

opinion that I have been writing merely in jest; the other judges of my *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* appear to have taken a similar view; so lightly do they treat the matter, and so facetious are their objections, as though it was their duty to answer one joke with another.

Having found, after three revisions of this system, that each time my thoughts about individual parts of it were altered, I may expect that on further consideration they will continue to change and renew themselves. For myself, I shall work most diligently to that end, and every usable suggestion from others will be welcome to me. —More, indeed, for however complete my conviction that the foundations of this whole system are unassailable, and however strongly I have here and there expressed this conviction—as I was quite entitled to—it remains nonetheless a possibility (though to be sure I cannot as yet imagine it), that they might after all be overthrown. Even this I should welcome, since truth would be the gainer thereby. Let my critics go to work on these foundations, and try to bring them down.

As to the true nature of my system, and the possible modes of classifying it, whether as the truly thorough-going criticism which I believe it to be, or as whatever else one wants to call it, that is nothing to the purpose. I have no doubt that many names will be found for it, and that a variety of mutually contradictory heresies will be imputed to it. The world may do this; only let them not rebuke me with old refutations, but refute me themselves.

Jena  
Easter tide 1795.

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## Part I

### FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE ENTIRE SCIENCE OF KNOWLEDGE

#### § 1. FIRST, ABSOLUTELY UNCONDITIONED PRINCIPLE.

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Our task is to *discover* the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge. This can be neither *proved* nor *defined*, if it is to be an absolutely primary principle.

It is intended to express that *Act* which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible.<sup>1</sup> In describing this *Act*, there is less risk that anyone will perhaps, thereby *fail* to think what he should—the nature of our mind has already taken care of that—than that he will thereby think what he should not. This makes it necessary to *reflect* on what one might at first sight take it to be, and to *abstract* from everything that does not really belong to it.

Not even by means of this abstracting reflection can anything become a fact of consciousness which is inherently no such fact; but it will be recognized thereby that we must necessarily *think* this *Act* as the basis of all consciousness.

The laws (of common logic) whereby one must straightway think this *Act* as the foundation of human knowledge, or—what amounts to the same thing—the rules whereby this reflection is initiated, have not yet been proved to be valid, but are tacitly assumed to be familiar and established. Only at a later point will they be derived from that proposition whose assertion is warranted only if they are warranted also. This is a circle, though an

<sup>1</sup>This has been overlooked by all who insist at this point, either that what the first proposition asserts is *not included* among the facts of consciousness, or that it *contradicts* them.

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unavoidable one. (cf. *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*, § 7). But since it is unavoidable, and openly acknowledged, we may appeal to all the laws of common logic even in establishing the highest fundamental principle.

In proceeding to the required reflection, we must set out from some proposition that everyone will grant us without dispute. And there should doubtless be many such. Reflection is free; and it matters not from whence it starts. We choose that which offers us the shortest road to our goal.

So soon as this proposition is conceded, we must simultaneously be granted, as an Act, what we seek to set at the basis of the whole Science of Knowledge. And reflection must confirm that this Act is granted as such *along with the proposition*. Let any fact of empirical consciousness be proposed; and let one empirical feature after another be detached from it, until all that remains is what cannot any longer be dismissed, and from which nothing further can be detached.

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1. The proposition *A is A* (or  $A = A$ ), since that is the meaning of the logical copula) is accepted by everyone and that without a moment's thought: it is admitted to be perfectly certain and established.

Yet if anyone were to demand a proof of this proposition, we should certainly not embark on anything of the kind, but would insist that it is *absolutely* certain, that is, *without any other ground*; and in so saying—doubtless with general approval—we should be ascribing to ourselves the power of *asserting something absolutely*.

2. In insisting that the above proposition is intrinsically certain we are *not* asserting that *A is the case*. The proposition *A is A* is by no means equivalent to *A exists*, or *there is an A*. (*To be*, without a predicate attached, means something quite different from 'to be' with a predicate; of which more anon.) If we suppose that *A* signifies a space enclosed by two straight lines, the first proposition still remains perfectly true; though the proposition that *A exists* would obviously be false.

On the contrary, what we are saying is: *If A exists, then A exists*. Hence there is simply no question here as to *whether A*

actually exists or not. It is a matter, not of the *content* of the proposition, but simply of its *form*; not of that *about which* you know something, but of *what* you know about anything at all, whatever it may be.

Thus in claiming that the above proposition is absolutely certain, what is established is that between that *if* and this *then* there is a necessary connection; and it is the *necessary connection between the two* that is posited *absolutely*, and *without any other ground*. To this necessary connection I give the preliminary designation X.

3. But with respect to A itself we have thereby said nothing, as yet, as to *whether* it exists or not. Hence the question arises: Under what condition, then, *does A exist*?

a) X is at least *in* the self, and posited *by* the self, for it is the self which judges in the above proposition, and indeed judges according to X, as a law; which law must therefore be given to the self, and since it is posited absolutely and without any other ground, must be given to the self by itself alone.

b) *Whether*, and *how*, A is actually posited we do not know: but since X is supposed to designate a connection between an unknown positing of A and an absolute assertion of that same A, on the strength of the first positing, then *at least so far as this connection is posited*, A is *in* the self and posited *by* the self, just as X is. X is possible only in relation to an A; now X is really present in the self: and so A must also be present in the self, insofar as X is related to it.

c) X is related to that A which occupies the logical position of subject in the foregoing proposition, just as it also is to that which stands as predicate; for both are united by X. Both, therefore, so far as they are posited, are posited in the self; and given that the A in the subject position is asserted, that in the predicate is asserted absolutely; hence the above proposition can also be expressed as follows: if A is posited *in the self*, it is thereby *posited*, or, it thereby *is*.

4. Thus the self asserts, by means of X, that *A exists absolutely for the judging self, and that simply in virtue of its being posited in the self as such*; which is to say, it is asserted that within the

self—whether it be specifically positing, or judging, or whatever it may be—there is something that is permanently uniform, forever one and the same; and hence the X that is absolutely posited can also be expressed as  $I = I$ ;  $I$  am  $I$ .

5. By this operation we have already arrived unnoticed at the proposition: *I am* (as the expression, not of an *Act*, to be sure, but nonetheless of a *fact*).

For X is posited absolutely; that is a *fact* of empirical consciousness. But now X is equivalent to the proposition 'I am I'; hence this, too, is asserted absolutely.

But the proposition 'I am I' has a meaning wholly different from that of 'A is A'. For the latter has content only under a certain condition. If A is posited, it is naturally posited as A, as having the predicate A. But this proposition still tells us nothing as to *whether* it actually is posited, and hence whether it is posited with any particular predicate. Yet the proposition 'I am I' is unconditionally and absolutely valid, since it is equivalent to the proposition  $X^2$ ; it is valid not merely in form but also in content. In it the I is posited, not conditionally, but absolutely, with the predicate of equivalence to itself; hence it really is posited, and the proposition can also be expressed as *I am*.

This proposition, 'I am', has so far been founded merely on a fact and has no more than factual validity. Should the proposition  $A = A$  be certain (or, more precisely, what is absolutely posited therein, namely X), then the proposition 'I am' must also be certain. Now it is a fact of empirical consciousness that we are constrained to regard X as absolutely certain; and so too with the proposition 'I am', on which X is founded. Hence it is a ground of explanation of all the facts of empirical consciousness, that prior to all postulation in the self, the self itself is posited. —(I say of all the facts: and this depends on proof of the proposition, that X is the highest fact of empirical consciousness, underlying and contained in all others; which might well be conceded without any

<sup>71.e.</sup> in plain language: I, who posit A in the predicate position, necessarily know, because *the same was posited in the subject position*, about my positing of the subject, and hence know myself, again contemplate myself, am the same with myself.

proof, even though the whole Science of Knowledge is occupied in proving it).

6. We return to the point from which we started.

a) The proposition 'A = A' constitutes a *judgment*. But all judgment, so empirical consciousness tells us, is an activity of the human mind; for in empirical self-consciousness it has all the conditions of activity which must be presupposed as known and established for purposes of reflection.

b) Now this activity is based on something that rests on no more ultimate ground, namely  $X = I$  am.

c) Hence what is *absolutely posited*, and *founded on itself*, is the ground of *one particular activity* (and, as the whole Science of Knowledge will show, of *all activity*) of the human mind, and thus of its pure character: the pure character of activity as such, in abstraction from its specific empirical conditions.

The self's own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity. The self *posits itself*, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it *exists*; and conversely, the self *exists* and *posits* its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action and deed are one and the same, and hence the 'I am' expresses an Act, and the only one possible, as will inevitably appear from the Science of Knowledge as a whole.

7. Now let us consider once more the proposition 'I am I'.

a) The I is posited absolutely. Let it be assumed that what is *absolutely posited* is the I occupying the place of formal subject<sup>72</sup> in the above proposition; while that in the predicate position represents that which *exists*; hence, the absolutely valid judgment that

<sup>72</sup>This, at all events, is what the logical form of every proposition tells us. In the proposition 'A = A', the first A is that which is posited in the self, either absolutely, like the self itself, or on some other ground, like any given not-self. In this matter the self behaves as absolute subject; and hence the first A is called the subject. The second A designates what the self, reflecting upon itself, discovers to be present in itself, because it has first set this within itself. The judging self predicates something, not really of A, but of itself, namely that there is an A in it; and hence the second A is called the predicate. —Thus in the proposition 'A = B', A designates what is now being posited; B what is already encountered as posited. —It expresses the passage of the self from positing to reflection on what has been posited.

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both are completely identical, states, or absolutely asserts, that the self exists because it has posited itself.

b) The self in the first sense, and that in the second, are supposed to be absolutely equivalent. Hence one can also reverse the above proposition and say: the self posits itself simply because it exists. It *posits* itself by merely existing and *exists* by merely being posited.

And this now makes it perfectly clear in what sense we are using the word 'I' in this context, and leads us to an exact account of the self as absolute subject. *That whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing*, is the self as absolute subject. As it *posits* itself, so it *is*; and as it *is*, so it *posits* itself; and hence the self is absolute and necessary for the self. What does not exist for itself is not a self.

(To explain: one certainly hears the question proposed: *What* was I, then, before I came to self-consciousness? The natural reply is: *I* did not exist at all; for I was not a self. The self exists only insofar as it is conscious of itself. The possibility of this question is based on a confusion between the self as *subject*, and the self as *object* of reflection for an absolute subject, and is in itself utterly improper. The self presents itself to itself, to that extent imposes on itself the form of a presentation, and is now for the first time a *something*, namely an object; in this form consciousness acquires a substrate, which *exists*, even though without real consciousness, and thought of, moreover, in bodily form. People conceive of some such situation as this, and ask: *What* was the self at that time, *i.e.*, what is the substrate of consciousness? But in so doing they think unawares of the *absolute subject as well*, as contemplating this substrate; and thus they unwittingly subjoin in thought the very thing from which they have allegedly abstracted, and contradict themselves. You cannot think at all without subjoining in thought your self, as conscious of itself; from your self-consciousness you can never abstract; hence all questions of the above type call for no answer, for a real understanding of oneself would preclude their being asked.)

8. If the self exists only insofar as it posits itself, then it exists only for that which posits, and posits only for that which exists.

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*The self exists for the self*—but if it posits itself absolutely, as it is, then it posits itself as necessary, and is necessary for the self. *I exist only for myself; but for myself I am necessary* (in saying 'for myself', I already posit my existence).

9. *To posit oneself and to be* are, as applied to the self, perfectly identical. Thus the proposition, 'I am, because I have posited myself' can also be stated as: '*I am absolutely, because I am*'.

Furthermore, the self-positing self and the existing self are perfectly identical, one and the same. The self is that *which* it posits itself to be; and it posits itself as *that* which it is. Hence *I am absolutely what I am*.

10. The Act now unfolded may be given immediate expression in the following formula: *I am absolutely, i.e., I am absolutely BECAUSE I am; and am absolutely what I am, both FOR THE SELF*.

If the account of this Act is to be viewed as standing at the forefront of a Science of Knowledge, it will have to be expressed somewhat as follows: *The self begins by an absolute positing of its own existence.*<sup>4</sup>

We started from the proposition  $A = A$ ; not as if the proposition 'I am' could be deduced therefrom, but because we had to start from something given with *certainly* in empirical consciousness. But it actually appeared in our discussion that it is not the 'I am' that is based on ' $A = A$ ' but rather that the latter proposition is based on the former.

If we abstract from 'I am' the specific content, namely the self, and are left with the mere form that is given with this content, *the form of an inference from being posited to being*, as for purposes of logic we are compelled to do (cf. *Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*, § 6), we then obtain ' $A = A$ ' as the *basic proposition of logic*, which can be demonstrated and determined only through the Science of Knowledge. *Demonstrated*, in that A

<sup>4</sup>To put all this in other words, which I have elsewhere employed: *the self* is a necessary identity of subject and object: a subject-object; and is so absolutely, without further mediation. This, I say, is what it means; though this proposition has not been so readily understood as one might have thought, or weighed according to its high importance, which, prior to the Science of Knowledge, has been treated with utter neglect; so that the preceding discussion of it cannot be dispensed with. [Note of 1802, Tr.]

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is A, because the self that has posited A is identical with that in which A has been posited; *determined*, in that everything that exists does so only insofar as it is posited in the self, and apart from the self there is nothing. No possible A in the above proposition (no *thing*) can be anything other than something posited in the self.

By making a further abstraction from judging, as a specific activity, and having regard only to the general *mode* of action of the human mind that this form presents, we obtain the *category of reality*. Everything to which the proposition 'A = A' is applicable, has reality, *insofar as that proposition is applicable to it*. Whatever is posited in virtue of the simple positing of some thing (an item posited in the self) is the reality, or essence, of that thing.

(The scepticism of Maimon is ultimately based on the question of our right to apply the category of reality. This right can be derived from no other—we are absolutely entitled thereto. The fact is, rather, that all other possible rights must be derived from this; and even Maimon's scepticism inadvertently presupposes it, in that he acknowledges the correctness of ordinary logic.—But we can point out something from which every category is itself derived: the self, as absolute subject. Of every other possible thing to which it may be applied, it has to be shown that reality is transferred to it *from the self*:—that it would have to exist, provided that the self exists.)

That our proposition is the absolutely basic principle of all knowledge, was pointed out by Kant, in his deduction of the categories; but he never laid it down specifically as the basic principle. *Descartes*, before him, put forward a similar proposition: *cogito, ergo sum*—which need not have been merely the minor premise and conclusion of a syllogism, with the major premise: *quodcumque cogitat est*; for he may very well have regarded it as an immediate datum of consciousness. It would then amount to *cogitans sum, ergo sum* (or as we should say, *sum, ergo sum*). But in that case the addition of *cogitans* is entirely superfluous; we do not necessarily think when we exist, but we necessarily exist whenever we think. Thinking is by no means the essence, but merely a specific determination of existence; and our

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existence has many other determinations besides this.—*Reinhold* put forward the principle of representation, and in Cartesian form his basic proposition would run: *represento, ergo sum*, or more properly: *representans sum, ergo sum*. He makes a notable advance over *Descartes*; but if his intention is to establish simply knowledge itself, and not merely a propaedeutic to the same, it is not enough; for even representation is not the essence of existence, but a specific determination thereof; and our existence has still other determinations besides this, *even though they must pass through the medium of representation, in order to attain to empirical consciousness*.

Our principle has been overstepped, in the sense ascribed to it, by *Spinoza*. He does not deny the unity of empirical consciousness, but pure consciousness he completely rejects. On his view, the whole series of presentations in an empirical subject is related to the one pure subject as a single presentation is to a series. For him the self (what he calls *his self*, or what I call *mine*) does not exist absolutely *because* it exists; but because *something else* exists.—The self is certainly a self *for* itself, in his theory, but he goes on to ask what it would be for something other than the self. Such an 'other' would equally be a self, of which the posited self (e.g. *mine*) and all other selves that might be posited would be modifications. He separates *pure* and *empirical* consciousness. The first he attributes to God, who is never conscious of himself, since pure consciousness never attains to consciousness; the second he locates in the specific modifications of the Deity. So established, his system is perfectly consistent and irrefutable, since he takes his stand in a territory where reason can no longer follow him; but it is also groundless; for what right did he have to go beyond the pure consciousness given in empirical consciousness?—It is easy enough to see what impelled him to his system, namely the necessary endeavor to bring about the highest unity in human cognition. This unity is present in his system, and the error of it is merely that he thought to deduce on grounds of theoretical reason what he was driven to merely by a practical need; that he claimed to have established something as truly given, when he was merely setting up an appointed, but never attainable, ideal.

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We shall encounter his highest unity again in the Science of Knowledge; though not as something that *exists*, but as something that we *ought to*, and yet *cannot*, achieve. — I further observe, that if we go beyond the *I am*, we necessarily arrive at Spinozism (that, when fully thought out, the system of Leibniz is nothing other than Spinozism, is shown in a valuable essay by Solomon Maimon: *Über die Progressen der Philosophie, etc.*); and that there are only two completely consistent systems: the *critical*, which recognizes this boundary, and the *Spinozistic*, which oversteps it.

§ 2. SECOND PRINCIPLE, CONDITIONED AS TO CONTENT.

The same reason which made it impossible either to prove or derive the first principle also applies to the second. Here then, as before, we proceed from a fact of empirical consciousness, and deal with it, on the same terms, in a similar fashion.

1. The proposition that ' $\sim A$  is not equal to  $A$ ' will undoubtedly be accepted by everyone as perfectly certain and established, and it is hardly to be expected that anyone should demand proof of it.
2. Yet, if such a proof were possible, it could not be derived in our system (whose inherent correctness still remains problematic, indeed, until the science is completed) from anything else but the proposition that ' $A = A$ '.
3. No such proof is in fact possible. For assuming, at the utmost, that the above proposition were equivalent to ' $\sim A = \sim A$ ' (and hence that ' $\sim A$  is identical with some  $Y$  posited in the self), and that it were now to amount to: 'if the opposite of  $A$  is posited, then it is posited', we should then be asserting absolutely the same connection ( $= X$ ) as before; and it would in no sense be a proposition derived from and proved by means of ' $A = A$ ', but just that very proposition itself. . . . (And hence, too, the form of this proposition, so far as it is a purely logical proposition, is really comprehended under the highest of forms, the condition of *having form* at all, namely, the unity of consciousness).

4. But this has no bearing whatsoever on the question: Is the opposite of  $A$  posited, and under what condition of the *form of mere action* is it posited as such? It is this condition which would have had to be derived from ' $A = A$ ', if the foregoing proposition were itself to be considered a derived one. But such a condition simply cannot be obtained from ' $A = A$ ', since the form of counterpositing is so far from being contained in that of positing, that in fact it is flatly opposed to this. Hence it is an absolute and unconditional opposition.  $\sim A$  is posited absolutely, *as such*, just because it is posited.

As certainly, therefore, as the proposition ' $\sim A$  is not equal to  $A$ ' occurs among the facts of empirical consciousness, there is thus an opposition included among the acts of the self; and this opposition is, as to its mere *form*, an absolutely possible and unconditional act based on no higher ground.

(The *logical* form of the proposition *as such* (if stated in the form ' $\sim A = \sim A$ ') presupposes the identity of subject and predicate (i.e., of the *presenting* self, and the self *presented as presenting*: cf. note p. 99). But even the possibility of counterpositing itself presupposes the identity of consciousness; and the procedure of the self in acting thus is properly as follows:  $A$  (absolutely posited) =  $A$  (the object of reflection). By an absolute act this  $A$ , as object of reflection, is opposed to  $\sim A$ , and this latter is judged to be also opposed to the absolutely posited  $A$ , since both  $A$ 's are the same: a likeness based (§ 1) on the identity of the positing and the reflecting self. — It is further presupposed that the self which acts in *both* cases, and judges in both, is the same. If it could be opposed to itself in the two acts,  $\sim A$  would be equal to  $A$ . Hence even the transition from positing to counterpositing is possible only through the identity of the self).

5. By means, therefore, and only by means, of this absolute act, the opposite is posited, so far as it is *opposed* (as a mere contrary in general). Every opposite, so far as it is so, is so absolutely, by virtue of an act of the self, and for no other reason. Opposition in general is posited absolutely by the self.
6. If any  $\sim A$  is to be posited, an  $A$  must be posited. Hence the act of opposing is also conditioned in another respect. Whether such an act is possible at all, depends on another act; hence the act is