

JOHANN GOTTLIEB FICHTE

# The System of Ethics

According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre

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## Introduction

### Fichte's life and works

Johann Gottlieb Fichte was born on May 19, 1762 in Rammenau, Saxony (in the eastern part of today's Germany). He studied theology and law at Jena, Wittenberg and Leipzig without taking a degree (1784–1788) and served as a private tutor in several families in Saxony, Prussia and Switzerland (1784–1793). In 1790, upon studying Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), he became an enthusiastic adherent and supporter of Kant's Critical philosophy. Indeed, when his first publication, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792)<sup>1</sup> appeared anonymously, it was widely assumed to be a work by Kant himself. Kant publicly declared Fichte to be the author of the latter work and thereby launched Fichte's meteoric philosophical career. He was offered a professorship at the University of Jena, where he began teaching in the Summer Semester 1794. During his five years at Jena, Fichte's widely attended lectures and numerous publications exercised a tremendous influence on German philosophical and literary culture.

Fichte's major works from his Jena period are *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1794),<sup>2</sup> *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*

<sup>1</sup> *Attempt at a Critique of all Revelation*, trans. Garrett Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre or, of so-called "Philosophy,"* in Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988; Cornell Paperbacks, 1993) [henceforth = *EPW*], 94–135.

(1794–1795),<sup>3</sup> *Foundation of Natural Right* (1796–1797),<sup>4</sup> *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797–1798),<sup>5</sup> and *The System of Ethics* (1798). His lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (1796–1799),<sup>6</sup> which are preserved only in student transcripts, are also central documents for any informed understanding of Fichte’s early system. Though written shortly after he left Jena for Berlin, *The Vocation of Man* (1800),<sup>7</sup> represents an effort on Fichte’s part to summarize the conclusions of his Jena system in a more accessible or “popular” form.

In 1799 Fichte lost his professorship in Jena over charges of atheism stemming from his publication in 1798 of a brief essay “On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World.”<sup>8</sup> He spent most of the remaining years of his life in Berlin, where he initially supported himself by giving private and public lecture courses and later assuming a professorship at the newly founded university there (1810–1814). During those years Fichte published little, and what he did publish were not the new versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that he was developing in his private lectures, but revised versions of his public lectures on the philosophy of history and philosophy of religion, as well as his celebrated *Addresses to the German Nation* (1806).<sup>9</sup> As a result, he came to share the fate he himself had helped bring upon Kant: that of being surpassed in the eyes of the philosophical public by his own followers and successors, first Schelling and later Hegel.

In fact, Fichte remained philosophically active and productive until shortly before his death from typhoid fever January 29, 1814. He left behind a large number of unpublished works and lecture notes, some of which were edited by his son, Immanuel Hermann Fichte, in the mid-nineteenth century and all of which are now being made available in the complete

<sup>3</sup> Contained under the title “Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge,” in J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge With the First and Second Introductions*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) [henceforth = *SK*], 87–286.

<sup>4</sup> *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser and trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) [henceforth = *FNR*].

<sup>5</sup> Contained in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994) [henceforth = *IWL*], 1–118.

<sup>6</sup> *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo (1796/99)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) [henceforth = *FTP*].

<sup>7</sup> *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

Ethics, the philosophical discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right and wrong. Its subject consists of fundamental issues of practical decision making, and its major concerns include the nature of ultimate value and the standards by which human actions can be morally evaluated. For coverage of religious conceptions of ethics and the ethical systems associated with world religions, see Buddhism; Christianity; Confucianism; Hinduism; Jainism; Judaism; Sikhism. The origins of ethics. Mythical accounts. Introduction of moral codes. If one has in mind ethics proper i.e., the systematic study of what is morally right and wrong it is clear that ethics could have come into existence only when human beings started to reflect on the best way to live. Engineering Codes of Ethics and the Duty to Set a Moral Precedent. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, Vol. 22, Issue. 5, p. 1333. CrossRef. Google Scholar. Ylimaki, Rose M. Fetman, Lisa J. Matyjasik, Erin Brunderman, Lynnette and Uljens, Michael 2017. Beyond Normativity in Sociocultural Reproduction and Sociocultural Transformation. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 53, Issue. The System of Ethics. Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Edited by Daniel Breazeale, Guenter Z llner. Publisher: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511806612.005>. pp 1-2. Export citation. Recommend this book. Email your librarian or administrator to recommend adding this book to your organisation's collection. At its simplest, ethics is a system of moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and lead their lives. Ethics is concerned with what is good for individuals and society and is also described as moral philosophy. The term is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition. Ethics covers the following dilemmas Ethics doesn't always show the right answer to moral problems. Indeed more and more people think that for many ethical issues there isn't a single right answer - just a set of principles that can be applied to particular cases to give those involved some clear choices. Some philosophers go further and say that all ethics can do is eliminate confusion and clarify the issues. After that it's up to each individual to come to their own conclusions. Meta-ethics, concerning the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions, and how their truth values (if any) can be determined. Normative ethics, concerning the practical means of determining a moral course of action. Applied ethics, concerning what a person is obligated (or permitted) to do in a specific situation or a particular domain of action.[2]. Contents.