

Having once arrived at this conviction of an underlying spiritual unity, the difficulty for Fichte was how to descend from it into the diversities and contradictions of the actual world which surrounds us, or philosophically to explain how it comes that that which is essentially and originally united should have unfolded itself in the world of many things, many persons, and many contradictions. This difficulty Fichte does not profess to solve: he merely interprets it. The existence of materiality, of the mechanical, of all that destroys the original unity and harmony, is for him just as much an immediate and inexplicable fact as is the conception of the spiritual and deeper unity. But of the two facts the latter is for us human beings the greater and more important, brought home to us continually by the necessity to act, to do something, and by the possibility of self-determination according to some ethical principle or moral law.

The attempts of Fichte to elaborate the logical and psychological details of his great conception must now be regarded as unfortunate, and indeed at the time they tended to bring discredit upon the whole of his philosophy, exposing it to much criticism, and even to ridicule.¹ His greatness lay, not in the direction of logical analysis, but rather in the personal fervour with which he emphasised the principle of freedom and self-determination according to high moral standards. He did this in an age when the sense of liberty was making itself felt everywhere among the rising generation. With them it was frequently apt to run riot, and

¹ Fichte himself complains of this in the above quoted Introduction of the year 1797.