The Relation between Human Consciousness and its Ideal as Conceived by Kant and Fichte.¹⁾

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In this paper I have tried to compare the doctrines of Kant and Fichte²⁾ with regard to the ideal of experience, and the relation of this ideal to experience. The relation between the two philosophers may be studied from many different points of view. From no single point can we get a complete survey of the problem, but each gives us some help in solving it; and it has seemed to me that a comparison from this particular aspect may not be altogether lacking in value and interest.

In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, a sharp line of distinction is drawn between the formal and the material aspect of human cognition. On the one hand, we have the matter, which is given from without; on the other, the formative activity, which comes from within. These two seem to be utterly disparate: the matter is mere matter; the form, mere form. The content of knowing, if we look at it in itself, is a mere manifold — chaotic, unrelated, meaningless. It is only through the unifying activity of the understanding that this formless mass receives shape and meaning; it is only because the

¹⁾ A chapter from a dissertation for the degree of doctor of philosophy at Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.

²⁾ In the discussion of Fichte's doctrine, I have been obliged, from lack of space, to confine myself to the works of the first period. Since these, however, are more closely connected with the Kantian philosophy than the later works, and since the particular problem which we have to investigate is more prominent in them, it has been possible to limit the study in this way.

References to the First and Second Editions of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* are indicated by the letters A and B respectively; other references to Kant's Works are to the edition of Rosenkranz and Schubert, which is indicated by the letter R. References to Fichte are to the *Sämmtliche Werke* (Berlin, 1845), indicated by the letters S. W. and to the *Nachgelassene Werke* (Bonn, 1834), indicated by the letters N. W.

scattered sensations have been worked upon by a formative activity that they have been united into significant wholes.¹⁾ In itself the matter is essentially formless. „In der Erscheinung nenne ich das, was der Empfindung korrespondiert, die Materie derselben, dasjenige aber, welches macht, dass das Mannigfaltige der Erscheinung in gewissen Verhältnissen geordnet werden kann,²⁾ nenne ich die Form der Erscheinung. . . . Das, worin sich die Empfindungen allein ordnen und in gewisse Form gestellt werden können“ kann „nicht selbst wiederum Empfindung sein.“

And, on the other hand, if we look at the unifying activity of thought by itself, it seems to be mere form. For its content, it is wholly dependent upon something external. As soon as the manifold is given, the unifying activity can shape and mould it; but the manifold must be given. The formative principle has no power to create its own content; the form of knowledge is essentially empty. „Das Mannigfaltige“ muss „für die Anschauung noch vor der Synthesis des Verstandes, und unabhängig von ihr, gegeben sein. . . . Die Kategorien . . . sind nur Regeln für einen Verstand, dessen ganzes Vermögen im Denken besteht, d. i. in der Handlung, die Synthesis des Mannigfaltigen, welches ihm anderweitig in der Anschauung gegeben worden, zur Einheit der Apperception zu bringen, der also für sich gar nichts erkennt, sondern nur den Stoff zum Erkenntnis, die Anschauung, die ihm durchs Objekt gegeben werden muss, verbindet und ordnet.“⁴⁾

And even when we consider this formative principle in its highest manifestation, the transcendental unity of apperception, the case is no better; here, too, the form is mere form. One might

¹⁾ It would take us too far afield if I should stop to justify my assumption that the pure forms of space and time are phases of the activity of the self. In spite of the fact that Kant refers them to sensibility, and that he attributes spontaneity to the understanding alone, it seems that the logic of his system requires him to say that the entire formal aspect of our experience is due to the spontaneity of consciousness, while only the material aspect is to be referred to receptivity. And perhaps it may be urged that by introducing the imagination, which is to mediate between sense and understanding, and by making the pure schema a transcendental determination of time, Kant implicitly corrects his explicit statements.

²⁾ I have followed the reading of the Second Edition, „geordnet werden kann“; the First Edition has, „geordnet angeschaut wird“.

³⁾ A, 20; B, 34.

⁴⁾ B, 145.

think indeed that in this pure self-consciousness we have, at least implicitly, that union of subject and object which must always constitute the ideal of knowledge; here, if nowhere else, it would seem, we may hope to find a form which can supply its own content, which needs no aid from any foreign principle. But Kant does not long permit us to cherish this hope. On this point his statements are very explicit: we may not say that in the pure Ego form and content, subject- and object-self are one; for in the pure Ego there is no content, no object-self, at all. The transcendental unity of apperception is mere form; in itself it has no content whatever. *Das Ich ist einfach, „weil diese Vorstellung keinen Inhalt, mithin kein Mannigfaltiges hat.“¹⁾ „Durch das Ich, als einfache Vorstellung, ist nichts Mannigfaltiges gegeben; in der Anschauung, die davon unterschieden ist, kann es nur gegeben . . . werden.“²⁾*

Thus we seem to have a complete opposition between the two factors of human knowing: its matter is essentially formless; its form, essentially empty. We must not forget, however, that we have discovered this opposition by considering the two elements abstractly. In the concrete process of thought, the content is not formless, nor is the form empty. As a matter of fact, we never have mere form or mere content; we always have a union of form and content. How clearly Kant himself sees this, is perhaps an open question.³⁾ It is one, however, that we need not stop to

¹⁾ A, 381.

²⁾ B, 185.

³⁾ There are, no doubt, many passages in the *Kritik* which speak of the formal element of thought as if it existed in the mind ready-made, like a mould waiting to be filled. On the other hand, passages like the following seem to indicate that Kant sometimes rose above this crude conception: —

„Durch dieses Ich, oder Er, oder Es, . . . welches denkt, wird nun nichts weiter als ein transscendentales Subjekt der Gedanken vorgestellt = X, welches nur durch die Gedanken, die seine Prädikate sind, erkannt wird und wovon wir, abgesondert, niemals den mindesten Begriff haben können.“ (A, 346; B, 404.)

„Das Mannigfaltige in einer sinnlichen Anschauung Gegebene gehört notwendig unter die ursprüngliche synthetische Einheit der Apperception.“ (B, 148.)

„Der Verstand vermag nichts anzuschauen, und die Sinne nichts zu denken. Nur daraus, dass sie sich vereinigen, kann Erkenntnis entspringen. Deswegen darf man aber doch nicht ihren Anteil vermischen, sondern man hat grosse Ursache, jedes von dem andern sorgfältig abzusondern und, zu unterscheiden.“ (A, 51; B, 75, f.)

Perhaps we shall come nearest to the truth if we say that Kant held both views without clearly differentiating them; that he never quite outgrew his

consider; for even if we maintain that Kant regarded his separation of form and matter as a methodological device, we must still admit that his doctrine of the nature of thought is far from satisfactory. Kant may not mean to say that the two elements of our knowledge exist apart; but there can be little doubt that he represents their union in thinking as more or less artificial. The two elements are always found together, but they are not shown to belong together; they imply, but at the same time repel, each other: they do not constitute an organic unity. As Professor Creighton says, „Each object of knowledge is taken as really composed of a contribution from sense and a contribution from understanding. These elements really enter into it, and can be analyzed out of it The synthetic character of thought is conceived as analogous to a process of mechanical fabrication, or chemical combination.“¹⁾)

This defect in human knowing, as Kant conceives it, comes out most clearly when we consider the contrast between our cognition and that ideal of knowledge which Kant holds before us in the conception of *intellektuelle Anschauung*. The whole question of the nature of *intellektuelle Anschauung* and of its relation to the other features of Kant's system is one of much interest. Thiele's careful study²⁾ has made it evident that the conception, as it appears in the *Kritik*, has more than one form. According to his interpretation there are three main stages in the development of the doctrine. On this point I am inclined to disagree with him: the conception, it seems to me, has only two distinct phases; and it has these two because at different times Kant approaches the problem from two different points of view. In human cognition, form and matter seem to stand apart; but in the ideal of knowledge they must constitute a perfect unity. Now in one phase of the doctrine of *intellektuelle Anschauung*, Kant starts with his concept of matter, and seeks to pass from it to the thought of this organic unity, while in the other phase he attempts to reach the ideal by starting with the concept of form. In the one case, he tries to give us a matter which contains its own prin-

earlier and cruder conception of form and matter as actually existing apart, but that on the other hand he sometimes had glimpses of the truer conception.

¹⁾ The Nature of Intellectual Synthesis (*Philosophical Review*, Vol. V, p. 145).

²⁾ *Kants intellektuelle Anschauung*, 1876.

ciple of form; in the other, a form which supplies itself with content.

The first attempt gives us the doctrine in its cruder aspect. *Intellektuelle Anschauung* is the faculty of immediately apprehending things in themselves. Our cognition is defective because it deals with mere phenomena; the objects of intuitive understanding are noumena. „Wenn uns die Sinne etwas bloß vorstellen, wie es erscheint, so muß dieses Etwas doch auch an sich selbst ein Ding und ein Gegenstand einer nicht sinnlichen Anschauung, d. i. des Verstandes sein, d. i. es muß eine Erkenntnis möglich sein, darin keine Sinnlichkeit angetroffen wird und welche allein schlechthin objektive Realität hat, dadurch uns nämlich Gegenstände vorgestellt werden, wie sie sind.“¹⁾

This conception, as we have already stated, seems to have been formed on the analogy of the material aspect of our cognition. *Intellektuelle Anschauung* is here represented as pure receptivity; it differs from our knowledge simply in the fact that the content is given as it is in itself, and is not altered in the process of being received and unified. The matter given in experience is warped by being subjected to the unifying activity which works through the pure forms of intuition (*Anschauung*) and conception. As given, it is a shapeless mass, which receives form through the activity of a new principle; but this principle is regarded by Kant, not as dwelling in the matter itself, but as working upon it from without. In *intellektuelle Anschauung*, on the contrary, the form is immanent. No discursive faculty of understanding imposes upon the manifold content a unity that is foreign to its nature.²⁾ The matter of *intellektuelle Anschauung* contains its own principle of unity; the content and form are one.

This conception, however, is far from being satisfactory; although, from one point of view, *intellektuelle Anschauung* seems to have its form within itself, and in so far to be an organic unity, yet, from another, we see that the unity is by no means perfect. For, so long as we have the faculty of apprehension set over against that which it apprehends, there must be at least a partial opposition of form and matter. The given content may bring its

¹⁾ A, 249.

²⁾ „Ein Verstand, vor den es [das Noumenon] gehörte . . . , nämlich nicht diskursiv durch Kategorien, sondern intuitiv in einer nichtsinnlichen Anschauung seinen Gegenstand zu erkennen.“ (A, 256; B, 811, f.)

form with it; but in the process of being apprehended, it must receive a new form.

In the second and higher phase of the doctrine of *intellektuelle Anschauung*, this difficulty does not exist. Here, Kant starts with the formal principle of knowledge, and asks himself what modification it must undergo in order to correspond to our notion of the ideal cognition. The great defect of the pure Ego is its emptiness; the I think is indeed the highest form, but it is form devoid of content. And because of its emptiness, it cannot in itself give us any cognition whatever. „In der synthetischen ursprünglichen Einheit der Apperception“ bin ich „mir meiner selbst bewusst, nicht wie ich mir erscheine, noch wie ich an mir selbst bin, sondern nur dass ich bin. Diese Vorstellung ist ein Denken, nicht ein Anschauen.“ Nun ist „zur Erkenntnis unserer selbst ausser der Handlung des Denkens, die das Mannigfaltige einer jeden möglichen Anschauung zur Einheit der Apperception bringt, noch eine bestimmte Art der Anschauung, dadurch dieses Mannigfaltige gegeben wird, erforderlich.“¹⁾

Thus, it is the emptiness of the I think which prevents it from meeting the requirements of our ideal. It is because it has no content of its own, because it is dependent upon something else for the matter upon which it is to work, that it is defective as a principle of knowledge. If then we are to conceive of *intellektuelle Anschauung* as free from the limitations of the pure Ego of apperception, we must think of it as a self-consciousness which is not empty, but which finds within itself the material upon which it is to work. And this is the conception to which Kant comes. In the higher form of the doctrine, *intellektuelle Anschauung* is described as a pure self-consciousness which is its own object, a self-consciousness in which the act of unifying the manifold is at the same time the process whereby this manifold first comes into being. „Das Bewusstsein seiner selbst (Apperception) ist die einfache Vorstellung des Ich, und, wenn dadurch allein alles Mannigfaltige im Subjekt selbstthätig gegeben wäre, so würde die innere Anschauung intellektuell sein.“²⁾ „Ein Verstand, in welchem durch das Selbstbewusstsein zugleich alles Mannigfaltige gegeben würde, würde anschauen.“³⁾

In this thought of the pure self-consciousness which is one with

1) B, 157. 2) B, 68. 3) B, 135.

its object because it has itself for object, we have Kant's highest conception of the ideal of knowledge. Here at last, we find the perfect union of form and content; here at last, the dualism which is so manifest in human cognition gives place to a higher unity.

Now so long as we look at this conception in itself, it seems satisfactory; but as soon as we consider the relation between this ideal and our own cognition we discover some difficulties. For Kant's intellektuelle Anschauung is at best but a problematic concept, and therefore one to which we can never assert that there is any reality corresponding. Moreover, our notion of this perfect cognition is so vague and indefinite that strictly speaking we have no right to call it a concept at all. „Wir konnten nicht beweisen, dass noch eine andere Art der Anschauung [als die sinnliche] möglich sei, und obgleich unser Denken von jener Sinnlichkeit abstrahieren kann, so bleibt doch die Frage, ob es alsdann nicht eine blossе Form eines Begriffes sei und ob bei dieser Abtrennung überall ein Objekt übrig bleibe?“¹⁾ Man kann „nicht annehmen“, dass Noumena „gegeben werden können, . . . ohne dass man eine andere als sinnliche Art der Anschauung als möglich voraussetzt, wozu wir aber keineswegs berechtigt sind Wir haben einen Verstand, der sich problematisch weiter erstreckt als jene [Sphäre der Erscheinungen], aber keine Anschauung, ja auch nicht einmal den Begriff von einer möglichen Anschauung, wodurch uns ausser dem Felde der Sinnlichkeit Gegenstände gegeben“ werden können.²⁾

But the case is even more serious than this. Not only is it true that our ideal of knowledge is, and must be, vague and that we have no warrant for saying that it has any real existence; but it is also true that the ideal is for us utterly unattainable — nay, more, that it is a goal to which human knowing cannot even approximate. The limits of our cognition are fixed once for all. Whatever progress the future may bring must always be a progress within these limits, never a transcending of them. We know only the phenomenon; we can never come face to face with the thing in itself. Progress in knowledge can consist only in learning more and more about phenomena; it can never bring us one whit nearer to the reality behind them.

¹⁾ A, 252, f.

²⁾ A, 254, f.; B, 309, f.

That Kant draws this sharp line of demarcation between knowing and its ideal, is evident, I think, as soon as one considers the general spirit of the *Kritik*. The declaration that metaphysics is impossible, the assertion that our knowledge must be limited to phenomena, the insistence that our intuition must be sensuous and that the transcendental Ego cannot have the slightest content, indicate a belief that the difference between our cognition and intellektuelle Anschauung is one, not of degree, but of kind. There are only a few passages in the *Kritik* which seem to justify any modification of this interpretation; and they are the passages in which Kant speaks of the possible common root of sensibility and understanding. „Wir . . . fangen nur von dem Punkte an, wo sich die allgemeine Wurzel unserer Erkenntniskraft teilt und zwei Stämme auswirft, deren einer Vernunft ist.“¹⁾ „Dasjenige Etwas, welches den äusseren Erscheinungen zum Grunde liegt . . ., als Noumenon betrachtet, könnte doch auch zugleich das Subjekt der Gedanken sein.“²⁾

From these passages it seems that Kant recognised the possibility that the formal and material aspects of thought might have the same origin. Still, his emphatic repudiation of the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*³⁾ shows that his recognition of the possibility did not affect his general position. So much at least he would certainly say: that for us the dualism of form and content is ultimate;⁴⁾ that our ideal of a unity in which it is surmounted is only a problematic concept; and that so far as we can ever know, our cognition is wholly different in kind from this ideal unity.

It seems necessary to lay some emphasis upon this point because it is often overlooked.⁵⁾ Reading Kant, as we do, in the

¹⁾ A, 835; B, 863. cf. A. 15; B, 29.

²⁾ A, 358. ³⁾ R., XI, 153, ff.

⁴⁾ That is, in this life. In one passage, Kant speaks of the possibility that death may be „das Ende dieses sinnlichen Gebrauchs eurer Erkenntniskraft und der Anfang des intellektuellen“. (A, 778; B, 806, f.)

⁵⁾ E.g., by Thiele. His position is not stated with so much clearness as is to be wished; but apparently he tries to show that our own self-consciousness as Kant conceived it, not merely suggests the ideal, but is itself a partial realisation of the ideal. *Intellektuelle Anschauung*, in its highest form, is according to Thiele „absolutes Wissen, absolute Identität von Wissen und Sein“. Now „unser menschliches Selbstbewusstsein ist ein unendlich matter Abglanz jenes absoluten Wissens.“ Apparently, however, the difference between the two is not in kind, but merely in degree. „In dem Denkakte ‚Ich‘ fallen Subjekt und Objekt zusammen, hier ist das Wissende das Gewusste, hier ist Identität von Wissen und Sein“ (*Kants intellektuelle Anschauung*, 95).

light of those who came after him, we are prone to attribute to him doctrines which should really be credited to his successors. In one sense, of course, it is true that the conception of knowledge as an ever-deepening unity of subject and object owes its being to Kant; but it is true, chiefly in the sense that by drawing a sharp line of distinction between subject and object, Kant set others to thinking how the opposition might be overcome. The thought that subject and object must be a unity, that the apparent dualism in our knowing cannot be ultimate, is to be credited, not to Kant, but to Fichte; and I cannot see what is to be gained by attributing to Kant a doctrine which he explicitly rejected, and which is at variance with the general spirit of his philosophy.

It is often said, however, that the dualism which is so manifest in the earlier *Kritik* is overcome to a considerable extent in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* and the *Kritik der Urteilkraft*. In one respect this is perhaps true; but in general, I think that the amount and value of the correction which Kant is supposed to have made in these later writings have been overestimated.

In the sphere of knowledge, as we have seen, there is no possibility of the slightest approximation toward the ideal; the difference between human cognition and intellektuelle Anschauung is absolute. In the moral realm, however, the case seems to be somewhat better. Apparently Kant believes that we may gradually approach the ideal of morality; the task is indeed infinite, yet there is a possibility of progress. „Die völlige Angemessenheit des Willens zum moralischen Gesetze ist Heiligkeit, eine Vollkommenheit, deren kein vernünftiges Wesen der Sinnenwelt, in keinem Zeitpunkte seines Daseins, fähig ist. Da sie indessen gleichwohl als praktisch notwendig gefordert wird, so kann sie nur in einem ins Unendliche gehenden Progressus zu jener völligen Angemessenheit angetroffen werden. . . . Einem vernünftigen, aber endlichen Wesen ist nur der Progressus ins Unendliche, von niedern zu den höhern Stufen der moralischen Vollkommenheit möglich. Der Unendliche . . . sieht, in dieser für uns endlosen Reihe, das Ganze der Angemessenheit mit dem moralischen Gesetze.“¹⁾

At first thought, this may seem to be a decided advance upon the doctrine of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. As soon, however, as we examine the matter closely, we see that the gain

¹⁾ R., VIII, 261, ff.

is more apparent than real; for the advantage has been secured by lowering the concept of the ideal. In the earlier *Kritik*, the ideal is described as an organic unity of content and form; but in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* it seems to be conceived as mere form.

The dualism which appears in the sphere of knowledge as the opposition of sense and understanding meets us in the moral realm as the opposition of desire and the moral law. According to Kant, the moral law is purely formal; its whole content must be sought in natural desire: and the relation between it and this desire is represented as complete opposition. Natural impulse has its source in the world of sense. It is utterly disparate from that pure self-consciousness which forms the basis of all morality. „Der Wille ist mitten inne zwischen seinem Prinzip a priori, welches formell ist, und zwischen seiner Triebfeder a posteriori, welche materiell ist.“¹⁾ „Nur ein formales Gesetz, d. i. ein solches, welches der Vernunft nichts weiter als die Form ihrer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung zur obersten Bedingung der Maximen vorschreibt, kann a priori ein Bestimmungsgrund der praktischen Vernunft sein.“²⁾

Now if the two elements of our moral experience are essentially opposed, the only morality possible for us would consist in the subjugation of one of them by the other. And this is precisely the conception which Kant seems to have of the nature of morality. The development of the moral life is regarded as the gradual annihilation of our natural impulses. Desire is not to be taken up into the moral law and purified until it is worthy to be the content of the moral life; it is to be crushed out. The ideal of morality is to be found, not in the organic unity of content and form, but in the complete subjection of content to form. „Das Wesentliche alles sittlichen Wertes der Handlungen kommt darauf an, dass das moralische Gesetz unmittelbar den Willen bestimme. Geschieht die Willensbestimmung zwar gemäss dem moralischen Gesetze, aber nur vermittelt eines Gefühls, welcher Art es auch sei,³⁾ das vorausgesetzt werden muss, damit jenes ein hinreichender Bestimmungsgrund des Willens werde, so wird die Handlung nicht Moralität enthalten Das moralische Gesetz“ thut „allen unsern Neigungen Eintrag.“⁴⁾ „Nur das, was bloss als Grund, niemals aber als Wirkung mit meinem Willen verknüpft ist, was nicht meiner

¹⁾ R., VIII, 20. ²⁾ R., VIII, 185.

³⁾ The italics are mine. ⁴⁾ R., VIII, 195, ff.

Neigung dient, sondern sie überwiegt, wenigstens diese von deren Überschlage bei der Wahl ganz ausschliesst, mithin das blossе Gesetz für sich, kann ein Gegenstand der Achtung sein.“¹⁾

It may be urged, however, that in identifying the formal law with the ideal of the moral life, we are misrepresenting Kant. Holiness, Kant tells us, is indeed the highest good, but it is not the complete good. The summum bonum in its truest sense is „Glückseligkeit, ganz genau in Proportion der Sittlichkeit ausgeteilt.“²⁾ It may be, then, that Kant conceives of the moral ideal not as mere form, but as a unity of form and content. Whether this be the case, however, we need not stop to decide; for here, too, we find a lower conception of the ideal than that which appears in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. It is true that in the complete good we have a union of form and matter; but this is by no means an organic unity. Virtue and happiness are not one in essence; they are held together by an external force. In themselves they are utterly opposed; in order to make their union intelligible, we must postulate the existence of a Divine Being. „Man muss bedauern, dass die Scharfsinnigkeit dieser Männer [der Epikuräer und der Stoiker] unglücklich angewandt war, zwischen äusserst ungleichartigen Begriffen, dem der Glückseligkeit und dem der Tugend, Identität zu ergrübeln Glückseligkeit und Sittlichkeit“ sind „zwei spezifisch ganz verschiedene Elemente des höchsten Guts, und ihre Verbindung“ kann also „nicht analytisch erkannt werden,“ sondern ist „eine Synthesis der Begriffe.“³⁾ „Also ist das höchste Gut in der Welt nur möglich, so ferne eine oberste Natur angenommen wird, die eine der moralischen Gesinnung gemässe Kausalität hat.“⁴⁾

Thus, whichever view we take of Kant's moral ideal, we see that it is far from being that organic unity of form and content which we have in the ideal of intellektuelle Anschauung. It seems, then, that we are justified in saying that with regard to the relation between human experience and its ideal, the second *Kritik* makes no real advance upon the first. The ideal of morality is less inaccessible than the ideal of knowledge, because it is lower.

1) R., VIII, 20. 2) R., VIII, 247.

3) R., VIII, 248, ff. We have here another illustration of that mechanical conception of synthesis to which Professor Creighton calls attention in the article from which we have quoted.

4) R., VIII, 265.

But we are as far as ever from the conception of human experience as being implicitly that unity of form and matter which we must always regard as the ideal.

Nor can I see that the case is any better when we come to the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. It is often said, to be sure, that in this work Kant finally overcomes the dualism of his system; that in the aesthetic judgment we have that harmony of subject and object for which we have so long been searching, and that the concept of design bridges the gulf between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. It does not seem to me, however, that Kant really solves the problem in either of these cases,¹⁾ though he perhaps indicates the direction in which the solution is to be sought. At first, indeed, it may seem that in the immediate apprehension of the beautiful, we have that harmony of subject and object for which the theoretical consciousness seeks in vain. But when we recall Kant's comparison of aesthetic and rational Ideas, we see that this can hardly have been his meaning. „Ideen . . . sind, nach einem gewissen (subjektiven oder objektiven) Prinzip, auf einen Gegenstand bezogene Vorstellungen, so ferne sie doch nie eine Erkenntnis desselben werden können. Sie sind entweder nach einem bloss subjektiven Prinzip der Übereinstimmung der Erkenntnisvermögen unter einander (der Einbildungskraft und des Verstandes) auf eine Anschauung bezogen und heissen alsdann ästhetische, oder nach einem objektiven Prinzip auf einen Begriff bezogen und können doch nie eine Erkenntnis des Gegenstandes abgeben und heissen Vernunftideen. . . . Eine ästhetische Idee kann keine Erkenntnis werden, weil sie eine Anschauung (der Einbildungskraft) ist, der niemals ein Begriff adäquat gefunden werden kann. Eine Vernunftidee kann nie Erkenntnis werden, weil sie einen Begriff (vom Übersinnlichen) enthält, dem niemals eine Anschauung angemessen gegeben werden kann.“²⁾

The natural inference from this passage seems to be that the ideal of knowledge is no more fully realised in the aesthetic than in the rational Idea. Just as the latter needs intuition, in order that it may become valid knowledge, so the former needs conception.

¹⁾ It may be interesting to notice that in one of his later treatises Fichte declares that the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, which professes to mediate between the sensible and intelligible worlds, does not fulfil its promise. (N. W., II, 103, f.)

²⁾ R., IV, 218, f.

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There is a defect even in our apprehension of the beautiful; the adequate concept (formal element) is lacking. And even if one were willing to grant that in his doctrine of the beautiful, Kant comes somewhat nearer to the perfect harmony of subject and object, still one cannot help feeling that the difference between aesthetic contemplation, as Kant conceives it, and his ideal of intellektuelle Anschauung is a difference in kind.

And when we turn to the teleological faculty of judgment, there seems to be still less reason for maintaining that the dualism of the earlier works is overcome. For Kant frequently reminds us of the difference between our cognition, with its inevitable dualism, and the ideal of an intuitive understanding, in whose act of thought the existence of the object is given.¹⁾ And he tells us more than once that the concept of design, which is supposed to mediate between the sensible and the intelligible world, has merely subjective validity. All that it does is to make it possible for us to think the unity of nature and freedom. „Der Begriff der Zweckmässigkeit der Natur in ihren Produkten“ wird „ein für die menschliche Urteilstkraft in Ansehung der Natur notwendiger, aber nicht die Bestimmung der Objekte selbst angehender Begriff sein, also ein subjektives Prinzip der Vernunft für die Urteilstkraft, welches als regulativ (nicht konstitutiv) für unsere menschliche Urteilstkraft eben so notwendig gilt, als ob es ein objektives Prinzip wäre.“²⁾

It seems clear, then, that Kant's conception of experience had not changed when he wrote the *Kritik der Urteilstkraft*. The opposition which the first *Kritik* finds between the two aspects of human experience and which reappears in the ethical treatises meets us for the third time in the *Kritik der Urteilstkraft*. In themselves, form and matter may not be opposed; but Kant is very sure that as aspects of our experience they stand apart, that alike in our simplest perception and in our most complicated processes of reasoning, in our aesthetic consciousness and in our moral experi-

¹⁾ „Es ist dem menschlichen Verstande unumgänglich notwendig, Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit der Dinge zu unterscheiden. Der Grund davon liegt im Subjekte und der Natur seiner Erkenntnisvermögen. Denn wären zu dieser ihrer Ausübung nicht zwei ganz heterogene Stücke, Verstand für Begriffe und sinnliche Anschauung für Objekte, die ihnen korrespondieren, erforderlich, so würde es keine solche Unterscheidung (zwischen dem Möglichen und Wirklichen) geben. Wäre nämlich unser Verstand anschauend, so hätte er keine Gegenstände als das Wirkliche.“ (R., IV, 292.)

²⁾ R., IV, 295.

ence, the dualism of content and form persists. We have indeed a vague notion of a kind of consciousness in which this dualism is surmounted: but we do not know that any such cognition really exists; and, on the other hand, we may be very sure that if it does exist, it is wholly unlike our own consciousness.

Now the great difference between Kant and Fichte is that the latter seeks to rise above this opposition of content and form, that he insists unflinchingly that even for us it is not ultimate. Knowledge, our knowledge, is a unity. It appears indeed as duality: but its task is just to rise above this dualism; to conquer this phenomenality; to know itself, not in its appearance, but in its truth.

That human thought is essentially a unity, is the fundamental presupposition of the Wissenschaftslehre. In fact, Fichte maintains that it is the fundamental presupposition of all philosophy. In assuming that philosophy is possible, we are virtually assuming that human knowing is a system; but this means that all its various forms are expressions of one underlying principle, that the nature of thought — in all its phases — is one. This is the supposition upon which all philosophy proceeds; this must be true, if philosophy is to exist at all. „Es ist leicht zu bemerken, dass bei Voraussetzung der Möglichkeit einer solchen Wissenschaftslehre überhaupt . . ., immer vorausgesetzt werde, dass im menschlichen Wissen wirklich ein System sei. Soll ein solches System darin sein, so lässt sich auch, unabhängig von unserer Beschreibung der Wissenschaftslehre, erweisen, dass es einen solchen absolut-ersten Grundsatz geben müsse.“¹⁾

But although Fichte insists that thought is essentially unitary, he does not deny that it seems to itself dualistic, nay, more, that it must seem to itself so. „Die Ichheit besteht in der absoluten Identität des subjektiven und des objektiven (absoluter Vereinigung des Seins mit dem Bewusstsein und des Bewusstseins mit dem Sein), wird gesagt. Nicht das subjektive, noch das objektive, sondern — eine Identität ist das Wesen des Ich Kann nun irgend jemand diese Identität, als sich selbst, denken? Schlechterdings nicht; denn um sich selbst zu denken, muss man ja eben jene Unterscheidung zwischen subjektivem und objektivem vornehmen, die in diesem Begriffe nicht vorgenommen werden soll. Ohne diese Unterscheidung ist ja überhaupt kein Denken möglich.“²⁾

¹⁾ S. W., I, 52.

²⁾ S. W., IV, 42.

We see, then, that Fichte, as well as Kant, admits the dualism of form and matter in our cognition. He makes no attempt to deny that on the plane of ordinary consciousness these two aspects of knowing are sharply opposed. He differs from Kant merely in his insistence that we can rise above this plane, to a point from which we can see that the opposition is not the highest truth. „Das a priori und das a posteriori ist für einen vollständigen Idealismus gar nicht zweierlei, sondern ganz einerlei; es wird nur von zwei Seiten betrachtet.“¹⁾

If, now, this opposition between the two aspects of experience is not fundamental, if human knowing is at bottom a unity of content and form, then the difference between it and its ideal is one, not of kind, but simply of degree. For Kant, as we have seen, our cognition is utterly unlike that ideal unity of form and matter to which he gives the name of *intellektuelle Anschauung*. For Fichte, on the contrary, the essence of the two is the same. All knowing is a union of form and matter, subject and object. This union may have various degrees of completeness; the duality is never quite overcome in actual or individual modes of knowing. The essence of thought, however, consists, not in its particularity, but in its absoluteness. The more perfectly the duality has been overcome, the more has the true nature of knowing been manifested. For its true nature is not the actual, but the ideal. Our consciousness can be understood only when it is considered in its relation to absolute knowing.

This insistence that the nature of thought can be understood only when it is interpreted in the light of its ideal, illustrates a difference in method between Kant and Fichte. Kant starts with human experience and finds in it certain oppositions, which may all be regarded as different phases of the fundamental opposition between content and form. Since he sees no way of rising above these, he accepts them as ultimate. But if we hold that thought is essentially dualistic, then we can never hope to bridge the gulf between it and that ideal unity in which all oppositions are harmonised. Thus for Kant the relation between experience and its ideal is conceived negatively; the ideal is the negation of the real.

Now Fichte sees as plainly as Kant the dualistic aspect of our experience: but he does not succumb to it so readily. For

¹⁾ S. W., I, 447.

him, a purely negative relation is unthinkable. The ideal cannot be the mere negation of the real. And if it be true that by starting with experience we can never show the relation between it and its ideal, then we must not start with experience.¹⁾ If we cannot explain the ideal by means of the real, we must try to explain the real from the ideal.

It should be noted, however, that even Fichte regards the ideal of experience as unattainable. The perfect unity of form and content is the goal of an infinite progress: thought may gradually approach it but can never reach it. Die „höchste Einheit werden wir in der Wissenschaftslehre finden; aber nicht als etwas, das ist, sondern als etwas, das durch uns hervorgebracht werden soll, aber nicht kann.“²⁾ „Die Einheit des reinen Geistes ist mir un-erreichbares Ideal; letzter Zweck, der aber nie wirklich wird.“³⁾

We see, then, that Fichte agrees with Kant in regarding the ideal as unattainable, but that he differs from Kant in holding that the relation between it and our actual experience is a positive one. And in saying that the relation is positive, we do not mean simply that consciousness may gradually approximate to its ideal; we mean also that in a sense it already is the ideal. The Idea of the Ego is not transcendent, but immanent — not so much a goal outside thought, which attracts it, as a moving principle within, which impels it forward. „Das Ich ist nur das, als was es sich setzt. Es ist unendlich, heisst, es setzt sich unendlich.“⁴⁾ „Dennoch schwebt die Idee einer solchen zu vollendenden Unendlichkeit uns vor, und ist im Innersten unseres Wesens enthalten.“⁵⁾

The unity of consciousness, then, is not something external to consciousness; it is the internal principle at work in consciousness. The progress of knowledge is not approximation toward an external unity, but the making explicit of a unity which is already implicit. This is brought out most clearly in the oft-quoted passage from the *Zweite Einleitung*: „Im Ich, als intellektueller Anschauung, liegt lediglich die Form der Ichheit, das in sich zurückgehende Handeln, welches freilich auch selbst

¹⁾ „Nun hat die Philosophie den Grund aller Erfahrung anzugeben; ihr Objekt liegt sonach notwendig ausser aller Erfahrung.“ (S. W. I, 425.)

²⁾ S. W., I, 101.

³⁾ S. W., I, 416, note.

⁴⁾ S. W., I, 214.

⁵⁾ S. W., I, 270.

zum Gehalte desselben wird.¹⁾ Das Ich, als Idee, ist das Vernunftwesen, inwiefern es die allgemeine Vernunft teils in sich selbst vollkommen dargestellt hat, wirklich durchaus vernünftig und nichts als vernünftig ist; also auch aufgehört hat, Individuum zu sein, welches letztere es nur durch sinnliche Beschränkung war: teils, inwiefern das Vernunftwesen die Vernunft auch ausser sich in der Welt, die demnach auch in dieser Idee gesetzt bleibt, ausführlich realisiert hat. Die Welt bleibt in dieser Idee, als Welt überhaupt, als Substrat mit diesen bestimmten mechanischen und organischen Gesetzen; aber diese Gesetze sind durchaus geeignet, den Endzweck der Vernunft darzustellen. Die Idee des Ich hat mit dem Ich, als Anschauung, nur das gemein, dass das Ich in beiden nicht als Individuum gedacht wird; im letzteren darum nicht, weil die Ichheit noch nicht bis zur Individualität bestimmt ist, im ersteren umgekehrt darum nicht, weil durch die Bildung nach allgemeinen Gesetzen die Individualität verschwunden ist. Darin aber sind beide entgegengesetzt, dass in dem Ich, als Anschauung, nur die Form des Ich liegt, und auf ein eigentliches Material desselben, welches nur durch sein Denken einer Welt denkbar ist, gar nicht Rücksicht genommen wird; da hingegen im letzteren die vollständige Materie der Ichheit gedacht wird . . . Das erstere ist . . . ursprüngliche Anschauung . . . : das letztere ist nur Idee; es kann nicht bestimmt gedacht werden, und es wird nie wirklich sein, sondern wir sollen dieser Idee uns nur ins unendliche annähern.“²⁾

In this passage we have the most complete expression which Fichte gives us, of his conception of thought as a self-developing form. The Ego as intellektuelle Anschauung³⁾ is form whose

¹⁾ The italics are mine.

²⁾ S. W., I, 515, f.

³⁾ It is hardly necessary to point out that Fichte uses the term *intellektuelle Anschauung* in a different sense from that in which Kant employed it. With Fichte the phrase seems to have two significations, which are, however, closely connected. Sometimes, as in the passage just quoted, *intellektuelle Anschauung* seems to be thought of as the form which has not yet unfolded its content, as the still undifferentiated unity which is the basis of experience. At other times, however, Fichte speaks of it as the act of philosophical reflection through which we discover this underlying unity. In an interesting passage in the *Zweite Einleitung* (S. W., I, 471, ff.), Fichte himself tells us that *intellektuelle Anschauung* has a different meaning in his system from that which it has in Kant's. „Die intellektuelle Anschauung im Kantischen Sinne ist ihr [der Wissenschaftslehre] ein Unding.“ As Thiele remarks, however (op. cit., 178, ff.), Fichte does not seem to recognise the higher form of Kant's doctrine.

content has not yet become explicit. Hence Fichte speaks of it as mere form. But it is evident that the content which it gains in the process of development does not come to it from without. As Fichte himself says, „the form of egohood — the activity returning upon itself“ — becomes its own content. In short, we have here the germs of Hegel's conception of the Idea which gradually realises itself, the universal which develops by becoming more and more concrete.

In this doctrine, human experience seems to occupy a middle position between the form which has as yet no explicit content and the fully developed form in which the content has been perfectly explicated. Now experience seems dualistic; in the process of development, the content is set over against the form, from which it has proceeded and with which it is really identical. This temporary opposition is essential if the higher unity is ever to be made manifest.¹⁾ In order that the apparently empty identity may show itself as identity in difference, the difference must be emphasised. Thus, human consciousness, in spite of its seeming dualism, is a necessary stage in the realisation of the ideal unity of form and content. It appears wholly unlike its ideal; but on examination the difference, which seems at first to be one of kind, resolves itself into a mere difference in degree of development.

There is one other point which must be considered in our study of Fichte's conception of the relation between thought and its ideal. We saw that in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* Kant seems to admit the possibility that we may approximate to the ideal of morality, but that he makes this advance by conceiving of the ideal either as empty form or as an artificial union of form and content. The question naturally suggests itself, whether Fichte's gain also may not be merely apparent; and this question must now be considered.

We may say at once, I think, that Fichte does not conceive of the ideal as an artificial unity of form and matter. In the works

Certainly Kant's *intellektuelle Anschauung*, regarded as a self-consciousness in whose very act of unity the manifold content is given, is not an *Unding* for Fichte. Its parallel in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, however, is not the *Ego* as *intellektuelle Anschauung*, but the *Ego* as *Idea*. Thiele does not seem to recognise the fact that in the *Idea* of the *Ego* we have Kant's *intellektuelle Anschauung* in its highest form.

¹⁾ „Keine Synthesis ist möglich ohne eine vorhergegangene Antithesis.“ (S. W., I, 114.)

of the first period, to which our study is confined, it would be impossible for him to think of the summum bonum as that mechanical union of happiness and virtue which Kant describes — for the simple reason that he conceives of God, not as a transcendent being, but as the immanent principle in all conscious life. The question which remains for us, then, is whether he thinks of his ideal as mere form and thus regards the progress of experience as the gradual annihilation of content.

Some critics seem disposed to answer this query in the affirmative. Professor Andrew Seth, e. g., in *Hegelianism and Personality*, evidently interprets Fichte as teaching that the Idea, which gradually develops itself in the world of consciousness, is purely formal, and that if it could ever be perfectly realised we should have form utterly devoid of content. The ground upon which this interpretation is based, seems to be the statement, which Fichte often makes, that if the goal of the infinite progress were ever realised, individuality would have disappeared. This statement Professor Seth evidently interprets as meaning that the end of the process would be a relapse into the unconscious, into that which is lower than our own conscious experience. Fichte's theory, he says, „even as a metaphysic of ethics is insufficient. Morality becomes illusory, if it is represented as the pursuit of a goal whose winning would be suicidal to morality itself, and to all conscious life We may well withdraw our eyes from the goal if we are not to lose heart for the race. Fichte's account, in short, leaves no permanent reality in the universe whatever. The world is hung, as it were, between two vacuities — between the pure or Absolute Ego on the one hand, which is completely empty apart from the finite individuals whom it constitutes, and the ‚Idea of the Ego‘ on the other, which is admittedly unattainable, and, if attainable, would be a total blank, the collapse of all conscious life.“¹⁾)

It can not be denied that in some of Fichte's treatises, and particularly in the *Sittenlehre* of 1798, there are passages which suggest this interpretation. It seems to me, however, that Professor Seth fails to take account of other statements which indicate that, sometimes at least, Fichte rises to a higher conception of the ideal.

In the *Grundlage*, the dualism of form and content is represented at first as an opposition between Ego and Non-Ego; but this

¹⁾ *Hegelianism and Personality*, 2nd ed., 58, f.

soon develops into an opposition between the Ego as infinite and the Ego as finite. Now if we believe that finite and infinite are essentially opposed, then the unity which we regard as the ideal of thought must be conceived as purely formal; but if we maintain that the opposition is not irreconcilable, our ideal becomes an organic unity of content and form. In the one case, the goal of the endless progress is represented as the annihilation of content, the complete absorption of the finite into the infinite; in the other, as the perfect interpenetration of form and content, as the finite which has developed into the infinite, as the infinite which is fully realised in the finite.

There are some indications in the *Grundlage* of a tendency to adopt the first alternative — to emphasise the opposition of finite and infinite and thus to suggest that the unattainable ideal of experience would be mere empty form. „Ich und Nicht-Ich sowie sie durch den Begriff der gegenseitigen Einschränkung gleich- und entgegengesetzt werden, sind selbst beide etwas (Accidenzen). im Ich, als teilbarer Substanz; gesetzt durch das Ich, als absolutes unbeschränkbares; Subjekt, dem nichts gleich ist, und nichts entgegengesetzt ist.“¹⁾ And again: „Insofern das Ich durch das Nicht-Ich eingeschränkt wird, ist es endlich; an sich aber, so wie es durch seine eigene absolute Thätigkeit gesetzt wird, ist es unendlich. Dieses beide in ihm, die Unendlichkeit und die Endlichkeit, sollen vereinigt werden. Aber eine solche Vereinigung ist an sich unmöglich. Lange zwar wird der Streit durch Vermittelung geschlichtet; das unendliche begrenzt das endliche. Zuletzt aber, da die völlige Unmöglichkeit der gesuchten Vereinigung sich zeigt, muss die Endlichkeit überhaupt aufgehoben werden; alle Schranken müssen verschwinden, das unendliche Ich muss, als Eins, und als Alles, allein übrig bleiben.“²⁾

These passages give the best expression which I have found in the *Grundlage* of the tendency to oppose the finite and the infinite aspect of the Ego. On the other hand, we have several emphatic statements in favor of the higher conception of the ideal. „Keine Unendlichkeit, keine Begrenzung; keine Begrenzung, keine Unendlichkeit; Unendlichkeit und Begrenzung sind in einem und ebendemselben synthetischen Gliede vereinigt. — Ginge die Thätigkeit des Ich nicht ins Unendliche, so könnte es

¹⁾ S. W., I, 119.

²⁾ S. W., I, 144.

diese seine Thätigkeit nicht selbst begrenzen Ferner, wenn das Ich sich nicht begrenzte, so wäre es nicht unendlich.“¹⁾ „Ohne jene Beziehung [auf ein Objekt] wäre kein Objekt für das Ich, sondern dasselbe wäre Alles in Allem und gerade darum Nichts.“²⁾ „Das absolute Ich ist schlechthin sich selbst gleich: alles in ihm ist Ein und ebendasselbe Ich und gehört (wenn es erlaubt ist, sich so uneigentlich auszudrücken) zu Einem und ebendemselben Ich; es ist da nichts zu unterscheiden, kein mannigfaltiges; das Ich ist Alles und ist Nichts, weil es für sich nichts ist, kein setzendes und kein gesetztes in sich selbst unterscheiden kann.“³⁾

Additional support for this second interpretation of Fichte's ideal is found in the Recension des Aenesidemus. „Das Ich in der intellektuellen Anschauung ist . . . schlechthin selbständig und unabhängig. Das Ich im empirischen Bewusstsein . . . , als Intelligenz, ist nur in Beziehung auf ein Intelligibles und existiert insofern abhängig. Nun soll dieses dadurch sich selbst entgegengesetzte Ich nicht Zwei, sondern nur Ein Ich ausmachen, und das ist geforderter Maassen unmöglich; denn abhängig und unabhängig stehen im Widerspruche. . . . Jene Vereinigung, Ein Ich, das durch seine Selbstbestimmung zugleich alles Nicht-Ich bestimme (die Idee der Gottheit), ist das letzte Ziel [unseres] Strebens.“⁴⁾

This passage furnishes a strong argument for the theory that Fichte's ideal is not empty form. The ideal is spoken of as the union of the two aspects of the Ego; and the words in which this union is described, remind us forcibly of Kant's description of intellektuelle Anschauung as a cognition in which, by the very act of self-consciousness, all the manifold is given. But the completest expression of this conception which Fichte gives us is found in the passage which we have already quoted from the Zweite Einleitung.⁵⁾ Here we are explicitly told that the form becomes its own content and that in the Idea of the Ego „die vollständige Materie der Ichheit gedacht wird“.

On the other hand, the weight of evidence in the Sittenlehre seems to me to be in favor of Professor Seth's interpretation.⁶⁾ Here,

1) S. W., I, 214. 2) S. W., I, 261.

3) S. W., I, 264. 4) S. W., I, 22, f.

5) S. W., I, 515, f.

6) Fichte's admiration for the Kritik der praktischen Vernunft is well known, and it may explain in part the tendency toward rigorism which appears in the Sittenlehre.

as in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, the dualism of experience takes the form of an opposition between desire and the moral law. The natural impulse is directed toward enjoyment; the higher impulse, toward the self-determining activity of reason. „Inwiefern der Mensch auf blossen Genuss ausgeht, ist er abhängig von dem Vorhandensein der Objekte eines Triebes; ist sonach sich selbst nicht genug Aber inwiefern der Mensch nur überhaupt reflektiert und dadurch Subjekt des Bewusstseins wird , wird er Ich, und es äussert sich in ihm die Tendenz der Vernunft, sich schlechthin durch sich selbst, als Subjekt des Bewusstseins , zu bestimmen.“¹⁾

What now is the relation between these two impulses? Are they to be regarded as mutually exclusive, or does their apparent opposition rest upon an underlying unity? Sometimes Fichte seems to hold that the opposition is fundamental. But if it is, then the harmony which is demanded by the moral law can be reached only by the annihilation of the lower impulse. The impulse toward self-activity is to reign supreme; natural desire must be thwarted, negated, blotted out. „Diese allein [die reine absolute Thätigkeit] ist das eigentliche wahre Ich; ihr wird der Trieb entgegengesetzt, als etwas fremdes; zwar gehört er zum Ich, aber er ist nicht das Ich. Jene Thätigkeit ist das Ich.“²⁾ Der reine Trieb „geht gar nicht auf einen Genuss, von welcher Art er auch sein möge,³⁾ vielmehr auf Geringschätzung alles Genusses Er geht lediglich auf Behauptung meiner Würde, die in der absoluten Selbstständigkeit und Selbstgenügsamkeit besteht.“⁴⁾

But in another passage, Fichte tells us that the two impulses are not essentially opposed. „Mein Trieb als Naturwesen, meine Tendenz als reiner Geist, sind es zwei verschiedene Triebe? Nein, beides ist, vom transscendentalen Gesichtspunkte aus, ein und ebenderselbe Urtrieb, der mein Wesen konstituiert: nur wird er angesehen von zwei verschiedenen Seiten. Nämlich, ich bin Subjekt-

¹⁾ S. W., IV, 130.

²⁾ S. W., IV, 140. It should be noticed that the statements which seem to commit Fichte to the theory that the ideal is merely formal do not imply that it is essentially unlike consciousness. Here, e.g., Fichte insists that the formal aspect of consciousness is its true nature.

³⁾ The italics are mine. Cf. the equally strong statement from Kant (*R.*, VIII, 195), quoted above.

⁴⁾ S. W., IV, 142.

Objekt und in der Identität und Unzertrennlichkeit beider besteht mein wahres Sein. Erblicke ich mich, als durch die Gesetze der sinnlichen Anschauung und des discursiven Denkens vollkommen bestimmtes Objekt, so wird das, was in der That mein einziger Trieb ist, mir zum Naturtriebe . . . Erblicke ich mich, als Subjekt, so wird er mir zum reinen geistigen Triebe . . . Aber beide konstituieren nur ein und ebendasselbe Ich; mithin müssen beide Triebe im Umfange des Bewusstseins vereinigt werden. Es wird sich zeigen, dass in dieser Vereinigung von dem höheren die Reinheit . . . der Thätigkeit, von dem niederen der Genuss als Zweck aufgegeben werden müsse; so dass als Resultat der Vereinigung sich finde objektive Thätigkeit, deren Endzweck absolute Freiheit, absolute Unabhängigkeit von aller Natur ist: — ein unendlicher . . . Zweck . . . Sieht man nur auf das höhere Begehrungsvermögen, so erhält man bloss Metaphysik der Sitten, welche formal und leer ist. Nur durch synthetische Vereinigung desselben mit dem niederen erhält man eine Sittenlehre, welche reell sein muss.“¹⁾

On the whole, this passage seems to argue against the Kantian conception of morality. It is not perfectly certain, however, that the „absolute Unabhängigkeit“, which Fichte identifies with the ideal, is anything more than empty form. It is possible also that by his distinction between „Metaphysik der Sitten“ and „Sittenlehre“ Fichte means that the latter deals with our actual moral experience and the former with the nature of the moral ideal.

There is a similar uncertainty in regard to another passage,²⁾ which is too long to be quoted in full. At first thought, Fichte tells us, it seems as if the higher and lower impulses were utterly opposed, and thus the causality of the higher were merely restrictive and negative. But freedom must be a positive force. Now it can be this, only if it is „Grund einer wirklichen Handlung.“ The two impulses, then, are united in the moral act, just as they are in the „Urtrieb“. So far, the theory seems consistent; but Fichte now goes on as follows: „Der reine Trieb geht auf absolute Unabhängigkeit . . . Nun kann . . . das Ich nie unabhängig werden, so lange es Ich sein soll; also liegt der Endzweck des Vernunftwesens notwendig in der Unendlichkeit.“³⁾

It is hard to say what is Fichte's precise meaning in these

¹⁾ S. W., IV, 180, f.

²⁾ S. W., IV, 147, ff.

³⁾ S. W., IV, 149.

passages; but it must be admitted, I think, that they furnish some ground for Professor Seth's criticism. As we have seen, however, Fichte frequently rises to a higher point of view; and it is because it fails to take account of this fact that the criticism must be regarded as inadequate. We cannot deny that Fichte occasionally loses his grasp of the higher conception, but we must admit that at other times his hold upon the truth seems to be firm.

It must be remembered, however, that Fichte always maintains that if the goal were ever reached, individuality would have disappeared. And unless I am greatly mistaken, this statement is the real ground of Professor Seth's objection to the theory. Apparently Professor Seth holds that the disappearance of individuality means a relapse into the unconscious. But this, it seems to me, is merely an assumption; there is no good reason for identifying the two notions. When Fichte says that in the Idea of the Ego, individuality — and hence consciousness, in his sense of the word — will have vanished, he does not mean to assert that the Idea is to be conceived on the analogy of the unconscious. To think of it thus would be to make it mere dead being, whereas Fichte always declares that the fundamental principle of his philosophy is life and activity.¹⁾ Evidently his meaning is that in so far as it differs from consciousness it is not lower, but higher. Our consciousness is steadily working toward the point at which the dualism of subject and object shall be surmounted. If this point were ever reached, we should see beyond the dualism, should apprehend subject and object in their true relations. Now Fichte gives the name of „consciousness“ to the stage in which we do not see beyond the opposition; hence he says that in the completed ideal, consciousness will have disappeared. But this hardly justifies us in maintaining that the goal of the process is „a total blank“.

We may now sum up briefly the results of our study. We have seen that Kant's conception of the ideal of experience is differ-

¹⁾ In his *Gerichtliche Verantwortung gegen die Anklage des Atheismus*, Fichte explains what he means by saying that his ultimate principle (God) is not conscious: „Nur in Rücksicht der Schranken und der dadurch bedingten Begreiflichkeit habe ich das Bewusstsein Gottes geleugnet. Der Materie nach — dass ich mich bemühe, das unbegreifliche auszudrücken, so gut ich kann! — ist die Gottheit lauter Bewusstsein, sie ist Intelligenz, reine Intelligenz, geistiges Leben und Thätigkeit. Dieses Intelligente aber in einen Begriff zu fassen, und zu beschreiben, wie es von sich selbst und andern wisse, ist schlechthin unmöglich.“ (S. W, V, 266.)

ent at different times. When he is dealing with the moral aspect of consciousness, he fails to reach his highest conception. The moral ideal is for him either pure form (the moral law) or a mechanical synthesis of form and content (the complete good). And in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, the doctrine of the ideal has two forms, one of which is very far from being satisfactory. In this lower phase of the doctrine, *intellektuelle Anschauung* is described as the faculty of immediately apprehending things in themselves: here we have a more complete synthesis of form and matter than that which exists in our own experience; but the union is still somewhat artificial. In the higher phase of the doctrine, we have the perfect unity of form and content, the pure self-consciousness which is its own object.

In Fichte's philosophy too, we find that the ideal is not always conceived in the same way. To be sure, there does not seem to be any tendency to think of it as an artificial union of form and matter; but there is evidence of a disposition to regard it as empty form. There are slight traces of this tendency in the *Grundlage*, but it is more manifest in the *Sittenlehre*. On the other hand, we find that Fichte often regards the ideal as an organic unity of form and content. It is true that he constantly asserts that in the Idea of the Ego all individuality has disappeared; but this should not be interpreted as meaning that the goal of the infinite progress is a relapse into blank identity.

At his best, then, Fichte has the same conception of the ideal which we have found in the higher form of Kant's *intellektuelle Anschauung*. The difference between the two thinkers is that Kant holds that the relation between this ideal and experience is negative, while Fichte regards it as positive. Kant insists that experience is essentially dualistic, and hence different in kind from *intellektuelle Anschauung*; Fichte maintains that experience is essentially a unity, and that it differs from its ideal, not in kind, but in degree.