

§ 125.

*Johann Gottlieb Fichte*¹ (1762-1814). — Johann Gottlieb Fichte, son of a ribbon-maker in limited circumstances, was born at Rammenau, in Upper Lusatia. Through the influence of the town-preacher, who, as his instructor, discovered in him very remarkable intellectual endowments, and by the generosity of the Freiherr von Miltitz, he attended the schools of Meissen and Pforta, for a period of six years, to prepare for a theological course in the university. He entered the University of Jena in 1780; studied theology and the philosophical systems of Spinoza and Wolff. Owing to straitened circumstances, while in the university and for several years afterwards, he engaged in private teaching, in tutoring in families (as did Kant before him, and Schelling and Hegel and Herbart after him), and in literary "hack-work." At about the age of twenty-eight he began especially to turn his attention, until then occupied much more with theological than with philosophical subjects, to philosophy, and wrote a work, entitled a "Critique of all Revelation," which was an application of the Kantian philosophy to a theological point. In the summer of 1791 he visited the home of Kant, taking with him the manuscript of this work, in the hope of winning by the work the favor of the Königsberg sage. The work received the approval of Kant, and through his influence gained a publisher (1792). The ascription of the authorship of it to Kant immediately, gave the author of it, when he became known as such, a high reputation. The next year Fichte received the appointment of *professor extraordinarius* at the University of Jena. Though his success as a lecturer was great, he gave offence to the powers that were, and by a want of complaisance lost his place. He had incurred a charge of atheism

¹ Zeller, Erdmann, Noack; Fichte's "Introduction to the Science of Knowledge" ("Journal of Spec. Phil.," vol. i.); "Facts of Consciousness" (ibid., vol. v., etc.); "Popular Works" (ed. by Smith); Everett's "Fichte" (Griggs's "Philosophical Classics"); "Encyc. Brit."

by publishing, in a philosophical journal edited by him, an essay of Carl Forberg on the "Determination of the Conception of Religion," in which popular views were antagonized; and by substituting in a partial apology for Forberg's performance such an unorthodox conception as that of the moral order of the world for that of God. A threat on his part to resign his chair in case of a reprimand from the academical senate of the university was followed by his receiving permission to withdraw from the faculty, which he did, in 1799. Settling in Berlin, he was occupied until 1809 with literary work, modifying and lecturing upon his system (he lectured one semester at the University of Erlangen), and earnestly championing the cause of German education and German nationality. In 1809, on the foundation of the University of Berlin, he accepted a professorship in the institution. He became dean of the philosophical faculty, and afterwards rector of the university. His efforts to bring about moral reform among the students of the university — to do away with duelling and student-societies — caused friction in his official management, and he resigned the rectorship. He died by a contagious fever taken while attending his wife, who had been a nurse in the military hospitals of Berlin. He was, and still is, regarded as a moral as well as an intellectual personality of very great nobility and power.

Works. — Fichte's most important works are perhaps the following: "Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre, oder sogenannte Philosophie" ("On the Conception of the Science of Knowledge, or so-called Philosophy"), (1794); "Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre" ("Foundation of the Entire Science of Knowledge"), (1794); "Ueber die Bestimmung des Gelehrten" ("Nature of the Scholar"), (1794); "Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre" ("Outline of what is peculiar to the Science of Knowledge"), (1795); "Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre" ("Foundation of Natural Right according to the

Principles of the Science of Knowledge" (1796); "System der Sittenlehre" ("System of the Science of Morals"), (1798); "Die Bestimmung des Menschen" ("The Destination of Man"), (1800); "Der geschlossene Handelsstaat" ("The Exclusive Commercial State"), (1800); "Ueber die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters" ("Characteristics of the Present Age"), (1805); "Anweisung zum seligen Leben, oder die Religionslehre" ("Way to the Blessed Life, or Theory of Religion"), (1806); "Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten und seiner Erscheinungen im Gebiete der Freiheit" ("On the Nature of the Scholar and his Appearance in the Realm of Freedom"), (1806); "Reden an die deutsche Nation" ("Addresses to the German Nation"), (1808).

Philosophy: Introduction.—The problem of philosophy is (according to Fichte) to discover the ground of experience, or those ideas which we have that are accompanied by the feeling of necessity. As the ground of experience is outside experience, the philosopher has first of all to abstract from experience. He thus obtains, on the one hand, an intelligence-in-itself (in so far as he abstracts from concrete intelligence, or subject), and, on the other, a thing-in-itself (in so far as he abstracts from real things, or objects). One of these two must be the ground of experience (and of the other); philosophy, or, better, the science of knowledge, must be either Idealism or Dogmatism. At first blush it appears impossible to decide between the two. The dogmatist can—from his point of view—explain freedom and self-consciousness as mere appearance; the idealist, the thing-in-itself as a mere invention or chimera. A ground of decision lies in a certain peculiar fact,—that though the thing-in-itself can be entirely abstracted from, intelligence cannot, but remains in the last possible abstraction as a necessary presupposition of the abstraction, and therefore as object to itself. The perception of this fact depends upon the creation of it in ourselves by a free act of pure self-consciousness.

The fact is — and this is its peculiarity — both objective and subjective, a fact-act. Further, in the unity of intelligence with itself in self-consciousness, — for the universal notion, the very conception, of intelligence itself, is that it *knows* (all things), and hence has intelligence of itself, — we have a unity which is not at all explicable by dogmatism, since the category of dogmatism, that of (mechanical) cause and effect, contemplates subject and object as two distinct and disparate things, whereas in self-consciousness they are one. On the other hand, it is not possible to deduce the determined world from pure undetermined intelligence; there must be presupposed a certain nature — certain laws — of intelligence; and the feeling of necessity accompanying determined representations may be explained as the feeling by intelligence of the limits of its own essence. The laws of the action of intelligence, as surely as they are grounded in the one nature of the intelligence, constitute in themselves a system. If we gather these laws at random from experience, we do not *prove* them to be laws; we leave it possible for the unstilled dogmatist to assert that they are merely qualities of independently existing classes of things. But such is the method of Critical Transcendental Idealism (of Kant), which therefore puts forth laws of external experience only. Complete Transcendental Idealism must begin from a single fundamental law of reason, which is shown as contained immediately in consciousness. This first law involves as condition a second, and that a third, and so on; and the last, as containing all the conditions of the first act, by which the laws are discovered, must contain the system of all necessary representations, or the total of experience. Idealism does not have this experience in view as a foreknown object and result which it should arrive at; it proceeds from its starting-point according to certain rules, careless as to what the results of its investigation may prove to be. In so far as those final results are found in experience, they are *a posteriori*; in so far

as they are necessary consequences of our reasoning, they are *a priori*. Since philosophy is the explanation of experience, a "philosophy that does not agree with experience is wrong in its presupposition or deduction." The *presupposition* of Idealism is one contained in reason itself, and no rational person will admit that human reason contains any problem the solution of which is altogether impossible. The *deduction* is a necessary one; what is postulated is supplemented by its necessary condition, and this by its, and so on until the sum of conditions is shown to be exhausted. These conditions form an organic whole, and this whole is a product or realization of *free* thinking. Hence philosophy is Transcendental Idealism. Now, the first law of thought is that the ego, or pure transcendental self, posits originally absolutely its own being; or the essence of the ego consists in positing itself as being. (By way of explanation, it may here be said that *in the beginning* the ego *is*, and is all that there is, — is only as positing something, and hence posits itself.) This law expressed in terms of bare logic, which abstracts from all subject-matter, is merely the familiar Law of Identity; but the former, rather than the latter (which is by abstraction derivable from it), is the beginning and foundation of real thought. A second equally original fact of consciousness is that the ego *opposites* to itself — or posits over against itself — a non-ego. This act is, equally with the first, an act of the ego, and in so far in contradiction or antithesis to it. (Hence the Logical Law of Contradiction.) The voiding of the contradiction — reconciliation or synthesis of the acts or laws — is possible only in so far as ego and non-ego are conceived as reciprocally limited and limiting. The third law of thought (which, unlike the first two, is not a mere statement of fact, but a deduction) is, Ego *opposites* to the limited or divisible ego (*i. e.*, the merely posited ego, not the ego which embraces, since it posits, both sides of the opposition) a limited, or divisible, ego. In these three principles we have,

deduced, Kant's categories of affirmation, negation, and limitation. These principles are the first principles of all knowledge. In the method by which they have developed themselves — *i. e.*, position, opposition, reconciliation, or thesis, antithesis, synthesis — we have the method of philosophical knowledge. The third principle — further — contains the foundations of the two main divisions of philosophy; *vis.*, theoretical and practical philosophy, or science of knowledge. The principle underlying the former is, Ego posits itself as determined by the non-ego; the principle underlying the latter is, Ego posits itself as determining the non-ego.

Theoretical Science of Knowledge. — From the principle, just now given, of the theoretical science of knowledge it appears that ego is passive in relation to the non-ego (thesis). But as ego originally posits the non-ego, it is, in being determined by it, active (antithesis). One and the same ego is, then, in one and the same relation both passive and active (passive because and in so far as it is active, and *vice versa*), that is, in it a relation of reciprocity obtains (synthesis). In so far as ego is merely passive, and negation of its opposite, non-ego is *cause and reality*. In so far, further, as it determines itself, it is *substance*. In so far as it determines itself in some limited manner, it is *accident*. There remains an unresolved contradiction in the fact that ego is both determined and self-determining, effect and substance. The resolution of the contradiction can lie only in the supposition of an infinite activity in the non-ego that can be overcome only by an infinite series of acts of the ego, since ego, in a certain sense, posits non-ego as often as it posits itself. The two-fold activity of positing and transcending is what may be termed *productive imagination*. The first product of the activity is the realization by the ego of the fact of limitation (the action of the non-ego) in itself, — sensation. The apprehension of the object of this limitation is intuition. The discovery of the cause in its origin in the ego gives

the image. The distinguishing of the two, by an act of comparison, *as* image and its cause, is understanding. The discovery by the ego of itself as ultimately both cause and image is judgment, in which the ego emerges as free from non-ego, and wholly practical.

Practical Philosophy: Theory of (1) Right, and (2) Morals. — The ever-recurrent activity which, in the theoretical sphere, appears as a relation between subject and object, ego and non-ego, continues in the practical sphere, but rather as a relation of the ego to itself, or as self-determination. The non-ego here appears as but a part of the effort of the infinite ego to realize itself, — a fact not apparent in the sphere of the theoretical. From the foregoing it at once follows that the infinite ego contains within itself an infinite number of other egos, — since all non-egos are egos, — standing in a relation or reciprocal limitation. The finite rational being can exist as such only as it finds itself reflected in other beings like itself (since it must have an *other* and must also — since it is *self*-conscious — see itself in its other) : as it in turn reflects for others like itself themselves. (1) Here is the origin and basis of the right (in which, therefore, the non-ego has its *raison d'être*). The law of right is that the freedom of each must be limited by the idea of that of all others : every free being must be treated as an end, and not merely as a means. Natural or original rights (as far as such exist) are such as are founded on the mere conception of personality, and are the right of personal freedom and the right of property (which is acquired through labor). Relations between individuals in the sphere of right are further determined by *contract*, the possibility of a violation of which implies the existence, in an acknowledged independent sphere, of the right of coercion. This right can belong only to a totality of individuals constituting a State, the first duty of which is, precisely, the securing of rights to individuals as such. The source of power in the State is the people as a whole. Popular sovereignty, exer-

cised in the form of pure Democracy, gives, however, not the best, but the worst form of government. The best is government by the Best,—an “Aristocracy.” Practically, the State can never *be* perfect, but fulfils its office if it continually approximate the ideal of the best State. The office of protecting the right involves the right to punish — which has for its end the improvement of the criminal and the prevention of crime — and the maintenance of a police. Besides the protection of rights, the State has also the offices of promoting material welfare (by organization of labor) and of educating the people, which is its principal duty. It is a duty of the State to tolerate absolutely free inquiry and free speech. (2) The goal of the infinite activity of the ego can never be anything merely real, but the ideal. The subjective consciousness as such spontaneously realizes itself in the fundamental conception — which is also an impulse or instinct — of rational self-determination, the moral law, the so-called “categorical imperative.” With this purely rational impulse is joined another, — the natural, — which it has to bring into harmony with itself. In the natural impulse in its various forms — the bodily desires — are found the materials to which the moral impulse in its purity gives form and law. The harmonization of the natural with the spiritual impulse is a process of progression through three stages, in the first of which natural impulse unrestrainedly rules, the maxim of the subject being individual happiness; in the second, the moral impulse rules but blindly; in the third, the true conception of the moral as such. This progression is never fully completed. The feeling, obtained in the last stage, of harmony with the ideal, of satisfaction, is the response of “conscience” to the fact of the (relative) attainment to the ideal. A condition of the realization of the notion of freedom is the ethical association of men a “church,” to be a member of which is the duty of every person. But this does not mean that religion is anything more than a practical belief in a moral

order of the world. God cannot be conceived as a personality; for if conceived as a particular substance, he must be conceived as having a body. The essence of religion is morality, and positive religion can be nothing but a body of conventional modes and means of securing the cultivation of the moral sense.

(*So-called*) *Later Philosophy of Fichte.* — Philosophy has thus far been for Fichte the explanation of the ground of experience, but of that ground (as we can now see) in its logical, or better, phenomenological, rather, than in its ontological character. The Absolute, or God, has thus far been treated as a mere ideal, and the pure ego, it has been understood, is not as such given in consciousness, but is outside consciousness or experience as its ground. All that has been stated or implied of it, is that it must be absolute as the presupposition of the absolute positing of itself. When, now, Fichte concentrates thought upon this, it becomes for him the Absolute, lying above and constituting the limitation and non-being of knowledge or consciousness. It is being *and* not-being, it is primordial, is God. Absolute knowledge — the Science of Knowledge — is not this being, but an image or manifestation of it, and indeed its knowledge of itself. But there is only one absolute — namely, being, God. But being, or the absolute, is not mere substance, not the God of Spinoza, of which knowledge is a mere accident. “The real life of knowledge is in its root the inner being and essence of the absolute itself; and there is between the absolute, or God, and knowledge in the deepest root of its life, no difference, but the two become lost in one another.”¹ It is the infinite moral will of the universe. In accordance with this view the practical or ethical problem consists in recognizing God as alone real, and all else as not-being, and making

¹ See Professor Everett's chapters on the ontology of Fichte in his “Critical Exposition of Fichte's Science of Knowledge” (Griggs's “Philosophical Classics”); also Professor Adamson's article on Fichte in the “Encyclopædia Britannica.”

ourselves and others, — humanity, in short, — a revelation of the divine nature. Man's highest felicity is the returning through knowledge — the Science of Knowledge — out of the manifoldness of phenomena to the unity of being. The knowledge of the identity of humanity with God may be given in immediate consciousness, — may be "revealed," as it was to the founder of Christianity; but the will of God may also be an object of philosophical knowledge. The Bible is merely a pedagogical instrumentality, not to be literally taken. In the development of human nature, the end of which is the becoming rational through freedom, there are five epochs: (1) One of the undisturbed rule of reason in instinct, — the epoch of innocence; (2) One in which there is a rule of arbitrary external authority, and dogmatism in teaching prevails; (3) An epoch in which indifference to truth and latitude as to conditions of sinfulness prevail; (4) An epoch of rational science and incipient righteousness; (5) An epoch of free self-culture and spiritual salvation. — Fichte, it should be said, did not himself conceive that his philosophical standpoint had ever radically altered. The historians, however, have *generally*¹ thought otherwise.

¹ Not always. Professor Adamson says (*loc. cit.*): "It can neither be admitted that Fichte's views underwent radical change, nor that the *Wissenschaftslehre* was ever regarded as in itself complete, nor that Fichte was unconscious of the apparent difference between his earlier and later utterances [*Cf.* Professor Zeller]. It is demonstrable by various passages in the works and letters that he never looked upon the *Wissenschaftslehre* as containing the whole system. It is clear from the chronology of his writings that the modification supposed to be due to other thinkers (Schelling and Schleiermacher), were from the first implicit in his theory, and if one fairly traces the course of thought in the early writings, one can see how he was inevitably led on to the statement of the latter, and at first sight divergent, views. On only one point, the position assigned in the *Wissenschaftslehre* to the absolute ego, is there any obscurity. From the early work, '*Neue Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre*,' unquestionably to be included in the Jena period, one can see that from the outset the doctrine of the absolute ego was held in a form differing only in statement from the later theory." Professor Everett says: "When we have

Result. — The system of Fichte is a rationalistic attempt at the union of the subjective and objective elements of experience by the deduction of the latter from the former. The attempt is scarcely successful, since the object as such, or thing-in-itself, survives as an object of moral need or intuition, without thereby receiving an explanation of itself as it is in itself. There is in this system no place for a theory of nature as such. Almost with equal truth may it be said also that there is in it no place for a theory of art, since this presupposes both subject and object. The system may be described as subjective practical idealism or rationalism. The advance by it upon that of Kant is one not so much in the adjusting of subject and object as in the harmonizing the subject within itself, as in the deduction of understanding from the pure ego (or of the categories from pure self-consciousness), and of the practical and theoretical faculties from a common root.

§ 126.

*Fichtians.*¹ — The (earlier) system of Fichte was adopted wholly, or in considerable part, by Schelling (in his first philosophizings); Friedrich Carl Forberg (1770–1848), docent and adjunct at Jena; Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848), professor-extraordinary in the theological faculty at Jena, and co-editor (with Fichte) of a philosophical journal; Johann Baptista Schad (1758–1834), professor at Kharkov (Russia); Friedrich Schlegel

reached the ontology, we have found a point of view from which the system becomes a unit. . . . The so-called earlier and later systems of Fichte are the complementary elements of a single system. The great difference between them is to be found in the fact that, in his earlier works, Fichte started from psychological analysis, and moved towards ontology; in his later, he started from the ontology, and based his psychology directly upon this. The ontology, it must be noticed, does not form the substance of the later statements of the Science of Knowledge. It simply forms the introduction to what is really, in its aim as in its title, a Science of Knowledge."

¹ See Erdmann, § 314, 2; Noack.