Research Article

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The *Wissenschaftslehre* and the Philosophical Life

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Abstract: In some of his writings, Fichte describes the Wissenschaftslehre as addressed exclusively to philosophers of profession; at other times, he argues that philosophy is of concern for every rational being. In this article I examine these seemingly contradictory stances by contextualising them historically. I claim that throughout his Jena-writings, Fichte presents a consistent idea of the societal and ethical relevance of philosophy. This idea, I further contend, can best be explained as an input into the debate about the popularity of philosophy that had been ongoing since the early 18th century. By tracing this debate from Christian Thomasius to Fichte, I show that while Fichte was certainly critical of the eclectics and popular philosophers, he was also influenced by some of their metaphilosophical conceptions.

Keywords: Fichte; vocation of the scholar; popular philosophy; eclecticism

1 Introduction

According to the historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot, ancient and modern philosophy differ from each other in their most essential ambitions. In antiquity, he claims, philosophy was first and foremost a way of life. The philosophical schools were not defined primarily by their speculative positions, but rather by their practices and life rules. They had particular diets as well as particular physical and spiritual exercises devoted to realizing particular ideals of the good life.

In the Middle Ages, Hadot argues, this form of philosophy was gradually supplanted by a radically different one. Philosophy was now transformed into a systematic, logical discipline in which the theoretical doctrines rather than the practical adherence to them took centre stage. A chief reason for this development can be found in the institutional context; in contrast to the tradition of antiquity, medieval philosophy was presented mainly in the form of university teachings. Philosophy thus became synonymous with *school* philosophy and was adapted to the demands of scholastic instruction. According to Hadot, it is precisely this scholastic conception that still dominates philosophical discourse in the present day. A particularly clear example is, in his view, to be found in the idealist tradition:

> The dominance of Idealism over all university philosophy, from Hegel to the rise of existentialism and subsequently the vogue of structuralism, has done much to foster the idea that the only true philosophy must be theoretical and systematic.[1]

It is not difficult to come up with arguments in support of this view. The system-oriented character of idealism, along with its detailed conceptual examination and its strict deductive approach, seems to make it a typical example of thought cast in the mold of school philosophy. The institutional context appears to further confirm

1 Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 261.

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this. The prominent idealists were all university professors and generally understood their philosophical task as rooted in this societal role.

Nevertheless, Hadot's distinction between life philosophy and school philosophy leaves one with a feeling of dissatisfaction when it is applied to the German idealists. For although the idealist tradition is undeniably characterized by complex systematic works, these works cannot be understood as intended for a purely theoretical purpose. On the contrary, a defining mark of the idealists is their strong emphasis on the *practical* task of philosophy. For them, philosophy could not be reduced to a scholastic thought exercise void of relevance outside the lecture halls. Rather, the idealists argued, thinking becomes truly philosophical only when it gives rise to a practical striving, a *becoming* that reaches into the innermost being of the philosophizing individuals and irrevocably affects them. Its highest end is therefore the essence of man as such – and in this respect it cannot be understood as the exclusive concern of the scholars. Indeed, Hadot himself notes this; in Kant's practical philosophy, and especially the categorical imperative, he identifies "one of the fundamental themes of the way of life proper to ancient philosophy".[2] Evidently, the boundary between philosophy as life-practice and as a systematically presented academic discipline is not always razor-sharp.

Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* offers another example of this tension between philosophy as scholastic teaching and as life practice. In several of his writings, Fichte emphasizes that his thought is intended for scholars and does not concern the wider public. For example, the *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* begins with a warning to potential readers who have not attended his lectures. The book, Fichte writes, was published as notes for the audience and is "not intended for the general public."[3] In the *Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy*, he delineates his audience in even more radical terms:

> Of course not all people should dedicate their lives to the sciences and consequently not to the foundation of all other science, a scientific philosophy; penetration into the investigations of such a philosophy also requires a freedom of spirit, a talent, and a diligence encountered in only a few individuals.[4]

The position could hardly have been more definite. Philosophy, Fichte appears to think, concerns only those who find their vocation in science – it is and must remain school philosophy.

But in other contexts, Fichte seems to express the opposite view. For example, in the political-philosophical essay *Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought*, he declares that he is writing for "the uninformed public" rather than a small minority of "learned gentlemen".[5] And the aim of the text, he continues, is not to spark a pedantic conversation among self-proclaimed thorough thinkers, but to influence "public opinion".[6]

The same idea is expressed even more clearly in the *Contribution to the Correction of the Public's Judgements on the French Revolution*. "The intention," Fichte states, "is not that some few chosen ones know what is worth knowing, and that few among them act accordingly. The theory of man's duties, rights, and aspirations after death is not the school's trinket." Rather, it should be understood as "common good" and must one day become as universally available as "air and light".[7] Through this vision, Fichte at the same time ascribes a special moral task to the scholar in general and the philosopher in particular. Philosophy must not remain within the walls of the school; only when it permeates society at large will it have achieved its purpose.

One cannot avoid noting the ambiguity of Fichte's position. Whereas he sometimes explicitly discourages laymen from engaging in philosophical inquiry, he at other times describes the relevance of philosophy as universal and common to all human beings. If we interpret his stance in line with Hadot's distinction, Fichte seems to vacillate between understanding philosophy as school science and as life practice.

But perhaps it is not the case that Fichte's understanding of philosophy is inconsistent – perhaps it is rather Hadot's distinction that fails to grasp the central tenets of this understanding. This is the conclusion for which I

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2 Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 269.
3 Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, 196; GA I/2, 251.
4 Fichte, "Crystal Clear Report", 39–40; GA I/7, 185.
5 Fichte, "Reclamation", 119–120; GA I/1, 167.
6 Fichte, "Reclamation", 120; GA I/1, 167.
7 Fichte, *Contribution*, 6; GA I/1, 203.

argue in this article. It is true that Fichte distinguishes between scientific philosophy addressed to scholars and popular philosophy addressed to the wider public. But in both of these cases, he understands philosophy as inseparable from the lived experience of man; in his view, true philosophy must intervene in life.

This does not mean that Fichte's conception of philosophical life is identical with that of the ancient tradition Hadot has meticulously examined. However, the question I pose in this article is not *whether* Fichte understood philosophy as an art of living, but *how* such an art of living can in his view be conceived and practiced. In other words, what is at stake in Fichte's philosophy is not the abandonment of the ideal of the philosophical life, but the emergence of a new such ideal, formulated in a new intellectual-historical context. For Fichte, this ideal is compatible with the stance that a certain kind of philosophy must be reserved for the learned, while a certain kind of philosophy must be made as universal as possible.

1.1 Framework, Contributions, and Previous Studies

A central premise of the article is thus that Fichte distinguishes between scientific and popular philosophy; in his view, philosophy has a scholastic task and a task that extends beyond the school. Fichte finds it crucial to separate these two genres of philosophy, but he finds it equally crucial to prove that they cannot be understood without reciprocal reference to each other. In other words, school philosophy is a necessary condition for philosophy's ability to influence society at large, and philosophy understood as social practice is conversely a condition of possibility for scientific philosophy.

Fichte's distinction between the scientific and the popular is similar to – but, crucially, not identical with – Hadot's distinction between philosophy as school science and philosophy as way of life. For as the following analysis will show, Fichte does *not* equate philosophy as a way of life with the use of philosophical teachings outside of the school. Rather, we will see that he takes the academic philosopher to embody the philosophical life both in his own thought and in the way he communicates it with the society around him. Similarly, one might be tempted to consider the distinction between school philosophy and popular philosophy to be parallel with that between theoretical and practical philosophy, but to Fichte, both theoretical and practical philosophy have a scientific-systematic as well as a popular use.

The distinction between Fichte's esoteric/scientific and exoteric/popular texts is well established in historical scholarship on his thought. Traditionally, his systematic texts have been the focus of scholarship on the Jena-period, while the popular writings have been relegated to more or less successful attempts to recount the results already derived from the esoteric writings.[8] However, there are also scholars who have underlined the practical-popular task as fundamental to the conception of the early *Wissenschaftslehre*.[9] Similarly, there are many excellent studies noting that Fichte believes his philosophy to have both a scientific-speculative dimension and a dimension of a more existential or life-philosophical nature.[10]

I will join these scholars in arguing that the relationship between the theoretical and practical task of philosophy, as well as that between its scientific-systematic and popular form, is fundamental for understanding

8 Of course, the state of affairs is rather different concerning Fichte's later philosophy, where the popular addresses to the German nation have arguably attracted more scholarly attention than the scientific-systematic works. I therefore wish to underline that I am talking here only about scholarship on Fichte's Jena-*Wissenschaftslehre*. On this, cf. Beiser, "Fichte and the French Revolution", 39.

9 Reinhart Lauth, for example, argues that Fichte's popular lectures on the vocation of the scholar occupies "a key place in his philosophical system", proposing that the *Grundlage* must be read in consonance with them (Lauth, "Fichtes Gesamtidee der Philosophie", 254). More recently, Peter L. Oesterreich and Hartmut Traub have developed a similar idea in the monograph *Der Ganze Fichte: Die populäre, wissenschaftliche und metaphilosophische Erschließung der Welt*. See also Gareewa, "Die Bedeutung der Populärphilosophie bei J. G. Fichte und A. Schopenhauer".

10 An older work on the topic that still merits being read is Weischedel, *Der frühe Fichte*. In more recent scholarship, Daniel Breazeale distinguishes between what he calls the scientific and the existential dimensions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* – the latter being related to the striving for "personal *unity* or *wholeness*," thus constituting the source of the "deeper and fundamentally practical need" of which scientific philosophy is to offer a grounding (Breazeale, *Thinking through the "Wissenschaftslehre"*, 125.) There are also many scholars who have emphasised the 'primacy of the practical' in Fichte's philosophical system. See, e.g., Ameriks, "Kant, Fichte, and the Radical Primacy of the Practical"; Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 196; Beiser, "Fichte and the French Revolution", 51–52.

Fichte's metaphilosophical theories. The exoteric writings are thus as essential as the esoteric ones, and the two categories of texts can mutually illuminate each other. However, previous studies tend to consist in close readings of Fichte's own *oeuvre* that offer relatively little in terms of contextualisation.[11] This article serves as a complement to them by treating Fichte's conceptions of popular philosophy and philosophical life practice as an intervention in a long and complex debate: In fact, the question of the practical use of philosophy was a central one of the German Enlightenment as such, and scholastic philosophy was repeatedly criticized by German academics throughout the 18th century. The debate gained new momentum with the publication of Kant's first *Critique*, which Kant's adversaries saw as a return to an outdated scholastic formalism. Kant's followers responded with a counterattack against popular philosophy and its demand for the immediate practical applicability of philosophical teachings. My claim is that Fichte intended his *Wissenschaftslehre* to resolve this debate once and for all – and his position in it is far more complex than it might at first appear. In particular, I intend to show that by contextualising the *Wissenschaftslehre* in this way, we can achieve new perspectives on Fichte's notion of feeling as it relates to philosophical reflection.

For these reasons, I begin my investigation with a historical background in two parts (sections 2 and 3). In the fourth section of the article, I then proceed to a reconstruction of Fichte's position on the issue and its relation to his philosophical system in general. My focus here is Fichte's philosophy during his Jena period, 1794–1799.

2 Eclecticism and Popular Philosophy

The start of the German Enlightenment is traditionally dated to October 31, 1687. On this day, Christian Thomasius performed a seemingly ordinary act of great symbolic significance: he announced his forthcoming lectures at the University of Leipzig in German instead of the prevalent Latin. In German cultural history, this event has been ascribed an almost mythical significance. At this moment, Thomasius became the great reformer of learnedness – a Luther of philosophy, as his contemporary follower Heumann describes him.[12]

In fact, Thomasius was not the first to lecture in German: teaching in the vernacular language was not the norm, but it had taken place for centuries.[13] The image of Thomasius as a pioneer is thus to some extent exaggerated. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to consider him a highly important figure of the German Enlightenment, and the language issue does in fact capture some of the crucial aspects of his reform project.[14]

Latin had for a long time formed the basis of an international learned community, a *republica literaria* or *Gelehrtenrepublik*.[15] This linguistic community made possible the spreading of knowledge beyond national borders, but it also excluded the wider *national* audience from learned debates. Latin was reserved for priests, jurists, and professors, but was not generally mastered by the middle classes.[16] Thomasius's transition to the vernacular aimed at nothing less than transforming science and education from the exclusive property of scholars to the common property of society. The university's walls against the outside world were to be torn down and its teachings made accessible to new segments of the population. Even those who did not pursue university studies would now be able to inform themselves about the progress of science through texts written in their own

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11 There is more research interpreting other post-Kantians, and Kant himself, against the fund of the popular-philosophy debate. Some examples are di Giovanni, "Popular Philosophy"; Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*.

12 Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophia. Sechtes Capitel", 609. On Thomasius's role in the German Enlightenment and its connection to Kant, see Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, 9–10, 17, 106.

13 Michael Maurer, "Christian Thomasius oder: Vom Wandel des Gelehrtentypus im 18. Jahrhundert", 431.

14 Research on Thomasius in the history of philosophy is extensive, but only in recent years has the classic picture of his role in the German Enlightenment begun to be examined more critically. Several important contributions to re-examining and reassessing his thought can be found in Vollhardt (ed.), *Christian Thomasius (1655–1728)*.

15 See, e.g., Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words*, 156; Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment*, 47.

16 Cf. Josephson, "Böcker eller universitet? Om ett tema i tysk utbildningspolitisk debatt kring 1800", 184: "Previously marginalised groups of readers such as women ['*fruntimmer*'] and the 'uneducated' were considered to, through the book market, have been given the opportunity to take possession of knowledge of a kind that until recently had been reserved for a small elite of Latin-speaking men".

mother tongue. Enlightenment meant *popular* enlightenment – a general dissemination of knowledge that translated into social practice and contributed to the spiritual development of the lower classes.[17]

Already in the late 17th century, the German *Aufklärer* thus understood themselves as critics of school philosophy. In relation to this, the description of Thomasius as the Luther of philosophy is not unjustified. Thomasius's Enlightenment ideals were largely motivated by Protestant convictions whose self-proclaimed enemy was Catholic scholasticism and monastic culture (pejoratively referred to by Thomasius himself as "monk-philosophy"[18]). For Thomasius, this tradition was characterized by metaphysical pedantry without social or scientific benefit. In their secluded and restricted circles, the scholastics could engage in subtle logical exercises and intricate reasoning about the nature of God – but their doctrines, Thomasius believed, were incomprehensible to the outsider and had no prospect of improving the morality of the individual citizen. The scholastics were nitpickers who lost themselves in theoretical musings without concern for the applicability of philosophy to real life.

Thomasius's main objection to the scholastics was thus not directed at the formal correctness of their doctrines, but rather at their supposed unworldliness. In his view, the true value of philosophy did not lay in any given doctrine, no matter how systematic and technically unobjectionable it was. Rather, philosophy earned its name – the pursuit of wisdom – only when it formed the *will* of the human beings and taught them to direct their activities towards the good, virtuous and useful. "He is far wiser," writes Thomasius,

> who, without subtle and hair-splitting knowledge of the good promotes the benefit of himself and others than he who, through the most subtle reasoning – even if his reasoning concerns the good itself – harms himself and others.[19]

True wisdom, then, was to be understood not only as insight into truth in general, but insight into the *useful* truths that could lead man to bliss. Thomasius calls this a "living" knowledge, i.e. one that is not merely theoretical, but is expressed as a feeling of longing for bliss.[20] This feeling, Thomasius continues, must lead the student to practically strive for blissfulness, but also to "show others precisely this way to bliss, or at least show them the means by which they can tear themselves from the corruption that is caused by foolishness".[21] A "dead" knowledge, by contrast, may be intricate and theoretically developed but nonetheless "lacks bliss, that is, peace of mind, but still believes that it lacks nothing."[22]

Among those who took impression from Thomasius's reform project was the aforementioned Heumann, who, in his journal *Acta philosophorum*, developed the Thomasian ideas into a detailed concept of philosophy. Philosophy is, according to Heumann's definition

> through and through *scientia practica* that never stops at mere theory and speculation but always turns to *praxis* in all things. And I do not hesitate to say that I cannot consider a pure *theoreticus* to be a true *philosophus*, even if I gladly hold him to be a learned, yes, even profoundly learned man.[23]

In contrast to this image of the theorist, the philosopher is in Heumann's eyes characterized by his or her ability to embody his or her teachings and live in accordance with them. The criterion by which a true philosopher may be recognized is therefore

> that he is *virtuous*: for wisdom clearly shows him that the vices are most harmful to man, but that, conversely, virtue makes him blissful. However, when someone makes a profession out of wisdom but in deed [*in der That*] is not wise, but rather through a life full of vices makes himself unhappy, then he ought to be viewed not as a *philosophus*, but as a sophist.[24]

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17 Cf. Binkelmann & Schneidereit, "Einleitung", p. Iv.
18 E.g. Thomasius, *Höchstnöthige Cautelen*, 24, 34–35, 60.
19 Thomasius, *Höchstnöthige Cautelen*, 11.
20 Thomasius *Höchstnöthige Cautelen*, 14; cf. 86–87.
21 Thomasius *Höchstnöthige Cautelen*, 14.
22 Thomasius *Höchstnöthige Cautelen*, 14.
23 Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. Drittes Capitel", p. 100.
24 Heumann, "Einleitung zur Historia Philosophica. Drittes Capitel", 96.

It is worth emphasizing how this concept of philosophy does not focus on speculative positions about the nature of the world or the faculty of knowledge. The tradition founded by Thomasius was explicitly uninterested in given positions on such issues; what mattered was the ability of the philosopher to embody wisdom and live in accordance with it. The true essence of philosophy was the pursuit of virtue and happiness that first *gave rise* to thinking, not the *results* of thinking in the form of given concepts and their logical connections. According to Thomasius, then, philosophy "must not be merely memorized and consist in mere speculation; it also requires the studious pupil's consent, which springs from the heart and produces a longing for true wisdom."[25]

This approach also constituted a criticism of scholasticism, which Thomasius and his followers took to be based on pure faith in authority. The traditional erudite scholar was not, they argued, trained to think for himself, but only to memorize a set of predetermined doctrines. In the case of Catholic scholasticism, this led to a dogmatic reliance on Aristotle, but the same form of sectarianism could in Thomasius's view be found everywhere in the history of philosophy. Pythagoreans, Platonists, Neoplatonists and Cartesians were all examples of a narrow sectarianism in which one's own master was elevated to infallibility while all other philosophical doctrines were rejected out of hand. In contrast to this, the true philosophical method ought to consist of an unceasing examination of each doctrine before the court of one's own reason. A philosopher in the true sense of the word was characterized by being a *Selbstdenker* – a concept that came to define the intellectual ideals of the German Enlightenment.[26]

Thomasius and his followers had a name for this form of philosophical life practice: *eclecticism*. The eclectic was for them distinguished from the pedant in that he or she constantly strove to put his or her philosophical insights into practice as to achieve both individual and societal happiness through them. He or she was also distinguished from the sectarian in that he or she did not recognize the authority of any single doctrine, but instead was able to test each philosophical doctrine with his or her own reason as a yardstick.[27] In this way, Thomasius argued, eclectic philosophy became a constant pursuit of virtue, open-mindedness, and intellectual independence – and in this respect it was ultimately synonymous with true philosophy in general.[28]

2.1 The Emergence of a New Scholarly Ideal

The eclectic vision of philosophy's social task had a strong impact on 18th-century Enlightenment culture in Germany.[29] "The whole world now demands of a philosopher that he be an eclectic," as Christoph Meiners summarized the spirit of the times in 1772.[30]

Indeed, the traditional scholar was increasingly accused of being an unworldly "school-fox"[31] that, according to the eclectic *Aufklärer*, must be replaced by a new kind of philosopher and a new kind of scientific practice. In his *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philosophie* (Letters on Objects of Philosophy), Michael Hißmann complains that ancient, life-oriented wisdom has been removed "from the sphere of life to that of the teaching pult" and has thus lost its ability to influence the moral education of mankind.[32] The university philosopher is portrayed even more vividly by Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld:

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25 Thomasius, *Höchstnöthige Cautelen*, 34.

26 Hißmann, for example, contrasts his own age to a preceeding one where *Selbstdenken* was considered a crime and where "philosophy was condemned to slavery" (Hißmann, *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philosophie,* 18). C.f. "Selbstdenken" in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 9; Albrecht: *Eklektik: Eine Begriffsgeschichte*, p. 416; Senigaglia, "Die Projektdimension der Popularphilosophie", 79.

27 Etymologically, eclecticism denotes an independent selection in which the thinker freely chooses the best teachings from various sources. Cf. Holzhey, "Philosophie als Eklektik"; Gerlach, "Eklektizismus oder Fundamentalphilosophie? Die Alternativen Wege von Christian Thomasius und Christian Wolff im philosophischen Denken der deutschen Frühaufklärung an der Universität Halle".

28 Cf. Thomasius, *Einletiung zur Hof-philosophie*, 52.

29 Cf. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, ch. 1.

30 Meiners, *Revision der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, 60.

31 Thomasius himself used the term, e.g. in *Einleitung zur Hof-philosophie*, 36.

32 Hißmann, *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philosophie*, 9.

> With a look that appears to announce an important scene, the doctor of philosophy [*Weltweisheit*] and master of all seven liberal arts ascends to his wooden throne, from which he is called to tyrannise the reason of the young world. He teaches what no common sense [*gesunder Verstand*] can understand, proves what still no human being has proven, piles together a chaos of empty theorems and opinions, enumerates, paragraphs, defines, demonstrates, distinguishes, refutes, and calls this heap a system, mocks the useful truth and the instructive feeling of humanity, cheers over the deformed offsprings of his brain and consecrates them with the sacred name of philosophy.[33]

It must be emphasized, however, that descriptions of this kind were in no way intended to dismiss the university as an institution. On the contrary, it is characteristic of the German Enlightenment that its representatives were themselves often university teachers. The polemic against the caricatured school-fox, then, must be read as intended to reform the university and establish a new societal role for the scholar. According to the enlightened vision of philosophy's popular dissemination, the scholar ought to spread philosophy beyond the confines of the university *in virtue* of his own role as university professor. The criticism of scholasticism, which consistently focused on its supposed pedantry and introversion, could be contrasted with an idea of the scholar as a popular educator and enlightener. The ambition was not to dissolve the boundary between the learned institutions and the wider population, but to strengthen the legitimacy of the scholars by linking it to the spiritual upbringing of the people.[34]

Thomasius was an early advocate of this transformation of the role of the scholar, and it is not unjustified to regard his educational reform work in Halle as one of the foundations for the emergence of the modern university.[35] In the later part of the 18th century, the University of Göttingen also became an important centre for the development of a new university order. Among the most important reformers were the philosophers Christoph Meiners, Johann Heinrich Georg Feder, and Dietrich Tiedemann.[36]

However, not only the university, but also the printing press was reinterpreted as a tool of the Enlightenment to spread knowledge, reason, and science to the masses (or at least to the nobles and the educated bourgeoisie). Thus, in the 18th century, an expansive new genre of literature emerged which, through its popular appeal, also enjoyed commercial success. Bookshops were filled with philosophical textbooks written "for citizens of all classes", "for ladies", "for laymen", or simply "for everyone".[37]

2.2 Popularization and the Form of Philosophy

Already in the early history of German eclecticism, the question arose how philosophy could in practice become useful to this new and wider audience. Writing in German was seen as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for reaching a readership beyond the walls of the university. Apart from the language, several commentators argued, the basic *form* of philosophy must be reformed.

A recurring viewpoint in this discussion was that the philosophical presentation should in various ways be brought closer to the empirical existence of the human being, his or her everyday life. Abstract, speculative reasoning needed to be anchored in experience through examples and clear instructions for use, and

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33 Hirschfeld, *Vom Guten Geschmack in der Philosophie*, 7–8.
34 Cf. Binkelmann & Schneidereit, "Einleitung", p. vi–vii.
35 For a detailed examination of Thomasius's pedagogical practice, see Risbjerg Eskildsen, "Christian Thomasius, Invisible Philosophers, and Education for Enlightenment".
36 In his autobiography, Feder describes his pedagogical method as intended to give rise to self-reflection rather than to create faithful followers: "[it] was already in the nature of my teaching", he says, "that it could not found a visible school". As for Thomasius and earlier eclectics, the point was not to found new systems, but to spread "a useful philosophy". Feder, *J.G.H. Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, 79–80.
37 E.g. Adelung, *Geschichte der Philosophie für Liebhaber*; Basedow, *Practische Philosophie für alle Stände*; Knigge, *Versuch einer Logik für Frauenzimmer*; Unzer, *Grundriß einer Weltweißheit für das Frauenzimmer*.

philosophical jargon needed to be replaced with everyday language. In his essay *Vom guten Geschmack in der Philosophie* (On Good Taste in Philosophy), Hirschfeld presents a detailed argument in support of this vision:

> I do not reject all the so-called neologisms [*Kunstwörter*] in philosophy; they are to some extent inevitable and to some extent convenient, at least for those who are familiar with the profession. But should they not be reduced? Perhaps this would allow more useful truths to take the place of empty words. And should they not at least be avoided in those writings which are intended for the great world, for castles and huts? In this way philosophy would lose its disagreeable, pedantic reputation and be understood and loved instead. And how many disputes would be avoided if philosophers used the universal language of the world instead of their own mystical one?[38]

The premise of Hirschdfeld's argument was typical of contemporary popularizers: that the human being as such is rational, and thus susceptible to the lessons of philosophy. What distinguished the traditional scholar from the educated citizen in general was that the latter used a more immediate "common sense" focused on concrete objects of experience.[39] Speculative thinking must therefore give way to a more life-oriented philosophy that immediately appealed to the interests of the reading public.

The writings resulting from this vision were sometimes of a nature that 21st-century readers would perhaps not immediately recognize as philosophy at all. In her *Moral für Frauenzimmer* (Morality for Women), for example, Dorothee Henriette von Runckel discusses not only the nature of morality in general, but also delves deep into how it can be practiced for the typical woman of the higher classes. No question related to everyday-life – what literature one ought to read in one's spare time, the dangers of excessive coffee-drinking, and the benefits of taking frequent walks – was deemed too ignoble for being examined in this manner.[40] The more philosophy addressed the quotidian issues of the general citizen, the more it could contribute to public virtue. "[*T*]*urn the knowledge of your duties to your heart*", wrote Runckel, "*wisely prepare yourself for every day, and at the end of it, carefully examine yourself*."[41] From its scholarly-theoretical form, philosophy was to be transformed into an ongoing scrutiny and forming of the self – a way of life.

This ambition simultaneously led to an upgrading of the faculty of sensibility. In order to affect the public, philosophy should not merely address reason – it must also be directed at the feelings, the heart, of the reader: "We have not only the light of reason leading our eye to recognize a law of virtue. Also our heart feels what is *noble* and *ignoble*, *allowed* or *punishable*, *praiseworthy* or *disgraceful*".[42]

The motto of this reform project was *popularization*, and its proponents were often referred to as popular philosophers.[43] Towards the end of the century, this term gradually gained ground at the expense of the previously dominant concept of eclecticism. But there was no sharp philosophical distinction between the two; popular philosophers (with a few exceptions)[44] saw themselves as eclectics and were explicitly influenced by Thomasius. In most contexts, eclecticism and popular philosophy could be used as synonyms.

The popular philosophers did not go unchallenged, however; at the same time as their breakthroughs, concerns were raised that the ideal of broad accessibility would lead to an erosion of scientific thoroughness. The debate flared up with new intensity in the wake of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

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38 Hirschfeld, *Vom guten Geschmack in der Philosophie*, 27–28. Cf. Hißmann, *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philsophie*, 9; Feder, *J.G.H. Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, 79.

39 Cf. Senigaglia, "Die Projektdimension der Popularphilosophie", 79; Asmuth, "Von 'Seichtigkeit' und 'Pedanterie'", 98.

40 Runckel, *Moral für Frauenzimmer*, 105–106, 160, 162.

41 Runckel, *Moral für Frauenzimmer*, 61.

42 Runckel, *Moral für Frauenzimmer*, 14. Cf. Hirschfeld, 4–5, 10, 35. On the role of feeling in popular philosohpy and its connection to moral sense-theory, see Binkelmann & Schneidereit, "Einleitung", x; Senigaglia, "Die Projektdimension der Popularphilosophie", 82.

43 Despite the undeniable influence of the popular philosophers in 18th-century Germany, relatively few detailed studies have been devoted to their thought; see Bachmann-Medick, *Die ästhetische Ordnung des Handelns*; Böhr, *Philosophie für die Welt*; Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*; Zimmerli, "'Schwere Rüstung' des Dogmatismus und 'anwendbare Eklektik'"; Christoph Binkelmann & Nele Schneidereit, *Denken fürs Volk?*.

44 Feder explicitly describes himself as an eclectic in his autobiography. (Feder, *J.G.H. Feder's Leben, Natur und Grundsätze*, 81.) One of the few popular philosophers to partially question the eclecticism was Meiners; cf. Meiners, *Revision der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, 64, 68, 73.

3 Idealism and the Quarrel About the Popularity of Philosophy

In the 1760s and 70s, the popular philosophers regarded Kant as an important ally. His critique of rationalist logic and his quick, accessible style seemed to make him one of the most exemplary representatives of the popularization movement.[45] With the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, however, the attitude of popular philosophers changed radically. Meiners, Feder, Eberhard, and Tiedemann published several articles – and entire journals – aimed at demonstrating the shortcomings of the Kantian project.

The popular-philosophical objections against Kant varied in character, ranging from Lockean empiricism to defences of Leibnizian and Wolffian rationalism. This is in itself characteristic of the popular-philosophical movement, whose common denominator never consisted in given epistemological positions. What united them was instead the notion of the moral and spiritual task of philosophy, that is, the requirement that it be useful. This was the underlying motive for the popular-philosophical dislike of *Critique of Pure Reason*: the work was, simply put, far from *popular*, and thus seemed to betray the ideal of an experiential and accessible philosophy.

This objection was most explicitly expressed by Christian Garve, whose review of Kant was published in the *Göttingsche Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* in 1782. Garve begins by noting that the critique of reason "constantly tests the reader's understanding, if not always teaches it" – a subtle but unambiguous objection of a popular philosophical nature.[46]

The anonymously published review gave rise to a famous controversy. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant urged the reviewer to come forward so that the debate could be conducted openly.[47] Garve responded to the request in a long letter to Kant. He argues that the printed version of his text is not exclusively his own; the editor Feder is said to have made significant changes so that Garve can hardly recognize his own reasoning. Nevertheless, Garve reiterates the view that philosophy must be expressed in an easily understandable and popular way – a task Kant has failed to accomplish:

> I believed that it must be possible to render more easily comprehensible (to readers not wholly unaccustomed to reflection) the truths that are supposed to bring about important reforms in philosophy. […] [M]y opinion, perhaps mistaken, is still this: that your whole system, if it is really to become useful, must be expressed in a popular manner, and if it contains truth then it can be expressed.[48]

At first glance, the critique may appear philosophically superficial; the object of Garve's objection is the form of presentation rather than the actual content of Kant's thought. However, this illustrates how the conflict between Kant and the popular philosophers was largely based on *metaphilosophical* disagreements. At stake was the question of the nature of philosophy – and thus also the question of the philosopher's vocation and place in society. It is telling that Garve cites the question of utility as a criterion. From his popular-philosophical perspective, the philosopher's most important task consisted in making his teachings accessible and useful.

From the perspective of the popular philosophers, the line of conflict was thus defined: they believed to be entering into a confrontation with a new form of esoteric school philosophy. However, both Kant and his followers were unwilling to accept all the premises of popular-philosophical criticism. Laying claim to a purely scholastic philosophical tradition and renouncing the idea of the social relevance of philosophy did not seem like a viable defence, and nor would it have been in line with Kant's philosophical ambitions. To justify the value of critical philosophy, it was thus necessary to formulate a *third* position that was neither purely scholastic nor purely popular-philosophical.

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45 Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 169–70; Senigaglia, "Die Projektdimension der Popularphilosophie", 81, 84.
46 Garve, "Critik der reinen Vernunft. Von Imman. Kant" [Review], 40. Quoted in Kant, *Prolegomena*, 201.
47 Kant, *Prolegomena*, 130.
48 Quoted in Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, 193.

3.1 Transcendental Philosophy

In fact, Kant had already developed an idea of this nature in the first *Critique*, where he discusses the relation between the scholastic and cosmopolitan concepts of philosophy.[49] According to the former, he writes, philosophy consists in "a system of cognition [...] sought only as a science without having as its end anything more than the systematic unity of this knowledge, this is the logical perfection of cognition".[50] The cosmopolitan concept, however, connects this logical perfection with a "personalized ideal", and "[f]rom this point of view philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)".[51] For Kant, this cosmopolitan ideal must necessarily inform the scholastic one – only in this way does philosophy become relevant to man's moral ends, and only in this way does the philosopher become the "legislator of human reason" rather than an "artist of reason" (*Vernunftkünstler*).[52] The artist of reason here corresponds to the popular-philosophical archetypes of the monk-like scholar and the pedant: it refers to a thinker who loses himself in empty thought games without anchoring them in lived reality or directing them towards the interests of humanity.

Kant thus claims that the cosmopolitan concept of philosophy plays an essential role in establishing the value of philosophical speculation. But the way he describes this cosmopolitan concept also illustrates what he sees as the shortcomings of the popular-philosophical project. The popular philosophers want to bring philosophy closer to the people by building it on experience, common sense, feeling, and example. When Kant instead describes the task of cosmopolitan philosophy in terms of laying down laws for human reason, this means to him that it must of necessity go *beyond* experience. The laws of reason cannot be contained in experience, but must be conceived as its conditions of possibility. The main merit of a critical philosophy is thus that it opens up a philosophical field beyond naïve empiricism and shows how the practical task of reason – its "essential ends" – is derived from this transcendental realm.

While Kant does not entirely dismiss the value of popular philosophy, he does emphasize that critical philosophy has a value and legitimacy that cannot be limited to immediate use. This is not a rejection of the idea of popularization, but an expression of the view that popular philosophy must be complemented by an esoteric or scholastic one. In fact, several popular philosophers essentially agreed with this position (even if they did not agree with Kant on how an esoteric philosophy should be formulated).[53] The conflict was fundamentally about where the emphasis of philosophy should be placed – but few of the debaters wanted to abolish systematic school philosophy altogether.

In the 1790s, however, Kant's followers increasingly began to understand the popular philosophers as enemies of thorough philosophy in general. The terms "popular philosophy" and "eclecticism" started taking on a pejorative meaning, denoting superficial crowd-pleasing and lack of thoroughness.[54] Karl Leonhard Reinhold played an important role in establishing these negative connotations. In his influential *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, he wholeheartedly defends Kant's criticism from popular-philosophical objections. The popular philosophers, he claims, assume "that one must enjoy the blessings of the sun and of reason without pondering about the way in which we get to them". But this assumption is in fact in conflict with the nature of reason itself. For reason has an immanent need "to act according to a clear conception of its laws"[55] – and such a conception can only be achieved through a critique of reason. The popular-philosophical aversion to speculation can thus not claim to be based on real common sense. Rather, according to Reinhold, it results in an unreflective belief in a

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49 The literature on this section and its importance to Kant's philosophical project as such is immense. My own discussion is not intended to be exhaustive, but should be read as an overview in relation to the general context examined in the article. For other, more detailed treatments, see e.g. Bacin et al. (eds.), *Kant und die Philosophie in weltburgerlicher Absicht;* Furgate, "Kant's World Concept of Philosophy and Cosmopolitanism".

50 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A838/B866.

51 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A839/B867.

52 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A839/B867.

53 Meiners, for example, argues for the need of an esoteric philosophy in *Revision der Philosophie*, 118, 133–134.

54 Cf. Asmuth, "Von 'Seichtigkeit und 'Pedanterie'", 99.

55 Reinhold, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, 69.

reason that remains blind to its own nature. Similarly, Reinhold takes the eclectic principle of independent selection to result in "mutilated fragments from the most different scientific edifices".[56] Rather than a true thinker, the eclectic should thus be understood as an unprincipled collector of opinions.

3.2 Popularity Versus Freedom of Thought

The conflict between idealism and popular philosophy had several dimensions. It largely concerned the concept of philosophy as such, but it also had more immediate political ramifications. Critics of popular philosophy were often concerned that the quest for popularization would harm academic and intellectual freedom. As they argued, the demands for the immediate availability of knowledge to the public risked resulting in a narrow restriction of the topics a scientific writer could address. As long as the target audience of philosophical literature consisted only of academics, it was possible to defend a relatively large freedom of the press and opinion even concerning controversial issues such as religion. If, on the other hand, philosophy began to be regarded as the concern of every citizen, there was a worrying possibility that these academic freedoms would be severely curtailed.

These fears were not unjustified; several popular philosophers argued that philosophical authors should exercise a degree of self-censorship when addressing the public. Hißmann, for example, proposes that "the medicines for the healthy spirit must be distributed in several doses and must least of all be given all at once to a lady."[57] It is worth noting how the female audience is used as an argument. Popular philosophy emerged at a time when a reading public of both genders had been established, and according to Hißmann, it was important to educate this audience without threatening traditional norms.

In a similar vein, Meiners argues that, when faced with two equally plausible positions on a given issue, the scholar must "defend and propagate the one that has an undeniable influence on public tranquillity and bliss."[58] Those doctrines which do not meet these criteria, on the other hand, must be suppressed, regardless of their truth value. The possible objection that this restricts free speech is answered as follows:

> "But that restricts my freedom of conscience and thought?" – No: no police of reason will put you on trial for thinking differently from the Church. But you are not allowed to *say* so, let alone try to defend your opinion.[59]

The popular-philosophical demands for the dissemination of science were thus often associated with demands that printed literature must be morally instructive. But this could easily be interpreted as meaning that it may in no way be politically or religiously controversial – a demand that at least some popular philosophers explicitly made. Against this background, the debaters who wanted to defend a strictly scientific and esoteric print market cannot be regarded as mere elitists. Rather, they were concerned that popularization would ultimately legitimize an erosion of freedom of the press and freedom of opinion.

These concerns became particularly concrete with the accession of William Frederick II to the Prussian throne. William Frederick's father, Frederick II, was seen in his time as the epitome of an enlightened despot. His interest in philosophy and science, as well as his liberal stance on religious matters, quickly endeared him to progressive intellectuals of the time. In his famous essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" Kant even went so far as to describe the age of Enlightenment as "the century of *Frederick*".[60] But with the coronation of William Frederick II, this era seemed to be definitively over. The new king quickly carried out a complete reversal of political direction: censorship laws were tightened, religious freedom was curtailed, and prominent writers were forced to exercise considerable caution in their expression. Kant himself soon became aware of the new intellectual climate: his *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* was met by a formal letter from the royal authorities urging him not to interfere in religious debates in the future.

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56 Reinhold, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, 128.
57 Hißmann, *Briefe über Gegenstände der Philosophie*, 56.
58 Meiners *Revision der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, 88–89.
59 Meiners *Revision der Philosophie. Erster Theil*, 126.
60 Kant, *Political Writings*, 58.

Kant's response to this censorship clearly illustrates his attitude towards the popularity of philosophy. He argues that the work does not concern the general public at all, but rather must be considered a "closed book" accessible only to the learned.[61] Toning down the claims of popularity and re-establishing a sphere of strictly academic exchange of ideas was urgent for both philosophical and political reasons.

4 Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a Theory of the Social Role of the Philosopher

It was in this philosophically and politically turbulent period that Fichte developed his conception of the social task of philosophy. Like Reinhold and other critical philosophers, he often expressed a strong aversion to popular-philosophical ideals. In his public lectures in Jena, he contrasts transcendental philosophy with "the common popular philosophy, which is no philosophy at all".[62] And the lecture series as a whole begins with the following cautionary admonition to the audience:

> If I suspected that among you there were many of those "popular philosophers" who resolve every difficulty easily and without any effort or reflection, merely with the aid of what they call their own "healthy common sense" – if this is what I thought, then I would seldom stand here before you without quailing.[63]

Formulations such as these may seem to indicate that Fichte was consistently negative about the idea of philosophy's popularization. But this conclusion is, in fact, too hasty. In several other contexts, Fichte appears as an unusually radical defender of the social task of philosophy. This is not least the case in the *Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought*, where his main concern is to prove the injustice of any restriction of free speech. The exchange of ideas, he here argues, is an inalienable human right, and a social contract that abrogates this right is therefore inherently unjust.

Fichte does thus not agree with those who wanted to protect academic freedom by cutting it off from the public sphere; he goes much further in his defence of the right of scholars to disseminate controversial views. He sees it as necessary for philosophy to influence society at large, and seeks no compromise with political authorities. It is clear that this differs from Kant's more cautious stance. But it also differs from the popular philosophers' moderate idea of the conditions for a public print market and reading culture. If anything, Fichte here emerges as an unusually far-reaching advocate of popularization.

When Fichte dismisses popular philosophy, then, this cannot be interpreted as a rejection of the idea that philosophy has a value for the public. Rather, he is objecting to the specific philosophical attitude that characterizes the movement of the popular philosophers. When he speaks of popular philosophy and popular philosophers, he refers to a particular group of contemporary philosophers rather than to popularizing efforts in general.[64]

To clarify the meaning of this, it is necessary to study Fichte's characterization of popular philosophers more closely. Two features in particular stand out. First, Fichte understands popular philosophy as grounded in the concept of common sense. In the quotations above, he argues that for the popular philosophers, common sense takes the place of careful investigation. As a result, he believes that their philosophy does not consist of careful reflection, but rather immediately resolves all problems in advance. When the popular philosophers appeal to common sense, they are in fact appealing only to their unexamined, intuitive feeling and are therefore avoiding the actual work of philosophical thought. The quotation clearly illustrates the conceptual shift of popular philosophy that took place in the post-Kantian period: rather than self-thinking or rational examination free from prejudice and belief in authority, it could now be understood as uncritical *faith* in prejudice disguised as *sensus communis*.[65]

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61 Kant, *Akademie Ausgabe VII*, 8.

62 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 203; GA II/3, 327.

63 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 153; GA I/3, 34.

64 Cf. Senigaglia, "Die Projektdimension der Popularphilosophie", 90.

65 Cf. Breazeale, *Thinking Through the "Wissenschaftslehre"*, 109, 127.

Second, Fichte objects to the popular philosophers' emphasis on the concept of utility. The popular philosophers demand that philosophy be useful, that it be immediately tied to experience and offer clear instructions for a good and virtuous life. But through this understanding, Fichte argues, philosophy is reduced to a kind of instruction manual. The demand for usefulness leads to the idea that "everything which is published should be as easy to use as a cookbook or an arithmetic book".[66] Here, too, we can observe a significant conceptual change. Like common sense, the concept of usefulness has now come to be associated with the absence of actual thought. According to Fichte, the popular philosopher asks for ready-made rules so that he himself does not have to engage in the actual use of reason.

To some extent, Fichte's criticism of popular philosophy is justified, but to some extent it can be accused of constituting a strawman argument. It is certainly true that both common sense and usefulness were fundamental notions for the popular philosophers, but far from all of them reduced these to the cookbook form Fichte describes. In this context, however, we need not worry about whether Fichte's objections are legitimate or not; regardless of this they undeniably show what *Fichte himself* intended when evoking the concept of popular philosophy.

At the same time, it must be underlined that Fichte's criticism of the popular philosophers is not intended as a criticism of every philosophical popularization effort. In fact, Fichte not only considers it necessary for philosophy to influence society at large, but he is (directly or indirectly) influenced by the philosophical concepts of the eclectic tradition in two specific respects. First, Fichte's concept of philosophy has a clear kinship with Thomasius's distinction between living and dead knowledge. Second, such a kinship can be identified also in Fichte's conception of the social task of the philosopher. These two points will be elaborated in the following sections of this article.

4.1 The Spirit and Letter of Philosophy

Central to Fichte's philosophical system is the concept of activity or action. In the *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, he argues that the ultimate foundation of philosophy must consist in a particular form of action – a *Tathandlung* or *(f)act* – and that this action must be conceived as the "unconditioned foundational principle of all human knowledge."[67] In the posthumously published public lectures entitled "On Spirit and Letter in Philosophy", this concept of action is related to the nature of man as such. "The human mind or spirit", Fichte writes here, "is activity and nothing but activity."[68] Philosophy, understood as human spirit's self-investigation, thus also consists of a particular form of activity, namely the activity of *thought*.[69]

From this it follows that philosophy cannot be understood as something given in advance, as an object approached by the philosophizing individual but existing independently of the thought-act. Therefore, it cannot be transferred from one human individual to another as a finished product, doctrine or rule. On the contrary, each person must produce it in him- or herself, by his or her own rational-spiritual work.[70] But at the same time, every communication of philosophy in words – through spoken or written language – transforms it into precisely such a product and gives it the appearance of being an already completed doctrine. As Fichte explicitly emphasizes to his audience, this makes the transmission of philosophical thought a pedagogically complex task:

> I set before you a product, into which I believe I have breathed a few Ideas. But I do not give you the ideas themselves, nor can I do so. I give you the mere body. The words which you hear constitute this body.[71]

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66 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 145; GA I/3, 26.
67 Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, 200; GA I/2, 255.
68 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 200; GA II/3, 325.
69 On the spirit – letter distinction in Fichte's Jena philosophy, see Ivaldo, "Die Rolle der Einbildungskraft in Fichtes. Überlegungen über Geist und Buchstaben"; Görner, "Poetik des Wissens".
70 Cf. Senigaglia, "Die Projektdimension der Popularphilosophie", 95.
71 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 196; GA II/3, 320.

For this reason, the communication of the content of philosophy cannot be immediate. Those who listen to a philosophical lecture or read a philosophical book do not really encounter philosophy in the spoken or written word. Instead, they are faced with an expression of philosophical activity that has been made into an object of the senses, but that has thereby also been solidified in a stiffened form. This sensual object, Fichte argues, must not be interpreted as the philosophy itself, but as an image of or sign for it. The sign points towards the actual philosophical content, but it can only be grasped if it is actively (re-)created by the listener or reader in his or her own mind: “Spirit obtains its rules from within itself. It needs no law; it is a law unto itself. The person without spirit obtains his rules from without; he is able to do nothing but copy.”[72]

It is obvious that the relation between the truly philosophical and its sensuous expression can easily be misunderstood – and according to Fichte, many have indeed confused the mere form or presentation with its living, spiritual content. Such confusions can take place not only in philosophy, but are a risk inherent in all spiritual activities. For example, Fichte understands also the work of art as a particular expression of spiritual ideas. Like philosophy, the essence of the work of art does not consist in its form, but in the living principle of which the form is an expression. Those who are spiritually inspired by a work of art must therefore be able to embody this ideal principle in ever new forms; they must see that the essential lies beyond the particular, fossilized product. Fichte contrasts this with the viewer “lacking in spirit”.[73] For such a person, the work of art, for example a sculpture, appears as nothing more than “a statue like any other”.[74] If this observer of poor spiritual ability is him- or herself a skilled craftsperson, he or she may well imitate the outward form of the work of art and even achieve a work which, in terms of this form, matches the quality of the original. But such a copy would be spiritless, imitating the external form without insight into the underlying idea.

The same is true, according to Fichte, in philosophy. It is thus quite possible to understand a philosophical system as a given logical relation between propositions – to memorize these propositions, repeat them, and reproduce them – without having penetrated into what they actually express: the essential vocation and striving of the human spirit.

> [E]ven if one employs this principle in this quite correct manner, it still remains entirely possible that one has merely learned the letter of this principle without having grasped its spirit. Perhaps one employs the formula that expresses this principle because one has accepted it on trust or faith, or perhaps because one has noticed how useful it is for providing specific explanations for all of those things which philosophy is supposed to explain. Nevertheless, so long as one has not had the intuition of what is expressed in this formula, then one possesses no more than a formula.[75]

Herein lies the essential distinction for Fichte between the spirit and the letter, and thus between the spiritually capable thinker and the spiritless “literalist” (*Buchstäbler*).[76] The latter may well know a philosophy as a mere work of memory, i.e., in the sense of “learn[ing] it by heart and repeat[ing] it”,[77] but cannot him- or herself be a philosopher. Fichte’s typological description of these two characters is clearly in line with the eclectics; the literalist is reminiscent of the “school-fox” while the true philosopher of spirit is a variant of the *Selbstdenker*. It is therefore striking that Fichte describes the literalist as possessing a mere “dead and empty item of knowledge” in contrast to the living one of philosophy.[78] The distinction immediately brings to mind Thomasius and his conception of philosophy as life wisdom based on independent thought. This parallel becomes all the more striking when Fichte describes how philosophy must emboss its impression on the human being:

> Philosophy is not something that floats in our memory or is printed in books for us to read; instead, philosophy is what has stirred and transformed our spirit and has ushered it into a higher, spiritual order of things. Philosophy is something which has to exist within us. It must be our entire being; it must be the whole education of our spirit and heart.[79]

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72 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 198; GA II/3, 321.
73 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 197; GA II/3, 321.
74 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 198; GA II/3, 321.
75 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 204; GA II/3, 329–330.
76 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 193; GA II/3, 316.
77 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 212; GA II/3, 337.
78 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 206; GA II/3, 331.
79 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 207; GA II/3, 332–333.

The quotation not only emphasizes the practical importance of philosophy for the individual, but thereby also points in the direction of its intersubjective and ultimately societal significance. As we shall soon see, Fichte believes that the higher, spiritual order towards which philosophy strives presupposes interpersonal relations, and therefore a society in the broad sense. Fichte develops this aspect in detail in the public lectures he began in Jena in 1794, the first five of which he published with the title *Some Lectures on the Scholar's Vocation*.

4.2 Man and Society

In 18th-century Germany, *der Gelehrte* – "the learned man" or "the scholar" – was first and foremost a designation for a particular social class, namely those with a university education. It is not in itself remarkable that Fichte devoted a series of public lectures to this concept; as students, his audience was on the threshold of entering the social circle of *die Gelehrten*, and would thus benefit from a review of the tasks and duties this social status entailed. Similar lecture series for new students – known as "encyclopedic lectures" – were already common at universities.[80] In general, they served both as an overview of university studies and as a kind of first socialization into the norms and ideals of the academic community.

However, it becomes clear already in the introduction that Fichte's lecture series differs from such a practically oriented overview. To understand the concept of the scholar, Fichte begins, we must first of all understand the concept of society and man's vocation as a member of it. This, however, requires in turn an examination of man's vocation as such. Thus, instead of an account of the nature and aims of university studies, the audience is plunged into a philosophical inquiry into the nature of man. Hereby, Fichte shows that he is not only interested in following the genre of encyclopedic lectures. By insisting that the task of the scholar can only be grasped by relating it to the interests of humanity as such, he emphasizes that the lectures are just as much a contribution to the then 100-year-old debate on the popularity and general human interest of philosophy. But equally, the lecture series should be understood as one of several possible introductions to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and especially as a complement to the parallel private lectures on the foundations of this philosophy. The point is then to show how the popularity debate can be addressed and resolved once and for all precisely on the basis of Fichte's philosophical system.

So what is the vocation of man? Fichte formulates his answer to this question in two complementary ways. First, the human being must be considered its own end rather than a means to something else. This essential self-purposefulness is in turn linked to its reason:

> Just as certainly as man is rational, he is his own end, that is, he does not exist because something else should exist. Rather, he exists simply because he should exist. His mere existence is the ultimate purpose of his existence, or (which amounts to the same thing) it is contradictory to inquire concerning the purpose of man's existence: he is because he is. This quality of absolute being, of being for his own sake, is the characteristic feature, the determination or vocation of man, insofar as he is considered merely and solely as a rational being.[81]

Second – and again with reference to the nature of reason – the human being must strive for unity with itself:

> The ultimate characteristic feature of all rational beings is, accordingly, absolute unity, constant self-identity, complete agreement with oneself. This absolute identity is the form of the pure I and is its only true form; or rather, in the conceivability of identity we recognize the expression of the pure form of the I.[82]

At this point, Fichte draws the attention of his audience to a tension in the concept of man. For it is obvious that this vocation of absolute unity and eternal identity cannot be conceived as *de facto* realized in man's empirical existence. On the contrary, the human being constantly finds itself involved in relations with things which are not itself, but which constitute its negation.[83] The self-identity or I-hood of the human being, therefore exists side by

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80 Cf. Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment*, 96–101.
81 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 148; GA I/3, 29.
82 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 149; GA I/3, 30.
83 Cf. Beiser, "Fichte and the French Revolution", 50.

side with a not-I in the empirically given, external world. If, on the one hand, the human being finds *within* itself the vocation of identity and unity, it on the other hand constantly finds this identity destroyed *outside of* itself.

How can this dilemma be resolved? As Fichte proposes, this can be done if the human being directs his or her activity towards the not-I and seeks to reshape it in the image of his or her reason – by striving to realize in the external world a mirror image of his or her own I or rational essence. The external, non-rational, and mechanical nature must thus be subordinated to the rational activity of the I and brought into harmony with the precepts of reason:

> Man must try to modify these things. He must attempt to bring them into harmony with the pure form of the I, in order that the representation of these things, to the extent that this depends upon the properties of the things, may harmonize with the form of the pure I.[84]

Here, a central aspect of Fichte's concept of vocation emerges, namely that it does not denote an already realized state. Rather, vocation indicates the necessary *direction* towards which a being tends in virtue of its essence. Indeed, for Fichte, it is a crucial point that the human individual cannot in principle fully realize its vocation. Instead, its existence must consist of an unceasing activity that constantly approaches an essentially unreachable horizon.

> Man's final end is to subordinate to himself all that is irrational, to master it freely and according to his own laws. This is a final end which is completely unachievable and must always remain so – so long, that is, as man is to remain man and is not supposed to become God.[85]

This infinite path, then, consists in the human being's seeking to reshape the not-I, nature, or the external world according to its own rational and moral principles. Fichte describes this as turning the not-I into a spiritualized "counter-image" or "counterpart" of the I.[86] But what does this mean in practice? The question is particularly pressing because, for Fichte, the I cannot be the object of empirical experience: it is a transcendental concept that cannot be exhausted in any particular sensualized image. Yet the human being can only strive towards its vocation by bringing the not-I into harmony with the I, so the seemingly impossible task *must* be solved.

This problem is at the centre of Fichte's second lecture. Man, he writes here, has an essential need to behold his own being beyond himself. He can do this only if he encounters, in sense experience, something like himself – something rational that he can think of as constituting its own end. An experience of such a being, however, is the experience of another human being, the intersubjective encounter with a not-I that is at the same time its own I:

> Man also possesses the concepts of reason and of rational action and thought. He necessarily wills, not merely to realize these concepts within himself, but to see them realized outside of him as well. One of the things that man requires is that rational beings like himself should exist outside of him.[87]

At this point Fichte believes that he has demonstrated the human being's need to relate its being to others beyond itself; only in communion with the other can it continue to strive towards its necessary vocation. In other contexts, this relationship is elevated to an even more central position in Fichte's philosophical system. In the *Foundations of Natural Right*, for example, intersubjectivity is shown to be a basic condition for a finite, rational being to be conceivable at all, and thus as a basic condition for all human knowing, thinking and acting as such.[88]

It is precisely this idea that recurs in the lectures on the vocation of the scholar: the human becomes human only in communion with other human beings, and the vocation of man therefore presupposes social relations. Such a relationship is both similar and dissimilar to man's relationship with the not-I or nature. In both cases, the I is faced with something beyond itself, something that it cannot wholly regard as part of itself. In both cases,

84 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 149–150; GA I/3, 30–31.
85 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 152; GA I/3, 32.
86 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 155; GA I/3, 35.
87 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 155; GA I/3, 35–36.
88 Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, 29; GA I/3, 340.

moreover, Fichte argues that this encounter awakens in the I an urge to make the other part of itself, to reshape it according to rational principles. But in the relation to the not-I, this is done by letting one's own reason rule over an external, irrational thing. The relation to another rational being, on the other hand, can only appear as such a relation if the other is recognized as its own end, if it is allowed to exercise its own reason without coercion or external control. This is precisely why philosophy cannot be memorized as a preconceived doctrine; it becomes truly rational only if each person realizes it in him- or herself as his or her own rational activity.

The striving for unity that arises in the encounter with the other is therefore not aimed at abolishing the individuality that separates one person from another. Rather, it aims at making the individuals reciprocally recognize each other as such within a social organization. Thus, Fichte also defines society in general as "the relationship in which rational beings stand to each other."[89]

It is in this conception of interpersonal (or, more generally, intersubjective) relations that Fichte's understanding of the social character of philosophy begins to become clear.[90] If the interpersonal relationship were to be limited to a purely sensual exchange, to the satisfaction of sensual desires and needs, it could not ultimately meet the criteria of a relationship between rational beings. Instead, such a relationship is at hand only when people relate to each other *as* rational or thinking – when they exchange *thoughts* with each other and enter into a dialogical community. For Fichte, one of the essential characteristics of society is thus that it enables a rational and spiritual exchange. The free exchange of ideas, he writes in his *Freedom of Thought* essay, is "the sweetest commerce of mankind, the free and happy giving and taking of the noblest things they have".[91] The concept of society is thus realized only when the activity of reason in the individual unites with the corresponding activity in the other. But, conversely, reason cannot be realized as an ascetic activity of the individual. Rather, society is the expression of its gradual realization, of every human's striving to achieve its vocation as a rational being. Philosophy must therefore address itself to society and constitute its rational, dialogical basis.

4.3 The Unique Task of the Scholar

From this, it seems obvious that philosophy cannot possibly be the exclusive concern of the scholarly community. Rather, its essential truths must concern every rational being. This is even more clearly emphasized by the centrality of intersubjectivity in Fichte's system. If the rational being can only realize itself as such in the encounter with other rational beings, then philosophy can satisfy rational ends only given the possibility of its being communicated.

With this we have thus reconstructed Fichte's argument for the social task of philosophy, which for him is synonymous with its necessary striving to be realized as a lived activity. But as we have seen, Fichte simultaneously maintains that scientific philosophy is *not* always intended for the popular majority. On the contrary, he argues, it must in a certain sense be reserved for those who devote their lives to science. To get to the bottom of his understanding of philosophy's popularity, we must examine how he justifies this position.

As we have seen, Fichte understands philosophy as grounded in the human spirit. This spirit, he further argues, consists of "activity and nothing but activity". As the science of the human spirit, philosophy is therefore concerned with "[spirit's] acts, for it contains nothing else with which one could become acquainted."[92]

For Fichte, an action is conditioned by its directionality towards an object. In general, however, the activity tends toward something beyond itself, toward an *external* object given in empirical life. Therefore, spirit often acts without being aware of its own activity, and it can express itself without clearly realizing how this is done. This is the case, for example, in art, where the artist may well be unaware of the spiritual force working in and through him or her.

89 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 153–154; GA I/3, 34.
90 Cf. Beiser, "Fichte and the French Revolution", 52.
91 Fichte, *Reclamation*, 127.
92 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 200; GA II/3, 325.

> We are only indirectly conscious of our own acting. We are conscious of it only by means of the object of our acting, that is, through the object upon which we act. We are never conscious of acting as such, and on account of the laws governing the human mind we could never be conscious of this.[93]

In philosophy, however, spirit makes *spirit itself* into its object. For Fichte, we cannot be immediately aware of the pure activity of the spirit, but philosophy is able to convey it through the act he calls reflection:

> The only way we can become conscious of the action of our own mind is if *this action* of which we wish to become conscious is acted on *in turn*, that is, becomes the object of an action called "reflection." When I entertain a representation of the physical world, all that I am conscious of is the physical world. The only way that I can become conscious of *my own activity* qua representing is by entertaining a representation of *my activity of representing* the physical world. In doing so, I stand upon a higher level; I reflect upon my own activity, which is present within my representation.[94]

Reflection, however, is at the same time an abstraction – through it, the external object recedes into the background so that action itself can come to the fore: "I am unable to reflect without *abstracting*, because I cannot be conscious of two clear representations at the same time."[95] There is a striking similarity here between Fichte's conception of philosophy and 20th-century phenomenology. Translated into the language of phenomenology, we could describe Fichte's philosophical method as an *epoché* of the external world, whereby the intentional directionality of the spirit towards it is made visible.

Importantly, this implies a certain kind of philosophical *withdrawal* from empirical life and its preoccupation with external things.[96] The philosopher does not, of course, cease to belong to this life and this external world, but in his or her philosophizing, he or she nevertheless directs his or her attention away from it. One cannot, in one and the same spiritual act, be absorbed by the external world and conscious of one's own activity in the relation to the external world. This also means that the human individual, as a finite being, cannot be *exclusively* a philosopher – philosophy can take place only through a temporary withdrawal from the things that occupy the individual in its everyday reality. Importantly, Fichte takes this to open up the possibility that not everyone can be a philosopher at all. Let us now move on to his reasoning about this division of philosophy as a social task.

4.4 The Class of the Scholars

In his description of society, Fichte starts from reason's quest for unity with itself. The ultimate purpose of society is therefore "*the complete equality of all of its members*."[97] But in reality, Fichte goes on, this equality must be realized through a simultaneous division. Since man is a *finite* rational being, each individual must also differ in several respects from every other. The human being is embodied, and thus possesses unique, personal experiences of itself and the world around it. It is also mortal, and thus its capacity for action and activity is temporally limited in a way that also distinguishes it from its fellow human beings.

I-hood cannot, therefore, be exhaustively realized on the individual level. Rather, the individual participates in I-hood precisely by sharing it with other people. This sharing therefore also allows for a *division* in which each individual works for a particular purpose and leaves other purposes to other people. In this way, community and cooperation can lead to a refinement of each individual endeavor that would be impossible for the single citizen. Society therefore presupposes what Fichte calls a division of classes.

In the fourth lecture, Fichte finally arrives at the special social class he calls the scholars. He ascribes to this class a particularly worthy task, namely that of linking the partial aspirations of every other class to the concept of man's vocation and highest purpose in general. The unique role of the scholar consists in connecting the particular to the universal, in investigating how every given state and purpose of human society relates to I-hood as such.

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93 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 201; GA II/3, 325.
94 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 201; GA II/3, 325.
95 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 201–202; GA II/3, 326.
96 Cf. Breazeale, *Thinking Through the "Wissenschaftslehre"*, 127.
97 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 163; GA I/3, 44.

Since man is a finite being, this task cannot be incumbent on every individual. Therefore, the individual must decide on an activity towards which it wishes to direct its worldly existence. To be a philosopher is a *special* calling, a *special* task which, although it is founded in man's vocation in general, does not necessarily belong to every rational being to the same degree. The scholar, Fichte writes, is a scholar only by distinguishing himself from other social classes.[98]

At the same time, however, Fichte consistently understands the vocation of the scholar as directed towards the progress of society and the universal realization of freedom. In this respect, the conception is unmistakably in line with the ideal of the scholar that had emerged within the framework of eclectic philosophy. For Fichte, as for Thomasius, the philosopher is the educator, enlightener and teacher of society. Only by connecting their thinking with the needs and purposes of humanity can the philosophers find a justification for their speculative endeavors. But as we have seen, Fichte differs from the popular-philosophical tradition in that he does not see a conflict between the socially oriented task of philosophy and its tendency towards a transcendental sphere beyond possible experience. On the contrary, the task of philosophy in relation to society consists in *conveying* experience with its transcendental conditions and in showing how man's empirical existence is founded in a principle that is not contained in the empirical realm itself. And the principle which must determine the organization of society can only be seen through the turning of reflection from the sphere of empirical life.

4.5 Sense and Sensibility

But how can the philosopher go about communicating this principle to those who are not themselves scholars? In answering this question, Fichte expresses an innovative position in the popularization debate – a position that differs both from the popular philosophers and from the earlier defenders of school philosophy.

For the popular philosophers, the key to the dissemination of philosophy was that it was confined to experience and could give rise to clear, immediately applicable rules of life. The popular philosophers did not generally see an irresolvable conflict between this task and the esoteric or scholastic value of philosophy. But when the professional philosophers communicated their doctrines, they should, in their view, present the results of thorough investigation without detailing the intricate path leading to them. The use of reason and understanding was no doubt important to the popular philosophers, but just as important was that philosophy address the sensibilities, the *feelings*, of the public.

Fichte discounts several central aspects of this vision as unsatisfactory. If the popular value of philosophy were thus reduced to its results, it would take precisely the form of dead letter-knowledge rather than living and spiritual knowledge – it would become nothing more than a cookbook or arithmetic book. Moreover, if philosophy confines itself to the sphere of experience, it fails to reveal the higher spiritual reality in which man's true vocation lies.

But Fichte nevertheless believes that there is a way for philosophical teachings to spread to non-philosophers, and this way is in fact related to one of the central popular-philosophical concepts: that of feeling.[99] Unlike the popular philosophers, however, Fichte ties this concept to the transcendental vocation of the human spirit.

As we have seen, Fichte describes philosophy as the self-examination of spirit, as an action in which the action itself is reflexively made into an object. Philosophy therefore becomes an expression of spirit's self-examining self-consciousness. But spirit is also expressed in a variety of activities that are not strictly philosophical. And when spirit is confronted with such an activity – or with its sensualized, objectified results – it is able immediately

98 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 146; GA I/3, 27.

99 The similarity here does not concern the interpretation of the concept of feeling itself: Fichte's understanding of it differs significantly from the more empiricist popular philosophers whose use of it was inspired by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. The important similarity is to be found, rather, in the context where the concept of feeling is activated, namely the context of how philosophy can be disseminated to non-philosophers. – The role of feeling in Fichte's philosophy is discussed, among others, by Ivaldo, "Die Rolle der Einbildungskraft in Fichtes Überlegungen über Geist und Buchstaben", 110–111;Ware, "Feeling, Drive and the Lower Capacity of Desire"; Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 106 (here with reference to Hutcheson, who exercised an influence on the German popular philosophers), 145–147, 160.

to recognize its experience precisely as spiritual. Thus, the beholding of a work of art can constitute a spiritual experience even for the non-artist – and so, too, can a philosophical doctrine reverberate in the spirit of the person confronted with it. This experience is precisely what Fichte refers to as feeling – and feeling, therefore, opens up for the communication of philosophy that is not strictly scholastic-systematic.

This idea recurs in several places in Fichte's lectures on the vocation of the scholar. In the introduction, he describes how scientific philosophy is based on the absolute positive proposition "I am".[100] However, this proposition cannot be developed in the context of the broader public lectures. Instead, Fichte chooses to "propose a hypothetical proposition, one which is indelibly etched in human feeling." [101] Similarly, he states that philosophy is necessary "for a clear, distinct, and complete insight into this vocation [of man]," but that it is not necessary for "a feeling of it".[102]

For Fichte, popularization does therefore not signify a public use of reason understood in the form of common sense. Nor is it a matter of disseminating the results of thorough philosophical investigations in the form of ready-made instructions applicable without the need for deeper understanding. In this case, popular philosophy would be a solidified product rather than the activity of reason – and from Fichte's point of view, it would therefore not be alive or productive. Rather, the pedagogical task of the philosopher consists in appealing to the sensibility of the public and creating a resonance in the human mind – a resonance that at the same time calls for activity, action, and ceaseless self-development in freedom.

5 Summary: Fichte's Idealism as a Systematic Idea of Philosophical Life

In Hadot's historical account, systematic school philosophy is contrasted against a practical philosophy of life. Hadot regards the latter conception of philosophy as characteristic of ancient, the former of modern thought. At the same time, however, he is careful to emphasize that the idea of philosophy as life practice was never erased. Not least the Enlightenment and its notions of public reasoning are highlighted as examples of the continuous survival of this idea.

Although Hadot himself does not explicitly discuss the German eclectic and popular-philosophical tradition, it is easy to see how the German Enlightenment fits his description. In fact, several German Enlightenment thinkers themselves described the historical development of philosophy along similar lines: for them, scholasticism constituted an abandonment of the proper, life-oriented task of ancient philosophy. Like Hadot, they contrasted the systematic claims and logically oriented structure of scholasticism with the immediacy and applicability of ancient wisdom.

For the popular philosophers, idealism could therefore appear only as another form of scholasticism. In Kant's criticism, and even more so in the intricate systems of post-Kantian idealists, they saw an abandonment of philosophy's proper task of providing man with useful rules of conduct to apply in his lived experience.

But the idealists themselves did not accept this dichotomy. Rather, their ambition was to reach beyond the dichotomy as such, to construct a bridge between systematic philosophy and philosophy of life. The field of transcendental philosophy could, in their view, for the first time establish and fully illuminate the practical issues in which the popular philosophers were so invested.

This conception is present already in Kant and Reinhold, but plays an even more central role in the thought of Fichte. For Fichte, popular philosophy is ultimately guilty of the same mistake as traditional school philosophy. He shares the popular-philosophical criticism that traditional scholastic philosophy remains blind to the practical interests of man. Hence, his *Wissenschaftslehre* constantly points to the need for a practical principle as the basis of theoretical knowledge. The nature of knowledge can only be understood, he argues, if we understand the being *for whom* knowledge is urgent to investigate – and this being can, in turn, only be understood if we gain insight

100 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 148; GA I/3, 29.
101 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 148; GA I/3, 29. Cf. Breazeale, *Thinking Through the 'Wissenschaftslehre'*, 113.
102 Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 147; GA I/3, 28.

into the practical interest that leads it to *want* knowledge. Both the will and the striving for the realm of the ethical are therefore always implicitly given in seemingly disinterested theoretical thought.

But, conversely, the question of practical interest cannot be exhaustively answered if the inquiry is arbitrarily limited to man's empirical experience. The highest good must rather be understood as the condition of possibility of experience, its transcendental basis. Thus, Fichte rejects the idea that popular philosophy can be separated from scholastic-scientific thought and understood independently of it. The distinction between popular and scientific philosophy, Fichte argues, should certainly not be dissolved – but the boundary between them must be thought of as dynamic in the sense that it must be constantly crossed.

As I hope to have shown in this article, Fichte can thus be read as proposing a solution to a problem first expressed by the eclectics and popular philosophers. Furthermore, his solution makes use of a central conception in the thought of Thomasius and later popularizers, namely that of feeling. This is not to claim a general harmony between Thomasius's and Fichte's philosophies. Doubtlessly there are fundamental differences between their theories of knowledge, ethics, political philosophy, or any other philosophical subdiscipline. But my intention has not been to compare their stances on these disciplines in particular, for example to contrast Thomasius's ideas on virtues to Fichte's system of ethics. Rather, I claim that there is a historical continuity in their *metaphilosophical* endeavours. On the level of conceiving the philosopher's vocation in society, I maintain that Fichte's thought can most fruitfully be understood if it is situated in the context of the Enlightenment tradition stretching back to Thomasian eclecticism.

Fichte is no uncritical follower of this tradition. He is a transcendental critic of it, examining and developing what he takes to be its *a priori* grounds and adhering to what he himself could have called its 'spirit' without following its 'letter'. This is evident not least in his concept of feeling as such, to which he ascribes a transcendental function that cannot be found among the popular philosophers. In this respect, then, Fichte's philosophy is neither an abandonment of the ideal of philosophical practice nor a return to an ancient tradition. Rather, his goal is to find a new concept of the philosophical life.

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