



The Philosophy of Fichte

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Fichte is a Kantian in about the same sense that Plato was a Socratic. Instead of taking up and developing particular critical problems he makes the vivifying kernel, the soul of criticism, his own. With the self-activity of reason (as a real force and as a problem) for his fundamental idea, he outlines with magnificent boldness a new view of the world, in which the idealism concealed in Kant's philosophy under the shell of cautious limitations was roused into vigorous life, and the great Königsberger's noble words on the freedom, the position, and the power of the spirit translated from the language of sober foresight into that of vigorous enthusiasm. The world can be understood only from the standpoint of spirit, the spirit only from the will. The ego is pure activity, and all reality its product. Fichte's system is all life and action: its aim is not to mediate knowledge, but to summon the hearer and reader to the production of a new and pregnant fundamental view, in which the will is as much a participant as the understanding; it begins not with a concept or a proposition, but with a demand for action (posit thyself; do consciously what thou hast done unconsciously so often as thou hast called thyself I; analyze, then, the act of self-consciousness, and cognize in their elements the forces from which all reality proceeds); its God is not a completed absolute substance, but a self-realizing world-order. This inner vivacity of the Fichtean principle, which recalls the pure actuality of Aristotle's [Greek: nous] and the ceaseless becoming of Heraclitus, finds its complete parallel in the fact that, although he was wanting neither in logical consecutiveness nor in the talent for luminous and popular exposition, Fichte felt continually driven to express his ideas in new forms, and, just when he seemed to have succeeded in saying what he meant with the greatest clearness, again unsatisfied, to seek still more exact and evident renderings for his fundamental position, which proved so difficult to formulate.

The author of the *Wissenschaftslehre* was the son of a poor ribbon maker, and was born at Rammenau in Lusatia in 1762. The talents of the boy induced the Freiherr von Miltiz to give him the advantage of a good education. Fichte attended school in Meissen and in Pforta, and was a student of theology at the universities of Jena and Leipsic. While a tutor in Zurich he made the acquaintance of Lavater and Pestalozzi, as well as of his future wife, Johanna Rahn, a niece of Klopstock. Returning to Leipsic, his whole mode of thought was revolutionized by the Kantian philosophy, in which it was his duty to instruct a pupil. This gives to the mind, as his letters confess, an inconceivable elevation above all earthly things. "I have adopted a nobler morality, and, instead of occupying myself with things without me, have been occupied more with myself." "I now believe with all my heart in human freedom, and am convinced that only on this supposition duty and virtue of any kind are possible." "I live in a new world since I have read the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Things which I believed never could be proved to me, e.g., the idea of an absolute freedom and duty, have been proved, and I feel the happier for it. It is inconceivable what reverence for humanity, what power this philosophy gives us, what a blessing it is for an age in which the citadels of morality had been destroyed, and the idea of duty blotted out from all the dictionaries!" A journey to Warsaw, whither he had been

attracted by the expectation of securing a position as a private tutor, soon afforded him the opportunity of visiting at Königsberg the author of the system which had effected so radical a transformation in his convictions. His rapidly written treatise, *Essay toward a Critique of All Revelation*, attained the end to which its inception was due by gaining for its author a favorable reception from the honored master. Kant secured for Fichte a tutor's position in Dantzic, and a publisher for his maiden work. When this appeared, at Easter, 1792, the name of its author was by oversight omitted from the title page, together with the preface, which had been furnished after the rest of the book; and as the anonymous work was universally ascribed to Kant (whose religious philosophy was at this time eagerly looked for), the young writer became famous at a stroke as soon as the error was explained. A second edition was issued as early as the following year.

After his marriage in Zurich, where he had completed several political treatises (the address, *Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, who have hitherto suppressed it, Heliopolis in the Last Year of the Old Darkness*, and the two *Hefte, Contributions toward the Correction of the Public Judgment on the French Revolution*, 1793), Fichte accepted, in 1794, a call to Jena, in place of Reinhold, who had gone to Kiel, and whose popularity was soon exceeded by his own. The same year saw the birth of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. His stay in Jena was embittered by conflicts with the clergy, who took offense at his ethical lectures (*On the Vocation of the Scholar*) held on Sunday mornings (though not at an hour which interfered with church service), and with the students, who, after they had been untrue to their decision—which they had formed as a result of these lectures—to dissolve their societies or orders, gave vent to their spite by repeatedly smashing the windows of Fichte's residence. Accordingly he took leave of absence, and spent the summer of 1795 in Osmannstädt. The years 1796-98, in which, besides the two *Introductions to the Science of Knowledge*, the *Natural Right* and the *Science of Ethics* (one of the most all important works in German philosophical literature) appeared, mark the culmination of Fichte's famous labors. The so-called atheistic controversy resulted in Fichte's departure from Jena. The *Philosophisches Journal*, which since 1797 had been edited by Fichte in association with Niethammer, had published an article by Magister Forberg, rector at Saalfeld, entitled "The Development of the Concept of Religion," and as a conciliating introduction to this a short essay by Fichte, "On the Ground of our Belief in a Divine Government of the World." For this it was confiscated by the Dresden government on the charge of containing atheistical matter, while other courts were summoned to take like action. In Weimar hopes were entertained of an amicable adjustment of the matter. But when Fichte, after publishing two vindications couched in vehement language, had in a private letter uttered the threat that he would answer with his resignation any censure proceeding from the University Senate, not only was censure for indiscretion actually imposed, but his (threatened) resignation accepted.

Going to Berlin, Fichte found a friendly government, a numerous public for his lectures, and a stimulating circle of friends in the romanticists, the brothers Schlegel, Tieck, Schleiermacher, etc. In the first years of his Berlin residence there appeared *The Vocation of Man*. *The Exclusive Commercial State*, 1800; *The Sun-clear Report to the Larger Public on the Essential Nature of the New Philosophy*, and the *Answer to Reinhold*, 1801. Three works, which were the outcome of his lectures and were published in the year 1806 (*Characteristics of the Present Age, The Nature of the Scholar, Way to the Blessed Life or Doctrine of Religion*), form a connected whole. In the summer of 1805 Fichte filled a professorship at Erlangen, and later, after the outbreak of the war, he occupied for a short time a chair at Königsberg, finding a permanent university position at the foundation of the University of Berlin in 1810. His glowing *Addresses to the German Nation*, 1808, which essentially aided in arousing the national spirit, have caused

his name to live as one of the greatest of orators and most ardent of patriots in circles of the German people where his philosophical importance cannot be understood. His death in 1814 was also a result of unselfish labor in the service of the Fatherland. He succumbed to a nervous fever contracted from his wife, who, with self-sacrifice equal to his own, had shared in the care of the wounded, and who had brought the contagion back with her from the hospital. On his monument is inscribed the beautiful text, "The teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars that shine forever and ever." Forberg in his journal records this estimate: The leading trait in Fichte's character is his absolute integrity. All his words are weighty and important. His principles are stern and little modified by affability. The spirit of his philosophy is proud and courageous, one which does not so much lead as possess us and carry us along. His philosophemes are inquiries in which we see the truth arise before our eyes, and which just for this reason lay the foundations of science and conviction....

1. The Science of Knowledge

(a) The Problem.—In Fichte's judgment Kant did not succeed in carrying through the transformation in thought which it was his aim to effect, because the age did not understand the spirit of his philosophy. This spirit, and with it the great service of Kant, consists in *transcendental idealism*, which by the doctrine that objects conform themselves to representations, not representations to objects, draws philosophy away from external objects and leads it back into ourselves. We have followed the letter, he thinks, instead of the spirit of Kant, and because of a few passages with a dogmatic ring, whose references to a given matter, the thing in itself, and the like, were intended only as preliminary, have overlooked the numberless others in which the contrary is distinctly maintained. Thus the interpreters of Kant, using their own prejudices as a criterion, have read into him exactly that which he sought to refute, and have made the destroyer of all dogmatism himself a dogmatist; thus in the Kantianism of the Kantians there has sprung up a marvelous combination of crude dogmatism and uncompromising idealism. Though such an absurd mingling of entirely heterogeneous elements may be excused in the case of interpreters and successors, who have had to construct for themselves the guiding principle of the whole from their study of the critical writings, yet we cannot assume it in the author of the system, unless we believe the *Critique of Pure Reason* the result of the strangest chance, and not the work of intellect. Two men only, Beck, the teacher of the Standpoint, and Jacobi, the clearest mind of the century, are to be mentioned with respect as having risen above the confusion of the time to the perception that Kant teaches idealism, that, according to him, the object is not given, but made.

Besides the perspicuity which would have prevented these misunderstandings, Fichte misses something further in Kant's work. Considered as a system Kant's expositions were incomplete; and, on his own confession, his aim was not to furnish the science itself, but only the foundation and the materials for it. Therefore, although the Kantian philosophy is established as far as its inner content is concerned, there is still need of earnest work to systematize the fragments and results which he gives into a firmly connected and impregnable whole. The *Wissenschaftslehre* takes this completion of idealism for its mission. It cannot solve the problem by a commentary on the Kantian writings, nor by the correction and addition of particulars, but only by restoring the whole at a stroke. He alone finds the truth who new creates it in himself, independently and in his own way. Thus Fichte's system contains the same view of the matter as the critical system—the author is aware, runs the preface to the programme, *On the Concept of the Science of Knowledge*, 1794, "that he never will be able to say anything at which Kant has not hinted,

immediately or mediately, more or less clearly, before him,”—but in his procedure he is entirely independent of the Kantian exposition. We shall first raise the question, What in the Kantian philosophy is in need of completion? and, secondly, What method must be adopted in completing it?

Kant discusses the laws of intelligence when they are already applied to objects, without enlightening us concerning the ground of these laws. He derived the pure concepts (the laws of substantiality, of causality, etc.) from (logic, and thus mediately from) experience instead of deducing them from the nature of intelligence; similarly he never furnished this deduction for the forms of intuition, space and time. In order to understand that intelligence, and why intelligence, must act in just this way (must think just by means of these categories), we must prove, and not merely, with Kant, assert, that these functions or forms are really laws of thought—or, what amounts to the same thing, that they are conditions of self-consciousness. Again, even if it be granted that Kant has explained the properties and relations of things (that they appear in space and time, and that their accidents must be referred to substances), the question still remains unanswered, Whence comes the matter which is taken up into these forms? So long as the whole object is not made to arise before the eyes of the thinker, dogmatism is not driven out of its last corner. The thing in itself is, like the rest, only a thought in the ego. If thus the antithesis between the form and the matter of cognition undergoes modification, so, further, the allied distinction between understanding and sensibility must, as Reinhold accurately recognized, be reduced to a common principle and receptivity be conceived as self-limiting spontaneity. In his practical philosophy also Kant left much unfinished. The categorical imperative is susceptible of further deduction, it is not the principle itself, but a conclusion from the true principle, from the injunction to absolute *self-dependence on the part of reason*; moreover, the nature of our consciousness of the moral law must be more thoroughly discussed, and in order to gain a real, instead of a merely formal, ethics the relation of this law to natural impulse. Finally, Kant never discussed the foundation of philosophy as a whole, but always separated its theoretical from its practical side, and Reinhold also did nothing to remove this dualism. In short, some things that Kant only asserted or presupposed can and must be proved, some that he kept distinct must be united. In what way are both to be accomplished?

Since correct inferences from correct premises yield correct results, and correct inference is easy to secure, everything depends on the correct point of departure. If we neglect this and consider only the process and the results of inference, there are two consistent systems: the dogmatic or realistic course of thought, which seeks to derive representations from things; and the idealistic, which, conversely, seeks to derive being from thought. Now, no matter how consistently dogmatism may proceed (and when it does so it becomes, like the system of Spinoza, materialism and fatalism or determinism, maintaining that all is nature, and all goes on mechanically; treats the spirit as a thing among others, and denies its metaphysical and moral independence, its immateriality and freedom), it may be shown to be false, because it starts from a false principle. Thought can never be derived from being, because it is not contained therein; from being only being can proceed, and never representation. Being, however, can be derived from thought, for consciousness is also being; nay, it is more than this, it is conscious being. And as consciousness contains both being and a knowledge of this being, idealism is superior to realism, because idealism includes the latter as a moment in itself, and hence can explain it, though it is not explicable by it. Dogmatism makes the mistake of going beyond consciousness or the ego, and working with empty, merely formal concepts. A concept is empty when nothing actual corresponds to it, or no intuition can be subsumed under it (here it is to be noted that, besides sensuous intuition, there is an intellectual intuition also; an example is found in the ego as a self-intuiting being). Philosophy, indeed, may abstract and must abstract, must rise above

that which is given—for how could she explain life and particular knowledge if she assumed no higher standpoint than her object?—but true abstraction is nothing other than the separation of factors which in experience always present themselves together; it analyzes empirical consciousness in order to reconstruct it from its elements, it causes empirical consciousness to arise before our eyes, it is a pragmatic *history of consciousness*. Such abstraction, undertaken in order to a genetic consideration of the ego, does not go beyond experience, but penetrates into the depths of experience, is not transcendent, but transcendental, and, since it remains in close touch with that which is intuitable, yields a real philosophy in contrast to all merely formal philosophy.

These theoretical advantages of idealism are supplemented by momentous reasons of a practical kind, which determine the choice between the two systems, besides which none other is possible. The moral law says: Thou shalt be self-dependent. If I ought to be so I must be able to be so; but if I were matter I would not be able. Thus idealism proves itself to be the ethical mode of thought, while the opposite mode shows that those who favor it have not raised themselves to that independence of all that is external which is morally enjoined, for in order to be able to know ourselves free we must have made ourselves free. Thus the philosophy which a man chooses depends on what sort of a man he is. If, on the other hand, the categorical imperative calls for belief in the reality of the external world and of other minds, this is nothing against idealism. For idealism does not deny the realism of life, but explains it as a necessary, though not a final, mode of intuition. The dogmatic mode of thought is merely an explanation from the standpoint of common consciousness, and for idealism, as the only view which is both scientifically and practically satisfactory, this explanation itself needs explaining. Realism and idealism, like natural impulse and moral will in the sphere of action, are both grounded in reason. But idealism is the true standpoint, because it is able to comprehend and explain the opposing theory, while the converse is not the case.

The nature, the goal, and the methods of the Science of Knowledge have now been determined. It is genuine, thoroughgoing idealism, which raises the Kantian philosophy to the rank of an evident science by deducing its premises from a first principle which is immediately certain, and by removing the twofold dualism of intuition and thought, of knowledge and volition, viz., by proving both contraries acts of one and the same ego. While Reinhold had sought a supreme truth as a fundamental principle of unity, without which the doctrine of knowledge would lack the systematic form essential to science, while Beck had interpreted the spirit of the Kantian philosophy in an idealistic sense, and Jacobi had demanded the elimination of the thing in itself, all these desires combined are fulfilled in Fichte's doctrine, and at the same time the results of the Critique of Reason are given that evidence which Aenesidemus-Schulze had missed in them. As an answer to the question, "How is knowledge brought about?" (as well the knowledge of common sense as that given in the particular sciences), "how is experience possible?", and as a construction of common consciousness as this manifests itself in life and in the particular sciences, Fichteanism adopts the name *Science of Knowledge*, being distinguished from the particular sciences by the fact that they discuss the voluntary, and it the necessary, representations or actions of the spirit. (The representation of a triangle or a circle is a free one, it may be omitted; the representation of space in general is a necessary one, from which it is impossible for us to abstract.) How does intelligence come to have sensations, to intuit space and time, and to form just such categories (thing and property, cause and effect, and not others quite different)? While Kant correctly described these functions of the intuiting and thinking spirit, and showed them actual, they must further be proven, be shown necessary or deduced. Deduced whence? From the "deed-acts" (*Thatandlungen*) of the ego which lie at the basis of all consciousness, and the highest of which are formulated in three principles.

(b) The Three Principles.—At the portal of the Science of Knowledge we are met not by an assertion, but by a summons—a summons to self-contemplation. Think anything whatever and observe what thou dost, and of necessity must do, in thinking. Thou wilt discover that thou dost never think an object without thinking thyself therewith, that it is absolutely impossible for thee to abstract from thine ego. And second, consider what thou dost when thou dost think thine “ego.” This means to affirm or posit one’s self, to be a subject-object. The nature of self-consciousness is the identity of the representing [subject] and the represented [object]. The pure ego is not a fact, but an original doing, the act of being for self (*Fürsichsein*), and the (philosophical, or—as seems to be the case according to some passages—even the common) consciousness of this doing an intellectual intuition; through this we become conscious of the deed-act which is ever (though unconsciously) performing. This is the meaning of the first of the principles: “The *ego* posits originally and absolutely its own being,” or, more briefly: The ego posits itself; more briefly still: I am. The nature of the ego consists in positing itself as existing. Since, besides this self-cogitation of the ego, an *op-position* is found among the facts of empirical consciousness (think only of the principle of contradiction), and yet, besides the ego, there is nothing which could be opposed, we must assume as a second principle: To the ego there is absolutely opposed a *non-ego*. These two principles must be united, and this can be accomplished only by positing the contraries (ego and non-ego), since they are both in the ego, as reciprocally limiting or partially sublating one another, that is, each as *divisible* (capable of quantitative determination). Accordingly the third principle runs: “The ego opposes in the ego a divisible non-ego to the divisible ego.” From these principles Fichte deduces the three laws of thought, identity, contradiction, and sufficient reason, and the three categories of quality—reality, negation, and limitation or determination. Instead of following him in these labors, we may emphasize the significance of his view of the ego as pure activity without an underlying substratum, with which he carries dynamism over from the Kantian philosophy of nature to metaphysics. We must not conceive the ego as something which must exist before it can put forth its activities. Doing is not a property or consequence of being, but being is an accident and effect of doing. All substantiality is derivative, activity is primal; *being arises from doing*. The ego is nothing more than self-position; it exists not only for itself (*für sich*), but also through itself (*durch sich*).

The actions expressed in the three principles are never found pure in experience, nor do they represent isolated acts of the ego. Intelligence can think nothing without thinking itself therewith; it is equally impossible for it to think “I am” without at the same time thinking something else which is not itself; subject and object are inseparable. It is rather true that the acts of position described are one single, all-inclusive act, which forms only the first member in a connected system of pre-conscious actions, through which consciousness is produced, and the complete investigation of whose members constitutes the further business of the Science of Knowledge as a theory of the nature of reason. In this the Science of Knowledge employs a method which, by its rhythm of analysis and synthesis, development and reconciliation of opposites, became the model of Hegel’s dialectic method. The synthesis described in the third principle, although it balances thesis and antithesis and unites them in itself, still contains contrary elements, in order to whose combination a new synthesis must be sought. In this, in turn, the analytic discovery and the synthetic adjustment of a contrariety is repeated, etc., etc. The original synthesis, moreover, prescribes a division of the inquiry into two parts, one theoretical and the other practical. For it contains the following principles: The ego posits itself as limited by the non-ego—it functions cognitively; and: The ego posits itself as determining the non-ego—it functions volitionally and actively.

(c) The Theoretical Ego.—In positing itself as determined by the non-ego, the ego is at once passive (affected by something other than itself) and active (it posits its own limitation). This is possible only as it posits reality in itself only in part, and transfers to the non-ego so much as it does not posit in itself. Passivity is diminished activity, negation of the totality of reality. From reflection on this relation between ego and non-ego spring the categories of reciprocal determination, of causality (the non-ego as the cause of the passion of the ego), and substantiality (this passion merely the self-limitation of the ego). The conflict between the causality of the non-ego (by which the ego is affected) and the substantiality of the ego (in which and the activity of which all reality is contained) is resolved only by the assumption of two activities (or, rather, of two opposite directions of one activity) in the ego, one of which (centrifugal, expansive) strives infinitely outward while the other (centripetal or contractile) sets a bound to the former, and drives the ego back into itself, whereupon another excursus follows, and a new limitation and return, etc. With every repetition of this double act of production and reflection a special class of representations arises. Through the first limitation of the in itself unlimited activity “sensation” arises (as a product of the “productive imagination”). Because the ego produces this unconsciously, it appears to be given, brought about by influence from without. The second stage, “intuition,” is reached when the ego reflects on sensation, when it opposes to itself something foreign which limits it. Thirdly, by reflection on intuition an “image” of that which is intuited is constructed, and, as such, distinguished from a real thing to which the image corresponds; at this point the categories and the forms of intuition, space and time, appear, which thus arise along with the object. The fourth stadium is “understanding,” which steadies the fluctuating intuition into a concept, realizes the object, and looks upon it as the cause of the intuition. Fifthly, “judgment” makes its appearance as the faculty of free reflection and abstraction, or the power to consider a definite content or to abstract from it. As judgment is itself the condition of the bound reflection of the understanding, so it points in turn to its condition, to the sixth and highest stage of intelligence, “reason,” by means of which we are able to abstract from all objects whatever, while reason itself, pure self-consciousness, is that from which abstraction is never possible. It is only in the highest stage that consciousness or a representation of representation takes place. And at the culmination of the theoretical ego the point of transition to the practical ego appears. Here the ego becomes aware that in positing itself as determined by the non-ego it has only limited itself, and therefore is itself the ground of the whole content of consciousness; here it apprehends itself as determining the non-ego or as acting, and recognizes as its chief mission to impress the form of the ego as far as possible on the non-ego, and ever to extend the boundary further.

The “deduction of representation” whose outline has just been given was the first example (often imitated in the school of Schelling and Hegel) of a *constructive psychology*, which, from the mission or the concept of the soul—in this case from the nature of self-consciousness—deduces the various psychical functions as a system of actions, each of which is in its place implied by the rest, as it in turn presupposes them. This is distinguished from the sensationalistic psychology, which is also genetic, as well as from the mechanical or associational psychology, which likewise excludes the idea of an isolated coexistence of mental faculties, by the fact that it demands a new manifestation of the soul-ground in order to the ascent from one member of the series to the next higher. It is also distinguished from sensationalism by its teleological point of view. For no matter how much Fichte, too, may speak of the mechanism of consciousness, it is plain to the reader of the theoretical part of his system not only that he makes this mechanism work in the service of an end, but also that he finds its origin in purposive activity of the ego;

while the practical part gives further and decisive confirmation of the fact. The danger and the defect of such a constructive treatment of psychology—as we may at once remark for all later attempts—lies in imagining that the task of mental science has been accomplished and all its problems solved when each particular activity of the ego has been assigned its mission and work for the whole, and its place in the system, without any indication of the means through which this destination can be fulfilled.

(d) The Practical Ego.—The deduction of representation has shown how (through what unconscious acts of the ego) the different stages of cognition, the three sensuous and the three intellectual functions of representation, come into being. It has proved incapable, however, of giving any account of the way in which the ego comes at one point to arrest its activity, which tends infinitely outward, and to turn it back upon itself. We know, indeed, that this first limitation, through which sensation arises, and on which as a basis the understanding, by continued reflection constructs the objective world, was necessary in order that consciousness and knowledge might arise. If the ego did not limit its infinite activity neither representation nor an objective world would exist. But why, then, are there such things as consciousness, representation, and a world? From the standpoint of the theoretical ego this problem, “Whence the original non-ego or opposition (*Anstoss*), which impels the ego back upon itself?” cannot be solved, since it is only through the opposition that it itself arises. The “deduction of the opposition,” which the theoretical part of the Science of Knowledge did not furnish, is to be looked for from the practical part. The primacy of practical reason, already emphasized by Kant, gives us the answer: *The ego limits itself and is theoretical, in order to be practical.* The whole machinery of representation and the represented world exists only to furnish us the possibility of fulfilling our duty. We are intelligence in order that we may be able to be will.

Action, action—that is the end of our existence. Action is giving form to matter, it is the alteration or elaboration of an object, the conquest of an impediment, of a limitation. We cannot act unless we have something in, on, and against which to act. The world of sensation and intuition is nothing but a means for attaining our ethical destiny, it is “the material of our duty under the form of sense.” The theoretical ego posits an object (*Gegenstand*) that the practical ego may experience resistance (*Widerstand*). No action is possible without a world as the object of action; no world is possible without a consciousness which represents it; no consciousness possible without reflection of the ego on itself; no reflection without limitation, without an opposition or non-ego. The *Anstoss* is deduced. The ego posits a limit (is theoretical) in order (as practical) to overcome it. Our duty is the only *per se* (*Ansich*) of the phenomenal world, the only truly real element in it: “Things are in themselves that which we ought to make of them.” Objectivity exists only to be more and more sublated, that is, to be so worked up that the activity of the ego may in it become evident.—The same ground of explanation which reveals the necessity of an external nature enables us to understand why the one infinite ego (the universal life or the Deity, as Fichte puts it in his later works) divides into the many empirical egos or individuals, why it does not carry out its plan immediately, but through finite spirits as its organs. Action is possible only under the form of the individual, only in individuals are consciousness and morality possible. Without resistance, no action; without conflict, no morality. Individuality, it is true, is to be overcome and destroyed in moral endeavor; but in order to this it must have existed. Virtue is a conquest over external *and internal* nature.

A gradation of practical functions corresponding to the series of theoretical activities leads from feeling and striving (longing and desire) through the system of impulses (the impulse to representation or reflection, to production, to satisfaction) up to moral will or the impulse to

harmony with self, which stands opposed to the natural impulses as the categorical imperative. The practical ego mediates between the theoretical and the absolute ego. The ego ought to be infinite and self-dependent, but finds itself finite and dependent on a non-ego—a contradiction which is resolved by the ego becoming practical, by the fact that in ever increasing measure it subdues nature to itself, and by such increasing extension of the boundary draws nearer and ever nearer to the realization of its destination, to become absolute ego.

2. The Science of Ethics and of Right.

The moral law demands the control of the sensuous impulse by the pure impulse. If the former aims at comfortable ease and enjoyment, the latter is directed toward satisfaction with one's self, to endeavor and self-dependence. (Enjoyment is inevitable, it is true, as satisfaction where any impulse whatever is carried out; only it must not form the end of action.) Morality is activity for its own sake, the radical evil—from which only a miracle can deliver us, but a miracle which we must ourselves perform—is inertness, lack of will to rise above the natural determinateness of the impulse of self-preservation to the clear consciousness of duty and of freedom. For the moral man there is no resting; each end attained becomes for him the impulse to renewed endeavor, each task fulfilled leads him to a fresh one. Become self-dependent, act autonomously, make thyself free; let every action have a place in a series, in the continuation of which the ego must become independent. To this formal and universal norm, again, there is added a special injunction for each individual. Each individual spirit has its definite mission assigned to it by the world-order: each ought to do that which it alone should and can do. Always fulfill thy moral vocation, thy special destination. Or both in popular combination: Never act contrary to conscience.

The elevation to freedom is accomplished gradually. At first freedom consists only in the consciousness of the natural impulse, then follows a breaking away from this by means of maxims, which in the beginning are maxims of individual happiness. Later on a blind enthusiasm for self-dependence arises and produces an heroic spirit, which would rather be generous than just, which bestows sympathy more readily than respect; true morality, however, does not arise until, with constant attention to the law and continued watchfulness of self, duty is done for its own sake. No man is for a moment secure of his morality without continued endeavor. In order to deliverance from the original sin of inertness and its train, cowardice and falsity, men stand in need of examples, such as have been given them in the founders of religions, to construe for them the riddle of freedom. The necessary enlightenment concerning moral conviction is given by the Church, whose symbols are not to be looked upon as dogmatic propositions, but only as means for the proclamation of the eternal verities, and which, like the state (for both are institutions based on necessity), has for its object to make itself unnecessary as time goes on.

The system of duties distinguishes four classes of duties on the basis of the twofold opposition of universal (non-transferable) and particular (transferable) duties, and of unconditional duties (directed to the whole) and conditional duties (directed toward self). These four classes are the duties of self-preservation, of class, of non-interference with others, and of vocation. The lower calling includes the producers, artisans, and tradesmen, whose action terminates directly on nature; and the higher, the scholars, teachers of the people or clergy, artists, and government officials, who work directly on the community of rational beings. Fichte's thoughtful and sympathetically written discussion of marriage is in pleasant contrast to the bald, purely legal view of this relation adopted by Kant.

Natural right is for Fichte, as for Kant, whose theory of right, moreover, appeared later

than Fichte's, entirely independent of ethics, and distinguished from the latter by its exclusive reference to external conduct instead of to the disposition and the will. The rule of right gains from the moral law, it is true, new sanction for conscience, but cannot be derived from the law.—The concept of right is to be deduced as a necessary act of the ego, *i.e.*, to be shown a condition of self-consciousness. The ego must posit itself as an individual, and can accomplish this only by positing itself in a relation of right to other finite rational beings; without a thou, no I. A finite rational being cannot posit itself without ascribing to itself a free activity in an external sense-world; and it cannot effect this latter unless (1) it ascribes free activity to other beings as well, hence not without assuming other finite rational beings outside itself, and positing itself as standing in *the relation of right* to them; and unless (2) it ascribes to itself a material body and posits this as standing under the influence of a person outside it. But, further, Fichte considers it possible to deduce the particular constitution both of the external world and of the human body (as the sphere of all free actions possible to the person). In the former there must be present a tough, durable matter capable of resistance, and light and air in order to the possibility of intercourse between spirits; while the latter must be an organized, articulated nature-product, furnished with senses, capable of infinite determination, and adapted to all conceivable motions.

If a community of free beings, such as has been shown the condition of individual self-consciousness, is to be possible, the following must hold as the law of right: So limit thy freedom that others may be free along with thee. This law is conditioned on the lawful behavior of others. Where this is lacking, where my fellow does not recognize and treat me as a free, rational being, the right of coercion comes in; coercion, however, is not to be exercised by the individual himself—since then there would be no guaranty either for its successful exercise or for the non-violation of the legal limit—but devolves upon the state. The state takes its origin in the common will of all to unite for the safeguarding of their rights, and determines by positive laws (intermediate between the law of right and legal judgments) what shall be considered rights. Thus there result three subjects for natural right: original rights or the sum of that which pertains to freedom or personality (inviolability of the body and of property), the right of coercion, and political right. The aim of punishment is the reform of the evil doer and the deterrence of others. Fichte is in agreement with Kant concerning the principle of popular sovereignty (Rousseau) and the exercise of the political power through representatives; but not so concerning the guaranties against the violation of the fundamental law of the state. Instead of the division of powers recommended by Kant he demands supervision of the rulers of the state by ephors, who, themselves without any legislative or executive authority, shall suspend the rulers in case they violate the law, and call them to account before the community. Every constitution in which the rulers are not responsible is despotic. Fichte did not continue loyal to this principle, that the state is merely a legal institution. He not only demands a state organization of labor by which everyone shall be placed in a position to live from his work, in the *Natural Right* and the *Exclusive Commercial State*, but, in his posthumous *Theory of Right*, 1812, he makes it the chief duty of the state to lead men, by the moral and intellectual training of the people, to do from insight what they have hitherto done from traditional belief. Through the education of the people the empirical state is gradually to transform itself into the rational state.

3. Fichte's Second Period: his View of History and his Theory of Religion.

Fichte's transfer to Berlin brought him into more intimate contact with the world, and

along with new experiences and new emotions gave him new problems. While a vigorously developing religious sentiment turned his speculation to the relation of the individual ego to the primal source of spiritual life, empirical reality also acquired greater significance for him, and the intellectual, moral, and political situation of the time especially attracted his attention. The last required philosophical interpretation, demanded at once inquiry into its historical conditions and a consideration of the means by which the glaring contradiction between the condition of the nation at the time and the ideals of reason could be diminished. The *Addresses to the German Nation* outlined a plan for a moral reformation of the world, to start with the education of the German people; while the *Characteristics of the Present Age*, which had preceded the *Addresses*, defined the place of the age in the general development of humanity. The scheme of historical periods given in the *Characteristics* and similarly in the *Theory of the State* (innocence—sin—supremacy of reason, with intermediate stages between each two) is interesting as a forerunner of Hegel's undertaking.

History is produced through the interaction of the two principles, faith and understanding, which are related to each other as law and freedom, and strives toward a condition in which these two shall be so reconciled that faith shall have entirely passed over into the form of understanding, shall have been transformed into insight, and understanding shall have taken up the content of faith into itself. History begins with the coming together of two original and primitive races, one of order or faith, and one of freedom or understanding, neither of which would attain to an historical development apart from the other. From the legal race the free race learns respect for the law, as in turn it arouses in the former the impulse toward freedom. The course of history divides into five periods. In the state of "innocence" or of rational instinct that which is rational is done unconsciously, out of natural impulse; in the state of "commencing sin" the instinct for the good changes into an external compulsory authority, the law of reason appears as a ruling power from without, which can be disobeyed as well as obeyed. We ourselves live in the period of "completed sinfulness," of absolute license and indifference to all truth, of unlimited caprice and selfishness. But however far removed from the moral ideal this age appears, in which the individual, freed from all restraints, heeds naught except his egoistic desire, and in his care for his own welfare forgets to labor for the universal, yet this ultimate goal, this doing from free insight that which in the beginning was done out of blind faith, cannot be attained unless authority shall have first been shaken off and the individual become self-dependent. A few signs already betoken the dawn of the fourth era, that of rational science or of "commencing justification," in which truth shall be acknowledged supreme, and the individual ego, at least as cognitive, shall submit itself to the generic reason. Finally, with the era of rational art, or the state of "completed justification and sanctification," wherein the will of the individual shall entirely merge in life for the race, the end of the life of humanity on earth—the free determination of all its relations according to reason—will be fulfilled.

In the Jena period the religious life of the ego simply coincided for Fichte with its practical life; piety coincided with moral conduct; the Deity with the absolute ego, with the moral law, with the moral order of the world. A change subsequently took place in his views on this point. He experienced feelings which, at least in quality, were distinct from readiness for moral action, no matter how intimately they are intertwined with this, and no matter how little they can actually be separated from it; *religion* is possible neither without a metaphysical belief in a suprasensible world, nor without obedience to the moral law, yet in itself it is not that belief nor this action, but the inner spirit which pervades and animates all our thought and action—it is life, love, blessedness. And as quiet blessedness is here distinguished from ceaseless action, so for our thinker the inactive Deity, the self-identical life of the absolute, separates from the

active universal reason, which in its individual organs advances from task to task. The earlier undivided and unique principle, the absolute ego, divides into the *Ichheit* (moral law, world-order), and an absolute as the ground thereof. “The spirit (the ego, or, as Fichte now prefers to say, knowledge) an image of God, the world an image of the spirit.” The active order of the world (the moral law which realizes itself in individuals) the immediate, and objective reality the mediate, revelation of the absolute!

Does this view of religion, which Fichte incorporates also in the later expositions of the Science of Knowledge, indicate an abandonment and denial of the earlier standpoint? The philosophy of Fichte’s second period is a new system—so judge the majority of the historians of philosophy. It is not a transformation, but a completion of the earlier system; the doctrine promulgated in Berlin continues to be idealistic, as that advanced in Jena had itself been pantheistic—this is the opinion of Fortlage and Harms, in agreement with the philosopher himself and with his son. Kuno Fischer, also, who shows a constant advance in the development of Fichteanism, a gradual transition “without a break,” may be counted among the minority who hold that throughout his life Fichte taught but one system. We believe it our duty to adhere to this latter view. The Science of Knowledge (the world a product of the ego) enters as it is into the later form of the Fichtean philosophy; the latter gives up none of the fundamental positions of the former, but only adds to it a culmination, by which the appearance of the building is altered, it is true, but not the edifice itself. In the discussion of the question the following three have been emphasized as the most important points of distinction between the two periods: In the earlier system God is made equivalent to the absolute ego and the moral order of the world, in the later he is separated from these and removed beyond them; in the former the nature of God is described as activity, in the latter, as being; in the one, action is designated as the highest mission of man, in the other, blessed devotion to God. All three variations of the later doctrine from the earlier may be admitted without giving up the position that the former is only an extension of the latter and not an essential modification of it (*i.e.*, in its teachings concerning the relation of the ego and the world). Fichte experienced religious feelings the philosophical outcome of which he worked into his system. He now knows a first thing (the Deity as distinct from the absolute ego) and a last thing (the inwardness of religious devotion to the world-ground), which he had before not overlooked, much less denied, but combined in one with the second (the absolute ego or the moral order of the world) and the one before the last (moral action). It is incorrect to say that, in his later doctrine, Fichte substituted the inactive absolute in place of the active absolute ego, and the quiet blessedness of contemplation in place of ceaseless action. Not in place of these, but beyond them, while all else remains as it was. The categorical imperative, the absolute ego or knowledge is no longer God himself, but the first manifestation of God, though a necessary revelation of him. Religion had previously been included for Fichte in moral action; now fellowship with God goes beyond this, though morality remains its indispensable condition and inseparable companion. Finally, how to construe the previously avoided predicate, being, in relation to the Deity, is shown by the no less frequent designation of the absolute as the “Universal Life.” The expression being, which it must be confessed is ambiguous, here signifies in our opinion only the quiet, self-identical activity of the absolute, in opposition to the unresting, changeful activity of the world-order and its finite organs, not that inert and dead being posited by the ego, the ascription of which to the Deity Fichte had forbidden in his essay which had been charged with atheism, not to speak of the existence-mode of a particular self-conscious and personal being. Instead of speaking of a conversion of Fichte to the position of his opponents, we might rather venture the paradoxical assertion, that, when he characterizes the absolute as the only true being, he

intends to produce the same view in the mind of the reader as in his earlier years, when he expressed himself against the application of the concepts existence, substance, and conscious personality to God, on the ground that they are categories of sense. The chief thing, at least, remains unaltered: the opposition to a view of religion which transforms the sublime and sacred teaching of Christianity “into an enervating doctrine of happiness.”

Falckenberg, Richard. *History of Modern Philosophy: From Nicholas of Cusa to the Present Time*. Trans. A.C. Armstrong. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1893.

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