Belief in God is a living and animating principle within human beings, and it springs from life itself, not from dead concepts. ("Concluding Remark by the Editor," I/6, 411; IW, 179).¹

The controversy between Mendelssohn and Jacobi, which erupted publicly in 1785, impacted the development of German philosophy in the subsequent decades in almost incalculable respects. To name just two of these, the rise of German Idealism and of early German Romanticism are both inconceivable apart from the flowering of Spinozism occasioned by the earlier controversy. As Frederick C. Beiser has convincingly shown, nothing less than the authority of reason itself was at stake in the so-called "Pantheismusstreit."² Still, it is important to keep in mind that the heart of the issue


² Frederick C. Beiser, The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).
was the authority of reason vis-à-vis religious belief. The debate between Mendelssohn and Jacobi, on which virtually every major figure of the period had something to say, was fundamentally a debate about religion. It brought to a head a long-standing tension in eighteenth-century thought, particularly in Germany, between the partisans of rationalist metaphysics and those (most famously in Germany, J.G. Hamann) who took religion to be fundamentally a matter of pre- or sub-rational “sentiment [Empfindung].” This tension is articulated most clearly in K. L. Reinhold’s intervention into the dispute, the Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie.3 Reinhold’s work presents the issue in terms of the relationship between rational reflection, on the one hand, and common sense “natural” faith, on the other. In this epochal work, Reinhold attempted to bring Kant’s new “critical” perspective to bear on the larger issue of the relationship between philosophical reflection and religious belief.

Reinhold’s work in turn stimulated others to take up the torch of Kantianism and to address the religious questions of the era from that point of view. In particular, the little known Leipzig philosopher K. H. Heydenreich (1764–1801) and the better known pioneer of idealism, J. G. Fichte (1764–1814), each attempted to develop a new philosophical synthesis that responded to the “Pantheismusstreit” in the “spirit” of Kant’s philosophy.4 Heydenreich, though virtually ignored by contemporary scholars, played a key role in shaping the larger intellectual context in which post-Kantian philosophers, including Fichte, worked out their views. The present essay has three interlocking goals: (1) to rehabilitate Heydenreich as an important figure in his own right and as an important player in the development of the philosophy of religion in Germany in the 1790s; (2) to explore the hitherto overlooked role that Heydenreich played as a stimulus to Fichte’s intellectual development during the crucial “Jena phase” (1794–1800) of his career; and (3) to utilize Heydenreich’s views to bring out some of the distinctive aspects of Fichte’s position during this period.

3 This seminal work was first published serially in 1786–87. See the recent English translation: Karl Ameriks, ed., Letters on the Kantian Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19–23.

4 In Fichte’s case, this aspect of Reinhold’s influence is made quite clear in their exchange of letters in February and March of 1794 (III/2, 63; 77). Heydenreich quotes Reinhold at several points in his Betrachtungen über die Philosophie der natürlichen Religion. He also authored a well-received review of Reinhold’s Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens, which appeared in Neue Leipziger gelehrte Anzeigen 46 (1790): 362–66. This is reprinted in Faustino Fabbianelli, Die zeitgenössischen Rezensionen der Elementarphilosophie K. L. Reinholds (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2003), 54–57.
Karl Heinrich Heydenreich (1764–1801) was an important figure in the tumultuous German philosophical scene in the 1790s, and yet he has been all but forgotten. His System der Ästhetik (1790) was the first serious philosophical response to Kant’s Critique of Judgment. In two works from the 1780s, Über Mendelsohns Darstellung des Spinozismus (1787) and Natur und Gott nach Spinoza (1789), he addressed directly the intellectual watershed of his age, the so-called “Pantheismusstreit” described above. His attempt at a fair-minded presentation of Spinoza’s philosophy was widely noted, and it earned him an appointment in philosophy at the University of Leipzig. Heydenreich’s work exercised a profound influence on the reception of Spinoza by the young Romantic generation, with Schleiermacher (ca. 1793–94) and Hölderlin (ca. 1795) being particular beneficiaries.

As it did for Fichte, the publication of Reinhold’s Briefe and Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason led to a profound shift in Heydenreich’s position. His ardent partisanship for Spinoza cooled somewhat, and he took up the project of developing a thoroughly Kantian philosophy of religion.


7 For Fichte’s dramatic account of his conversion to Kantianism, see his letter of August 12, 1790 to his future wife Marie Johanne Rahn (III/1, 166), of August-September 1790 to Weißhuhn (III/1, 167–68), of September 5, 1790, again to his fiancée (III/1, 170–72), and of November 1790, again to Weißhuhn (III/1, 190).

8 What little recognition Heydenreich has received from recent scholars has come precisely in connection with this reputation as an exponent of a Kantian philosophy of religion. See, for example, Ulrich L. Lehner, ed., Religion nach Kant: Ausgewählte Texte aus dem Werk Johann Heinrich Tieftrunks (1759–1834) (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2007). Björn Pecina has also discussed Heydenreich’s role as a pioneer of an anthropological approach to religion, in which the essence of religion is a kind of intuition or feeling. In this respect, Heydenreich laid important groundwork for the view that bore fruit in later years in Schleiermacher, Fries, de Wette, and Otto. See Pecina, Fichtes Gott: Vom Sinn der Freiheit zur Liebe des Seins (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2007), 119. The classic statement of Schleiermacher’s position is, of course, his Über Religion of 1799. See Richard Crouter, ed., On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (Cam-
The fruits of this attempt appeared in a two-volume work (1790–91) entitled *Betrachtungen über die Philosophie der natürlichen Theologie*, which, like his earlier efforts, attracted some note. Heydenreich’s fame as a leading defender of Kantianism began just as Fichte, who had only just begun to appreciate Kant’s work, was sojourning in Leipzig (ca. 1790). Like Reinhold (and, later, like Fichte), Heydenreich was interested in forging a new philosophical system, the essential elements of which were to be derived from Kant. Heydenreich was particularly motivated by a desire to correct C. C. E. Schmid’s reading of Kantianism as an “intelligible fatalism” that postulated a sort of opaque causality in the noumenal realm.9 Heydenreich first addressed himself to Schmid explicitly in an influential 1791 review of the latter’s *Versuch einer Moralphilosophie*, which appeared in the leading Kantian organ of the day, the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*.10 Heydenreich’s reservations about “intelligible fatalism” reappeared in the second volume of the *Betrachtungen*.

Fichte, whose “Review of Leonhard Creuzer, *Skeptical Reflections on the Freedom of the Will*” (a work which itself included an approving forward by C. C. E. Schmid) appeared in 1793 in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, refers directly to Heydenreich’s criticisms of Schmid’s views (I/2, 8). Along with Reinhold and Kant himself, Heydenreich’s work provided an early impetus to Fichte’s “system of freedom,” as he often styled his position during the “Jena phase” of his career.11 Heydenreich’s name also appears in connection with Fichte’s response to Schmid’s views in a draft letter to J. K. Lavater, dated February 1794. Fichte included in this draft a slip of paper listing a number of works, including Schmid’s *Versuch einer...*
Moralphilosophie and two works by Heydenreich, one of which is his Betrachtungen (III/2, 59). It is highly probable, then, that Heydenreich’s own interpretation of the Kantian notion of freedom of the will stimulated Fichte’s own efforts to improve upon and systematize the critical philosophy. Heydenreich also likely had a more indirect influence on Fichte’s turn to Kantianism during the latter’s Leipzig period. Indeed, in a September 27, 1790 letter to his friend Weißhuhn, Fichte describes the electric atmosphere surrounding Heydenreich in Leipzig (III/1, 175). During the preceding summer, Fichte had begun his first serious study of Kant’s philosophy, with particular attention to the Third Critique, a work to which Heydenreich had recently published an important critical response. Thus, despite the absence of extant evidence that Fichte had direct, personal contact with Heydenreich in Leipzig (or later on in the 1790s), it is difficult to fathom the possibility that there was no indirect contact. Indeed, a number of scholars have recently drawn attention to the possible significance of Fichte’s proximity to Heydenreich during the height of the latter’s fame.12

Fichte’s own comments in his review of Creuzer make it clear that, at least by 1793, Heydenreich’s attempt to address the issue of “intelligible fatalism” had impacted his own work on the concept of freedom and on the attempt to put Kantianism on a sure foundation. It must be recalled, however, that Heydenreich’s own fame, and well as the bulk of his work, focused on the philosophy of religion. In particular, Heydenreich’s response to the “Pantheismusstreit” earned him considerable notoriety at the time. Thus, in addition to providing a stimulus for Fichte’s fundamental project of constructing a “system of freedom,” it also seems plausible to suppose that Heydenreich’s work had some impact, even if only indirectly, on Fichte’s investigations in the more circumscribed domain of the philosophy of religion during the 1790s. At the very least, Heydenreich’s prominence as an expositor of an original Kantian theory of religion entails that his work made a significant contribution to the intellectual atmosphere in which Fichte’s own views developed during the “Jena phase” of his career. This fact allows for a fruitful comparison between Fichte’s and Heydenreich’s positions, one that will be seen to reveal important similarities as well as momentous differences. In short, by examining Heydenreich’s posi-

tion in the Betrachtungen alongside Fichte’s work on religion after the crucial breakthrough to the Wissenschaftslehre (ca. 1793–94) one can achieve valuable insights into the promises and perils of a Kantian approach to religion.

Heydenreich’s Betrachtungen, an ambitious two-volume work, represents the first attempt at a Kantian philosophical theology, predating Kant’s own attempt in this regard by two years. Following Reinhold, whose work is cited on a number of occasions, Heydenreich endeavors, in his own words, to “completely harmonize genuine philosophy with faith.”13 Like Reinhold in his Briefe, Heydenreich attempts to show that faith need not fear legitimate philosophical criticism, which is equally the foe of skeptical unbelief and rationalist metaphysics. In other words, again like Reinhold, Heydenreich defends the thesis that Kant’s critical philosophy undercuts the dilemma posted by Jacobi in his debate with Mendelssohn, i.e. that one must choose either rationalism, which leads to fatalism and atheism, or a salto mortale into pre-critical faith. As already noted above, Fichte cites the second volume of the Betrachtungen in his review of Creuzer. The first volume, however, is more concerned with the fraught legacy of the “Pantheismusstreit.” In this part of the work, Heydenreich articulates (1) a theory of the essence of religion, and (2) an account of the relationship between religion and philosophical reflection. As will be seen in some detail below, Fichte also has strong views on both counts. By spelling out Heydenreich’s position in some detail, the distinctive aspects of Fichte’s philosophy of religion, considered as an important tributary in the larger stream of Kant-inspired work in this field, can be set fruitfully into relief.

In a move that echoes Reinhold’s Briefe and anticipates much that Fichte goes on to say in his own writings, Heydenreich begins his multi-volume exploration of philosophical theology by conceding that philosophy is something of a late arrival.14 That is, religious faith is achieved not


14 See, for example, an extensive introductory comment found in the text of Fichte’s lectures on Platner’s Philosophischen Aphorismen: “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 with in us as something hidden but also, as it were, as something we are certainly able to discover. [. . .]. [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? [. . .]” (GA II/4, 288–89). A parallel remark occurs in a transcript of a later lecture on the same material from 1797: “Human beings should not be induced to believe in God by means of philosophy, for that is simply impossible; instead, it is as-
through philosophical reflection but rather “through a gradual, involuntary activity [Wirken]” of human reason. Heydenreich urges that, despite its central role in human life, explicit reflection on religion is quite rare. Faith is not the result of a tortuous inferential process; instead, the starting point of philosophical reflection is a kind of “theism” that “lacks clear grounds,” a “faith of feeling [Gefühlsglaube]” that Heydenreich styles a “natural mental product [geistiges Naturprodukt].” The task of the philosopher, then, is not to produce grounds for religious belief, but rather to “clarify [verdeenlichen]” grounds that are already there, and to defend these from skeptical attack. Heydenreich elaborates this point in a later section of the work:

One completely misunderstands [verkennt] the theoretical philosophy of religion if one expects conviction from it. The mere description of a magical experiment, if the means are not really put into play, scarcely produces the phenomenon; so too, a vital, constant belief in God can scarcely arise from the study of a science alone, which is merely concerned with a certain description of a necessary manner of acting of reason.

Still, as the subsequent course of the discussion makes clear, this position does not rule out rational apologetics. Moreover, Heydenreich later insists that philosophy of religion has two components. First, there is the “theoretical” element, which seeks to clarify and articulate the grounds of religious belief that are innate within human rationality. At the same time, there is “practical” philosophy of religion, which Heydenreich also calls “ascetics,” which does have the task of strengthening religious convictions. He also makes it clear that these two sides of the philosophical enterprise are not in competition, but rather are complementary. The practical enterprise “assumes an entirely correct theoretical philosophy of natu-
The bulk of Heydenreich’s discussion, however, is devoted to the “theoretical” side of the philosophy of religion. In the opening section of the work, he embarks upon this aspect of the enterprise by first of all articulating the “inner organization” of the “faith of feeling.” Despite the fact that “faith of feeling” is not the outcome of careful reasoning, as well as the fact that most adherents of this faith lack a clear understanding of the concepts involved, Heydenreich nevertheless insists that even this “faith of feeling” is rational, i.e. consists of articulated concepts. Such faith is “impossible if the truths that are related to it are not presented according to their primary concepts.”

That is to say that the “faith of feeling” would be nonsensical were it devoid of all conceptual content. Thus, the “inner organization” of this “faith of feeling,” which it is the job of the philosopher to articulate clearly, is constituted by a set of “primary concepts [Hauptbegriffe].” Heydenreich lists them as follows: (1) “the concept of one’s own individuality and autonomy [Selbständigkeit]”; (2) “the concept of a complete system of beings” somehow related to (1); (3) “the concept of the contingency [Zufälligkeit] and dependency of this universe”; and (4) “the concept of a primary author [Erzeugers] of the universe, which is itself not authored.”

The intelligibility of the last of these concepts rests, in turn, on (5) the concept of “perfect moral goodness,” (6) the concept of “the most complete wisdom,” and (7) the concept of “the most unlimited power.” Collectively, and in relation to one another, these concepts exhaust what Heydenreich calls the “inner organization” of the “faith of feeling.”

Having stressed the conceptual nature of this “theism of feeling [Theismus des Gefühls or Gefühls-Theism],” Heydenreich is still careful to assert that it is not, by and large, something that one consciously develops or arrives at through careful reflection. He asserts, instead, that:

... it rests upon a faith that is developed passively without aiming at a definite terminus, and is firmly established without conscious self-activity [Selbstthätigkeit]; it is so little critical that, on the contrary, questions about clarity, coherence [Bündigkeit], and har-

20 Ibid., 235.
21 Ibid., 6.
22 Ibid., 6–7.
23 Ibid., 7–8.
mony, and about the distinction between objective and subjective truth, are not even considered.24

As will be shown in more detail below, Fichte shares Heydenreich’s picture of the immediacy and, as it were, philosophical innocence of this “theism of feeling.” But, the crucial difference between the two will be seen to lie in Heydenreich’s insistence that, for all its naïveté, the “theism of feeling” is based on reason and is constituted by relatively robust concepts. Indeed, he is comfortable with attributing to it the full-blown conception of God as a creator, sustainer, and ruler of the universe who acts for a rational purpose, i.e. “the general harmony of true happiness with true worthiness.”25 Moreover, given its basically rational nature, the “theism of feeling” is capable of being transformed by the “spirit of criticism” into “a conviction that rests upon clearly conceived grounds.” For Heydenreich, carrying through this “spirit of criticism” is a continuation of Reinhold’s project in the Briefe, where Kantianism enables one to navigate through intellectual conflicts of the age by exposing the pretensions of both “blind faith” and “blind unbelief,” and thereby making possible a rational commitment that excludes the threat of mere “indifferentism.”26

As will be seen below, this aspect of Heydenreich’s views distinguishes them quite clearly from those worked out by Fichte in the period under consideration here (ca. 1793–1800). For Fichte, it is essential that a philosophical explanation of religion leave the phenomenon itself unaltered. This marks a shift from the approach Fichte takes in his early Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung, where his project is much closer to the one announced here by Heydenreich. However, the evidence suggests quite strongly that Fichte began to have reservations about this early work almost as soon as it had been written. These are expressed quite clearly in a draft letter to Weißhuhn from October 1791 (III/1, 268–69). In a later letter of July 1794, also to Weißhuhn, Fichte confesses the work “mediocre,” arguing that financial reasons drove him to publish it, and asserting that “Since that time I think that I have come a long way” (III/2, 181). By all accounts, Fichte found his own philosophical voice in the summer and autumn of 1793, particularly during the course of his response to G. E. Schulze’s skeptical criticisms of Reinhold. The rather hidebound Kantianism of the Versuch was quickly replaced by the startling originality of the

24 Ibid., 11.
25 Ibid., 13. Italics in original.
26 Ibid., 38, 40–41.
Jena Wissenschaftslehre. The Versuch is not, for all this, without importance in the study of Fichte. However, it is in the more mature philosophy of religion developed during his years in Jena that one can see more of Fichte’s distinctive position, particularly vis-à-vis Heydenreich.

With the goal of transforming the “theism of feeling” into rational faith, Heydenreich begins a lengthy discussion (that occupies the remainder of the book) that has a clearly apologetic flavor. Heydenreich argues that the “true, genuine concept of God” is one that satisfies the “demands of reason.” Crucially, it must satisfy the demands of moral or practical reason, something which, according to Heydenreich, the bare concept of a “necessary being” cannot do. While granting that “supernatural revelation” has a role to play in the process of coming to know God, Heydenreich insists that the concept of God must arise from the demands of reason alone. The “true concept of God” must be understood as an idea of reason in the Kantian sense, that is, as “a necessary condition, contained originally within the nature of reason, for its lawful activity [Wirksamkeit].” It is, therefore, a priori (i.e. not derived from experience) and necessary (i.e. not simply what he calls a “political fiction [politische Erfindung]”).

A bit later, Heydenreich argues that the upshot of Kant’s “Dialectic of Pure Reason” is that there is no objective, i.e. theoretical, means for demonstrating that the concept sketched above is actually instantiated. “Philosophy,” he writes, “goes wrong when it wants to demonstrate the reality of religious concepts on the basis of concepts of pure reason.” Even worse, however, are attempts to derive the existence of God a posteriori, since a posteriori derivations cannot provide certainty of the sort demanded in the case of religious belief. However, “subjective” grounds can be discovered, such that belief in God can have “subjective truth.” Following Kant’s position in the Critique of Practical Reason, Heydenreich maintains that the subjective ground in question is morality. "Subjective truth" is possessed by objects that, despite any absence of confirming experience,

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27 For an excellent and accessible account of Fichte’s philosophical development during these years, see Daniel Breazeale’s “Fichte in Jena,” in EPW, 1–45.
28 Heydenreich, Betrachtungen, 43.
29 Ibid., 44–46.
30 Ibid., 56.
31 Ibid., 56.
32 Ibid., 232.
33 Ibid., 232–33.
34 Heydenreich presents his moral proof on pages 168–76. It also receives a more extended treatment in volume 2 of the same work.
nevertheless are subject to a “conviction” that is immune from all doubt or any consideration that its negation might be true.\(^{35}\)

Having outlined these “subjective grounds,” Heydenreich returns to an earlier issue, the nature of these grounds themselves. He insists that his readers not be misled into thinking that “subjective grounds” are feelings. Instead, as he had made clear previously, a “subjective ground” is a “subjective constitution [Beschaffenheit]” in the sense of a constitution of the subject that “must belong to its nature essentially rather than contingently [zufällige].”\(^{36}\) These include any “fundamental principle” of the “faculty of knowledge [Erkenntnissvermögens],” any modification of the subject “whose only possible condition could lie in such a being regarding the condition of which the subject must necessarily decide,” or any assumption that cannot be rejected or dismissed on pains of “utter mysteriousness [Räthselhaftigkeit] or nonsensicality [Widersinnigkeit].”\(^{37}\) For Heydenreich, Kant has shown that one cannot acknowledge the authority of the moral law and deny this rational belief in God on pains of self-contradiction.\(^{38}\) Later, Heydenreich describes similar sorts of “subjective grounds” as objects of “natural belief [Naturglauben],” though the list is less formal and more determinate. It includes “a person’s own existence, the existence of the external world, the innate [angebohrnen] forms, laws, and principles of the mental faculty,” as well as the “moral law.”\(^{39}\)

Heydenreich insists that these grounds are themselves not feelings, nor is our consciousness of them a feeling. Against Ewald, an early critic of Kant, Heydenreich tries to defend the latter’s contribution to philosophical theology precisely by arguing that the subjective grounds for religion provided by Kant are not mere feelings but are genuinely “rational grounds [Vernunftgründe].” He writes:

Kant has not, therefore, turned a feeling into a postulate. Feeling presupposes the postulate; and that [the postulate] is true harmonizes completely with the laws of the cognitive faculty [Erkenntnisskräfte] of this being. Of course, many people always conceive of the moral grounds that produce this feeling of taking-for-true [Fürwahrhaltens] so obscurely [dunkel] that they seem to be a

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 145.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 152.  
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 152–53.  
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 179–80.  
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 213, 219.
mere feeling, and the thought of the same seems to be a mere feeling [Fühlen], and they never raise them to clarity and transparency [Klarheit und Deutlichkeit].

In other words, the sheer fact that many people fail to grasp the “subjective grounds” of religious belief in an articulate way does not show that these grounds themselves are somehow non-rational or non-conceptual. On the contrary, as items of “natural belief,” these grounds are necessarily rational, since absurdities would never have such an enduring and universal power to convince the human mind without any reflection. This is what Heydenreich means when he calls them “immediate,” and when he goes on to claim that this is the point Jacobi is making when he asserts that “all knowledge and demonstration is based on faith.” Religious belief itself, however, is not an object of “natural belief.” It is not immediate, but rather is mediated by inference, however obscurely one might be conscious of the inferential process required. Hence, Heydenreich insists that “the existence of a supersensible being” is an object of mediated “rational faith [Vernunftglauben].”

A great deal more could be said about the contents of Heydenreich’s Betrachtungen, particularly about the first volume, if only because of its undeserved neglect. As the first real example of a Kantian philosophical theology, Heydenreich’s ambitious work has historical significance in its own right. As an attempt to weigh in on the principal debates of the period by a philosopher who enjoyed considerable recognition by his contemporaries, Heydenreich’s Betrachtungen is also of indispensable value for scholars interested in the development of the philosophy of religion after Kant. Indeed, a detailed comparison of Heydenreich’s views with Kant’s philosophical theology, as well as with Jacobi’s more personalist perspective, would no doubt reveal a rich cache of historical and philosophical insights. Such a comparative enterprise, however, is quite beyond the scope of the present discussion. Instead, taking Heydenreich to be pursuing his own program within a broadly Kantian framework, one can gain a great deal from comparing his philosophy of religion with that of Fichte (ca. 1794–1800), who also understood himself to be constructing an original system that nevertheless remained true to the “spirit” of Kant’s critical revolution. In particular, it can be should that, like Heydenreich, Fichte (1) takes religion

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40 Ibid., 199.
41 Ibid., 214–15.
42 Ibid., 219.
to be essentially a matter of pre-reflective feeling or sentiment [Empfindung], and that (2) he places great emphasis on the meta-philosophical question of the relation between religion and philosophical reflection. Fichte’s position on both counts is subtly, but importantly, different from Heydenreich’s. Seeing this allows one to grasp, in clearer outline, some of the distinctive features of Fichte’s transcendental or critical approach to the philosophy of religion.

Like many of the great figures of classical German philosophy, Fichte began his career as a student of theology, destined for the life of a Lutheran clergyman. His interest in religion thus developed early, and remained in place through the remainder of his life. During the first period of his mature philosophical activity (1793–1800), Fichte corresponded with theologians and theology students from all over the German-speaking world. The controversy that broke out in 1799 over his 1798 essay “On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World,” while it cost him his position at Jena, did nothing to dampen the notoriety of Fichte’s views on religion.

One important source for Fichte’s views on “faith [Glaube]” in general, and, a fortiori, on religious faith in particular, was F. H. Jacobi.43 Here again, a detailed examination of Fichte’s relationship with Jacobi, and particularly of the differences and similarities between their respective positions, would yield a great deal of insight. Fortunately, recent scholarship has gone a long way towards providing such an examination.44 My concern here is with the virtually ignored relationship between Fichte and Heydenreich. Hence, I will forgo a lengthy exploration of Jacobi’s own views or of their similarities and differences with Fichte’s. Still, I freely acknowledge Jacobi’s crucial role both as an independent thinker of some moment and as an influence on Fichte during the 1790s. Fichte’s own sincere admiration for Jacobi is expressed in his first letter to him, written on 29 September, 1794. Fichte concludes his brief note, with which he has enclosed a copy of his recently published Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre, by asserting that “If there is any thinker in Germany with whom I wish and

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43 For a rich account of the fraught relationship between Fichte and Jacobi, see George di Giovanni, Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind 1774–1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

hope to agree in my particular convictions, then you are he, my most worthy sir” (III/2, 202). Writing a little less than a year later, Fichte tells Jacobi, no doubt to the surprise of the latter, that “... I have read your writings again and again, and I am altogether astonished at the remarkable uniformity [auffallende Gleichförmigkeit] of our philosophical convictions” (III/2, 391). Writing again on April 26, 1796, Fichte asserts that agreement with Jacobi is for him the touchstone of the correctness of his own views (III/3, 18). There is strong evidence that Fichte was quite conversant with all of Jacobi’s works.45

Among the plausible points of agreement between Jacobi and Fichte, one that stands out is Jacobi’s conception of “faith [Glaube],” found principally in David Hume (1787). Here, Jacobi tries to clarify his conception of “faith” as “[w]hatever is incapable of strict proof” in response to an earlier published objection by Wizenmann. In his defense, Jacobi cites a review recently published in the Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung of Reid’s Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, where Reid is credited with linking “perception” or “sensation [Empfindung]” with “belief.” He goes on to quote Hume’s Enquiry to the same effect.46

Aside from Reid and Hume, another likely source for Jacobi’s interpretation of “faith” or “belief” as a kind of “sensation” is Hamann. In his seminal Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten, Hamann characterizes Socratic ignorance, or Socrates’ belief in his own ignorance, as a kind of “sensation” or “sensibility [Empfindung],” which must be sharply distinguished from any sort of “doctrine [Lehrsatz].” Hamann generalizes this well beyond Socratic ignorance, incorporating a whole range of common sense beliefs into the domain of faith:

Our own existence and the existence of all things outside of us must be believed and cannot be determined [ausgemacht] in any other way. What is more certain than the end of a human being, and of what truth is there a more universal and guaranteed knowledge? [. . .] What one believes therefore does not need to be dem-

45 Fichte cites or refers to David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch (1787) at I/3, 256, 339; and III/3, 70. He refers to the second (1789) edition of Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn at I/5, 447; III/3, 209, 326, and 334–35. Fichte also knew Jacobi’s two “philosophical novels” quite well. He cites Eduard Allwills Briefsammlung (1792) at I/5, 360; III/2, 391; and III/3, 18; and Woldemar (1796) at II/4, 303; III/3 18 and 29.

Crowe • Heydenreich, Fichte, and Religion

 monstrated, and a proposition can be ever so incontrovertible proven without being believed. [...] Faith is not a work of reason, and therefore also cannot succumb to its attack; because believing [Glauben] occurs as little on the basis of reasons than does tasting and seeing.47

There is no evidence that Fichte had read Hamann himself, though, of course, there is also no evidence that he had not. The safest conclusion, therefore, is that Hamann’s conception of faith as (1) a kind of sensibility and (2) as sub- or pre-rational, and therefore as immune to skeptical attack, was mediated to Fichte by Jacobi. However that might be, this view of the essence of religion as lying in pre-reflective feeling or sentiment was shared by many at the time, and probably has its roots in Lutheran Pietism. Heydenreich, as a participant in the “Pantheismusstreit” of the 1780s, was clearly aware of Jacobi’s work. As noted previously, he refers to Jacobi directly in the Betrachtungen. Heydenreich’s lengthy discussion of what he calls the “faith of feeling,” in which he stresses its relative independence from philosophical reflection, must be seen as, in part, an attempt to do justice to Jacobi’s contentions during the debates of the 1780s. What Heydenreich contributed to Fichte’s development was an ambitious synthesis of the Hamann-Jacobi conception of faith and a broad commitment to Kant’s critical project. Concretely, this manifests itself in Heydenreich’s meta-philosophical comments about the relationship between philosophical reflection and the “theism of feeling.”

Like Heydenreich, Fichte is quite suspicious of the ability of philosophers to really convince anyone regarding religious belief.48 For example, in the “Divine Governance” essay, Fichte avers that “we by no means wish our argument to be viewed as a means for convincing the unbeliever” (I/5, 348; IW, 143). Thus, also like Heydenreich, Fichte wants to limit the role of philosophy to an expository and explanatory project, i.e. that of “the derivation of the believer’s conviction” (I/5, 348; IW, 143). The explanation in question is, of course, a transcendental, rather than a naturalistic, empirical, or psychological one. That is, what Fichte proposes to do is to account for religion as a condition of human rationality, or more precisely, of practi-

cal rationality. Put slightly differently, Fichte wants to account for religion, along with other instances of what Heydenreich would call “natural beliefs,” as conditions for agency. In so doing, Fichte hopes to provide something Heydenreich does not, namely, a unified system that makes practical reason its foundation.49 Heydenreich, too, attempts to elucidate what he takes to be our innate, pre-reflective religiosity by taking moral reason as fundamental. With respect, then, to the philosophy of religion, Fichte and Heydenreich share a common project: the transcendental explanation of religious belief. Within this broadly Kantian program, however, there are important points of divergence between the two. In what follows, I will set out these commonalities and differences in the interests of bringing some overlooked elements of Fichte’s position into relief.

Seeing Fichte’s debts to Heydenreich more precisely, however, requires some reconstruction. Aside from the two places noted above, Fichte makes no more explicit references to Heydenreich’s Betrachtungen. Still, two prominent themes in Heydenreich’s work reappear (though modified in important ways) in Fichte: (1) the emphasis on the pre-reflective or tacit character of faith, and (2) the characterization of faith as a sort of “feeling” or “sensibility.” In what follows, I will present, in respective order, Fichte’s endorsements of these two elements of Heydenreich’s views, followed by his significant departures from them.

Regarding the claim that religious belief is rarely the result of a voluntary, self-conscious inferential process, some of Fichte’s first explicit assertions of it occur in his lectures on Platner’s Philosophische Aphorismen

delivered in Jena in the mid-1790s. These lectures as a whole are an invaluable source for Fichte’s philosophy of religion. In the passage quoted below, shown here with the accompanying marginal comment from the manuscript, Fichte expresses a conception of religious belief that closely follows much of what Heydenreich says in his discussion of the “faith of feeling.” Fichte, however, already departs from Heydenreich in that he seems to group religion in with other mental phenomena that Heydenreich would refer to as items of “natural belief.”

This faith [Glaube] accompanies [begleitet] the moral character. It is in no way necessary that someone reflect on it or become aware that he has it. [MARGINAL COMMENT: This is how it is in all of our representations, e.g., [of] the Non-I. We do not think about it. Causality. Substance.] (II/4, 300).

The significance of this marginal comment is twofold. First, it serves to differentiate Fichte’s views on religion from those of Heydenreich, in that Fichte does not recognize any generic distinction between religious belief and other items of common sense knowledge. His examples here are the concepts of causality and of substance. The thought seems to be that we employ these concepts constantly in our everyday experience of the world, and that we do so without having our hands on an analysis of them. Religious belief, Fichte suggests, is similar, as his remarks on “practical faith” below make clear. Second, this passage coheres with a surprising element of Fichte’s philosophy of religion, namely, his insistence that it is a “fact of consciousness” or a “representation accompanied by a feeling of necessity,” and is, in some sense, on an epistemic par with belief in an external world, in other minds, and in moral obligations that transcend our interests.  

50 These lectures remain largely under-appreciated by Fichte scholars. For a noteworthy exception that focuses on the contribution they make to understanding Fichte’s philosophy of religion, see Folkart Wittekind, Religiosität als Bewußtseinsform: Fichtes Religionsphilosophie 1795–1800 (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloh Verlagshaus, 1993).

51 In his “Review of Aenesidemus,” a seminal text in the mature system of the Jena period, Fichte even goes so far as to rank religious belief alongside “the immediately certain ‘I am’” as having an equal measure of certainty (I/2, 65; EPW, 76). In a transcript of a lecture course from 1797, Fichte is even more unequivocal in this regard: “. . . it is assumed that human beings believe in God in just the same way as they accept that there is an external world, and both are equally necessary,” and again, “. . . it is as necessary to believe in God as in a world. There are and can be no atheists” (IV/1, 401). This is an element of Fichte’s broader position on religion during this period that I have explored extensively in my “Fact and Fiction in Fichte’s Theory of Religion,” Journal of the History of Philosophy (forthcoming).
A bit later, Fichte is careful to distinguish "faith of the heart [Herzensglauben]" from "belief" or "faith" as "theoretical insight" derived from "reflection on what one accepts practically" (II/4, 301). In a student transcript of this lecture, Fichte makes substantively the same point, asserting that the belief in God "is not a matter of thought but of the faith of the heart [Herzensglaubens]" (IV/1, 413). As with most of his views on the philosophy of religion, what Fichte first worked out in the lectures on Platner appears publicly, and fatefully, in his "Divine Governance" essay of 1798. In regard to the point under discussion, one finds the noteworthy remark that religion "is based not upon logic, but upon one's moral disposition or sentiment" (I/5, 352; IW, 148). This point is one shared not only by Fichte and Heydenreich, but also by others from roughly the same era. I have already described Hamann's contention that faith is not a matter of doctrine (Lehrsatz). J. G. Herder, who, of course, learned a great deal from Hamann, draws the same distinction in his "Von Religion, Lehrmeinungen, und Gebräuche" of 1798.52

As the storm of the "Atheism Controversy" broke upon him in the winter of 1798–99, Fichte continued to insist that faith is fundamentally distinct from holding to a ramified theological system. In his "Appeal to the Public," the first polemical piece to appear following the confiscation of the offending essay in Electoral Saxony, Fichte echoes the "Divine Governance" essay by claiming that religion is an affair "of the moral sense of human beings" rather than of a fully articulated "philosophical system [Lehrgebäude]" (I/5, 440). This point is developed in the next installment of the polemic, viz., the "Verantwortungsschrift," which Fichte partly co-authored with Niethammer. Here, Fichte quotes a passage from the piece by Forberg that induced him, fatefully as it turned out, to publish his own brief account of the philosophy of religion: "Religion can subsist just as well with polytheism as with monotheism, with anthropomorphism as with spiritualism" (I/6, 51). Fichte provides his gloss immediately following the quotation: "If religion here is synonymous [gleichbedeutung] with religiosity [Religiosität], as it indisputably is in this context, then I subscribe entirely to this position" (I/6, 52). In other words, if "religion" means "religiosity," a sort of pre-reflective, inarticulate feeling or sensibility, then it is indeed true that it could coexist with any number of more ramified theological positions.

This claim coheres with Fichte’s statements elsewhere about the relationship between feeling and conceptual representation. In an essay called “Concerning the Difference Between the Spirit and the Letter within Philosophy,” Fichte presents an account of how feeling is prior to representation, such that the latter depends upon the mediation of the imagination (II/3, 317–19; EPW, 194–96). He includes the representation of God within this account. In his “Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy” from the late 1790s, Fichte presents substantially the same account (FTP, 230). Finally, in “From a Private Letter,” Fichte’s last public pronouncement regarding the “Atheism Controversy,” Fichte writes:

I maintain that all belief in God and in something divine develops [entwickelt sich] and has always developed in the minds of all good human beings from this necessary way of thinking (necessary, that is, on the presupposition of the freely produced moral disposition) and that their belief is never anything other than belief in this order, the concept of which they have merely further developed and determined, albeit unconsciously and guided by the instructions they have received within society (I/6, 386–87; IW, 174–75).

For the present discussion, the important thing to note about this passage is Fichte’s claim that ramified conceptions of divinity are the results of education. The upshot of all of these remarks is that, since religion is pre-reflective, a matter of feeling rather than of thought, it is quite possible that it could be articulated in various, perhaps even incompatible, ways. Hence Fichte’s rare endorsement of Forberg’s view. It is, however, also worth noting that Fichte does not think that every conceptual articulation or philosophical system is compatible with this “faith of the heart.” In the System of Ethics from 1798, Fichte links materialism and egoistic hedonism with atheism (I/6, 169–70; SE, 174). The latter connection is also made in his lectures on Platner and, disastrously, in some of Fichte’s polemical writings during the “Atheism Controversy” (II/4, 294; I/5, 416).

The second point of contact between Fichte and Heydenreich concerns, as should already be clear by now, the nature of this pre-reflective religiosity. Indeed, Heydenreich’s characterization of it as Gefühlsglaube could have just as well issued from Fichte’s pen as from his own. A brief sampling of Fichte’s comments on the subject will serve to substantiate this claim. One particularly important source for Fichte’s philosophy of religion, the
unpublished “Recollections, Answers, Questions” from 1799–1800, is rife with assertions of this sort. Arguing in particular against Eberhard, one of Fichte’s many critics during the “Atheism Controversy,” Fichte insists that religion originates in “sensibility [Empfindung]” rather than in a “rationalized [errössnirt]” system (II/5, 128). Moreover, genuine religion, according to Fichte, always remains at the pre-conceptual level of “life” (II/5, 131). Debates about concepts and about doctrines are utterly absent from what Fichte labels “true religiosity” (II/5, 131), something that could only be conceivably true if this religiosity were a matter of sensibility rather than of reason. Fichte also wants to draw the same lesson from this claim about the nature of religion as did Hamann before him. That is, since “religion is full [erfüllt] of feeling and sensibility [Empfindung],” philosophical theorizing “neither destroys it nor attempts to re-create it” (II/5, 136). This view is not simply local to Fichte’s discussions of religion. He makes a similar point in the “Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy” lectures, noting that “Feeling is the ultimate limit [of consciousness] and cannot be further analyzed or put together. A feeling simply is what it is because it is” (FTP, 177).

While Fichte largely agrees with Heydenreich’s contention that religion is, at bottom, an affair of feeling and sensibility, this is also a point at which the two diverge. Indeed, it is precisely because Fichte regards feeling as non-conceptual, as the passage quoted immediately above makes clear, that he must reject Heydenreich’s claim that the “inner organization” of faith is comprised of “primary concepts.” Fichte does not explicitly target Heydenreich in this respect. However, given his demonstrated familiarity with the Heydenreich’s Betrachtungen, it is not entirely implausible to suppose that the latter is at least in the background of Fichte’s arguments. Recall that, for all his stress on the tacit, pre-reflective nature of the “faith of feeling,” Heydenreich remains enough of a rationalist to insist that it is structured conceptually. This is what makes it possible for philosophical reflection to turn it into “rational faith [Vernunftglaube]” by elucidating the “subjective grounds” of faith. Fichte stops well short of endorsing this aspect of Heydenreich’s views.

Fichte’s hesitation in ascribing conceptual articulation to the “faith of the heart” is evident in his “Appeal to the Public.” Consider the following strongly-worded passage:

It is in the first instance weakness of head, and, in the second, weakness of heart, to want to reverse the relation in order to make
the feeling dependent on the concept. Every rational person would, no doubt, laugh at someone who would not believe that he was cold or warm unless someone could put in his hand a piece of pure substantial coldness or warmth for analysis; so, too, whoever in the slightest sketches out a concept of God without unrelated to our moral nature and demands that such a concept be in the least degree independent, has never known God and is alienated from the life that derives from Him (I/5, 428).

The claim that feeling is prior to conceptuality has already been met with in the context of Fichte’s philosophy of religion. It has been shown to influence his understanding of the relationship between what he elsewhere calls “cognitions and doctrines [Kenntnisse und Lehren]” to “true religiosity” (II/5, 131). Here, the issue is what Heydenreich had called the “inner organization” of primordial religiosity. Fichte is denying what Heydenreich explicitly asserts, namely that this religiosity is somehow dependent upon or otherwise posterior to a set of “primary concepts.” In “From a Private Letter,” Fichte explicitly denies that “the concept of an intelligible moral order, in its philosophical purity, simplicity, and precision” should be attributed to “the adherent of the popular religion” (I/6, 388; IW, 175). Similarly, in the “Concluding Remark by the Editor,” the publication of which was unfortunately delayed by the exigencies of the “Atheism Controversy,” Fichte is unequivocal that “Belief in God is a living and animating principle within human beings, and it springs from life itself and not from dead concepts” (I/6, 411; IW, 179).

Fichte’s position is that the explanandum that is analyzed by philosophy, which he elsewhere calls the totality of “representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity,” is utterly innocent of the kinds of concepts derived by philosophers in their attempts at explanation. This is a commitment that extends well beyond Fichte’s unfortunately abbreviated comments on religion. Its generality of scope is announced quite clearly in the *System of Ethics*. Fichte writes:

By no means does consciousness commence with abstract thinking. Philosophy has become a web of chimeras because one has treated consciousness itself as beginning with abstractions, which is indeed how philosophy does begin, and has confused what is to be explained (actual consciousness) with the explanation thereof (philosophy). (I/6, 95; SE, 90)
Or, has he puts it more succinctly in the same work, “a theoretical proposition is not felt and cannot be felt” (I/6, 162; SE, 166). The context for these remarks is ethics, not the philosophy of religion. Fichte’s move is to argue that the pre-reflective feeling of obligation or moral constraint can be philosophically derived from abstract concepts, including a formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative, without one’s having to attribute such abstractions to anyone.

Heydenreich’s insistence on the conceptual basis of the “faith of feeling” also led him to the view that faith is not an immediate (i.e. non-inferential) “natural belief.” Fichte, inasmuch as he rejects the first of these claims, also dispenses with the second. In his 1794 “Review of Aeneisidemus,” Fichte asserts that it is his “innermost conviction” that religious faith has “a certainty that infinitely transcends that objective certainty which becomes possible only through the mediation of the intelligent I” (I/2, 65; EPW, 76). Thus, while he (at least at this point in his career) shares Heydenreich’s attribution of “subjective” truth to faith, he apparently rejects the claim that the truth or certainty of faith is conveyed to it via inference. In his later “Appeal to the Public,” Fichte says that we know the divine “as immediately as we know ourselves” (I/5, 425). Similarly, in the “Verantwortungsschrift,” he describes religious belief as “the immediate truth par excellence” (I/6, 53). This emphasis on immediacy is, therefore, another important point at which Fichte diverges from Heydenreich.

Despite his caveats about the unreflective nature of the “faith of feeling,” Heydenreich goes wrong in Fichte’s eyes precisely when he attributes robust conceptuality to it. For Fichte, this is to turn philosophy into a “web of chimeras.” That is, Heydenreich is guilty of trying to substitute the results of philosophical reflection for the stuff of real life, “dead concepts” for a “living and animating principle within human beings.” During the “Atheism Controversy,” Fichte tries to defend himself by pointing out how his opponents are guilty of reading him as making the same error. The abstract, impersonal concept of a “moral world order,” so far from being the content of (much less a substitute for) “true religiosity,” is rather an explanatory fiction derived for the purposes of philosophy.53

53 This reading of Fichte’s enterprise has been most fully developed in a pair of essays by Daniel Breazeale: (1) “Fichte’s Philosophical Fictions,” in Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore, eds., New Essays on Fichte’s Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 175–208; and (2) “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.
Related to this, Fichte also clearly rejects Heydenreich’s goal of transforming the “theism of feeling” into “rational faith.” Indeed, if many of Fichte’s own comments on his project in the philosophy of religion are to be taken seriously, he has no intentions of altering or revising religion at all.\(^5\) In an unpublished text dating from the concluding months of the “Atheism Controversy,” Fichte asserts that “Our system [. . .] completely denies the possibility of producing an object that is valid for life or for science by means of mere thinking [. . .]" (GA II/5: 114). Or again, in the same place, Fichte observes that “Philosophemes of transcendental philosophy are in themselves dead, and have no influence at all on life, neither for good nor for ill, just as little as a painting could move or walk” (GA II/5: 134). This position is also clearly articulated in “From a Private Letter,” a brief but important text that was also composed in response to the “Atheism Controversy”:

I solemnly affirm that no part of my philosophy, including my philosophy of religion, seeks to produce anything new within the minds of human beings. [. . .]. In the course of [one’s] philosophical enterprise, this “something” [i.e. religion] remains as it is and is not altered thereby. Indeed, if the philosopher had to alter it in order to be able to derive it, this would be a proof that he did not understand his own craft and that his system was false. (GA I/6: 377; IW, 165, emphasis added)

Or again:

Consequently . . . my philosophy alters nothing concerning religion, as it has dwelt within the hearts of all well-meaning people form the beginning of the world and will continue to dwell there until the end of time; and my philosophy would be false just as surely as it did alter anything. (GA I/6: 377; IW, 166)

Fichte is certainly willing to recognize that particularly theological systems, as well as creedal formulations of religious intuitions, can be subjected to rational criticism and revision (e.g., GA I/5: 219; SE, 231). But

\(^5\) There are, of course, some ambiguities in Fichte’s position here. I have explored these at length elsewhere in “Revisionism and Religion in Fichte’s Jena Wissenschaftslehre,” British Journal for the History of Philosophy 16 (2008):371–92; and “Fact and Fiction in Fichte’s Theory of Religion.”
this does not at all imply that his goal is to transform the “theism of feeling” into a ramified system of any sort. Recall that, for Heydenreich, the motivation and justification for doing just that was provided by the claim that the “theism of feeling” actually contains a fairly sophisticated conceptual structure already, as it were, “built into” it. Fichte, as has been shown above, rejects this claim. For him, a philosophical theory simply cannot substitute for humanity’s innate religiosity. It may, however, provide an explanation of the latter within a unified system that accounts for religion, along with other fundamental human beliefs, as conditions of agency.

This paper has had three primary goals: (1) the rehabilitation of K. H. Heydenreich as an important figure in the history of post-Kantian philosophy of religion in Germany; (2) the reconstruction of a plausible connection between Heydenreich and Fichte's intellectual development during the 1790s; and (3) the articulation of some distinctive elements of Fichte's philosophy of religion during this period. Both Heydenreich and Fichte undertake a creative adaptation of the “spirit” of Kant's philosophy to the philosophy of religion. Both stand as having made independent and original contributions in this regard. After 1800, Fichte’s philosophy of religion followed its own dynamic and went in new directions. In the 1790s, however, when he was at the height of his fame and subsequent influence, he was driving at much the same thing as Heydenreich was in his Betrachtungen. Taken together, the work of both men gives us a valuable window into the possibilities, promises, and perils of doing the philosophy of religion in a “critical” spirit.

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