

Bildung as Standpoint. Philosophy of Religion as Philosophy of Culture in Fichte’s Middle Period

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Abstract – While *Bildung*, as Gadamer affirms, was in the 19th century the element in which the sciences lived, there is traditionally no epistemological ground to justify its status. This leads to an *aporia*: *Bildung* as self-cultivation is meant to be an end in itself, yet must also provide for the unity of particular sciences and their separate goals. This paper sees a solution in Fichte’s middle period via the cultivation of Attention, allowing one simultaneously to stay within the realm of *Bildung* and conceive of the particulars that are its manifestations. Attention first appears in the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804), where it is an existential mood and prerequisite for entering the system. Varying degrees of it then come to qualify the standpoints found in the *Anweisung zum Seligen Leben* (1806). Finally, in the life of the *Anweisung*’s Johannine Christ and the finished Scholar of the *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten* (1805), Fichte presents us with a model of *Bildung* grounded in Attention, one whose priorities are transmission and initiation.

Keywords – *Bildung*, German Idealism, Fichte, Philosophy of Education, *Wissenschaftslehre*

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1. Introduction

Up until at least the middle of the twentieth century, self-cultivation was arguably the main goal of education. In the German-speaking world, this ideal is encompassed by *Bildung*, a term as difficult to translate today as it was to theorize in the classical age of German philosophy. And while indispensable for the development of both human and natural sciences in the 18th and 19th centuries, it lacked a theoretical foundation. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Bildung* “was the Element in which the human sciences of the 19th century lived, even if they had no epistemological ground by which they could vindicate (*rechtfertigen*) this claim.”¹

¹ “Der Begriff der *Bildung*, der damals zu beherrschender Geltung aufstieg, war wohl der größte Gedanke des 18. Jahrhunderts, und eben dieser Begriff bezeichnet das Element, in dem die Geisteswissenschaften des

This paper will explore the problem of epistemologically connecting *Bildung* to the forms of knowledge it grounds, using the writings of the middle period of Johann Gottlieb Fichte to provide it with a metaphysical foundation. Along Fichtean lines, the aporia is reframed as the problem of the particular manifestation of a self-enclosed totality. In other words, if *Bildung* has no goal outside of itself, the particular sciences would have to relate to it not as things subsequent and separate, but as standpoints that allow one to adjudicate the whole from a limited point-of-view within that whole. Self-cultivation thus becomes a form of Attention, of sustained concentration not only on objects of experience, but on one's very observation of them. Herein, we will first establish Fichte's theory of Attention in the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*. A second section shows how this concretizes into a theory of standpoints in the *Anweisung zum Seligen Leben* of 1806. A third and final section then applies this theory to two Fichtean models of the *Gebildete mensch*, the Christ of John's Gospel as described in the *Anweisung*, and the finished Scholar (*vollendeter Gelehrter*) of the 1805 lectures on the essence of the scholar, *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten*. Both figures achieve a level of Attention that gives them the capacity to make the notion of learning itself translucent, allowing them to initiate others into knowledge-of-knowledge, or a reflective life.

2. Ganze, Volle, Aufmerksamkeit: the 1804 Wissenschaftslehre as Alchemy of Attention

Roughly spanning the years 1804 to 1807, Fichte's middle period marks a major turning point in the development of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (WL hereafter), seeing three series of lectures on the subject in 1804, the most complete being the second, running from April 16th to June 8th.² If lecturing replaced writing, it is because Fichte hoped to emphasize the performative character of the WL; the hearers of these lectures were laypersons, not philosophers. Fichte expected as much. What he asked of them was not philosophical agility, but merely the capacity for Attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*). If they were only capable of giving themselves over entirely to the exercise that Fichte proposed, the system would construct itself. In so doing, they would arrive at the insight that they were always already within this system, not as *I*, the overly subjective expression of the whole in Fichte's earlier work, but as *We*, the multitude of *Wissenschaftslehrers* who perform the system repeatedly.

Transcendentally, Attention evokes the fundamental orientation of consciousness. To pay Attention to the fact *that experience is*, that objects are intelligible, evokes the conditions of their intelligibility, which in turn never exists without an object *in concreto*. One's objective

19. Jahrhunderts leben, auch wenn sie das erkenntnistheoretisch nicht zu rechtfertigen wissen" (H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1990, pp. 14-15).

² *The Science of Knowing: J.G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. W.E. Wright, Albany, SUNY, 2005, with Lectures in Roman numerals, followed by Wright's page numbers. Citations from the German are taken from the critical edition, *Gesamtausgabe*: GA, II, 8. See Lauth's foreword (pp. XV-XLIV) for historical details.

knowledge has pre-subjective conditions – Kant said as much when he asserted that the *I* must be able to accompany (*begleiten können*) all of my representations.³ The conditions of experience are not experiences themselves. Ironically, Kant presents these conditions as having some ontological value *per se*, albeit that of an unknown “x.” And on Fichte’s reading, Kant’s threefold attempt at broaching this “x” in the tripartite critical enterprise backfires, producing three Absolutes instead of one.⁴ There is, in Fichtean terms, a misplaced application of genetic deduction (a tracing back or *zurückführung* of what is known to the sources that account for its appearing) at work in the Kantian oeuvre: Kant wants a genetic deduction of the object of experience, but eschews such a deduction for the critical project’s internal unity.

The rejoinder that Fichte makes in the 1804 WL inverts Kant’s priorities: thought is always traceable to an absolute unity, while objects of thought are the product of separating judgments. Truth, in other words, is One, whereas the objects of knowing are always particularized. “On a particular occasion I divided the science of knowing into two main parts; one, that it is a doctrine of truth, and second, that it is a doctrine of appearance and illusion, but one that is *indeed true* and grounded in truth.”⁵ A twofold methodology is therefore adopted in the presentation of the 1804 WL: lectures 6-14 constitute an *Aufsteigen* or reduction (*zurückführung*) of all experience to the dynamic unity of Being and Thinking, “A,” or more adroitly, *Life*; lectures 16-28 constitute an *Absteigen* or appearing of objects *qua* manifestations of the One-Truth.⁶ Fichte also characterizes the latter as a *Phänomenologie* or *Bildlehre*. While Absolute Being, or Truth, is all-encompassing pure activity, the particularities of everyday experience are irreducible to Truth. If, from that higher point of view, particulars seem illusory, from the point of view of experience, any unity of particulars is inexpressible. The task that Fichte sets out for himself, therefore, is to provide a genetic deduction of the ungenetic *qua* ungenetic. This is meant not only to describe the reciprocal nature of knowledge and its conditions, but also the Truth-value of what is there, of the compelling nature of experience.

Fichte expresses this through a formula:⁷

$$A \bullet - S-D \bullet - x, y, z$$

³ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 131.

⁴ “But [Kant] did not conceive of it [i.e., “A”, the Absolute’s placeholder in consciousness] in its pure self-sufficiency in and for itself, [...] but rather only as a common *basic determination* or *accident* of its three primordial modes, x, y, z, [...] as a result of which for him there are actually three absolutes and the true unitary absolute fades to their common property” (SK, Lecture II, p. 31).

⁵ SK, Lecture XV, p. 115.

⁶ Cf. Lecture XXI: “Wir lassen es daher, als bloßes Mittel des Heraufsteigens fallen, bis es im Herabsteigen sich wieder findet” (GA, II, 8, p. 320). The English translates *Aufsteigen* as ascent and *Absteigen* as descent. While this is a gloss, such glossing is almost inevitable.

⁷ Cf. SK, Lecture V, p. 40. For another version, see SK, Lecture II, p. 30.

"A" is the conceptual stand-in for Life, the dynamic form of the Absolute. It is the genetic root for which Kant cannot provide.⁸ The dashes separate this One-Truth-Life into particularisation; while this separation involves two levels of determination, they occur simultaneously – there is really, then, only one dash and one point.⁹ The first (general) separation into *Sein* and *Denken* constitutes the first things whose ground "A" is outside experience, and is a prerequisite separation for judgment to come about.¹⁰ The second (specific) separation into x, y, and z refers to Kant's three critiques, or to use Fichte's terms, the sensible (or mutable), the supersensible (the immutable), and the unity of the two.¹¹ The crucial element in the formula is the point (•), which separates "A" from the forms of particularization that seek their ground in it. It also formally implicates *Attention* within the WL's methodology. The point is actually a meta-standpoint, an artificial disjunction that separates the unified "A" from categories of judgment (S-D) that result in the concretization of the manifold into experience (x, y, z). "The science of knowing stands in the point,"¹² we are told, and the very act of *Wissenschaftslehre* involves projecting (*projiziert*) the products of everyday experience into this point. If one can simply pay Attention to the fact *that* knowledge is compelling, that the appearing of particulars is immediately credible to us, without analyzing the content of experiences themselves, the foundational character of "A" as pre-subjective condition for knowledge reveals itself, albeit without the construction of particular knowledge that would necessarily ensue.¹³ Attention allows one to presuppose the *thatness* or *daß* of an appearing, and then reconstruct appearance itself (x, y, z) within the point (•). In other words, if one just pays Attention to the fact *that* knowing appears in a compelling manner, one realizes that it is a construction, and can thus be reconstructed *as if* from without.¹⁴ Fichte's phenomenology is therefore a theory of appearance as constructed image. To pay Attention to such images is to unveil their image character, and their true ontological value thereby.

Attention thus postpones any act of judgment, a staying power that Fichte describes using forceful alchemical metaphors such as *das Lager des Todes* and *der Tod in der Wurzel*.¹⁵ To

⁸ Cf. SK, Lecture II, p. 30.

⁹ "A is admitted; it divides itself simultaneously into x, y, z" (SK, Lecture II, p. 32).

¹⁰ "Thus, absolute oneness [...] resides in the principle [...] of the absolute oneness and indivisibility of both, which is equally, as we have seen, the principle of their disjunction" (SK, Lecture I, p. 25). On this account, one could also conceive of S and D as Kant's *a priori* and *a posteriori*.

¹¹ Cf. SK, Lecture II, pp. 31-32.

¹² SK, Lecture IV, p. 40.

¹³ "Thus, the basic character of the ideal perspective is that it originates from the presupposition of a being which is only hypothetical and therefore based wholly on itself; and it is very natural that it finds just this same being, which it presupposes as absolute, to be absolute again in its genetic deduction, since it certainly does not begin there in order to negate itself, but to produce itself genetically" (SK, Lecture XI, 89).

¹⁴ Cf. SK, Lecture VIII, p. 91.

¹⁵ "This discontinuous projection is evidently the same one that we have previously called, and presently call, the form of outer existence [...]. For what this means, as a projection, concerning which no further account can be given and which thus is discontinuous, is the same as what we called "death at the root (*den Tod in der*

presuppose and reconstruct is to *precipitate* objects into a place of death. Critically, the presuppositional sort of thinking that Attention gives rise to, embodied by an *as if*, lets one examine the structure of experience without ever leaving it.¹⁶ From here arises the insight that the system constructs itself,¹⁷ and we are in it. Writes Fichte,

[The] knack for grasping these lectures is the knack of full, complete Attention (*das Talent der ganzen vollen Aufmerksamkeit*), which throws itself into the present object with all its spiritual power, puts itself there and is completely absorbed in it, so that no other thought or fancy can occur [...]. [First] we are required to construct a specific concept internally. This is not difficult: anyone just paying Attention to the description can do it (*Jeder, der nur auf die Beschreibung Acht hat, kann es*); and we construct it in front of him. Next, hold together what has been constructed; and then, without any assistance from us, an insight will spring up by itself, like a lightning flash. [...] For we do not create the truth, and things would be badly arranged if we had to do so; rather, truth creates itself by its own power.¹⁸

Instructive here is Fichte's use of a light metaphor: the Absolute is seen as an all-encompassing light whose movement is interrupted by the objects it illuminates: light *lights*, or is brought to a halt, by objective knowledge. This means that conceptualization cannot have an external ground: it seemingly just appears. To take up Fichte's alchemical imagery, if to precipitate is to change a substance's form, there is always a left-over residue, or *caput mortuum*.¹⁹ In this case, the *caput mortuum* is the object itself, which in contrast to the Absolute (*Life*), is always *dead*. The fact that objects are mere left-overs is precisely how they are to be reconciled to the Absolute-Life: objects are themselves the appearing of the One, which *de facto* cannot appear; they are images of the invisible One. Transcendentally speaking, the condition of the possibility of the One's emergence is the ungenetic nature of its images. To put it simply, a known object and its presubjective conditions emerge in tandem.²⁰

Fichte formally expresses this mutual conditionality as a "*Soll*." The *Bildlehre* as a whole is encapsulated by the *Soll*'s structure. It is the formal expression of the *As if* produced by Attention. If Attention allows for an insight to arise, it is an insight into the structure of the *Soll*: "Soll es zu der absoluten Einsicht kommen, daß u.s.w., so muß eine solche ideale

Wurzel". The gap, the rupture of intellectual activity in it, is just death's lair (*das Lager des Todes*)" (SK, Lecture XIV, pp. 111-112). Cf. GA, II, 8, p. 221.

¹⁶ SK, Lecture XIV, 114.

¹⁷ SK, Lecture III, 37.

¹⁸ SK, Lecture V, pp. 47-48; Cf. GA, II, 8, p. 67.

¹⁹ The German *Absatz* is also used to translate the Latin *Caput Mortuum*. Cf. K. Figala, *Der alchemische Begriff des Caput Mortuum in der symbolischen Terminologie Hegels*, in H.G. Gadamer (Hg.), *Stuttgarter Hegel-Tage 1970*, Heidelberg, Bouvier, 1974, pp. 141-152.

²⁰ Alessandro Bertinetto expresses this in terms of a relationship between *Bilden* (constructive thought) and its copy, or concrete showing forth (*Abbild*). Putting their relationship in Kantian terms, Bertinetto writes "[Abbild sans Bilden] est 'aveugle', [Bilden sans Abbild] est 'vide'" (A. Bertinetto, *Philosophie de l'imagination, philosophie comme imagination. La "Bildlehre" de J.G. Fichte*, in J.-C. Goddard, M. Maeschalk (eds.), *Fichte. La Philosophie de la Maturité (1804-1814). Réflexivité, Phénoménologie et Philosophie*, Paris, Vrin, 2003, p. 59).

Sichconstruction absolut faktisch gesetzt werden. – Die Erklärung in unmittelbarer Einsicht ist bedingt durch die absolut faktische Voraussetzung des zu Erklärenden”.²¹

The *Soll* is a five-fold movement:²²

- 1) A (X). Appearance is compellingly present, it is evident (*Evidenz*). Insofar as it is evident, it implies the identity of the starting point (immediacy) with the end (Absolute-Life).
- 2) A • (S-D; x,y,z). Then arises the insight into the constructed nature of being, which introduces a twofold cleavage. The point therefore represents the gap between the *in-sich-von-sich* and its ideally constructed image.
- 3) A • S-D; x,y,z. The gap is the product of construction as well. It is an artificial separation. It involves a projection “without principle.” Better still, it is the principle of the absence of principle.²³ The only certainty is the act of projection itself.
- 4) (A; S-D; x,y,z). Projection itself is the categorical foundation of the relation of what is both outside and inside the point; everything can be reconstructed within it.
- 5) [(A, X) • (X • A)]. If everything is constructed within the point, then the sides (Truth-Life-Absolute and Experience-Particularity) are reversible. In other words, seen from experience, the disjunction is a necessary postulate that leads to precipitation. Seen from the point of view of Life, it is entirely illusory. The ground of the relation between the two is their mutual self-elaboration.

Of note is the fifth point, which does not introduce anything new, but affirms the reversibility of the established permutations. This highest insight, that which integrates the emergence of the particular into the emergence of the whole *from within* that whole is itself the Science of Knowing, and to obtain this insight implies full Attention. The active participant's Attention to the *Soll* – that is, to the unfolding of the Science of Knowing – is constitutive of the *Soll*'s five-fold development, to the Science of Knowing itself.²⁴ It is the necessary manifestation of freedom's self-expression. Attention is not only insight into, but integration within, the *Soll*'s movement.

²¹ SK, Lecture XVI (GA, II, 9, p. 250). The sentence is difficult to translate. Wright offers the following: “If (*Soll*) the absolute insight is to arise, that, etc., then such an ideal self-construction must be posited entirely factually. The explanation through immediate insight is conditioned by the absolutely factual presupposition of what is to be explained” (SK, p. 125).

²² While Fichte insists on the *Fünffachkeit* or “quintuplicity” of the WL, he confines his development of it to a few telegraphic remarks. I base my interpretation largely on Lecture XXVII, where the metaphor of seeing and seeing-of-seeing prevails. I concur with Martial Gueroult, for whom the *Soll* is the centrepiece of the *Bildlehre* and the foundation of quintuplicity (M. Gueroult, *L'évolution et la structure de la doctrine de la science chez Fichte*, 2 tomes, Paris, Belles Lettres, 1930, t. II, pp. 121-122). Cf. SK, Lecture XVII, p. 131.

²³ Cf. SK, Lecture XVI, p. 124.

²⁴ Cf. SK, Lecture XXVII, pp. 194-195.

If the “fifth form” or plenitude of forms of knowing is itself the WL, then the other, particularized levels of the *Soll* must also refer to forms of knowledge. By means of quintuplicity, Fichte derives four “lower” levels of knowledge (sensibility, legality, morality, and religion), or particular sciences that would constitute a philosophical system.²⁵ Aside from the WL itself, then, a complete philosophical system would also require philosophies of Nature, Law, Ethics, and Religion.²⁶ Yet if Attention has transformed the WL into a standpoint from which the division of knowledge into disciplines is possible, then each discipline is itself also a standpoint. Establishing Attention’s relation to each standpoint, however, is not a task undertaken in the theoretical WL but rather in its popular presentations. To properly link Fichte’s *Aufmerksamkeit* to *Bildung*, we must explore the Doctrine of Religion, the highest of the particular standpoints.

3. The Standpoints of Attention: *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben*

The *Way towards the Blessed Life* (as the *Anweisung zum Seligen Leben* is usually rendered in English²⁷) corresponds to the highest particular science, that of religion, and is also fundamentally a “popular” presentation of the middle-period WL. It therefore offers the most systematic view of what stands on the right-hand side of the point, S-D; x,y,z. Here, the notion of Attention will take on the valence of Standpoint,²⁸ creating progressively broader ways of seeing or *Weltanschauungen*, culminating in Science, or the WL itself. These standpoints correspond to the sciences announced at the end of the 1804 lectures. Successive points of view are not necessarily struck down, but rather “enlightened” and made more translucent.²⁹ It is, in a Fichtean way, a theory of incarnation as protracted phenomenological application of the WL. Such an application is analogous to the *Bildlehre* of the WL; each standpoint is a sort of dynamic schema or rule of application (better, perhaps, to say, rule of manifestation) delineating the manner in which the Absolute or *Life* appears.³⁰

²⁵ SK, Lecture XXVIII, p. 199.

²⁶ See G. Rametta, *La philosophie fichtéenne de la religion*, in “Laval philosophique et théologique”, 72/1, 2016, pp. 7-9.

²⁷ All citations are from the German critical edition. English translations are my own.

²⁸ Marco Ivaldo refers to “cinq niveaux, c’est-à-dire cinq formes de vies,” later using the term “typologies,” and then repeatedly, “points de vue,” cf. M. Ivaldo, *La vie authentique*, in P. Cerutti (éd.), *Lire l’initiation à la vie bienheureuse de Fichte*, Paris, Vrin, 2017, p. 41 ss. Hartmut Traub writes of “*Weltanschauungen*” and links these directly to *Aufmerksamkeit*. As with Ivaldo, he sees this as belonging to a typology. Cf. H. Traub, *Vollendung der Lebensform: Fichtes Lehre vom seligen Leben als Theorie der Weltanschauung und des Lebensgefühls*, in “Fichte-Studien”, 8, 1995, p. 179. Both link the *Anweisung* explicitly to the 1804 WL.

²⁹ Cf. GA, I, 9, p. 109.

³⁰ This is largely the point of the Light metaphor, as we shall see in a moment. For a further investigation of this point, see S. Schütz, *Transzendente Prinzipien in Fichtes WL 1804-II: Eine Interpretationsskizze zur systematischen Rolle von “Licht” und “Bilden”*, in “Fichte-Studien”, 47, 2019, pp. 229-250.

True to the bedrock tenants set forth in the 1804/II WL lectures, the "Life" spoken of here is always already *Blessed*. The insight – once again, Attention's work – is to realize that one was living a blessed life all along. In theological terms, gaining eternal life involves realizing that one is already in it. Through religion, which opens one up to WL, Attention takes on an aspect of spiritual exercise, of *Aufmerksamkeit* as *Contemplatio*.

In the sphere of religion, the "A" of the WL is called alternately *Life, Love, Being, or Thought*. Insofar as all these are different descriptors of the highest, ineffable, and dynamic being, one might also add God. If Life expresses the dynamic nature of Being, Love stands for the striving (*Trieb*) of particular beings who wish to be reunited with these highest things – that is, with God.³¹ The means by which one strives for God is thought. Not only is thought the manifestation of God's own being,³² it is the substantial form of Life.³³ To live is to think, and the dynamic, self-enclosed perfection of thought is God himself. Faith in the doctrines of Christianity, then, is nothing other than clear and lively (*lebendige*) thought.³⁴ Opposed to this lies *death*, which Fichte forcefully characterizes as nothing or non-being (*Nichtsein*), a mere heuristic concept that denotes some degree of separation from Life. Death, therefore, can only exist as an admixture (*vermischte*) with Life. Death does not have any active role in separating Life and that which strives for it; in reality, it is the "gap" between the two, the point (•) in the WL's diagram, the *Absatz* or *caput mortuum* that will prove to be a residue of Being's activity. It is in fact Love itself that separates, creating particular consciousness (that is, a Self). Yet it is also love that reunites consciousness with Life.³⁵

This depends upon a fundamental distinction, that of *Seyn* and *Daseyn*, of "A" and its appearance or image.³⁶ As with the WL, here consciousness is the image of Life, its manifestation as a particular. While thought provides consciousness with objects that are inevitably products of separating judgment (death), it can also renounce particulars and engage in a tracing-back (*Zurückziehen*) that – just as in the WL – requires one to abstract oneself from the compelling nature of objects and participate in thought's very structures. Writes Fichte:

It is certainly true that through the return of our minds (*zurückziehung unseres Gemüthes*) from the apparent, the objects of our former love pass away and gradually disappear, until, in the ether of a new world that opens up to us, they return to us with renewed beauty; and that all of our previous life dies, until, as a small addition (*leichte Zugabe*) to the new life that begins in us, we regain it.³⁷

³¹ GA, I, 9, p. 59.

³² GA, I, 9, p. 69.

³³ GA, I, 9, p. 62.

³⁴ GA, I, 9, p. 63.

³⁵ GA, I, 9, p. 56.

³⁶ In this context, "existence" would be a gloss. The point is that *Daseyn* is an outward-appearing image or "Äußerung" of *Seyn*. Note that *Äußerung* can also mean utterance, corresponding to the idea of Logos, or the Word of God.

³⁷ GA, I, 9, p. 63. In the 1804/II WL, *Zurückführung* is used instead.

This is essentially a rephrasing of what he previously wrote about the methodology of the WL, quoted above: “wir lassen es daher, als bloßes Mittel des Heraufsteigens fallen, bis es im Herabsteigen sich wieder findet”.³⁸ This is, moreover, Attention’s role: it operates a reconstruction that brackets out objects of experience. Recast as thought, Attention comes to the fore, and embodies what the notion of *Soll* theorized.

To think is to live, and to act unreflectively or distractedly according to mere opinion (*Meinung*) is death.³⁹ The world of mere opinion is the antechamber of Attention. While already thought, it is trapped in immediacy. The problem here is not the acceptance of the immediate as credible (Fichte never doubts this), but rather the notion that the external world can be known unreflectively, as if there were no inner forum for the adjudication of experience. Here, thought is merely an afterthought. It is opinion because it does not reflect at all, imprisoned by dispersion and distraction – indeed, even the naïve materialist is a step above mere opinion.⁴⁰

Ultimately, mere opinion inhibits one from seeing that consciousness or *Daseyn* is itself the exteriorisation of *Seyn*, a splitting (*Spaltung*) that is the product of consciousness, but which nonetheless takes place *within* consciousness. It belongs to consciousness to see *Daseyn* as *Daseyn* and *Seyn* as *Seyn*, God as God and World as World. Indeed, from the point-of-view of *Seyn*, of “A” or God, there is no separation, only an appearing-as-image. The world, then, is nothing more than the manifestation of God, the appearing of God for consciousness.⁴¹

This *Seyn-Daseyn* split inaugurates the possibility of perspective (*Gesichtspunkt*), something of which mere opinion is incapable. Yet, because death is not something in-itself, but rather always mixed in with Life, present in all *Daseyn* and hence a fundamental element of *Seyn*’s manifestation, something of the dispersion or distraction of mere opinion survives Attention’s progress, disappearing only when the fundamental split between *Seyn/Daseyn* or World/God has been (so to speak) left behind.

³⁸ SK, Lecture XXI (GA, II, 8, p. 320).

³⁹ GA, I, 9, p. 80.

⁴⁰ Cf. GA, I, 9, p. 84. While the secondary literature generally ignores the role of *Meinung*, Traub, *Vollendung*, cit., pp. 168-169, refers to it briefly.

⁴¹ “Jenes stellende Vorhandenseyn ist der Charakter desjenigen, was wir die Welt nennen; der Begriff daher ist der eigentliche Welterschöpfer, vermittelt der aus seinem inneren Charakter erfolgenden Verwandlung des göttlichen Lebens in ein stehendes Seyn, und nur für den Begriff und im Begriffe ist eine Welt, als die nothwendige Erscheinung des Lebens im Begriffe; jenseits des Begriffes aber, d.h. wahrhaftig und an sich, ist nichts und wird in alle Ewigkeit nichts, denn der lebendige Gott in seiner Lebendigkeit” (GA, I, 9, p. 99). In the 1805 WL, Fichte insists even more forcefully that the world could not have been made *ex nihilo*, from nothing. “Gott is Welterschöpfer: Nein: den es giebt keine Welt, u. kann keine geben[;] denn nur das absolut *ist*, das absolute aber kann nich realiter u. wahrhaftig aus ihm selber heraus gehen. [...] Aus Nichts wird Nichts; Nichts bleibt ewig Nichts” (GA, II, 9, p. 288). The *Anweisung* brings the further insight that the world is instead created *ex deo*.

Constitutive of consciousness, the split between *Seyn* and *Daseyn* refers back to the S-D split of the WL, the separation of Being and Thought that gives traction to judgment and inaugurates consciousness. As the breaking of totality, it is qualitatively infinite. A further division, however, takes place among appearances themselves.⁴² This second division, which in the WL produces x,y,z, is a division of seeing, a separation of consciousness's possibilities into five distinct viewpoints. That they are five in number and not three is due to the nature of the division of A into S,D,x,y,z, which happens "in one stroke." Hence the initial division into S-D is also the division of A and X(S-D; x,y,z). Since the "A" of the diagram can only be the stand-in for the ineffable Absolute, there is affinity between "A" and "S." *Seyn*, which can be described according to the two categories of *Seyn* and *Da-seyn*, inhabits both sides of the gap or point. If each point belongs to a particular science, "S," the highest of the five, can only belong to the WL itself. The WL would therefore constitute a pure seeing of seeing, and each lower level a particular lesser manner of employing consciousness. Each of these manners of seeing is a *Gesichtspunkt* that corresponds to one of the algebraic letters in the formula announced in the 1804/II WL, and also corresponds to a particular science.

Overall, Attention is the affective tone of the WL, and disseminates such a tone in each standpoint. Fichte establishes this by comparing the capacity for concentration to a fixed or gathered-together geometrical point, akin to a concentrated beam of light that might otherwise be relaxed into a broad and diffusive shining. Analogously, Love is experienced through acts of concentration; it is the pleasurable striving of thought towards being, and hence the Affect of Being (*Affekt des Seyns*). As Attention frees itself of the distraction of mere opinion as it journeys upward, each stage of its itinerary takes on an affective tone, a particular colour as its metaphorical light constricts. What follows is a reading of the five standpoints according to the level of Attention each elicits.⁴³

The first standpoint, that of sense experience (*Sinnenwelt*), is a purely materialist outlook.⁴⁴ It takes pleasure in the material world and fantasies about it, seeing humanity merely as flesh. Insofar as it is utterly arrested by what is external and incapable of conceiving of an internal life on its own, the feeling here is one of fascination, of being utterly caught up in sensation. It also corresponds to the "x" of the formula, Kant's first Critique as theory of knowledge of the sensible world. In Fichte's own schema it yields a *Naturphilosophie*, a theory of the mechanisms of external necessity.

The second standpoint is that of Law (*Legalität*). Such a legalist worldview is once removed from sense experience, supposing that laws establishing equality ground freedom. A hierarchy is therefore introduced: first law, then freedom, and finally, sense experience. This law "is" or has ontological weight before all other things. This priority of the supersensible over the sensible corresponds to the "y" of WL, with Fichte explicitly referencing the *Critique of*

⁴² GA, I, 9, p. 107.

⁴³ For a summary of the five standpoints (albeit without the inclusion of mere opinion) see M. Ivaldo, *La vie authentique*, cit., pp. 42-44.

⁴⁴ GA, I, 9, pp. 106-107.

Practical Reason. Fichte himself has also extensively worked on the notion of a *Rechtslehre* or philosophy of law, the particular science that corresponds to this level.⁴⁵ And while legalism represents progress when compared with sense experience, it depends on an axiom – one that is procured *a priori* and without proof. Reiterating a classic criticism of the categorical imperative, Fichte claims that it is empty, containing neither content nor authentic affect.⁴⁶ The only feeling it elicits is that of obedience, the cold and impersonal respect for the law.

The third standpoint is a watershed moment. Ethical Life (*Sittlichkeit*)⁴⁷ marks the end of the material progression of Standpoints; higher levels are an inward change, not necessarily affecting the circumstances of external life.⁴⁸ With Ethical Life, content is added to what was empty in the world of legalism; an authentic subjectivity is achieved, whereby one's life is ordered towards a calling or vocation in the broad sense, a *Bestimmung*.⁴⁹ While a life lived according to law merely orders experience according to an axiom, ethical life is creative, manifesting itself in religious art, poetry, and the thought of some few philosophers – Plato had an inkling of it, and Jacobi came close to it.⁵⁰ In essence, one no longer obeys the law simply because one must, but rather embraces it personally and provides it with content. Philosophically, this involves an elaborate movement of renouncing oneself in order to embrace the empty law, and then finding oneself again through supplying the law with creative content, following the pattern of the *Soll*: law and subject mutually produce each other, generating Culture. Any Fichtean theory of *Bildung* – or culture more broadly – would have to begin here.⁵¹ Culture itself is an immanent appearing that follows the *Soll*. This third stage manifests itself – both individually and collectively – through talent. The very coming forth of the world is facilitated by the culture-generating acts of art, poetry, philosophy, politics, jurisprudence, etc., and the individual who possesses such a capacity is akin to an artist. In this way, the third Standpoint corresponds to “z” on the diagram; it is the capacity for judgment and uniting the sensible and supersensible, as does Kant's third Critique. It represents the formal study of *Sittenlehre*, but also encompasses aesthetics – a subject otherwise overlooked

⁴⁵ Cf. GA, I, 9, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Cf. GA, I, 9, p. 137.

⁴⁷ Older English translations use the term “Higher Morality.” Fichte sometimes uses the term to qualify the *Sittlichkeit*, cf. GA, I, 9, p. 110: “durch höherer Moralität”.

⁴⁸ Cf. GA, I, 9, pp. 112-113. This follows the logic of separation at a single stroke: SD and xyz are materially the same, with xyz being the more determinate articulation of what was already latent in SD.

⁴⁹ GA, I, 9, p. 109.

⁵⁰ GA, I, 9, p. 110.

⁵¹ Raymond Geuss helpfully points out a tradition in *Germanistik* going back at least to Kant's third Critique (§ 41) that makes a distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisierung*. While the former refers to personal discipline and the development of individual talent, the latter concerns communicating the pleasure one takes in a particular object to others. In much the same spirit, Herder will distinguish between *Erziehung*, or the education imposed on one, and *Bildung*, the part of one's education that is self-cultivation. One could thus theorize that *Kultur* and *Bildung* form a subjective pole, while *Zivilisierung* and *Erziehung* form an objective pole. Cf. R. Geuss, *Kultur, Bildung, Geist*, in “History and Theory”, 35/2, 1996, pp. 151-164.

in Fichte's system. Its mood is one of inspiration, that of an artist breathing life into raw material.

Fourth comes Religiosity (*Religiosität*).⁵² It is the inner completion of the ethical life, brought about by the realization that the content with which subjectivity supplied the empty law is not actually created by the subject, but is in fact the manifestation of God. It is in religion, therefore, that the *Bildung* or culture of the last step reveals itself to be *Bild*, a showing-forth as image. For if God is Being (*Seyn*), this remains an empty category. The content of the concept of *Seyn* is *Daseyn*: the dynamic apparition of subjects and the world they inhabit are the manifestation of God, his dynamic essence. To attain religiosity, then, is to realize that we are God's life. Living out this religiosity consists in adopting an attitude of reverence, of treating others as manifestations of God. This attitude also corresponds to right thinking, to seeing the world as it is, and represents the mental capacity for a *posteriori* judgment.

Fichte says little of the fifth point, *Wissenschaftslehre* itself.⁵³ If few obtain it (indeed, Fichte would seem to insinuate that the highest most people may ever – or need ever – reach is the *Sittlichkeit*), it is nonetheless the summit where all multiplicity is brought back to unity, a vision from the other side of the point or gap. Here thought and love perfectly coincide in the ultimate expression of apriority, and one is able to contemplate God's manifestation fully as self-manifestation; indeed, when one reaches such a level of Attention, contemplation as sabbath-day rest is all that is left.

Quintuplicity and its Standpoints

Meinung	–	–	–	Dispersion
Sinnenwelt	KrV	x	Naturphilosophie	Fascination
Legalität	KpV	y	Rechtslehre	Obedience
Sittlichkeit	KU	z	Sittenlehre (<i>and</i> Ästhetik)	Inspiration
Religiosität	<i>a posteriori</i>	D	Reigionslehre	Reverence
Wissenschaft	<i>a priori</i>	S (• S)	Wissenschaftslehre	Contemplation

4. Bildung and the Awakening of Attention: Christ and the Scholar

In the previous section, we established that the *Anweisung* is the practical application of the WL's phenomenology of Attention. Attention concretely produces culture within the third standpoint, that of Ethical Life, with its individual expression – *Bildung* – and broader expression – *Kultur* – mutually conditioning each other. For Fichte, *Bildung* as a technical term

⁵² Cf. GA, I, 9, pp. 110-111, 171.

⁵³ GA, I, 9, pp. 112, 173-174.

would most likely mean achieving a higher metaphysical standpoint by means of Attention, and that this standpoint would manifest or image itself through concrete actions: first creative (*Sittlichkeit*), then empathetic (*Religiosität*), finally contemplative (*Wissenschaft*). The process of *Bildung* implies the cultivation of Attention by means of Thought, concentrating on something in particular rather than letting the mind relax into dispersion. This last section offers a reflection on *Bildung* based on what we have established in reading the WL and *Anweisung*. First, I wish to suggest that Fichte's model of the cultivated person is the Christ of the Gospel of John. Insofar as John's Christ is the perfect embodiment of the Absolute, he offers a model meant to lead others to realizing their capacity for manifestation. The completion of *Bildung*, therefore, lies in its image character. Second, I claim manifestation is also at the heart of the scholarly life according to Fichte's 1806 lecture series *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten*.⁵⁴ To be a scholar is to embark upon an *imitatio Christi*, albeit in a very particular way. Central here is the idea of transmission.

Fichte's presentation of the five Standpoints is interrupted in the sixth lecture of the *Anweisung*, an aside meant to prove that the WL is "as old as the world,"⁵⁵ even if Fichte is the first to present it systematically. The Gospel of John, he affirms, was in fact already a popular presentation of the WL's main doctrines. Proof is found in the prologue, which expresses not a doctrine of creation, but rather the affirmation that the Word was *always already* present, and is the medium through which the world is brought into existence. This Word is itself God, but in contradistinction to the Hidden God, the *deus absconditus* that is the Father, the Word is God as he manifests himself. God the Father is therefore *Seyn*, and the Word or Son his *Daseyn*.⁵⁶ The latter is made Incarnate, becoming flesh in a moment that represents the initial *Spaltung* or split that separates S and D, providing for the possibility of an intelligible world. Hence the Christ figure is the paradigmatic *Wissenschaftslehrer*; as he was already there at the beginning, he has always known that the point or gap that separates Truth from Experience is illusory – he has no need to reconstruct the system, because he was always aware of the equiprimordially of God and the latter's self-manifestation. To be Christ means to have always inhabited the fifth and highest standpoint. One can – as Christ's disciples did – obtain this fifth Standpoint through following his example, which consists in emptying oneself of one's own desires and seeking to do the will of the Father, known only through the manifestation that is the Son. In this way, the Word can be made flesh in each disciple according to a movement similar to that of the *Soll*, both as described in the WL and in the 3rd to 5th standpoints of the *Anweisung*. Fichte's Christ, then, offers a perfectly rational

⁵⁴ Citations from GA, I, 8.

⁵⁵ GA, I, 9, p. 115.

⁵⁶ "Dieses – bei Gott Sein nun, nach unseren Ausdrücke dieses Dasein, wird ferner charakterisiert als Logos oder Wort. Wie könnte deutlicher ausgesprochen werden, daß es die sich selbst klare und verständliche Offenbarung und Manifestation, sein geistiger Ausdruck sei, – daß, wie wir dasselbe aussprachen, das unmittelbare Dasein Gottes notwendig Bewußtsein, teils seiner selbst, teils Gottes se ; wofür wir den strengen Beweis geführt haben" (GA, I, 9, p. 119).

teaching in accordance with the WL; he has come not to forgive sins, but rather to vanquish the illusion that there is something real other than God.⁵⁷ Christ is Fichte's World Soul, but according to an ontology of manifestation, not emanation. His mission is to make the esoteric Truth of God's self-manifestation – the way things really are – exoteric and translucent, such that others can see it for themselves.

The Fichtean Christ is foremost a pedagogue, and his work is to initiate his disciples into a contemplative experience by making God conceptually available. Those with ears to hear can follow his example, applying themselves with Attention. The same role is attributed to the scholar in Fichte's 1806 lecture series *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten*. There, the Absolute is described as a divine idea (*göttliche Idee*), a self-knowing and self-communicating absolute. The role of the scholar is to communicate – or better still, to make intelligible to the student – this divine idea.⁵⁸ It is out of love for the divine idea that one embarks upon the scholarly life, inspired by an as-yet unknown supernatural object. Fichte calls this inspiration Genius,⁵⁹ and although it is itself an empty movement akin to legality, the divine idea will eventually provide it with content.⁶⁰ Like an artist who inhabits the third standpoint of the *Anweisung*, or a disciple of Christ seeking to follow the Master, the scholar must creatively provide content for the divine idea via *genius*, only to then realize that this belongs to the divine idea itself.⁶¹ Indeed, the goal of the scholarly life is to manifest in an utterly transparent fashion the divine idea. One does this by removing oneself from the distractions of the world and looking into oneself – in other words, giving oneself over to Attention.⁶² The manifestation of this state is initiation of others into the art of Attention. And while one can achieve such Attention without the aid of a teacher, the scholar is capable of systematically guiding others along the path towards it. He thus expresses the divine idea in various forms that allow students to penetrate into it themselves.⁶³ If the scholar's mission is one of systematic manifesting allowing for the reconstruction of such manifestation in the inner forum of students, the Fichtean Christ is the prototypical *gebildete Mensch*, a scholar who elicits one's Attention and seeks to make the divine idea transparent. The difference between the scholar and the Christ, however, is that Christ does this through his person and example, whereas the scholar performs it discursively.

What both the Johannine Christ and the finished scholar (*vollendeter Gelehrter*) have achieved is a level of interior lucidity, a standpoint from which experience can be adjudicated

⁵⁷ "Die Vereinigung mit mir giebt die Vereinigung mit dem ewigen Gott und seinem Leben, und die Gewissheit derselben; also, dass man in jedem Momente die ganze Ewigkeit ganz hat und besitzt, und den täuschenden Phänomenen einer Geburt und eines Sterbens in der Zeit durchaus keinen Glauben beimisst, daher auch keiner Auferweckung, als der Rettung von einem Tode, den man nicht glaubt, weiter bedarf" (GA, I, 9, p. 125).

⁵⁸ GA, I, 8, p. 64.

⁵⁹ GA, I, 8, p. 81.

⁶⁰ GA, I, 8, p. 83.

⁶¹ This is the state of the "finished scholar" (*vom vollendeten Gelehrten*) in Lecture VII, much akin to the fourth standpoint, *Religiosität*. Cf. GA, I, 8, pp. 111-117.

⁶² GA, I, 8, pp. 86-87.

⁶³ GA, I, 8, pp. 126, 131.

without ever leaving it. Being attentive to one's own life ultimately gives rise to the realization that experience and reflection on one's experience not only condition each other, they emerge simultaneously. The question of the ground of *Bildung*, then, can only be solved by never leaving it – by focusing, as it were, on the first part of the word, *Bild*, and its inevitable connotation of manifestation. To reflect on one's own experience is to reflect on the nature of experience itself, for the two can never be dissociated. So with particular sciences, or Standpoints, and with knowledge itself. And while on this reading, *Bildung* may not be an independent attribute, it represents the attitude required for the acquisition of knowledge – to return to Gadamer's phrase, the element in which the sciences live. Or better still, the vision of their manifestation.

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