Fichte, Eberhard, and the Psychology of Religion

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In marked contrast to much of twentieth-century psychology and philosophy, prevailing accounts of affect, emotion, and sentiment in the eighteenth century took these phenomena to be rational and, to a certain extent, cognitive.[1] Because of a combination of disciplinary diffusion and general lack of physicalist assumptions, accounts of affectivity in the eighteenth century also tended to be quite flexible and nuanced. This is particularly true of an influential stream of Anglo-Scottish and German thought on morality, aesthetics, and the philosophy of religion. Following Shaftesbury, many of the most prominent philosophers of the century regarded affective states and processes as playing a crucial role in accounts of value. In most cases, this tendency was combined with a sort of anti-rationalism, that is, with a tendency to minimize the role of reason in everything from common sense perceptual knowledge to religious belief. Hutcheson's moral sense theory and his well-known and influential criticisms of moral rationalism exemplify this trend.[2] It is perhaps more pronounced in Lord Kames, who followed the lead of Shaftesbury

[1] For an erudite and informative account of the historical process underlying this shift in perspective, see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[2] Hutcheson's most well-known and influential works are: *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (ed. Wolfgang Leidhold; Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2004) and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (ed. Aaron Garrett; Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2002). These works originally appeared in 1725 and 1728, respectively. Hutcheson's philosophy of religion is more pronounced in *A System of Moral Philosophy* (ed. Daniel Carey; London: Continuum, 2005), which first appeared posthumously. Most contemporary scholarship is concerned with Hutcheson's place in the development of modern moral philosophy. A few works, however, include discussions of his religious views. See, for example, Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense: Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003) 111–26. Kivy's verdict is unsparingly negative. For two more balanced accounts, see Frederick Rauscher, "Moral Realism and the Divine Essence in Hutcheson," *History of*

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and Hutcheson in aesthetics, moral theory, philosophy of religion, anthropology, and history.[3] In Germany, this stream of thought was quite well-received by philosophers both inside and outside the dominant Wolffian tradition.[4] Particularly important and influential in this respect were Johann Georg Hamann, who drew upon Hutcheson, Hume, and the "Common Sense" school to defend a conception of faith as "sentiment (*Empfindung*)," and Johann Gottfried Herder, a polymath and philosophical pioneer whose work in psychology, anthropology, history, aesthetics, biblical criticism, and theology consistently stresses the fundamental role of passion, affect, and sensibility in every aspect of human culture.[5]

A theory of the origins and nature of religion in terms of emotion and affect, first developed by some of the thinkers mentioned above, has come to have an enormous and lasting impact on both theology and the secular study of religion. Indeed, the latter, as an independent discipline, owes its origins to the work of people like Lord Kames and Herder.[6] Nineteenth-century giants like Schleiermacher and de Wette cemented this "sentimentalist paradigm" in the study of religion, and key twentieth-century thinkers like William James, Georg Simmel, and Rudolf Otto followed with their own important contributions to this tradition. To point to one clear example of the subterranean influence of this line of thought, contemporary work on the psychology of religion, a discipline that has flourished in the last twenty years, is also characterized by a marked preference for attitudinal and motivational conceptions of religion over more cognitive, belief-oriented approaches.

A crucial figure in the post-Kantian tradition, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, has largely been left out of seminal accounts of the eighteenth-century tradition as outlined above. His views on religion have been obscured by the fog surrounding the so-called "Atheism Controversy" of 1799. This is understandable due to the fact that the pamphleteering of Fichte and his opponents contains more in the way

Philosophy Quarterly 20 (2003) 165–81 and Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 181–200.

[3] Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782) is virtually ignored today but was much admired in Britain and in Germany in the eighteenth century. His views on religion are found in 1) *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (ed. Mary Catherine Moran; Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2005) and 2) *Sketches of the History of Man* (ed. James A. Harris; 3 vols.; Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2007).

[4] Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) were two prominent representatives of the Wolffian tradition who were also receptive to many ideas found in the Anglo-Scottish tradition deriving from Shaftesbury, particularly in the field of aesthetics. See Armand Nivelle, *Kunst- und Dichtungstheorien zwischen Aufklärung und Klassik* (2d ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971).

[5] For a discussion of Herder that also focuses on his innovative departure from Wolffian psychology, see my "Beyond Theological Rationalism: The Contemporary Relevance of Herder's Psychology of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21 (2009) 249–73.

[6] Two excellent studies of the history of the modern science of religion that discuss its eighteenth-century background are Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1986) and Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989).

of character assassination and recrimination than of substantive philosophical debate. A noteworthy exception to this, however, can be found in Fichte's exchange with Johann August Eberhard. Like their predecessors, both Fichte and Eberhard highlight the central role of affect in religion; moreover, like other people in the tradition stemming from Shaftesbury, both Fichte and Eberhard stress that moral and religious feelings are rational. Their disagreement concerns precisely what it is that makes moral and religious feelings rational. For Eberhard, the best account is a Wolffian one that takes moral and religious feelings or "sensations (*Empfindungen*)" to be confused clusters of representations that implicitly contain abstract truths discernible by reason. For Eberhard, to separate religious feelings from theoretical rationality, as he thinks the British "moral sense" theorists and Fichte try to do, is to open the door to the dreaded bugbear of early modern philosophy of religion, "enthusiasm." For Fichte, on the other hand, the Wolffian conception of philosophy as a science, which drives Eberhard's account, is no longer compelling. Instead, Fichte is interested in developing a "pragmatic history of the human mind" that accounts for fundamental features of first-order human experience, including religion, by treating them as conditions of human agency. In the end, the "Atheism Controversy" can be viewed as a moment in the birth-pangs of the modern study of religion. Fichte's repudiation of Wolffian rationalism sets the stage for the broadly historical, anthropological approach to religion that emerged in the century after his dismissal from Jena.

Eberhard's Critique of Fichte

The "Atheism Controversy" is the name given to the furor caused by Fichte's 1798 essay *On the Basis of Our Belief in the Divine Governance of the World*.[7] Ironically, Fichte published this essay by way of a critical reply to a piece by his colleague Forberg, which can be more plausibly read as at least implying, if not asserting, atheism. Fichte's intentions notwithstanding, a public outcry arose, first in Electoral Saxony, and then in Saxony-Weimar. Fichte's interventions on his own behalf, such as the 1799 *Appeal to the Public*, were ill-conceived and only served to deepen the hostility of his critics. One of these, J. A. Eberhard (1739–1809), who occupied a prestigious chair of philosophy at Halle, published his own response to Fichte's *Appeal to the Public*. His essay, entitled *Concerning Prof.*

[7] References to Fichte's works are given beginning with the critical edition, *J.-G. Fichte. Gesamtausgabe der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (ed. Reinhard Lauth et. al; Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964–). When applicable, reference is also made to the relevant English translations according to the following abbreviations:

IW	*Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings* (trans. Daniel Breazeale; Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1994).
SE	*The System of Ethics* (ed. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
WLnm	*Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo (1796/99)* (ed. Daniel Breazeale; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Fichte's God and the Idols of His Opponents: A Calm Examination of His Appeal to the Public *in Some Letters*, took issue with a number of elements of Fichte's position, while largely (though not entirely) avoiding the superficial editorializing of Fichte's other opponents. Fichte seems to have regarded Eberhard's essay as one of the few objections to his position that merited a response. His unpublished essay, *Recollections, Answers, Questions* (1801) is largely a sustained reply to Eberhard on various points.

Among the many aspects of Fichte's view that worries Eberhard, the one that concerns me here is his response to Fichte's discussion of the role of "feeling" or "sense" in religion. In the offending *Divine Governance* essay, Fichte asserts that religious faith is "based not upon logic, but upon one's moral disposition or sentiment."[8] At the end of this same essay, Fichte offers a gloss on Goethe's poetic image of God as the "all-comprehensive (*Der Allumfassend*)." He approves of this image, but only "after . . . one has first apprehended him [i.e., God] through the moral sense [*durch moralischen Sinn*] and not, as it were, by means of theoretical speculation."[9] In the "Appeal to the Public," the piece to which Eberhard directly responds, Fichte stresses the immediacy of this "feeling" or "sentiment" and argues that the concept of God stems from an attempt to "synthesize" this feeling for the purposes of communicating it to others. He writes that "the relation of a supernatural world-order [i.e., God] to our moral feeling, is primary and is simply immediate; the concept arises later, and is mediated through the former."[10] In a later passage, Fichte summarizes what he takes to be distinctive about his view:

> According to me, the *relation* of the deity to us as moral beings is immediately given; a particular being of this deity is thought of simply as a result of our finite representation, and this being contains nothing other than immediately given relations; only they are synthesized in the unity of a concept. *According to my opponents*, every relation to the deity ought to be first inferred and derived from something independent of these relations, instead of a discovered knowledge of the essence of God in and for itself.[11]

Leaving aside for now what the content of this "moral sense" is, what Fichte seems to be asserting here is that religion is based on an affective sensation, on the sort of thing that his contemporaries labeled a sentiment (*Empfindung*), a sense (*Sinn*), or a feeling (*Gefühl*), and which we today might be inclined to label an "emotion." As such, it does not depend upon any prior concepts nor upon any sort of inferential process. Rather it is, as Fichte says, immediate, in the same way that our "sense" of our own existence is immediate. Fichte will grant, of course, that this "feeling" is somehow distinct from physical sensations like warmth or cold, but he also argues that all of these feelings share the quality of immediacy or nondiscursiveness. It

[8] Series I, volume 5 (I/5), 352; *IW*, 148.

[9] I/5, 337; *IW*, 153.

[10] I/5, 428.

[11] I/5, 432–33 [italics in original].

is precisely this claim, that religion is ultimately a non-discursive, pre-conceptual "feeling" or "sentiment" that Eberhard attacks.

As previously noted, Eberhard occupied the chair of philosophy at Halle, which had previously been occupied by Christian Wolff.[12] Eberhard made a reputation for himself, which persists to this day, as a vociferous defender of Wolffianism, particularly against Kant and his followers.[13] Eberhard was a close associate of Mendelssohn's in Berlin during the 1760s. In 1772, his *New Apology of Socrates, or an Inquiry into the Salvation of Pagans* caused an uproar among more orthodox Lutherans with its defense of the claim that the idea of God does not depend upon supernatural revelation but is instead innate to human nature. Both this little essay and his prize-winning treatise on rational psychology, *General Theory of Thought and Sensation* (1776), gained Eberhard widespread recognition as a champion of Wolffian rationalism and of the allied theological movement known as Neology, all of which eventually resulted in his appointment to the prestigious chair of philosophy at Halle. In his treatise on psychology, Eberhard expounds a version of Wolff's rationalist psychology that purports to give a more adequate treatment of the so-called "lower faculties" of the soul as well as to seriously engage with the work of British thinkers like Locke, Hutcheson, Hume, and Lord Kames. Eberhard published numerous textbooks based on his lectures at Halle. These were widely read and respected at the time, and Kant used his 1781 textbook on natural theology in his own course on the same subject. At Halle, Eberhard influenced many students who later on came to be distinguished in their own rights, including Schleiermacher. Later on during his career, Eberhard gained notoriety as a controversialist. In particular, he defended Wolffianism against Kant, editing two periodicals during the 1780s and 1790s that became the leading organs of anti-Kantianism. Indeed, Eberhard's critique of Fichte begins with a satire on Kantianism as modish and ephemeral.

Eberhard launches his criticisms of Fichte's psychology of religion proper with an analogy:

> It would be a peculiar reply were a married man asked about the correct relations in which he stands to his wife, and he replied that "They are immediately given to you; in order to know them, you do not need to be familiar with your wife, you do not need to know her gender, you do not need to know wherein the physical and moral differences of the two sexes lie, and you do not even need to know whether there is a woman that exists in the world."[14]

[12] For a general overview of Eberhard's life and work, see Gerda Haßler, *Johann August Eberhard (1739–1809). Ein streitbarer Geist an der Grenzen der Aufklärung* (Halle/Saale: Hallescher, 2000).

[13] See *The Kant-Eberhard Controversy* (ed. Henry Allison; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) and Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987) 217–24.

[14] J. A. Eberhard, *Über den Gott des Herrn Professor Fichtes und den Götzen seiner Gegner. Eine ruhige Prüfung seiner Appellation an das Publikum in einigen Briefe* (Halle: Hemmerde and Schwetschke, 1799) 19.

The point that Eberhard, somewhat clumsily, seems to be making with this analogy is that important moral questions, such as how to treat one's wife, cannot be intelligibly answered except by appealing to a fairly robust group of articulate concepts. That is, grasping one's "relations" to another person requires more than just "feeling" something; it requires a relatively ramified conception of oneself and the other person. The lesson for Fichte seems to be that a moral feeling, which is meant to cue one into one's relationship with God, cannot be properly seen as a feeling about this relationship unless one already knows something fairly complicated about God in the first place.

Eberhard argues that moral feeling is in fact dependent on the "cultivation of reason." This is meant to be the lesson of the marriage example described above. Eberhard is quite explicit that a relatively detailed conceptual apparatus underwrites moral feeling, in the same way that a proper view about one's spousal relations depends upon some relatively clear ideas. Eberhard now couches his point in terms of a series of rhetorical questions:

> Why is moral feeling in an uncultured person uncouth [*roh*], while it is proper, refined, and comprehensive [*weitumfassend*] in the cultured and enlightened [person]? Is it not because the former is devoid of concepts, while the latter is rich in correct, clear [*hellen*], effective concepts? Why has the horror of superstition disfigured morality? Is it not the fault of the false concepts of God that the superstitious person has constructed for himself?[15]

The principal point of these rhetorical questions is evidently that moral feeling is dependent upon concepts. The more and better concepts one has, the more refined one's moral sensibility will be. He makes substantially the same point by considering child development. In his *Appeal to the Public*, Fichte had suggested that the attempt to make moral feeling depend upon concepts of the deity is as absurd as making sensory feelings, like those of warmth or coldness, depend upon some prior understanding of the mechanics of perception. Eberhard's response is to deny that there is any analogy between sensory feelings and moral feeling. He does this by pointing out that children certainly have sensory feelings but doubtful whether they have moral feelings.[16] Eberhard summarizes his basic claim as follows:

> The moral feeling is expanded, corrected, and refined to the extent that the supply of *concepts* is increased, the intellect is enlightened, and *reason* is exercised. But reason is exercised not only by learning to make more correct inferences, but also by having more correct premises provided to it for these inferences. Reason will be provided with more [correct premises] the more, and more correct, concepts it has of things.[17]

[15] Eberhard, *Ueber den Gott*, 20.

[16] Ibid., 21–22.

[17] Ibid., 22 [italics in original].

Eberhard next provides what is meant to be a diagnosis of views like Fichte's. On this account, an uncultured person absorbs, quite involuntarily, the "developed *concepts* and *judgments*" of her more enlightened associates and then mistakenly ascribes the rudimentary judgments that follow to "an *original* feeling." Such a person only later is able to develop the capacity "to analyze the *concepts* that lie at the basis of his feelings."[18] Here, Eberhard is relying on the Wolffian distinction between "common," "vulgar," or "natural" knowledge and scientific knowledge. On the Wolffian view, both aim at certainty, but only the latter is really capable of it, because reason can discern the principles that are implicit in "vulgar" knowledge.[19] For Eberhard, his own view is the only one that could possibly secure a "rational education and a purposive moral culture [*Bildung*]."[20] On the other hand, a view like the one Eberhard sees in Fichte "leads to a foolish enthusiasm [*Schwärmerey*] and to a contempt for science that is common to all enthusiasts and is the most notable element of their characters."[21] On the Wolffian view, a science must be rigorously deductive and depends upon one's first having secured principles that contain nothing but clear and distinct ideas. Moreover, following Wolff himself, most members of his school regarded science in this sense as crucial to the improvement of humanity, that is, to what Eberhard and his sympathizers called "enlightenment [*Aufklärung*]." His claim is that Fichte's position impedes human progress by undermining the bases for scientific treatments of morality and religion.

Most of Fichte's opponents in the "Atheism Controversy" were worried that he had taken the final step from thin theism or deism to full-blown unbelief. Eberhard, curiously enough, seems to have the opposite worry. "Enthusiasm," a catch-all term for religious fanaticism, which was used in German-speaking discussions primarily to refer to various radical Pietists and other revivalists who placed great emphasis on religious affections, was not a label typically affixed to putative free-thinkers.[22] Eberhard's point, however, is that by making moral feeling independent of concepts, Fichte has effectively made religion, which is founded in moral feeling, totally independent of reason. Eberhard takes it that he has shown that if moral feeling is indeed the basis of religion, then it is only proximately so. The real bedrock consists of "correct concepts of the existence of God and of His attributes," which are matters

[18] Ibid., 23 [italics in original].

[19] See, for example, the "German Logic," or *Vernünftige Gedanken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes. Und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in der Erkenntnis der Wahrheit* by Christian Wolff (Halle, 1712; [repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1965]) lxxxli.

[20] Eberhard, *Über den Gott*, 23.

[21] Ibid., 23.

[22] Eberhard's fellow neologian, J. J. Spalding, authored an influential rationalist critique of "enthusiasm" that went through five editions between 1761 and 1784. See J. J. Spalding, *Gedanken über den Werth der Gefühle in dem Christenthum* (ed. Albrecht Beutel and Tobias Jersak; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). Eberhard provides his own analysis of enthusiasm in *Allgemeine Theorie des Denkens und Empfindens* (Berlin: Voß, 1786; repr., Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1968) 173–75.

for theoretical rather than practical reason.[23] Following Wolff, Eberhard stresses that what is impressive about God is His perfect "wisdom" and "reason," revealed in "the harmony and beauty of the universe, in which everything that agrees is arranged and follows according to universal reasons [*Gründen*]," such that the employment of theoretical reason constitutes a way of worshipping God.[24] This is, more or less, a summary statement of the neologians' program. Through the complete rationalization of Christian doctrine, the neologians claimed to have reduced Christianity to its original, pristine state as a pure religion of reason aimed at promoting moral perfection.[25] Perhaps ironically, this program earned the neologians the suspicions of orthodox Lutherans, many of whom later had similar worries about Fichte's philosophy.

Eberhard's difficulty with Fichte's view is apparent, but why, we might ask, was Eberhard moved to respond in the first place? Answering this question requires an examination of some of his other, earlier writings, in which he outlines his rational psychology. This rational psychology turns out to be the deeper point at which Eberhard and Fichte part ways. The first place to look for the underlying motives behind Eberhard's criticism of Fichte lies, naturally enough, in his earlier criticisms of moral sense theories. Eberhard is insistent that Fichte belongs in this camp. Fichte's own remarks in the *Divine Governance* essay and elsewhere seem to render Eberhard's reading quite plausible. Indeed, one of the interesting things that contemporary scholars can learn from the Eberhard-Fichte exchange concerns precisely the extent to which Fichte's views do indeed echo the positions of his predecessors in both the Anglo-Scottish and German philosophical traditions of the eighteenth century.

Near the beginning of his 1781 *Rational Theory of Ethics* [*Sittenlehre der Vernunft*], Eberhard signals his intention to assert the right of reason to be the final arbiter of morality, claiming that "sentiment [*Empfindung*]" is quite inadequate for the purposes of moral judgment.[26] A bit further on in his discussion, Eberhard grants that there are "genuine moral sentiments," which he defines in Wolffian language as "the vivid representation of moral perfection in oneself and others," and he singles out Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith as theorists who have done much to illuminate these crucial elements of moral psychology.[27] However, he also seems to regard the efforts of the British moralists as somehow incomplete. For Eberhard, the real philosophical work comes in deriving these moral sentiments from "the primary basic drive of the human soul."[28] In sections

[23] Eberhard, *Ueber den Gott*, 24.

[24] Ibid., 25.

[25] For an account of this aspect of the neologians' program, see Henry E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment: His Philosophy of Religion and Its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1966) 38–42.

[26] J. A. Eberhard, *Sittenlehre der Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971) 5.

[27] Ibid., 11–13.

[28] Ibid., 12.

fifty one through fifty five, his criticism of moral sense theory is more direct and forceful. Here, he once again defines the moral sense as the capacity for having indistinct, "confused," representations of moral qualities.[29] As he would later urge against Fichte, Eberhard maintains that the moral sense is not "original" but rather depends upon "other capacities of the soul."[30] Referring to Hutcheson's *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* and to Lord Kames's *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, Eberhard rejects the position of "ethicists" who "have held the moral sense not only to be an innate faculty, but also to be one that is independent of the basic faculty of the soul."[31] Eberhard does not explain why this is a reason to reject the British moral sense theory. However, he does go on to offer comments that anticipate the core of his argument against Fichte:

> Moral judgments lie wrapped up in the inner sentiments of the soul, and are thus, in this sense, innate. The moral sense is therefore, like every other capacity of an actual soul, not a bare capacity, but rather contains concepts and judgments that can be made clear through this capacity, though only obscurely and inarticulately.[32]

That is, the moral sense theorists are correct in asserting that people have something like moral intuitions. But these are only moral intuitions because there are already innate concepts and even innate judgments that are dimly represented by the faculy that they call the "moral sense." In other words, the feelings or sentiments that are commonly attributed to the moral sense really depend upon concepts of the perfection of human actions. These feelings, as moral feelings, certainly succeed in representing this perfection—but only "obscurely and inarticulately." Thus, the capacity that produces these sorts of intuitions can, according to Eberhard, be itself improved through the cultivation of reason and its continual application to moral judgment.[33]

The unexplained comment about a "basic faculty of the soul," mentioned above, points back to an even earlier piece by Eberhard, his prize-winning *General Theory of Thought and Sensation* of 1776. On the Wolffian model, in order to be a proper science, psychology must derive its concepts from a single first principle. Following Wolff, Eberhard maintains that all of the operations of the soul can be derived from a single power of representation and its inherent limitations.[34] On this account, there cannot be any rigid distinction between thought or reason and the so-called "lower faculties" of the soul, which Eberhard labels "sensation" or "sentiment [*Empfinden*]." Instead, the distinction between the two lies in a sort of

[29] Ibid., 46.
[30] Ibid., 47.
[31] Ibid., 49.
[32] Ibid., 49–50.
[33] Ibid., 50.
[34] Eberhard, *Allgemeine Theorie*, 32.

continuum of clarity and distinctness of representations.[35] Sensation is characterized as a confused synthesis of "a large number of smaller partial representations into a total representation," within which these constituent parts cannot be clearly distinguished from one another.[36] Thought or reason, on the other hand, consists in "the elevation of one individual perception to a certain level of clarity and distinctness."[37]

Eberhard uses the concept of goodness to illustrate the distinction he is defending. He charts an ascending order of clarity and distinctness from a vague sense of beauty or attractiveness, to the perception of the fitness of a means to an end, to the perfection of the end itself, and finally to the abstract, universal perfection that underlies all of these various representations.[38] Sensation is able to have a confused representation of a manifold held together by various relations, but only thought or reason can grasp the sort of clear and distinct concept required for definitive moral judgment.[39] Toward the end of this essay, Eberhard describes how what his contemporaries called "common sense" relies upon an "unexplained feeling of truth" in making primitive theoretical judgments.[40] While "common sense" surely can be useful, it is also ultimately unreliable. After all, in different nations at different times, "common sense" seems to have authorized "the most repulsive [*abgeschmacktesten*] principles."[41] Moreover, "profound intellect" often demonstrates truths that are quite counter-intuitive from the standpoint of common sense.[42] Thus, one is not at all surprised to find Eberhard asserting the following:

> Something is true if one can grasp it conceptually, while it is false if one cannot grasp it conceptually. Should one want to explain this conceivability, then it is evident that one can guarantee it for oneself in no other way than through methodical [*stufenweise*] reduction [*Zurückkehren*] to indubitable principles [*Grundsatze*].[43]

This is, in Eberhard's words, the Wolffian conception of scientific knowledge. He goes on to make a similar argument with respect to the moral sense. He writes:

> It follows from this that the knowledge of the truth is not the work of sensation, and therefore that a particular feeling cannot be an unmistakable characteristic of the truth. This axiom extends not only to theoretical, but also to *practical* knowledge. Moral propositions must be known [*erkannt*] through the same mode of argumentation as the theorems [*Lehrsätze*] of the other sciences, because they contain judgments whose truth one can substantiate in no

[35] Ibid., 70–72.

[36] Ibid., 149.

[37] Ibid., 66.

[38] Ibid., 88–90.

[39] Ibid., 90.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 181.

[42] Ibid., 182.

[43] Ibid., 183.

> other way than by showing the coherence of their elements. Just as there are truths that are beyond the horizon of common sense, so too there are moral matters the evaluation of which is beyond the horizon of moral feeling.[44]

Moral sense theorists (Eberhard mentions Hutcheson and Lord Kames) are guilty of giving sensation a brief that goes beyond its nature.[45] Eberhard demurs with respect to enumerating all of the deleterious consequences of such a view but does not miss the opportunity to proclaim loudly that "[i]t is . . . the duty of philosophy to banish this feeling from philosophy itself and direct it towards its true calling."[46] Eberhard's response to Fichte's *Appeal to the Public* is thus entirely in line with views that he had been defending for over two decades prior to the outbreak of the "Atheism Controversy" in 1799. Eberhard's rational psychology and his conception of the nature of knowledge commit him to rejecting any view that makes moral sense or feeling independent of theoretical reason. Such a view is precisely what he sees in Fichte's controversial writings on religion.

Fichte's Response to Eberhard

Fichte's unpublished *Recollections, Answers, Questions*, until recently only available in a heavily edited version published by I. H. Fichte, constitutes a direct reply to many of Eberhard's arguments. For the most part, Fichte seems content to reiterate claims made elsewhere. Moreover, the fragmentary and unfinished nature of this text makes it somewhat unsatisfactory as a response to Eberhard's detailed criticisms. It does, however, provide some insight into Fichte's conception of his philosophical project as well as into his view of the importance of feeling and affect in human life.

According to Fichte, Eberhard (and, by extension, other Wolffians) make "knowledge [*Erkenntniß*]" the primary or superior faculty of the human mind, while "life," Fichte's catch-all term for "the system of feelings and of desires," into something inferior or dependent upon the former.[47] Fichte, by his own account, reverses this privileging of the rational faculty. Instead of making it fundamental, he leaves to it the task of "observing [*Zusehen*]."[48] That is, on Fichte's account, the primary "reality" of human life is a system of "feelings." Reason has the task of reconstructing and explaining this system. Fichte articulates this conception of the task of philosophy in many of his writings from this period. For example, in his "First Introduction" to the incomplete *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), he asserts that "the task of philosophy is to indicate the basis or foundation of experience," and the actual content of philosophy is

[44] Ibid., 183–84 [italics in original].

[45] Ibid., 184.

[46] Ibid., 185–86.

[47] II/5, 137.

[48] Ibid.

best viewed as a purely rational construction.[49] In his "Second Introduction," he insists that his philosophy "can never be a *way of thinking*; instead, it is nothing more than speculation."[50] His contemporaneous lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* "according to a new method" contain similar remarks:

> This constitutes the very essence of transcendental philosophy: that it has no desire to become a way of thinking that could be employed within life; instead, it observes an [actual] I, which embodies within life this system of thinking described by transcendental philosophy.[51]

For Fichte, knowledge, in the strict Wolffian sense of science, is not the primary end of human life. According to the common Wolffian view of philosophers like Eberhard, there is a drive for certainty even at the level of common sense, and the task of philosophy is to fulfill this drive by constructing a deductive system based on the innate principles that can be found even within common sense. Fichte, on the other hand, proposes what he calls a "pragmatic history of the human mind."[52] He famously asserts that philosophers "are not the legislators of the human mind."[53] Fichte accuses Eberhard of doing just that, being a legislator. This is typified for Fichte in Eberhard's apparent attempt to "produce certain cognitions and concepts through free, voluntary thought" and then to "affect [*afficiren*] the faculty of desire with these, produce feelings, and determine the actions of human beings."[54]

A "pragmatic historian," however, is also supposed to avoid being a mere "journalist."[55] Presumably, a journalist simply relates a series of events or a group of facts. To do history like a journalist would be to be a chronicler. Fichte, however, means for his "history of the human mind" to be systematic. But in what way, precisely? In the eighteenth century, the notion of "pragmatic history" was used most often to describe a style of narrative historical writing that attempted to show the underlying causes of and causal relations between significant events.[56] At the same time, as the name suggests, "pragmatic history" was also history with a message. The *Annals* of Tacitus were taken as exemplary in this regard; Tacitus's goal is to provide an analysis of the origins of certain political arrangements and a cautionary tale about their deleterious effects. Thus, for Herder, a noteworthy

[49] I/4, 206–207; *IW*, 33–34.

[50] I/4, 211; *IW*, 38 [italics in original].

[51] *WLnm*, 472.

[52] I/2, 147.

[53] I/2, 147.

[54] II/5, 137.

[55] I/2, 147.

[56] My account of "pragmatic history" in Fichte closely follows Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte's Conception of Philosophy as a 'Pragmatic History of the Human Mind' and the Contributions of Kant, Platner, and Maimon," *JHI* 62 (2001) 685–703. For a discussion of "pragmatic history" in Herder and other eighteenth-century thinkers, see John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 336–39.

practitioner of "pragmatic history," it "should aspire to be what it was for the ancients, the voice of patriotic wisdom and the reformer of the people."[57] Kant draws attention to this idea as well in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, where he observes that "A *history* is pragmatically composed when it makes one *prudent* [*klug*], that is, when it teaches the world how to pursue what is advantageous better, or at least as well, as the preceding age was able to do."[58]

How is Fichte's project "pragmatic history"? Fichte offers little in the way of positive instructions on how one should live. He does, however, famously make practical reason the foundation of his entire system.[59] In this much, he also reflects Kant's definition of a "pragmatic" anthropology as one that is primarily concerned with "what man, considered as a freely acting being, makes of himself or what he can and should make of himself."[60] The two senses fit together for Fichte in that, by making practical reason the foundation of his system, he aims to do what previous philosophers had, by his lights, all failed to do, namely, to integrate our conceptions of ourselves as rational agents with our picture of the world as governed by causal necessity.[61] However things might fare with this rather grand project, the main issue here is how Fichte's account of religion as originating in moral feeling reflects his commitment to the notion of philosophy as a "pragmatic history of the human mind." First, Fichte is, as he states quite clearly in a lecture

[57] J. G. Herder, "On Recent German Literature: First Collection of Fragments," in *Selected Early Works 1764–1767: Addresses, Essays, and Drafts; Fragments on Recent German Literature* (trans. Ernest A. Menze and Michael Palma; University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) 94.

[58] Kant's works are cited here from the standard edition: *Kants Gesammelte Schriften* (ed. Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900–) 7:417n.

[59] There is a voluminous and contentious literature on the primacy of practical reason in Fichte. For some of the most important recent discussions, see: Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 47–52; Wayne M. Martin, " 'Without a Striving, No Object is Possible': Fichte's Striving Doctrine and the Primacy of Practice," in *New Perspectives on Fichte* (ed. Tom Rockmore and Daniel Breazeale; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1996) 19–34; Daniel Breazeale, "Certainty, Universal Validity, and Conviction: The Methodological Primacy of Practical Reason within the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*," in *New Perspectives*, 35–60; Wayne M. Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997) 118–25; Daniel Breazeale, "The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory: Fichte and the Primacy of Practical Reason," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1996) 47–64; Allen W. Wood, "The 'I' as Principle of Practical Philosophy," in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel* (ed. Sally Sedgwick; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 93–108; Karl Ameriks, "Fichte's Appeal Today: The Hidden Primacy of the Practical," in *The Emergence of German Idealism* (ed. Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999) 116–32; and Karl Ameriks, "The Practical Foundation of Philosophy in Kant, Fichte, and After," in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy*, 109–28.

[60] Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7:119.

[61] See, for example, Fichte's critique of "dogmatism," i.e., Spinozism, for failing to achieve precisely this integration (I/4, 263–64; *IW*, 97–98).

on Platner's *Philosophical Aphorisms*, his project is to account for the genesis of religion as a central phenomenon in human life:

> Whence does [belief in God] enter the human spirit? How is it to be deduced? It must lie deeply hidden, for the ground [of it] lies within us as something hidden but also, as it were, as something we are certainly able to discover. But *how* do we know it? [Belief in God] is something that is absolutely present for us, and for everyone—the first [and] highest [belief]. How to track it down, how to provide a proper deduction of it? This is the highest level of philosophy. The [philosophy] that correctly deduces belief in the deity has thereby accomplished everything.[62]

Second, Fichte's account of the genesis of religion will begin with human agency, rather than with theoretical reason. That is, Fichte wants to reconstruct religion as a condition of our self-consciousness as moral agents. This emerges quite clearly in the infamous *Divine Governance* essay. Rejecting what eighteenth-century writers called "physico-theology," Fichte insists that his deduction begins with our self-consciousness as agents. He describes this self-consciousness as follows:

> I discover myself to be free of any influence from the sensible world, absolutely active in and through myself, and thus I discover myself to be a power elevated above everything sensible. This freedom, however, is not indeterminate; it possesses a goal of its own.[63]

Fichte's core claim about religion is summarized negatively in his "Concluding Remark by the Editor" thus: "if (to assume for the moment something that is impossible, though it is precisely what is assumed by all proofs of the sort examined here) man were nothing but a creature aware of nature and were not also an ethical being, then the concept of a God would simply never arise within his soul."[64] For Fichte, then, the rationality of religion, considered as a pre-reflective feeling or sentiment, does not depend upon there being innate concepts of the divine attributes. Instead, it depends upon seeing religion as a condition of agency.

In his response to Eberhard, Fichte tries to explain how theoretical reason is not enough to enable the exercise of our agency. Theoretical reason can, at best, establish that some conditional holds. In this case, theoretical reason can perhaps establish that it is logically possible that if our moral vocation is to be realized, then our dutiful action must be a condition of its realization.[65] But only if there is a feeling connected with our conceptions of ourselves as moral agents can this conception be translated into something that actually shapes the course of one's life. In other words, the exercise of our agency depends on a sort of trust or faith, for, as Fichte observes elsewhere, "Whoever acts virtuously confesses God in a

[62] II/4, 288–89.

[63] I/5, 351; *IW*, 147.

[64] I/6, 413; *IW*, 180.

[65] II/5, 149.

practical way, whether or not he does so with his mouth."[66] Just as a farmer, for example, must trust the causal order of nature in order to undertake her labors, so, too, any human being must have a sort of trust or faith in the efficacy of her own agency.[67] Perhaps the most instructive discussion of this point comes in the 1798 *System of Ethics*, in the middle of a discussion of the moral relationships between parents and children. Fichte observes that the obedience of children depends upon "a childlike belief in the higher wisdom and goodness of the parents as such."[68] The same sort of phenomenon is at play in religion, which Fichte attributes to mature moral agents:

> In the child, obedience is an imitation of the moral way of thinking in its entirety, and that is why it is more important than anything else; for the child relates to the command and person of its parents in the same way a cultured human being relates to the moral law as such and to the executor of the same, God. We ought simply to do what duty commands, without trying to calculate the consequences; and yet, simply in order to be able to do what duty commands, we must necessarily assume that the consequences will turn out well in God's hands.[69]

This account parallels many remarks from Fichte's lectures on Platner. For example, he describes religion as a sort of "confidence," or a sense that God is that "without which I neither live nor move."[70] God is "that which promotes [*befördert*] our freedom *in front* and *behind*." He likens belief in God to belief in other minds in that "[i]t could be otherwise— but *it is* this way, we *feel* it." Thus, "In proofs for the existence of God one simply feels that it ought to be this way."[71] Fichte's approving quotation from *Faust*, Part I is also revealing here: "The All-Embracing [. . .]/The All-Sustaining,/Does he not embrace and sustain/You and me, as well as himself?"[72]

On Fichte's pragmatic account, religion originates in a felt sense that the world is hospitable to human moral agency. Without this sense, it would be impossible to exercise this agency in the first place. Just as healthy child development requires a degree of trust or confidence in one's parents, one's peers, and the world as a whole, so too mature moral agency depends on a very similar sort of sentiment. It is thus as a condition of moral agency that religious feelings are rational. No appeal needs to be made to the apparatus of Wolffian psychology.

[66] II/4, 303–4.
[67] I/6, 379–80; *IW*, 168.
[68] I/5, 296; *SE*, 320.
[69] I/5, 296; *SE*, 320–21.
[70] II/4, 302–3.
[71] II/4, 310.
[72] I/5, 357; *IW*, 153.

Conclusions

The flashpoint of the dispute between Eberhard and Fichte can be located fairly precisely. Their views constitute different answers to the question of what has to be the case about moral-religious affective states to be responsive to reason. For Eberhard, as for most of the leading lights of the Wolffian tradition, the answer is that affects are analogous to judgments. That is, the products of the moral sense are confused or obscure bundles of representations that have been unified by a further representation. Again, like other Wolffians (e.g., Mendelssohn), this position commits Eberhard to holding that affects can be analyzed into representations that, at least in principle, can be made clear and distinct through rational reflection.

Fichte, on the other hand, denies that the fact that moral-religious sentiments can respond to reason entails any such thing. Instead of being judgment-like, Fichte holds that these affective states are more like perceptions, ways of "taking" the world. More specifically, the affect that is at the basis of religion is a pre-reflective "take" on the world as being hospitable to human agency. Fichte goes on to suggest that one may indeed *reflect* on this pre-reflective "take." One may do so out of a desire to articulate it to other people. One can inquire into whether or not this "take" is reasonable, justified, or consistent with other pre-reflective commitments. However, Fichte also stresses that one need not do so.[73] However that may be, Fichte also seems to have held that *everyone* has this "take"; that it is what he called a "fact of consciousness." Moreover, even people whose (faulty) reflection leads them to beliefs that conflict with this "fact of consciousness" must still have this "take" on the world. He says this quite clearly in a number of places; perhaps the most lucid account is found in his lectures on Platner's *Philosophical Aphorisms*:

> [T]here is a great deal within us that we constantly presuppose without being clearly conscious of it precisely because we do not reflect upon it. The same is true here: everyone who really thinks morally and adopts ends in the world of freedom presupposes it necessarily; he cannot do otherwise; but he need not necessarily know it himself; indeed, even if it is pointed out to him by someone else, he can still deny it on the basis of a misunderstanding.[74]

This central point of disagreement has wider implications. In particular, one finds that Fichte's account is much more friendly to the development of systematic inquiries into comparative religion and other research programs that are characteristic of modern religious studies. To see how this is the case, some more reconstruction is in order. On Eberhard's view, any moral-religious sentiment must *already* contain—albeit obscurely—representations of the divine nature and attributes. Thus, the concept of God is *already* there before reflection. As a good Wolffian, Eberhard is also committed to the claim that proper reflection or analysis will inevitably produce clarified, distinct renderings of this primitive

[73] *WLnm*, 230–31.

[74] II/4, 320.

representation. The answer to the question of what God is like is, as it were, already given before it is even asked. As a corollary, Eberhard asserts that we have a moral obligation to eliminate erroneous theological views, in particular "crude or gross [*groben*] concepts of God."[75] Pious feelings and sentiments must be based on certain, clear, and distinct knowledge of the divine attributes rather than the other way around.[76] In other words, proper, virtuous worship of God depends upon having the right concept of God. It is difficult to see how a view like this could be friendly to a study of comparative religion that is independent of theological apologetics.

Fichte's position, on the other hand, implies none of these commitments. He does seem to hold that there are better and worse ways to go about reflecting on one's moral-religious sentiments and so of arriving at more articulate conceptions of God. Moreover, his position certainly does not rule out the claim that a particular theological system does the best job at articulating our pre-reflective "take" on the world. However, because Fichte does not share Eberhard's Wolffian psychology, his account does not place any a priori limitations on the course or results of reflection. Instead, Fichte holds that theological traditions are the expressions of progressive reflection on the part of a community:

> Allow me to explain myself more clearly by means of an example: what is most essential about every possible symbol or creed is expressed in the proposition, "there is something or other that is supersensible and elevated above all nature." Anyone who does not earnestly believe this cannot be a member of a church; such a person is completely incapable of all morality and moral cultivation. What this supersensible something may be, the identity of this truly holy and sanctifying spirit, the character of the truly moral way of thinking: it is precisely concerning these points that the community seeks to determine and to unify itself more and more, by means of mutual interaction.[77]

The "supersensible," that is, the content of our moral-religious sentiments, "continues to become further determined in a process that continues for all eternity."[78] This lack of any a priori limitation on the progressive refinement of theological systems also opens the door to comparison. This is an implication that Fichte himself draws quite explicitly, mentioning Judaism and Islam in particular.[79] In other words, quite independently of any apologetic aims, one can investigate the theological systems of religions other than one's own under the assumption that these are particular streams of the progressive determination of the supersensible, as Fichte calls it. Fichte's view thus anticipates what has come to be called an *expressivist*

[75] Eberhard, *Sittenlehre*, 135.

[76] Ibid., 149.

[77] I/5, 218; *SE*, 230–31.

[78] I/5, 218; *SE*, 231.

[79] I/5, 219; *SE*, 231.

account of religious doctrines. However, unlike those that derive more directly from Schleiermacher's work, Fichtean expressivism allows considerably more scope for *reason* in the process of expression. Indeed, the dominant image that Fichte uses for the process of the development of religion is of a public, reasoned dialogue. The Ecumenical Councils of the fourth through eighth centuries might provide an interesting case study for this model.

Looking back from the perspective of two centuries of nontheological religious studies, the triumph of the Fichtean view over the Wolffian model seems almost inevitable. Still, I would like to close with some considerations that can be drawn from Eberhard's account and that can provide a useful counterweight to some prevailing assumptions in the contemporary study of religion. Affective accounts of religion—from Freud, Otto, and Durkheim, to name a few—often minimize or even repudiate the role that belief plays in religious life. The appeal of religion is generally attributed to a combination of psychological and sociological factors that rarely refer directly to the content of theological systems. Psychological measures of religiosity rarely include items that target specific, articulated theological positions, opting instead for capturing vaguer sentiments. The result, it seems to me, is that the plausibility of such accounts suffers. At the very least, accounts of religion that minimize or ignore belief fail to preserve the phenomenon. Eberhard's account, at least in spirit, does a better job of describing the role that religious beliefs play in motivating religious behaviors and in shaping religious attitudes. As such, it still has valuable insights for contemporary study.