the pressing questions of human existence. In the end, it is the realism of facts that fosters the emergence of transcendental questions.

The observation of the similarities between the two doctrines, Fichte's theory of knowledge and the doctrine of religion in the gospel of John, can be described as an isomorphism. I adopt this term from Gaetano Rametta, who identifies an isomorphism in Fichte's 1807 *Wissenschaftslehre* between the discipline of philosophy, where reflection annihilates itself to find its ground, and the *Wissenschaftslehre* where the "genetic movement of reflection" negates itself in order to grasp the Absolute.²⁷⁸ This idea of an isomorphism can already be identified in the 1806 *Anweisung*, where the Johannine doctrine of God creating the Word, which explains how existence came into being, is the same as the *Als*-structure of consciousness.²⁷⁹ In the same way as consciousness creates images in the mind—which appear to be the one reality but which are in fact expressions grounded in a source—God has posited existence in its image, as a revelation.

Therefore, the 1806 *Anweisung* provides a concept of religion that is not defined as blind faith, but that is grounded in the proper insight into consciousness as image-creating. According to Fichte, this truth of the *Wissenschaftslehre* has always existed in Christianity, specifically in the gospel of John. Once the representations in consciousness are understood *as* representations that require a source, they act as an *Anweisung* or revelation of God in humanity. Although a

²⁷⁸ Rametta, "The Speculative Structures of Fichte's 1807 *Wissenschaftslehre*," 9.

²⁷⁹ Rametta, 23. This idea has been abstracted from notes added to the text by translator Garth Green, who makes the connection between the structure of consciousness and the gospel of John.

proper unity with God cannot be attained by human beings because of the limiting conditions of knowledge, this manifestation of the divine in existence provides individuals with the means to actively determine this oneness as the object of their love. Thereby, religion requires human beings to start living, that is, living a true life where the Absolute has become the freely chosen objective of an individual's will. How such a life should be organized is the subject matter of *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*.

Chapter 3: The path of history and the vocation of humankind

The theoretical delineation of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* not only introduces Fichte's doctrine of religion in the *Anweisung*, it also forms the foundation of a discussion of knowledge as it relates to history and culture, which is the focus of *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1805). The *Grundzüge* forms Fichte's exposition of the features of the present age to position this time period in his delineation of history as a whole. History is presented in these lectures as unfolding according to a plan controlled by divine governance.²⁸⁰ In this context, the connection of the theory of knowledge to history is a crucial element to comprehending Fichte's later determination of the vocation or purpose of humankind. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of Fichte's theory of history must be addressed as he does not provide an obvious deduction of the concept.

But first, at this point in the systematic interpretation of the three works, the relation between the popular expositions of the *Anweisung* and the *Grundzüge* must be discussed. Although both works are concerned with Fichte's theory of knowledge and the vocation of humankind, there are several differences between them. The former lecture series focusses on how individuals can attain an insight into a blessed life, whereas the latter lectures aim to elevate humanity as a whole to this understanding. Fichte regards this process in the *Grundzüge* as the manifestation of the "world-plan."²⁸¹ Moreover, where Fichte in the *Anweisung* merely claims that a blessed life can be attained through a negation of reflection that facilitates the formation of love for the divine, in the *Grundzüge* he expands on this insight by explaining how individuals should live together in society with this insight. The latter work thus addresses the necessary practical implications of the insight into consciousness. Additionally, reading the works in a

²⁸⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, trans. William Smith, 18 (John Chapman, 1847), x.

²⁸¹ Fichte, 3.

thematic as opposed to a chronological order reflects how the doctrine of truth and the doctrine of appearances outlined in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* are each applied to their respective series of popular lectures. In such an understanding, the *Anweisung* reflects the *Wissenlehre*—the doctrine of truth or knowledge—and presents it as a *Religionslehre* or doctrine of religion.²⁸² The *Grundzüge*, on the other hand, forms a doctrine of appearances since it explains the phenomena of history as originating from one and the same source. In effect, it proves to be helpful that the individual route to blessedness from the *Anweisung* was discussed first to comprehend how Fichte extrapolates his insight into existence to the larger realms of culture in the *Grundzüge*.

The seventeen lectures on the *Grundzüge* took place in the winter of 1804-1805 and were also delivered in Berlin. According to translator William Smith, the audience of these lectures were men from the inner circle of Frederick-William, the king of Prussia, who were interested in teachings about political freedom and popular education.²⁸³ Aside from detailed descriptions of the development of various epochs, history, and the state, the primary argument of the lectures concerns the notion of a religious ground of existence. Smith highlights that Fichte's notion of religion must be apprehended as *ordo ordinans*, where God is established as the principle of the universe, as the origin of Absolute freedom.²⁸⁴ In this context, the connection of necessity and freedom to religion and knowledge is a crucial element to comprehending Fichte's concept of the purpose of human existence.

This chapter concentrates on the affinity in the *Grundzüge* between Fichte's theory of history and the *Als*-structure of consciousness, where history follows a similar structure as that of consciousness as it was established in the previous exegeses. This insight into the interplay

²⁸² Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Anweisung Zum Seligen Leben*, ed. Hansjürgen Verweyen, vol. 41994 (Felix Meiner Verlag Hamburg, 2012), 13.

²⁸³ Fichte, *Characteristics (1805)*, v.

²⁸⁴ Fichte, viii–ix.

between history and knowledge allows individuals to recognise their experiences as always already situated within the necessary course of history, while at the same time having agency to make an impact on this process. Eventually, the insight into knowledge as situated within history will lead humanity to its vocation—the fulfilment of the plan of history—which is the religious calling to overcome individuality so that humankind can live in unity with its absolute source. In other words, Fichte shows how humanity ought to understand itself and how, with this knowledge in mind, it should shape moral action.

The ensuing interpretation of this work commences with a deliberation of Fichte’s construal of the theory of history in the *Grundzüge*, which, according to some scholars, requires a transcendental deduction because this is lacking in the text, before transitioning into Fichte’s apprehension of the notion of reason and its connection to various epochs in the five-fold structure of history. The next section evaluates how Fichte characterizes the historical state of knowledge in his age, and what is needed to escape its deplorable state. This section thereafter explains the metaphysical division of consciousness in this work, since Fichte uses vocabulary shaped around “ideas” to explain this structure. Lastly, a discussion of the concept of religion in this work is required—more specifically Christianity—since it relates both to knowledge and to external cultural factors of existence such as the moral organization of society, to ultimately define Fichte’s religiously inspired idea of vocation.

3.1 Reason and the five-fold division of history

Fichte’s theory of history in the *Grundzüge* is only marginally discussed in academic scholarship, leaving much space for interpretation. In this thesis, the notion of history will be defined only to the extent that it is relevant to further Fichte’s theory of knowledge and religion.

Two scholars who have written on the concept of history in the *Grundzüge* are Quentin Landenne and Ives Radrizzani, who both focus on providing a deduction of the principle of history in order to express the necessity of history in relation to freedom. While these authors rightly point to the significance of freedom for the realization of the world-plan, the position of the theory of history within the structure of consciousness in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* requires a more profound evaluation. Particularly, its relation to the *Religionslehre* of the *Anweisung* and the image-creating features of consciousness requires elaboration.

A crucial issue in this context is how Fichte approaches the notion of history in the *Grundzüge*. Ives Radrizzani states that Fichte neglects to provide a “deduction of the transcendental structure of history,” which impedes the interpretation of its related concepts.²⁸⁵ More specifically, he questions how Fichte conjoins philosophy as having an end with the idea of history as inherently open.²⁸⁶ In order to show that Fichte determines that history can achieve completion similar to philosophy, Radrizzani provides the *a priori* deduction of the transcendental structure of history that Fichte never wrote, which must be discussed in order to arrive at the concept’s relation to the structure of knowledge.²⁸⁷ Radrizzani divides the deduction into three parts, where individuals first become conscious of their involvement and agency in the determination of history, which, secondly, leads to the insight that knowledge of the past is always *a posteriori* and empirical. Nevertheless, the third point is that there must be an *a priori* structure of history that gives meaning to it, hence its connection to the theory of knowledge.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ James and Zöller, *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, 223. Issue is also touched upon by Landenne, who refers to Radrizzani on this matter. Landenne, “Spéculation et Liberté Dans La Philosophie de l’histoire Du Caractère de l’époque Actuelle de J. G. Fichte (1804-1805),” 470.

²⁸⁶ James and Zöller, *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, 222.

²⁸⁷ James and Zöller, 223.

²⁸⁸ James and Zöller, 224–27.

Radrizzani's deduction points to the interplay in history between the notions of necessity and freedom. Although there is a divine world-plan that must necessarily find its end, individuals possess agency to leave their mark on history. This agency reflects Fichte's claim that philosophy is ultimately about actions. A mere theoretical insight into the *a priori* structure of history is insufficient since it is only a means to bring history to its completion.²⁸⁹ Because free action necessarily takes place within the external world governed by phenomena, individuals need an insight into knowledge that form the condition for this freedom. Most significantly, the deduction shows that one of the conditions of consciousness is that human beings are always already immersed in history and that they have the agency to bring it to its completion.²⁹⁰ This condition of experience Fichte already outlined in the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo* (1796/99), where he claims that all thinking happens in the context of experiences, hence within time.²⁹¹

While Radrizzani's deduction of the concept of history is helpful for the systematic interpretation of the work, it does not specifically reflect on the relation of the concept of history to the *Als*-structure of consciousness. Through an investigation into the same framework of consciousness that was found in the exegeses of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Anweisung*, the significance of history can be explained through a metaphysical division and a division of appearances as the condition of consciousness. The general ideas derived from the facts of

²⁸⁹ James and Zöller, 231.

²⁹⁰ James and Zöller, 224–25.

²⁹¹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) Nova Methodo* (1796/99), ed. Daniel Breazale (Cornell University Press, 1998), 284. In the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*, Fichte already alludes to the idea of a goal that is required for action, which is the result of “thinking.” Thinking is conditioned by history, as the phenomena of history incite the emergence of thought. Hence, time is at the basis of all change, as it emerges together with the multiplicity of images in reflection. Furthermore, Fichte claims that “one must think of time as several united moments” pp. 280, which is similar to the idea of the epochs in history that are united in one eternal time. The exact meaning of the notions of time and history as Fichte uses them throughout his many developments of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is still to be traced.

history must be perceived *as* ideas, projecting not only a source but also revealing a final purpose of history. Nevertheless, the course of history itself remains inconceivable. In the end, only the insight into the oneness of the Absolute and existence bridges the gap between the *a priori* and *a posteriori* structures of history.²⁹²

History understood through the doctrine of knowledge reflects the idea that there is an order to history, leading both humanity and history to its fulfilment. According to Fichte, it is the philosopher's task to explain how the phenomena of experience reveal the "common idea" of the age.²⁹³ Every "epoch of time" refers to the "fundamental idea" of that age, and these ideas can be understood "by and through" each other. Furthermore, these fundamental ideas must be apprehended *a priori*, referring to an original idea of time, that is, to a "world-plan" (*Weltplan*). Fichte defines this world-plan as "the fundamental idea of the entire life of man on earth."²⁹⁴

The empirical facts of existence must be comprehended as representations in consciousness of the fundamental idea of an age, or in the terms of the *Anweisung*, the metaphysical division of history is the same as the idea of consciousness as world-creating. According to the metaphysical insight into the structure of consciousness in the *Anweisung*, the Absolute manifests itself in existence in the form of consciousness. The different modes of viewing the world expressed by consciousness as the principle of division are further divided into a manifold of perspectives in individual reflection. The individual moves towards an insight into this structure through the historical five modes of viewing the world. Similarly, an epoch is defined as the general consensus of the ideas that represent an age. The fundamental idea of humankind is divided into five modes of viewing that each correspond to a specific epoch. Thus,

²⁹² James and Zöller, *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, 241.

²⁹³ Fichte, *Characteristics* (1805), 2.

²⁹⁴ Fichte, 2.

the insight into consciousness *as* creating images reveals the notion of the world-plan that must be discovered through the progression of five epochs, each representing a new idea or mode of viewing.

In the popular lectures Fichte merely states the idea of the world-plan factually, forming the foundation on which he will build his philosophy: “*The end of the life of [hu]mankind on earth is this—that in this life they may order all their relations with freedom according to reason.*”²⁹⁵ The notion of freedom in this text refers to humankind as a whole, and it is the “first accessory condition of our fundamental principle [the world-plan],” which becomes apparent in the “collective consciousness of the race.”²⁹⁶ This principle of freedom is the necessary condition for the attainment of knowledge about existence, and thereby it forms one of the most significant features of Fichte’s refined later philosophy. The aim of this presupposition is to bridge the gap between experience and consciousness, where human beings can perceive the divine origin of consciousness without resorting to determinism. The principle of freedom and its connection to necessity will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

The fundamental idea of the world-plan shows that the life of humanity can be divided into two primary epochs, where humankind exists in the first epoch without having ordered its relations with freedom according to reason, and a second epoch where this “voluntary and reasonable arrangement” has been realized.²⁹⁷ In this first primary epoch, reason exists as a mere sensation and is characterized as “blind instinct,” reflecting the transitory life.²⁹⁸ Freedom is the opposite of this blind instinct, and is therefore called “seeing.”²⁹⁹ In seeing, knowledge arises

²⁹⁵ Fichte, 4.

²⁹⁶ Fichte, 4.

²⁹⁷ Fichte, 4.

²⁹⁸ Fichte, 5.

²⁹⁹ Fichte, 5.

that forms the qualification for the “liberation from reason as instinct,” which progresses in the second primary epoch because of life seeking blessedness.³⁰⁰ Fichte considers this the “art” (*Kunst*) of ordering the relations of reason with knowledge in such a way that mankind becomes “a perfect image of its everlasting archetype in reason,” in which humanity will find peace and blessedness.³⁰¹ This idea of the archetype and image is important, since it reinforces the idea that human beings are manifestations of the Absolute, in the same way as consciousness creates images that refer to an absolute source.

On the basis of these two primary epochs, Fichte distinguishes five principle epochs that characterize the development of the world-plan in reason, which he coats in religious language. In essence, the five epochs reflect common ideas of the five modes of viewing the world from the historical division in the *Anweisung*. Each of these epoch represents the idea or “spirit” (*Geist*)³⁰² of an age: The first epoch concerns the state of innocence and reason as instinct, where one follows sense perceptions. The second epoch refers to the state of reason as external authority or law, which demands blind faith, and which is also called the “state of progressive sin.” Fichte considers the third epoch to be his own age. It is in a state of “completed sinfulness,” as this state is characterized by the indifference to all truth. The fourth epoch is the epoch of reason as knowledge, of “progressive justification” in religion. The fifth epoch refers to humanity as the image of reason, the state of “completed justification and sanctification” of science in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.³⁰³ Fichte emphasizes that the progression through these

³⁰⁰ Fichte, 5.

³⁰¹ Fichte, 6.

³⁰² This idea of a “spirit” or *Geist* as encompassing the idea that represents a certain time period reminds one of G.W.F. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*). While there is no conclusive study about the comparison of the concept of spirit and history by Fichte and Hegel, there could be a correlation between the two that is yet to be explored.

³⁰³ Fichte, *Characteristics* (1805), 7.

epochs is nothing else than a “retrogression,” where individuals return to their original condition with a new insight.³⁰⁴

Fichte illustrates this idea of a retrogression through the epochs with an interpretation of the Biblical story of the fall. In paradise, humanity used to live in a state of innocence and well-being, but “without knowledge, without labour, without art.”³⁰⁵ As a result of the fall, humanity learned about the distinction between good and evil—which characterizes a life of divisions—and their objective became to “build a paradise for itself after the image of that which it has lost.” To put it differently, humanity has to perceive itself as the image of the divine and negate all distinctions brought about by reflection. Humankind, thus, has to free itself from its unknowing state, the state of blind instinct, in order to obtain knowledge about existence. The individual alone cannot further this process: It has to be achieved through the combined effort of humankind as a whole.³⁰⁶ In the end, the challenge of humanity is to lead all individuals to the insight into the unity with the divine, while realizing that they cannot overcome the conditions of knowledge and history and must instead focus on living.

Fichte explains the reason for humanity’s state of existence by using an argument *ad verecundiam* that appeals to the authority of religion, making the foundation of his argument precarious. Yet, as the following sections will show, the philosophical structure of consciousness of the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* lurks in the background of this work.

³⁰⁴ Fichte, 7.

³⁰⁵ Fichte, 7.

³⁰⁶ Fichte, 9.

3.2 How to order life according to reason

Fichte continues his discussion of the notion of reason and its connection to the development of history by examining the characteristics of his age, the third age, and particularly the deplorable state of knowledge that must be overcome through an insight into the structure of consciousness. It requires an insight into the limits of knowledge, which necessitates the introduction of a new notion of religious love that has practical implications for how people treat others.

The liberation from authority as blind instinct in the third age is conditioned by our understanding or concept (*Begriff*).³⁰⁷ However, in the third age this leads to what Fichte calls the state of completed sinfulness, expressed in the following maxim: “*To accept nothing as really existing or obligatory but that which they can understand and clearly comprehend.*”³⁰⁸ The third age values experience as the only means to understanding existence, because it provides visible proof for knowledge through trial and error.³⁰⁹ Therefore, in this age, all claims to *a priori* knowledge are denied. Naturally, morality is considered the highest virtue, indicating that individuals are expected and encouraged to pursue their own interests with consideration of the interests of others.³¹⁰ Moreover, religion is turned into a “mere doctrine of happiness,” where God is only useful in the pursuit of prosperity, hence why Fichte’s calls it the age of completed sinfulness.

In order move away from this age of sinfulness and to arrive in the age of knowledge in which individuals recognize both that which is conceivable and accept all that cannot be known as inconceivable, the limits of consciousness must be designated and understood.³¹¹ In other

³⁰⁷ Fichte, 14.

³⁰⁸ Fichte, 14.

³⁰⁹ Fichte, 19.

³¹⁰ Fichte, 21.

³¹¹ Fichte, 14–15.

words, they have to accept the same maxim that was also outlined in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, that the inconceivable must be understood as inconceivable. Since consciousness is conditioned by the principle of division, the unity of individuals with the divine is concealed for human conception. The specific notion of unity in this context leads to a principle that has significance particularly in the *Grundzüge*, namely that all individuals are but a “single ray (*Gedachte*) of the one universal and necessary thought.”³¹² When reflection has been examined by knowledge and deemed insufficient through the “art” of ordering the relations of reason with knowledge, the latter becomes a living reality.³¹³

3.3 The metaphysical division of the ideas

Because of the limits that condition finite consciousness, Fichte introduces a notion of religious love that exemplifies the pursuance of higher knowledge in the fourth age. In order to live in accordance with the principle of reason, a human being has to give up his search for individual well-being, and “forget himself in the race.”³¹⁴ This resembles a Christian form of neighborly love. Hereby, Fichte’s philosophy necessarily becomes practical, taking the form of a moral imperative that is, nonetheless, inextricably bound to the theory of knowledge. The world-plan can be attained if humanity denounces their individuality in favor of humankind, but in order to do so there has to be an idea or conception of this imperative.

Fulfilling the world-plan requires a love that encompasses not just the individual but humanity as a whole, and this is achieved by means of breaking down the impulses towards the fulfilment of one’s own well-being. Love in the context of this initial step is only a means, or a

³¹² Fichte, 16.

³¹³ Fichte, 17.

³¹⁴ Fichte, 25.

“vestibule to the higher life.”³¹⁵ Similar to its definition in the *Anweisung*, love unites humanity since it takes away the distinctions between individuals that were created by reflection. As a means, love overcomes the conflict between the desire to act in favor of individual consciousness alone and acting on concerns for humankind as a whole; this is the first step towards a higher life.³¹⁶ Ultimately, individuals must dedicate themselves to “ideas,” since ideas encompass all of humanity in the various *Gedanken* that constitute the one, universal thought.³¹⁷

To elucidate, Fichte defines the idea as “*an independent, living, matter-inspiring thought.*”³¹⁸ This means that he conceives of all matter as the expression of the universal idea, which alone is self-sufficient. Therefore, proper thought constitutes *a priori* ideas.³¹⁹ Only truth lives, because ideas are independent of conceptualized experiences.³²⁰ In the manifestation of ideas in the individual through the denunciation of presentations, all love for the lower self is eradicated. Actions otherwise performed in accordance with an external law of duty are here internalized and understood, and thereby they provide blessedness.³²¹ Hence, I infer that the idea as defined by Fichte is in essence the image of the Absolute or God that reveals itself as such when an insight into consciousness is attained. Hence, the image in consciousness teaches humanity about its own nature.

Considering that the idea gives rise to all of material existence—the world-creating features of the structure of consciousness—the question of the occurrence of pain and sorrow in life is at stake. Similar to how this question was answered in the *Anweisung*, the idea manifests itself in different ways in reflection only, since outside of consciousness there can be nothing but

³¹⁵ Fichte, 27.

³¹⁶ Fichte, 30.

³¹⁷ Fichte, 27.

³¹⁸ Fichte, 42.

³¹⁹ Fichte, 42.

³²⁰ Fichte, 52.

³²¹ Fichte, 43.

oneness.³²² The idea takes five different forms throughout the ages; “worlds produce worlds,” as the ideas of the past bring about the present, and the present awaits the future.³²³ In the mode of viewing of the third age, the age that Fichte is mainly concerned with, the idea is seen “*as idea*,” and in the fourth form, in religion, one understands the universal form of the idea where everything lives and dwells in the Absolute.³²⁴

Therefore, the act of extending love to humanity as a whole is the same as devoting oneself to the ideas. Since ideas are representations of the Absolute that reveal the nature of existence, an insight into the ideas is at the same time an insight into the principle of division. The *Als*-structure of consciousness shows itself here as explaining how individual reflection divides the one, eternal idea into different forms in consciousness. It is the task of the individual to recognize the idea *as* an idea resulting from the necessary image-creating of consciousness whilst also recognizing this idea as represented by facts of history. Put differently, only a self-conscious act that negates reflection, which obscures the self-sufficiency of ideas, can express living oneness as the source of ideas.

Only ideas can provide blessedness, and in an age where the ideas are obscured by empirical knowledge, the only way to overcome the unpleasant feeling that comes with this emptiness, is “wit” (*Witz*).³²⁵ Only those able to accept the ideas are able to distinguish wit in its proper nature, by distinguishing it from folly. Fichte refers to this concept as that which communicates the highest truth “*in its most direct and intuitive aspect*,” unmediated as a revelation.³²⁶ Wit is therefore not finite reason—which would be when a philosopher explains an

³²² Fichte, 44.

³²³ Fichte, 47.

³²⁴ Fichte, 45–46.

³²⁵ Fichte, 56.

³²⁶ Fichte, 57.

idea step by step—but a direct revelation of truth within the mind of the individual. Therefore, Fichte also refers to it as a “godlike spark.” In its first shape, it appears as the “light-conductor in the spiritual world,” and in the second shape it is the “lightning of an idea.”³²⁷ It is where humanity is in direct connection to its absolute source and the “inevitable fate” of their existence.³²⁸ Thus, this godlike spark is a revelation of the divine, providing direct understanding of an idea. This will incite individuals to understand their position in the history of the world.

3.4 Necessity and freedom in history

Fichte’s explanation of the metaphysical division of ideas within human consciousness requires a negation of consciousness as image-creating in order to make space for a divine spark or revelation of the Absolute within. This means that individuals can understand themselves as originating from the same source, and thereby recognize their common humanity. Although they cannot escape the basic conditions of the divisive nature of reflection, the insight into the structure of consciousness allows, or rather, requires them to give shape to their existence as their vocation. The relation between freedom and necessity in history thus requires elaboration, to show the agency that human beings have to order their relations with reason in accordance with freedom, and to fulfil the world-plan to lose oneself in humanity.

First, the notion of history requires further explanation, particularly its connection to the theory of knowing. Quentin Landenne directs us to the ninth lecture of the *Grundzüge*, where the metaphysical notion of necessity is discussed in relation to history and freedom.³²⁹ Fichte

³²⁷ Fichte, 58.

³²⁸ Fichte, 58.

³²⁹ Landenne, “Spéculation et Liberté Dans La Philosophie de l’histoire Du Caractère de l’époque Actuelle de J. G. Fichte (1804-1805),” 470.

delineates history as a part of knowledge, that is, of empirical knowledge.³³⁰ He advances a metaphysical principle of history: “*Whatever actually exists, exists of absolute necessity; and necessarily exists in the precise form in which it does exist; it is impossible that it should not exist, or exist otherwise than as it does.*”³³¹ In other words, there is nothing but the immediate manifestation of God or the Absolute in the form of knowledge. As a result of this, the world that is created in the individual’s minds is the “mediate or indirect” manifestation of the divine, as an *a priori* and self-sufficient idea represented in images.³³²

Hence, because of the limits of knowledge, no one can say definite things about the origin of the world and existence. Yet, the philosopher can provide an account of the “*necessary conditions*” of existence. The historian, in turn, can only determine the facts of history.³³³

Whereas philosophy reaches what is “incomprehensible” since it arrives at the question *why* things are as they are, history must simply perceive facts “*as facts.*”³³⁴ Facts are only significant for finite understanding, not for the insight into consciousness, as it cannot explain their *a priori* importance. Nevertheless, with history we can find out what exactly we do not know.³³⁵ Before history, when there was nothing new or unexpected to be reported, there was only myth, as this was before human beings had started living or had chosen an object for their love.³³⁶

History is made up of an *a priori* and an *a posteriori* element as previously outlined in Radrizzani’s exposition.³³⁷ The philosopher is concerned with the *a priori* characteristics of the

³³⁰ Fichte, *Characteristics* (1805), 101.

³³¹ Fichte, 102.

³³² Fichte, 102.

³³³ Fichte, 104.

³³⁴ Fichte, 107.

³³⁵ Fichte, 108. What about the idea of myth as philosophical, as before history.

³³⁶ This idea of myth is important in situating Fichte’s theory of history within similar projects of other idealists such as Schelling and Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Answering the question of how these three ways of looking at history connect is a project in itself.

³³⁷ Fichte, *Characteristics* (1805), 110.

world-plan, and only uses the *a posteriori* elements of history to illustrate the significant points in history where humanity moves forward to the new epoch.³³⁸ Therefore, necessity moves humanity forward, that is, “an intelligent necessity of a divine life.”³³⁹ Only in this form of necessity can humanity be free and living, because God manifests itself in no other way than in existence, and only in the acceptance thereof can individuals find blessedness.³⁴⁰

Hence, Fichte’s concept of history provides a space for individuals to act, and it also allows the philosopher to position herself within the development of history and the world-plan. Also, because history has no meaning in itself and only provides facts, it cannot reflect any causal relations. The previously mentioned metaphysical maxim that everything exists exactly as it must be, brings a certain order and necessity to the universe. Nevertheless, there remains space for freedom in this ordered universe, which is reflected in the condition of humanity as confined to the principle of division in consciousness and their ability to negate reflection as insufficient. Ultimately, the interplay between necessity and freedom is linked to the course of history, which will bring humanity to the fulfilment of its purpose, while at the same time allowing individuals to have an influence on their own existence and the course of history. More than that, Fichte actually requires individuals to use their freedom to act, as the novel idea of humanity requires a different moral arrangement of life and society.

3.5 Freedom, religion and the insight into consciousness

Fichte characterizes Christianity as the main influence on the development of the ages in fulfilment of the world-plan. Since Fichte believes that Christianity brought forth the heroes that

³³⁸ Fichte, 110.

³³⁹ Fichte, 111.

³⁴⁰ Fichte, 112.

advanced the course of history through its various epochs, this religion must now become the principle of a new political and social order.³⁴¹ Moreover, as has been shown before, Fichte recognizes the teachings of Christianity— that is, of the Johannine gospel—as representing the same truths as his *Wissenschaftslehre*. By what means the Christian religion must become the ordering principle of society is considered in this section. The main concepts to evaluate in this context are the notions of freedom and religion, since Fichte’s definition of these concepts is essential for a discussion of the theory of knowledge in the *Grundzüge*. The social conditions of existence such as political, social and scientific powers are external influences on individuals, and they provide the means for individuals to move towards inward knowledge. While Fichte discusses these powers extensively, this section only focusses on the connection of history and knowledge to external life as such in connection to an inward and religious life.

One of the institutions that organizes the outward life of humanity is the state, since it provides laws that govern the outward actions of individuals. However, it cannot do the same for people’s opinions.³⁴² In the development of the state throughout history, religion must become its “creative and governing principle.” Religion is “love of goodness” or “virtue.” It constitutes the love of God in us, and this love is free from all compulsion by authorities such as the state.³⁴³ True religion teaches that humanity is the existence or manifestation of God, meaning that there is nothing but oneness. Since division only occurs in the human mind, the vocation of humanity is to negate the distinctions existing within consciousness and to find blessedness in the divine.³⁴⁴ The state must remain separated from religion, but also keep pace with the

³⁴¹ Fichte, 37–38.

³⁴² Fichte, 65.

³⁴³ Fichte, 150.

³⁴⁴ Fichte, 151.

development of the religious sense of humanity which must come from within the individuals, and adjust its laws accordingly.

The gradual development towards this religious insight is thus accompanied by and influences the progression of the ideal state, leading to an idea of vocation that is not just inward and individual, but that has wider implications for human culture. In Fichte's own words: "There would arise by means of this religion a public opinion throughout the whole realms of culture, [...] which would leave them at full liberty to do good, while it would often effectually restrain the desire of wrong-doing."³⁴⁵ Consequently, for Fichte, a new morality emerges alongside the development of the religious insight into knowledge.

According to Fichte, the task of philosophy is to investigate and redress the doctrine of Christianity, since both philosophy and religion strive to achieve the "highest purity and an original harmony."³⁴⁶ Philosophy for Fichte is the unfolding and creation of Christianity, and one way in which this manifests in existence is morality.³⁴⁷ Practically speaking, the Christian religion provides the principles for the "manners" that characterize an age. Fichte defines manners as the "*concealed principle of conduct [...] which have become secondary nature, but on that very account are not distinctly recognized in consciousness*" in all humanity.³⁴⁸ It is imperative of positive public good manners in the age of knowledge that everyone perceives all other people as sharing the same common humanity. This equality of all human beings is inherently a Christian idea.³⁴⁹ This Christian principle must therefore achieve the character of

³⁴⁵ Fichte, 152.

³⁴⁶ Fichte, 171–72.

³⁴⁷ Fichte, 172.

³⁴⁸ Fichte, 172.

³⁴⁹ Fichte, 176–77.

concealed principle, by which Fichte means that the principle is not merely conceived but that it also has a “true and living existence.”³⁵⁰

Once this latter concept has been internalized by individuals, the true and highest vocation of humankind has been achieved; namely, to dedicate oneself to humanity as a whole by negation of the ego and individual desires. Henceforth, it is the task of the state to facilitate this internalization of good manners, wherefore individuals must dedicate themselves to the state as well by accepting its laws and governance.³⁵¹

However, religion is not a merely a concealed or “unconscious” principle, since it must eventually reveal itself directly and inwardly in “clear consciousness.”³⁵² In this clear moment of perception, the individual understands the law of morality within as coming forth out of the one, eternal life.³⁵³ It is here directly “revealed as life,” whereby the idea of duty, that one “ought to” act morally, is overridden by the will of God, and by love and blessedness.³⁵⁴ Put differently, this revelation allows human beings to understand the laws of morality as coming from within, in contrast to viewing these laws as signifying duties imposed by a state. Individual desires are hereby disregarded in favor of religion or the will of God. In such a life, Fichte advances, “whatever exists, *as* it exists and *because* it exists, labours in the service of the eternal life.”³⁵⁵ Religion elevates human beings above the transient and above time and epochs as such, so that the individual can oversee their unity with humanity as a whole.³⁵⁶ Hence, all relations of

³⁵⁰ Fichte, 177.

³⁵¹ Fichte, 181.

³⁵² Fichte, 183.

³⁵³ Fichte, 188.

³⁵⁴ Fichte, 189.

³⁵⁵ Fichte, 189.

³⁵⁶ Fichte, 190.

freedom are ordered in accordance with reason, to actively negate consciousness in favor of the divine life, and to find the idea of religion within.³⁵⁷

In general, the *Grundzüge* articulates the isomorphic features of the structure of consciousness in the cultural and historical realms of existence. God, as the ordering principle of the world or archetype, manifests an image in existence. From the *Anweisung*, the insight was derived that this metaphysical process is isomorphic to the structure of consciousness, which creates images that refer back to an Absolute source and that leads to an insight into blessedness. In the *Grundzüge*, we find not only the necessity for a personal insight into this structure of consciousness, but also the need to realize that all individuals share the potential in reason to attain this insight because we are all images of the divine. This allows for the elevation of humanity as a whole to blessedness by means of a morality that can be understood inwardly. Such a form of ethics is maintainable because the initiative to follow certain laws of duty comes from within free individuals who understand *why* they must act in a certain way, as opposed to this being imposed by the state:

“The religious man, indeed, does all those things without exception which the law of duty enjoins; but he does them not as religious man, for he was already bound to do them, independently of all religion, as a purely moral man—as a religious man, he does the same things, but he does them with a nobler, freer inspiration.”³⁵⁸

Thus, Fichte aims to achieve an insight into our world by providing a doctrine of appearances that characterizes the development of culture by means of the development of humanity through history and various political states: “The phenomena of time, without exception, are regarded as necessary and progressive developments of the one, ever-blessed,

³⁵⁷ Fichte, 202.

³⁵⁸ Fichte, 190.

original Divine Life,” and each phenomenon is a condition for the existence of this higher life.³⁵⁹ This interpretation demonstrates how both nature and culture are inherently aiming to outwardly foster the inward spark of light for humanity to fulfil its vocation; namely, to achieve a blessed life. The role of religion as overcoming the limits of knowledge, is characteristic of Fichte’s mature works, and this idea culminates in the 1805 work with its idea of the fulfilment of the calling of humankind.

³⁵⁹ Fichte, 196.

Chapter 4: The implications of the exegeses for Fichte's philosophy of religion

Ultimately, the exegesis of Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* and the subsequent popular lectures on the *Anweisung* and the *Grundzüge* deepens the existing scholarship on Fichte's philosophical project and provides a new insight into the interconnection between these works. Therefore, contrary to academic consensus, it is worth studying Fichte's philosophy of religion in these works of the middle period because they constitute a coherent unity on this subject, whereby individuals are able to understand themselves and their place and purpose in the world. It is beneficial to clearly outline the results of the exegeses with regards to these new perspectives, specifically what it contributes to the notions of consciousness, religion, freedom and necessity, and how these are united by Fichte's advanced notion of vocation. This will allow me to reposition Fichte in the debates about his transcendental idealism.

To begin with a reiteration of the justification for reading the three books as a unity in the order indicated above, the exegeses show that the chosen works form a trilogy together that characterizes Fichte's developing philosophy of religion. In such a reading, the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* introduces the necessary concepts and ideas for philosophers to grasp the theory of knowledge that explains the conditions for experience. The 1806 *Anweisung* is necessary as a popular introduction to the doctrine of religion that teaches individuals about their vocation, which is to find a blessed life through the insight into consciousness. Subsequently, the 1805 *Grundzüge* provides an account of the cultural and historical developments that foster the progress of humanity as a whole in the attainment of the insight into knowledge about their existence. Together, these lecture series achieve a profound image of humanity, where humanity can comprehend itself as the manifestation of God. Here, the necessary phenomena that allow individuals to attain an insight into their existence are recognized as images of the divine, which

has implications for the designation of culture, history and society. Concurring with Di Giovanni's claim that Fichte was the only one who viewed the cultural implications of Kant's Copernican revolution about the idea of self and humanity, the exegeses have shown that Fichte has nuanced and explained these implications of a novel idea of selfhood in more depth in the popular works after the *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800).³⁶⁰

A significant issue that arose from the interpretations of the works is how Fichte's popular philosophy grounds its principles. Finding a foundation for philosophy has been Fichte's aim from the beginning, yet in the 1805-1806 lectures aimed at a popular audience, the philosophical justification for this ground is not clearly articulated. However, as this thesis demonstrates, the element of Fichte's philosophy that can be used to connect the three works and to provide a foundation for the popular works, is the *Als*-structure of consciousness. In this structure, consciousness is explained through itself as obscuring the *a priori* oneness of God and existence. The idea of consciousness as world-creating, as the principle of division that makes individuals rely on the world of the senses solely, reveals the truth that the ground of experience is inconceivable. This insight does not only have implications for an individual's idea of knowledge, but for the broader perspective of humanity, religion and culture. In each of the three works, a comprehension of the image-creating features of consciousness leads to a renewed purpose of humanity. This image-creating does not only explain the nature of the mind, but also shows that humanity is a manifestation of the divine in the form of knowledge.

Hence, this *Als*-structure of consciousness must be understood as Rametta describes an isomorphism. In the same way that human beings create images of what they perceive in their minds, God has manifested itself in existence. The images in the human mind must refer to an

³⁶⁰ Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors*, 10.

origin, meaning that they are compared to an idea or blueprint. The natural sense of truth or wit that allows us to make this comparison, is at the same time the revelation of the Absolute or God. In the language of the *Grundzüge* this means that every individual's thought shares in the universal or eternal thought. The notion of an isomorphism in this context thus represents what Fichte has attempted to convey with the definition of the existence of the Absolute as light in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Every individual shares in the light, and similar to the way in which light is broken into various colors and shades through a prism, the principle of division in consciousness separates the one life into different ideas. Therefore, individuals are various forms of manifestation of the divine who all appear in different ways. But in fact, we all share the same source of existence, the Absolute. This insight elicits an advanced notion of religion.

Religion in Fichte's understanding is not a mere instrument for his way of educating a popular audience. More than that, religion refers to what is beyond finite understanding, to the inconceivable, as it is established by the insight into the unity of consciousness. Religion is not blind faith since it constitutes the insight that the source of existence lies in the Absolute, beyond finite knowledge. Nevertheless, the notion of religion indicates that individuals can only know *that* this is the condition of knowledge, not *how* this happens, since the latter requires profound knowledge of the theoretical delineation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is only attainable by the philosopher. For all others, it is enough to have faith based on a rational act of freedom. Through an insight into consciousness, individuals are free to aim their desire to what matters most on the basis of their common humanity with others. It is the divine spark that Fichte recognizes in each individual that makes this insight possible. Once individuals view themselves as part of the divine world-plan, they can find their vocation within that plan and live a blessed life after negating their individuality and the world of change.

This explains why Fichte's transcendental idealism in the three works can be characterized as a theory of knowledge that explains how individuals can attain limited knowledge about the conditions of their existence. As Socrates only knew that he knew nothing, Fichte wants to arrive at the source of this inability to know, considering that we are unable to judge what is outside of finite knowledge. Outside of knowledge, there is only Being as *esse in mero actu*, meaning that we must focus on living. Therefore, the question of the meaning of existence, of the vocation of humankind as it was prevalently asked at the end of the 18th century, has attained a new meaning because of Fichte. It indicates the idea that there is nothing outside of knowing that we can consciously attest to. Since we are confined to knowing, knowledge forms the sole object that can be studied before we can enter into any discussions concerning other fields of science. And yet, now the limits of knowledge have been revealed, Fichte does not leave an empty void for humanity; there is a prospect of a blessed life. What cannot be known, the oneness of existence with the Absolute, must instead be lived.

Because Fichte has explained *how* the ground of the Absolute is inconceivable to us, he is able to claim that the Absolute or God constitutes the moral order of the world. Hence, there is necessity involved in the unfolding of history, as it follows the progression of the various modes of knowing. However, human beings are free to make choices in how they approach their world. They can choose to remain dependent on the transient world or actively desire to accept God as the foundation of existence, and this depends on what they choose as the objective of their love. A religious person who has proportioned their desire with the will of God has achieved and accepted that there is a life larger than their own, which is a life that all other individuals share. In their freedom to pursue this relationship with other people, God and the world, individuals attain happiness and blessedness. In Fichte's theory of knowledge, humanity must use their

everyday life as a starting point to obtain an insight into its existence, only to find that they are still engrained and in this ordinary life. Yet, they have obtained a renewed insight that their roots are in the Absolute. Human beings are God's manifestation and share in its wisdom, and they can do so by overcoming what Henrich calls their "learned ignorance."³⁶¹

³⁶¹ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 274.

Conclusion

Fichte's philosophy of religion in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, the 1806 *Anweisung* and the 1805 *Grundzüge* thus forms a complete story of the vocation of humankind where the theoretical background in the first-mentioned work explains the structure of consciousness as an *Als*, which renders a new meaning for existence in the practical realm of existence in the latter two works; since we cannot conceptualize the foundation of existence, it must instead be *lived*. Fichte discusses what it means to live with this insight in the subsequent popular works. The metaphysical insight into the conditions of knowledge, the doctrine of knowing, is necessarily accompanied by a progression of how one views the phenomena of history and culture, the doctrine of appearances. Moreover, understanding consciousness as world-creating shows how the perspective of the world changes when the mode of viewing the world has been explained through the insight into consciousness.

Looking at Fichte's philosophy from the historical division of the various modes of viewing the world, the particular view that leads to a blessed life is the religious one. While the scientific worldview—one step higher—explains *how* consciousness as image creating is connected to its foundation, Fichte does not go into this in the popular lectures; he proclaims its truth on the basis of religious claims instead, which leads to the same insight but from a religious perspective. One main criticism of Fichte's popular lectures is that his philosophy is not properly grounded and misses an evaluation of the necessary philosophical presuppositions. Yet, as this thesis aimed to show, by tracing the references to the *Als*-structure of consciousness throughout these works, it becomes clear that if these are properly understood, they form the essential presuppositions to ground Fichte's mature philosophy. Once this has been established, the popular lectures further provide a guide for living with this new insight into consciousness.

This guide for living shows that Fichte's idealism is not empty subjectivism, there is a world outside of our minds. How we view this world is conditioned by our freedom to actively choose our perception of the world, which is dependent on the object that we choose for our love. How the world is perceived is thus dependent on how we identify and perceive the phenomena, which are inherently manifestations of the Absolute. Therefore, Fichte's transcendental idealism must be understood as a theory of knowledge, where the desired object of love is transcendental, since it lies outside of humanity's conceptual realm. However, this does not mean that the Absolute is completely transcendent. Since the Absolute is the ground of our ability to project images in consciousness, we are all manifestations of the Absolute in knowing. All the phenomena of existence are explained as manifestation of God, which Fichte established as the same truth that the Johannine gospel promulgates.

Fichte himself thus states that his doctrine of knowledge is a doctrine of religion. The truth about the conditions of existence must be lived, and this insight brings blessedness to humanity since the inconceivability of the Absolute requires a notion of religious love. It also brings moral imperatives with it, because every individual must be recognized as having the same rational foundation and ability to choose a life of blessedness. In this recognition, individuality must be repudiated in favor of a life concerned with all of humanity. This means that we need a society wherein individuals are stimulated to find truth within themselves, and where external institutions are established that accompany this progression. If individuals distinguish the "godlike spark" in themselves and others, all other people must be regarded with equal esteem, introducing a Christian from of ethics.

This understanding of religion as the result of the insight into knowledge and as becoming the characterizing feature of institutions that externally organize society, indicates a

few important insights about the notion of vocation after the Enlightenment. The idea of the self as necessarily connected to an Absolute and to others bears witness to a historical notion of a purpose that evolves throughout history, and that is dependent on society's historical progression towards an insight. In his developing philosophy of religion, Fichte could therefore reconcile the ideas of freedom and necessity so that they support his transcendental project. Comprehension of the structure of consciousness as concealing oneness is indispensable in this project as it justifies the accounts of both necessity and freedom.

The systematic exegesis of the works in this thesis has thus demonstrated the philosophical depth and development that Fichte has achieved in devoting himself to the project of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Hopefully, such a systematic overview will motivate scholars to explore other parts of Fichte's middle and late philosophy in order to expand academic scholarship, principally in the English language. In this way, the influence that Fichte could have had on the development of the field of philosophy of religion can be achieved, which will have consequences for the reception of the figures in German idealism that came after him. This also means that Fichte was not a mere follower of Kant or an obscure mystic, but a philosopher who never ceased until his death to develop an understanding of his unified system of knowing, with the intention to answer the question of how humanity should understand itself, and to develop a view of what the purpose of humanity and its conditions of existence could be.

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