

## The Conceptual Origin of Worldview in Kant and Fichte

### Introduction

The concept of a worldview began as a technical term in the German Idealist period. A full philosophical analysis of how and why it came about, though, remains outstanding. It is well established that Kant coined the concept,<sup>1</sup> as *Weltanschauung*, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790).<sup>2</sup> However, the common assumption seems to be that Kant had no substantive use for it since he uses it only once in the aforementioned work and never employs it again in any other.<sup>3</sup> Even so, this assumption is precipitate. Although undeniably desultory, I argue that Kant's intended use for *Weltanschauung* and its close cognates (*Weltbetrachtung* and *Weltbeschauung*) shines through his texts and reveals his search to relate metaphysics to common experience. I establish this claim in Part I. In Part II, I explore how Johann Gottlieb Fichte recognized the potential of worldview as a concept and emancipated it from Kant's system to fit his own. In his 1806 *Guide to a Blessed Life*<sup>4</sup> – albeit favoring *Weltansicht* over *Weltanschauung* – Fichte closes the circle and articulates explicitly the importance of constructing a worldview. Ultimately, this study – beyond filling a historical gap in the literature – makes the case for seeing worldview-construction as essential to German Idealist thought: namely, as a means of orienting one's life through philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

### I.

While certainly underdeveloped when compared with other concepts in Kant's thought, worldview (in its various guises) is developed in response to a problem. The problem – in short – is how to unify Kant's theory in order to adequately account for the unity of experience. I will unpack this problem and Kant's attempt to answer it

---

<sup>1</sup> See “Weltanschauung” in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* compiled by Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, as well as Meier (1967, pp. 71ff.) and Naugle (2002).

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the *Critique of Pure Reason* by the A/B pagination. All other references refer to the *Akademie Ausgabe* (AA) of his collected works in 29 volumes by the *Deutschen* (formerly, *Königlichen Preußischen*) *Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1902 – ). The number before the comma and page number refers to the volume number. With the exception of the first *Critique* – for which I use the Kemp Smith translation – all other translations refer to the Cambridge editions of his collected works unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Meier (1967, pp. 71ff.) and Heidegger (1982, pp. 4f.).

<sup>4</sup> All references to Fichte's works are to the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA) *der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1962 – ). The Roman numeral refers to the volume series, followed by the edition separated by a comma. The page number is after the colon. Fichte's *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben* has only one English translation from 1889 by William Smith from Volume II of *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*. The title, I think, is best translated as, *Guide to a Blessed Life, or the Doctrine of Religion*, and I translate it myself to avoid anachronistic language.

<sup>5</sup> Förster (2010), Fugate (2019), and Schnädelbach (2000, esp. pp. 150ff.) come closest to explorations of the notion of the philosophical view. Düsing (1971), Beiser (2006), and Insole (2008) provide interpretations of the highest good, which touch on themes that the technical term addresses.

via a worldview in sections 2 through 4, but I begin in section 1 with the chore of locating the conceptual shape of worldview in Kant's works.

### 1. *Kant's Worldview Maneuver*

Kant did not define "worldview" and he employs various concepts to articulate it.<sup>6</sup> It is necessary, then, to look for its general contours. To that end, I refer to Kant as having in mind a *worldview maneuver*. When the terms he uses to signify it are not synonymous, they are nevertheless so close in meaning to possess a Wittgensteinian family resemblance to the same basic conceptual move. While Kant only uses *Weltanschauung* once, he uses *Weltbetrachtung* (*world observation*) in the third *Critique* multiple times, as well as *Weltbeschauung* (*world inspection*) in earlier and later works to communicate a reflective process relative to an idea. Moreover in a related but different sense, he uses *Weltbegriff* (*world concept*) in the first *Critique* and *Jäsche Logik* to communicate a regulative principle of philosophical investigation.<sup>7</sup> The general *worldview maneuver* in all these variations is as follows: When lacking coherence or harmony (*Konsequenz* or *Zusammenstimmung*) amongst necessary judgments in experience, we must first posit an idea of reason as a unifying point of reference and then construct a coherent set of necessary judgments in relation to it, which together form a model of reality. And the world forms as the object of our observations [*Betrachtungen*] or intuitions [*Anschauung*] from the standpoint or perspective that we hold as subjects in it.<sup>8</sup>

To begin, this maneuver is a close cousin (or perhaps, grandchild) of *Weltbegriff* from the first *Critique*. Though Kant does not connect *Weltbegriff* with an act of reflective judgment (which he developed only later), it is nevertheless a conceptual predecessor in that it seeks a unifying substrate for heterogeneous experiences:

I entitle all transcendental ideas, in so far as they refer to absolute totality in the synthesis of appearances, *world concepts* [*Weltbegriffe*], partly because this unconditioned totality also underlies the concept – itself only an idea – of the world-whole. (A407-8/B434).

A world-concept provides (in a regulative sense) an underlying unity for our investigations of nature by signposting, as it were, each representative part as

---

<sup>6</sup> It is common to find researchers produce comprehensive summaries of "Kant's worldview." A consequence of my study is that this application ironically employs Kant's fledgling technical term in a non-technical sense to his philosophy, i.e., akin to something like a "general description of Kant's system." See, e.g., Schrempf (1891), Kroner (1914), Windelband (1904), Makkreel (2021) whose works attempt holistic accounts of Kant's philosophy.

<sup>7</sup> See Fugate (2019) for an excellent discussion of this concept in connection with the debate as to this concept's relation to cosmopolitanism.

<sup>8</sup> Kant makes frequent reference to "Standpunkt" or "perspective," throughout his works, which is also important here. It is important because it represents the relatum constructing the worldview in question. We occupy the standpoint of transcendental subjects. That various standpoints can be occupied is an innovation by Schelling and Fichte, which I detail below in part II. For more on perspective in Kant, cf. Kaulbach (1990).

connected and ordered within an unconditioned whole. Further, Kant emphasizes in the Architectonic that the *Weltbegriff* plays a role in defining the task of the systematic philosopher (A838-9/B866-7).

In the third *Critique* one sees a subtle shift in the philosophical meaning of the term. While world-concept in the first *Critique* is roughly identical to the unifying idea, world-view by the third *Critique* expands to include a process past the mere positing of a grounding idea. This is indicated both when Kant employs *Weltanschauung* and *Weltbetrachtung* in different contexts therein.

When Kant coins *Weltanschauung* in the analytic of the sublime, he employs it as a sensible view of things related to an idea of reason as reference point:

For it is only by means of this [faculty in the human mind that is itself supersensible] and its idea of a noumenon, which itself admits of no intuition though it presupposes as the substratum of the *Weltanschauung* as mere appearance, that the infinite of the sensible world is **completely** comprehended in the pure intellectual estimation of magnitude **under a concept**, even though it can never be completely thought in the mathematical estimation of magnitude **through numerical concepts**. (AA 5, pp. 254-5)

This passage, while anything but self-evident, employs the worldview maneuver in the context of the mathematical sublime. Kant indicates that if we work only with observable sequences, we never arrive at a notion of nature as a complete whole. So we must supplement this series with a unifying concept through our noumenal capacity to think of the perfect unconditioned idea of infinity under which the plurality of numerical concepts (quantities) stand in connection. Only then do we have a measurement as a point of reference [*Grundmaß*] for nature when taken as a whole. Subsequently, we can then employ this idea to ground our worldview. The general worldview maneuver is easy to locate and differentiate from a mere world-concept. Looking to the underlined portion of text, one sees that worldview comes apart from the “substratum” (or idea of infinity posited). That is, worldview is the holistic picture that we set in relation to an idea as a regulative principle. And it is regulative here vis-à-vis the whole collection of sensible experiences, which we intuit [qua *Anschauung*] and which constitutes our grasp of nature as an inexhaustible whole.

Where the worldview maneuver is on clearest display occurs at the end of the third *Critique* in the doctrine of method, where Kant refers to it as *Weltbetrachtung*. In the doctrine of method, Kant investigates the application of the a priori principle of purposiveness not merely to works of art and organisms, but rather in through reflective judgment to nature as a whole. And when asking about the possibility of nature, Kant thinks that we are led to so-called “last” questions that produce beliefs rather than knowledge. The questions are: Why are we – as moral beings – here? And why does creation exist at all (AA 5, pp. 425f.)? To answer these questions, Kant compares two ways of taking up the world as a harmonious whole, which, in turn, lead to reflective standpoints or outlooks in which judgments stand in relation to

other judgments systematically. The result – which Kant emphasizes (but which the Cambridge edition leaves without emphasis) – is: a “*Betrachtung der Welt*” (second and third editions) or “*Weltbetrachtung*” (first edition) (AA 5, p. 442).<sup>9</sup>

Finally, beyond the third *Critique*, one finds further evidence that Kant operated with a worldview maneuver in both late and early texts. In the *Opus postumum*, Kant remarks on the necessity of a worldview in order to make coherent the domains of experience, in which “God, the world, and man” are brought together in one transcendental view of things:

A *cosmotheoros*<sup>10</sup> who creates the elements of knowledge of the world himself, *a priori*, from which he, as, at the same time, an inhabitant of the world, **constructs** a world-vision [*Weltbeschauung*] in the idea. (AA 21, p. 31, bold facing mine).

In creating such a *Weltbeschauung* “in the idea,” various elements of human experience *a priori* – i.e., one’s existence in the world according to natural laws and one’s obligation as a noumenal member of the moral kingdom of God – find fit. The idea is required but the world only comes into view through an extra act of judgment to “construct” this world in the idea (Kant uses the verb “zimmern,” which comes from carpentry). Also in the *Opus postumum*, Kant refers to the notion of a “*Weltbeschauer (Cosmotheoros)*” (AA 21, p. 552), who searches for “a *basis* in idea for all the unified forces which set the matter of the whole of cosmic space in motion” (AA 21, p. 553). And although less developed, Kant even uses the term *Weltbeschauer* in the *Groundwork* (1785) in a way that dovetails with the worldview maneuver. There it distinguishes how the sensible world might appear to many *Weltbeschauer* as different, while the intelligible world must appear the same for all *Weltbeschauer* (AA 4, p. 451). In all these varied contexts – natural scientific, moral, and religious – from different points in his career, we see Kant refer to a philosophical need to judge the plurality of the whole as unified in a totality. And completing this task is the goal of philosophy.

## 2. *The Problem of Unity*

Admittedly, Kant’s application of worldview is haphazard and its development inchoate. Nevertheless, a distinct philosophical form shines through. Because it shines the brightest in the third *Critique*, and because it is Kant’s development of worldview there that inspired Fichte and Hegel, I will spend this section presenting the problem it addresses and the next two sections explaining how worldview construction provides a solution. Taken together, these sections zoom in to articulate and analyze a case study, as it were, of the worldview maneuver in action.

---

<sup>9</sup> See, AA 5, pp. 378 & 446 for other instances of *Weltbetrachtung*.

<sup>10</sup> Adickes (1920, p. 140) notes that this is most likely inspired by Christiaan Huygens’ posthumous work, *Cosmotheoros, oder weltbetrachtende Muthmassungen von deren himmlischen Erdkugeln und deren Schmuck* (1698, my emphasis on “*weltbetrachtend*”), which was translated into German with this title for the second edition in 1743.

The problem of unity it addresses arose because of Kant's drive to account for all judgments of experience in a systematic manner without gaps. With the second *Critique*, Kant realized that the results of the first two *Critiques* painted an inherently dualistic picture of experience.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, there are the necessary laws of nature that our cognizing stringently applied to intuitions provided by sensibility. These laws constructed a deterministic picture of the world as appearance. And on the other hand, we are aware through an irreducible fact of reason that we face moments in which we know we *ought* to act and *could* – from this consciousness – further determine that we are free to act. If the world of appearances is deterministic, however, how can we be free to act morally in the same domain? After the second *Critique*, Kant understood that freedom could not merely be outside of the sensible world, but indeed only mattered if it could change it (see, e.g., AA 5, p. 195).

This dualistic picture indicated a “chasm” or “gap” between the two domains of experience (see AA 5, p. 195 and AA 20, p. 245). We know that the theoretical and practical domains of experience are not necessarily in contradiction with each other; but neither do we know that they are in harmony. Can we find a point of reference to ground the unification of these domains and our disparate but necessary judgments such that coherence in our thinking results? It is here, where Kant will employ a worldview to provide unity and fill “a gap in the system of our cognitive faculties, [...] insofar as they are related in their determination not only to the sensible but also to the supersensible” (AA 20, pp. 244-5). But without appearances offering any prospect for orienting ourselves, what concept can bridge the gap?

### 3. *The Positing of an Idea for Unity*

The idea that Kant identifies to fill this gap is the highest good as a system of final ends. To signify this choice, Kant refers explicitly to it as providing a *Beziehungspunkt* (*point of reference*) in the third *Critique* and the *Religion*, relative to us taking up a certain perspective or transcendental *Standpunkt*. The highest good provides the “final aim” that we must judge into nature, since merely looking at the “nexus of ends discovered in [nature] with ideas of reason [...] we can form no common reference point [*Beziehungspunkt*] for all these natural ends, no sufficient teleological principle for cognizing all the ends together in a single system” (AA 5, pp. 440-1).<sup>12</sup> In the *Religion*, he states in a similar vein:

It cannot be a matter of indifference for morality as to whether it does or does not make the concept of a final end of all things (to act in harmony with which indeed does not increase the number of its duties, but which provides them with a special point of reference [*Beziehungspunkt*] of the unification of all ends). For through this alone can an objectively practical reality be provided for the connection of purposiveness from freedom with

---

<sup>11</sup> The dualism at play is disputed. For my purposes, it is enough to point out a dualism between the legislating faculties themselves. Another reading sees the dualism in his distinction between appearances and the *thing in itself*, or between the phenomenal and noumenal spheres (see, e.g., Franks 2005). One could view the dualism from this angle and still get at the same problem.

<sup>12</sup> Translation altered to reorder “sufficient teleological principle” as in line with the original German.

purposiveness of nature – which we cannot at all do without” (AA 6, p. 5, my translation).

The highest good as a system of final ends can relate to both the theoretical domain of nature as well as the practical domain of freedom. Through such a point of reference, the possibility arises that they are not in conflict with each other but rather potentially unified behind the appearances. This positing of an idea to provide a common foundation to judgments that seem mutually exclusive is the first step of the worldview maneuver.

But Kant goes further than merely positing an idea since it represents a necessary but not sufficient condition to close the gap. It is insufficient, first, for a technical reason: namely, an idea is a concept, but a worldview as Kant employs it is the systematic outlook *based* on the idea. Thus, merely positing a unifying idea does not count as worldview, but does enable the creation of one. Moreover, if one merely locates the unifying idea, then one might still not form a view of the world. It is one thing to posit that the whole must fit together, and another thing to check the coherence (or harmony) of the interrelated, necessary judgments that shape it.

#### 4. *Testing Coherence, Creating a Worldview*

What more must one do in order to produce a worldview? Using Kant’s own repeated use of “*Zusammenstimmung*” both as a noun and verb to indicate coherence or harmony throughout the third *Critique*, the second step relies on the task of reflection about how the necessary judgments of experience cohere after positing an idea. Harmony or coherence for Kant is essential for bringing together knowledge claims as constitutive of one experience. As he notes in the *Dohna Logik*: “*Coherency* means [...] that everything stands in connection. The coherent is the highest thing in our use of cognition” (AA 24, pp. 735-6). What Kant has in mind, I think, parallels Gilbert Harman’s coherence theory of reason, which seeks a holistic fittingness between one’s beliefs: “Whether such a belief is justified depends on how well it fits together with everything else one believes. If one’s beliefs are coherent, they are mutually supporting” (1986, pp. 32-3). A task to search out holistically how one’s beliefs fit together, support each other, etc. represents an extra step to positing an idea. And Kant in the doctrine of method of the third *Critique* performatively, as it were, guides us through a reflective process of judging the whole of creation to test our judgments for coherence. There, connected explicitly with the task of closing the gap between nature and freedom, Kant tests two ideas to check for the overall coherence of necessary judgments. And it is in the conclusion of each analysis that we see him refer to a *Welbetrachtung* as the resulting outlook.

This performative illustration of the worldview maneuver’s second step occurs in §§86-87, i.e., the ethicotheology and moral proof of God’s existence. In both, Kant analyzes our judgments of physical and moral teleology in relation to either the idea of a material void or the idea of a system of final ends. The goal is to check which constellation of necessary judgments relative to an idea provides the most coherent picture. The original German of §86 sets the reader into a frame of mind intended to

enliven one's own reflective judgments. It begins: "Es ist ein Urteil..." or in my translation:

It is a judgment, which even the common understanding cannot free itself from, if one reflects about the *Dasein* of things in the world and existence of the world itself: (AA 5, p. 442, translation altered)

I leave the colon, which is omitted from the translation of the collected works in the Cambridge edition, and translate as directly as possible since the grammar and ending of the clause seem intentionally formed to achieve a certain goal: namely, to prepare the mind for receiving a judgment that should find approval in one's own reflection about the world.

The judgment is that without the final moral end towards which the world might be progressing, there would be no discernible point to the order: "i.e., the judgment that without human beings the whole of creation would be a mere desert, existing in vain and without a final end" (AA 5, p. 442). Kant is not speaking anthropocentrically, but rather ethico-centrally.<sup>13</sup> The judgment is a value judgment about existence itself. If all that existed were beings lacking the idea of a final end according to which the world's phenomena could be organized, Kant thinks we would be left with a picture of the world as, in essence, pointless. And if we assume that nature lacks any real aim guiding it towards full perfection, then the alternative – for Kant, a chaos of matter in the void – is untenable and throws us back to the starting line of having to judge again. For this would contradict natural ends and contradict the moral law as a fact of reason; and we can neither make sense of the world without natural ends nor silence the moral law.

That is, in the seat of reflective judgment we are forced back to the beginning. Chaos is as nonsensical as a hodgepodge of experience without any order at all. In this second step, the reflecting subject checks for the coherence between necessary judgments within a single horizon delimited by the idea. It is only this conscious testing of coherence that brings the world into view. And such a task, when complete, indicates for Kant the ultimate goal of philosophy as articulated in the *Opus postumum*:

Without transcendental philosophy one can form for oneself no concept as to how, and by what principle, one could design the plan of a system, by which a coherent whole could be established as rational knowledge for reason; yet this must necessarily take place if one would turn rational man into a being who knows himself. (AA 21, p. 7, underlining mine)

Clearly, Kant thinks that this process is not only the philosopher's quest but everyone's quest in the pursuit of knowing oneself. Indeed, no person, Kant thinks, finds "satisfaction" for reason until an outlook is formed combining nature with the highest good. As he notes in the *Metaphysik Vigilantius* lectures (1794-5): "herein lies the ground that metaphysics absolutely must be cultivated, because otherwise the

---

<sup>13</sup> See Höffe 2008, esp. pp. 291ff. and 306.

whole end of all cognitions of theoretical and practical reason cannot be fulfilled. [...] In short, no human being can be without metaphysics” (AA 29, p. 948).

As a technical term, worldview connotes an active process of orienting oneself relative to the world. Contrary to some modern uses of the term as “just my philosophy,” there is a necessary shared nature of worldview in this technical sense due to its relation of *necessary* judgments a priori relative to an idea. That is, a worldview is more than merely the sum of one’s opinions. Further, it is important that a worldview be understood as an act of creation by reflection. Rather than a passive aggregate, a worldview is only at hand in this sense if one reflects and shapes it through the method of philosophy.

## II.

I turn now to Fichte. Though Kant was first to introduce the term as an inchoate notion, as Dieter Henrich observed: “Fichte was the first to bring the word *Weltanschauung* (image of the world) to philosophical prominence” (2008, p. 20). Yet Fichte’s development and deployment of worldview as a technical term is as little discussed in the literature as Kant’s. Re-establishing Fichte’s employment of the concept is the goal of this section.

While Kant gestured in this direction, Fichte deserves full credit for recognizing the importance of worldview formation and evolution as central to everyday lived experience. My goal now is to map out how Fichte built on Kant’s foundation, in particular thanks to his exchanges with Schelling. While Kant set the parameters and stakes of what it means to produce a worldview as the telos of philosophy, Fichte’s work represents the fullest development of this worldview-creating process as not merely staving off deep metaphysical contradiction in one’s experience, but rather as a task of philosophy in action. Above all Fichte analyzed in his theory of the five-fold hierarchy of worldviews how many *Ansichten* might compete with each other while still referring to the same world. And in this process, he articulated how philosophy as a method reveals the way of ascent to the highest worldview, which – in turn – provides for human flourishing.

### *1. Fichte’s Recognition (and Hegel’s Critique) of the Worldview Concept*

Fichte was attuned to Kant’s use of *Weltanschauung* in a way similar to my reconstruction above. For in his 1792 work, *Attempt at a Critique of all Revelation* – published just two years after the first edition of the third *Critique* and worked on in 1791 while he was visiting Kant, who supported its subsequent publication – Fichte employs the term *Weltanschauung* for a purpose to unify the domains of theoretical and moral reasoning in the idea of a higher, legislating being. He writes:

The possibility of this convergence [*Übereinkunft*] [of natural and moral causality...] can only be thought through their mutual dependence on a higher legislation, which serves as a grounding for both [...] If we could provide a *Weltanschauung* as grounds for the principle of this higher



legislation, it would be the case according to this principle that one and the same effect – which in relation to the world of sense according the moral law is free and leads back to the causality of reason, but which in nature appears as coincidental – be recognized as completely necessary. (GA I,1, p. 70, my translation).

Fichte echoes Kant's suggestion of a worldview but sets it in a God's-eye view of things as a necessary way to make coherent our reflections on nature's necessity and moral freedom. His choice of *Weltanschauung* as opposed to *Weltbetrachtung* suggests the interchangeability between the terms. Perhaps Fichte deemed *Weltanschauung* as more apposite for the point being made or as more pleasing to the ear. Regardless, the same point was in the offing.

Fichte's attempt to clarify how a worldview can account for the unity between theoretical and practical reason shows that he had carefully studied the third *Critique*. We can be certain of this since Fichte in the fall of 1790 – about six months prior to his visit to Königsberg, which began on July 1, 1791 – worked on his first, still unpublished philosophical treatise, titled *Versuch eines erklärenden Auszugs aus Kants 'Kritik der Urteilskraft'* [An Attempt Regarding an Explanatory Excerpt from Kant's 'Critique of Judgment'] for which he could find no publisher.<sup>14</sup> Thus, this year was the year of the third *Critique* for Fichte – which further explains why at this point, Fichte embraces the Kantian picture of worldview without developing it on his own.

Mirroring Fichte's reading of worldview in Kant, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) Hegel titles his discussion of moral self-consciousness and its fit within nature as “the moral *Weltanschauung*” [die moralische *Weltanschauung*]. There, he clearly has the doctrine of method from the third *Critique* in mind. In what does this *Weltanschauung* consist? Hegel reads it, like Fichte, as a reflective outlook that seeks harmony between the domains of nature and morality in experience: “From this determination [of self-consciousness] is developed a *moral worldview* [moralische *Weltanschauung*] which consists in the relation between the absoluteness of morality and the absoluteness of Nature” (GW 9, p. 325<sup>15</sup>). Both Fichte and Hegel saw worldview referring to a task of combining morality and nature into one, unified model in judgment.

## 2. The Schelling Conflict: From *Weltanschauung* to *Weltansicht*

Had Fichte's use of worldview remained so closely aligned to the Kantian maneuver as it was in 1792, the story would be over. But Fichte's later theory goes through a puzzling metamorphosis. In his later theory, that is, he details how varieties of possible worldviews shape our experience as a whole, each with a corresponding way of enriching one's life. This change is due largely to Schelling's influence. Through

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Adamson 1881, pp. 23f., and Medicus 1914, pp. 25ff.

<sup>15</sup> “GW” references Hegel's *Gesammelte Werke* (1968 – ). Translation altered, since the original German emphasizes “moral worldview,” which A.V. Miller in his translation forgets (see, 1977, p. 365); and I replace Miller's gangly “moral view of the world” with “moral worldview.”

a back-and-forth in both published texts and private correspondence, which began in 1795 with Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*<sup>16</sup> and ended approximately with Fichte's 1800-1 *The Vocation of Man*, Fichte expands the dualistic picture on offer in Kant. What Fichte realized through this exchange is, first, that one does not arrive at a singular worldview through transcendental philosophy, but rather at a fivefold hierarchy of coherent worldviews that impact how we live. The second realization was that philosophy itself offered the means to ascend from the lower ones to the highest worldview.

The starting point of the exchange is Schelling's *Philosophical Letters*.<sup>17</sup> Schelling attempts to mediate between the two strong camps of philosophy dominating German intellectual circles at the time: on the one hand, Spinoza's system and, on the other hand, Kant's transcendental idealism. Schelling makes two points that Fichte found alarming: first, he claims (a) that the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Wissenschaftslehre* (*WL*) are not philosophical systems proper, but rather works that set the conditions for subsequent philosophizing<sup>18</sup>; and (b) the Spinozistic and the Critical systems are not actually in contradiction with each other, but rather are equally valid approaches to the same goal,<sup>19</sup> namely, "absolute" knowledge of experience as a solution to "the problem of the existence of the world" (WW 1, p. 313). For Schelling, attainment of the goal required a synthesis of Spinoza's and Kant's philosophy into one identical pursuit for absolute knowledge. The "two systems should necessarily exist side by side" (WW 1, p. 306), Schelling notes, and, indeed, they coalesce through a Hegelian-like sublimation when pressed: "it is confirmed throughout that all contesting principles are unified and all contradicting systems become identical as soon as one rises to the absolute" (WW 1, p. 331). Thus, while valid in certain respects individually, they are incomplete or (as he elsewhere notes) even "false"<sup>20</sup> if treated as fully self-sufficient. The choice, Schelling thinks, is not between two worldviews, but rather three.

Schelling's two claims, while intended charitably, bothered Fichte. He felt that he was being misunderstood by a close ally (see, GA III,5, pp. 43f.) and he set out to correct Schelling's error. Fichte's initial response occurs in *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797-1798), in which he addresses Schelling's essay directly. In regards to (a), Fichte defends his *WL* as not merely a formal treatise preceding philosophy, but rather as constitutive of philosophy itself. Indeed, Fichte asserts that there is something inherently flawed about philosophizing outside or beyond the *WL*. Fichte thinks that only within the *WL*'s system can philosophers find validation since their concepts then are not "dead" or "reactive" to that which is investigated, but rather "alive" and "active" as they develop *sui generis* through the philosopher's gaze and intellectual intuition (GA I,4, p. 209). In regards

---

<sup>16</sup> All pagination refers to *Schellings Werke* (WW). Translations from his *Philosophical Letters* comes from Schelling (1979); all other translations are my own.

<sup>17</sup> For more detail on Schelling's critique, cf. Bruno (2014).

<sup>18</sup> See, WW I, pp. 301ff.

<sup>19</sup> See, WW I, pp. 293, 306, and 330f.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Schelling's 1796-1797 *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre*, WW I, pp. 418f.

to (b), Fichte asserts that systems are not passively inhabited or inherited like “dead furniture, which one can leave or adopt as one pleases” (GA I,4, p. 195). Instead, “The philosophy one chooses for oneself, depends on the kind of person one is” (GA I,4, p. 195). While different worldviews exist, that is, this does not mean for Fichte – in contrast to Schelling – that one can occupy two simultaneously, or hold two as equally true in order to produce an “absolute” third. Philosophy is not a matter of choosing between options on a menu, but rather connected with one’s life and the thinking that guides it.

Despite this response, it is clear that Schelling’s suggestion of a third, sublated perspective (combining the transcendental and Spinozistic systems) contributed to Fichte’s awakening from his Kantian slumber vis-à-vis the concept of a worldview.<sup>21</sup> In both *On the Basis of our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World* (1798) and *The Vocation of Man* (1800-1), Fichte notes that one’s “*Standpunkt*” and “*Gesichtspunkt*” depends on a choice and that it is very open one.<sup>22</sup> And while the choice is between the familiar “common” view of natural science or a “transcendental” one that incorporates one’s moral calling (GA I,5, pp. 349f.), he emphasizes the stakes of the choice in starker language and entertains the possibility that one might not – as Kant seems to think – accept the transcendental one as readily. That is, Fichte presents an analysis of both standpoints as live options. And more importantly, Fichte seems to think that this choice in philosophical approach will ultimately shape one’s very lived experience in a way that he begins to spell out explicitly. It is not that we may entertain two worldviews side-by-side, but rather we may ascend through these and this ascent will provide new vistas of experience. In the *Divine Governance* essay, he writes: “The entire world has received for us a completely changed *Ansicht*” (GA I,5, p. 353), once we take it up from the transcendental *Gesichtspunkt*. And in *The Vocation of Man*, Fichte points out that a change of perspective allows us to conceive of the world in a different light: “And herewith the eternal world rises before me more brightly, and the basic law of its order stands clearly before the eyes of my spirit [*Geistes*]” (GA I,6, p. 280). Emphasizing the manner that this enriches one’s lived life, Fichte notes that in occupying “this standpoint [*Standpunkt*],” one’s entire existence also takes on a different quality: “I am a new being, and my entire relation to the world before me is transformed” (GA I,6, p. 302). In sum, Fichte realized that worldview ascension has the potential to not merely describe experience writ large, but rather defines experience through and through, filling it with newly won meaning.

Up until 1800, Fichte’s worldview theory remained dualistic. But the seeds of change are evident in the intense private correspondence between Fichte and

---

<sup>21</sup> As early as his 1794/95 *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte thought that there were certainly two, consistent systems: “I note further, that one – if one transgresses the *I am* – must necessarily arrive at Spinozism! [...] and that there are only two completely consistent systems: the Critical, which recognizes this limit, and the Spinozistic, which jumps past it” (GA I,2, p. 264, my translation).

<sup>22</sup> This terminology was in vogue and taken up explicitly in Jacob Sigismund Beck’s 1796 work, *Einzig Möglicher Standpunct aus welchem die critische Philosophie beurtheilt werden muß*, which Reinhold referred to as Beck’s “*Standpunktslehre*,” and which Fichte praised explicitly in his *New Presentation* essay (GA I,4, p. 203n).

Schelling that occurred in roughly the same period from 1799-1802. Schelling continues to push Fichte on the place of the *WL* relative to philosophy of nature.<sup>23</sup> While Fichte resists Schelling's solution, he does admit in a letter dated December 27, 1800 that "transcendental philosophy" in the *WL* requires "further expansion," indeed "even in its principles" (GA III,4, p. 406). He hints in the same letter that he has begun this process in the third part of *The Vocation of Man* detailing faith. What principle is missing? Fichte notes quite gnomically: "In a word: a *transcendental system of the intelligible world* is still missing" (GA III,4, p. 406).<sup>24</sup> It is this synthesis of the intelligible world that heralds Fichte's eventual development of what he refers to as the highest synthesis of the ethical, religious, and scientific states of consciousness within one system as the fifth *Weltansicht*.

Specifically, the revolution in Fichte's thought that freed him of the Kantian picture occurred shortly after writing this letter and *The Vocation of Man* in the summer of 1801. The key clue is Fichte's letter to Schelling dated May 31-August 7, 1801. Fichte reverses his claim from December 1800 and asserts in a defiant tone that nothing is missing from the *WL* in terms of its principles, rather only in its "completion [*Vollendung*]" through the "highest synthesis," namely of the "world of spirit [*GeisterWelt*]" (GA III,5, p. 45). And he goes on to lay out what amounts to arguments that he refines later in his lectures on religion, i.e., that God is the absolute and pure being that we arrive at in our search for a ground of our and the world's existence (GA III,5, p. 48). He argues that this represents the complete step of the *WL* in its account of reality: hence, it does constitute philosophy proper, which, in turn, undermines Schelling's claim (a).

Regarding claim (b), namely, that multiple worldviews are valid, Fichte embraces it but also makes it his own in that possible worldviews must find mediation through the *WL*. Referring explicitly to "Ansicht," which points to his later use of *Weltansicht*, Fichte writes that: "Every individual is a *particular Ansicht* of this system [of the spiritual world], coming from its own point of grounding [*GrundPunkte*]; but this point is the *WL*, this itself science [*Wissenschaft*]" (GA III,5, p. 48). It follows that there are multiple views of the whole that rest on competing foundational principles, all of which relate to the whole, the worldview of which promises to stand above the rest and set them in relation to each other. Perhaps giving Schelling too little credit for the suggestion that a third and absolute position must be attained, Fichte also sees the importance of locating a higher worldview in the intelligible sphere.

Around this time, the proverbial floodgates must have opened. For not only does Fichte go on to create a five-fold hierarchy of possible worldviews in 1804, but he further critiques explicitly the Kantian worldview as impoverished in so far as it

---

<sup>23</sup> Schelling states that the *WL* is not itself actually philosophy since it progresses "merely logically" and, consequently, "does not have anything at all to do with reality" (GA III,4, p. 363).

<sup>24</sup> Fichte wrote a more detailed draft of this letter, *Brief 584a*, in which he expands that this system of the intelligible world will require going out past the Ich into the noumenal, which we label "God" (GA III,4, p. 405), but it seems quite similar to his account from *The Vocation of Man* in that it occurs via conscience and moral feelings.

remains merely formal and empty in its conception of what ethical *life* entails. Indeed, it constitutes the second lowest worldview in Fichte's hierarchy, second only to the materialist worldview. Schelling's answer to the revolution in Fichte's thought in a letter dated October 3, 1801 underscores how dramatic he found the shift in Fichte's thought to be. Schelling writes:

What is now your highest synthesis was – at least in your earlier presentations – absent. For according to those the moral world-order was [...] itself God. This is now, if I see correctly, no longer the case and this changes the entire situation of your philosophy to a considerable degree. (GA III,5, p. 83)

Indeed, this course correction by Fichte opened a new horizon, which emphasizes all the more the task of philosophy as not merely charting the conditions of experience, but rather discovering a life-orienting source of experience through ascension towards higher, systematic views of the world. And in this process, we see Fichte's theory of worldviews evolve in a way that paralleled his personal experience of ascending from a dualistic Kantian perspective to his new position that promised a totally new standpoint. For Kant, though, Fichte's higher synthesis would count as enthusiastic forays beyond the bounds of what can be known and, consequently, the coherence of which could not be checked through interrelations of *a priori* necessary judgments relative to an idea.

### 3. *Methodological Differences*

Fichte found Kant's project of bridging the domains of theoretical and practical reason important. He, however, came to think that the success of the project demanded a different approach. Before exploring Fichte's development of worldview in detail, two qualities of Fichte's unique method need explication.

The first is the fact that Fichte found it warranted and necessary for philosophy to employ what Kant referred to as "intellectual intuition" (*intellektuelle Anschauung*). Kant thought that such a faculty might be possible for other beings, but that for us it remained impossible. On his account we only receive intuitions (or the content for our representations) from our passive faculty of sensibility. The world supplies us with raw data as a manifold, which we then process into a standard, universal form. But we have no control or active role in generating what the senses provide. Fichte in his early and late thought disagreed with Kant on this score and argued vociferously that we are capable of intellectual intuition. And in his later thought, Fichte expanded the use of intellectual intuition beyond the mere act of attending to oneself as self-consciousness (which it represented in his earlier thought). Instead, Fichte argued that we could indeed through the intellect alone come to actively generate an accurate picture of how things hang together in truth without depending on or taking our cue from the senses. Indeed, the senses provide only contingent information.

Fichte's reasoning is that because we require concepts produced by our own self-consciousness that do not arise from the senses or mere beliefs, we must ground

our knowledge in pure thinking to get at absolute truth. And because of his conviction that we can intellectually intuit our way to truth, it is right that a philosophical “science takes up all belief, and transforms it into intuition [*Schauen*]” (GA I,9, p. 112). Indeed, some of the most central and important questions that we ask, the *last questions* for example, point (for Fichte) to the importance of intellectual intuiting – or *pure* thinking:

Actual, higher thinking is that which produces a purely, mental [*geistiges*] object absolutely out of itself – without any assistance from external sensibility and without any relation at all to this sense. In normal life, this kind of thinking occurs when, for example, one inquires about the way that the world or humanity originated, or about the inner legislation of nature. (GA I,9, p. 84)

While experience presents us with an endless stream of appearances, the question about what underlies these appearances requires a special form of intuiting in which the intellect posits a unity that is otherwise lacking: the unity produced is a world, which we view – as it were – in special intellectual sense of the term.<sup>25</sup>

This leads to the second methodological difference from Kant: namely, that this formation of the image of things beyond the senses – a process of intellectually viewing that Fichte refers to as employing our “mind’s eye” or *geistiges Auge* (GA I,9, p. 69)<sup>26</sup> – means that certain truths about our shared reality are not passively *had* as it is with normal sight, but require a conscious *act* of reflection in order to be made manifest in the mind.

Worldviews or, for Fichte, *Weltansichten* take on more gravitas from both of these qualities. Kant certainly thinks that worldviews require conscious formation in relation to an idea. But a worldview for Kant remained essentially problematic or hypothetical, since one could never find an adequate *Anschauung* (or literal view) of it in perception. Yet for Fichte, we can and, in fact, should form an *Anschauung* or *Ansicht* of the world as the unconditioned whole underlying the contingent set of impressions offered by the senses. Thus, a worldview for Fichte is not merely possible to think, but indeed possesses real implications for lived experience (thanks to quality one). And although Kant advocates for a worldview as important for an account of a well-ordered experience, the normative force of worldview formation is underdeveloped. Despite his claim that everyone needs metaphysics, Kant does not explain in detail how worldview creation changes or impacts life and flourishing. For Fichte, on the other hand, worldviews occupy a central position in one’s lived life as

---

<sup>25</sup> The world, in Fichte’s late thought, is a manner of seeing the divine presence in all things, though in an imperfect or clouded sense (ein Schein) of the unconditioned, perfect being itself: “In intellectual seeing [*geistigen Sehen*] that, which is divine life in itself, becomes something-seen [*Gesehenen*], i.e., a complete presence, or a world” (GA I,9, p. 105).

<sup>26</sup> See also from *The Vocation of Man* his reference to it as a special “organ” (GA I,6, pp. 252, 257, and 280). Fichte refers to knowledge consisting in way of seeing throughout many works, see Zöller (2014).

achievements of conscious acts. The consequence is that one's life is enriched by the degree to which one conceives of a well-formed worldview (thanks to quality two).

#### 4. *Fichte's Refining of Worldview*

The text where Fichte articulates his theory of worldviews is the collection of lectures on religion that he delivered in 1806 in Berlin, namely, the *Guide to a Blessed Life, or the Doctrine of Religion*. And as noted, it presents a much more robust theory of worldviews as central to not only a philosopher's life, but indeed to anyone's life. I first briefly sketch what Fichte keeps and then turn to explore in more depth what he adds.

Fichte keeps the general form of the worldview maneuver provided by Kant. A worldview is built in relation to an idea by seeking coherence of one's judgments and beliefs in accordance with it. Fichte reiterates time and again that one must seek an original and persisting point, or *Grundpunkt*, that like the idea from Kant's works provides one's standpoint to ground one's worldview construction. Fichte writes:

For it belongs to [forming a *Weltansicht*], that one has a firm standpoint of one's worldview in the first place, [i.e.,] that one posits the reality, the self-sufficiency, and the root of the world in One determined and unchanging *Grundpunkt* out of which one derives the rest [of what appears] as merely participating in the reality of the first. (GA I,9, pp. 108-9)

Fichte thinks, just as Kant did, that unity depends on an organizing principle, a systematic idea provided by reason that organizes how experience as a whole hangs together. And he details how one must further check for the coherence of one's worldview in a second reflective step. But it is in detailing this reflective process that the picture takes on a new form.

And one can see in this shift Fichte improving on Kant's original recipe insofar as the Kantian model has two deficiencies. First, it is not clear whether the philosophical worldview – as Kant sees it – is open for debate. Clearly, Kant thought that two possible worldviews might be entertained. But Kant does not seem to think that the first is tenable. He quickly points to the second (the ethicotheological one) as *the* ideal substrate that follows from our moral nature and which allows for a coherent system to result.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is not totally clear that varieties of worldview can take shape in the Kantian picture. Yet it is quite conceivable and in line with common sense – as Schelling illustrated explicitly – to think that multiple coherent worldviews can obtain, and which, in turn, can disagree with each other while nevertheless claiming legitimacy. Second, Kant's worldview – as a philosopher's construct – might appear anemic without further exploration. What does it mean for one's life once a worldview is possessed? In a charitable spirit, Kant's model is too incomplete to answer; but that's precisely the point. It seems at most times that the ideal

---

<sup>27</sup> I have detailed the practical extension of Kantian ideals as substrate elsewhere (Englert 2022).

philosopher alone quests after a worldview, even though the common understanding, Kant thinks, will concur when pressed.

To the first deficiency: While in the Kantian picture (and earlier Fichtean one) we glean two worldviews (one of which is quickly trumped by the second one), Fichte argues that there is a five-fold manner of viewing the world [*Fünffachheit der möglichen Ansichten der Welt*]. By a manner of viewing the world, Fichte means that even though we all stand in relation to the same world in reflection, the way that we reflect on this relation as such depends very much on our individual epistemic access and character as thinkers (GA I,9, p. 105). He thinks that absolute being represents a unified, unchanging, and eternal substrate (*as such*); yet the way we take it up in reflection varies (*for us*). Each worldview remains distinctive in the sense that the unifying point is different in each.

All five worldviews form together a hierarchy, in which each superseding worldview eclipses and subordinates the previous form. Thus, contra Schelling, “a higher worldview does not abide beside itself the lower, rather every higher [one] annihilates the lower [ones] – as the absolute, and as the highest standpoint – and subordinates these under itself” (GA I,9, p. 109). Lessons remain learned, elements of the world remain in force, but the emphasis on which point unifies the world as its central idea shifts the higher one ascends. And – as one would expect from a European Enlightenment thinker – this shifting is dependent not on the mere elapsing of time or one’s cultural context, but rather by the effort that one exerts in one’s thinking and critical self-reflection.<sup>28</sup> Here we see the reverberations from his encounter with Schelling: one’s system, one’s outlook is a choice with philosophical consequences that reach into one’s day-to-day existence.

But, while strict sounding, this development provides an openness that seems lacking in Kant’s thought à la the first deficiency. Fichte provides a comparative framework for appreciating how we can all share one world, form a well-crafted view of it, but remain in stark disagreement about how it hangs together in general; indeed, how we can share a world, but live worlds apart.

The first and second worldviews align, as noted, with the reductive empiricist and Kantian moral worldviews respectively. The reflective transition goes along the same lines as detailed above. But the next three expand the alternatives significantly. In a dialectic foreshadowing Hegel’s, each intermediate worldview shows itself as in need of a conceptual transition. The first, sensible worldview is incomplete and must give way to a lawful worldview in which morality takes central position. However, a purely abstract moral law is incomplete without realization in the world of sense: the third worldview, or ethical standpoint, shows that only ethical life can work as a

---

<sup>28</sup> See, “The thought appears to force itself upon us that this diversity is not of the object, but of the view of the object, as it continuously persists; that is, that [the diversity] can only rest on the obscurity or clarity, depth or superficiality, completeness or incompleteness of this view of the One persisting world. And this just so happens to be the case” (GA I,9, p. 105).



unifying point for organizing our picture of the world.<sup>29</sup> And this worldview depends on discovering behind the mere “form” of the moral law a “*qualitative* and *real* idea of the same” (GA I,9, p. 109.) Fichte must have had something like this in mind after his change from *The Vocation of Man*: the law alone reveals an order in the abstract, but the substance of change requires believing and submitting to ideas as structuring the world in an archetypal fashion behind the appearances. The moral order if not realized in our actions and institutions remains hollow. But what the reality of this idea indicates is not to be found in our consciousness or in our actions, but points to an actual higher being, a highest synthesis of the *GeisterWelt*. Thus, a shift is required to the fourth, religious worldview.

The fourth and fifth worldviews, as the final two worldviews, transition from the practical to the contemplative in a shift away from Kant’s priority of the practical. For when we reflect on the productive ethical life, we cannot find in the world – as it is given by the senses – any adequate source for the laws that govern us, hence we transition to the religious standpoint. The divine source of all being and morality takes on the central focus of this worldview.<sup>30</sup> Finally, this worldview bases itself on the fact *that* some divine source organizes the world and is responsible for all that was prioritized in previous worldviews. As intelligent beings, though, we want to know *how* this primordial being works and its nature as it is. Hence, we are led to metaphysics as a science. The last worldview is the philosophical or scientific standpoint. And while reality is equally grasped in religion, Fichte believes that the structure provided by a scientific methodology adds to faith insofar as it – while not reducing God – brings us into a communion with the absolute source of all being and knowledge in a more aware state.

An interesting offshoot of this Fichtean development is that he notes that this hierarchy is not a possession of philosophy. Fichte admits that one need not study philosophy in order to grasp higher worldviews (though the final worldview, it appears, does require one to reflect philosophically, though not in an academic sense per se). Instead, he points out that poets, sages, and prophets seem – as if by chance – to grasp higher worldviews without working for them (GA I,9, p. 106). Thus, even while reserving the best view for the philosophically minded, Fichte readily admits that it is not philosophy’s exclusive property.

With this brief exegesis of the hierarchy of worldviews and who can access them, we can turn to the second deficiency of Kant’s barebones theory. It is clearer on Fichte’s reading just how worldviews do not merely answer a philosophical question, but indeed enrich one’s life. For, if one comes to appreciate things at a deeper level through a raised awareness, one – according to Fichte – also comes to

---

<sup>29</sup> This worldview ultimately leads to Fichte’s conclusion that we must – to occupy such a worldview – let go of our own preconceived notions about what we ought to do. This surrendering, though, is for the sake of being absorbed in – as it were – the divine course of the world. There are familiar overtones with Hegel’s notion of *Sittlichkeit* from the *Philosophy of Right*, in which one’s higher moral calling requires adopting the role of a participant in an ethical substance that sublates one’s will.

<sup>30</sup> Fichte thinks that Christianity is the truest of the monotheisms. However, the worldview itself might be consistent with other eschatological doctrines.

lead a different life: “the aforementioned five manners of viewing the world are the same as that which I called the various, possible steps and developmental degrees of inner spiritual [*geistigen*] life” (GA I,9, p. 105). And for Fichte, one cannot talk about one’s inner spiritual life without connecting it to love in a non-romantic, philosophical sense.<sup>31</sup> What we do and think, as well as how we choose our company and the allocation of time shows us how it is that we love and live.

For Fichte, therefore, one’s worldview is not a philosophical tool to stave off the possibility of metaphysical contradiction in experience, but rather a way of living and loving wisely. And the manner that one forms a worldview, or worse fails to form one at all, will entail how one lives and the degree to which one loves or finds blessedness. The real danger is if one simply reneges on the intellect’s desire to seek a focal point for one’s inner life through a worldview: “Such [persons] have absolutely no stable view [*Blick*], rather they look cross-eyed in perpetuity at the manifold” (GA I,9, p. 109). And without a stable view, these individuals will lose focus, energy, and self-determination, for only in the process of organizing one’s own inner life around a worldview “is the human being autonomous,” as opposed to a “blind and lawless blob [*Ohngefähr*]” (GA I,9, p. 130).<sup>32</sup> The philosophical worldview on such a reading is anything but anemic. It is a full-blooded expression that enriches one’s life. Of course, this sounds quite elitist, but this would be too hasty. First, the lack of a worldview for Fichte arises not from one’s education, but rather grows if one is simply indifferent. And, moreover, it is not that we must turn, per se, to academic philosophy and seek salvation in the ivory tower. On the contrary, Fichte sees his project – as a philosophy of religion and explicit “*Guide to a Blessed Life*” – as a call to check one’s beliefs. This seems in line with many world wisdoms and religions as a call to *know* thyself by reflecting on the world. In the process one might find a deeper sense of meaning and belonging in an otherwise hectic world. And Fichte, while highly opinionated about the preferred outcome, underlines that this remains a personal choice. While not elitist, it is paternalistic. But not all advice given paternalistically is bad advice.

## Conclusion

I have detailed and analyzed the conceptual origin of worldview in Kant and Fichte. For both of them, worldview creation presents each person with a life-orienting task. And they both also agree that there are universal and correct ways of completing this task relative to certain truths and necessary judgments that persist as fundamental features of the human condition. My analysis of worldviews shows that Kant and Fichte intended the philosophical use of worldview to be a formal tool in checking the coherence of necessary judgments relative to an idea, as opposed to filling out a system with specific, historically contingent contents.

---

<sup>31</sup> Fichte’s notion of love is something like an attunement of oneself with the grounds of the one’s worldview. He describes it as an “*affect of being*” (see GA I,9, pp. 133f.) in which one harmonizes (or fails to) with the overall unity of the unconditioned.

<sup>32</sup> Fichte refers to such an impoverished spiritual life repeatedly as a “*blindes und gesetzloses Ohngefähr*” (see also GA I,9, p. 132), or as a “spiritual non-existence” (ibid.).

Nevertheless, Schelling voiced a worry about how certain worldviews might wield an ironhanded force. Since he is often overlooked in contemporary scholarship, it seems only fair to offer him the last word from his *Philosophical Letters* where he calls for a pluralistic approach:

Nothing can rouse the indignation of the philosophical mind more than the declaration that henceforth all philosophy shall be detained in the fetters of a single system. The genuine philosopher has never felt himself to be greater than when he has beheld an infinity of knowledge. The whole sublimity of his science has consisted in just this, that it would never be complete. (WW 1, p. 306).

The question, then, for Kant and Fichte's theories is whether a worldview can evolve. Perhaps Fichte's account can be the most use here since it demonstrates a way in which we can progress through stages of viewing the world to a position that promises a coherent resting place for all thought. But Hegel's system also beckons since it begins just three years later with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to put various worldviews, Kant's included, to the test.<sup>33</sup>

\*

## References

- Adamson, R. (1881). *Fichte* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood).
- Adickes, E. (1920). *Kants Opus postumum: dargestellt und beurteilt*. In *Kant-Studien Ergänzungsheft Nr. 50* (Berlin: Reuter & Reichard).
- Beiser, F. (2006). 'Moral Faith and the Highest Good', in P. Guyer (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 588-629.
- Bruno, G. (2014). "Freedom and Pluralism in Schelling's Critique of Fichte's Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*," *Idealistic Studies* 43 (1/2): 71-86.
- Düsing, K. (1971). "Das Problem des höchsten Gutes in Kants praktischer Philosophie," *Kant-Studien* 62 (1-4): 5-42.
- Englert, A. (2022). "How a Kantian Ideal Can Be Practical," *Inquiry* 65: 1-28.
- Fichte, J.G. (1962 – ). *Gesamtausgabe (GA) der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog).

---

<sup>33</sup> I'm indebted to participants in Andrew Chignell and Lara Buchak's Princeton Project in Philosophy and Religion workshop, where an early draft of this paper was presented. I also presented it to Huaping Lu-Adler's D.C./Baltimore Kant Workshop, as well as to the Philosophisches Seminar of the Freie Universität Berlin. In both settings, I profited from wonderful feedback. Finally, I would like to thank the careful comments of the two anonymous reviewers who helped improve the paper.

- Förster, E. (2010). 'What Is the "Highest Point" of Transcendental Philosophy?', in Pablo Muchnik (ed.). *Rethinking Kant Volume 2*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), pp. 257-271.
- Franks, P. (2005). *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Fugate, C. (2019). "Kant's World Concept of Philosophy and Cosmopolitanism," *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie* 101 (4): 535-583.
- Harman, G. (1986). *Change in View: Principles of Reasoning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1968 – ). *Gesammelte Werke (GW) im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner).
- (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Heidegger, M. (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).
- Henrich, D. (2003). *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Höffe, O. (2008). 'Der Mensch als Endzweck', in O. Höffe (hrsg.). *Klassiker Auslegen. Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag), pp. 289-308.
- Huygens, C. (1698). *Cosmotheoros, oder weltbetrachtende Muthmassungen von deren himmlischen Erdkugeln und deren Schmuck*, übers. J. Wurzelbaur in 1703 (Leipzig).
- Insole, C. (2008). "The Irreducible Importance of Religious Hope in Kant's Conception of the Highest Good," *Philosophy* 83 (3): 333-351.
- Kant, I. (1902 – ). *Akademie Ausgabe (AA) der Königlichen Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: de Gruyter).
- (1929). *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press).
- Kaulbach, F. (1990). *Philosophie des Perspektivismus: Wahrheit und Perspektive bei Kant, Hegel und Nietzsche* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr).
- Kroner, R. (1914). *Kants Weltanschauung* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr).
- Makkreel, R. (2021). *Kant's Worldview: How Judgment Shapes Human Comprehension* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press).
- Medicus, F. (1914). *Fichtes Leben* (Leipzig: Meiner).

- Meier, H. (1967). *“Weltanschauung”*: Studien zu einer Geschichte und Theorie des Begriffs [Inaugural-Dissertation] (Münster, Westfalen: Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster).
- Naugle, D. (2002). *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Cambridge: W.B. Eedermans).
- Schelling, F.W.J. (1927). *Schellings Werke (WW) Nach der Originalausgabe in neuer Anordnung*, hrsg. Manfred Schröter (München: Beck and Oldenbourg).
- (1979). *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press).
- Schnädelbach, H. (2000). *Philosophie in der modernen Kultur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp).
- Schrempf, C. (1891). *Die Christliche Weltanschauung und Kants sittlicher Glaube* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Windelband, W. (1904). *Immanuel Kant und seine Weltanschauung* (Heidelberg: C. Winter).
- Zöller, G. (2014). “‘Life into which an Eye is Inserted’: Fichte on the Fusion of Vitality and Vision,” *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 69 (4): 601-618.