

It was natural that the position taken up by Fichte should provoke much criticism and opposition, that his one-sided accentuation of the subjective side of reality should appear unsatisfactory. At that time a twofold interest was spreading in the study of natural phenomena, especially of the phenomena and forms of living or animated nature; it was also the age that witnessed the discovery of galvanic phenomena, which for a time seemed

more or less successful attempts to arrive at, and give expression to, a reasoned body of thought or a creed. With Schelling the process becomes still more tentative and changing, and this was the more the case as he lived long enough to realise the insufficiency of the whole idealistic movement of thought. From the beginning to the end of his career Fichte had a definite purpose before him. He was, more than any of the other leading thinkers of the century, a man who had a conscious message to deliver to his age and nation. He was influenced by other thinkers, but they did not divert his thinking and teaching into new courses; they furnished only new aspects and new ways, with the help of which he could find a more and more adequate expression of his guiding idea and fulfil his mission. This view of Fichte's speculative labours is now, thanks to the painstaking researches and the lucid expositions of historians like Kuno Fischer, Falckenberg, and Windelband, generally established. Earlier writers of the history of modern philosophy, following misrepresentations and misunderstandings of Fichte's main object, which can be largely traced to the influence of Schelling, were wont to speak of an earlier and a later system of Fichte's philosophy. This view is now replaced by the conviction of

the consistency of Fichte's main argument. For our purposes it is of special interest to note how, with Fichte, the interest in one and the same fundamental idea—the supremacy of moral law and order—moved away from the significance which this idea had for the problem of knowledge to that which it had for the problem of reality. The initial theory of knowledge (*Wissenschaftslehre*) in the light of the same central conception gradually developed into a theory of being (*Ontology*), an answer to the question; What is the truly Real? Of all the earlier philosophies the only one, in modern times, which has answered this question definitely was that of Spinoza; all other thinkers, such as Descartes, Leibniz, and even Kant, not to speak of the realistic school in this country, found the Real in something which was given or known already in some other way. This is owing to the essentially receptive attitude which all these thinkers took up to the existing regions of knowledge occupied by common-sense, science, or religious doctrine. The question: What is the truly Real? in perfect simplicity, directness, and independence presented itself in modern times first in Spinoza, and after he had been neglected and almost forgotten, in Fichte.