

DISCUSSIONS.

NOTES ON FICHTE'S "GRUNDLAGE DER WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE."

I.

A Suggested Distinction in Philosophical Terminology.

THE published suggestions of Titchener¹ and of Scripture² toward a uniformity in psychological nomenclature are indications of the wide-felt need for a vocabulary which shall at least approach the ideals of accuracy and of precision. Of course, students of the natural sciences meet the same difficulty; yet to a great degree they have been able to invent their own terms for elements, processes, forces or organs, hypothesized or discovered by themselves; and the ambiguity, where it appears, exists only between rival meanings attached by different scholars to the same word. The terminology of psychology, on the other hand, is that of common life, since the material of psychology is just human experience; and psychological terms are freighted with the rich and fluctuating meanings which every-day use crowds into them, as well as with the conflicting significations of psychologists of different schools. Evidently the same is true of words more strictly metaphysical than psychological. If not, as is sometimes said, the whole history of philosophy, then at least the history of long periods might be written in the form of an account of meanings attached by different philosophers to such words as "idea," "universal," "ego." This last word is not the least ambiguous of philosophical terms, and any scheme which proposes to indicate the exact meaning intended in any particular instance of its use, deserves consideration. Such a device, suggested by Dr. C. C. Everett in his commentary on Fichte, and adopted by other writers,³ is the designation of the subject ego by the nominative of the personal pronoun *I*, and of the object ego by the accusative *Me*. An elaboration of this scheme has suggested itself in the study of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, namely, the further distinction, by the use of capitals and of small letters, between the greater ego, the

¹ *Mind*, April, 1893.

² *American Journal of Psychology*.

³ Cf. Ward (article on "Modern" Psychology, in *Mind*, Jan., 1893), who inaccurately attributes this "convenient simplification" to Professor James.

überindividuelles Ich,¹ and the lesser ego, of the individual, or of the moment. The words *Ego* and *ego* will then, strictly speaking, refer to the ego as totality, that is, as subject-object; but will also be used untechnically where the distinction between subject and object is not made at all. The greater *Ego*, on its subject-side, will be represented by *I (Ich)*, on its object-side by *Me (Mich)*; on the same principle the lesser ego will be *i (ich)*, as subject, and as object, *me (mich)*. These terms may be briefly summarized:—

EGO.

- A. *Ego*, as subject.
- I. The *I* (which is interpreted as) —
 - a. The more-than-individual consciousness (*überindividuelles Ich*), in its subject-aspect.
 - or b. The Absolute *I (Ich)*, in its subject-aspect.
 - II. The *i (ich)*: the individual ego, as subject.
- B. *Ego*, as object.
- I. The *Me* (which is interpreted as) —
 - a. The more-than-individual consciousness, in its object-aspect.
 - or b. The Absolute *Me (Mich)*, in its object-aspect.
 - II. The *me*.
 - a. The individual *me (mich)*; the individual, as object.
 - b. The empirical *me (mich)*.
 1. The mere object-moment of consciousness (an abstraction).
 2. The fact-of-consciousness as object (percept, emotion, etc.).

Clearly, all these terms correspond with actual distinctions in actual systems of philosophy, though not all of them are admitted by every thinker. The *überindividuelles Ich*, for instance, will be recognized as a philosophical necessity long before one arrives at the conviction of the reality of an absolute ego. Such a more-than-individual consciousness is Kant's *Transcendental Unity of Apperception* and Fichte's *Einbildungskraft* or his *absolutes Ich*.² But Kant and Fichte and Schelling deny the possibility of the *Me*, that is, of the greater *Ego*, in its object-aspect; and the essence of every philosophy which teaches that God comes to consciousness only in the individual, and that there is no self-consciousness of the Absolute, is a denial of the existence of the *Me*. In a system of absolute idealism, on the other hand, like Hegelianism or like absolute theism, both elements are included in the conception of the Absolute,

¹ Falckenberg's expression.

² Fichte applies to his including ego now the one, and now the other of these names.

which becomes complete subject-objectivity, the *I-Me*. A consistently deterministic system may, finally, reject the subjectivity of the individual, refusing to recognize the *i* or *ich*.

This differentiation of meaning may be extended with advantage to the province of the non-ego. From this point of view materialism may be seen to interpret the non-ego as *non-Ego* (the wholly-beyond-consciousness or independent matter). For idealism, on the other hand, there is no non-ego, but a mere *not-me*, a partial object-reality, which lies outside the individual consciousness.

The appreciation of these distinctions is undoubtedly an outcome of the study of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, yet the application of them will be found an important aid in the study of the book. Provided with this set of terminological pigeon-holes, stopping at each occurrence of the words to determine in which division a given *Ich* or *Nicht-ich* belongs, let one, for instance, approach the antinomies. "Das Ich setzt das Nicht-Ich, als beschränkt durch das Ich" becomes "The *I* posits the *not-me* as limited by the *me*," and its converse is the statement, "The *I* posits the *me* as limited by the *not-me*." The propositions in this form require no resolution of an antinomy, but a careful analysis of the relations of *me* and *not-me* to each other and the including *Ego*. Such an analysis is the real treasure imbedded in the mass of over-elaborate and artificial discussion of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The essential achievement of the book, as has been already suggested, is just this distinction between the larger and the lesser ego, and the insistence that the latter only is limited by a non-ego. This amounts to the demonstration that the non-ego is no non-Ego or thing-in-itself, but a not-me, an element of Absolute Consciousness, though relatively independent of individual consciousness. True, the retention in various forms of the *Anstoss* (the external impetus which determines Absolute Consciousness to determine itself) is, as Schelling and Hegel did not fail to point out, a virtual admission of a *Ding-an-sich* or non-*Ego*; but Fichte, though he never clearly realized it, had himself shown the uselessness of the *Anstoss*.

II.

Fichte's Equivocal Use of the Word "Bestimmen."

The main antinomy of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is expressed by the two propositions (A) "the ego posits the non-ego as limited by the ego,"¹ and (B) "the ego posits itself as limited by the non-ego."²

¹ (A) "Das Ich setzt das Nicht-Ich als beschränkt durch das Ich."

² (B) "Das Ich setzt sich selbst als beschränkt durch das Nicht-Ich."

These statements are balanced in expression and imply a perfectly antithetical relation. Fichte, however, excludes the consideration of the first of them (A) from the Theoretical Part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and develops from the second (B) another antinomy, whose complete expressions are (1) "the non-ego limits the ego"¹ and (2) "the ego limits itself."²

Now, the first of these subordinate propositions (1) is properly obtained by neglecting the first clause of the assertion (B) "the ego posits itself as limited by the non-ego"; but in the second (2) the word "posits" (*setzt*), of the original proposition (B), has been improperly replaced by the word "limits" (*bestimmt*). The result is antithesis and antinomy, at the expense of an inexcusable confusion (logical as well as philosophical) of the activity of the ego, which is positing, creating, being-conscious (*setzen*), with the activity of the non-ego, which is limiting (*bestimmen*). Here, then, is a case in which the equivocal use of a word is the occasion or the result of that painful elaboration which is a chief fault of the work of Fichte. He may attain a significant truth; but the very joy of the discovery is worn away by the carefulness with which the truth is turned and twisted, viewed in this light and in that, from every possible standpoint, important or unimportant. Only at the end of the devious and tortuous path which he has cleared, through tangles of subtlety and speculation, through which he need never have passed, will Fichte admit that he is in the presence of the light which has long been illuminating the discussion.

MARY WHITON CALKINS.

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ATTENTION: IS IT ORIGINAL OR DERIVATIVE?

THIS general question branches into two special ones: (a) Is attention the cause or the effect of muscular movement? (b) Regarded simply as a process of consciousness, is it an irreducible activity, or is it the product of other mental "forces?"

(a) Of the school of psychologists which considers the muscular element as of chief importance in attention, Ribot may be taken as the type. It is to this author, then, that reference will principally be made in the treatment of this problem.—"Its [attention's]

¹ "Das Nicht-Ich bestimmt das Ich."

² "Das Ich bestimmt sich selbst."