

we might nevertheless ask the question: granting that human knowledge does exist as a fact, what conception have we to form of the constitution of the human mind in order to explain this fact? In the same way we can treat the ethical problem: granted that morality, *i.e.*, conduct regulated by the sense of obligation, does exist, what conception have we to form of human nature so that this fact may become intelligible to us?¹ This way of putting the question, of formulating metaphysical problems, opens the door to a peculiar and novel form of speculation; it invites the thinking mind to go as it were behind the ultimate data of consciousness, to construe, so to speak, an ideal ground or process,² lying beneath or behind consciousness, through and out of which the ultimate

¹ The unique and original manner in which Fichte approaches the question of knowledge as well as that of activity is much more clearly and intelligibly explained in the Introduction to his most perfect work, the 'System der Sittenlehre' (1798). A great deal of the obscurity contained in his earlier Treatises on 'Wissenschaftslehre' is here removed and the fundamental problem stated very clearly. "How something that is objective can become subjective, how something existing for itself can become a presentation—to take up the problem of philosophy at this well-known end—how I say this remarkable change can take place nobody will ever explain, who does not find a point in which what is objective and subjective is indeed not differentiated but one and the same. Such a point our system establishes and starts from it. Selfhood (*Ichheit*), intellect, reason—or however we may name it—is this point. This absolute identity of subject and object in the Self can only be

inferred, cannot be shown to be an immediate fact of actual consciousness. As soon as an actual consciousness arises, even if it is only the consciousness of oneself, the differentiation follows. Only in so far as I distinguish myself, the conscious, from myself, the object of this consciousness, am I conscious of myself. On the various aspects of this differentiation of the subjective and objective, and again of the reunion of both, depends the whole mechanism of consciousness" (Fichte's 'Werke,' vol. iv. p. 1). "As theoretical philosophy has to expound the system of necessary thought implied in the fact that our presentations correspond with something existing, so also has practical philosophy to show exhaustively that way of thinking which is necessary to explain how something existing can correspond to our presentations and follow from them" (p. 2).

² What Fichte terms a Pragmatic Psychology.