

## Johann Gottlieb Fichte

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) was one of the founders of German Idealism. In his main philosophical works he attempted to provide a rigorous philosophical foundation for Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) critical philosophy. His philosophy of religion was in many ways similar to Kant's, especially in identifying the substance of religion with morality and in deriving religious belief from the demands of the moral life. Accordingly, he argued that any supposed historical revelation of God must be judged by whether the content of the alleged revelation agrees with the content of the moral law. Revelation, therefore, adds nothing to morality; its purpose is to motivate us to perform our moral duties. This emphasis on morality is due to the driving force of Fichte's philosophy, the need to vindicate the claims of human freedom over against philosophical theories of naturalism and determinism, especially that of Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677). Fichte achieved public notoriety in 1798-1799 when charges of atheism arose in the wake of some of his published works. Although Fichte was not an atheist, he did hold that God cannot be regarded as personal or self-conscious. Instead, he presented God as the creative ground of the universe's moral order. We are not able to form a clear conception of this ground, although Fichte referred to it as reason, will, life and being.

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