



What is the Wissenschaftslehre? Fichte's Berlin Philosophy

Matthew Nini

*Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg-
im-Breisgau*

The work of J.G. Fichte (1762-1814) can be summarized in one word: *Wissenschaftslehre* (*WL*). This neologism represents the name that Fichte gave to his philosophical system, continually revised and extended in the works that bear it as their title. In all, there are some seventeen versions of the *WL*. Varying in form, structure, and style, each of these is a unique philosophical work. In particular, Fichte's *WL* is often seen as being divided into two periods: those produced in Jena before the turn of the century, and those in Berlin after 1800. Using one of the most robust and comprehensive versions of the *WL*, I would like to argue that while Fichte's Berlin period does indeed do something new, addressing concerns and making arguments that were not made in Jena, it is still a version of the same system. Every version of the

WL is grounded in a deceptively simple insight: that conscious and self-conscious are inseparable in the act of knowing. In every version of *WL*, Fichte will expand this insight into a transcendental argument and deploy it in order to meet some philosophical challenge. In 1804, this transcendental argument is faced with its greatest challenge yet: the reconciliation of being and knowing in human consciousness. Addressing this question is facilitated by a key realization, one first present in the 1804 *WL*: that language is not external to the foundational insight, but itself part of its unfolding: in other words, to ask "*What is the WL?*" means that one is already doing it. This will lead Fichte to deepen the structure of his transcendental argument to include an element of self-awareness. In this way, the philosophical exercise that is *WL* is one whose conclusions coincide with its performance.

Matthew Nini received a PhD from McGill University in Montreal, Canada. He is currently postdoctoral research fellow at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg-im-Breisgau. His book "Fichte in Berlin" will appear in April 2024 with McGill-Queen's University Press.