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Facticity and Genesis: Tracking Fichte's Method in the Berlin *Wissenschaftslehre*

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Abstract

The concept of facticity denotes conditions of experience whose necessity is not logical yet whose contingency is not empirical. Although often associated with Heidegger, Fichte coins 'facticity' in his Berlin period to refer to the conclusion of Kant's metaphysical deduction of the categories, which he argues leaves it a contingent matter that we have the conditions of experience that we do. Such rhapsodic or factual conditions, he argues, must follow necessarily, independent of empirical givenness, from the I through a process of 'genesis.' I reconstruct Fichte's argument by (1) tracing the origin of his neologism, (2) presenting his Jena critique of Kant's rhapsodic appeal to the forms of judgment, and (3) illustrating the Jena period's continuity with the Berlin period's genetic method, while noting a methodological shift whereby Fichte directs his critique against his own doctrine of intellectual intuition in order to eliminate its 'factual terms.'

Keywords



facticity – genesis – rhapsody – deduction – intuition – insight

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In *Being and Time*, Heidegger aims to answer the question of the meaning of being without appealing to either contingent facts of perception or necessary facts of logic. Such appeals traditionally fuel oscillation between skepticism and dogmatism, between despair about perception's justificatory power and hubris about logic's explanatory power. Instead Heidegger conducts a phenomenological investigation into the *a priori* conditions by which being is disclosed to us, including our historical situation, social enmeshment, and responsibility to unchosen norms.¹ Jointly termed 'facticity,' these conditions are not

1 See Heidegger on historicity, sociality, and normativity (Heidegger, Martin: *Being and Time*. Albany 1996: pp. 17–18, 111, 247–248).
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contingent perceptual discoveries, for they constitute the very possibility of our openness to a perceptible world: “Facticity is not the factuality of the *factum brutum* of something objectively present, but is a characteristic of the being of *Dasein* taken on in existence, although initially thrust aside. The ‘that’ of facticity is never to be found by looking”.² Nor are such conditions necessary logical principles, for their denial yields no contradiction. ‘Facticity’ rather denotes a set of radically contingent or brute presuppositions of human existence, which are inescapable for us, but at whose root there is no reason. The term signifies the unique modal space of conditions whose necessity is not logical, but whose contingency is not empirical. Hence Heidegger describes facticity in terms of thrownness: although we can interpret it philosophically, we are simply given over to it.

The concept of facticity is fascinating in its own right, but also for what it reveals about its idealist heritage, for Heidegger’s analysis of the modal space of radically contingent conditions is neither unprecedented nor unprompted. On the one hand, Kant thematizes just this space, setting a precedent for Heidegger’s existential phenomenology. On the other hand, the German idealist project of removing bruteness from critical philosophy is a key factor prompting Heidegger’s rejection of claims to presuppositionlessness. It is therefore well worth considering facticity’s origins in idealism.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant locates transcendental conditions of possible experience at the modal register of anthropic necessity. They are unavoidable for us yet radically contingent in that they derive from no absolute principle of reason. Thus, despite being necessary for our sensibility, there is no reason for why space and time are our forms of intuition. Rather, they belong to a “kind of representation that is peculiar to us,” a kind of sensibility whose “origin” is a “mystery” (A35/B51, A278/B334). And despite our ability to metaphysically deduce the categories from the forms of judgment, there is no “further ground” for why just these forms, and hence just these categories, are ours. Indeed, the precise kind and number of the categories is a “peculiarity of our understanding” (B145–146). Such claims to the bruteness of transcendental conditions position Kant as a philosopher of facticity *avant la lettre*.

Early calls are made by Maimon, Reinhold, and Schelling for a basic premise in the form of a first principle to provide support for Kant’s conclusions, without which such conclusions are at risk of reflecting merely our subjective disposition and of failing to compose a rigorous system. Fichte is the first to predicate systematic critical philosophy on eliminating radical contingency

² Heidegger, *Being*, p. 127. See Heidegger on language and truth (pp. 152, 210).
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and to charge its presence with rhapsody or what he calls ‘facticity’, a philosophical term that he coins at the beginning of his Berlin period. Texts from this period maintain his view in Jena that the conditions of experience are not inscrutably brute facts, but rather must be rendered fully intelligible by the absolute freedom of reason or the I.³ Supposedly factual conditions of experience are shown to follow necessarily from the I through a process he calls ‘genesis’. As Fichte says in the Berlin lectures of spring 1804,⁴ “an *absolutely given fact* [...] bears in itself the mark of its insufficiency as a *highest principle* for the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” the mark of a “facticity” that we must “master [...] genetically” (GA 11/8:180–181).⁵ Fichte’s critical response to apparently factual conditions of experience is to show that they are in fact necessary conditions that the I generates from itself, independent of empirical givenness.

Facticity is a conceptual watershed in post-Kantian thought. For Fichte, it is the final obstacle for systematic idealism. For Heidegger, it informs the phenomenological method of avoiding skepticism and dogmatism. Yet this history remains neglected. German idealism scholarship still strongly favours Kant and Hegel, while Anglophone Fichte literature still focuses mostly on his Jena texts.⁶ This has the unfortunate effect of obscuring Fichte’s role in the development of post-Kantian logic, overlooking a pivotal coinage for phenomenology, and disregarding the relation between Fichte’s critique of Kant and Heidegger’s turn to the latent factual elements of Kant’s idealism. It is therefore crucial to explore the Berlin *Wissenschaftslehre* for the origin of such a decisive philosophical concept.

- 3 See Fichte: “it is the very nature of I-hood to determine itself unconditionally, to be what is absolutely first {in every moment of reflection} and never to be anything secondary { – for otherwise it would not be an I}” (GA IV/2:157).
- 4 For these lectures, I cite the English translation of GA 11/8 by using the page ranges that are denoted by double numbers in square brackets, which correspond to facing pages drawn from the sw and *Copia* versions of the lectures.
- 5 Cf. Fichte’s claim in 1805’s *Propädeutik Erlangen* that “all facticity can become genetic” (GA 11/9:54) and his call for the “absolute annihilation of all facticity” in that year’s *Principien der Gottes-, Sitten-, und Rechtslehre* (GA 11/7:354).
- 6 Recent exceptions are: Breazeale, D., Rockmore, T. (ed.): *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte’s Later Philosophy*. Chicago 2008; Nuzzo, Angelica: “Fichte’s 1812 Transcendental Logic: Between Kant and Hegel.” In Breazeale, D., Rockmore, T. (ed.): *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*. Amsterdam 2010; Martin, Wayne: “Nothing More or Less than Logic: General Logic, Transcendental Philosophy, and Kant’s Repudiation of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.” In: *Topoi* 22 (2003); and Schlösser, Ulrich: “Presuppositions of Knowledge versus Immediate Certainty of Being: Fichte’s 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* as a Critique of Knowledge and a Program of Philosophical Foundation.” In: Breazeale, D., Rockmore, T. (ed.): *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*. Amsterdam 2010.

In part 1, I trace the origin and development of Fichte's neologism. In part 2, I review the Jena period's methods of intellectual intuition and genetic deduction. Intellectual intuition exhibits our awareness of the I's primary and irreducible freedom, establishing it as philosophy's first principle. Genetic deduction derives from the I the necessary conditions of its realization, avoiding any rhapsodic appeal to radically contingent origins. In part 3, I illustrate the Jena period's continuity with the Berlin period's methods of insight and genesis. Insight yields unconditional knowledge of the oneness of a first principle, while genesis deduces the multiplicity of the conditions of experience by showing that they emerge from this principle's "self-construction" (GA II/8:196–197). I then note a methodological shift: Fichte now detects radical contingency within intellectual intuition, whose "ideal" form and "real" content he announces "are at their root *factual*" (GA II/8:180–181). I reconstruct his argument for why insight into the I must become genetic if it is to remove this deeper instance of facticity and thereby prove "knowing's absolute self-sufficiency" (GA II/8:44–45), which remains the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s abiding principal concern.

I offer this account as a piece of Fichte scholarship. Although my wider goal is to provide the background for a concept that is central to phenomenology, a first step in this project is to clarify the meaning of facticity – the problem that it denotes and the solution that it demands – in Fichte's later work, which is neglected in Anglophone literature. Retrieving facticity from the Berlin period serves to clarify Fichte's overall methodology. It thereby promises to draw scholars of idealism and phenomenology into discussion of a common issue, for while facticity may require us to posit a principle for its elimination, it may also turn out that we presuppose facticity just by positing at all.

1

The first philosophical use of 'facticity' occurs at the turn of the 19th century in Fichte's Berlin period.⁷ In 1799's *Reminiscences, Answers, Questions*, he says that "what is actual," viz., that which in perception is "factically recognizable [*factisch erkennbar*]," differs from that which is, in a "logical" sense, "absolutely first," viz., freedom as the "principle of possibilities" (sw v:360).

7 On Fichte's neologism, see Denker, Alfred: "The Young Heidegger and Fichte." In: Rockmore, T. (ed.): *Heidegger, German Idealism, and Neo-Kantianism*. New York 2000; and Kisiel, Theodore "Heidegger – Lask – Fichte." In: Rockmore, T. (ed.): *Heidegger, German Idealism, and Neo-Kantianism*. New York 2000.

This claim can be read alongside two related claims from 1806's *The Way Towards the Blessed Life or the Doctrine of Religion*. First, Fichte says that the absolute's existence is "factual and accidental [*factisch und zufällig*]" if it is viewed with a "merely factual glance [*factischen Blicke*]," whereas, for "decisive truthful thinking," the absolute's existence "necessarily follows" from its "inner being" (SW V:510). Second, he says that the "historical" is "factual [*factisch*]," i.e., an "absolute Fact [*absolutes Factum*]," existing for itself alone and isolated from everything else, not explained or deduced from a higher reason," whereas the "metaphysical" is so deduced and thus "cannot be grasped merely as Fact [*lediglich als Factum*]" (SW V:568). We can see from these cases that the factual is a mark of contingency, whether this pertains to the content of perceptual givenness, the absolute when falsely conceived, or historical events lacking intelligibility. Moreover, in these cases, such contingency contrasts, respectively, with the necessity of "freedom" as a first principle, the necessary existence of the "absolute," and the necessity of deductions from "reason." Since, for Fichte, the absolute freedom of reason is synonymous with the I (see SW I:253, SW III:1, 22, 53, 58, GA II/8:204–205, and GA IV/2:157, 220), we can also see that the contingency of the factual is specifically to be distinguished from the necessity of either the I itself or deductions from the I.

Similarly, 1801's *Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* associates facticity with contingency. Fichte claims that knowing the absolute requires, not mere intuition "in its immediate facticity [*unmittelbaren Facticität*]," but rather an intuition that is "completely one with thinking," i.e., intellectual intuition (SW II:47). He extends this claim later by saying that the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself is "absolutely factual [*schlechthin factisch*]" from the side of intuition," which apprehends mere "facticity [*Facticität*]" unless it forms a "necessary unity" with thinking (SW II:161–162). He concludes by explaining that "the absolute insight into an absolute form of knowledge" consists in distinguishing "factual knowledge [*factischen Wissen*]," which is "contingent," from the "absolute knowledge" that all such knowledge "is necessarily grounded on freedom" (SW II:54–55). With this third text in view, we can now see that facticity is a mark of a contingency that impedes systematic philosophy insofar as it presents a false condition of experience, i.e., a condition that lacks the necessity that is demanded by systematicity. Mere intuition without thinking is a spurious condition of experience, while merely contingent knowledge cannot be its own condition. Again, we find that the relevant sense of necessity concerns the I, for it is the freedom of the I that serves as the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s absolute ground and it is the I whose intuition must be intellectual if it is to provide the kind of knowledge that is capable of grounding all knowledge.

The early Berlin texts use 'facticity' to designate the problematic contingency of conditions of experience whose determination lacks systematic rigour. Unlike the factual, a true condition of experience has absolute priority, as Fichte says in *Reminiscences*, or is deducible from a condition with such priority, as he says in the *Blessed Life*, or is that whose intuition is intellectual, as he says in the *Presentation*.

Facticity is not to be confused with facts. Facticity is radically contingent in that it characterizes a purported condition of experience that lacks the necessity of either a first principle or a deduction from that principle. Facts, by contrast, are empirically contingent and are, moreover, compatible with systematic necessity, since, just by appearing, they conform to true conditions of experience. Facticity thus consists, not in the sensible givenness of empirical actuality, but rather in the brute givenness of unthought or derived conditions of experience, conditions whose origin is obscure and whose necessity thus lies in doubt. As Fichte says in the *Presentation*, the factual must be "renounced" and a "higher" point of reflection adopted, from which such conditions as time and space can be derived from a knowledge that is "always remaining in itself" (SW II:132–133). Thus, while Fichte distinguishes facticity from facts like Heidegger over a century later, unlike Heidegger, he holds that facticity must be subordinated to the absolute freedom of reason.

The early Berlin texts display Fichte's sustained commitment to avoiding what Kant describes in the first *Critique's* metaphysical deduction as the problem of deriving the categories "rhapsodically from a haphazard search for pure concepts, of the completeness of which one could never be certain, since one would only infer it through induction, without reflecting that in this way one would never see why just these and not other concepts should inhabit the pure understanding" (A81/B106–107). As we will see in part 2, Fichte returns the rhapsody charge to Kant throughout the Jena period in texts like the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*: "The conclusions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* are [...] the same as those of Kant's philosophy, but the way in which these results are established is quite different. Kant does not derive the laws of human thinking in a rigorously scientific manner" (GA IV/2:7).⁸ Fichte agrees with Kant about the categories' necessity for experience. But since Kant traces their origin to forms of judgment that are inherited from traditional, i.e., general logic and that he admits lack an absolutely rational ground, Fichte must derive them

8 Cf. Fichte's question to the critical idealist in the *New Presentation*: "how did you become aware that the laws of the intellect are precisely these laws of substantiality and causality?" (SW I:442).

from “something higher” (GA IV/2:8).⁹ Fichte echoes this complaint in Berlin during his 1812 lectures on transcendental logic when he says that Kant “was not so disinclined as he ought to have been [toward general logic]” and “had not recognized that his own philosophy requires that general logic be destroyed to its very foundation” (SW IX:111–112). Rather than take what in *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* he calls “a detour through logic,” Fichte sets the categories’ genetic deduction from the I as the “proper task” of idealism (SW I:442, 446; cf. GA II/3:27–28). The rhapsody problem is thus a precursor to the facticity problem, for it exposes seemingly brute conditions of experience and shows that they must rather arise *sui generis* from reason’s own free activity, i.e., from I-hood.

To the extent that the rhapsody problem prefigures the facticity problem, we should expect that Fichte’s solutions to them are methodologically related. I will present the methods of the Jena and Berlin periods in parts 2 and 3 in order to demonstrate their continuity in just this respect. We will see how Fichte’s dual method of intellectual intuition and genetic deduction in Jena are meant to solve the rhapsody problem and how this sets a methodological precedent for his solution to the facticity problem in Berlin.

2

In the Second Introduction to the *New Presentation*, Fichte asks:

What then is the overall gist of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, summarized in a few words? It is this: Reason is absolutely self-sufficient; it exists only for itself [...] It follows that everything reason is must have its foundation within reason itself and must be explicable solely on the basis of reason itself and not on the basis of anything outside of reason, for reason could not get outside of itself without renouncing itself. In short, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is transcendental idealism.

SW I:474

It may seem unlikely to those familiar with the letter of Kant’s philosophy to learn that it affirms either reason’s absolute self-sufficiency, given our dependence on sensibility, or reason’s absolute existence, given our affection by the

⁹ Cf. Fichte’s letter to Reinhold, 1 March 1794 (Fichte, J.G.: *Early Philosophical Writings*. Ithaca 1988: p. 376).
 ■S. replaced by p., ok?

thing in itself. But Fichte distinguishes the letter from the “spirit” of Kant’s idealism, which consists in “divert[ing] the attention of philosophy away from external objects and to direct it within ourselves,” this as a means to proving that “a systematic derivation of all consciousness or, what comes to the same, a system of philosophy, would have to set out from the pure I, exactly as is done in the *Wissenschaftslehre*” (SW I:477, 479). His textual evidence for transcendental idealism’s identity with the *Wissenschaftslehre* is §§16–17 of the Transcendental Analytic:

[original apperception] is that self-consciousness which, because it produces the representation I **think**, which must be able to accompany all others and which in all consciousness is one and the same, cannot be accompanied by any further representation [...] The supreme principle of all intuition in relation to the understanding is that all the manifold of intuition stand under conditions of the original synthetic unity of apperception.

B132, 136; corrected citations from SW I:475–476

By themselves, these passages do not convey the affinity of Fichte’s and Kant’s idealism. Hence Fichte asks: “what, summarized in a few words, is the gist of the Kantian philosophy?” (SW I:474).

Fichte explains that original apperception is the “pure self-consciousness” that is “the same in all consciousness, and thus it is not determinable by anything contingent within consciousness. The I that appears within pure self-consciousness is determined by nothing but itself, and it is determined absolutely” (SW I:476). This explanation implies two criteria for systematic philosophy, which will reflect Fichte’s view in Jena that the *Wissenschaftslehre* consists of “precisely two parts” (GA IV/2:179).

The first criterion is that the I is “determined absolutely” and “determined by nothing but itself,” i.e., the I is absolutely self-determining. Given the nihilistic threat of Spinozism against which Fichte develops his system,¹⁰ I call this the anti-nihilist criterion. It is the requirement that the I is absolutely free and

10 Although Jacobi speaks of annihilation in his *Spinoza Letters* (Jacobi, F.H.: *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*. In *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Altwil*. Montreal 1994: pp. 362, 374, 376), ‘nihilism’ is not coined until Jacobi’s “Open Letter to Fichte,” after Fichte composes his main Jena texts. Moreover, Jacobi charges Fichte himself with nihilism in the “Open Letter,” depicting the *Wissenschaftslehre* as an “inverted Spinozism” that reduces objects to moments of “pure and empty consciousness” (p. 502). Nevertheless, Fichte is clear in the Jena texts that provoke Jacobi’s charge that his idealism aims to refute Spinozism’s nihilistic corollary.

that its function is thus to accompany all our representations and not, as Jacobi fears in his *Spinoza Letters*, “to accompany the mechanism of the efficient causes,” which would render freedom an “illusion.”¹¹ To satisfy this criterion is to enshrine the I’s freedom as a first principle, a self-grounding activity that can ground a derivation of the conditions of experience or, “what comes to the same,” a philosophical system. The second criterion is that the I “is not determinable by anything contingent within consciousness.” Given Fichte’s criticism of Kant’s metaphysical deduction for deriving the categories from a radically contingent origin, I call this the anti-rhapsody criterion. It is the requirement that no brute conditions, e.g., forms of judgment or forms of sensibility, are imposed on the I.

Fichte denies that Kant meets the anti-nihilism criterion because, by holding that the ‘I think’ is “a thinking, not an intuiting,” and by proscribing intellectual intuition of the actuality of the I or, indeed, of any being (B157; cf. B72, B307, A252/B308), Kant leaves idealism’s first principle unproven and so leaves unchallenged Spinozism’s opposing first principle: substance. As he says in the Second Introduction: “The intellectual intuition of which the *Wissenschaftslehre* speaks is not directed toward any sort of being whatsoever; instead, it is directed at an acting – and this is something that Kant does not even mention (except, perhaps, under the name ‘pure apperception’)” (SW I:472). Intellectual intuition would prove the actuality of the I beyond its mere thought insofar as it consists in the immediate awareness of my free activity, i.e., of my instantiation of I-hood, and would thereby refute the nihilistic corollary of Spinozism’s first principle.


Likewise, Fichte denies that Kant satisfies the anti-rhapsody criterion, since Kant derives the categories from forms of judgment whose origin is as groundless as the forms of sensibility. Again, Fichte’s criticism implicitly distinguishes between the letter and spirit of Kant’s philosophy:

I know full well that Kant has by no means actually *constructed* a system of this sort [...] I also know that Kant has by no means *proven* that the categories he has postulated are conditions for the possibility of self-consciousness, but has merely asserted that this is so [...] Nevertheless, I am equally certain that Kant has entertained the *thought* of such a system, that all of the things he has actually presented are fragments and results of this system.¹²

SW I:478

¹¹ Jacobi, *Writings*, p. 189.

¹² Cf. Fichte’s letter to Niethammer, 6 December 1793 (Fichte, *Early*, p. 369).

 Kant could have “proven” that the categories are conditions of self-consciousness had he shown that they are the “results” of a grounded system, i.e., had he derived them from a first principle instead of from brute facts. But the latter is precisely how Kant describes the forms of judgment from which the metaphysical deduction derives the categories:

for the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring about the unity of apperception *a priori* only by means of the categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them, a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we have precisely these and no other functions for judgment or for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition.

B145–146

Like the forms of sensibility, the forms of judgment are radically contingent insofar as they are not derived from reason alone. Insofar as it posits an origin for the categories that limits reason’s self-sufficiency, the metaphysical deduction proceeds rhapsodically. As Fichte complains, in the Kantian edifice, “the construction materials – though already well prepared – are jumbled together in a most haphazard manner” (SW 1:479n). He repeats the rhapsody charge in 1800’s *New Version of the Wissenschaftslehre*: “The I think that is able to accompany all of my representations! [...] This is what Kant says in a rhapsody entitled: Deduction of the Categories, where he carries out everything except a deduction.”¹³ Admitting “anything contingent” into idealism betrays its spirit. Hence Fichte must satisfy the anti-rhapsody criterion by providing necessary premises for Kant’s “fragments and results.”

The criticism of Kant and the clarification of idealism’s spirit yield a twofold job description that Fichte upholds during the Jena period. First, the *Wissenschaftslehre* must satisfy the anti-nihilism criterion by intellectually intuiting the I’s absolute freedom.¹⁴ Second, it must satisfy the anti-rhapsody criterion by genetically deducing the system of the conditions of experience from the I itself.

13 Fichte, J.G. and F.W.J. Schelling: *The Philosophical Rupture Between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence* (1800–02). Albany 2012: p. 104.

14 ‘Intellectual intuition’ does not appear in the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte introduces the term earlier, in his review of Schulze’s *Aenesidemus*, and resumes its use in the *Nova Methodo* and the *New Presentation*. But we can see the concept behind the term at work in the *Foundations* if we compare the latter with Fichte’s description of a first principle in the *Aenesidemus* review.

To satisfy the anti-nihilism criterion, it is insufficient for an idealist to complete what Fichte calls philosophy's first "task" of locating the "explanatory ground" or first principle of experience in the I, for the Spinozist locates an opposing ground in the Not-I. The idealist must also answer philosophy's "first demand" of discovering the ground of experience by attending to herself and apprehending her self-sufficiency in intellectual intuition (SW I:422–423). In this regard, my intellectual intuition secures, not the mere thought of a first principle, but rather knowledge that is accessible only through my first-person awareness of my freedom, through my "immediate consciousness that I act" (SW I:463). Moreover, to satisfy the anti-rhapsody criterion, it is insufficient for an idealist to prove the necessity of the categories, e.g., by proving our *a priori* right to them, as Kant's transcendental deduction does, if such a deduction rests on their metaphysical deduction from a radically contingent origin. We must also prove that the categories' source is not "contingent within consciousness," but rather arises "from the very nature of the intellect" (SW I:442). Thus, genetic deduction ensures that the categories are conditions of experience that arise *sui generis* from the I.

Crucially, the rhapsody problem concerns the deduction of the categories, not the intellectual intuition of the I. We will see in part 3 that, in the Berlin period, Fichte traces this problem back to intellectual intuition under the name 'facticity.'

3

We saw in part 1 that Fichte coins 'facticity' in order to name an intolerable contingency, viz., the apparent radical contingency or groundlessness of the conditions of experience. The problem of facticity is thus another guise of rhapsody, for it undermines the possibility of systematic philosophy by subordinating the absolute freedom of reason or the I to brute facts that allegedly exceed its power of self-determination. In *Reminiscences* and the *Blessed Life*, 'factual' denotes the sheer givenness of perceptual content, the absolute's dependence on external causes, and historical events that resist intelligibility. In the *Presentation*, 'facticity' denotes a first principle whose intuition is not intellectual. In each case, a purported condition of experience is in fact false because its determination is arbitrary, whether perceptually, causally, historically, or intuitively. A true condition of experience, by contrast, has absolute priority insofar as its intuition is intellectual or else is deducible from a condition that has absolute priority.

A more extensive investigation of facticity occurs in the 1804 spring lectures in Berlin. Fichte begins the Sixth Lecture by asserting that the *Wissenschafts-*

lehre “has the task of *tracing* all multiplicity *back* to absolute oneness” and “*deduc[ing]* all multiplicity *from* oneness” (GA II/8:84–85). We can see how this assertion contains a restatement of the methodological division of labour that Fichte adopts in Jena by examining the concepts of oneness and multiplicity.

Fichte describes oneness in the First Lecture in terms of the “unconditionally true.” He explains that “whoever would have [this truth] must produce it entirely out of [themselves]. The presenter can only provide the terms for insight; each individual must fulfill these terms in [themselves]” (GA II/8:4–5). Insight into oneness evokes the Jena doctrine of intellectual intuition of the I, which, in response to philosophy’s first task, is an immediate awareness of the unconditioned ground or first principle of experience and which, in response to philosophy’s first demand, “everyone has to discover immediately within [themselves]” (SW I:463). As Fichte now puts it, in insight, “What we genuinely comprehend becomes part of ourselves, and if it is a genuinely new insight, it produces a personal transformation” (GA II/8:18–19). Such a transformation consists in one’s elevation to the standpoint of freedom.

Fichte describes multiplicity, not in terms of the “mere empirical givenness” of objects, but rather in terms of those “distinctions” that can be “established in the *mind*.” Such distinctions, he explains later in the Thirteenth Lecture, are “modes of consciousness [that] must be deduced from self-consciousness” in “proper genetic fashion” (GA II/8:84–85, 200–201). Deducing non-empirical modes of consciousness evokes the genetic deduction of the categories, which distinguish and relate substance and accident, cause and effect, self and other, etc., and which, in order to satisfy systematic philosophy’s scientific criterion, must show that the categories are “immanent laws of the intellect” (cf. SW I:442) and not dictated by tradition, on pain of rhapsody. As Fichte puts the point in Berlin, no such categorial distinctions can be “merely factual,” but “must become genetic” (GA II/8:148–149).¹⁵

In the Sixteenth Lecture, Fichte confirms the continuity of his Jena and Berlin periods by reiterating the claim that the *Wissenschaftslehre* has “two main parts.” The first part is the “doctrine of reason and truth,” which provides “a single insight” into a “fundamental principle.” The second part is the “doctrine of appearance and illusion” or “*phenomenology*,” which “deduce[s] from the first part, as necessary and true appearances, everything which up to now we have let go as merely empirical” (GA II/8:206–207, 228–229, 242–243).¹⁶ We

15 Cf. Fichte’s description of the historical event in the *Blessed Life* with his claim here that “merely apprehending multiplicity, as such in its factual occurrence, is history” (GA II/8:8–9).

16 For a survey of pioneering uses of ‘phenomenology’ in Lambert, Kant, and Fichte, see

can explicate this new characterization of the two parts of the *Wissenschaftslehre* by drawing on the opening assertion of the Sixth Lecture. Regarding the first part, insofar as a doctrine of reason and truth affords insight into the oneness of a first principle, it must secure knowledge of the I, although we will soon see that this insight is more complicated than Fichte first illustrates in Jena. Regarding the second part, insofar as the doctrine of appearance and illusion deduces from the doctrine of reason and truth, on the one hand, that which is “necessary” and, on the other hand, that which we initially take as simply given or “let go as merely empirical,” it must genetically deduce the multiplicity of conditions of experience from the I, instead of deriving them inductively from observations of traditional logic. We can therefore say that the Berlin period’s methods cohere with the Jena period’s by, first, demonstrating our insight into the oneness of the I as a fundamental principle and, second, deducing the multiplicity of conditions that, as modes of consciousness, make the I’s realization in experience possible.¹⁷

Now, whereas Fichte levels the rhapsody charge against Kant’s metaphysical deduction of the categories in Jena, he claims in the Thirteenth Lecture that the danger of radical contingency, now under the name ‘facticity,’ runs even deeper: “the primary error of all previous systems has been that they began with something factual and posited the absolute in this” (GA II/8:202–203). Fichte no longer scrutinizes merely the categories’ necessity, but also that of philosophy’s first principle. Once again, however, he targets Kant. Fichte claims that, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, we find “the confession that the sensible and supersensible worlds must come together in a common but wholly unknown root.” He objects that if this root is “inscrutable, then while it may indeed always contain the *connection* [of the two worlds], I at least can neither comprehend it as such, nor collaterally conceive the two [worlds] as originating from it” (GA II/8:32–33). By leaving the ground of the sensible and supersensible in the

Piché, Claude: “The Concept of Phenomenology in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1804/11.” In: Waibel, V., Breazeale, D., Rockmore, T. (ed.): *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition*. Berlin 2010.

17 On the continuity of Fichte’s Jena and Berlin periods, see Schmidt, Andreas: *Der Grund des Wissens. Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre in den Versionen von 1794/95, 1804/11 und 1812*. Paderborn 2004; Hyppolite, Jean: “L’idée de la Doctrine de la Science et le sens de son évolution chez Fichte.” In: *Figures de la pensée philosophique. Écrits de Jean Hyppolite (1931–1968)*, Tome I. Paris 1971; and Gueroult, Martial: *L’Évolution et la Structure de la Doctrine de la Science chez Fichte*. 2 volumes. Paris 1930. On Fichte’s methodological division in the Berlin period, see Piché, “Phenomenology”; and Zöller, Günter: “Fichte’s Later Presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.” In: James, D., Zöller, G. (ed.): *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*. Cambridge 2017.

dark, Kant degrades philosophy's first principle "from genetic manifestness," where genesis is the method of deducing "necessary and true appearances," to "merely factual manifestness, completely contravening the inner spirit of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" (GA II/8:60–61). As we saw in part 1, facticity spoils the necessity of any purported condition of experience, including its ultimate condition. A first principle is factual if it is brutally unfathomable, imposed without reason. It is therefore no true condition.

Remarkably, Fichte denies having yet given a presentation of the I that escapes the threat of facticity. He states that the task of deducing the "oneness" of the I is "entirely new and has not even arisen in the earlier presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" (GA II/8:242–243). This raises the unprecedented challenge that the I's oneness must itself be deduced, i.e., that insight into the I must itself be made genetic. Fichte's methodological shift in Berlin is thus to maintain his distinction between the insight into the I and the genesis of *a priori* conditions, but also to provide insight with its own genetic deduction, lest facticity spoil the root of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. As he says in the Fourteenth Lecture, we require "the genetic deduction of the I" (GA II/8:216–217).¹⁸ This explains Fichte's demand that his system's first part, "as a doctrine of truth and reason, expunges all facticity from itself" (GA II/8:206–207). This also contextualizes his assertion that insight into the I is "the only truly difficult part" of his system, the second part being the "brief and easy affair" of "deducing all possible modifications of apparent reality" in the form of *a priori* conditions (GA II/8:132–133). In fact, the spring lectures offer no deduction of conditions familiar from the Jena period. Nevertheless, they do claim to detect and remove facticity from insight into the I. I turn now to reconstruct the argument for this claim, although I will not evaluate it here.

In the Seventeenth Lecture, Fichte asserts that "a genuine derivation must have a reliable principle. Otherwise [...] one deduces from the intrinsically contingent something else which is also contingent [...] As if a good, proper, and reliable standpoint could arise when one had two terms, neither of which could stand by itself, each relying reciprocally on the other" (GA II/8:260–261).¹⁹ Earlier in the lectures, he stresses the importance of seeing what the I "authentically is" and then describes seeing what "we really *are* in our highest peak," viz., instances of I-hood, as a matter of "ascend[ing] from factual terms to genetic ones" (GA II/8:40–41, 76–77). What are the "factual terms" that pre-

18 Cf.: "let us make this insight itself genetic" (GA II/8:248–249).

19 Cf.: "only principles can enter the circle of our science. Whatever is not in any possible respect a principle, but is instead only a principled result and phenomenal, falls to the empirical level" (GA II/8:86–89).

clude seeing what the I “authentically is,” which is just to say, what we “really *are*”? And how do such factual terms prevent the I from serving as a “reliable,” i.e., non-contingent principle for the “genuine derivation” of systematic philosophy?

An answer lies in the Ninth Lecture, where Fichte detects a disjunction at the foundation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, viz., in the cognition of its first principle. On the one hand, the I has epistemic priority as the “inner essence of knowing,” since no knowledge is possible without its idea. On the other hand, the I has ontological priority as “knowing’s formal being,” since no knowledge exists outside its actuality. The I’s twofold priority yields two aspects of its cognition: we must think the I’s idea or “concept” as the essence of knowing and we must intuit the I’s actuality or “light” as the being of knowing. But the distinction between thinking and intuiting imposes the “task” of “finding the oneness” of these cognitive aspects: “The essence of knowing [is] not without its being, and vice versa, nor intellectual knowing without intuition and vice versa, which are to be understood so that the disjunction that lies within them must become one in the oneness of the insight” (GA II/8:138–139). The disjunction is intolerable because neither aspect of cognizing a first principle is adequate for insight into it. Thinking the I raises a question of actuality: this thought may be empty, lacking light. Intuiting the I raises a question of ideality: this intuition may be blind, lacking a concept. Hence, neither cognitive aspect is self-standing. As Fichte says above, the “reliable standpoint” of a first principle is inaccessible if our cognition of it relies on “two terms, neither of which could stand by itself.” Moreover, if the epistemic and ontological terms of cognizing the I are not self-standing, they themselves are factual insofar as they fail to grasp a true condition of experience. Such factual terms must, as Fichte puts it, be raised “to genetic ones,” i.e., terms that stand together and grasp the I as the ultimate condition of experience. Failing this, we lack insight into the I’s authentic nature as first principle and, consequently, lack insight into our own nature as instances of I-hood.

Fichte’s detection of a disjunction within the cognition of the I modifies his view in Jena that we cognize the I as the “first principle of all human knowledge” and as “that *Act* which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible” (SW I:91). According to this earlier view, we simultaneously think the I as internal and essential to knowing, lest it be externally and accidentally imposed onto knowing, and intuit the I’s being immediately, unmediated by an intervening and endless series of empirical states. But in Berlin, Fichte identifies thought and intuition of the I with what, in the Fifteenth Lecture, he calls “*idealistic*” and “*realistic*” maxims that “are at bot-

tom *factual*" (GA II/8:234–235).²⁰ The Twelfth Lecture describes the idealistic maxim as assuming a "standpoint of reflection" on the I's "essence" and the realistic maxim as assuming the "*absolutely given fact*" of the I's "existence." Since each maxim "one-sidedly" regards itself as absolutely valid, each "annul[s] the other" while offering only an arbitrary starting point. This yields a "disjunction" between "two terms absolutely demanding unification" (GA II/8:178–181; cf. 170–173). Without unifying the idealist and realist aspects of our cognition of the I, there is no insight into the I's oneness and therefore no principle to ground philosophy.

Cognizing the I's oneness requires removing the "conflict of maxims" between thinking the I in reflection and intuiting the I as given. Fichte says that this conflict is "alleviated only by setting out a law of maxims" (GA II/8:172–173). In the Second Lecture, he states that "The *Wissenschaftslehre*'s own maxim is to admit absolutely nothing inconceivable" (GA II/8:32–33). We can see how this statement prescribes a "law" that can resolve the conflict between the idealistic and realistic maxims if we see that neither maxim can conceive of what it posits. First, one cannot conceive of the I as cognized just by thinking its idea, since any such act of thought assumes the I's actuality as its ground. Second, one cannot conceive the I as cognized just by intuiting its actuality, since an intuition of the I as the I is an essentially self-conscious thought. Hence, neither maxim posits something conceivable and so neither is admissible into philosophy.

However, since we must cognize the I's oneness in order to ground philosophy, we must render conceivable what both maxims posit, viz., the idea and actuality, or concept and light, or essence and existence of the I. Fichte does so in the Eighteenth Lecture by relinquishing the one-sidedness of each posit and reconceiving them as "*grounded*" in the I's own "*nature*" (GA II/8:280–281). The I's nature alone explains the unity of the thought of its essence and the intuition of its existence, for it alone makes possible this thought and this intuition. In other words, the I alone explains how it is possible to cognize its actuality because it is presupposed by all cognition as unconditionally actual. When we distinguish between thinking and intuiting the I, then, we divide what antecedently must be a unity. Whether we think or intuit the I, we cannot but exhibit the I's oneness, however partially. Hence, whereas neither of the factual terms that yield the disjunction in the cognition of the I posit any-

20 Cf.: "Do not think of 'idealism' and 'realism' here as artificial philosophical systems which the *Wissenschaftslehre* wants to oppose: having arrived in the circle of science, we have nothing more to do with the criticism of systems [... They] arise only in philosophy and especially in the *Wissenschaftslehre*" (GA II/8:178–179).

thing conceivable in isolation, we can reconceive them as genetic terms, i.e., as jointly derivative of the I's own "*self-genesis*" (GA II/8:322–323).²¹

In keeping with the Jena period's view that the I as first principle is not merely a fact, but also an act, i.e., not merely a truth, but also a performance, Fichte concludes in the Eighteenth Lecture that the "principle of absolute idealism" must be "presupposed [...] as something to be enacted and by no means as something to be understood" (GA II/8:322–323). To cognize the I's oneness is actively to exhibit the principle on which all cognition rests, a presupposition that, unlike the factual terms of the idealist and realist maxims, cannot be derived from anything more basic.²² Hence Fichte declares in the following lecture: "our task has been completed in its highest principle" (GA II/8:298–299). We can see that this conclusion is the result of Fichte taking a self-critical stance toward his Jena doctrine of intellectual intuition, whose factual terms are now genetically mastered.

Cognizing the I's oneness demonstrates the practical standpoint from which, on pain of nihilism, we cannot be driven. But it also enables us to overcome facticity within even the highest philosophical distinction, viz., between the thinkable essence and intuitable existence of the I. By raising this distinction from the factual terms of one-sided maxims that attempt to posit the inconceivable to expressions that are derivative of the I's own nature, we can deduce the oneness of the I and thereby achieve genetic insight into philosophy's first principle. In this, we meet the new challenge that motivates the methodological shift in the Berlin *Wissenschaftslehre*.



Facticity starkly divides idealist and phenomenological aspirations for philosophical explanation generally and deduction in particular. For Fichte, facticity presents intolerable contingency for a deduction of the logic of experience. For Heidegger, by contrast, facticity represents the brute structure of our existence, any attempt to deduce or reduce which is an evasion of what it is to be human,

21 Cf.: "I have touched here on the very important distinction between a merely *factual regarding*, like our thinking of the in-itself, and *genetic insight*, like that into the in-itself's self-construction [... R]eason exists in duality, as subject and object, both as absolute. This ambiguity must be removed. We can *ground* this entire existence most effectively with the formula already previously used and proven: reason *makes itself* unconditionally intuiting" (GA II/8:196–197, 410–411).

22 This explains Fichte's otherwise puzzling attribution of "absolute facticity" and "*primordial facticity*" to the I (GA II/8:46–47, 298–299; cf. 358–359).

a symptom that is not unique to philosophy. As he defines it, facticity is characteristic of Dasein as such yet “*initially thrust aside*.” If so, then German idealism’s apparent victory over facticity may express our tendency to cover over what we are, to prefer a slumber of sorts. Hence, although Fichte is as convinced as ever in Berlin that we always “remain” in the “hand” of the I,²³ Heidegger will insist that Dasein “never gets back behind its thrownness.”²⁴

To be sure, Heidegger’s phenomenology aligns with key features of Fichte’s idealism. In the *New Presentation*, Fichte claims that “the only type of being with which we can be concerned is a *being for us*” (sw 1:500). For an idealist, being is meaningful only if it is structured by conditions of experience, which are necessary only if they derive from I-hood. The ontological upshot is that an understanding of being depends on an understanding of our being. As Fichte says in the *System of Ethics*, freedom is “the sole true being and the ground of all other being,” a truth “according to which all other truth must be directed and judged” (sw IV:26, 53). Similarly, Heidegger claims in *Being and Time* that “*fundamental ontology* [...] must be sought in the *existential analysis of Dasein*.”²⁵ He supports this claim by observing that an inquiry into being unavoidably implicates the “constitutive attitudes” of the inquirer, such as understanding and grasping. These attitudes are “modes of being of a particular being, of *the being we inquirers ourselves in each case are*. Thus to work out the question of being means to make a being – he who questions – transparent in its being.”²⁶ If no account of being can ignore or suspend the being of we who account, then an analytic of Dasein is “a task whose urgency is hardly less than that of the question of being itself.”²⁷ Interest in the meaning of being essentially involves attitudes characteristic of our inquisitive sort of being. These include, beyond understanding and grasping, concernfulness and striving for personal and shared futures, attitudes that Fichte defends against Spinozism.

In “On the Essence of Ground,” Heidegger explicitly identifies ontology’s ground with freedom, stating that, by opening a perspective onto a meaningful world of choices, freedom “unveils itself as making possible something binding, indeed, obligation in general. *Freedom alone can let a world prevail*.”²⁸ This coheres with his claim in *Being and Time* that Dasein is not merely an

23 Fichte, J.G.: *The Vocation of Man*. Indianapolis 1987: p. 111.

24 Heidegger, *Being*, p. 262. ■ S. replaced by p., ok?

25 Heidegger, *Being*, p. 11. ■ S. replaced by p., ok?

26 Heidegger, *Being*, p. 6. ■ S. replaced by p., ok?

27 Heidegger, *Being*, p. 42. ■ S. replaced by p., ok?

28 Heidegger, Martin: “On the Essence of Ground.” In: McNeill, W. (ed.): *Pathmarks*. Cambridge 1998: p. 126. ■ S. replaced by p., ok?

objectively present “*what*,” but always also “*a who*,” to whom projects, including ontology, owe their significance.²⁹ In the spirit of idealism, we substitute the tempting question of freedom’s place in the world with the authentic question of the world’s place with respect to freedom. Heidegger in this sense inherits Fichte’s insight that freedom is a fundamental presupposition of ontology.

Nevertheless, Heidegger fundamentally transforms Fichte’s insight with his hermeneutics of facticity. Rather than posit the absolute freedom of reason or I-hood as a first principle, he claims that “Initially and for the most part, Dasein is taken in by its world” and is “*not itself*.”³⁰ Interpreting factic life reveals how we typically avoid responsibility for who and how to be, deferring to the expectations of an anonymous public. Inauthenticity distorts our freedom, although without thereby annihilating it. Indeed, inauthentic behaviour presupposes freedom, since, for Dasein, it is freedom’s average expression. Heidegger puts this point in unmistakably Fichtean terms: “‘not I’ by no means signifies something like a being which is essentially lacking ‘I-hood,’ but means a definite mode of being of the ‘I’ itself; for example, having lost itself.”³¹ Rather than undermining I-hood, being determined by the norms and habits of nameless others is factually characteristic of I-hood’s everyday expression.

A hermeneutics of facticity offers an understanding of our entangled existence in the world, a fact whose necessity is not logical, but whose contingency is not empirical. Fichte’s idealist refutation of nihilism puts within reach an ontology that is ripe for such an understanding. Yet it is an open question whether post-Kantian ontology should follow his attempt to eliminate the trace of facticity.³²

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29 Heidegger, *Being*, p. 42.

30 Heidegger, *Being*, pp. 108–109. ■ S. replaced by p., ok?

31 Heidegger, *Being*, p. 109. ■ S. replaced by pp., ok?

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