APPENDIX: THE SO-CALLED 'OLDEST SYSTEM PROGRAMME OF GERMAN IDEALISM' (1796)

recto

An Ethics. As the whole of metaphysics will in future come under *Morality* – of which Kant only gave an *example* with his two practical postulates and *exhausted* nothing, this ethics will be nothing but a complete system of all Ideas, or, which is the same, of all practical postulates. The first Idea is naturally the notion of *my self* as an absolutely free being. With the free self-conscious being [*Wesen*] a whole *world* emerges at the same time – out of nothing – the only true and thinkable *creation from nothing* – Here I will descend to the fields of physics; the question is this: how must a world be for a moral being? I should like to give wings again to our physics which is progressing slowly and laboriously via experiments.

Thus – if philosophy gives the Ideas and experience the data we can finally achieve the grand physics which I expect from later epochs. It does not appear that our present physics could satisfy a creative spirit which is like ours, or like ours should be.

From nature I come to *human activity* [*Menschenwerk*]. Putting the Idea of humanity first – I want to show that there is no Idea of the *State* because the state is something *mechanical*, just as little as there is an Idea of a *machine*.

Only that which is an object of *freedom* is called an *Idea*. We must, then, also go beyond the state! – For every state must treat free people as a piece of machinery; and it should not do this; thus it must *come to an end*.

You can see yourselves that here all the Ideas, of eternal peace etc. are only *subordinate* Ideas of a higher Idea. At the same time I want here to establish the principles for a *History of Mankind* and to completely expose the whole miserable human creation of state, constitution, government, legislature. Finally come the Ideas of a moral world, divinity, immortality – the upturning of all superstition, the pursuit of the priesthood, which has recently been feigning reason, by reason itself. – Absolute freedom of all spirits who bear the intelligible [*intellektuelle*] world in themselves, and may not seek either God or immortality *outside themselves*.

Finally the Idea which unites all, the Idea of *beauty*, the word taken in the higher platonic sense. I am now convinced that the highest act of reason, which embraces all Ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that *truth and goodness* are brothers *only in beauty* – The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power

verso

as the poet [*Dichter*]. People without aesthetic sense are our pedantic philosophers [*BuchstabenPhilosophen*]. The philosophy of spirit is an aesthetic philosophy. One cannot be spiritual [*geistreich*] in anything, one cannot even reason spiritually about history – without aesthetic sense. It should here become apparent what it is that people lack who understand no Ideas – and admit faithfully enough that everything is a mystery to them as soon as it goes beyond charts and registers.

Poetry thereby gains a higher dignity, at the end it again becomes what it was at the beginning – *teacher of (History) Mankind*; for there is no philosophy, no history any more, poetry alone will survive all the remaining sciences and arts.

At the same time we hear so often that the masses should have a *sensuous religion*. Not only the masses but also the philosopher needs monotheism of reason of the heart, polytheism of imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] and of art, this is what we need!

First of all I shall speak here of an Idea which, as far as I know, has never occurred to anyone – we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the Ideas, it must become a mythology of *reason*.

Before we make the Ideas aesthetic i.e. mythological, they are of no interest to the *people* and on the other hand before mythology is reasonable the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Thus enlightened and unenlightened must finally shake hands, mythology must become philosophical and the people reasonable, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make the philosophers sensuous. Then eternal unity will reign among us. Never the despising gaze, never the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests. Only then can we expect the *same* development of *all* powers, of the individual as well as all individuals. No power will be suppressed any more, then general freedom and equality of spirits will reign! – A higher spirit sent from heaven must found this new religion among us, it will be the last, greatest work of mankind.

(Trans. Andrew Bowie)