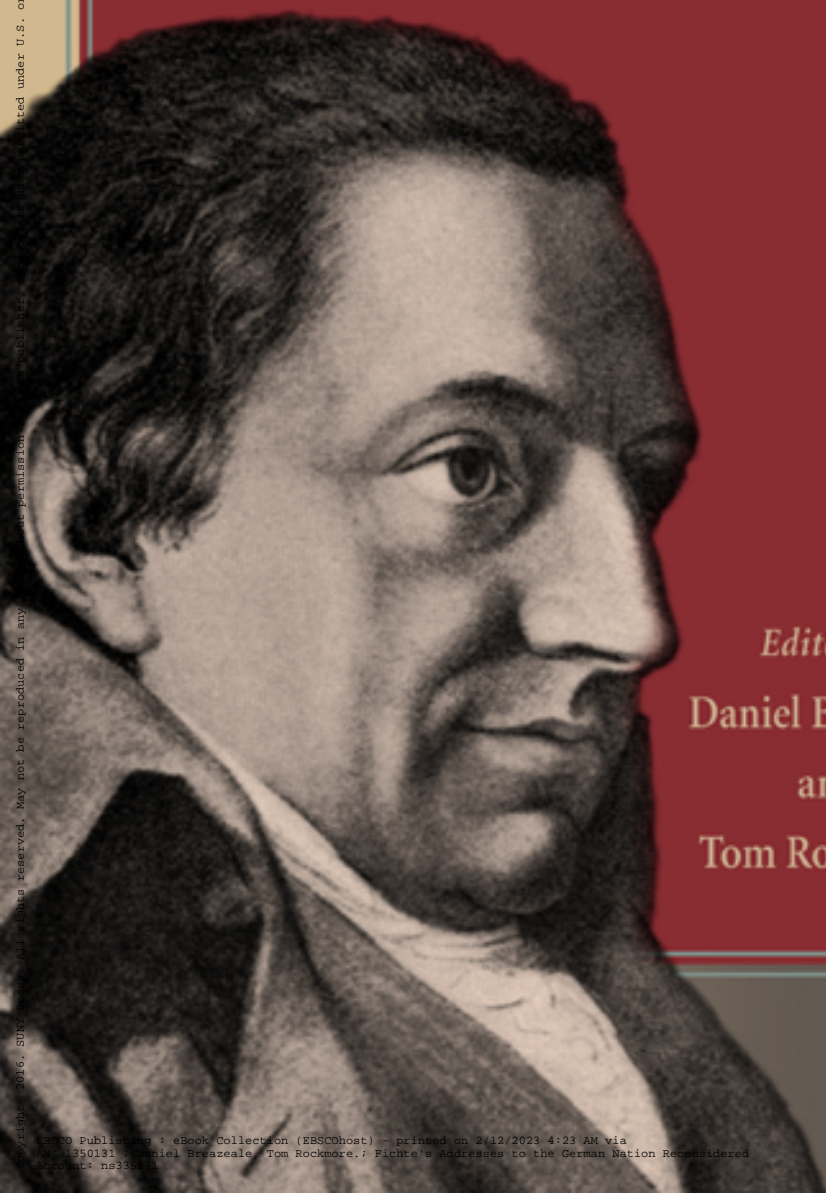


FICHTE'S  
*Addresses to the German Nation*  
RECONSIDERED



*Edited by*  
Daniel Breazeale  
and  
Tom Rockmore

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**SUNY**  
**P R E S S**

Published by  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS  
Albany

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For information, contact  
State University of New York Press  
[www.sunypress.edu](http://www.sunypress.edu)

Production, Laurie D. Searl  
Marketing, Fran Keneston

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Breazeale, Daniel, editor. | Rockmore, Tom, 1942– editor.  
Title: Fichte's addresses to the German nation reconsidered / edited by Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore.  
Description: Albany : State University of New York Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2016007289 (print) | LCCN 2016030221 (ebook) | ISBN 9781438462554 (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781438462561 (e-book)  
Subjects: LCSH: Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 1762-1814. Reden an die deutsche Nation. | Germany—Politics and government—1806-1815. | Education and state—Germany—History—19th century. | National characteristics, German—History—19th century.  
Classification: LCC DD199.F43 F53 2016 (print) | LCC DD199.F43 (ebook) | DDC 320.540943—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016007289>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## Abbreviations Used in This Volume

- AA            *Immanuel Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902 ff.)
- AGN           *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. Gregory Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- AGN<sup>2</sup>         *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. Isaac Nakhimovsky, Béla Kapossy, and Keith Tribe (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2013)
- BM            Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800)
- BWL           Fichte, *Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* (1794)
- EPW           *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988)
- ET            G. H. Turnbull, *The Educational Theory of J. G. Fichte. A Critical Account, together with Translations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927)
- FiG            *Fichte in Gespräche*, ed. Erich Fuchs. 7 Vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1978–2012)
- FNR           *Fichte, Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- FTP            *Fichte: Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992)



- GA *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth†, and Hans Gliwitzky† (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964ff.)
- GNR Fichte, *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796/97)
- GG Fichte, *Über den Grund unseres Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung* (1798)
- GWL Fichte, *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95)
- IWL Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994)
- PW *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, trans. William Smith, 2 Vols., 4th ed. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999 [orig., London: Trübner, 1889])
- RD Fichte, *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (1808)
- SE Fichte, *System of Ethics*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- SK *Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)
- SS Fichte, *System der Sittenlehre* (1798)
- SW *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte, eight vols. (Berlin: Viet & Co., 1845–46); rpt., along with the three vols. of *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes nachgelassene Werke* (Bonn: Adolphus-Marcus, 1834–35), as *Fichtes Werke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971)
- WLn<sub>m</sub>[H] Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (“Halle Nachschrift,” 1796/97)
- WLn<sub>m</sub>[K] Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (“Krause Nachschrift,” 1798/99)

# Introduction

## On Situating and Interpreting Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*

DANIEL BREAZEALE

In July 1799, shortly after losing his position as professor of philosophy at the University of Jena, Fichte moved to Berlin. At that point, the Prussian capital still lacked a university of its own, and thus Fichte was forced to support himself and his family (which remained in Jena until joining him in Berlin a few years later) solely by means of his writings and privately subscribed lessons and lectures. To this end, he composed and published in quick succession four books intended for a broad “popular” audience: *The Vocation of Man* (January 1800), *The Closed Commercial State* (November 1800), the *Sun-Clear Report to the General Public concerning the Essence of the Latest Philosophy* (April 1801), and *Friedrich Nicolai's Life and Remarkable Opinions* (May 1801).<sup>1</sup> Soon after arriving in Berlin Fichte also became heavily invested in an (ultimately unsuccessful) effort to reform a local branch of Royal York Masonic lodge, and his lectures to his fellow Masons were published, in a heavily edited version, in a local Masonic journal in 1802 and 1803 under the title *Letters to Constance*.<sup>2</sup>

One suspects that financial exigencies<sup>3</sup> were also at least partially responsible for his decision to authorize a new edition of his first (and, as it turned out only) full-scale presentation of the foundations of his new system of philosophy, the so-called *Wissenschaftslehre* or “Doctrine of Science” of 1794/95. This new edition, which was bound with a reissue of *The Distinctive Character of the Wissenschaftslehre with Respect to*

*Theoretical Faculty* (1795) appeared in 1802.<sup>4</sup> Yet despite all of this disruption and “popular” literary activity, Fichte by no means abandoned his ongoing “scientific” efforts to perfect his system after arriving in Berlin; on the contrary, he immediately set to work on a new version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, based upon the text of his lectures on “Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (*Wissenschaftslehre*) *nova methodo*,” which he had successfully delivered three times in Jena. Presumably, this was also the version that he employed as the basis for a private tutorial on his philosophy, which he conducted in late 1800 for a local banker, Samuel Solomon Levy.

Sometime in the winter of 1800–01, however, he abandoned his efforts to revise his Jena lectures and began instead an altogether new presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Once again, as was his custom, he developed this new version in conjunction with private lectures that he delivered daily in his own apartment to a small group of listeners in the spring of 1802. Though he produced a complete manuscript of this new version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (“New Presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” 1801–02<sup>5</sup>), he abandoned it as well and began yet another completely new presentation of his system, once again in conjunction with a private tutorial for a local count, which he conducted in the spring of 1803.<sup>6</sup> Eighteen–four was a year devoted entirely to renewed efforts on his part to construct an adequate presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Over the course of that year Fichte composed and presented to his private students no fewer than three complete sets of lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>7</sup> The following year he continued to develop this new version of his philosophy in the form of private lectures entitled “Doctrine of God, Ethics, and Right.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the truly immense effort that he had devoted to these efforts, none of these radically new presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* appeared during the author’s lifetime, and some did not appear until the first decade of the twenty-first century.

During the latter part of 1804 Fichte announced plans to deliver, by subscription and individual ticket sales, weekly Sunday lectures in a rented hall in the Academy of Sciences. The announced topic of these Sunday lectures was “A Philosophical Characteristic of the Age.” The series began November 4, 1804, and continued until March 17, 1805. Despite the rather high cost of both subscriptions and individual tickets, the audience for these lectures numbered well over one hundred and included government ministers and foreign ambassadors. These same lectures were eventually published in April 1806 under title *Characteristics of the Present Age*.<sup>9</sup>

The following year, thanks to the intervention of patrons and allies in the Prussian court, Fichte enjoyed a brief, one-semester appointment as professor of philosophy at the Prussian University in Erlangen (May–September 1805). There he presented a series of general introductory lectures on philosophy, which included a “propaedeutic” to the same, as well as lectures on logic and metaphysics. He also produced for the occasion yet another completely new version of his lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre*,<sup>10</sup> while also delivering a series of weekly public lectures on the same theme as his earlier public lectures in Jena: that is, the duties and vocation of the academic scholar. Like the earlier set, these new lectures were published, in early 1806, under the title *On the Essence of the Scholar and Its Appearance in the Realm of Freedom*.<sup>11</sup>

Upon his return to Berlin, Fichte announced a second subscription series of Sunday lectures, this time on topics associated with the philosophy of religion. These new lectures began January 13, 1806, and concluded March 30, 1806. They were subsequently published in April 1806 under the title *Guide to the Blessed Life*.<sup>12</sup>

Eighteen-six was, of course, another year of crisis and turmoil in European political history, which was marked, above all, by the ongoing Napoleonic wars. In December of the preceding year, the forces of the French Empire had defeated those of Austria and Russia at the battle of Austerlitz, leading to the Peace of Pressburg between Austria and France, which ended the so called “war of the third coalition” against Napoleon and led to the formation of the French-led Confederation of the Rhine, as well as to the official demise of the Holy Roman Empire (August 6, 1806). A new “war of the fourth coalition” (a coalition of Prussia—which had not participated in any of the previous coalitions against France—Saxony, Great Britain, Russia, and Sweden) ensued almost immediately and—just as quickly—resulted in a humiliating rout of the vaunted Prussian forces by those of Napoleon at the battle of Jena-Auerstedt (October 14, 1806). This was quickly followed by the French invasion of Prussia and occupation of Berlin (October 25, 1806).

Fichte followed these momentous events very closely and with growing consternation, as is evidenced by his new studies and literary activities during this period. Whereas some citizens of Prussia held themselves aloof from the fortunes of the third coalition and even welcomed the defeat of Prussia’s rival Austria at the battle of Austerlitz, Fichte is reported to have passionately demurred, declaring that “not a year will pass before we will most deeply regretting this defeat.”<sup>13</sup> As the year advanced (along

with the French armies), Fichte, who had long enjoyed (or suffered from) a well-earned reputation as a supporter of the French Revolution<sup>14</sup> and who had on several past occasions at least toyed with the idea of resettling his family in the French Republic, became more and more adamant in his opposition to the new Napoleonic empire and its leader—and more and more preoccupied with the parlous fate of Prussia in particular and the various “Germanic” lands in general.

Thus, in the summer of 1806, not long before the battle of Jena, he began work on two dialogues titled “Patriotism and its Opposite.”<sup>15</sup> One of the main themes of these unpublished dialogues is the relationship between patriotism and cosmopolitanism, the former of which Fichte describes as a means to the latter.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he continued, even if a single nation were to take up the common cause of humanity, this “goal of the human species” is one that can be achieved not by force of arms but only by means of a perfected (philosophical) *science*, the goal of which is to spread to all mankind “the original sources of truth and reality, grasped at their point of absolute unity.”<sup>17</sup> This, goal, which is, of course, preeminently that of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, is, he maintains, one that has been pursued and cultivated among the Germans more than among any other people. Hence, another theme of these dialogues: to pose the questions, “What is German?” and what is relationship of Germanness to, on the one hand, the cosmopolitan goals of all humanity and, on the other, the pursuit of science (i.e., philosophy)? These are questions and themes with which Fichte was already quite well acquainted, above all from his familiarity with A. W. Schlegel’s *Lectures on Fine Literature and Art*, which had originated as a series of public lectures delivered in Berlin in the years 1801–04. The direct influence of Schlegel’s *Lectures* upon Fichte is not difficult to detect in both the *Characteristics of the Present Age* and the *Addresses*. Like Herder before him, Schlegel stressed the close relationship between language and national character, and it was Schlegel, not Fichte, who first emphasized the unique character and superiority of the German language and contrasted it with the “dead” Latinate languages spoken by Southern Europeans. Schlegel also assigned to the Germans in particular the task of guiding the moral development of humanity as a whole and stressed the close link between German patriotism and the larger, cosmopolitan values of all humanity.<sup>18</sup>

Following the mobilization of Prussian troops on August 9, 1806, Fichte unsuccessfully petitioned the Prussian court to be appointed a chaplain to the army, suggesting that it would be his special task to use

his rhetorical gifts to address and inspire the leaders of the military. In preparation for this task, he composed and submitted to the court a proposed “Address to the German Warrior,” which included a “manifesto” concerning the goals to be achieved in the coming war as well as an impassioned denunciation of Napoleon, to whom Fichte refers simply as “he who bears no name.”<sup>19</sup>

Only four days following the defeat of the Prussian forces at the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt, the entire court fled Berlin for the safety of the Prussian outpost of Königsberg in East Prussia, near the Russian border. Fichte, who was by this time receiving regular stipends from the king, accompanied the court on this journey. The entourage arrived in Königsberg at the end of November 1806 and remained there until early the next summer, when the defeat of the combined Prussian and Russian forces by the French at the Battle of Friedland, not far from Königsberg, on June 14, 1807, once again forced the court to take flight, this time to Copenhagen. In evident despair, Fichte described these events to his wife as follows:

Think of how things appeared to us. On the eve of the decisive battle the balance was still equal, and if only we could have avoided *utterly bovine stupidity* then victory could have been our fate. What would you feel in such a case! Still, you can hardly imagine our historically unprecedented helplessness following the battle. . . . I had already resolved to allow the present world and its citizens to die out for me. On this occasion, God’s way was not ours. I believe that the German nation *must* be preserved, but I see that it has been extinguished.<sup>20</sup>

But Fichte did not let his time in Königsberg go to waste. Among other things, he found the time and occasion to prepare and to deliver yet another entirely new series of lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* at the University of Königsberg, where the king had provided him with a temporary appointment (January 5–March 20, 1807).<sup>21</sup> In addition, he employed his time for private study, including a renewed study of Italian and Portuguese.

Throughout this period he was particularly preoccupied with questions of education in general and Prussian national education in particular. To this end, he immersed himself in a renewed study of the writings and pedagogical theory of the Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich

Pestalozzi, with whom he had become personally acquainted while living in Zurich in the years prior to his departure for Jena and for whose pioneering ideas and practical achievements he had long expressed great admiration. Pestalozzi's methods emphasized the importance of awakening and fostering the child's sense of his own "self-activity," and his method for doing this was to begin with the simplest manual exercises before gradually proceeding to the most abstract speculations. As Fichte wrote to his wife, in requesting a copy of Pestalozzi's *How Gertrud Teaches Her Children*, "I am now studying his educational system, in which I find the true medicine for a sick humanity—as well as the only way to make this same humanity capable of understanding the *Wissenschaftslehre*."<sup>22</sup>

Fichte also devoted his six months in Königsberg to the study of the writings of Machiavelli and went so far as to translate excerpts from his writings and to publish these, along with his own commentary, in the journal *Vesta* in June 1807.<sup>23</sup> In this essay, as in his earlier unpublished writings, Fichte was clearly intent on applying some of the lessons of Florentine Renaissance republicanism to the present situation in central Europe, as is also indicated by another unfinished project he worked on off and on during the spring of 1807: an ambitious eight-part "utopian tract" entitled "The German Republic."<sup>24</sup>

Following the Peace of Tilsit (July 1807) between France, Russia, and Prussia, and a two-month pause in Copenhagen, Fichte finally arrived back in occupied Berlin on August 19, 1807. Hardly had he arrived when he learned that the king (who had not yet returned to his capital) intended to establish a new Prussian state university in Berlin and officially invited Fichte (along with other leading academics) to submit detailed ideas and plans for the same. Accordingly, in less than a month he completed and sent to the cabinet an elaborate plan for the new institution, though the plan that was eventually adopted for the new Prussian university was not Fichte's but Alexander von Humboldt's.<sup>25</sup> Hence, even after returning to Berlin, he continued to occupy himself primarily with questions of moral pedagogy and national character and explicitly conceived of the new university as an "institute of national education."<sup>26</sup>

In late November 1807 Fichte publicly announced his intention to resume his Sunday lectures. In fact, he had begun drawing up plans for a new lecture series while still in Copenhagen during the summer of 1807, inspired in part by his correspondence and personal conversations with the eminent historian Johannes von Müller. Von Müller too lamented the embarrassing collapse of the Prussian army and the ensuing French

occupation and proposed to Fichte that the most effective way to respond to this situation would be “through words and writings of many kinds, with gentleness and rigor, in order to kindle feelings, prevent despair, and illuminate the path toward improvement.”<sup>27</sup>

The new Sunday subscription series was first announced as a continuation of Fichte’s earlier lectures on the *Characteristics of the Present Age* and as an effort “to bring them up the present age.”<sup>28</sup> The relationship between those earlier lectures and the new ones is made clear enough in the first *Address*: In the *Characteristics* (again, partly inspired by A. W. Schlegel’s *Lectures*), Fichte had laid out a bold, a priori schema of human history as divided into five parts: (1) an original era of “innocence,” in which reason is present among mankind only in the form of instinct; (2) an era of “progressive sin,” in which reason is present in the form of an external authority demanding blind faith and obedience; (3) an era of “complete sinfulness,” in which mankind has liberated itself from the authority of reason in every form; (4) an era of “progressive justification,” in which reason is operative in the form of knowledge; and finally, (5) an era of “complete justification and satisfaction,” in which reason is present as an art and humanity has become a perfect reflection of reason itself. In the *Characteristics*, Fichte had described his own age as occupying the third era, that of complete sinfulness; but in the *Addresses* he suggests that, thanks to the utter defeat of Prussia, he and his contemporaries now stand on the cusp between the third and the fourth eras. A major goal of the *Addresses* is therefore to make members of the audience and readers of the text explicitly aware of their parlous situation and of the unique opportunity it offers them: an opportunity to make the all-important transition from an age of lawless freedom and corruption to one of freedom governed by rational (moral) laws. Fichte’s explicit aim was to persuade his audience and readers that they were indeed capable of beginning a new era in human history and life—that they were capable, in Fichte’s words, of being “born again.”

The plan was to have each of the fourteen *Addresses* printed and distributed individually, over the course of the series, in order, as Fichte explained, “to lose no time in renewing and cultivating a German way of thinking.”<sup>29</sup> With this aim in mind, he duly applied to the office of the Prussian censor for advance approval of his plan. But after examining the text of the first *Address*, the censor rejected Fichte’s application. Calling attention to some politically sensitive passages in the first *Address*, the censor demanded to evaluate the entire series of lecture before approving



publication of any of the same. Eventually, however, Fichte was allowed to print and distribute the rest of lectures in the series individually, despite some misgiving from the censor concerning certain passages in the fourth, eighth, and fourteenth *Addresses*, and despite the unfortunate loss by the censor of the only copy of Fichte's thirteenth lecture, which required him to compose the published version completely afresh.

When the series was completed on March 20, 1808, and it was time to publish the entire text, the censor had still not approved the first *Address*, though permission was eventually granted. Meanwhile, production of the book continued, with the printer simply leaving space for the first *Address* to be inserted. Due to a miscalculation, however, more space was left than was required for the first *Address*, which is why the published version is prefaced by brief excerpts from Fichte's previously published essay on Machiavelli and from his first unpublished dialogue on "Patriotism and its Opposite." The full text of the *Addresses to the German Nation* was published in May 1808, seven months before the ending of the French occupation in December and the return of the king at the beginning of 1809.

According to Fichte's son, during the period he was composing and delivering the *Addresses* Fichte was also engaged in an intensive historical study of the resistance of the ancient German tribes to the Roman invasion, specifically as described in Tacitus's *Germania*. Indeed, his son claims that this "was almost the only book he was reading while composing the *Addresses*." Fichte even went so far as to translate extensive passages from Tacitus, which he completed following the fourth *Address*, passages specifically dealing with the essence of "Germanness." Moreover—again, according to Fichte's son—Tacitus's text also exercised a strong influence on the distinctive rhetorical style of the *Addresses*.<sup>30</sup>

The circumstances surrounding Fichte's actual delivery of the *Addresses* quickly became and in many quarters still remains the stuff of patriotic legend. It is certainly true that Fichte exposed himself to a certain amount of personal risk in delivering these lectures during the French occupation of Berlin. Not long before he commenced his Sunday lectures, namely, in August 1806, the Berlin bookseller Johann Phillip Palm had been executed on the order of Napoleon for disturbing a seditious pamphlet. Fichte duly reminded one his correspondents of Palm's fate, before going on to declare his own willingness to risk his life by delivering his *Addresses*.<sup>31</sup> This fear was shared by Fichte's wife, Johanna, who wrote that her husband's public lectures had "cost me a much fear,

since I was constantly aware of the fate of the unfortunate Palm. I was constantly hearing about the firing squads and could not sleep a single night so long as the foreigners, who have frightened many people in unprecedented ways, remained. This book [the *Addresses*] is written with deepest love and out of the strongest sense of duty and resignation, for the author was very well aware of the danger to which he was exposing himself.”<sup>32</sup>

The atmosphere in which Fichte delivered his addresses was described some years later by one of the members of Fichte’s audience, Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, who also emphasized that many in the audience were all too aware of Palm’s recent fate and thus fearful for Fichte, “whose freedom and life hung upon his every word.” They were thus in awe of the “extraordinary courage of the German professor,” who had the courage to continue to speak even as his lectures were frequently interrupted and threatened “by the drums of the marching troops.”<sup>33</sup> This same account, further embroidered with reports of the presence of French spies in Fichte’s audience, was duly repeated by Fichte’s son, I. H. Fichte (who was only twelve at the time the *Addresses* were presented), in his biography of his father and then handed down to future generations.<sup>34</sup>

Though there can be no doubt that Fichte and his wife, along with many others, did indeed fear retaliation by the occupying power, there is also evidence that the French were not particularly concerned with nor bothered by the Sunday *Addresses* by this professor of philosophy, if indeed, they were aware of them at all. In any case, they certainly took no action against Fichte, though they did investigate other politically suspect writers and intellectuals in Berlin.<sup>35</sup>

Nearly six hundred copies of the *Addresses* were sold within a month, and it was at first widely read and received generally positive reviews.<sup>36</sup> However, there is little evidence that it exercised the kind of immediate galvanizing influence upon the “German people” or the Prussian government that Fichte had hoped and that subsequent mythology implies. It does not, for example, seem to have been the case that the *Addresses* played any significant part in provoking or sustaining the Prussian role in the successful “War of Liberation” against Napoleon in 1813–14. Indeed, as Gregory Moore has recently pointed out, Fichte’s name and his *Addresses* were seldom invoked in this context; on the contrary, the ideas expressed in the *Addresses* were more likely to be criticized as naive or suspect. No German prince made any effort to institutionalize Fichte’s ideas for a revolutionary new system of German national education. Instead, “when

reaction set in after the Vienna Congress, German governments cracked down on any subversive ‘demagoguery’ that would upset the post-war restoration. The *Addresses* were not celebrated as a brave rallying cry to the German nation in its darkest hour but seen rather, by the Central Commission of Investigation in Mainz, as the *fons et origo* of liberalism and republicanism, corrupting German youth and striving to unite them ‘in a community independent of the individual governments.’<sup>37</sup> Thus, when I. H. Fichte proposed a second edition of the *Addresses* in 1824, his request was rejected out of hand by the Prussian censor, forcing him to turn to a printer in Saxony. Nevertheless, at the time of Fichte’s death, January 19, 1814, the *Addresses* was probably his best-known work, through which, in the words of one obituary, “this profound thinker performed his greatest service to his fatherland.”<sup>38</sup>

To be sure, the *Addresses* did inspire some republican sympathizers and activists during the decades following Fichte’s death, especially those associated with the radical student movement (the so-called *Burschenschaften*), and somewhat later Fichte was cited as an inspiration by German constitutional liberals involved in the abortive revolutionary movements of 1848 (several of whom ended up in the United States, including the family A. E. Kroeger, who went on to make the first, earnest but deeply flawed, English translations of many of Fichte’s philosophical writings). Fichte’s political ideas also had a direct influence upon the socialist movement in Germany under the leadership of Ferdinand Lasalle, who authored several books on the relevance of Fichte’s ideas to contemporary German and international politics. Such influences, however, were vastly overshadowed by the growing conservative mood following the Congress of Vienna and by subsequent events, including the period of strong reaction following the events of 1848. Consequently, for several decades following his death in 1814 Fichte’s name was virtually forgotten and the *Addresses* seldom cited.

By the centennial of Fichte’s birth, however, in 1862 (the same year Otto von Bismarck became prime minister of Prussia), both the domestic and the international political situations had altered markedly, and the veritable flood of solemn public addresses, newspaper articles, and pamphlets that commemorated this event all tended to focus not on the *Wissenschaftslehre* but rather upon the portrait of Fichte as the heroic prophet of German nationalism, and emphasized the special significance of the *Addresses* in this respect. A good example of this may be found in the description by the historian and avid nationalist Heinrich von

Treitschke, in 1862, of the author of the *Addresses to the German Nation* as “the first prominent herald of the ideas that motivate Germany’s national party today.”<sup>39</sup>

Fichte’s reputation as a fervent German nationalist grew apace during the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war and the ensuing consolidation of the German *Reich* under Prussian leadership in 1871. Similarly, during the period leading up to and surrounding World War I (a period that included numerous, fervently nationalistic centenary celebrations of Fichte’s death), the *Addresses* were frequently cited as providing prescient confirmation of the unique character and special destiny of the German nation. At the same time, of course, and for many of the same reasons, this same text was vilified by authors in Great Britain, France, America, and Italy.<sup>40</sup>

Even in the aftermath of the Great War, Fichte’s name continued to be a nationalist rallying cry in Germany, and was invoked by Friedrich Ebert, first president of the Weimar Republic, in his inaugural address to National Assembly, February 6, 1919, when he declared that the task facing the new government was to put Fichte’s ideas into effect and to make good on “what Fichte gave to the German nation as its vocation.”<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, both National Socialists and Marxists appealed to Fichte and the *Addresses*, though of course it was the claims of the former that triumphed. This, of course, only cemented Fichte’s notoriety among his many opponents. Here, for instance, is how the *Addresses* were described in 1941 by the conservative American poet-historian, Peter Viereck:

Fichte’s *Speeches to the German Nation*, during the War of Liberation [*sic!*], are the philosophic foundation of modern German *Realpolitik*. He preached a double moral standard: what is wicked for the individual to do becomes holy if done by the state. Unlike the individual the state should use for victory, if needed, all possible frauds, violations of law, and violent crimes. The collective Volk-ego should be bound by no external laws or limits.<sup>42</sup>

It is largely because of the close association of Fichte’s *Addresses* with the more virulent forms of German nationalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that this particular text, and indeed, Fichte’s philosophy in general, was largely ignored or dismissed by many philosophers and political theorists, even following the end of World War II.

As worldwide interest in Fichte's philosophy revived in the 1960s and thereafter, the *Addresses* remained toxic material in the eyes of many scholars, both in Germany and abroad. As a result, this text, for all its fame and notoriety, has been largely neglected by two recent generations of Fichte scholarship. It is, therefore, high time to reexamine and to reconsider the content of this controversial text, independently of the myths and the reception history that surround it. Such a reexamination, at least for English speaking readers, has been greatly facilitated by the recent appearance of not one but two excellent new English translations of the *Addresses*. It is our hope that the papers collected in this volume will contribute to a revival of scholarship in this area and stimulate new interpretations of the *Addresses to the German Nation*.

As first-time readers of the *Addresses* often discover to their surprise, the fate and calling of "the German people" is by no means the only focus of this rich text, which includes a variety of diverse themes and investigates a wide number of topics. Among the contents of the *Addresses* are the following: (1) an inquiry into the reasons for the capitulation of the Prussian army in the face of the Napoleonic invasion and the heavy responsibility for the same borne by Fichte's own countrymen, and especially by the prevailing system of education; (2) a sustained investigation of the question "What is German?" and of the relationship of the German *Volk* and of German *Kultur* to that of other Europeans; (3) a meditation, inspired by A. W. Schlegel and Herder, on the relationship between a "people" and their native language and on the important differences between those who possess a "living" or "primordial" language (*Ursprache*) and those who speak a dead and derivate Latinate tongue; (4) a new theory of education, greatly indebted to the work of Pestalozzi, as essential to both the moral development of the individual and the political progress of the nation; (5) an inquiry, with roots extending back to Fichte's earliest Jena writings, into the conditions that make possible the moral development of an individual and of a society, and indeed of humanity at large; (6) an argument, derived from A. W. Schlegel as well as from the ideologues of the French Revolution, that at certain specific historical points a certain specific nation has the mission and indeed the duty to serve as the "advance guard," as it were, of humanity at large, thus affirming the cosmopolitan ideals long affirmed by Fichte, but now in the context of an apology for Prussian nationalism; (7) a number of concrete proposals for instituting a series of truly radical educational reforms, first in Prussia and then in other German lands and finally in Europe as a

whole; and finally, (8) an account of the intimate connection between all of these practical goals and the cultivation of the science of philosophy, as perfected in Fichte's own *Wissenschaftslehre*.

All of these themes and several more are discussed by the authors included in this volume, who also represent a variety of different modes of analysis and styles of scholarship.

In chapter, 1 Daniel Breazeale confronts what appears to be a serious tension between Fichte's early enthusiasm for human freedom and the system of education proposed in the *Addresses*, which calls for the "complete eradication" of the pupil's freedom and aims to produce individuals incapable of acting in opposition to the moral law. Breazeale insists, however, that a careful investigate of Fichte's early writings, with special attention to the crucial distinction between "formal" and "material" freedom, reveals that he did not, in the *Addresses*, retreat from his earlier position, but always viewed the term *freedom* as deeply ambiguous and maintained from the first that purely formal or "apparent" freedom must be replaced by genuinely material or "essential" freedom. It is precisely the task of the new system of primary education or moral cultivation proposed in the *Addresses* to foster, but not to compel, such a development of the individual and nation.

In chapter 2, Mário Jorge de Carvalho addresses the fact that one can think something and be completely convinced of its truth in a manner that may have little effect upon one's own life. After a concise revision of some milestones in the history of this question (notably Plato, Pascal, and Kierkegaard), de Carvalho focuses on Fichte's analysis of life's resistance to thought and outlines Fichte's very intricate model for explaining how life can offer resistance to thought and remain impervious or indifferent to it.

In chapter 3, Sila Özkara analyzes the theory of language presented in Fichte's fourth *Address* and does so by considering this as a theory of language on its own and by investigating how it may be situated within Fichte's corpus in the light of his larger metaphysical project. To that end, Özkara begins with a detailed explication and analysis of Fichte's theory of language and stresses the peculiarity of Fichte's theory as well as some of its inherent issues. She then argues that Fichte's theory of language, insofar as it champions a view of language as something that ought to be pure and free of foreign elements and influences, contradicts the three first principles underlying the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, which imply that difference is crucial and inherent in anything we may take as self-identical.

In chapter 4, Benjamin E. Crowe challenges standard histories of the reception of Fichte's *Addresses* and argues that this text engages deeply with issues regarding the nature of religion and its function (both for good and for ill) in society. The context of the *Addresses* helps to set into relief some important aspects of Fichte's philosophy of religion as a whole, as well as helping to situate Fichte's thought within the broader tradition that includes Hegel and the Left Hegelians. Crowe shows how Fichte's discussion of religion in the *Addresses* anticipates some of the central ideas in this later tradition, while still carving out a distinctive and philosophically weighty position.

In chapter 5, Jeffery Kinlaw explores the connection between spiritual and national renewal underlying Fichte's proposal for educational reform in the *Addresses* and in his moral theory. Kinlaw argues that Fichte centers his proposal for reform on the cultivation of one's inherent capacity to acknowledge normative authority and adhere to rational norms.

In chapter 6, Marina F. Bykova rejects a purely nationalistic reading of Fichte's *Addresses* and argues that they are consistent with the chief ideas of his practical philosophy, in particular, with his recognition of the importance of cultural identities for the formation of individuals and actual societies, and thus for the possible realization of a moral order in civil and political life. This self-realization is a journey of *Bildung*, an intricate process of self-cultivation, which necessarily involves enculturation to allow the individual to bring himself into accord with his society and the world. It is therefore most appropriate to read Fichte's *Addresses* in the context of the tradition of German humanism and to understand them as an attempt to offer a more elaborate account of *Bildung*.

In chapter 7, Rainer Schäfer interprets Fichte's nationalism not as an ethnic nationalism, but rather as a cultural and spiritual nationalism. Fichte's epistemology and ontology after 1800 combine the scientific notions of being, freedom, postulates of practical reason, and knowledge. Yet he finds that the concept of "Germanness" harbors a contradiction of universality on the one hand and particular German characteristics on the other. These particular German characteristics form a family resemblance, which is incompatible with the claim of universality. Schäfer argues that, for Fichte, freedom implies universality and cosmopolitanism, whereas the divine, the "One," implies appearance. This contradiction in Fichte's *Addresses* becomes virulent if one applies his scientific concepts to concrete political issues in order to show that only one specific nation is able to realize this form of freedom.

In chapter 8, Gabriel Gottlieb maintains that even though Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* appears to depart from the liberal commitment to freedom central to the writings of his Jena period, it can be reconciled with his earlier writings if one appreciates the nonideal nature of the *Addresses*. As a work of nonideal social and political philosophy, the *Addresses to the German Nation*, he argues, constitute a response to the problem of stability: How in the moment of crisis can a rational state stability be realized? The crisis, for Fichte, is both political and philosophical. By employing the concept of an imagined community, Fichte's response to the problem of stability is a proto- or philosophical nationalism that understands an existential commitment to freedom, as developed in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, to define what it means to be German. Gottlieb further suggests that his view of the German language resembles that of sacred languages, which were understood as giving expression to a divine reality. Likewise, the German language gives expression to rational life so that spiritual culture, or *Wissenschaftslehre*, can intervene in the life of a people, but it is freedom that defines Germanness rather than a commitment to a certain language. By virtue of their existential commitment to freedom, the German people are capable of responding to the political and philosophical crisis of modernity and thereby address the problem of stability.

In chapter 9, Arnold L. Farr examines the relationship between Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Right*, *Closed Commercial State*, and *Addresses to the German Nation* with respect to his theory of recognition, rights, and the state and proposes a charitable reading of the *Addresses* in light of these other texts. Though it may seem as if Fichte's nationalism in the *Addresses* undermines his prior theory of right, recognition, and his cosmopolitan impulse, in fact Fichte continues to maintain all of the elements of his earlier works. Farr concludes that Fichte's account of how recognition works and of how rights are to be established and protected is transformed as he moves from the abstract universal idea of recognition- and intersubjectivity-constituted rights to the particular situation of the German people. Recognition functions at three distinct but related levels in Fichte's work, to which there are parallels in the political struggles in the twentieth century.

In chapter 10, Michael Steinberg argues that more is at stake in the *Addresses* than German national rebirth. They seek a way out of the sterility of a culture in which an extreme individualism conceals the intersubjective activity of reason in the world. Steinberg places Fichte's



political and educational prescriptions in the context of his philosophical history, as found in *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, and highlights his demand for an absolute separation between the contemporary generation and those who will be able to grasp and carry forward the work of reason. Fichte's fundamental question concerns the very possibility of conscious social transformation, especially within a world in which "there is no such thing as society." Foreshadowing both the early Marx and the Wagner of the *Ring*, Fichte's analysis is perhaps even more pertinent today.

In chapter 11, Tom Rockmore investigates what he characterizes as the deep tension, even contradiction, between Fichte's interest in freedom and his authoritarian substitution of a religious model as a necessary condition of the fulfilled life. Fichte's desire, in the wake of the Napoleonic invasion, to apply philosophy to Prussian politics, accords with his consistent aim to join theory to practice. Yet, according to Rockmore, this step forward is assorted with a step backward, for Fichte depicts the philosopher as someone who intervenes on behalf of true religion in order to bring about the Christian realm on earth, which represents a retreat from the modern effort to free reason from faith.

In chapter 12, Anthony N. Perrovich explains how, with the coming of World War I, debate arose about the relation of the Germany of classical idealism to the contemporary Germany that many British and American observers regarded as militaristic and aggressive. Fichte's *Addresses* played a key role in this debate, as opponents cited the text—indeed, often the same passages—to illustrate and support their assertions. Perrovich shows how these wartime attacks on classical German idealism played an important role in discrediting idealism more generally and in shaping the character of postwar British and American philosophy.

Finally, in chapter 13, George J. Seidel considers the historical context within which Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* were first presented, as well as the relation of this text to Fichte's early writings on political philosophy. He also discusses Fichte's notion of a nation, the role of education, and that of language in the formation of a people. Seidel finds serious fault lines in each of these motifs: the difference between a people (society) and a state; education as passing on the culture or as active learning and problem solving; and also the problem of fashioning a common German language amid a plethora of dialects. He concludes with a discussion of the serious difficulty, then as now, of nation building of any sort.

## Notes

1. *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* [*The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987)]; *Der geschlossene Handlebstaat* [*The Closed Commercial State*, trans. Anthony Curtis Adler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012)]; *Sonnenklarer Bericht an das grössere Publikum über das Wesen der neuesten Philosophie* [*A Crystal-Clear Report to the General Public concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy*, trans. John Botterman and William Rasch, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler, (New York: Continuum, 1987)]; *Fr. Nicolai's Leben und sonderbare Meinungen*.

2. *Philosophie der Maurerei. Briefe an Konstant*, GA, I/8: 409–62. *The Philosophy of Masonry: Letters to Constance*, trans. Roscoe Pound, in *Masonic Addresses and Writings of Roscoe Pound* (New York: Macoy, 1953), 130–98.

3. See Fichte's December 15, 1802, letter to his brother Johann Gottlob, lamenting his financial situation and begging for assistance and his June 9, 1803 letter to Schelling, in which he reports that he has devoted three years to work on a new version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* without any lucrative employment, which left him in great financial difficulty. See too his July 1, 1803 letter to Cotta, in which he solicits help with his financial difficulties and inquires about the possibility of obtaining a position at a new school to be established in Paris for the purpose of training Protestant ministers.

4. This new edition was published by the Tübingen publisher Cotta, publisher of the first edition. That same year another, unauthorized edition of the *Foundations* was published in Jena by Gabler, an edition that includes some minor revisions that Fichte had sent to Gabler at a time when he was considering changing publishers for a projected (but never completed) revised version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

5. *Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre aus den Jahren 1801/02*, GA, II/6, 129–324.

6. *Privatissimum <für> G. D.*, GA, II/6, 329–73.

7. *Wissenschaftslehre* 1804-I (January–March), GA, II/7, 66–235; *Wissenschaftslehre* 1804-II (April–June), GA, II/8, 2–421 [*The Science of Knowing. J. G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. Walter E. Wright (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005)]; and *Wissenschaftslehre* 1804-III (November–December), GA, II, II/7, 301–68.

8. *Die Principien der Gottes- Sitten- und Sittenlehre*, (February–March 1805), GA, II/7, 378–489.

9. *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, GA, I/9, 189–396. *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, trans. William Smith, in *PW*, Vol. I, 1–268.

10. *Institutiones omnium philosophiae*, GA, II/9: 34–171. *Vierter Vortrag der Wissenschaftslehre—Erlangen, im Sommer 1805*, GA, II/9, 179–311.

11. *Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten, und seine Erscheinungen im Gebiete der Freiheit*, GA, I/8, 59–139. *The Nature of the Scholar and Its Manifestations*, trans. William Smith, in *PW*, Vol. I, 207–317.

12. *Die Anweisung zum seeligen Leben, oder auch die Religionslehre*, GA, I/9, 45–212. *The Way towards the Blessed Life, or Doctrine of Religion*, trans. William Smith, in *PW*, Vol. II, 289–486.

13. As reported by I. H. Fichte and cited in *FiG*, 6, pt. 2, 663.

14. See his anonymously published two-part tract, *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die Französische Revolution* (1793/94), GA, I/1, 201–404. See too *Zürückforderung der Denkfreyheit von den Fürsten Europens, die sie bisher unterdrückten. Eine Rede* (1793) [*Reclamation of Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, Who Have Oppressed it until Now. A Speech*, trans. Thomas E. Wartenberg, in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schimdt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 119–41. Regarding Fichte's attitude toward the French revolution, see *La révolution française dan la pensée Européenne*, ed. Daniel Schluthess and Philippe Muller (Neuchâtel: Presses Académique, 1989).

15. *Der Patriotismus, und sein Gegentheil*, GA, II/9, 393–445.

16. “Cosmopolitanism is the dominant will that the goal of the human species be realized by the human species; patriotism is the will that that this goal be attained first of all in that nation to which we belong, and that from this nation this success will then spread to the entire species” (GA, I/9, 399).

17. *Ibid.*, 426.

18. For a detailed examination of the parallels between A. W. Schlegel's views on language and culture and Fichte's, see Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son Temps* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1950), Vol. II, Part I, and Vol. II, Part II, 67–78.

19. *Reden an die deutschen Krieger zu Anfange zu Feldzugs 1806* and *In Beziehung auf dem Namenlosen*, GA, II, 79–85.

20. Fichte to Johanna Fichte, July 29 1807, GA, III/6, 153–54.

21. *Wissenschaftslehre, Königsberg*, GA, II/10, 111–217.

22. Fichte to Johanna Fichte, June 3, 1807, GA, III/6, 121. For Fichte's notes on Pestalozzi's book, see GA, II/10, 431–57.

23. *Über Machiavelli, als Schriftsteller, und Stellen aus seinen Schriften*, GA, I/9, 223–75.

24. *Die Republik der Deutschen*, GA, II/10, 377–426. The description of this work as “eine geplante utopischen Schrift” comes from the editors of GA, II/10, 374.

25. *Deducierter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höheren Lehranstalt*, GA, II/11, 83–170. [*Deduced Scheme for an Academy to be Established in Berlin*, trans. G. H. Turnbull, in *ET*, 170–259.]

26. GA, III/6, 185.

27. Von Müller to Fichte, July 25, 1807, GA, III/6, 151.

28. From Fichte's public announcement of his new series of Sunday lectures, November 28, 1807, *GA*, I/10, 9.

29. Fichte to Beyme, January 2, 1808, *GA*, III/6, 213.

30. I. H. Fichte, *Fichtes Leben und literarische Briefwechsel*, 2nd ed. (Sulzbach: Brockhaus, 1862), Vol. I, 427–28. Re. Fichte's (now lost) Tacitus translations, see Léon, Vol. II, Part 2, 70–71.

31. "I know very well what I am risking; I know that a bullet may kill me, as it did Palme. Yet I do not fear this, I would gladly die for my cause" (Fichte to K. F. Beyme, January 2, 1708, *GA*, III/6, 213).

32. Johanna Fichte to Charlotte von Schiller, December 20, 1808, *GA*, III/6, 282.

33. *FiG*, 4, 73.

34. See I. H. Fichte, *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes Leben und literarische Briefwechsel*, Vol. I, 525–39.

35. See H. C. Engelbrecht, *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: A Study of his Political Writings with Special Reference to his Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 126–28. For a detailed survey of the actual (as opposed to alleged) influence of Fichte's *Addresses* on the rise of German nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Rud Körner, "Die Wirkungen der Reden Fichtes," in *Forschungen zur Brandenburgische und Preussischen Geschichte*, 40 (1927): 65–87.

36. Eight contemporary reviews, not all of them positive and several very extensive, are collected in *Fichte in Rezensionen*, ed. Erich Fuchs, Wilhelm G. Jacobs, and Walter Schieche (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), Vol. 4, 265–374.

37. Gregory Moore, "Translators Introduction," in *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. Gregory Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) = *AGN*.

38. *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, February 10, 1814, as cited in *FiG*, 5, 71–72.

39. Henrich von Trietschke, "Fichte und die nationale Idee," in *Deutsche Lebensbilder*, ed. Lotte Blasche (Leipzig: Fikentscher, 1927), 62.

40. See, e.g., Hermann Reincke-Bloch, *Fichte und der deutsche Geist von 1914* (Rostock: Warkentien, 1915); Hermann Schwarz, *Fichte und Wir* (Osterwieck/Harz: Zickfeldt, 1917); Jay Holland Rose, *Nationality and Modern History* (New York: Macmillan, 1916); E. L. Hovelacyem, *The Deeper Causes of the War* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916); E. Goblot, "L'origine philosophique de la folie allemande. Les Discours à la Nation Allemande de Fichte," *Revue du Mois* (1915): 687–708; Felice Momigliano, "Amadeo Fichte e le caratteristiche del nazionalismo tedesco," *Nouva Antologia* 185 (1916): 62–75; John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Holt, 1915); and George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Scribner's, 1916).

41. Cited in Moore's Introduction to *AGN*, xxxv.

42. Peter Viereck, *Meta-Politics: The Roots of the Nazi Mind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), 192. This passage is unchanged from the first, 1941 edition. Viereck thus insists that there is a "long but unbroken chain linking Fichte's nineteenth-century theories with Hitler's twentieth-century practice" (194).

## From Autonomy to Automata?

### Fichte on Formal and Material Freedom and Moral Cultivation

DANIEL BREAZEALE

I well recall the first time I read the *Addresses to the German Nation* and how I was stopped in my tracks by a passage near the beginning of the second address, in which Fichte explicitly addresses defenders of the traditional system of elementary education (and, above all, of moral/religious instruction), whom he characterizes as committed to the view that one can never do any more than “indicate to the pupil what is right and exhort him to remain faithful to it.” However, “whether the pupil wishes to follow these exhortations is up to up him, and if he fails to do so it is his own fault; for he possesses free will [*freien Willen*], which no education can take away from him.” To this reasonable sounding position Fichte offers the following, striking rejoinder:

The very first error in the existing system of education lies precisely in acknowledging and counting upon the free will of the pupil, and this is a clear admission of the impotence and futility of this system. For in admitting that, despite the best efforts of this system, the will [of the pupil] is still free—which is to say, remains wavering between good and bad—this system admits that it neither can nor intends nor has any desire to form [*zu bilden*] the will; nor, since the will is the primary

root of the human being himself, does it have any desire to form the human being himself, something it holds to be altogether impossible. By contrast, the new system of education would consist precisely in this: namely, that, on that soil that it intends to cultivate, it completely annihilates freedom of will and will instead produce strict necessity in decisions and the impossibility of the opposite in the will, which can henceforth be confidently reckoned and relied upon.<sup>1</sup>

How, I asked myself, could the self-proclaimed author of “the first system of human freedom”<sup>2</sup> have countenanced an educational ideal that begins by “annihilating” the free will of the pupil, a system whose stated goal appears to be the production of a cadre of practical automata, who are simply incapable of willing or acting in opposition to the moral law? Surely, something has gone terribly awry here; but if so, what? And why? Is the apparent contradiction between Fichte’s enthusiastic embrace of human autonomy and his endorsement of an educational system apparently intended to produce moral automata simply one more indication of the often suggested gulf between the “earlier” and the “later” Fichte, or is there more to it than that? Is the contradiction in question perhaps not as sharp or as real as it first appears to be? Is there a way of reconciling these aspects of Fichte’s philosophy? And, if so, what does this tell us about the earlier—as well as the later—versions of the same? These are the questions that motivate the following remarks.

## I

As is well known, Fichte was deeply engaged with pedagogical issues from a very early date, as is indicated by the magisterially titled “Diary Concerning the Most Noteworthy Educational Errors that Have Come to My Attention,” which he submitted to his employers while working as a private tutor in Zurich in the summer of 1788 and in which he proclaims that raising children [*Kinderzucht*] “is the art of *making* the pupil *just as good as possible*.”<sup>3</sup>

The importance of education and the vital role to be played in the same by a new philosophically trained clerisy is a major theme of the popular lectures “Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation,” which Fichte delivered immediately upon his arrival at the University of Jena in May

1794. In these lectures, Fichte identifies the “absolute being” of humans with their autonomous will, that is, with their practical rationality or capacity to posit themselves as their own end. And in his lectures “On Spirit and Letter in Philosophy,” delivered immediately after those on the scholar’s vocation, he also observes that genuine freedom is something to be *acquired*, “whether by chance or by free choice [*freie Wahl*],” and that one always “makes oneself free before one wishes to free others.” On this occasion, however, he seems to conclude that there is no systematic means for accomplishing this goal, other than by providing others with “a living example of this way of thinking in word and in deed.”<sup>4</sup>

In his annual lectures on *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, which commenced in 1796, Fichte on the important distinction between formal and material freedom, a distinction first introduced in his lectures on *Foundations of Natural Right*. “Formal freedom” is now identified with the I’s capacity for “absolute self-affection” and thus as something originally posited along with I-hood itself or “immediate self-consciousness”; indeed, says Fichte it is identical with the latter, and, like pure I-hood, formal freedom is “unintuitable.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast, “material freedom” is the individual I’s “freedom of choice” [*Freiheit der Wahl*],” which is described as the “ideal activity of the practical power.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, whenever we elect a determinate goal, we are exercising our material—which is to say, our “practical”—freedom. In contrast, formal freedom designates the original independence of I-hood from the sphere of objectivity *in toto* and is therefore a condition for the very possibility of that practical or material freedom by means of which any actual, individual I determines itself in the objective world.<sup>7</sup> But here, in this purely foundational portion of his system, Fichte makes no distinction between the various ways in which material self-determination of the I may occur.

This deficiency is remedied in his much more protracted discussion of this topic in the *System of Ethics* (1798), which includes a “genetic deduction” of the principle of morality from the freedom of the I and offers a more detailed account of the relationship between formal and material freedom. This account is typically abstract and transcendental, as Fichte patiently and discursively constructs a picture of a rational being as necessarily free, for himself, both formally and materially, while also explaining how this same being posits himself as such through an ascending series of acts of self-positing or “reflections.”

Though Fichte explicitly claims that these elements must all be present in any fully rational being, he concedes that “one can grasp that this



positing, these acts of reflecting upon what originally constitutes us, have to fall into a temporal series, since they are all limited; and thus it will take some time until everything that is originally in us and for us is raised to the level of clear consciousness.” He then adds that “to describe this temporal course of the I’s reflections is to provide the history of an empirical being. Note, however, that everything that occurs along this course seems to ensue contingently, since it is dependent on freedom and by no means on any mechanical law of nature.”<sup>8</sup> What we have here, in other words, is another of Fichte’s “pragmatic histories,”<sup>9</sup> this time a genetic account of how, in order to posit itself as an I at all, the I must posit itself as freely acting, and then, in order to posit itself as freely acting, must posit itself as bound by the moral law. But in addition to this abstract, genetic account of moral consciousness, the *System of Ethics* also contains what one might call a “real history” of the moral development and education of actual human beings. We will first consider the abstract account and then turn to the more concrete individual history.

Once again, Fichte locates the formal freedom of the I in the innermost structure of I-hood itself, that is, in the fact that the I must “freely posit” for itself whatever appears within its consciousness.<sup>10</sup> The “freedom” in question is just another name for the original spontaneity of the I, its power of absolute self-positing, a power that is not dependent upon anything outside the I and is in this sense “free.” To be sure, those original determinations or “feelings” of the I, along with its purely “natural” drive, which are “freely posited” by the I qua intellect, are not themselves freely produced by the I, but can only be discovered or encountered by an *Anstoß* or “check” upon the original activity of the I. Yet, claims Fichte, simply by engaging in spontaneous reflection upon its own condition, as determined by its feelings and natural drive, the I “tears itself loose from all that is supposed to lie outside it, brings it under its control, and positions itself as absolutely self-sufficient.”<sup>11</sup> Nothing outside of the I *causes* it to engage in such a reflection or to posit for itself its own limitations. “The fact *that* such an act of reflection occurs—i.e., its form—is something absolute. It is not a product of nature; it occurs simply because it occurs, because I am I.”<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, though it may very well be acting in accordance with nothing but its natural drives, the I is never directly caused to do so by such drives.

Instead, this is something I bring about—employing, to be sure, a force that stems from nature, but one that is no longer *nature’s* force but is *mine*, because it has come under the sway

of a principle that lies above all nature, under the sway of the concept. Let us call this kind of freedom “*formal freedom*.” Whatever I do with consciousness, I do with this kind of freedom. Someone might therefore follow his natural drive without exception, and yet he would still be free in this sense of the term—so long as he acted with consciousness and not mechanically; for the ultimate ground of his acting would not be his natural drive, but rather his consciousness of this natural drive.<sup>13</sup>

This purely formal freedom of the I is, says Fichte, “is the root of all freedom.”<sup>14</sup> It designates the “external” freedom of every I from all that is not-I, without which it would be unable to make any conscious choices or to determine itself in any specific way.

But much more is required in order to explain the I’s capacity to choose between various ends (i.e., its *Willkür* or freedom of choice), let alone what Fichte here calls its “material freedom,” now understood as the finite I’s capacity to provide itself with its own ends by making freedom itself its object, a capacity that Fichte also describes as “internal” freedom.<sup>15</sup> Through a second (free) act of reflection the I posits for itself its own original reflection upon itself. In this way it first becomes explicitly aware of its formal or external freedom—that is, of the fact that, just because it is an I, it cannot be determined by anything outside itself. This new reflective self-consciousness allows the I to recognize itself as a *willing subject-object*, capable of free self-determination. Moreover, since willing always presupposes a relationship to something that resists it, willing must always have a determinate content or goal. One cannot think of an act of willing without thinking that it involves a demand that something different from the I be brought about by means of that act of willing.<sup>16</sup>

If, however, we abstract from the external object of willing and consider simply the *act* of willing as such, it appears as something primary and absolute about the I. Viewed in this way, declares Fichte, “it simply cannot be explained on the basis of any influence of something outside the I, but only on the basis of the I itself; and *this absoluteness* of the I is what would remain following abstraction from everything foreign.”<sup>17</sup> Fichte thus describes the will variously as “the *absolute tendency toward the absolute*”; or the I’s “absolute indeterminability through anything outside itself”; or its “tendency to determine itself absolutely, without any external impetus.”<sup>18</sup>

In this case, the intellect posits the will not as an external object but as constituting the very essence of the I itself, thereby bringing its will, in Fichte's words, "under the *sway of the concept*; and this is how the absoluteness of real acting first becomes *freedom* proper. Through the consciousness of its own absoluteness the I tears itself away—from itself [that is, from its previously posited relationship to its natural feelings and desires]—and puts itself forward as something self-sufficient."<sup>19</sup> Thus it only as an *intellect* that the I can succeed in determining itself, because only as such can it form any concept of itself as willing and conceive of an end or goal of its actions,<sup>20</sup> Only in this way can it posit itself as "possessing the power of causality by means of mere concepts"<sup>21</sup>—and thus, as free.

As Fichte points out, such a recognition of one's power of free self-determination can occur only if and when the I is actually engaged in an act of self-determination. Thus, it is only in the form of willing that the I becomes actually conscious of its own formal freedom.<sup>22</sup> What the I recognizes at this point for the first time is that—just because it is an "I"—it can never actually be driven by any specific natural drive, since it is conscious of its drives (i.e., is formally free) and thus possesses the power to choose which to satisfy and which not to satisfy.

According to the *System of Ethics*, "everything in the I is to be explained from a drive."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the I's consciousness of its own formal freedom must also be explained in terms of a drive as well: namely, a "pure drive" for freedom for its own sake. The *Urtrieb* or original drive of the I therefore has two distinct components: the natural drive for satisfaction and enjoyment and, in opposition to this, a pure drive for freedom or absolute self-sufficiency. Fichte calls this opposing drive "pure," because it is a feature not of the empirical but of the pure I (the I that possesses formal freedom by virtue of its originally reflective structure).

As previously noted, the I can retain its full formal freedom while aiming only at the satisfaction of its natural drives, since nature has now come "under the sway of the concept," even though the material or content of the ensuing actions is the same as that which nature, operating alone, would have provided. But once it has clearly recognized its pure drive for freedom for the sake of freedom, the actions of the I receive a new content as well. Henceforth, the I is not merely formally but also materially free and thus capable of accomplishing what nature alone could never accomplish. According to Fichte, any I that recognizes its own pure drive

for freedom for its own sake will affirm the following: because I possess such a drive, nature (and hence, my own natural drive) “has no *control* over me”; instead, I ought to determine myself quite independently of the dictates of the natural drive. This implies that I must be capable of intervening in “the series of nature” and initiating a new series within the same. The aim of the pure drive is not pleasure or enjoyment, but is the dignity [*Würde*] of the I itself, “which consists in absolute self-sufficiency [*absoluten Selbständigkeit und Selbstgenügsamkeit*].”<sup>24</sup>

Through this final and highest act of reflection, the individual I recognizes its pure drive not as something alien or in any way foreign to itself, but as constituting its very essence as an I. (This is the sense in which the material freedom of the I follows from clear reflection upon its formal freedom.) Now the individual can recognize itself for what it most truly is: namely, a “tool of the pure will” (pure will being just another way of describing the pure drive of the I) or “instrument of the moral law.”<sup>25</sup> And now, for the first time, it can posit itself as truly, “internally,” and *materially* free. Though such freedom is bound by no external, natural laws, it is by no means lawless; for it is bound by its own law, the law of freedom itself. Material freedom is thus the same thing as self-legislation or “autonomy.”<sup>26</sup>

The law in question—which is, of course, the *moral* law—does not determine or necessitate the individual I to act in any particular way, since if it did so, the I would then cease to be what it can never cease to be so long as it does not cease to be an I: that is to say, free. Instead, it stipulates what one *ought* to do in a particular situation, and it does this purely in accordance with the intellect’s newly discovered concept of the I’s own original self-sufficiency or formal freedom. Since the basis of the act that ought to occur lies entirely in the original freedom of the I, it is one “that ought to occur purely and simply because it ought to occur. This ought is therefore an absolute, categorical ought, and the rule in question is a law that is valid without exception, since its validity is simply subject to no possible condition whatsoever.”<sup>27</sup> Though the force of the moral ought can certainly be described as a kind of “compulsion,” such compulsion, Fichte insists, is not only not incompatible with the freedom of the I, but is instead, the highest expression of the same.

Let us now consider Fichte’s efforts to apply this general theoretical framework within the context of an account of the moral development of actual human beings. The first thing one becomes aware of when one becomes aware of oneself as an empirical I, according to Fichte, is one’s

natural drive, a drive one shares with all the other animals. But, as already noted, insofar as one is a conscious rational being at all, one is not simply driven by this drive; for one already possesses freedom in the “formal” sense described above. To be sure, one is not at first aware of such purely formal freedom, and therefore is not free for oneself but only in the eyes of others. In his own eyes, such a person remains little more than an animal, driven by desire.

And yet, insists Fichte, one can at any time become aware of one’s formal freedom by means of a freely initiated act of reflection upon the same. As a spontaneously occurring act, such a reflection cannot really be explained; it is, says Fichte, something that simply “occurs through absolute freedom,” something that “happens because it happens.” As we know from our previous genetic account of moral consciousness, such an act of reflection “ought to ensue; the empirical I ought to correspond to the pure I. But it does not *have to* ensue.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, though others may provide one with an “occasion” for such a reflection, they can never cause it to occur.

When and if such a free reflection upon one’s formal freedom does occur, however—and Fichte seems confident that this will be the case in the vast majority of human beings, though not perhaps in all—the individual thereby “tears himself away from the natural drive and positions himself as a free intellect independent of the natural drive.”<sup>29</sup> This provides him with something he did not possess before: namely, the power to defer gratification of a natural drive and to choose between satisfying or not satisfying several different drives. Thus, he becomes conscious that he possesses something essential to actual freedom: the power of choice or *Willkür*. A free choice presupposes, first, that one has formed a concept of what one is choosing and, second, that one has some reason or ground for choosing as one does. For Fichte, the concept of a radically ungrounded choice is self-contradictory. The ground in question serves as a rule guiding the individual’s free choice, which Fichte, following Kant, calls a “maxim.” At this point, of course, there is nothing in the consciousness of the individual we are observing but his natural drive, a drive that aims at pleasure and satisfaction. Hence, he will inevitably but “freely” choose as his maxim some rule for maximizing his own happiness. And in this way he becomes more than he was before: an *intelligent* animal. Even though the content of such a maxim is provided solely by nature, the maxim itself, at least with respect to its form (as a rule for choosing) is a product of the I’s own freedom.

One does not have to remain an intelligent animal in this sense, though Fichte concedes that it is “generally the case”<sup>30</sup> that human beings do in fact often remain at this lower level of reflection. Yet he insists that one has an obligation not to remain at this level of reflection, but to proceed to a higher level, at which genuine, material freedom first becomes possible—a level of reflection at which one can freely provide oneself with one’s own ends, and not simply take them up from nature. This new and spontaneous act of free reflection upon one’s original (formal) freedom as an I is precisely what opens the door to the possibility of genuine material freedom, that is, to moral autonomy.

Nevertheless, it may not lead *directly* to this result. Instead, it might stop halfway, as it were, so that one is clearly aware of one’s capacity to set ends for oneself freely and without any dependence upon the natural drive, but is not yet aware of one’s own pure drive as a new ground of choice or source of ends. It is the latter that that allows one to legislate for oneself as an individual a law that does not depend upon the free choice of the empirical subject—a freedom that is never more than formal.<sup>31</sup> Some people, however, do not complete the reflection in question, but stop, as it were, with the recognition of their own freedom of choice (*Willkür*). Such people recognize their capacity to set ends for themselves but fail to recognize that such a capacity also requires a regulative law of its own, one derived from a deeper insight into the formal freedom of the I and the relation of the same to the pure drive. Even if such a person were, “in some incomprehensible manner,” to become aware of his drive toward self-sufficiency, it would appear to him to be something contingent and blind, and bound by no law whatsoever. If there is any material maxim for the use of his freedom, it could only be this: that “lawless and arbitrary choice [*gesetzlose Willkür*] should have dominion over everything.”<sup>32</sup> Here Fichte is obviously thinking of a character similar to Jacobi’s *Eduard Allwill*, an anarchical “beautiful spirit,” driven by his will but incapable of legislating a law for the same: a rebel without a cause, as it were. To be sure, such a person is no longer merely an intelligent animal, for he is aware of his drive toward self-sufficiency, but he does not fully realize all that is necessarily associated with the latter drive, and therefore it drives him blindly.<sup>33</sup>

Though this clearly represents an advance beyond the previous standpoint of reflection, with its maxim of personal happiness, it also presents a new danger to the individual. For such a person will view actions in accord with duty not as binding obligations, but as heroic and

meritorious. For this reason, says Fichte, it is easier to improve the first type of human beings (“intelligent animals”) than these rebels without a cause. Though the latter standpoint may be very widespread among human beings,<sup>34</sup> it is also, according to Fichte, “irrational” and internally unstable, and with experience it is to be hoped that the proponent of blind *Willkür* will come to recognize the inadequacy of arbitrary self-assertion as a maxim of freedom, which will lead him to look more closely at the formal freedom of the I and become more clearly aware of his own pure will. With this, he will complete the course of reflection leading to the final standpoint: that of morality, that is, freedom under its own laws, material freedom.

A human being has only to raise to clear consciousness this drive to absolute self-sufficiency—which, when it operates as a blind drive, produces a very immoral character—and then, as was shown earlier, simply by means of this very act of reflection, this same drive will transform itself within him into an absolutely commanding law. . . . As a result of this reflection the blind drive for absolute causality becomes a law of conditioned causality. The human being in question now knows that he absolutely ought to do something. If this knowledge is to be transformed into action, then the human being must make it his maxim to do always and in every case what duty demands, *because duty demands it*.<sup>35</sup>

The reflection Fichte is here describing is one in which one explicitly reflects upon what was revealed in the preceding reflection: namely, one’s own *Willkür* or power of choice, the decision-making capacity of the I, which underlies even the wholly natural variety of (formally) “free will.” This, he assures us, will lead to a new and much clearer recognition of what is actually implicit in the concept of the original and merely formal freedom of the I. Such an intellect, writes Fichte, takes “self-sufficiency [*Selbständigkeit*] as a norm, in accordance with which the intellect charges itself to determine itself freely. . . . [T]he concept of self-sufficiency thus contains both the power and the law demanding that one employ this power steadfastly. You cannot think of the concept of self-sufficiency without thinking of these two [the power and the law] as united.”<sup>36</sup> The materially free individual therefore is one

who takes the aim of reason itself (the pure I, the pure will) to be his own, and in all his decisions and actions he strives to contribute to the best of his ability to achieving “the self-sufficiency of reason as such.”<sup>37</sup>

Once one has elevated oneself to this reflective standpoint, Fichte assures his readers, one simply cannot help but do what duty commands.

It is absolutely impossible and contradictory that anyone with a clear consciousness of his duty at the moment he acts could, in good consciousness, *decide not to do his duty*, that he should rebel against the law, refusing to obey it and making it his maxim not to do his duty, because it is his duty. Such a maxim would be diabolical; but the concept of the devil is self-contradictory and therefore annuls itself. —We can prove this as follows: To say that a human being is clearly aware of his duty means that he, as an intellect, absolutely demands of himself that he do something; to say that he decides to act in good consciousness contrary to his duty means that, at the same undivided moment, he demands of himself that he not do the very same thing. At one and the same moment, therefore, these contradictory demands would be placed upon him by one and the same power—a presupposition that annuls itself and involves the clearest and most patent contradiction.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this rather sweeping declaration, Fichte makes it clear that even a person who has liberated himself in the material sense just described remains at every moment capable of immoral actions. He is, after all, as Fichte observes, “free, and by means of his freedom he is also able to act immorally.”<sup>39</sup> It is in recognition of this possibility, says Fichte, that one wants to say, “I will and can will that the other person be free, but only on the condition that he use his freedom to advance the end of reason; otherwise, I certainly cannot will that he be free.” And this, he adds, “is quite correct. If the wish for universal morality is my ruling wish, as it surely ought to be, then I absolutely must wish to abolish any use of freedom that violates the moral law.” And yet it is at the same time equally true that “if freedom is abolished, then *all* the causality of reason is abolished, including its causality with respect to self-sufficiency. No one who wants self-sufficiency, therefore, can fail to want freedom. Freedom is the absolute condition for all morality, and without it no



morality whatsoever is possible.”<sup>40</sup> It is precisely this “contradiction” that has to be addressed by any adequate theory of moral education.

Fichte also offers a further explanation of moral failure: namely, the fact that one fails to sustain the level of self-reflection required in order to remain aware of one’s material freedom and the duty this imposes upon one to contribute to the end of reason as such. Even after one has first obtained a clear consciousness of the moral law, this same consciousness may become obscured and weakened simply from one’s failure to “hold fast” to one’s new insight into one’s material freedom. This happens, says Fichte, because, as natural beings, we share with nature the dominant trait of the same: to wit, inertia. It is therefore mental inertia or laziness (*Trägheit*) that explains both the failure of some people ever to make the move to the requisite higher level of reflection and the failure of others to remain there once they have made it.<sup>41</sup> It follows that one of the more important aims of moral education is to equip the individual with a character that will counter his natural tendency toward sloth. And the way to accomplish this aim, according to Fichte, is to appeal to his sense of self-respect, to his pride.

The individual would have to see himself in his contemptible shape and feel disgust toward himself; he would have to see exemplars who elevate him and provide him with an image of how he ought to be, who infuse him with respect, along with a desire to become worthy of respect himself. There is no other path toward cultivation.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding the spontaneously initiated act of reflection by means of which one becomes clearly conscious of one’s material freedom in the full, moral sense, one can say what was said of the preceding free reflection, by means of which one first became aware of one’s own formal freedom and hence of one’s power of choice: namely, that we can provide no explanation of how and why one chooses to engage in the new reflection in question. This too, according to Fichte, is something that “just happens,” and when it does, one has freely transformed oneself from an intelligent animal or rebel without a cause into a materially free human being. To be sure, Fichte believes that anyone who has accomplished this final reflection will insist that everyone ought to raise himself to this same level,<sup>43</sup> but we cannot force anyone to do so nor can we really explain how such a reflection is possible. As Fichte candidly confesses:

There is something incomprehensible here, and it cannot be otherwise, since we are now standing at the boundary of all comprehensibility: namely, the doctrine of freedom as it applies to the empirical subject. So long as I do not yet occupy a higher standpoint of reflection, then this standpoint does not exist for me, and hence I cannot have a concept of what I am supposed to do before I actually do it. Yet it nevertheless remains the case that this is what I absolutely ought to do. . . . The situation could not be otherwise, for an act of freedom is purely and simply because it is, and it is what is absolutely primary [*ein absolut erstes*], something that cannot be connected to anything else or explained on the basis of anything else.<sup>44</sup>

Fichte's basic claim here seems to be this: every I is, as such, radically self-sufficient and thus formally free and thus at least *potentially* free in the more robust, material sense as well. But additional and spontaneous acts of reflection upon one's formal freedom as an I are required in order to become, first, aware of one's power of free choice, and then of one's actual material freedom. The latter is not attained until the maxim of one's free choice is itself provided by reason alone, which requires a still higher reflection upon self-sufficiency as a norm. Though Fichte never actually says so, what his account strongly suggests is that human freedom is not an all or nothing proposition, but should be considered a matter of degrees.

When we look at freedom in this way, we cannot avoid asking questions about *how* one is able to proceed from a lower to a higher degree of freedom, that is, asking questions about the process of moral education or cultivation and the relation of the same to human freedom—the very question raised by the passage from the *Addresses* with which I began. So what does the *System of Ethics* have to say on this topic?

Here again, there is a certain ambivalence in Fichte's account. On the one hand, he insists that one can—and indeed should—lift oneself by one's own bootstraps, as it were, and achieve an awareness of one's material freedom purely through one's own spontaneity. In accordance with his original being as an I, every human being is “free and independent of nature,” says Fichte, “even if he is not free in actuality.” Moreover, “he always ought to tear himself loose from this state; and if one considers him to be absolutely free, then he is also *able* to do this.” Yet this seems to involve a paradox, which Fichte does not try to conceal, namely:

Before he can freely tear himself loose, however, he must first be free. But it is precisely his freedom itself that is fettered; the very force through which he is supposed to help himself is allied against him. No balance is established here; instead, there is [only] the weight of his nature, which is what holds him in check, and there is no counterweight from the side of the moral law. It is indeed true that a human being absolutely *ought* to step onto the other side of the scale and decide this conflict; and it is also true that he actually possesses within himself the force to give himself as much weight as is necessary, up to infinity, in order to outweigh his own inertia and that he can, at any moment, release this force from himself by putting pressure on himself, through sheer will. But how is he ever supposed to arrive at this act of willing, and how does he first become able to place such pressure on himself? Such a state [of willing] by no means emerges from the state he is in, which instead yields the opposite state, one that holds him in check and fetters him. . . . If one views this matter in purely natural terms, then it is absolutely impossible that a human being should be able to help himself; he cannot improve at all in this way. Only a miracle could save him—a miracle, moreover, which he himself would have to perform.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, Fichte also explicitly recognizes that the assistance (or at least the example) of other human beings is, generally speaking, essential to the process of becoming clearly aware of one's own material freedom—and doing so by exercising it. Even if—miraculously?—self-made moral agents remain possible, they are certainly not the norm. Fortunately, however, as Fichte argues in the *Foundations of Natural Right* and *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* and reiterates in the *Science of Ethics*, humans necessarily are and ought to recognize themselves to be social beings.<sup>46</sup> Thus, their development *as* human beings, which is focused upon their moral education, must generally be understood as a social phenomenon, requiring constant interaction between individuals.

For Fichte, the main aim of primary education is the moral/religious cultivation of the pupil, which it accomplishes by assisting the child as he progresses from a merely natural being, to the level of an intelligent animal, to that of autonomous moral agent. One might therefore say that the purpose of primary education is to assist the child in becoming clearly

aware of his own formal freedom as an I, so that he can exercise this freedom materially as well. The primary education of the child is not, however, completed when he becomes aware of his own pure drive and capable of conscientious action. In addition, he must acquire certain technical skills, since otherwise he could not be what he is being cultivated to become: “a good tool for furthering the end of reason.”<sup>47</sup>

Since this process of education begins at birth, it seemed only appropriate to Fichte during his Jena period that the primary responsibility for such education be assigned to the parents. Such an upbringing must precede any kind of specialized technical or professional training, and absolutely everyone should undergo the same kind of education, since the point of the same is to allow every child to recognize clearly the moral vocation that he shares with everyone else and to acquire the same sense of obligation to the same.<sup>48</sup> (Reflection upon the difficulty of assuring that everyone has the same kind of moral “home schooling” is surely one of the reasons Fichte later abandoned this position and called for a system of universal public education in sequestered public institutions.)

The appropriate *means* of moral education are described by Fichte as well: the parents should be concerned above all to develop their child’s awareness of his own freedom and all that this entails, but they are at the same time obliged to protect and to preserve their child. For this reason it will sometimes be necessary, not to extirpate, but to limit the child’s lawless (formal) freedom insofar as this conflicts with their duty to protect him or with their duty to cultivate his (material) freedom.

Though the first goal of the child’s early educators must be to instill in the child a degree of obedience and self-discipline—since this, says Fichte, is “the root of morality”<sup>49</sup>—they should not attempt to do this by compulsory means, since what they are trying to do is to cultivate the child’s free obedience. And this, according to Fichte, is something the child acquires only from the example of his parents, more specifically, from his “obscurely felt” recognition of their “wisdom and goodness,” which leads him to subordinate his will to theirs freely.<sup>50</sup>

The aim of moral education is not to abolish the freedom of the child, but to cultivate and shape it as an appropriate instrument of the child’s moral will, which, as we have seen, can be attained only by means of a freely undertaken act of reflection on the part of the child. The goal of the moral educator is to do all he can to foster and to stimulate such reflection, in order to “set freedom in motion” within the pupils and “lead them to the good principle within themselves.”<sup>51</sup> And the most effective

means of accomplishing this is by setting a good personal example of moral behavior.<sup>52</sup>

What they must never do, however, is to “restrict their children’s freedom for the sake of morality; for something is moral only to the extent that it is done or not done freely.”<sup>53</sup> Restrict it to some degree they must, however. But they can do this only when there is no other way to fulfill their parental duty to cultivate the child morally. “Thus, the very same end that requires me to protect the freedom of those who are equal to me also requires that I restrict the freedom of my child.”<sup>54</sup> But such restriction is strictly limited and no longer justified when it ceases to promote this end. Hence, the parents must always bear in mind that “one is educating free beings and not machines without a will, to be used by the first person who lays hold of them. On this matter, however,” concedes Fichte, “the parents alone are their own sole judge; they have to come to terms with themselves about this in the court of their own conscience.”<sup>55</sup>

In the same year the *Science of Ethics* appeared, Fichte gave a lecture (which he never published) on *Ascetics, as an Appendix to Morals*, in which he calls attention once again to the importance of recognizing the sense in which all human beings, whether they recognize the moral law or not, are “formally free” and thus insulated from the causal power of nature. But here Fichte makes an important addition to his previous discussion of formal freedom by conceding that this description of the formal freedom of the individual (as an I) does not really apply to that same individual “before he is a human being, i.e., when he is an unconscious child” or to those who never become a human being at all (“idiots and cretins”) or, finally, to those “raised by animals.”<sup>56</sup> This point is significant, since it suggests that even formal freedom is in some vital sense a product of socialization. This repeats a point first introduced in the *Foundations of Natural Right*: we are not born human beings, but must be raised and cultivated by other human beings to become such.<sup>57</sup>

In this same lecture, Fichte also reiterates his by now familiar claim that the good is something that can only proceed from the soul of an individual and cannot be produced by any external means nor according to any rule. But to concede that we are unable to compel others to become aware of their own material freedom is not to deny that we can provide them with useful—indeed, for most of us at least, indispensable—assistance or guidance for accomplishing this. And this is most likely to occur, reiterates Fichte, when, through one’s own personal example, one

manages to engage the pupils' "feeling of respect and gets them to direct their feeling of respect upon themselves."<sup>58</sup>

Fichte returned to this topic again in 1804, in his unpublished "Aphorisms on Education," written in conjunction with an abortive effort to set up in his own home a private elementary school for his own child and the children of a few colleagues and friends. It is a very high-minded document indeed, which begins with the declaration that "to educate a human being means to provide him with the opportunity to become the master and self-ruler of his entire power" and not to prepare him for any particular social role [*Stand*]. What matters for this kind of education is not so much what the pupil has learned as what he is.<sup>59</sup>

The pedagogic method advocated in these aphorisms is one that encourages the pupil to acquire everything on his own and for himself. With specific reference to moral education, Fichte stoutly denies the possibility of "*positive* moral education," in the sense of a curriculum explicitly intended to cultivate virtue in the pupil. Instead:

Morality must spring up on its own and gradually grow higher and spread in the modest calm of one's own heart, without idle talk and egotism, as external relations become both more numerous and clearer to the child himself. So it must be, and this is something that will always occur on its own and without any intentional assistance, *so long as the pupil is surrounded by nothing but good examples and everything that is bad, vulgar, and base is kept from his eyes.*<sup>60</sup>

In 1806, Fichte once again turned his attention to pedagogy and began a new and more serious study of the writings of Pestalozzi,<sup>61</sup> and he expressed his new thoughts on this subject in two unpublished dialogues entitled "Patriotism and Its Opposite." Eighteen-six was also the year in which he delivered his public lecture series *On the Characteristics of the Present Age*, in which he distinguished five general epochs of human history and identified his own era as that of "complete sinfulness." This new and much more negative characterization of his contemporaries is reflected in his new and significantly revised thoughts on education in general and moral education in particular.

In the second of these dialogues, Fichte laments the well-nigh-universal intellectual and moral corruption of his contemporaries, which he

says is the true source of all their other woes (such as their inability to resist the Napoleonic invasions). Any solution to this problem must, he insists, come from science itself, that is, from the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the goal of which is “to put into the free possession of human beings the fundamental source of truth and reality, at their point of absolute unity.”<sup>62</sup> This, and this alone, he insists is “the sole means for healing sick mankind.”<sup>63</sup> But in order for human beings to become receptive to such healing, they would first have to be able to understand the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself—something which, as Fichte frequently lamented, most people seem incapable of grasping. So how might they acquire the capacity to grasp it?

Fichte answers this question by describing how the kind of science he is talking about presupposes the ability to grasp what is immediately or intuitively self-evident, and he complains that this same ability has been all but extirpated by the prevailing system of education. Since everyone (that is, every I, as such) is necessarily endowed with this power, the way to prepare people for the new science is to provide them with a radically new kind of education, one that can cultivate that “art of intuition” they so obviously lack.<sup>64</sup> Fortunately, announces Fichte, we already possess an excellent model of just such a system of education: namely, that of the Swiss pedagogue Heinrich Pestalozzi. To be sure, Pestalozzi designed his system specifically for the children of the poor, but it is, in fact, “the sole means of salvation for mankind as a whole”; and it is this because it is “the sole means for forming a generation that would be capable of understanding Kant and the *Wissenschaftslehre*.”<sup>65</sup> Such an educational system is therefore “the absolutely indispensable elementary education of the entire future generation and of all generations to come”—indeed, of “the entire human race.”<sup>66</sup> It is precisely for this reason that Fichte proposes—now, for the first time—that it might serve as the model for a new system of German “national education.”

What he singles out for special praise in his account of Pestalozzi’s educational methods is its emphasis on letting the child discover things for himself, and, more specifically, encouraging him to discover himself by learning to clarify his feelings. The aim is to develop the child’s power of circumspection and self-awareness [*Besonnenheit*], so that he is able to isolated individual feelings within his chaotic stream of feelings and eventually raise himself above the compulsion of these natural feelings altogether, in order to “be born as an I [*gebiert sich zur Ichheit*].”<sup>67</sup> Thus, Fichte here proposes a new account of the child’s first awareness of his own formal freedom, as something that grows directly from his awareness

of and growing ability to discriminate between his various feelings and between those feelings and himself.

Fichte's interest in Pestalozzi continued over the following year, during which he read for the first time (in the summer of 1807) what is perhaps the latter's best-known work, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (1801), and took copious notes on the same.<sup>68</sup> This only reinforced his devotion to Pestalozzi's educational scheme, which he described in a letter to his wife as "the true means for healing sick humanity—as well as the only means that is capable of making it possible for them to understand the *Wissenschaftslehre*"<sup>69</sup>—two goals that, by this point, had become closely intertwined for Fichte.

## II

With this, we return to our starting point, the *Addresses to the German Nation*, which Fichte began delivering in Berlin in December 1807 and completed in April 1808, just a month before they were published. Let us see if this long detour through Fichte's earlier writings has better positioned us to understand the place of individual freedom in Fichte's new scheme for national education and the relationship of the same to his new plan for cultivating morality in human beings.

In these *Addresses*, Fichte picks up the theme of the abject corruption of the present epoch in world history. We now live, he declares, at the end of the era of "complete selfishness, which is the "root of all other corruption."<sup>70</sup> He informs his readers that the collapse of the Prussian forces in the face of the Napoleonic armies is a clear sign that this same age has reached its conclusion, and that "selfishness has annihilated itself by its complete development, because it has thereby lost its self and the self-sufficiency [*Selbstständigkeit*] of that self."<sup>71</sup> Over and over again in the *Addresses*, Fichte proclaims the same bad news and good news: the old era is dying or dead; we now stand on the brink of a new epoch and have the power to create a "new self and a new age," "an entirely new order of things."<sup>72</sup> Our task, he explains, amounts to nothing less than "a complete transformation of the human."<sup>73</sup>

Since Fichte identifies the previous and still prevailing system of education as the root cause of the expiring era of complete selfishness, his proposed means of ushering in the promised new age is to abolish the old system root and branch and replace it with an entirely new one,



based in large part upon the pedagogic methods of Pestalozzi. The explicit goal of this new system of education will be to bind the interest of the individual to that of the entire community and to accomplish this not by an appeal to enlightened self-interest but rather by developing within each pupil an ethical recognition of the greater whole to which he, as an individual I, essentially belongs. This, of course, was a theme already developed in the *System of Ethics*, where the goal of moral education was to help the pupil recognize himself as an instrument of something much larger than himself as an individual: namely, the pure will or moral law—which he recognizes as his true self. As Fichte now puts it, the goal of primary education is to cultivate in the child an appreciation of “his own extended self, which feels itself only as a part of the whole and can tolerate itself only within an agreeable whole.”<sup>74</sup> Hence, he describes the system of education he is proposing as nothing less than “the deliberate and sure art of cultivating the pupil to pure morality.”<sup>75</sup>

On one point Fichte is absolutely clear: the explicit goal of the new system is nothing less than the creation of a new type of person, an “extended self,” a “universal” or “national” self, whose self-interest extends to the whole because he really does see *himself*—and see himself *only*—as an individual bound by a universal moral law.<sup>76</sup> In order to produce a human being of this sort, one with a “firm and ever-ready will,” a will that can never will other than it now wills, it will first be necessary is to “annihilate his freedom” and “absorb it into necessity,” so that it will become “simply impossible” for him to will anything in violation of the moral law.<sup>77</sup> A person educated in this manner, promises Fichte, simply “must become good.”<sup>78</sup>

But Fichte now recognizes that such a supremely ambitious educational program cannot rely upon moral exhortations to accomplish its lofty aim. Much stronger and more direct means will be required, because, says Fichte, by the time the pupil begins his education his will is already “fixed.” Presumably, what he is referring to here is the emerging will of the child, insofar as this is determined, in part, purely by his natural drive, and in part by the corrupting influences of those around him—i.e., his “natural” educators, including quite specifically his parents. Fichte also seems to think that the child who enters such an educational institution will already have raised himself to a sufficient awareness of his formal freedom to be able to recognize and exercise his own power of free choice (not unlike that “rebellious” stage of self-consciousness mentioned in the *System of Ethics*.) *This*—and this alone—is the kind of “free will” that must

be completely eradicated before the new system of moral education can have any effect upon the pupil.

The appropriate way to further cultivate the will of the child and develop his capacity for genuine, material freedom, says Fichte, is to help him actively to love and take pleasure in what is good; and the way to do this is to replace his self-love with “another kind of love, one that aims directly at the good, simply as such and for its own sake.”<sup>79</sup> This explains Fichte’s attraction to Pestalozzi’s pedagogics, since the focus of the later is to encourage children to engage actively in their own education. Pestalozzi also emphasizes the importance of engaging the child’s power of imagination, the very same power that Fichte proposes to cultivate in order to enable the child to produce for himself images of the good—not for their own sake, but as “pre-figurations” of what ought to become the case. Only if the child learns to produce for himself an image of the good will he love it and seek to realize it in the world.

Here yet again, Fichte suggests that the most effective way to cultivate the child’s moral self-awareness is to provide him with compelling examples of upright character and behavior, as exemplified in this case by the teachers in Fichte’s new educational institutions. Fichte explains that the efficacy of such instruction by example depends upon its appeal to the child’s own drive for self-respect, “the purest and most original form in which the fundamental drive of man appears within his consciousness.”<sup>80</sup> It is in the adults who surround him and whose example he respects that the child first discovers a measure of his self-respect, which he will then internalize. Until then, however, the educator must appeal to the child’s natural drive for respect, which endows him (in the form of his educators) “with an external conscience, until one is produced within him.”<sup>81</sup>

But even if this new approach to primary education prevents selfishness from taking root in the pupil, something more is required for cultivating the moral will itself. How can the student be led to project for himself a specific image of the moral order and do so in such a way that “it will simply be impossible for him not to will this order and work with all his powers for its advancement”?<sup>82</sup> To this, Fichte proposes the following answer: the child will be led to do this for himself by, first, learning to project an image of the specific social order of which he himself is already a part, in the school envisioned by Fichte. In this way he will become accustomed to thinking of himself not simply as an individual, but as a part of larger whole, with which he identifies himself and to which he has specific responsibilities.

This, of course, will require a completely new understanding of what constitutes an educational institution and of the relationship of the same to the larger society, as well as to the pupil. The new system will require, among other things, that children be separated as completely as possible from the influence of their families, which, Fichte has now apparently come to realize, bear a considerable degree of blame for the general corruption and selfishness of the age. Rather than moral instruction by the parents being part of the solution to the problem of moral corruption, it is instead part of the problem.

Moreover, in order for an educational institution to play the role of society in miniature that is assigned to it in Fichte's scheme, it has to be separated as completely as possible from the surrounding society and must be, to the greatest extent possible, a closed and economically self-sufficient institution (somewhat in the manner of the state envisioned in Fichte's 1800 tract on the *Closed Commercial State*). The survival of such a school depends on everyone, including all the students, working for the good of the entire community (through various kinds of agricultural, mechanical, and intellectual labor). In this way every pupil will actively learn what it means to a part of whole larger than himself, to the interests of which he willingly subordinates his own private interests, and learn to "take pleasure in his activities and work on behalf of the whole."<sup>83</sup>

But this is not Fichte's only strategy for cultivating the moral self-consciousness of his pupils. Not only will they learn to think of themselves as members of a human social order, but also as members of a still higher, purely intelligible order. On this point he is somewhat—and perhaps deliberately—vague, but once again he appeals to the self-activity of the pupil himself for the production of this higher insight. Just as the child was led by his own self-activity to project for himself an ideal image of the social order as it ought to be, so he will also be led to construct for himself an image of "the supersensible world, in which nothing becomes." Moreover, he will also recognize the necessity of such an image and see that his own true life is his spiritual life, a life that exists in "living thought alone," whereas everything else merely appears to exist. Once he has achieved this insight, rhapsodizes Fichte, he will recognize his own life, along with that of every other spiritual being, "as an eternal link in the chain of the revelation of the divine life and learn to hold it sacred. . . . In a word, this development will cultivate him to religion; and this religion, which consists in living our life in God, should indeed prevail and be carefully nurtured in the new age."<sup>84</sup>

Admittedly, it is not easy to see what Fichte has in mind here, but it would appear to be something like the following: what will lead the pupil to this new religious insight into his own spiritual essence is nothing less than his mastery of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, understood not as an externally imposed doctrine, but as a way of thinking that each pupil must make his own through his own activity—something one can grasp, as Fichte frequently insisted, only by “thinking it for oneself.” Here, however, the emphasis is less upon the speculative content of this system than upon the beneficial practical effect such intellectual activity will have upon the pupil’s self-conception.

But simply *understanding* the true relationship between the spiritual and sensible realms is not the final goal of the system of primary moral education envisioned by Fichte; for even if the pupil has been “educated to the true religion,” in the Fichtean sense of the same, this remains a purely *cognitive* achievement. Hence, the final step in the ethical cultivation of the pupil is to stimulate him to determine his actions in the sensible world on the basis of his new knowledge of the supersensible one—to *live* his new religion (or philosophy), as it were. But, asks Fichte rhetorically, how can this be guaranteed? How can the educator be sure that, when the need arises and the student has left the institute, his religion will have a practical application and serve as a motive for doing what is right? How can we be sure that his moral/religious education will—in Fichte’s inimitable phrase—“work infallibly”?<sup>85</sup>

His answer is that that such a question could never arise, inasmuch as the products of such education will be acquainted with no gulf between theory and practice. Instead, he assures us, the pupil will have been “cultivated or formed [*gebildet*] in such a way that no knowledge he possesses will ever become something cold and dead for him as long as there is any possibility of it becoming animated.” For such a person, *all* knowledge, and not just knowledge of philosophy or religion, “shall of necessity intervene directly in life, as and when life requires it.”<sup>86</sup> In defending his optimism on this point, Fichte once again (in the third *Address*), invokes his theory of the basic drives (though this time in a somewhat modified version), in an effort to explain how cultivation of the “whole person” requires cultivation of both the will and the intellect of the child. The reciprocal interaction and development of his intellect and will is assured by the very nature of the pedagogy, which, in cultivating the child’s self-knowledge, also cultivates his love for the same and produces in him a burning desire to act in accordance with his deepening

self-understanding—which is, of course, the same lesson Fichte tried to impart to his first students in Jena: “Act, act! For that is what we are here for.”<sup>87</sup>

There will simply be no opportunity for the cultivation of selfishness in the new educational institution, because it constantly and explicitly aims to cultivate each individual’s “original drive,” which is the essential link between that individual and the universal moral order. In contrast, explains Fichte, selfishness is inevitably based on a faulty and obscure *feeling* of oneself (which is presumably the situation of the pupil when he first enters Fichte’s school). This “obscure feeling” of oneself is, according to Fichte, “the very root of selfishness.”<sup>88</sup> Hence, the pupil will be constantly encouraged and stimulated to reflect upon and to clarify for himself this obscure feeling, until he eventually obtains a new, clear consciousness of his own freedom as an I and of all that this entails. He will then realize that what he is most truly is “a link in a moral order”—a realization that, as Fichte once again assures us, will inevitably be accompanied by an ardent love for this spiritual order and a burning desire to realize it on earth through one’s own, freely willed actions. But only education can replace obscure feeling with clear knowledge. And thus it must be upon this alone that we pin our hopes for salvation from our present condition of complete sinfulness and selfishness: upon an altogether new system of education, one that, Fichte promises, will “certainly usher in an entirely new order of things, a new creation.”<sup>89</sup>

In the seventh *Address*, Fichte interrupts his discussion of education reform to address the underlying question: What constitutes genuine human freedom? In raising this question he introduces a new distinction between genuine or “essential” freedom and the “appearance of the same, a discussion that is in many ways simply an update of his earlier distinction between material and formal freedom, albeit couched in the new language of the later versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Properly understood, he now argues, freedom constitutes “the essence of original life,” which is to say that freedom is something “absolutely primary and original in man himself” [*ein absolut erstes und ursprüngliches im Menschen selber*].<sup>90</sup>

As Fichte points out, this is very different than the common understanding of freedom as an “undecided wavering back and forth [*Schwankens*] between several, equally possible alternatives.”<sup>91</sup> The latter, he insists, is really not freedom at all, which commences only with a decision of the will, which is followed by real action. With respect to its form, such a decision is absolutely primary and unconditioned. With respect

to its content, however, it may either refer to what Fichte now calls mere “appearances” or it may instead make reference to the reality beyond such appearances, which he here calls simply “the essence” [*das Wesen*].

Just as Fichte had previously described a “formally free” choice between naturally given ends as lacking “material” freedom, so he now denies that decisions between competing appearances are actually free at all, since the realm of appearances is thoroughly governed by its own law, according to which “each individual part is determined by every other part”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, such a decision is made by an individual who, if he is consistent in his thinking, identifies himself completely with this same realm of appearances and is therefore himself subject to the law of the same. To be sure, he is engaged in an act of conscious self-determination or “willing,” and to this extent he considers himself to be acting freely. The truth, however, is that the appearance of something “original and primary” (i.e., something uncaused) in his decision is just that: a mere *appearance*, which contains nothing “self-sufficient and original.”

In contrast, when “the essence” enters directly into the content of the will’s decision, this results in a genuinely new appearance, one based not upon another appearance but upon something in the I that is actually “self-sufficient and original.” A decision on the part of the will to let this essence “appear” always contains or makes reference to, in Fichte’s words, “something more” than mere appearance, *ein Mehreres* that cannot be explained in accordance with the universal law of the latter. As soon as a decision of the will allows this “something more,” this “essence,” to become visible in the world of appearances (the natural world), it also becomes subject to all of the laws applying the latter. Such an act of willing corresponds to what Fichte had previously called “internal” or “material” freedom, and “the essence” in question corresponds closely to what he had previously called the “pure will,” and both accounts fit the Kantian description of a free act as one in which a new chain of causally connected events is spontaneously initiated by a noumenal subject within the realm of phenomena.

From this, it follows that “freedom” is a deeply ambiguous term. On the one hand, all human beings are originally “free,” in the sense that they find themselves to be wavering between different possible decisions and actions and capable, on their own, as it were, of deciding between them, even if the power of choice is materially determined by the power of nature or “law of appearances” operating within the finite individual. But there is also a higher sense of freedom, the kind possessed only by

a person “whose life is seized by the true life and whose life has sprung directly forth from God—he is free and believes in freedom both in himself and in others.”<sup>93</sup> Employing the terminology of the *System of Ethics*, one could say that the first sort of decision is only “formally” free, whereas the latter is also free with respect to its content, or “materially.”

### III

By reexamining Fichte’s remarks about freedom, selflessness, and moral education in the *Addresses* in the context of his earlier reflections on the same topic, it becomes clear that these remarks, which at first glance seem so unpalatable and extreme, do not in fact represent any new “totalitarian turn” in his thinking. Indeed, when we place them in the context of the distinction between material and formal freedom developed in his Jena writings, we can see that there is no contradiction in Fichte’s strategy of limiting or even abolishing human freedom in one sense in order to foster and cultivate it in another.

Of course, one may still object to Fichte’s conception of material freedom as the subordination of the individual’s “natural” drive to ends provided by the “pure drive” that he shares with all other rational beings and possesses just because he is an I. The aim of this investigation has not been to defend Fichte’s theory of freedom against possible criticisms, but only to show that what he had to say on this topic in 1807 represents no real departure from what he was thinking more than a decade earlier. The distinction between various types of freedom is present almost from the start and is always related to the distinction, within the individual human being, between the “pure” and “empirical” aspects of finite I-hood.

This distinction was articulated even before Fichte arrived in Jena. It was, for example, already present in the oration *Concerning Human Dignity*, with which he concluded his lectures in Zurich in the first months of 1794 and which ends with the ringing declaration, “All individuals are included in the one great unity of pure spirit.”<sup>94</sup> To be sure, Fichte’s view of this relationship underwent a certain amount of evolution over the years. For example, when he published his speech *Concerning Human Dignity*, he included a note to the passage just cited, in which he reminded his readers that “the unity of pure spirit is, for me, an *unreachable ideal*, an ultimate goal, which, however, will never be actual.” The same cannot be

said of that “essence” or “something more” to which Fichte refers in the *Addresses*.

This reflects, I would suggest, a crucially important change in the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself, which by 1807 could no longer be described as a strictly *transcendental* philosophy in the sense of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, that is to say, a system that restricts its claims to the sphere of human consciousness and recognizes the latter as a circle within which the human mind is enclosed and from which we—along with our philosophy—can never escape. The later versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* certainly *seem* to go well beyond this circle in order to offer what the earlier versions did not presume to provide: namely, a transcendent explanation of the original determinacy of the finite I. But this does not really effect what Fichte has to say about human freedom and moral education in the *Addresses*.

What has changed, of course, is Fichte’s conception of precisely how an effective moral education should proceed. Whereas he had previously treated this as the private affair of the nuclear family, he now treats it as the most pressing concern of the state and insists that parents must be compelled to surrender their children to the new public educational institutions he prescribes. It is not difficult to imagine why he changed his mind on this important matter. Surely the explanation is to be found in the changes in Fichte’s own historical circumstances and in his rather dramatic response to the collapse of Prussian forces in the face of the Napoleonic invasions.

Desperate times, it seems, inevitably call for desperate measures. Since Fichte attributed the Prussian collapse to the well-nigh-universal moral corruption of his age, and since he attributed this corruption to the defective moral education received by his contemporaries, he could envision no real solution to the contemporary crisis other than through educational reform. This led him to reconsider his earlier views on this topic and to advance, in the *Addresses*, a new and truly radical scheme of universal national education designed not just to cultivate but to ensure the morality of future citizens. The goal of this new scheme was no different from that of his earlier ideas for the cultivation of morality; only the means had changed.

He still recognizes that genuine moral development is always—albeit inexplicably—possible in the absence of appropriate educational institutions and practices. “Miracles,” after all, are always possible. His conception of moral cultivation still emphasizes the importance of personal example as a means of stimulating self-activity and reflection. But his



new understanding of his own age and of the place of the same within the overall historical development of humanity gives his later reflections on moral education a new note of urgency.

This note is only amplified by what one might describe as Fichte's efforts in these public *Addresses* to "sell" his audience on the merits of his proposals for educational reform. There is no internal, systematic requirement that he describe this new system as operating according to "infallible" rules nor as absolutely "guaranteed" to produce citizens who will "necessarily" place the interests of the whole above their own interests. It would have been sufficient to describe the putative advantages of the projected system of education over the prevailing one, along with the salubrious consequences of instituting the same. Instead, Fichte adopted a utopian, perfectionist tone, one not altogether unknown in his earlier writings (such as Book III of *The Vocation of Man*). But such hyperbole should not prevent us from appreciating the possible merits of Fichte's proposals nor from consulting the *Addresses* for deeper insight into the actual content of his philosophy.

To be sure, one may still recoil at Fichte's rather casual talk about the need for the "complete annihilation" of the young pupil's freedom of will. And one may have serious reservations about an educational project that promises to educate a human being in such a manner that "it will become impossible for him not to do what he has recognized as good and to do instead what he has recognized as evil."<sup>95</sup> Though Fichte's rhetoric may seem extreme on such occasions, the claims themselves are, as I have tried to demonstrate, quite in keeping with the account of freedom and moral education found in such earlier works as the *System of Ethics*. There too, Fichte recognizes a kind of lawless and purely formal freedom of the I, which has to be, if not extirpated entirely, then at least curbed in the interests of cultivating another, higher type of material freedom. And there too he declares that a person who has clearly recognized his moral obligations simply must and cannot but act accordingly.

Few readers of the *Addresses*—then or now—are likely to be convinced by Fichte's urgent appeal. Most will raise objections of various sorts to his specific educational proposals and particularly to his conception of moral education, which, as has often been pointed out, seems to anticipate various and subsequent misbegotten schemes of social indoctrination. Fichte, of course, would stoutly reject any such comparison and remind us that none of this can be forced upon the child, who must freely generate within himself an insight into his own full, material freedom.

This, of course, hardly settles the issue. Once one has successfully eradicated the child's lawless and purely formal freedom of choice, what remains? In what sense is he still free to raise himself to and exercise his own full freedom? It is extraordinarily difficult to appreciate the sense in which, despite the "closed" institutional setting and sophisticated techniques of moral cultivation proposed by Fichte, the pupil is still supposed to retain ultimate responsibility for "freely" raising himself to the moral standpoint of material or essential freedom, or to understand how individual freedom is to be reconciled with Fichte's supreme confidence that his proposed educational system will infallibly produce what it aims to produce: human beings who have no choice but to think and to act morally.

But what alternative do we have if we take seriously the profound questions raised by Fichte concerning the nature of human freedom, the relation of the same to the moral law, and the challenge of successfully generating an awareness of the same within the individual? If we reject his answers to these questions, where does that leave us? Waiting for a miracle, perhaps?

## Notes

1. GA, I/10, 118–19; AGN, 22–23. (Though I will provide page references to this translation, I have modified it, as I have most of the English translations cited in this essay—including my own.)

2. Draft of a letter from Fichte to Jens Baggessen, April/May 1795.

3. GA, I/2, 149.

4. GA, I/6, 353n.; "On the Spirit and Letter in Philosophy. In a Series of Letters," trans. Elizabeth Rubenstein, in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schopenhauer, Hegel*, ed. David Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 263.

5. Halle transcript of *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, GA, IV/2, 58; FTP, 168n.

6. Ibid. See too Krause transcript, GA, IV/3, 374; FTP, 168.

7. "The sphere of what is determinable is an infinitely divisible manifold. Material freedom, i.e., the freedom of choice, consists in assembling [*Zusammensetzen*] this manifold, (Formal freedom is simply presupposed.) The practical [I] constructs with freedom a concept of its action, ideal free activity, material freedom, freedom of choice" (Eschen transcript of the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, GA, IV/3, 157–58).

8. GA, I/5, 165; SE, 169.

9. Concerning Fichte's conception of philosophy as "pragmatic history," see ch. 4 Of Breazeale, *Thinking through the Wissenschaftslehre: Themes from Fichte's Early Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

10. Unfortunately, Fichte does not strictly adhere to this understanding of formal freedom in the *System of Ethics*, and in §22 of Part III of the same ("Duties Regarding the Formal Freedom of All Rational Beings") he offers the following, very different definition of formal freedom. "The formal freedom of an individual consists in the continuous reciprocal interaction between his body, both as a tool and as a sensory organ [*als Werkzeug und Sinn*], and the sensible world—an interaction that is determined and determinable only through the individual's freely sketched concept concerning the character of this reciprocal interaction" (GA, I/5, 247; SE, 263–64). This kind of freedom can, of course, be threatened by the actions of others, something that is clearly not true of the kind of "formal freedom" discussed in Pts. I and II, which is also the kind of formal freedom discussed in what follows.

11. GA, I/5, 128; SE, 127.

12. GA, I/5, 127; SE, 126.

13. GA, I/5, 129; SE, 129.

14. Ibid.

15. On "external" and "internal" freedom, see GA, I/5, 214; SE, 225. External freedom, says Fichte, is already included in the concept of the I as an intellect, but internal freedom—the freedom to determine one's own ends—is not.

16. "To will something means to demand that some determinate object—which, in willing, is thought of only as a *possible* object, since otherwise it would not be willed but perceived—become an actual object of experience; and through this demand the latter is placed outside of us. Thus all willing contains within itself the postulate of an object outside of us, and in this concept [of willing] something is thought that is not ourselves" (GA, I/5, 41; SE, 29).

17. GA, I/5, 42; SE, 30.

18. GA, I/5, 45; SE, 33–34.

19. GA, I/5, 48; SE, 37.

20. "This is why a thing cannot be thought of as determining itself, since it does not exist prior to its nature (i.e., the total sum of its determinations). As was just said, something that is supposed to determine *itself* would, in a certain respect, have to be before it is, before it has properties and any nature at all. This can be thought only under our presupposition, under which, however, it can be thought very easily. As an intellect with a concept of its own real being, what is free precedes its real being, and the former [that is, the intellect] contains the ground of the latter [that is, its own real being]. The concept of a certain being precedes this being, and the latter depends upon the former.

“Our claim, therefore, is that only an *intellect* can be thought of as *free*, and that merely by grasping itself as an intellect it becomes free; for only thereby does it subsume its own being under something higher than any being, that is, under a concept” (GA, I/5, 51; SE, 40).

21. GA, I/5, 51; SE, 41. “From this point on, therefore, the I is free, and everything that occurs through the I is a product of this freedom” (GA, I/5, 138; SE, 127–28).

22. “R e s u l t. THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTER OF THE I, THROUGH WHICH IT DISTINGUISHES ITSELF FROM EVERYTHING OUTSIDE OF IT, CONSISTS IN A TENDENCY TO SELF-ACTIVITY FOR SELF-ACTIVITY’S SAKE; AND THIS TENDENCY IS WHAT IS THOUGHT WHEN THE I IS THOUGHT OF IN AND FOR ITSELF, WITHOUT ANY RELATION TO SOMETHING OUTSIDE IT” (GA, I/5, 45; SE, 33–34).

23. GA, I/5, 132; SE, 232.

24. GA, I/5, 134; SE, 135.

25. See GA, I/5, 230, 235, 242, 274–77, and 294; SE, 244, 250, 258, 296–98, and 318.

26. GA, I/5, 67; SE, 58.

27. GA, I/5, 66–67; SE, 57–58.

28. GA, I/5, 165; SE, 169–70.

29. GA, I/5, 170; SE, 166.

30. GA, I/5, 169; SE, 173.

31. See GA, I/5, 167; SE, 171. However, Fichte insists that such a person does not really formulate such a maxim, but is simply driven blindly by his incomplete grasp of his own drive to self-sufficiency.

32. GA, I/5, 175; SE, 180.

33. See GA, I/5, 171–72; SE, 176.

34. See GA, I/5, 175; SE, 180.

35. GA, I/5, 176; SE, 181.

36. Whenever a rational being reflects upon its own formal freedom or self-sufficiency, it at the same time “thinks its freedom under the law of self-sufficiency” (GA, I/5, 63–64; SE, 54).

37. “What I will is morality as such; it does not matter in the least whether this is *in* me or is *outside* me. I will morality from myself only insofar as it pertains to me, and I will it from others insofar as it pertains to them; my end is achieved in the same way through the one as through the other” (GA, I/5, 210; SE, 220). “The object of the moral law within me, as an individual, is not simply me alone but *reason as a whole*. I am the object of this law only insofar as I am one of the instruments of its realization in the sensible world. All it demands of me as an individual, therefore, and all for which it holds me alone responsible is that I should be a capable instrument [of the moral law]” (GA, I/5, 214; SE, 225).

38. GA, I/5, 176–77; SE, 181–82.

39. GA, I/5, 210; SE, 220.

40. GA, I/5, 210–11; SE, 221.

41. See GA, I/5, 183–84; SE, 190–91.

42. GA, I/5, 187; SE, 194.

43. “He absolutely *ought to have* raised himself to a higher level of reflection, and he also *could have done* this. He is to blame for not doing this, and hence he is also to blame for the unworthy maxim that flows from his failure to raise himself to a higher level of reflection” (GA, I/5, 168; SE, 172).

44. GA, I/5, 158; SE, 172–73.

45. GA, I/5, 184; SE, 190–91.

46. “It can thus be proven strictly *a priori* that a rational being does not become rational in an isolated state, but that at least *one* individual outside it must be assumed, another individual who elevates this being to freedom” (GA, I/5, 201; SE, 210).

47. GA, I/5, 294; SE, 318. The cultivation of these basic skills (reading and writing, for example) is also the task of the parents.

48. GA, I/5, 244; SE, 260.

49. GA, I/5, 297; SE, 321.

50. GA, I/5, 296; SE, 320.

51. GA, I/5, 280; SE, 302–303. “The good principle, which is present in all human beings and cannot be eradicated in anyone, is precisely the possibility of being able to respect something unselfishly [*uneigenützig*], without any regard to what is advantageous [to oneself], hence for an utterly *a priori* reason. Furthermore, this good principle is the drive to want to respect oneself, and it is also the impossibility that anyone could sink so low as to despise himself coldly and calmly. It is this principle to which we should lead others” (GA, I/5, 281; SE, 303).

52. GA, I/5, 284; SE, 306.

53. GA, I/5, 295; SE, 319.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. GA, II/5, 68.

57. See GA, I/4, 432; FNR, 132.

58. GA, II/5, 62. This, Fichte notes, is an issue of moral pedagogics and is thus not a proper concern of the science of ascetics, which is instead concerned with suggesting ways to prevent those who have already elevated themselves to the standpoint of morality from “backsliding” and obscuring their sense of duty and with proposing strategies for keeping their conscience alive and alert.

59. GA, II/7, 12.

60. Ibid., 15.

61. Fichte was acquainted with Pestalozzi’s *Lienhard and Gertrude* (1871) as early as 1788 (see the reference to the same in his “Random Thoughts during

a Sleepless Night,” *GA*, II/1, 104). While living in Zurich he also became personally acquainted with the author.

62. *GA*, II/9, 426.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *GA*, II/9, 435.

65. *Ibid.*, 438–39.

66. *Ibid.*, 439–40.

67. *Ibid.*, 442.

68. See *GA*, II/10, 432–57.

69. Fichte to Johanna Fichte, June 3, 1807.

70. *GA*, I/10, 109; *AGN*, 14.

71. *GA*, I/10, 104; *AGN*, 9.

72. *GA*, I/10, 105 and 110; *AGN*, 10 and 15.

73. *GA*, I/10, 216; *AGN*, 118. “So long as men remain imperfect, they cannot but err; and, even if they flee from the mistakes of their predecessors, they will find new ones all too easily in the infinite space of imperfection. Only a complete transformation, only the beginning of an entirely new spirit, can help us” (*GA*, I/10, 280; *AGN*, 178).

74. *GA*, I/10, 112; *AGN*, 17.

75. *GA*, I/10, 131; *AGN*, 35.

76. “Thus it follows that the means of salvation, which I have promised to disclose, consists in cultivating a completely new self, a self that has hitherto existed perhaps as an exception among individuals, but never as a universal and national self” (*GA*, I/10, 112; *AGN*, 17). As Fichte explains in the second *Address*, if some human beings did become good in the past, this was not because of their education, but due purely to chance, to their innate good nature, which outweighed their bad education. The same is the case with those who turned out to be morally bad; this was not because of their education; “instead, they went bad of themselves and due to their natural disposition.” See *GA*, I/10, 119; *AGN*, 24.

77. *GA*, I/10, 117–18; *AGN*, 23.

78. *GA*, I/10, 119; *AGN*, 24. “The education I propose shall be a sure and deliberate art for cultivating in human beings a firm and infallibly good will” (*GA*, I/10: 24).

79. *GA*, I/10, 119–20; *AGN*, 25.

80. *GA*, I/10, 229; *AGN*, 130.

81. *GA*, I/10, 224; *AGN*, 134.

82. *GA*, I/10, 128; *AGN*, 32.

83. *GA*, I/10, 129; *AGN*, 33.

84. *GA*, I/10, 132; *AGN*, 36.

85. *GA*, I/10, 134; *AGN*, 38.

86. *Ibid.*

87. "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation," *GA*, I/3, 57, *EPW*, 184.

88. *GA*, I/10, 137; *AGN*, 41. Here we have further evidence of Fichte's fundamentally Socratic/Platonic attitude toward morality: ignorance, that is, lack of self-knowledge, is *the* problem facing the moral educator. Strictly speaking, there is for Fichte no such thing as an immoral will.

89. *GA*, I/10, 138; *AGN*, 42. Recalling the first of his lectures on *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, Fichte declares: "If humanity is not to remain in this nothingness, it must henceforth make itself into everything it is yet to become. This is the actual vocation of mankind on earth: that it freely make itself into what it truly and originally is." But he then observes that this transformation must also occur at a particular time and place, namely, here and now, in Germany in the wake of the Napoleonic invasions. This is a momentous event, which represents, according to Fichte, "the true midpoint of man's life on earth, between the two principal epochs of the same" (*GA*, I/10, 138; *AGN*, 42).

90. *GA*, I/10, 191 and 195; *AGN*, 92 and 96.

91. *GA*, I/10, 191; *AGN*, 92.

92. *GA*, I/10, 192; *AGN*, 93–94.

93. *GA*, I/10, 194; *AGN*, 95. This of course does not represent Fichte's final word on the topics we have been considering: human freedom, moral development, and the place of coercion in the same. Fichte continued to meditate on these topics for the rest of life, and it would be interesting and worthwhile to follow the course of these meditations in the seven years left to him following the publication of the *Addresses*, paying particular attention to the contents of his recently published "Diary I, March 26–August 14, 1813" and his somewhat notorious lectures on *Theory of the State, or the Relationship between the Primordial State and the Kingdom of Reason*, from the Summer Semester of 1813.

94. *GA*, I/2, 89; *EPW*, 86.

95. *GA*, I/10, 139; *AGN*, 43.

## *Gedachtes Denken/Wirkliches Denken*

### A Strictly Philosophical Problem in Fichte's *Reden*

MÁRIO JORGE DE CARVALHO

#### Introduction. Life and Thought. Life's Resistance to Thought

Life and thought are not exactly a perfect match for each other. Time and again, either life or thought (and in particular philosophical thought) reminds us of this fact. On the one hand, life has its own demands and requirements, and more often than not it leaves no time for thinking or it stands in the way of philosophical inquiry. On the other hand, as E. M. Forster once pointed out, “truth”—and we might add: the quest for it—“is a flower in whose neighbourhood others must wither,”<sup>1</sup> and thought (and in particular philosophical thought) can prove to be a “troublemaker” or a strange guest—so that it seems life would be better off without it. To be sure, this is only part of the picture. For it must also be borne in mind that thinking (and not least, philosophical thinking) stems from life itself—from its unrest, from its needs and perplexities. And, on the other hand, thinking, viz., philosophical thinking is not restricted to itself: in the final analysis, life is what it is all about (and without this connection with life something crucial is lost, and thinking becomes pedantic, inane, and vacuous).

This question is, of course, far too complex to be addressed here. Any attempt to untangle the *intricate*—nay, the veritable *Gordian*—knot of



the relation (the bond, the tension, the paradoxical incongruity) between life and thought would go far beyond the scope of this paper. We shall therefore confine ourselves to a more modest task. We will concentrate on one of the key questions regarding the relation between life and thought, namely, the fact that one can think something, have what seems to be a full understanding of what one thinks, be completely convinced of its truth, etc.—but in such a manner that nevertheless life (one's own life: the very life in which this thinking takes place, the life of the person who believes in its truth, etc.) remains largely unaffected by what one thinks and believes to be true, that is to say, *impervious* or *indifferent* to it. In other words, it is possible not to live what one thinks: one can inwardly “talk the talk without walking the walk”—and indeed so much so that even if one becomes aware of this and tries to overcome this failing, something similar occurs with this new thought, so that at the end of the day, despite all one's efforts, one still does not live what one thinks. This paradox both of life and of thought—namely, the fact that one's life can offer resistance (and indeed tenacious resistance) to one's thought, so that they go separate ways—is what this paper is about.

### Some Milestones in the History of this Question

Being keenly aware of this issue and not failing to take it into account is the watermark of what might be termed *radical thinking*: philosophical thinking that scrutinizes itself and does not forget that paying attention to itself is one of its most important tasks. This is not the place to survey the complex history of this philosophical problem and the various models that have been proposed in order to explain how life can remain unaffected by thought and offer resistance to it. Let it suffice to briefly mention some milestones.

First, the problem we are talking about plays a pivotal role in the *corpus platonicum*. We can use the words from the *Seventh Letter* and say that Plato repeatedly calls our attention to the fact that human beings can be “superficially tinged” by their thoughts (N.B., by the very thoughts they believe to be true)—“like people whose bodies are sunburnt on the surface.”<sup>2</sup> This possibility—the possibility that thinking can be a mere surface coloring, penetrating, like sunburn, only skin deep (so that the  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  remains as unaffected by it as the bulk of one's body remains untinged by sunburn) plays a significant role in various contexts. On the

one hand, it is closely connected with the question whether intellectual grasp is enough to prompt action, or whether there are other important factors that can prevent one from acting according to what one thinks and believes to be true or right. In other words, the possibility in question is closely connected with the problem later tradition associated with Medea's "*video meliora, proboque; deteriora sequor*"<sup>3</sup> or with Paul's epoch-defining words in *Romans 7*: "*Nam velle, adhacēt mihi: perficere autem bonum non invenio. Non enim quod volo bonum, hoc facio; sed quod nolo malum, hoc ago.*"<sup>4</sup> But, on the other hand, Plato's reminder that our thoughts can turn out to be only skin deep does not concern just the connection between thought and action. It also concerns the fact that, in Plato's view, there is thinking and thinking (and indeed a rather complex network of thinking instances and conflicting truth claims, etc.). In other words, Plato's reminder has to do with his very intricate model of the psyche (viz., of the inner *polis*)—a model that, in the final analysis, is very far from being based on a twofold (or indeed a threefold) structure, for it has to do with a multilayered system of mutually transforming forces, each of which is depicted by Plato as having a view (viz., a thinking) of its own, so that a human being is like a society of various thoughts and beliefs, and everything depends on the relation of forces between them (on "who" prevails over "whom" within this inner society—on who holds power, on whether the opposition forces are strong or weak, etc.).

Secondly, let us briefly recall Pascal's doctrine about what he terms "*nos deux pièces,*" viz., his claim that "*nous sommes automate autant qu'esprit* [as much automaton as spirit]."<sup>5</sup> To put it in a nutshell, Pascal points out that there are two different kinds of persuasion, or that being persuaded of something can have two different origins. On the one hand, it can result from thinking about the matter in question, examining it, and getting some sort of self-evident insight into it. But on the other hand, one can be persuaded of something without having ever considered it—without focusing on it, without its being subjected to an inspection by the mind. The former kind of persuasion is what *l'esprit* is all about. The latter is what Pascal's *l'automate* (or *la machine*) stands for.<sup>6</sup> Pascal points out that every "inspection by the mind" has a rather limited capacity: one cannot pay attention to many different issues at the same time.<sup>7</sup> But the exact opposite holds true for the second kind of persuasion—for *l'automate* or *la machine*; in this case, the limited capacity of the focus of attention does not play a significant role; and thus, thanks to the "automaton" or the "machine," it is plainly possible to be persuaded of many different things *at the same*

*time*. And in fact the vast majority of one's assumptions or beliefs is of the second kind—and indeed so much so that their whole “career” as assumptions or beliefs took place in the realm of *l'automate* or *la machine*, and they were never subjected to any inspection by the mind. What is more, when something is being examined and the “inspection by the mind” gives rise to persuasion, the persuasion resulting from the inspection by the mind is only a very small part of the vast set of assumptions one is actually making. Life would be impossible if one's assumptions and beliefs were restricted to those that result from the inspection by the mind that is actually taking place at a given moment in time. And this means that, in the final analysis, the kind of persuasion Pascal's *l'esprit* stands for is embedded in the framework of *l'automate*, so that the views taken by *l'esprit* live, as it were, in a world mostly defined by *l'automate*.

Now, this twofold nature of persuasion paves the way for the possibility of a divorce between life and thought. For it is possible that *l'esprit* and *l'automate* take different views on the same subject—and indeed in such a way that life is shaped by *l'automate*, not by *l'esprit*, viz., by *thought*.

Let us take a closer look at this.

On the one hand, this has to do with the fact that at least in certain cases the claims made by *l'esprit* (viz., by thought) are there only as long as the focus lies on them, and disappear as soon as attention is relaxed or something else becomes the object of attention. The result being that the claims made by *l'esprit* (viz., by thought) have only an *intermittent* presence in one's life: most of the time one is captured by *l'automate* or *la machine*—as if one never had contact with anything else.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, even while something is grasped by the mind (i.e., even while the focus lies on the matter in question, and one is fully convinced that one's insight is true), even then what Pascal terms *l'automate* can remain unaffected and continue to hold the opposite view. In other words, even then one can hold at the same time<sup>9</sup> two conflicting views. And, what is more, even then *l'automate* can prevail upon *l'esprit* (viz., upon thought), so that life takes sides, as it were, with the former and not with the latter. For instance, I can grasp the self-evident fact that this moment of my life can be the very last, but this insight does not make the “automaton” waver in its certainty that my life will continue. In fact, the latter prevails upon the former—and indeed so much so that I use the insight in question as an example (i.e., as a “gear-wheel” in the “machine” of this paper, which in turn is a “gear-wheel” in the big “machine” of what my “automaton” believes to be the rest of the life ahead of me).

Thirdly, let us also recall Kierkegaard's model and in particular its key, namely, the distinction between what he terms *understanding in possibility* (*forstå i Mulighed*) and *understanding in actual reality* (*forstå i Virkelighed*). The point is that the very same non-immediate thought-content (and this means both a reality-related and a possibility-related thought-content) can be understood in two very different ways. And it must be borne in mind that the difference in question does not have to do with the content itself (with what is posited), but rather with the way in which it is posited (or, as we might also say, with what Kant calls *Setzung*—and with the fact that differences concerning the *Setzung* entail differences concerning how one relates oneself to one's *Setzungen*). In Kierkegaard's view, to understand a thought-content (i.e., either a reality or a possibility) *merely in possibility* means to understand it in such a manner that the content in question is posited but only in a realm exterior to actual reality or foreign to it (Kierkegaard also says: in the realm of imagination).<sup>10</sup> In other words, to understand a thought-content (a reality or a possibility) *merely in possibility* is to accept a possibility or a reality, to believe in it or to hold it to be true but in such a way that it nevertheless does not become something actually real and does not affect one like something actually real, viz., like the actual reality one is faced with. On the contrary, to understand a thought-content (i.e., either a reality or a possibility) in actual reality means to understand it in such a way that it becomes something actually real and affects one as the real thing (i.e., the actual reality or the possibility that has to be faced).<sup>11</sup>

In order to better comprehend this distinction we need to bear in mind that in Kierkegaard's view there are two different senses in which something thought to be real (i.e., something thought to be a "real" possibility or a "real" reality) can fail to become "actually real."

The first sense has to do with what Kierkegaard terms "*Virkelighed for mig*" ("reality for me"). This is not the place to analyze this concept (a transformation both of Epicurean, viz., Stoic, *pros eme* and Luther's "for you").<sup>12</sup> But we need to highlight what it stands for. Kierkegaard emphasizes the fact that human life depends on and is constantly guided by an assessment of the situation it finds itself in (one could also say: an understanding of where it stands). In other words, life is essentially related to, and based on, an insight into what it is faced with. And it takes its course according to this fundamental insight. We can therefore speak of *life's guiding insight*—an insight that is at life's core—or of a *vital insight* (for it is the insight life constantly relies on). Now, whatever plays

a significant role in this fundamental insight—viz., whatever plays a significant role in defining the situation my life finds itself in—is a reality for me (a *Virkelighed* for me) in Kierkegaard’s sense. On the one hand, a given reality is a “reality for me” if and only if it affects my life in this way, that is, if it plays this kind of role and is perceived as a defining factor of my life (of its “setting,” etc.). Otherwise, even if it is perceived as something real, it is not a reality for me. And, on the other hand, a given possibility is a “real possibility for me” if and only if it affects my life in this way, that is, if it plays this kind of role and is perceived as a defining factor of my life (of its “setting,” etc.). Otherwise, even if it is perceived as something really possible, it is not a real possibility for me. Put another way, the realm of actual reality (to wit, the realm of actual reality and actual possibility) for me is only one part of what I perceive to be real or really possible. The constellation of Cassiopeia or the fact that there are engineers in Australia is a reality—but it is not a reality for me in Kierkegaard’s sense, for it does not play any significant role in defining what my life has to deal with. The above-mentioned possibility that this moment of my life can be the very last one is a real possibility—but it is not a real possibility *for me* in Kierkegaard’s sense, for (as pointed out above) I tend to be guided by the “certainty” that my life will continue, and the latter (not the former) defines what I see myself faced with. Now, this enables us to understand one of the key phenomena Kierkegaard has in mind when he speaks of understanding non-immediate thought-contents merely in possibility (so that the content in question is posited but only in a realm exterior to effective reality or foreign to it). The point is that we can relate to thought-contents in such a way that, even if we hold them to be true, they do not become actual realities for us. This is what Kierkegaard’s well-known remark about “systematizers” who “in relation to their systems are like a man who builds an enormous castle and himself lives alongside in a shed” (for “they themselves do not live in the enormous systematic building”) is all about.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to what is often said, this remark does not concern only Hegel or German Idealists in general. It concerns every one of us. Or, to be more precise, it concerns the fact that we can understand what we think and believe to be true in such a way that it remains, as Kierkegaard puts it, *paa Afstand* (at a distance) and unreal, for it does not enter the realm of actual reality for us.<sup>14</sup> In a diary entry, Kierkegaard depicts the distance we are talking about in the following terms: “The fact is that when I understand something in possibility, I remain essentially unchanged, I remain in the old ways, and

make use of my imagination; when it becomes actual reality, then it is I who am changed. . . . When it is a matter of understanding in possibility, I have to strain my imagination to the limit; when it is a matter of understanding the same thing in actual reality, I am spared all exertion with regard to my imagination; actual reality is placed very close to me, all too close; it has, as it were, swallowed me, and the question now is whether I can rescue myself from it.”<sup>15</sup>

It need scarcely be said that this component of Kierkegaard’s model is closely related to, but does not overlap with Pascal’s distinction between *l’esprit* and *l’automate*. Let us take a brief look at this. On the one hand, Kierkegaard’s notion of *actual reality for me* highlights a phenomenon that does not play a significant role in Pascal’s account. Pascal focuses (1) on the difference between various sources of persuasion or belief and (2) on the relation of forces between them; he does not take into consideration what we have termed the vital insight or life’s constant guiding insight into what it is faced with and the fact that whatever plays a significant role in this regard is *actual reality kat’exochen* (and whatever does not play any such role is actually real only in a weak sense). On the other hand, this difference in focus goes hand in hand with a difference in composition, viz., with a difference in scope: Pascal’s *automate* encompasses all kinds of beliefs, regardless of whether they do or do not play the role of realities for us in Kierkegaard’s sense. The result being that, even if the vast majority of reality for us belongs to the field of *l’automate*, a very significant part of *l’automate* remains outside the realm of *Virkelighed for mig*. And, in the final analysis, what decides the relation of forces between our various components and their respective views is not so much whether a given belief or truth claim pertains either to *l’esprit* or *l’automate* as whether the belief or truth claim in question belongs or does not belong to life’s guiding insight and concerns or does not concern a *Virkelighed for mig*.

But this is not all. For there is a second sense in which something thought to be real (i.e., something thought to be a “real” possibility or a “real” reality) can fail to become “actually real.” Kierkegaard also draws our attention to the fact that non-immediate thought-contents can (and tend to) be represented in such a manner that (1) we deal with them without realizing what they really stand for (i.e., without focusing on the corresponding reality and trying to find out what it really looks like) and (2) we fail to notice this shortcoming and believe we are dealing with the realities themselves. For instance, we can deal with the idea that physical bodies are sets of vibrating, colliding, and moving atoms without trying

to determine what concrete set of vibrating, moving, and colliding atoms forms, say, my hand or a book before me, etc.—i.e., without realizing that we simply do not know. The point is not so much that we do not know what the sets of vibrating, colliding, and moving atoms really look like (what the set of vibrating, moving, and colliding atoms corresponding to a hand, a book, etc., is) as that we can deal with the idea in question (and indeed deal with it for a long time) without noticing that, as a matter of fact, we do not know this.

Kierkegaard's point is that thinking tends to be flawed by what he believes to be the characteristic weakness of imagination: "imagination constantly wants to foreshorten and to slip in another picture."<sup>16</sup> But the decisive fact is that this foreshortening can go so far that thought-contents are dissociated from the reality they stand for—with the result that the latter are eclipsed, as it were, and our thought moves solely in the realm of "thought-formulae" and loses track of what they are all about. In other words, non-immediate thinking is of such a nature that mere thought-formulae—which in fact differ considerably from the realities they stand for—tend to become surrogate realities. They thereby deflect our attention from the realities they stand for and take their place. The fact that we do not notice this is due to a particular kind of lack of acuity (a lack of acuity that does not concern the thought-formulae in question but rather their relation to the realities they stand for). Thus, without our noticing it, our belief in non-immediate thought-contents can be such that the only actual realities "on stage" while we believe in the former are the immediate realities of everyday life. For on closer inspection it turns out that the non-immediate realities we believe in are mere "thought formulae": they lack density, they are insubstantial, as it were, and what might be called "phantom realities" or "ghost realities"—the result being that instead of "dislodging" or "challenging" the immediate realities of everyday life they are opposed to, they just play the role of "inner features" or "inner components" of these very same realities.

In Kierkegaard's model, these two components (these two ways of understanding non-immediate thought-contents merely in possibility, not in actual reality) play a decisive role in making it possible for life to remain impervious to thought even when one is fully convinced of the truth of one's non-immediate thoughts. In Kierkegaard's view, these two kinds of understanding in possibility are complementary and mutually reinforcing, so that each of them alone is sufficient to produce a gap between life and thought, but the gap is deeper and wider when they work together, as is usually the case.

## Why Life's Resistance to Thought Is a Central Question in Fichte's *Addresses*

Now you are probably wondering, “What does all this have to do with Fichte?” It is a well-known fact that the question of life and thought (of life and philosophy, viz., of life and *Wissenschaftslehre*) plays a pivotal role in the *corpus fichteanum*. So many passages from Fichte's writings deal with this question that to survey them would go far beyond the scope of this paper. But it is somewhat less obvious that this question—and in particular the question as to how one's life can remain unaffected by what one thinks and believes to be true (i.e., impervious or indifferent to it)—also plays a crucial role in Fichte's *Reden an die Deutsche Nation*, and indeed so much so that Fichte's *Reden*, too, present what might be described as a model for explaining how life can remain unaffected by thought and offer resistance to it. Our purpose is to highlight and analyze this model. There is no point in denying that Fichte's remarks on this subject in the *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* are just a small part of the extensive jigsaw puzzle that should be pieced together to get the “entire story” and determine what Fichte has to say on this matter. But, as the saying goes, “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”—and if what we are about to consider is just a first step to a more comprehensive analysis, the main thing is that this first step may prove to be effective and put us on the right track toward understanding Fichte's views on this issue.

So much for the preliminary observations about the task ahead. Let us now go *in medias res*.

In order to understand Fichte's remarks on how one's life can remain unaffected by what one thinks and believes to be true (i.e., impervious or indifferent to it), it should be borne in mind that it is no accident that Fichte addresses this question in the *Reden*—and that the remarks we are talking about are not just something said in passing, i.e., more or less casual remarks with no bearing on the main subject (and the main ideas) of Fichte's *Addresses*.

Let us take a closer look at this. Regardless of the concrete historical situation they refer to, in the final analysis the subject of Fichte's *Addresses* is a radical change of view (the kind of change of view his *Grundzüge* are all about—and indeed a radical change of view brought about by thinking, viz., by thought).<sup>17</sup> In other words, one should not forget that the central subject of Fichte's *Addresses* is nothing less than what he himself terms “a new self,” a “new world,” a “new age”<sup>18</sup>—that is, something absolutely new, viz., “a wholly new order of things”<sup>19</sup>: a self, a world, an age other



than everything “given and found existing by us”<sup>20</sup> (a self, a world, an age “such as never existed”)—in short, “*die Erschaffung eines Neuen und vorher nie Dagewesenen*.”<sup>21</sup> This wholly new order of things enters the scene thanks to what Fichte characterizes as “the power to spontaneously create images, which are not simply afterimages or copies of reality, but can become its prototypes.”<sup>22</sup> Thinking—viz., thought—has this power. But Fichte’s *Addresses* are as much about this power as they are about the following question: What is required in order for these prototypes to become prototypes of something real?—Under what circumstances can this “power to spontaneously create images, which are not simply copies of reality” influence reality or, as Fichte also puts it, influence life (*ins Leben eingreife*)?<sup>23</sup> If thinking or *Geistesbildung* (viz., the “power to spontaneously create images, which are not simply copies of reality, but can become its prototypes”) fails to influence life, then thinking and life go their way independently of each other (*geht . . . jedes seinen Gang für sich fort*)<sup>24</sup>—so that, in the final analysis, thinking (viz., the whole “power to spontaneously create images, which are not simply afterimages or copies of reality, but can become its prototypes”) is, as Fichte points out at the end of the Fourth Address, but an “ingenious game devoid of all wish to make it anything more” (*ein genialisches Spiel, mit dem sie nichts weiter wollen*).<sup>25</sup> But Fichte’s point is that thinking (i.e., the above-mentioned “*Erschaffung eines neuen und vorher nie Dagewesenen*”) is not inevitably doomed to be just an “ingenious game”: it can influence life (*ins Leben eingreifen*), it can become something serious (*recht eigentlicher Ernst*, as opposed to a mere game).<sup>26</sup> The question is: How? And this question is what Fichte’s *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* are all about.

In a way it is a question similar to the one handled at the end of Book V of Plato’s *Republic*, namely the question as to how the πολιτεία (viz., the political regime or the organization of society) devised by Plato’s Socrates could come into being—whether it is possible for a πόλις to be organized in the way described by Socrates, and what would enable a πόλις to arrive at this kind of regime. To be sure, what is at stake in Fichte’s *Addresses* is far more than just a change of political regime—as pointed out above, it is nothing less than a whole new understanding of everything: and this means, nothing less than a whole new “world.” But at the end of the day the same also holds true for the change Plato is talking about in his *Republic*. It is far more than just a change of social or political organization—it is, rather, a change of the shape of reality itself, so that the two things go hand in hand. Anyway, the point here

is that in both cases (i.e., both in *Republic V* and in Fichte's *Addresses*) what is at stake is the transition from a new way of thinking—namely, a complete transformation of everything but only *in thought*—to what might be described as the effective realization of this new way of thinking in real life (so that the new way of thinking ceases to be just a way of thinking and becomes, as it were, the way things are: the very shape of reality itself and of one's life). In other words, what is at stake is the transformation of the distant “there” of what is merely thought (the “elsewhere” that can be reached by means of a “voyage of the mind”) into the “absolute Here” of what surrounds us and defines the very situation we are in. Thus, in the final analysis, what is at stake in the *Addresses* is the question: How does thinking (*Denken*)—and in particular the thinking of the “*vorher nie Dagewesene*”—become life, real life, in the truest sense of the word?

But if this is what Fichte's *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* are all about, then it is not surprising that the question as to how one's life can remain unaffected by what one thinks and believes to be true (i.e., impervious or indifferent to it) has a role to play in this writing. For, at the end of the day, the question “How does thinking (*Denken*)—and in particular thinking of the *vorher nie Dagewesene*—become life, real life, in the truest sense of the word?” cannot be answered without addressing the closely related issue of what can *prevent* thinking (viz., what one thinks and believes to be true) from becoming life, real life, in the truest sense of the word. So, on closer inspection it turns out that this latter question—and an attempt to answer it—is bound to be a centerpiece of Fichte's *Reden*.

### Thought, Life, and Action in Fichte's *Addresses*

Let this suffice as a brief outline of the framework of Fichte's handling of the question about life's resistance to thought in the *Reden an die Deutsche Nation*. In order to fully understand his view on this subject, one must have a clear-cut perception of what Fichte has in mind when he speaks (1) of *thinking* (viz., of the “power to spontaneously create images, which are not simply afterimages or copies of reality, but can become its prototype”), (2) of *life*, and (3) of their relation, viz., of what might be described as a gap and tension between them. For there are significant differences between Fichte's understanding of these matters and what one tends to assume if one does not pay enough attention to his words.

First, it should be borne in mind that when Fichte speaks of the “power to spontaneously create images, which are not simply afterimages or copies of reality, but can become its prototype,” what is at stake is not just the occasional use of this power or at most an “archipelago,” as it were, of this kind of images (an “archipelago” of creative thoughts and categorical innovations) scattered across an “ocean” of “what is *given and found existing by us*.” In fact, what is at stake is much more than this: it goes much more deeply and reaches much farther. For what Fichte has in mind is nothing less than the possibility of a change of view that, on the one hand, creates not just something relatively new, but rather something *entirely* new, and, on the other hand, reconfigures everything without exception, so that it literally creates everything anew. In other words, as pointed out above, what Fichte has in mind is nothing less than a completely new world in which everything—and this really means *everything*—is entirely different from the way it presents itself in the world as it seems to be given. In Fichte’s view, the power of thought is capable of bringing about this extraordinary kind of change.

But, having said that, it should be borne in mind that Fichte also calls our attention to the fact that this whole change of perspective can take place in the realm of thought without affecting life—or at any rate in such a manner that life remains largely impervious to this change. In other words, Fichte reminds us that life can remain unaffected by this new world of thought he refers to (1) for reasons other than the fact that one can have absolutely no idea of the new world in question (i.e., because one’s power of thought can remain undeveloped), and also (2) for reasons other than the fact that one’s power of thought can fail to meet the level required to create a fully developed image of the new world. For Fichte reminds us that life can remain unaffected by this new world of thought even when the latter is fully developed in the sense that the power of thought has managed to create the whole prototype of the new world. And this is the point here.

In short, Fichte makes two equally surprising claims—two claims that go against our usual assumptions and at the same time seem to go against each other. On the one hand, he claims that the power of thought is capable of producing nothing less than a radically new world. This is surprising enough—for we tend to assume that the power of thought is much more limited than this. But on the other hand he also contends that this new world can be there in thought (and indeed in such a way

that one is fully convinced of its truth, etc.) and still fail to shape one's life—so that, at the end of the day, the two worlds “coexist,” and one “does the splits,” as it were, and *thinks* in one world while *living* in the other. This, too, is surprising because we tend to assume that if one does indeed follow the new way of thinking and fully believes in it, then this new way of thinking (not least since it is so utterly different from the usual one and gives rise to nothing less than a whole new world) cannot fail to shape one's life.

Secondly, contrary to what may seem to be the case, Fichte's concern for life and for how far one's thought has an impact on one's life does not mean that in his view thought plays a lesser role, and that in the final analysis “only life counts” or the like. Nor does his concern mean that, when all is said and done, action (how one acts, what one does, etc.) is what life is all about—or, at any rate, that what is at stake when he speaks of life's resistance to the power of thought is the fact that one's actions or behavior do not express what one thinks to be true or right (so that, in the final analysis, what he has in mind is just one more instance of the *video meliora, proboque; deteriora sequor*).

Let us take a closer look at this.

On the one hand, Fichte emphasizes that thought is not just an instrument of life, as if the latter (life as opposed to thought) were *ein Selbstzweck*: an “end in itself.”<sup>27</sup> And in particular, thought is not just an instrument of life in the usual sense (namely an instrument of “life as usual”)—that is, of what seems to be an invariable framework (an invariable “chess game,” so to speak) within which our thoughts can play (or fail to play) the role of “chess pieces” (and no other role). Fichte's point is precisely that life can change and become or turn out to be something completely new (something other than the usual “chess game”: something that has never before existed)—and indeed in such a way that the power of thought<sup>28</sup> is what can make us stop playing the “old game” and start something entirely new.

But, on the other hand, Fichte also stresses the fact that our life (and this also means what we have in mind when we oppose “life” to “thought”) is intrinsically related to what thought is all about, viz., to what thought as such tries to achieve—namely, a true grasp of life. For our life is constituted in such a way that it claims to be based—and *needs* to be based—on a true grasp of itself. So that if what one thinks and believes to be true fails to shape one's life, the shortcoming in question concerns

life as much as it concerns thought.<sup>29</sup> For in this scenario one's life is not in accordance with what one believes to be true (i.e., with what life intrinsically claims and needs to be based on).

In addition, it should be borne in mind that in Fichte's view life and action are not exactly the same thing—and that, in the final analysis, failing to shape one's life is more than failing to shape one's behavior (viz., the way one acts, what one does). To be sure, life cannot be dissociated from action (viz., the way we act, what we do, etc.), and life's resistance to thought goes hand in hand with behavioural resistance to thought. But this does not mean that one's behavior is the sole factor of resistance to thought (and in particular to the kind of radically innovative thought Fichte has in mind). In Fichte's view, this has to do with the complexity and mutual dependency, viz., mutual involvement, between life's various components—a complexity and mutual involvement owing to which

1. life is not independent from thought or action, and the latter are not independent from one another (so that one cannot say that thought exists—and exists as it does—for the sake of activity, or vice versa)<sup>30</sup>;

and

2. life is of such a nature that it entails an “ought” (*Sollen*)—for it requires all its components to form a perfect whole (viz., a self-contained and cohesive unit: a *geschlossene Einheit*) in which each component is in perfect harmony with all the others.

In other words, in Fichte's view it is not only a question of thought influencing life—and it would not be enough if one's thought exerted influence on one's life.<sup>31</sup> As he puts it, it is, rather, a question of thought being itself life, self-subsistent life (*in sich selbstbeständiges Leben*)<sup>32</sup>—that is, it is a question of thought being itself action or behavior or (which amounts to the same) of action or behaviour being itself thought (i.e., what one holds to be true).

Thirdly, it should also be borne in mind that Fichte's insistence on the fact (1) that the power of thought is the power to create “*das nie Dagewesene*” and (2) that life can remain impervious to thought (and in particular to “*das nie Dagewesene*”) does not mean that we are deal-

ing here with two different worlds, realms or realities, each of which is characterized by its complete exteriority to the other. This, too, is an important point.

On the one hand, Fichte emphasizes that one's views (and this also includes one's thoughts) are not formed freely and arbitrarily: they are formed by one's life, and indeed so much so that they are actually "the inner root of one's own life, otherwise unknown to one, manifested as an intuition"<sup>33</sup> (so that it has become one's way of looking at things). As he points out, "It is what you really and inwardly are that steps before your outward eye, and you would never be able to see anything else. If you are to see differently, you must first of all become different."<sup>34</sup> Put another way, one's thought is not a self-contained and encapsulated realm—it is not rooted in itself, but is rather the expression of one's own life.

On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that in Fichte's view the "*nie Dagewesene*"—the "completely new world," he is talking about (the world disclosed by the power of thought and by the power of thought alone)—is not something completely exterior to life itself. In sum, it is not another world entirely beyond the world of life. On closer inspection it turns out that the "completely new world" Fichte has in mind is in fact the one real world—and indeed the very constitution of what remains unaffected by thought (namely, by the thought of this completely new world). In other words, according to Fichte it is not a question of two different realities; it is rather a question of two different points of view in the framework of one and the same reality—one of which (namely, the point of view that plays the role of "life" as opposed to the power of thought) has no insight into its own "inner constitution," viz., into the fact that, in the final analysis, it is made of the "new world" the other point of view is all about. In short, the "*nie Dagewesene*" Fichte refers to is the very "stuff" life (as opposed to thought) is made of—and it can be opposed to life only insofar as the latter remains stuck, as it were, on the surface of itself and is opaque to itself. We could also express this by saying that in a way the "*nie Dagewesene*" the power of thought is all about is *already there* (it is a "*nie Dagewesene*" only in the realm of *Anschauung* or *intuition*, i.e., as far as one's awareness is concerned).

Now, this does not change the above-mentioned fact that, according to Fichte, one's views (one's whole *Anschauung*) are the expression of one's own life or of what Fichte calls the "inner root of one's life" (*die innere Wurzel seines Lebens*). Fichte's point is precisely that what expresses itself in one's views is a certain relation of life to itself—or, to be more precise,

a certain degree of opaqueness or transparency of life to itself. And, in particular, what expresses itself both in life as opposed to thought and in thought as opposed to life (viz., in the gap between them) is life's opaqueness to itself, viz., the fact that life is at a distance from itself or estranged from itself. In the final analysis, the gap or distance between life and thought turns out to be a gap or distance between life and itself (and the form and degree of the former expresses the form and degree of the latter).

To sum up, *Nichtursprünglichkeit* (non-originality)<sup>35</sup> is what creates life as opposed to thought; *Nichtursprünglichkeit* (non-originality) is what creates the gap between them. In Fichte's view, the power of thought is able to bridge this gap and to foreshadow life in full transparency to itself (and this is what the "*nie Dagewesene*": the "completely new world" he has in mind is all about). In other words, the power of thought is able to foreshadow *Ursprünglichkeit*. But, the point is precisely that the power of thought can foreshadow *Ursprünglichkeit*—i.e., it can devise it in such a way that, on the one hand, life is no longer completely shaped by *Nichtursprünglichkeit* (non-originality) or fully estranged from itself, but, on the other hand, it does not achieve full *Ursprünglichkeit* (full "originality"), because there is still resistance to the full adoption of the "*nie Dagewesene*" (the "completely new world") devised by the power of thought—and one continues to live or to dwell in the "old world" (i.e., in the world resulting from the gap between life and itself, viz., from the lack of transparency of life to itself). In short, paradoxically enough, there is such thing as a still-estranged non-estrangement or an opaque transparency of life to itself. Or, put another way, there is something midway between *Ursprünglichkeit* and *Nichtursprünglichkeit*—and, when all is said and done, this is what life's resistance to the power of thought (and in particular to the "*nie Dagewesene*," to the "completely new world" Fichte refers to) is all about.

### "One's real mind and disposition"

This enables us to understand what Fichte has in mind when he writes the following in the Fifth Address: "In sich selbstbeständiges Leben aber . . . ist die Wissenschaft nur alsdann, wenn der Gedanke der wirkliche Sinn und die Gesinnung des Denkenden ist, also dass er, ohne besondere Mühe und sogar ohne dessen sich klar bewusst zu seyn, alles

andere, was er denkt, ansieht, beurtheilt, zufolge jenes Grundgedankens ansieht und beurtheilt, und falls derselbe aufs Handeln einfließt, nach ihm ebenso nothwendig handelt.”<sup>36</sup> Fichte focuses on what role thought must play in order to shape one’s life through and through and become “*selbstbeständiges Leben*” in the above-mentioned sense: it must be “the real mind and disposition of the one who thinks, so that without special effort and even without being clearly conscious thereof, one views and judges everything else that one thinks, views, and judges according to that fundamental thought—and, should the fundamental thought exert an influence on action, one just as inevitably acts according to it.”

Now, let us take a closer look at this. First Fichte points out that there is what he terms one’s real mind and disposition (*der wirkliche Sinn und die Gesinnung*), a central nucleus of persuasion or conviction defining both what one ultimately believes to be true and what determines one’s course of action. The point in highlighting the “*wirkliche Sinn und die Gesinnung*” is that one can hold something to be true without it entering or affecting this central nucleus of one’s vision. Secondly, Fichte stresses that if a thought does become one’s real mind and disposition, it imposes itself without especial effort and even without one being clearly conscious of it. It becomes one’s “default view,” as it were—so that “one views and judges everything else (everything that one thinks, views, or judges) according to this fundamental thought or fundamental assumption.” In short, fundamental thoughts (*Grundgedanken*) are “automatic” in this sense, and do not require one’s attention in order to shape what one sees. If a thought plays a relevant role only as long as one focuses on it, it does not affect the central nucleus in question and it is definitely not a *Grundgedanke* in Fichte’s sense. Thirdly, if a thought does not enter or affect the nucleus in question, it is perfectly possible that it exerts no influence on one’s course of action. But if a thought has practical implications and does enter or affect the above-mentioned nucleus, one cannot fail to act according to it.

But this is not all. On closer inspection it turns out that Fichte also draws our attention to something else. Life is populated by various thoughts, viz., by various truth-claims. But Fichte’s point is that these various thoughts (what one thinks, views, and judges) are not all on an equal footing with one another. It is, rather, that the whole manifold of one’s views depends on what Fichte terms a *fundamental thought* (*Grundgedanke*) in a second sense—namely, a thought of which everything else (every other thought or view) is an expression. In other



words, Fichte is also referring to a particular kind of structure of one's thoughts (truth claims or beliefs)—namely, that they all depend on a central core of fundamental assumptions, which provides the framework for and shapes all the others. The fact that there is a central nucleus of the above-mentioned kind does not prevent our beliefs from being completely independent from one another and entering or affecting the nucleus in question one by one. But Fichte claims that this is not so. In his view, what we have termed the central nucleus of persuasion or conviction has itself a complex structure and indeed the kind of “centralized structure” he depicts in the *Grundzüge* or in the *Anweisung* (the whole realm of one's views rests upon a fundamental assumption and bears its imprint). To be sure, the central nucleus of persuasion and conviction can be “filled” with very different assumptions or beliefs, depending on the individual case. But the point is that it is always based on a presiding assumption, which governs both the central nucleus (and everything in it) and whatever beliefs one may hold outside this nucleus—so that all one's views are essentially based on, and defined by, the central *Grundgedanke*, and the basic feature in each and every one of them is their belonging to the world defined by the *Grundgedanke*.

This is important because it shows that when Fichte speaks of the power of thought and claims that it is capable of producing a radical change of view (and indeed nothing less than an entirely new world), what he has in mind is not an aggregate of singular changes. In his view (1) the structure of our truth claims and beliefs has precious little to do with a mosaic of more or less independent views and (2) a radical change of view has precious little to do with an aggregate of piece-by-piece changes. Radical changes of the type he has in mind presuppose a change in the fundamental assumption, viz., a change in the *Grundgedanke*—and if there is no change of the *Grundgedanke*, there simply is no radical change.

Now, this means that life can remain impervious to a particular thought one holds to be true not only because the thought in question does not enter or affect what we have termed the central nucleus of conviction or persuasion, but also because the thought in question does not become the *Grundgedanke*—i.e., because life continues to be shaped by another *Grundgedanke* and the thought in question is just one view or belief in the framework of a world presided by another *Grundgedanke*. In the final analysis, a thought is not the same when it belongs to the realm defined by another *Grundgedanke* as when it is itself the presiding assumption and plays the role of the *Grundgedanke*. Only in the latter case does it unleash the full “blast” of its meaning and effect upon life.

## How Thought Can Be Just “a Thought Belonging to a Foreign Life” and “Merely Possible Thought”

Fichte then introduces two closely connected concepts, namely (1) what he terms “*der Gedanke eines fremden Lebens*” (“a thought belonging to a foreign life”) and (2) “*bloss möglicher Gedanke*” (“merely possible thought”): “*Keineswegs aber ist der Gedanke Leben und Gesinnung, wenn er nur als Gedanke eines fremden Lebens gedacht wird; so klar und vollständig er auch als ein solcher bloss möglicher Gedanke begriffen seyn mag, und so hell man sich auch denken möge, wie etwa jemand also denken möge.*”<sup>37</sup> A thought is by no means one’s “*Sinn und Gesinnung*” (or as he now puts it, *Leben und Gesinnung*, i.e., “one’s life and practical disposition”) “if it is thought only as a thought belonging to a foreign life—no matter how clearly and completely it may be conceived as one merely possible thought, no matter how lucidly one might think how someone could think thus.”

Three things should be borne in mind here.

First, when Fichte speaks of a “thought belonging to a foreign life” he does not mean that the thought in question is foreign in the sense that it is attributed to someone else, so that what makes it “foreign” is the either explicit or implicit reference to other people. Nor does he mean that the thought in question “comes from without,” has its origin in a foreign life or the like.<sup>38</sup> A thought is “the thought of a foreign life” if (1) it does not enter or affect one’s central nucleus of conviction or persuasion, and (2) if it does not become one’s *Grundgedanke* in the above-mentioned sense. In short, a thought is a “thought belonging to a foreign life” if it does not become a thought belonging to one’s own life.

Secondly, something similar holds true for what Fichte terms a merely possible thought (“*bloss möglicher Gedanke*”). What is at stake here is not the fact that the thought in question is merely possible in the sense that it can be but is not actually thought—or that it is viewed just as something possible (not as something real) or the like. Fichte’s point is that the thought in question is merely possible in the sense (1) that it does not enter or affect one’s central nucleus of conviction or persuasion, and (2) that it has not become one’s *Grundgedanke* in the above-mentioned sense. In short, the thought in question is merely possible because it has not become what one really thinks.

Thirdly, Fichte also points out that this can be so (i.e., a given thought can remain a “thought belonging to a foreign life,” viz., a “merely possible thought”) even if it is clearly and completely conceived—or, as he puts it, “no matter how lucidly one might think how someone could

think thus.” Here we touch the crucial point. Fichte calls our attention to the fact that thinking (and in particular thinking of the “*nie Dagewesene*”) takes the form “how someone could think thus” (*wie etwa jemand also denken möge*). In other words, thinking (and in particular thinking of the “*nie Dagewesene*”) thinks (1) in terms of “someone” (*jemand*) thinking thus, and indeed in such a way that (2) this “someone” can be either the person in question or someone else, but (3) with regard to the person in question this is just a possibility (for thinking can and does take place outside the central nucleus of conviction or persuasion and in such a manner that it does not play the role of the *Grundgedanke*). In other words, Fichte’s point is that there is something “impersonal” about thinking as such—that thinking (and in particular thinking of the “*nie Dagewesene*”) can do its work in the third person, as it were, without affecting either the central nucleus of conviction or the *Grundgedanke*. To be sure, what thus takes shape outside the central nucleus of persuasion or conviction and in such a way that it does not play the role of the *Grundgedanke* can enter the nucleus and become one’s *Grundgedanke*. But this is just a possibility. And, as Fichte points out, it remains just a possibility no matter how clearly and completely the thought in question may be conceived. For clearness of conception, completeness, lucidity, and the like have to do with the concrete shape a thought takes as something presented outside the above mentioned nucleus and whether it performs the function of *Grundgedanke* or not. Or, put another way, there is no necessary link between clearness of conception, completeness, lucidity, etc., on the one hand, and entering one’s central nucleus of conviction or persuasion or becoming one’s *Grundgedanke*, on the other.

### *Wirkliches Denken and gedachtes Denken*

What Fichte says next seems to show that we are on the right track, and that this is indeed the kind of model he proposes for explaining how one’s life can offer resistance to one’s thought.

First he focuses on what happens when a thought remains a merely possible thought. He writes: “*In diesem letztern Falle liegt zwischen unserm gedachten Denken und unserm wirklichen Denken ein grosses Feld von Zufall und Freiheit, welche letztere wir nicht vollziehen mögen; und so bleibt jenes gedachte Denken von uns abstehend, und ein bloss mögliches und ein von uns frei gemachtes und immerfort frei zu wiederholendes*

Denken.”<sup>39</sup> In this passage, Fichte distinguishes between what he terms “*unser wirkliches Denken*” (our real, viz., our “actual thinking”) and “*unser gedachtes Denken*” (“a thinking we merely think of”).<sup>40</sup> And he points out that between the latter and the former there lies “a wide field of *chance* [*Zufall*] and *freedom*—a freedom we can be unwilling to consummate; the result being that the thinking we merely think of [*jenes gedachte Denken*] remains *apart from us* or *detached from us* [*von uns abstehehend*]—a merely possible thinking [*mögliches Denken*]: one that has been set free of us and must always be freely recapitulated” (emphasis added).

But what exactly does Fichte mean by *gedachtes Denken*? When he opposes *wirkliches Denken* and *gedachtes Denken*, he is emphasizing that the latter is not what might be called “direct thinking” of the thought-content in question, but rather “thinking of thinking it.” We could also say that it is “thinking of *someone* thinking it.” That is, instead of actually thinking something, one thinks of someone (the above-mentioned *someone*) *thinking* it—the result being that one “stays out,” as it were, of actually thinking the thought-content in question. And that is why Fichte speaks of a sort of “distance” (*Abstand*), and stresses the fact that the *gedachtes Denken* remains apart from us (*von uns abstehehend*). In other words, the *gedachtes Denken* remains apart from the one who is thinking (we could add: both from the central nucleus of conviction or persuasion and from the *Grundgedanke* in the above-mentioned sense). And in this sense it remains merely possible thinking (*ein bloss mögliches Denken*).

On the other hand, in this passage Fichte also emphasizes that the gap between *gedachtes Denken* and *wirkliches Denken*—or, to be more precise, the gap separating the *gedachtes Denken* of a given thought-content from the *wirkliches Denken* of the very same thought-content—is a wide field of chance (*Zufall*) and freedom. He is making a twofold point. First, if a given thought-content is just the correlate of *gedachtes Denken*, the distance that must be bridged before it becomes *wirkliches Denken* is wide—that is, bridging the distance takes many steps, or rather one can take many steps and still fail to bridge the gap. Secondly, a wide distance in this sense could be perfectly compatible with a necessary, unavoidable, and unstoppable process—provided that the process required many steps, etc. But Fichte emphasizes that the kind of distance we are dealing with here has to do with *Zufall* (so that the outcome is largely determined by chance) and with freedom (with the fact that we are free to take these steps or not, and can be unwilling to take them). In short, he emphasizes that there is no continuity in the path between *gedachtes Denken* and

*wirkliches Denken*, that the process can falter—and that here, too, as the old saying goes, “there’s many a slip ’twixt cup and lip.”

Finally, Fichte focuses on what happens when a thought becomes *wirkliches Denken*: “*In jenem ersten Falle hat der Gedanke unmittelbar durch sich selbst unser Selbst ergriffen und es zu sich selbst gemacht, und durch diese also entstandene Wirklichkeit des Gedankens für uns geht unsere Einsicht hindurch zu dessen Nothwendigkeit. Dass nun das letztere also erfolge, kann . . . keine Freiheit erzwingen, sondern es muss eben sich selbst machen, und der Gedanke selber muss uns ergreifen und uns nach sich bilden.*”<sup>41</sup> If a thought has become *wirkliches Denken*, this means that it “has by itself (by its own agency) immediately taken hold of our self and made it into itself, and through the actual reality that thought has thereby acquired for us we obtain insight into its necessity. No freedom can forcibly bring about this result, rather it must be produced by itself, and thought itself must take hold of us and shape us after itself.”

Let us take a closer look at this.

According to Fichte, *wirkliches Denken* is characterized by the fact that what one thinks immediately takes hold of oneself (i.e., of one’s central nucleus of conviction or persuasion, viz., of one’s *Grundgedanke*) and makes it into itself (or shapes it after itself). Put another way, in this scenario there is no distance whatsoever between oneself and what one thinks. Fichte speaks of the thought in question immediately seizing or taking hold of our self (*Selbst*)—and what is at stake here is what might be described as being completely surrendered to the thought in question: nothing less than a complete invasion by it, leaving no “pockets of resistance.” And this is what he terms “*Wirklichkeit des Gedankens für uns*” (“actual reality of the thought for us”).<sup>42</sup> In other words, Fichte, too, has a concept of “actual reality for me” and according to him a given thought only acquires “actual reality for me” if it seizes me or takes hold of me like this. Now, when this is the case, “through the actual reality that thought has thereby acquired for us we obtain insight into its necessity”—i.e., into the impossibility of things being otherwise.

This is not the place to discuss this important aspect of Fichte’s theory of insight. And what matters most here is the role this passage assigns to thought itself, viz., to what Fichte also calls the “*lebendige Wirksamkeit des Gedankens*” (the “living effectiveness” or “living efficacy” of thought).<sup>43</sup> As he puts it, “no freedom can forcibly bring about this result, rather it must be produced by itself, and thought itself must take hold of us and shape us after itself.” In other words, in Fichte’s view

*wirkliches Denken*, viz., the “actual reality of the thought for us” (the *Wirklichkeit des Gedankens für uns*) has no other origin than this “living effectiveness” or “living efficacy” of the thought in question: in the final analysis, everything depends on how effective a given thought proves to be—i.e., on the degree to which it is able to take hold of him who thinks it (both to enter the above mentioned nucleus and to become itself one’s *Grundgedanke*).

A passage from the Seventh Address can help us better understand Fichte’s view on how *gedachtes Denken* and *wirkliches Denken* relate to each other:

Wer an ein festes, beharrliches und todtes Seyn glaubt, der glaubt nur darum daran, weil er in sich selbst todt ist; und nachdem er einmal todt ist, kann er nicht anders, denn also glauben, sobald er nur in sich selbst klar wird. Er selbst und seine ganze Gattung von Anbeginn bis ans Ende wird ihm ein zweites, und eine nothwendige Folge aus irgend einem vorauszusetzenden ersten Gliede. Diese Voraussetzung ist sein wirkliches, keineswegs ein bloss gedachtes Denken, sein wahrer Sinn, der Punkt, wo sein Denken unmittelbar selbst Leben ist; und so die Quelle alles seines übrigen Denkens und Beurtheilens.

[He who believes in a fixed, stable and dead being does so only because he is dead in himself; and once he is dead, he cannot but believe thus, as soon as he becomes clear to himself. Both he and all his kind from beginning to end become to him something secondary and a necessary consequence of some primary element that he must presuppose. This presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) constitutes his actual thinking (*sein wirkliches Denken*), by no means a merely fancied thinking (*keineswegs ein bloss gedachtes Denken*); it is his true mind (*sein wahrer Sinn*), the point at which his thinking is itself directly life; and it is thus the source of all the rest of his thinking and judging.]<sup>44</sup>

To be sure, in this passage Fichte is not addressing the question of how thinking can remain merely *gedachtes Denken*, etc. He is focusing on the inner structure of life, on the fact that life is intrinsically oriented by a fundamental presupposition, and on what happens when

this presupposition has to do with the belief in a “fixed, stable and dead being.” More importantly, this passage from the Seventh Address highlights what Fichte terms “the point at which thinking is itself directly life [*der Punkt wo Denken unmittelbar selbst Leben ist*],” and also the fact that life is characterized as involving something like this at its center. But in so doing, Fichte gives us an important hint about how *gedachtes Denken* and *wirkliches Denken* relate to each other. For he is suggesting (1) that there is no life without a *wirkliches Denken* (without a *Denken* that is itself directly life”), and (2) that the reason why merely *gedachtes Denken* is merely *gedachtes Denken* (and its correlate a “merely possible thought,” viz., “a thought belonging to a foreign life”) is that something else performs the vitally essential function of *wirkliches Denken*. In other words, this passage suggests that there is no such thing as merely *gedachtes Denken* (and no such thing as “merely possible thought,” viz., “a thought belonging to a foreign life”) existing all by itself. Merely *gedachtes Denken* (“merely possible thought,” etc) always takes place in the framework of a *wirkliches Denken*—or, to be more precise, in the framework of a life in which something else plays the role of *wirkliches Denken*; so that the difference between *gedachtes Denken* and *wirkliches Denken* has to do with what might be described as a “split” or duplicity in one’s thought. Or, put another way, the split is not so much a split between thought and life as a split between thought and thought in the framework of the above-mentioned split between life and itself.

#### Thought and Language (“Living Language” and “Dead Language”). Concluding Remarks

This leads to our last point. In the Fifth Address, after having presented his views on *wirkliches* and *gedachtes Denken*, Fichte focuses on the connection between this topic and his account of language (and in particular of the difference between organic, viz., living languages and inorganic, viz., dead languages).<sup>45</sup> He writes the following:

Diese lebendige Wirksamkeit des Gedankens wird nun sehr befördert, ja, wenn das Denken nur von der gehörigen Tiefe und Stärke ist, sogar nothwendig gemacht durch Denken und Bezeichnen in einer lebendigen Sprache. Das Zeichnen in der letzten ist selbst unmittelbar lebendig und sinnlich und wieder

darstellend das ganze eigene Leben, und so dasselbe ergreifend und eingreifend in dasselbe; mit dem Besitzer einer solchen Sprache spricht unmittelbar der Geist, und offenbart sich ihm, wie ein Mann dem Manne.

[Now this living effectiveness or efficacy of thought is very much favoured—and, indeed, where the thinking is of the proper depth and strength, even made inevitable—by thinking and designating in a living language. In such a language the symbol is itself immediately alive and sensory; it re-presents one's whole life and so takes hold of and exerts an influence on it. To the possessor of such a language spirit speaks directly and reveals itself as one man to another.]<sup>46</sup>

Fichte's wording in this passage may prove to be misleading, if we do not pay enough attention to what he really says. For it may make us think that he claims the following: (1) all depends on what he terms the "*lebendige Wirksamkeit des Gedankens*," (2) the "*lebendige Wirksamkeit des Gedankens*" can be favored—and indeed even made inevitable—by thinking and designating in a living language, so that (3) in the final analysis, the difference between a living language and a dead language<sup>47</sup> is the deciding factor of whether a thought has this *lebendige Wirksamkeit* and gives rise to *wirkliches Denken* (and becomes an actual reality for me) or not. But on closer inspection it turns out that this interpretation oversimplifies Fichte's claim, and that he does not speak of a simple and direct connection between thinking in a living language and the "*lebendige Wirksamkeit des Gedankens*" upon which everything depends.

In fact, Fichte draws a more complex picture. He without doubt emphasizes the role played by language and the fact that the difference between a living and a dead language has a major impact on how effective (*wirksam*) a thought is. But he does not claim that the "*lebendige Wirksamkeit des Gedankens*" depends solely on this (so that if a thought originates in a living language it necessarily and inevitably becomes the object of a *wirkliches Denken*). Fichte's claim is rather that "where the thinking is of the proper depth and strength" (*wenn das Denken nur von der gehörigen Tiefe und Stärke ist*) the "*lebendige Wirksamkeit des Gedankens*" can be favored—and indeed even made inevitable—by thinking and designating in a living language. In other words, Fichte speaks of a double condition: (1) if thinking is of the proper depth and strength



and (2) if it is thought in a living language. A given thought gives rise to *wirkliches Denken* and becomes a reality for one if and only if both conditions—(1) and (2)—are met. But in the final analysis there is no way of guaranteeing (1)—and therefore no way of guaranteeing the *Wirksamkeit des Denkens*, even if one is thinking in what Fichte terms a *living language*. And so the bottom line is that there is no way of guaranteeing that a thought becomes “reality for us,” viz., the object of *wirkliches Denken* in the Fichtean sense of the word.

This is not the place to discuss Fichte’s claims concerning the difference between these two kinds of language. What matters to us is the fact that he draws our attention to the key role also played by language—“that accompanies the individual into the inmost recesses of his mind as he thinks and wills, and either hinders him or gives him wings [*welche den Einzelnen bis in die geheimste Tiefe seines Gemüths bei Denken und Wollen begleithet, und beschränkt oder beflügelt*],”<sup>48</sup> and indeed so much so that, as Fichte puts it, “men are formed by language far more than language is by men.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, the main point for us is that Fichte includes this subtle yet crucial component (the role played by the language in which thought is thought, and the fact that language<sup>50</sup> can either foster or hinder the impact of thought upon life) in the complex network of factors that make the difference between merely *gedachtes Denken* and *wirkliches Denken* (viz., between “a thought belonging to a foreign life” or a “merely possible thought” and “real or actual thought”).

In the final analysis, what Fichte’s *Addresses* have to say on the difference between *gedachtes Denken* and *wirkliches Denken* goes far beyond the claim concerning the role played by language (and a fortiori far beyond the controversial claim concerning Germanic languages). To be sure, these claims play a key role within the economy of Fichte’s *Reden* and also a crucial role in his view on how life can remain impervious to thought. But the point is that Fichte’s analysis of this problem brings to light the complex network of factors and phenomena we have tried to outline, so that, on the one hand, Fichte’s language-related claims are just a part of this complex network of factors, and, on the other hand, most factors and phenomena he refers to are completely independent of his language-related claims.

Finally, it need scarcely be said that there are important points of contact between Fichte’s complex analysis of this question in the *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* and Plato’s, viz., Pascal’s remarks on this subject, and that Fichte’s views foreshadow some main aspects of Kierkegaard’s

handling of this topic. It also goes without saying that there are, nevertheless, significant differences in approach between them. But the point is not so much a comparison in the doxographical sense as the fact that these different approaches—and not least the model proposed by Fichte in his *Reden*—can help us get a glimpse into the labyrinth of phenomena we are dealing with here and do justice to its intricate complexity.

## Notes

1. E. M. Forster, “Joseph Conrad: a Note,” in *Abinger Harvest* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 154.

2. *Epistula* VII, 340d6–8: “δόξαις δ’ ἐπικεκρωσμένοι, καθάπερ οἱ τὰ σώματα ὑπὸ τῶν ἡλίων ἐπικεκαυμένοι.” We follow R. G. Bury’s and J. Harward’s translations with changes. Cf. Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 7, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA/ London: Harvard University Press/ William Heinemann, 1966) and Plato, *The Platonic Epistles*, trans. J. Harward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).

3. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 20f. For this problem in ancient thought, cf. J. Gosling, *Weakness of the Will* (London/New York: Routledge, 1990), T. Spitzley, *Handeln wider besseres Wissen. Eine Diskussion klassischer Positionen* (Berlin/ New York, de Gruyter, 1992), and J. Müller, *Willensschwäche in Antike und Mittelalter. Eine Problemgeschichte von Sokrates bis J. D. Scotus* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009); for this problem in eighteenth-century German philosophy, see notably M. Albrecht, “‘Aber ich folge dem Schlechteren.’ Mendelssohns mathematische Hypothese zum Problem des Handelns wider besseres Wissen,” in *Moses Mendelssohn im Spannungsfeld der Aufklärung*, ed. M. Albrecht et al. (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2000), 13–35, C. Schwaiger, “Das Problem des Handelns wider besseres Wissen bei Wolff, Baumgarten und Meier,” in *Christian Wolff tra psicologia empirica e psicologia razionale*, ed. F. L. Marcolungo (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007), 167–75 and C. Schwaiger, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten—ein intellektuelles Porträt* (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2011), 96ff.

4. *Romans* 7:18–19.

5. *Pensées*, 821 (Lafuma), 252 (Brunschvicg). See also 110, 112, 646, and 751 (Lafuma), 282, 344, 95, and 3 (Brunschvicg). Cf. Pascal, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. L. Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1963).

6. On “la machine,” see notably *Pensées* 5, 7, 11, and 25 (Lafuma), 247, 248, and 308 (Brunschvicg). Pascal also speaks of “l’instinct,” “le cœur,” “la connaissance du cœur et de l’instinct,” as opposed to “la raison,” “le raisonnement,” etc. To be sure, there are significant differences between these concepts.

But the point is that there is also a common denominator between the different pairs of opposites in question.

7. *Pensées*, 821 (Lafuma), 252 (Brunschvicg).

8. And so, to give only an example, *most of the time* we are as pre-Copernican as those before Copernicus.

9. Whether one is aware of it or not.

10. See notably S. Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg et al. (København: Gyldendal, 1968–1978<sup>2</sup>), [henceforth *Papirer*] VA57, VII<sup>1</sup>A 140, VII<sup>2</sup>B 35, IXA 39, X<sup>1</sup>A 248, X<sup>1</sup>A 394, X<sup>1</sup>A 537, X<sup>2</sup>A 137, X<sup>2</sup>A 546, 604, X<sup>3</sup>A 102, X<sup>4</sup>A 5, 33, 582, X<sup>5</sup>A 47, 51, 104, X<sup>6</sup>B 232, XI<sup>1</sup>A 283, 391, 394, 424, 430, XI<sup>2</sup>A 196, XI<sup>2</sup>A 279, 283, 321, 331, 552, XI<sup>3</sup>B 120, *Indøvelse i Christendom*, S. Kierkegaard, *Samlede Vaerker*, 2nd ed., ed. A. B. Drachmann, J. B. Heiberg et al. (København: Gyldendal, 1968–1978), [henceforth *SV*] XII 56f., 95f., 173, *Philosophiske Smuler*, *SV* IV, 271, *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*, *SV*, IX, 78ff, 88, 95ff., 351, *Øieblikket* 1–10, *SV*, XIV, 247ff.

11. See notably *Papirer*, VB44, 45, VII<sup>1</sup>A 68, 72, VII<sup>2</sup>B 235, VIII<sup>1</sup>A 27, 490, IXA 17, 20, 154, 382, 487, X<sup>1</sup>A 394, 417, 570, X<sup>2</sup>A 13, 114, 141, 202, 205, 418, 436, 439, 550, X<sup>3</sup>A 16, 169, 482, 519, X<sup>4</sup>A297, 533, 580, 582, X<sup>5</sup>A 143, XI<sup>1</sup>A 430, *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*, *SV*, VII 240f., 260ff., 301ff., 306ff., 312ff., 321ff., 327ff., 456ff., 571ff., and *Indøvelse i Christendom*, *SV*, XII, 56f., 60ff.

12. See notably the *Kirchenpostille* (1522), *Evangelium am 1. Sonntag des Advents*, M. Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimarer Ausgabe) 10 I/2 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1907), 21–62, in particular 24ff., and *Papirer* VIII<sup>1</sup>A 465.

13. *Papirer* VII<sup>1</sup>A 82. We follow H. V. Hong's and E. H. Hong's translation with slight changes. Cf. *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. H. V. Hong/E. H. Hong, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978). See also *Sygdommen til Døden*, *SV*, XI, 175f.

14. *Papirer* Va 57, VII<sup>1</sup>A 140, VII<sup>2</sup>B 235 (p. 191) IX A 39, X<sup>1</sup>A 248, 249, 394, 537, X<sup>2</sup>A 137, 546, 604, X<sup>3</sup>A102, X<sup>4</sup>A 5, 33, 582, X<sup>5</sup>A 47, 51, 104, X<sup>6</sup>B, 232, XI<sup>1</sup>A, 232, 283, 391, 394, 424, 430, XI<sup>2</sup>A 196, 279, 283, 321, 331, 552, XI<sup>3</sup>B 120, *Indøvelse i Christendom*, *SV*, XII, 56–57, 60, 95f., 173, *Philosophiske Smuler*, *SV*, IV, 271, *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger* *SV*, IX, 94f, 106, 111, 418, and *Øieblikket*, *SV*, XIV, 247f.

15. *Papirer* X<sup>2</sup>A 202.

16. *Papirer* X<sup>2</sup>A114.

17. On the connection between the *Reden* and the *Grundzüge*, see notably the First Address, *SW*, VII, 264f.

18. *SW*, VII, 265. We follow either Gregory Moore's or R. F. Jones's/G. H. Turnbull's and in some cases also I. Nakhimovsky's/B. Kapossy's/K. Tribe's translations with changes. Cf. *J. G. Fichte, Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. R. F. Jones/G. H. Turnbull (Chicago and London: Open Court, 1922), *AGN* and *AGN<sup>N</sup>*.

19. *SW*, VII, 291.

20. SW, VII, 304, 305.

21. SW, VII, 329. See also, for example, SW, VII, 368: “nicht etwa nur wiederholend das schon Dagewesene, sondern in die Zeit hineinerschaffend das durchaus Neue.”

22. SW, VII, 284–85.

23. SW, VII, 327, 329.

24. Ibid.

25. SW, VII, 327.

26. Ibid.

27. SW, VII, 329f.

28. N.B., the power to “spontaneously create images, which are not simply copies of reality, but can become its prototypes.”

29. And the problem is not only that one’s thought is “weak” and life is strong (so that the weakness of thought does not bother life)—life too has a problem with this.

30. See SW, VII, 329f. and 370.

31. SW, VII, 331.

32. Ibid.: “Innerhalb dieses Umkreises demnach und zufolge dieser Betrachtung ist es noch zu wenig gesagt, dass die Wissenschaft einfließe auf das Leben; sie ist vielmehr selber, und in sich selbstbeständiges Leben.”

33. SW, VII, 360: “[D]er Mensch bildet seine wissenschaftliche Ansicht nicht etwa mit Freiheit und Willkür, sondern sie wird ihm gebildet durch sein Leben, und ist eigentlich die zur Anschauung gewordene innere und übrigens ihm unbekanntete Wurzel seines Lebens selbst.”

34. Ibid.: “Was du so recht innerlich eigentlich bist, das tritt heraus vor dein äusseres Auge, und du vermöchtest niemals etwas anderes zu sehen. Solltest du anders sehen, so müsstest du erst anders werden.”

35. Ibid.

36. SW, VII, 331.

37. Ibid.

38. Nakhimovsky’s/B. Kapossy’s/K. Tribe’s English translation for “Gedanke eines fremden Lebens” (“a thought arising from an alien life”) suggests an idea foreign to the original’s wording. R. F. Jones’s/G. H. Turnbull’s translation (“the thought of a life that is strange or foreign”) and G. Moore’s “the thought of a foreign life” are more faithful to the original. But, of course, everything depends on the interpretation of “*wenn er nur als Gedanke eines fremden Lebens gedacht wird.*”

39. SW, VII, 331.

40. If we are not mistaken, the English translations for *gedachtes Denken* proposed both by R. F. Jones/G. H. Turnbull (“thinking at second-hand”) and by Gregory Moore (“idle or speculative thinking”) miss the point. I. Nakhimovsky’s/B. Kapossy’s/K. Tribe’s translation of this expression in the Fifth Address, SW, VII, 331 (“what we think we thought,” p. 59) goes in the right direction. But in this

regard their translation is not consistent, for in the Seventh Address, p. 91 (= SW, VII 373), they translate *gedachtes Denken* as “idle thought.”

41. SW, VII, 331–32.

42. Which foreshadows Kierkegaard’s concept of *Virkelighed for mig*.

43. SW, VII, 332.

44. SW, VII, 372–73.

45. The main subject of the Fourth Address. See in particular SW, VII, 318f., 320ff., 324, 325f., and 328.

46. SW, VII, 332.

47. I.e., the difference between: (1) a language whose sensory part (*sinnlicher Teil*) is immediately clear, conveys *eine wirklich erlebte Anschauung* and has the power to intervene directly in life and to stimulate it, so that the designation of supersensory things (*die Bezeichnung des Übersinlichen*)—which rests upon the sensory part of language and depends upon it—shares this power to intervene directly in life and to stimulate it; and (2) a language whose sensory part is neither immediately clear nor a vital stimulus, but seems entirely arbitrary, so that the designation of supersensory things involves a “dead element,” as it were, and lacks the power to intervene directly in life and to stimulate it.

48. SW, VII, 326.

49. SW, VII, 314.

50. And in particular the degree to which language (namely, what Fichte terms the *sensory part* of language and, therefore, also its supersensory part) is or is not “true to life” and able to “set life in action.”

## Linguistic Expression in Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*

SILA ÖZKARA

In the fourth address in the *Addresses to the German Nation*, Fichte presents a theory of language. My goal in this paper is to discuss Fichte's views on language and to place them in his broader metaphysical project. Fichte's view of language in the *Addresses* in part relies on a conception that many observers pass over in silence, and whose status is unclear, but deserves to be examined because it is crucial for his views regarding German nationalism. I will be reconstructing Fichte's argument in order, then, to examine it.

First, I will explain Fichte's theory of language in the fourth address. Then, I will discuss Fichte's three principles in the *Science of Knowledge* as the foundations for his transcendental project and the logical structure by which we are to think of anything. I will then claim that Fichte's view of language contradicts his third principle. Finally, I will briefly consider what this contradiction could indicate for Fichte's views of language as a part of a political treatise, on the one hand, and for his three principles as a part of a transcendental study, on the other hand, and raise the question of whether there is a way to reconcile the two.

### Fichte's View of Language

In the fourth address, entitled "The Principal Difference between the Germans and Other Peoples of Teutonic Descent," Fichte identifies

language as the main difference that makes Germans superior to the other Teutonic peoples. In this paper, I claim that Fichte presents a *theory* of language. In this section, first I will argue for this claim. Then, in order to understand the importance of language in Fichte's distinction between Germans and other peoples of Teutonic descent, I will present Fichte's theory of language in two main points. I will first discuss how for Fichte language is the fundamental defining feature of a community of people and their culture. I will then articulate Fichte's views on foreign languages either as incorporated into one's own language or in the context of speaking a foreign language.

### Fichte's Discussion of Language in the *Addresses* as a Theory of Language

One could ask whether it is fair to Fichte and his aims in the *Addresses* to claim that his discussion of language in the *Addresses* is in fact a *theory* of language, that is, an account of language that may be treated as a scientific rendering of the phenomenon, rather than perhaps merely a functional tool for what he would like to achieve in the work as a whole. Fichte might be seen as not concerned with giving a scientific account of language per se, but rather just talking about language as a part of his larger goal of forming a narrative for the building of a strong nation. After all, the discussion of language is found mainly in one address out of fourteen, and its degree of technicality is open to question, not to mention that Fichte was not a linguist. However, the field of linguistics was at its nascent stage during Fichte's time, and hence that Fichte was neither titled as nor had the education of a linguist does not preclude him from having his own theory of language.

It is important to consider the context in which these addresses were presented and Fichte's goal in writing and delivering them. As he claims in the first address, his goal is to propose a way for the German nation to raise itself up following the years of war and, further, to guide humanity as well to this high position. This, as exhibited in the following addresses, takes place through a program of education intended to bring about a national identity based on unity. Thus, one could say that Fichte's discussion of language is merely a functional tool for his account of successful *Bildung*.

All of these claims could be valid. Fichte may not have had in mind to give a full-fledged scientific account of what language is. We may not

know what his exact intentions were in providing an account of language here other than what is apparent to us in the sources available for us to read today. First of all, we know that language was not simply a passing interest that he happened to consider in the *Addresses*. He was concerned with how language functions and what that means for a society and its people. He writes about language in other places as well, for instance in his essay "*Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprunge der Sprache*" (1795).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, even if his account of language was merely a functional tool in the *Addresses*, it is a rather well-developed and detailed functional tool. Whatever Fichte's exact intentions may have been, he certainly has put a lot of thought into his account of language.

As for whether this is enough to classify this account as a *theory*, I think the answer is yes. For, Fichte provides quite a lot of detail regarding how he thinks language functions (as will be presented in the following section of this paper), and these views may be considered as theories in various subfields of modern-day linguistics, such as sociolinguistics, phonetics, and semantics. There is enough systematic content and richness in his account of language that may warrant us to treat his account as a theory of language, or at the very least attempt to understand and engage with it as such.

### Fichte's Theory of Language

As mentioned, Fichte's theory of language is presented around a distinction between Germans and the other Teutonic tribes. Fichte identifies two differences between Germans and the other Teutonic tribes.<sup>2</sup> Germans stayed in the original homelands of their ancestors and kept and developed their ancestors' original language, whereas the other tribes migrated and "adopted a foreign language and gradually modified it after their own fashion."<sup>3</sup> Fichte claims that "the change of native soil is quite insignificant," for people can adjust to different regions and climates with ease.<sup>4</sup> However, the change of language by the adaptation of a foreign one is "more significant" and for Fichte "establishes" the "contrast."<sup>5</sup>

Fichte wants to emphasize that the difference between the Germans and the other Teutonic tribes was not caused by either "the specific constitution" of either language, the one retained or the one adopted, or "the prior ancestry of those who continue to speak an original language."<sup>6</sup> Rather, for Fichte, what differentiates those who retained their original language is that for them "something peculiar [*Eigenes*] to them has been



retained and in the latter something foreign adopted” and “this language continues to be spoken without interruption, for men are formed by language far more than language is by men.”<sup>7</sup>

These are obscure claims. For, what difference does it make for language to be “peculiar” to one as a part of a group of people and how does speaking a language without interruption identify either an individual or a group as superior? Furthermore, how are people formed by language and not the other way around? As I hope to show, the claim that language forms people and is essential in the formation and development of a culture and individuals that exist as embodied living representations of that culture is crucial to Fichte’s account. This importance is highlighted by what Fichte regards as the “essence of language in general.”<sup>8</sup>

Fichte claims that “[t]he designation of objects” through certain sounds by speech organs is not arbitrary at all.<sup>9</sup> Rather, sounds are made by certain conventions to correspond to and express certain things, by “a fundamental law.”<sup>10</sup> The sounds of language correspond to what they correspond to necessarily.

Fichte writes, “Just as objects are represented in the sense organs of the individual with a particular shape, colour and so on, so they are represented in the organs of social man—that is, in language—with a particular sound.”<sup>11</sup> In this discussion of the essence of language, then, Fichte is calling attention to an analogy between the tripartite structure of *object—sense organ—perception* and that of *that which is to be expressed—speech organs—speech*.<sup>12</sup> This analogy, surprisingly for Fichte, shows an adherence to a pre-Kantian, precritical metaphysics and epistemology, which then shapes the rest of his discussion of language as the formative aspect of a group of people and their culture. For Fichte goes on to make the important claim that “[i]t is not really man who speaks; human nature speaks through him and announces itself to others of his kind.”<sup>13</sup> Individuals become the vessels through which human nature is expressed, and human nature here is the necessary formation of a culture in its given circumstances and its necessary relationship with its surroundings like the relationship of the sense organs and senses to their objects. Thus, language speaks through the individual more than it is the case that the individual employs language at her will in the ways in which she wants. Language forms the ways in which an individual may express herself and as such defines the structure within which she is to be in the world as a linguistic agent. As I discuss below, this suggests that there can be no differentiation between speakers.

Fichte writes that in given circumstances “there is but one language and this language is absolutely necessary.”<sup>14</sup> I will not discuss this issue in detail here but rather focus on the link to which he draws attention between the necessity of the particular development of the language with the necessity of its collective development by the particular group of people living in the same conditions and as a community. These necessary determinations that create particular languages suggest that language cannot be deemed to be a universal language since it is in fact “an offshoot thereof and precisely this particular offshoot.”<sup>15</sup> Each language is peculiar to the particular group of people through which it came to life. Fichte writes that, if the speech organs of a group of people who live together are influenced by the same external circumstances and thereby develop a language continually, then their language is the way it becomes through necessity, “and it is not really the people that express their knowledge, but rather knowledge that expresses itself through the people.”<sup>16</sup>

I have so far discussed Fichte's view of language as something that is inextricably connected to a group of people and their particular circumstances. What follows now is a discussion of his views about why it is problematic to speak a foreign language or to incorporate elements of a foreign language into one's own.

Fichte states that since the language is inextricably tied to a group of people, it co-develops with them, and thus “remains ever the same language.”<sup>17</sup> Although centuries pass and different individuals act as vessels of this language, “there is from the beginning a continuous transition without leaps.”<sup>18</sup> Introducing something foreign into the language becomes problematic because what is foreign does not have a place in the natural codetermination of nature and language. Before we explore this idea in more detail, however, we need to consider Fichte's distinction between two fundamental elements in a given language: the “sensuous” and the “supersensuous.”<sup>19</sup>

Fichte suggests that all human language is sensuous at the outset and only through a “rising” can the people as a group attain to a level of supersensuousness. Accordingly, we distinguish between two aspects of ourselves: “as an organ of a supersensuous world,” that is, as a soul or mind, and as “an organ of the sensuous world,” that is, as a physical body.<sup>20</sup> All the supersensuous aspects of language appear only in this supersensuous organ and are limited to it, as is the case with sensuous things. Thus, “the supersensuous organ can be indicated through language,” by equating particular supersensuous things with particular sensuous things.<sup>21</sup>

The “supersensuous,” then, refers to what is beyond (and perhaps higher to—hence the “rising”) that which is available to the mere senses and is developed as a meaning or sense that is “symbolic.”<sup>22</sup>

Fichte claims that this supersensuous aspect which provides a “symbolic designation” is developed by virtue of the development of the culture of a group of native speakers and thus reflects the developmental stage of the group.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the symbolic designation will begin and develop differently in different languages. As Fichte puts it, “[T]he beginning and further progress of this symbolic designation will take a very different turn in different languages, according to the difference in the relation that obtained and continues to obtain between the sensuous and spiritual development of the people speaking a language.”<sup>24</sup>

The supersensuous aspects of a language also arise as parts of a coherent whole. Fichte expresses this point when he writes that “potential supersensuous knowledge in the future is now designated according to its relation to the totality of supersensuous and sensuous knowledge embedded in the language as a whole.”<sup>25</sup>

This distinction between a supersensuous and a sensuous aspect of language is an odd one to make, especially because Fichte leaves the explanation of this distinction somewhat lacking.<sup>26</sup> Given his explanation, we can infer that what he means by the sensuous aspect is akin to the dictionary meanings of words, whereas the supersensuous aspect would then be a kind of meaning that is culturally established and that goes beyond dictionary definitions. The supersensuous aspect would have to correspond to culture or custom and use if it is to differ from the sensuous meaning of the word, that is, the connection of the sound to what it designates. It would be the cultural meaning that is placed on words and linguistic constructions, which is idiomatic and embedded in a network of meaning that is inherently connected to cultural practices. However, it is unclear on this view of language that a nonnative speaker would be unable to learn the language to the same degree as a native speaker.

Furthermore, could we then say that the supersensuous aspect is present in every word and in every linguistic construction? If the supersensuous aspect is a further meaning beyond the sensuous aspect, are there different supersensuous aspects, for instance, with respect to two words used separately, on the one hand, and these two words within a single phrase, on the other? In other words, how do different syntactic and morphological constructions affect and relate to the supersensuous aspect of language? Fichte’s account of this distinction leaves these and

many other questions unanswered. Although the field of linguistics was at its nascent stage during Fichte's time, Fichte's account could use further clarification and elaboration, especially because this distinction is crucial for his theory of language.

Putting this criticism aside, Fichte's two points, namely that the supersensuous aspects depend on the development of a culture and that the supersensuous aspects together with the sensuous aspects are constitutive of a coherent whole that is language, coupled with the previous position that language does not arise in the way that it does arbitrarily but rather of necessity, suggest that the supersensuous parts of one language can neither be translated into another language nor be understood by the speaker of another language.

Fichte gives two scenarios concerning the interaction with a foreign language, which he then relates to the supersensuous aspect of language. The first scenario is one in which foreign people are incorporated into a group in which they do not know the language. These newcomers need "to raise the sphere of their intuitions to the standpoint from which henceforth the language will continue to develop," since otherwise they will "remain without voice in the community and without influence on the language."<sup>27</sup> Only in this way can we say that "they [will] not form the language but the language [will form] them."<sup>28</sup>

The second scenario is one in which a community takes up an already well-developed foreign language and gives up its own.<sup>29</sup> For Fichte, this would not be problematic in the way that the first scenario is problematic if the community lets this language influence them freely and "is content to remain speechless until it has entered the sphere of intuitions of this foreign language."<sup>30</sup> However, there is an issue if the people "imposes its own sphere of intuitions on the new language, within which this language must henceforth move and starting from the point at which they found it."<sup>31</sup> Hence, in this first scenario, the foreign people must raise themselves to the cultural point at which the foreign language is and develop with that language if they hope to be a real efficacious part of that linguistic community. To be a real part of the linguistic community is to let the language form one's own person and one's cultural life.<sup>32</sup>

Fichte claims that this does not have consequences for the sensuous part of language since one can learn the sensuous aspects like a child learns a language. For these signs are "arbitrary" and may be learned by perceiving the signified objects.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, this change of language would have "the most momentous consequences for the supersensuous

part of language.”<sup>34</sup> For, the symbolic aspect of language cannot be uprooted and displaced with little regard to “the accompanying mental development.”<sup>35</sup> The people that have adopted the foreign language without rising to its appropriate level of awareness can at most “have the symbol and its spiritual meaning explained to them, whereby they receive only the flat and lifeless history of an alien culture but not a culture of their own, and get images which for them are neither immediately clear nor a vital stimulus, but which must seem to them as entirely arbitrary as the sensuous part of language.”<sup>36</sup>

They separate themselves from the symbolic, that is, the culturally sensitive aspect of the language since they are isolated from the culture. Consequently, “the entire sphere of the language” is “dead and closed off” to them and “its onward flow [is] interrupted.”<sup>37</sup> Although they may revive the language through their own culture, there nevertheless remains the breaking point in the flow of the life of the language that cannot be alleviated or mended. Thus, by giving their own cultural interpretation, their radical adaptation may give the appearance of life at the surface, but deep down the language “is dead and cut off from its living root.”<sup>38</sup>

A language that has remained continuous in the practice of its original speakers as not severed from its culture is symbolic and refers to the whole. An utterance in this language thus resonates with the whole language and culture through its interconnections. The language, as universal, speaks through the individual in continuity with the whole cultural heritage just as an individual is representative of the whole of which she is a part. Thus, necessity is affirmed in the whole-part relation insofar as the part is an expression of the whole, spatially and temporally.<sup>39</sup>

Fichte considers the repercussions of this view of language for the comparison of Germans and the other Teutonic tribes. The Teutonic tribes that adopted neo-Latin languages are speaking languages that are dead at the root, whereas the German language, which remained pure and loyal to the German culture and community from the start, is still very much alive. This point has linguistic and cultural ramifications. In “German speech the recourse to unintelligibility and obscurity arises either from clumsiness or malice” and can be corrected.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, “in the neo-Latin languages . . . this unintelligibility is natural and original” and “[t]here is no remedy, because those who speak them are not in possession of a living language by which they could scrutinize the dead one and, in the strict sense, they have no mother tongue at all.”<sup>41</sup> With regard to the ramifications for community, Fichte implies that the Teutonic tribes are

behind in terms of advancement and cultural flourishing in comparison to the Germans because they have lost the purity of the relation between their culture and language. Therefore, the culture is not able to come to life through the individual speakers of the community. The language, that is, the vessel of culture and collective consciousness, cannot find properly symbolic supersensuous expression in individuals because it is dead at the core, cut off from its roots. As a result, Fichte suggests that “[a] closer examination might perhaps show that those Teutonic tribes which adopted the Roman language encountered at the very outset such degradations of their earlier moral way of thinking through inappropriate and foreign symbols.”<sup>42</sup>

Whether or not we want to take these claims seriously, we ought nevertheless to recognize the driving force behind Fichte's view of language as something that ought to remain continuous, not infiltrated by foreign influences,<sup>43</sup> and which is proper to the group of people from which it originated. This shows a strict adherence to the view that language ought to remain pure. The inherent connection between culture and language implies the call for purity at two levels: first, the stress on the pure connection between the culture and language by maintaining the language that arose out of the development of the culture, and second, the maintenance of the purity of language by the exclusion of foreignness of all kinds, which cannot be assimilated.

At this point, I think it will be useful to consider whether Fichte's account of language is realistic. We can remark, to begin with, that Fichte has a deeply a priori account of language. He does not put the emphasis of his linguistic theory on anything empirical. Rather, he *reasons* through how he thinks language is and should be, and also bases language itself on a rational ground. Jere Surber also makes this point<sup>44</sup> in his reading of Fichte's other linguistic writings, for instance in “*Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprunge der Sprache*,” that Fichte is concerned with giving a “transcendental treatment” to the “*Ursprungsfrage*” of language. Surber writes that Fichte was concerned with “deduc[ing]” the origin of language from “the nature of Reason itself.”<sup>45</sup> According to Surber, Fichte “promotes . . . [language] to a position of necessary and intimate connection with the very notion of reason.”<sup>46</sup>

Since he relies only on reason, Fichte gives an inadequate account of natural language insofar as he romanticizes purity. A pure language is not realistic, even if this language is spoken by those who have developed culturally with it. In natural languages, there are always dialectal differences,

differences based on social and economic status, and on personal differences, all of which may be systematically observed and accounted for in the field of sociolinguistics. Given these internal distinctions that include the use of foreign elements, we can say that Fichte's account of language as something that *can be* pure is contradicted by facts. For, what does purity mean in a linguistic context, and what would it mean for a language to be pure in everyday use? Which particular speaker of the community would be speaking the pure language? These questions further call the notion of the supersensuous aspects of language into question. It would seem that the supersensuous aspects would have different meanings for different speakers. These and other issues in Fichte's theory of language may be further expounded. However, I will now turn to the three principles in order to then be in a position to show an inconsistency in Fichte's work.

### Fichte's Three Principles

Before going into why I think the view of purity in language is at odds with Fichte's three principles, especially the third principle, I will give a brief account of the three principles as they are found in Fichte's 1794 *Science of Knowledge*. But first, I will discuss the importance of the three principles for Fichte's philosophy.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>47</sup> Kant gives an account of cognition based on a controversial view of mind-independent reality or the thing-in-itself. Henry Allison's reading of Kant champions the discursivity thesis,<sup>48</sup> that is, that things-in-themselves, as distinct (as in another epistemological form) from their appearances in cognition, are distinct from and unknowable for the cognizing subject. Arguably, this is a major problem that the movement known as German Idealism grapples with, and according to which it defines itself as a philosophical movement: How can we account for cognition in the wake of the problem that Kant has identified regarding the content of cognition? Most, if not all, figures in German Idealism, including Hegel and Reinhold, are occupied with this issue. Fichte's three principles can be read as belonging to the overall attempt to grapple with this Kantian problem. In Fichte's three principles, the cognizing subject finds within itself what is other to it, of what it has cognition, to wit, either itself or what is not itself.

Insofar as Fichte's three principles are a reaction to Kant, they are crucial for his overall philosophy. He belongs to the German Idealist tradi-

tion, that is, the tradition that is concerned with and responds to Kant's philosophy. Fichte's three principles are an overarching response to Kant because they concern the basis, or rather, the main questions of German Idealism. Fichte himself writes that "[his] system frees [man] from the fetters of things in themselves, which is to say, from those external influences with which all previous systems—including the Kantian—have more or less fettered man."<sup>49</sup> Thus, in the following explanation of the three principles, it is important to consider this goal. From his statement, we can infer that Fichte's aim is to give an account of cognition that does not encounter what many in his time saw to be a deep problem in Kant's account.

Fichte, then, as I discuss below, by locating otherness, or the not-self, within identity, or the self, eliminates an otherness that is located outside the subject and makes otherness rather an integral part of identity. Thus, the import is twofold: difference is sourced from within identity (hence the self generates its other, not-self, within itself, and the self is also other to itself) and there is nothing other than the self and its other (that is generated by virtue of the self-identity of the self and that in turn is responsible for the existence of the self as its other), that is, there is nothing other than the subject and the difference it encounters. The crucial aspect of this discussion is that it suggests that difference is integral to any self, such as a cognizing subject, or a nation such as the German nation that Fichte idealized, or even to a language such as the German language.

The first principle is "the first[,] primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge."<sup>50</sup> It is an "Act" that asserts a self-relation, the fundamental self-identity of everything and "the basis of all consciousness."<sup>51</sup> It begins with "A = A" which is "A is A."<sup>52</sup> Through the realization of the "connection" of A to itself, which Fichte calls "X,"<sup>53</sup> the self that does this positing of A as connected to itself is asserted in the form of "I."<sup>54</sup> Fichte then reasons that "X that is absolutely posited can also be expressed as I = I; I am I."<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, "the *self posits itself* and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it *exists*" and vice versa<sup>56</sup> and "[t]he *self exists for the self*."<sup>57</sup>

The second principle shows difference, and can be seen as the opposite of the first principle, which shows identity.<sup>58</sup> Difference is entailed by the identity; the second principle follows from and in a way explains the first principle. The second principle is " $\sim A$  is not equal to A."<sup>59</sup> Opposition, or difference "in general is posited absolutely by the self."<sup>60</sup> Thus, the self asserts what is distinct from it, as precisely not being *it*. Hence, in Fichte's words, "[i]f any  $\sim A$  is to be posited, an A must be posited."<sup>61</sup>



The third principle brings the first two principles together.<sup>62</sup> Although when the “not-self is posited, the self is not posited” because they negate one another, nevertheless “the not-self is posited in the *self*; for it is counterposited.”<sup>63</sup> And “insofar as the not-self is to be posited in this consciousness, the self must also be posited therein.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, we retain an opposition within the self: “the identity of consciousness, the sole absolute foundation of our knowledge is itself eliminated.”<sup>65</sup> Since there is a unification of opposites in consciousness, X is also in consciousness.<sup>66</sup> X is necessary in counterpositing, and thus “itself must be a product . . . of an original act of the self” which is the “Y,” “an act of the human mind.”<sup>67</sup> By this, “the opposed self and not-self are unified . . . in one consciousness.”<sup>68</sup> We can think of A and ~A as existing together in a single whole without “mutual elimination and destruction” by recognizing that they act as “limits” for one another: in this mutual limiting, “the act Y will be a *limiting* of each opposite by the other; and X will denote the *limits*.”<sup>69</sup> By virtue of Y, “*both the self and the not-self are absolutely posited as divisible*.”<sup>70</sup> Hence, Fichte asserts that difference is implicit in the concept of identity: “The self is to be equated with, and yet opposed to, itself” and thus “all these oppositions are united.”<sup>71</sup> This principle is expressed in summary in the statement, “In the self I oppose a divisible not-self to the divisible self.”<sup>72</sup>

### The Contradiction between Fichte’s View of Language and His Three Principles

Fichte thinks that through these three principles he has “discovered the way in which philosophy must raise itself to the level of a manifest science.”<sup>73</sup> Fichte also holds that once he lays out the three principles, we will arrive at “the area in which everything can be proved.”<sup>74</sup> This shows that he takes the three principles to be foundational structures based upon which everything else may be explained. Commentators remark on this foundational status of the three principles. Günter Zöllner, for instance, claims that the three principles underlie and are responsible for “the basic structures of all knowledge and mental life.”<sup>75</sup>

As seen in my exposition of the three principles, Fichte’s third principle indicates that difference is to be found within identity, otherness within the selfsame. The other is necessarily included in one’s own

identity not merely as external, as the second principle suggests, but as integral and immanent. If we are to take the three principles as the basis of Fichte's system, as Fichte indicates, then we may not only use these principles to understand other parts of Fichte's philosophy, but also expect other aspects of Fichte's philosophy to be in accord and consistent with the three principles.

We may, for instance, look to the three principles to explain Fichte's theory of language, or at least to illuminate aspects of it. However, when we consider the three principles and Fichte's view of language together, I think that we will see they are incompatible. Fichte's view of language, as noted above, is based on the pivotal ideas of purity and continuity. According to Fichte's third principle, however, there is necessarily difference within identity, and identity and difference are integral and immanent to, and further entail each other and thus compose a whole.

If we take the third principle to apply to language, we need to allow for difference to exist within a language. There are two ways to interpret such a proposal. One is that there is internal differentiation in a given language by virtue of the differences of its individual speakers. Another is that different languages, that is  $\sim A$  or the not-self, are found within the language in question.

Although the first interpretation seems plausible, and would avoid a contradiction between Fichte's theory of language and his third principle, it is not adequate according to Fichte's framework. For to claim that the third principle applies to language because language always is internally differentiated by virtue of having individual speakers goes against Fichte's view that language speaks through the individual and that individuals are only vessels for the expression of language. Insofar as individuals are vessels through which language speaks, their differentiation is not significant if not impossible for Fichte, and would not allow for the difference that the third principle requires.

According to the second interpretation, however, Fichte's theory of language and the third principle are contradictory. From the angle of vision of this interpretation, each language ought to be saturated with elements of foreign languages. This may be in the form of foreign words, syntactical structures, morphological patterns, etc. imported into the language. It could also be the case that nonassimilated foreign speakers are active members of the linguistic community, engaging in linguistic practices with native speakers of the language. This is a comparatively more

realistic portrayal of natural language in its everyday existence than the one that Fichte provides, which suggests that foreign elements of a language or a foreign language is dead for the speaker.

Fichte's view of language, including strict adherence to purity, necessarily excludes the possibility of the inclusion of the not-self in the self, or even the divisibility of the self itself. Language for Fichte ought to be homogeneous and reflective of the culture as one single voice that excludes all that is different from it. It seems as though Fichte's view of language could only be explained by the first principle, the principle of self-identity, of the self positing itself absolutely. Fichte's language posits itself absolutely insofar as it speaks through the individual speakers (rather than the individuals speaking the language) and does so only with its own resources, excluding foreign influences, because foreign influences would fail to import requisite supersensuous determinations.

However, an explanation of language based on the first principle only is not a realistic way of accounting for living language in Fichte's terms. For not only are the three principles entailed by one another, but the third principle is also the condition for the other two principles. When we get to the exposition of the third principle, we see that it had been presupposed all along. X is a product of Y, which is the unifying term of the not-self and self.<sup>76</sup> To speak of language only in the terms of the first principle would be an incomplete rendering of a realistic account of language.

### What This Contradiction Entails

On the basis of this discussion, we may claim that Fichte's account of language is deficient if we are to take his three principles as the criteria through which to measure it. This disparateness of the two accounts could indicate several things. Among them are the following two options: either (1) Fichte's philosophical corpus is not consistent, or (2) the three principles are not meant to be taken as a metaphysical basis for Fichte's theories.

It is clear that there is an outright contradiction between Fichte's theory of language and his third principle: his theory of language is directed against the incorporation of foreign elements in a language, whereas the third principle requires that identity and difference are found within and codetermine one another. It would be inadequate for Fichte to say that

there is internal differentiation in language by virtue of the differences among speakers, since on his view language is something that speaks through the individual and the individual is only a vessel. Therefore, for Fichte's account, differences between individuals ought not to affect the purity and homogeneity of language. In a view that rejects internal differentiation even within the language's own parameters, foreign elements are even harder to incorporate into the picture. Thus, it is difficult to imagine that Fichte could defend himself against this criticism.

Leaving aside the contradiction with the three principles, Fichte's theory of language is inherently flawed insofar as it does not account for a realistic use of language that, at the core, is internally differentiated and developed in many ways through the influences of other languages. This is due partly to his lack of empirical linguistic knowledge, as well as to his reliance on a priori grounds of explanation. His account of language depends on thinking about what a language *ought* to be, which is then linked to his view of German as linguistically pure. Consequently, his a priori view of language proves to be an inadequate account for natural languages and, furthermore, simply contradicts his three principles.

## Notes

1. GA, I,3, 91–127.
2. AGN, 48.
3. Ibid. Some Germanic tribes migrated to Italy, Gaul, and Hispania. They adopted the Latin and Romance languages and Roman culture. I assume this migration is what Fichte has in mind.
4. AGN, 49.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. Note here that he is limiting himself to a language that has as its only modality sound, thereby excluding sign language as a possible language.
10. AGN, 49.
11. AGN, 49–50.
12. That Fichte regards language as almost a sense in his account can be seen in his statement that “[a]s things immediately present to man move him, so too must the words of such a language move him who understands it, for they also are things and by no means arbitrary contrivances” (AGN, 53).

13. AGN, 50.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. AGN, 50–51. It is unclear how he may account for certain kinds of linguistic change, for often languages change with outside influences.

19. AGN, 51.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. AGN, 52–53.

26. We could further question whether the terms *sensuous* and *supersensuous* could correspond to terms of modern linguistics and attempt to make sense of them anachronistically, which may prove useful to understand these terms from a scientific perspective today. However, such a cross-analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

27. AGN, 53. Fichte says here that these people should be “allowed to” come into the same sphere as the original race, need to be given “entry.” This suggests that he is pushing for cultural assimilation as the only viable way in which foreign people may have access to language. However, he does not indicate in what this assimilation consists.

28. AGN, 54.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. There may be further implications to this statement that being a part of a linguistic community practically means being formed by language, for Fichte. For, if language forms all those who are efficacious parts of a linguistic community, then not having raised oneself to “the sphere of intuitions,” to the standpoint of the language as it currently is would seem to imply that one is outside the cultural sphere and cannot be in any meaningful interaction with other speakers, in Fichte’s view. Surely, we know that this view is incorrect, for there are many examples of people being influential in languages foreign to them.

33. AGN, 54.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. AGN, 55. Fichte gives the examples of the Latinate words *humanity*, *liberty*, *popularity* and how these words are deficient in the German language in comparison with their Germanic counterparts.

39. This emphasis on unity and the whole may be seen in the following excerpt: "In a language that has remained continuously living this supersensuous part is symbolical; it summarizes at every step the totality of the sensuous and spiritual life of the nation as it is embedded in language in perfect unity, in order to designate a concept that is likewise not arbitrary but necessarily goes forth from the entire previous life of the nation. From this concept and from its designation a keen eye, moving backwards, ought to be able to reconstruct the entire cultural history of the nation. In a dead language, however, this supersensuous part, which while the language was alive was just the same, becomes, through its extinction, an incoherent collection of arbitrary and utterly inexplicable signs of equally arbitrary concepts; and nothing else can be done with either sign or concept beyond simply learning them" (AGN, 57).

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. AGN, 56. Fichte elaborates further on the ramification of a living language, on the one hand, and a dead language on the other, which will be fruitful to consider in another paper.

43. This is an implication I am making based on Fichte's account.

44. See Jere Paul Surber, "The Problems of Language in German Idealism: An Historical and Conceptual Overview," in *Phenomenology on Kant, German Idealism, Hermeneutics and Logic*, ed. O. K. Wiegand, R. J. Dostal, L. Embree, J. Kockelmans, and J. N. Mohanty (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 305–36.

45. Ibid., 317–18.

46. Ibid., 318. See also Jere Paul, *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy* (New York: Humanity Books, 1996).

47. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

48. See Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (Revised and Enlarged Edition) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

49. EPW, 385.

50. SK, 93.

51. Ibid.

52. SK, 94.

53. SK, 95.

54. SK, 96.

55. Ibid.

56. SK, 97.
57. SK, 99.
58. SK, 103.
59. SK, 102.
60. SK, 103.
61. Ibid.
62. SK, 106.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. SK, 107.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. SK, 108.
70. Ibid.
71. SK, 109.
72. SK, 110.
73. SK, 89.
74. SK, 105.
75. Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 44.
76. SK, 107.

## Critique of Religion and Critical Religion in Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*

BENJAMIN D. CROWE

Fichte's 1808 *Addresses to the German Nation* has primarily been received as a work of secular political philosophy, as a treatment of ideas such as nationality and national education rather than as a work in the philosophy of religion. For example, Wilhelm Windelband, an influential reader of Fichte, does not discuss religion at all in his *Fichtes Idee des deutschen Staates*.<sup>1</sup> More recent discussions of the text, such as David James's *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue*, continue this pattern.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this simply reflects the fact that Fichte does indeed minimize the role of religion in the ambitious reform and renewal program set forth in the text. Yet, the apparent sidelining of religion in the *Addresses* seems problematic in light of the fact that discussions of religious education, civic religion, and the religious obligations of the citizenry were fairly standard in most treatments of ethics and natural law during the period. For example, the textbook used by Kant in his lectures on moral philosophy includes these topics, which in turn appear in Kant's own discussions.<sup>3</sup> This feature of the *Addresses* also represents something of a departure for Fichte himself, insofar as both the 1798 *System of Ethics* and the later 1812 lectures on the theory of ethics deal with these topics.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, both texts include discussions of public religious instruction and religious institutions, and set forth the claim that moral progress requires public consensus on a creed (*Symbol*). By contrast, in the *Addresses*, Fichte



explicitly aims his remarks on educational reform not at the clergy, but rather at the secular authorities, arguing that the time for a religious monopoly on moral education has passed.

I have three goals in this paper. First, *contra* the reception history of the work, I will argue that the *Addresses* does deal with important issues in the philosophy of religion. Second, I will show how this work adds to our understanding of Fichte's religious thought through the discussions of how religion relates to society contained in the work. Finally, I will examine how Fichte's view anticipates the more familiar Left Hegelian critique of religion, while at the same time carving out a distinctive position.

I will argue that, rather than being a sideline issue as it might appear, religion is critical to what Fichte's is doing in this text. By saying that religion is critical to the *Addresses*, I mean four distinct but related things. First, Fichte mounts a critique of religion in the standard sense of the term, one that zeroes in on the otherworldly character of traditional religion in a way that anticipates Hegel's discussions of the "unhappy consciousness" and the development of Hegel's ideas by Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche. Second, Fichte presents a critique of religion in the Kantian sense of delimiting or defining its domain and its relationship to other aspects of human life. Third, religion is also critical to Fichte's project in the sense of being vital to it. Not only is the entire project of the *Addresses* underwritten by a moral-religious vision, but Fichte also maintains (again in a way that anticipates Hegel) that religion provides a perspective that unifies practical contradictions in a way that fulfills an essential human need. Fourth, religion is critical for Fichte in that, when it is properly understood and expressed institutionally, it furnishes a kind of characterological bulwark against tyrannical and morally enervating social systems.<sup>5</sup> Thus, despite the apparently limited role provided for religion in the central educational program of the work, religion is in fact vitally important to the agenda of Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*.

### Critique of Religion

Right from the beginning of the *Addresses*, Fichte signals his critical distance from traditional religion and religious institutions. As he sets forth what he views as the sorry state of German national life in §1, Fichte remarks on the failure of religion to furnish the social bonds required to

unify ruler and ruled (AGN, 15–16). In §3, Fichte argues that traditional (Protestant) religious education has actually conflicted with the goal of promoting a firm moral character among the general populace because of its insistence on people's "natural aversion to God's commandments" and the resultant impossibility of obedience for creatures with a corrupt nature (ibid., 43–44). Making a point that reappears, for example, in his 1812 lectures on the theory of ethics, Fichte then offers the psychological observation that people tend to acquiesce in what they believe to be essential to their natures (ibid., 44).<sup>6</sup> The tendency of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century apologetics to stress the historical foundations of Christian belief further detaches religious commitment from character and thus from people's motivational systems, rendering the "existence of God a historical fact whose truth is ascertained by the examination of witnesses" (ibid.). This point, too, reappears in the 1812 lectures; there, Fichte argues for a very circumscribed role for the historical branch of theology within the church (GA, II/13, 386–89). In §§6–7, as Fichte reviews the history of the German nation and of Europe more generally, he argues that the medieval system of religious education failed to inculcate morality in the citizenry, and that the Enlightened despotism of the early modern period used the image of the distant Deist god to capture the prince's role in a machine-like state apparatus (AGN, 82; 88–90).

Fichte's account of the failure of religion and of religious institutions to ground social unity in the moral character of the citizenry ultimately turns on the otherworldly character of traditional religion. This point emerges most clearly in §8. Fichte describes the world-denying ethos of the apostles and the earliest Christians, noting that this attitude was in part a justifiable response to the political situation in the Roman Empire (AGN, 100–101; 113–14). World-denying asceticism is, for Fichte as later for Hegel (in the famous discussion in chapter 4 of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*), the attitude of the person denied fulfillment in life. By singling out the otherworldly character of the earliest Christianity, Fichte anticipates the work of later scholars and theologians such as Nietzsche's colleague Franz Overbeck, as well as the fin-de-siècle "history of religions" school. On Fichte's reading, this otherworldliness alienated the founding generations of Christians from the "earthly fatherland," fostering "withdrawal from the affairs of state and nation" (ibid., 101). Otherworldliness, moreover, sets the stage for "religious enthusiasm," a kind of extreme attitude on which "temporal life forfeits its self-subsistence" (ibid.). For Fichte,

this is a perversion of authentic religiosity, since “[i]n the regular order of things . . . earthly life should itself be true life, a life one can rejoice in and enjoy with gratitude, even in the expectation of a higher one” (ibid.). Fichte bases this conclusion, first of all, on the relatively straightforward observation that human beings are embodied, social creatures. On a deeper level, however, one of the central elements of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* during this period is the derivation of the content and structure of the domain of appearance, via a process of nested schematization, from God or the Absolute. This account, he believes, rules out the sort of devaluation of earthly life that he sees in traditional religion.

This account of the nature of traditional religion links up most clearly with Fichte’s project in the *Addresses* in §11. Here, he observes how it has historically been the Church, rather than the secular authority, that has taken the lead in matters of education (AGN, 141). The nature of the Church’s role, however, was rooted in the ascetic attitude inherited from early Christianity: “The Church saw itself not so much as a constituent of the earthly commonwealth as a colony of heaven quite alien to it, sent to enlist citizens for this foreign state wherever it could take root; its education aimed at nothing save that men would not be damned in the other world, but blessed” (ibid.). This, for Fichte, explains the failure of the Church to stave off the social disintegration and consequent political collapse of his own day. This religious monopoly continued in Fichte’s time as the only sort of education that most people had access to, and which had its sole focus on “attaining blessedness in heaven” such that all else was left to the “haphazard and blind influence” of society (ibid., 142).

These are the essential contours of Fichte’s critique of religion in the *Addresses*. For those familiar with the later work of Marx and the Left Hegelians, for whom the critique of religion is the essential prerequisite for critique of society, the resonances should be obvious.<sup>7</sup> One should also recall here that Fichte had long held unorthodox views on religion, going even farther than Kant, for example, in articulating a thin philosophical theology predicated on the requirements of practical reason.<sup>8</sup> Fichte had frequently argued that the orientation of traditional religion toward otherworldly rewards made it inconsistent with human moral excellence as well as well-being. The kind of self-hatred he finds in traditional teachings about human corruption similarly come in for withering critique even in the final period of Fichte’s career (e.g., in the 1812 lectures on ethics). Given this critical perspective, it is not surprising that the role of religion in Fichte’s ambitious program in the *Addresses* is a diminished one.

### Kantian Critique of Religion

Besides the critique of religion, along proto-Left Hegelian lines, sketched out above, Fichte also offers in the *Addresses* a critique of religion in the more Kantian sense of the term. Part of the function of critique in Kant's sense is to set out the boundaries of a particular domain, for instance, that of theoretical reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>9</sup> In the *Addresses*, Fichte is likewise concerned with such boundary setting, in this case, with respect to religion.

In §3, Fichte sets out his own conception of true religion as “living our life in God” (AGN, 37), against which debased religion is a mere “handmaiden to selfishness.” Despite the tight connection between religion and the “higher morality” that Fichte articulates in this address, he nevertheless asserts that “[i]n everyday life, and in a well-ordered society, there is no immediate need at all for religion to mould life; true morality is perfectly sufficient for this purpose” (ibid.). This claim recalls Fichte's assertion in the infamous “On the Basis of Our Belief in Divine Governance,” the 1798 essay that sparked of the “Atheism Controversy,” that “[t]his is the only possible confession of faith: joyfully and innocently to accomplish whatever duty commands in every circumstance, without doubting and without pettifogging over the consequences” (GA, I/5, 354; IWL, 150).

In the present context, however, this claim is more immediately reflective of Fichte's position in two earlier cycles of public lectures delivered in Berlin, the 1804–05 *Characteristics of the Present Age* and the 1806 *Way to the Blessed Life or Theory of Religion*. In §16 of the *Characteristics*, Fichte outlines what he calls “true religion” in the context of a synoptic philosophy of history. Important features of this account recur in §§5 and 8 of the *Way to the Blessed Life*. Particularly in §5 of the latter, Fichte develops his conception of religion as a purely *contemplative* standpoint. It occupies a position between “higher morality,” which is a practical disposition, and philosophy or *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is also contemplative, but differs from religion in furnishing a complete explanation of the “facts of consciousness” constitutive of ordinary experience, moral life, and political organization. This hierarchical pattern endures in Fichte's later work. For example, the 1810–11 lectures entitled *Facts of Consciousness* culminate in a contemplative religious outlook, which paves the way for the rigorously deductive procedure of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Similarly, in the 1812 lecture on the theory of ethics, Fichte arranges

particular philosophical sciences in a kind of hierarchy of explanatory completeness, moving upward from the theory of nature, to the theory of right, to the theory of ethics, to the theory of religion, and thence to the most comprehensive explanatory level of the *Wissenschaftslehre* itself.

Fichte articulates essentially this same position here in the *Addresses*. As contemplative or theoretical, religion is not a requirement either of an efficacious moral disposition or of the kind of social order best engendered by such a disposition. Religion, for Fichte, only becomes practical when (1) society is immoral or corrupt, and (2) “when man’s sphere of activity lies not within but beyond the social order” (*AGN*, 37). As described above, these two conditions tend to be instantiated alongside one another, as oppressive or alienated social conditions force some people to look for ultimate fulfillment beyond earthly life.

### Critical Religion

It is important to recognize, however, that Fichte’s stress on the contemplative, as opposed to practical, nature of religion is established by him independently of his concerns about the traditional otherworldly bent of religion. As the citations mentioned previously show, Fichte motivates this contemplative account within his overall view of the explanatory relationship between different attitudes and the philosophical sciences that correspond to or articulate them. For this reason, Fichte is able to simultaneously castigate the ascetic or otherworldly side of religious faith and religious education, while also maintaining that the contemplative attitude characteristic of religion plays a valuable role in fulfilling a basic human drive.

The latter claim, that religion is critical in the sense of being essential or vital to human flourishing, is most fully presented in §3 of the *Addresses*. Pure morality (elsewhere called “higher morality”) is so called because it is “primary, independent, self-sufficient and self-existent,” that is to say, not “linked to and grafted on to a non-moral drive whose satisfaction it serves” (*AGN*, 35). That is, pure morality is “pure” in the Kantian sense, thus, disentangled as far as possible from our sensible natures. Accordingly, the development of such a pure morality requires at least some insight into a “higher order,” “that supersensuous world order in which nothing becomes, nor which has itself ever become, but forever only is” (*ibid.*, 36). This linkage between pure morality and insight into an

eternal order is another enduring feature of Fichte's thought. For example, in the "Appeal to the Public" of 1799, Fichte writes:

Through a disposition in our nature a whole new world is opened for us. Without this, all the poetizing [*Dichten*] and the aspiring [*Trachten*] of the human heart is merely towards sensible enjoyment, at best at the hegemony of our unconditioned self-will [*Eigenwillens*]; thus always at something given in external experience that is dependent upon accident. Through this disposition we attain a higher existence, which is independent of nature as a whole and is simply grounded in us ourselves; through it we arrive at a series [*Reihe*] which is quite fittingly called supersensible. (*GA*, I/5, 425)

At its most developed and articulate, such insight is just the same as the contemplative attitude that Fichte identifies with religion both here in §3 of the *Addresses* and in the various other texts from the period mentioned above. Religion is the insight that, ultimately, there is only *one* divine life of which all moral agents are members. A person who has attained this insight "will recognize his own life and every other spiritual life as an eternal link in the chain of the revelation of divine life and learn to hold it sacred" (*AGN*, 36). As discussed previously, Fichte thinks that this kind of self-understanding is not strictly necessary for morality. Why, then, does it merit discussion in a work ostensibly concerned with what is required by the immediate situation of Napoleonic domination?

In the *Addresses* itself, Fichte only hints at an answer to this question. Religion, he writes, "resolves the final contradiction, thus bringing perfect self-unity and clarity to his understanding" (*AGN*, 37). This suggestive remark makes some sense against the background of Fichte's view about the highest drive of human nature, viz., the drive toward a unified self.<sup>10</sup> Human beings are plainly inhabitants of distinct domains of self-understanding, which Fichte typically characterizes, in Kantian fashion, as the domains of *nature* and of *freedom*. Moreover, Fichte elaborates or ramifies this Kantian duality by differentiating a cluster of distinct attitudes, some of which straddle the basic duality and others of which inhabit one extreme or the other, and each of which is articulated by different kinds of philosophical outlook. One of the primary ambitions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* since its inception is the unification of the residual Kantian dualisms at the theoretical level. Beginning with the 1792 *Attempt*

at a *Critique of All Revelation*, Fichte was also concerned with the unification of the self as a desideratum of *practical* reason.<sup>11</sup> Views that left human nature divided against itself are characterized in many places as ultimately unsatisfying. The very structure of practical deliberation, as spelled out, for instance, in the 1798 *System of Ethics*, reflects Fichte's concern with harmonizing different aspects of an agent's nature (*GA*, I/5, 152–53; *SE*, 155). To move ahead to the last period of Fichte's career, the complex series of thought-experiments undertaken in the “facts of consciousness” lectures is designed to impel Fichte's audience to ever more unifying intuitions.<sup>12</sup>

Religion, while a contemplative stance rather than one that is directly practical or motivational, nevertheless fulfills a drive that Fichte consistently identifies as one of the deepest needs of our nature. This is another place in which the view expressed in the *Addresses* anticipates Hegelian ideas. In his own lectures on religion, Hegel often describes religious consciousness as the ultimate overcoming of alienation. From Hegel, this way of thinking about religion, namely, as a response to forms of alienation inherent in human existence, finds its way into the work of figures such as Kierkegaard and Marx.

It is also worthwhile to observe that the unifying intuition furnished by religion is likewise crucial for Fichte's entire project in the *Addresses* and elsewhere. The “new world” that Fichte promises to open up in §1 is something that can only come into being on the basis of an ideal “image,” of a kind “that are independent of reality and in no way copies [*Nachbilder*] but, rather pre-figures [*Vorbilder*] thereof” (*AGN*, 25). In §3, Fichte argues, as he does elsewhere, that it is only idealism that provides a philosophical outlook capable of articulating such ideals and of accounting for our capacity to disclose them. Idealism asserts that nothing truly exists but “the spiritual life that lives in thought [*Gedanken*]; that nothing else truly exists, but only appears to exist, and . . . that the ground of this appearance proceeds from thought” (*ibid.*, 36). As he had argued at the time of the “Atheism Controversy,” Fichte maintains that the true lesson of Kant's critique of physico-theology is that a proper conception of the ideal, divine realm cannot be grounded on the knowledge of nature or of history, but rather only on the moral disposition (*ibid.*, 42). Fichte remains convinced that idealism, as the philosophical outlook that proceeds *from* the assertion of the self-sufficiency of the spiritual, is the only position capable of adequately articulating or defending the disinterested love of the good that lies at the basis of morality. Whatever one thinks about this

claim, and there are indeed many questions to be asked, it is difficult to deny that this is what Fichte clearly holds. It is also difficult to overlook the way in which the point of view of idealism overlaps with the religious point of view that Fichte spells out in §3 of the *Addresses*, namely that ultimate reality consists in a single divine life whose life is one of *thought*.

### Religion *as* Critical

There is one last sense in which I want to say that, for Fichte, religion is critical. Despite his concerns about the complicity of otherworldly faith and the institutions that have supported it in the general decay of society, Fichte nonetheless furnishes religion, properly understood and institutionalized, with a crucial role in overcoming the order of things as they are. This, admittedly surprising, feature of Fichte's position comes across most clearly in §8. Here, Fichte begins his discussion by taking note of what would seem to be the very same otherworldly attitude that, as described above, he wants to reject. "Religion . . . is quite able to transport us beyond all time, and beyond the present, sensuous life, without the least injury to the justness [*Rechtlichkeit*], morality, and sanctity of the life seized by this faith" (AGN, 100). In other words, the transcendent point of view characteristic of religion need not degenerate into ascetic alienation. But, in §8, Fichte goes farther than merely allowing that religion is not always corrupting to enlist religion as an ally in the very struggle against tyranny and corruption that he is undertaking in the *Addresses*.

In a passage that once again echoes what Fichte had said in the "Divine Governance" essay of 1798, he writes that religion assures us that "we can still continue this activity solely to maintain the divine life that has broken forth in us and in relation to a higher order of things in a world to come, in which nothing that is done in God shall perish" (AGN, 100). Fichte retains the Kantian intuition that the postulates of religion give us an assurance to the effect that morality is not ultimately a losing proposition. Of course, it is precisely this hope for the world to come that forms the center of the otherworldly attitude Fichte is so concerned to combat. Intriguingly, however, his reflections push in a very different direction here. The "meaning of religion" is ultimately "that one resists enslavement and refuses to allow religion to degenerate into the last consolation of the captive," that one strives to "prevent the earth being made into hell to arouse a yet greater yearning for heaven" (*ibid.*, 101).



This is not necessarily what one would have expected Fichte to say in light of his critique of religion. What takes place in this portion of §6, however, is Fichte's attempt to articulate a more this-worldly (or perhaps, more theologically, Incarnational) conception of religiosity. This conception is grounded in the claim that "[t]he natural impulse of man, to be surrendered only in case of true necessity, is to find heaven already on this earth and to infuse his daily labours with everlastingness; to plant and cultivate the imperishable in the temporal itself" (AGN, 101). Rescued from the ascetic attitude, religion becomes a matter of shifting one's point of view regarding the value of earthly life, away from more traditional ideas about human corruption and sin and toward an appreciation of the idealistic perspective on which human existence is an appearance of divine life. Fichte is not particularly forthcoming regarding the details of how this shift operates, but his point is still fairly clear. An awareness of "an order of things that [one] could acknowledge as itself eternal and capable of receiving something eternal," of the "spiritual nature" that "surrounds us" (ibid., 102) is meant to inspire a vigorous sense of the value and dignity of human life that, in turn, motivates one to do what one can do to resist conditions that degrade humanity. Fichte's examples of such piety are not so much the ascetic heroes of monasticism but rather Roman patriots (many of whom he had encountered in Dante's presentation in *The Divine Comedy*).

## Conclusion

I hope that I have demonstrated that, despite its absence from the educational reform program that forms the heart of Fichte's project in the *Addresses*, religion is nevertheless an important character in the text. I want to conclude with some lingering questions about the consistency of the position that Fichte develops. As discussed above, Fichte critically delimits religion from other attitudes by emphasizing its contemplative, as opposed to active, character. At the same time, particularly in §6, he tries to articulate a religious position that, in its this-worldly orientation and appreciation for the dignity of human life, provides a locus for resistance against oppressive social systems. That is, while he anticipates Marx's concerns about the social costs of otherworldliness, Fichte is far from willing to repudiate religion as socially and politically efficacious. Yet, it would seem that religion can best fulfill this latter role not as a purely

contemplative outlook on the ultimate reality, but as an attitude or disposition with direct and obvious practical consequences. This point can be elaborated by contrasting Fichte's position with the one that Hegel adopts in his Berlin lectures on religion. There, Hegel consistently maintains that the *cultus* is essential to religion insofar as it is the *cultus* that concretely enacts the unification or reconciliation that lies at the heart of religious consciousness. Hegel rejects both the accounts of religion that reduce it to a theory and those that elide the distinctiveness of the *cultus* as a form of practice. He cites the moralizing conceptions of religion in Kant and in Fichte as prime examples of the latter tendency.<sup>13</sup> However that may be, we can see from the example of Hegel's own view that Fichte's critical delimitation of religion as a merely contemplative perspective renders it difficult to account for his concomitant insistence that religion does play an active role in life.

A further issue is more internal to the way that Fichte positions religion relative to "higher" or "pure" morality. Specifically, it is difficult to disentangle these two attitudes in any clean way within Fichte's texts. "Higher morality" already seems to entail a recognizably religious outlook. This is true both in the relatively brief discussion in the *Addresses* as well as in other texts, such as the 1798 *System of Ethics* and the 1812 lectures on ethics. To take up the latter, the discussion moves back and forth between theological concepts (such as the Incarnation and original sin), reflections on religious history and institutions, and discussions of the moral disposition [*Gesinnung*]. Indeed, throughout Fichte's career, the boundaries between morality as such and religion are quite permeable. This has led some to suspect that he simply reduces religion to morality, a suspicion seemingly confirmed by passages such as that from the "Divine Governance" essay cited previously. The issue I want to raise here is that this characteristic of Fichte's position threatens the stability of the boundaries that he attempts to set on religion as a *contemplative* attitude that does not bear directly on the conduct of life. Given that morality, properly conceived by Fichte's lights, is already thoroughly *religious*, it is hard to see how he can maintain that belief in a supersensible order is practically inert.

These questions only serve to show how the position on religion that Fichte carves out in the *Addresses* links up in important ways with his philosophy of religion as a whole. Thus, despite its apparently diminished role in this ambitious and controversial text, religion serves as a thread that links his ideas here with the rest of Fichte's system. Far from

being marginal, religion turns out to be *critical* to the *Addresses to the German Nation*.

## Notes

1. Wilhelm Windelband, *Fichtes Idee des deutschen Staates* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1921). The original text appeared in 1890 on the occasion of Wilhelm II's birthday.

2. David James, *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. ch. 5. Other recent studies of the *Addresses* that similarly leave religion to one side include Arash Abizadeh, "Was Fichte an Ethnic Nationalist? On Cultural Nationalism and Its Double," *History of Political Thought* 26 (2005): 334–59; and Richard Schottky, "Fichtes Nation-Begriff 1806 bis 1813—In der Spannung und Entwicklung," in *Gesellschaft, Staat, Nation*, ed. Rudolf Burger, Hans-Dieter Klein, and Wolfgang R. Schrader (Wien: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 159–84.

3. Kant most often employed the 1751 and 1763 editions of A. G. Baumgarten's *Ethica philosophica* (reprinted in AA, 27, 732–1028). For Kant's own lectures, see J. B. Schneewind and Peter Heath, eds., *Lectures on Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). An excellent scholarly account of eighteenth-century natural law and moral theory that highlights the importance of religious controversies is Knud Haakonsen, *Natural Law and Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a discussion of the context most immediately relevant to Kant and his successors, see Haakonsen, "German Natural Law," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 251–90.

4. For the 1798 *System of Ethics*, see GA I/5, 213–14, 218–24, 301–6; SE, 224–25, 230–38, 326–32. The 1812 material is found in GA, II/13, 337, 381–92.

5. This last feature of Fichte's conception of the social role of religion is also anticipated in the 1798 *System of Ethics*, where Fichte maintains that a belief in the infinite perfectibility of every rational being is "the first article of faith" in a moral community's creed, "something one cannot doubt without surrendering one's entire moral nature [*sittliche Natur*]," and which poses a danger to all sorts of tyranny by depriving the latter of its claim to necessity (GA, I/5, 218; SE, 229).

6. For example, Fichte holds that the doctrine of the universal corruption of humanity is itself "corrupting in the highest degree," an idea that is "unhealthy . . . and which one must work to extirpate" (GA, II/13, 377).

7. For one important locus of Marx's thinking on this issue, see his 1844 "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71–72.

For an excellent discussion of the development of Marx's thought and its context, see Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

8. See my "Fichte's Transcendental Theology," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92, no. 1 (2010): 68–88.

9. One of the clearest statements of Kant's conception of critique comes in the Preface to the A Edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Yet by this I do not understand a critique of books and systems, but a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive *independently of all experience*, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles" (AA, 3, Axii).

10. For two discussions of this key aspect of Fichte's thought, see Daniel Breazeale, "Philosophy and the Divided Self: On the 'Existential' and 'Scientific' Tasks of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*," *Fichte-Studien* 6 (1994): 117–47, and my "Fichte on Faith and Autonomy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (2013): 733–53.

11. Restraining the sensuous impulse may be essential to morality, but it is not all that needs to be said to provide a complete account. Without a further account of "the *positive* determination of the sensuous impulse by the moral law," we are left with an inadequate position that Fichte calls "stoicism in the doctrine of morals (the principle of self-sufficiency)" (I/1, 149; ACR, 24). The more complete view, which Fichte himself advocates, insists that the moral law "bring unity to the whole man" (I/1, 149; ACR, 24). Putting it slightly differently, Fichte maintains later on that the highest good is not simply a matter of conforming the will to what is right, but also entails the harmonization of the sensuous inclinations and what is right (I/1, 152–53; ACR, 27).

12. Fichte delivered four sets of lectures with the title "Facts of Consciousness" during the final phase of his career in Berlin (in the winter of 1810–11, the spring of 1811, the late fall of 1811, and the winter of 1813). We possess Fichte's manuscript for the 1810–11 course, as well as student transcripts of two later versions of the course. These lectures contain some of the most perspicuous formulations of Fichte's later conception of transcendental philosophy, though they have been unduly neglected by scholars.

13. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 228.



## Autonomy, Moral Education, and the Carving of a National Identity

C. JEFFERY KINLAW

[W]as an Geistigkeit und Freiheit dieser Geistigkeit glaubt, und die ewige Fortbildung dieser Geistigkeit durch Freiheit will, das, wo es auch geboren sey und in welcher Sprache es rede, ist unsers Geschlechts, es gehört uns an und es wird sich zu uns thun.

—SW, VII

In the *Reden an die deutschen Nation*, Fichte articulates and defends a theory of spiritual (*geistlich*) and moral self-formation that is to be the basis of his vision for national renewal in the aftermath of Napoleon's conquest and occupation of much of Europe. It is a cosmopolitan vision, as the passage cited at the heading of my paper suggests, but one based upon German exceptionalism, notably the claim that genuinely free, rational self-determination is a peculiarly German concept. Fichte's vision for a new national education designed to advance this spiritual and national renewal is to develop and bring to maturity a person's capacity for rational autonomy. The project aims to produce a new type of citizen, one who will be reliably committed *both* to the most comprehensive expansion of freedom and to the maximization of the common good—in sum, a citizen whose mature spiritual self-formation ensures that she will support and seek to sustain the new rational state. The new education thus aims to

build and develop a foundation for moral education whose initial step is to arouse one's native capacity to acknowledge and act on purely rational norms. Central to Fichte's proposal for a new form of communal spirit—one based upon freedom and cultivated by freedom—is a concept of freedom as self-initiated, rational self-determination, which Fichte motivates and defends against what he takes to be the primary rival and currently regnant alternative, namely, freedom in the advancement of self-interest. Associated with each concept of freedom is a basic self-conception shared by all who understand themselves, whether tacitly or reflectively, as persons whose primary motivation is to exercise that form of freedom. At issue in these lectures is a question of self-conception and life-orientation, since, as Fichte maintains, the former determines the latter.

Fichte's theory of moral agency and especially moral judgment, which the new education is designed to support, along with their political ramifications, have been seriously challenged most recently by David James.<sup>1</sup> Fichte's new education not only seeks to form citizens internally motivated to seek the common good, but furthermore citizens who necessarily will advance the common good. As a result, James argues, moral discretion, moral disagreement, and the acknowledged possibility that one at times might be justified in acting from self-interest are to be superseded ultimately and ideally by a decision-making process whereby finally all necessarily will the good. Thereby, the prominence of conscience in Fichte's Jena ethical theory has been supplanted in the *Reden* by a quasi-mechanical process of moral judgment that undermines human freedom. James's worry, then, is that Fichte cannot have it both ways, namely, a political theory that sustains freedom and a model for moral self-development whose output is citizens who necessarily will the good.

I argue that James's criticism is flawed in two fundamental respects. First, Fichte does not defend, or even presuppose, a comprehensive account of moral judgment and action in the *Reden*. Rather, he is concerned with the necessary condition and starting point for any moral theory: the capacity *freely* to acknowledge and act on the authority of universal moral norms. The new education thus advances the central theme of Fichte's Jena philosophy—free, rational self-determination. Necessarily willing the common good is the ideal goal of moral perfection toward which all should perpetually strive. Second, James fails to discern the core debate underlying Fichte's critique of self-interest (*Selbstsuchen*) and informing the entire set of lectures. I contend that Fichte argues against

two versions of self-interest theories of moral motivation, one that presupposes a libertarian<sup>2</sup> view of free will and one that presupposes classical compatibilism.<sup>3</sup> The latter receives virtually all of Fichte's attention, precisely because he avers that self-interest theories are actually versions of the dogmatism against which he had defended the *Wissenschaftslehre* throughout his tenure in Jena. As Fichte argues in the *Reden*, one's philosophical orientation, whether tacitly or reflectively acknowledged, informs one's self-conception—and thus one's view of human nature—which thereby informs how one lives her life. The entire *Reden* lectures can be read as a defense of transcendental idealism against dogmatism, yet here within moral theory rather than epistemology. The *Reden* targets one's core self-conception, which Fichte holds to be accurately construed as a rationally autonomous agent. Arousing and developing that core self-conception is, Fichte contends, the necessary means for producing a genuine *Volk*, which is Fichte's reading of Kant's kingdom of ends.

Fichte proposes fostering an entirely new national identity that emerges from nurturing citizens whose spiritual self-formation aims toward the development of a particular self-conception as a moral agent and citizen. "By means of the new education, we want to form Germans into a new totality, which is driven and enlivened through all its individual members by the same single interest."<sup>4</sup> What underwrites this single interest is the development of one's capacity for free, rational self-determination in which one delights in the good for its own sake. Exercising rational autonomy has its beginning in one's ability freely to project and live by rational norms. The new education thus has as its overarching goal the *Bildung* of humanity. Fichte's problem with the common pedagogy is that it does not share this concern for *Bildung*. This common pedagogy, or old pedagogy as Fichte calls it, emphasized rote memorization of facts and procedures, based on the assumption that rules of procedure (or proper thought) reflect the intrinsic properties of things. Learning is thus a form of passive apprehension that takes its cue from things, and has no recognition, as Fichte notes, of the mind as an independent and original principle of things themselves. Educational policy has thus been informed by philosophical dogmatism, and accordingly has failed to develop in students their natural capacity to determine things according to their own rational ends. To compensate for this deficiency and to inspire some enthusiasm for rote learning, the common pedagogy attempted to convince students that such learning would advance their own self-interest,



particularly their material well-being. In Fichte's mind the formula for moral corruption was thereby forged: the incentive for learning is the effective maximization of self-interest.<sup>5</sup>

Fichte offers three substantive reasons for rejecting self-interest theories of human nature: (1) self-seeking (*Selbstsucht*) is inherently corrupting; more directly, it is the root of all evil, and (2) self-interest theories, when made the foundation for political consent, undermine the very self-interest they intend to advance. Fichte provides scant direct evidence for (1), though he does implicitly cite the example of Rhineland princes whose own ambition inspired their enthusiastic collaboration with Napoleon's invading forces. I suggest that (1) be read in connection with (2). Consider then a standard theory of political obligation that begins with the premise that persons are motivated solely by rational self-interest. From this premise, the theory attempts to construct what actually is an artificial commonwealth, artificial because self-interest is an inherently unstable motive for political obligation. Maximization of self-interest always will override motivation to support the common good whenever the two conflict. Statesmen, Fichte contends, will recognize (and have done so) this deficiency and will thus attempt to make everyone in the commonwealth as similar as possible so that advancement of self-interest will aim toward as much a common goal as possible. As a result, (3) self-interest theories stifle both freedom and originality, two components in Fichte's view of German exceptionalism.<sup>6</sup> Self-interest theories are thus self-undermining, since they argue for the establishment of political societies in which freedom, as construed by these theories, cannot be fulfilled. The common good can be secured only by coercion.<sup>7</sup>

The common pedagogy thus fails to facilitate a genuine ethical world order (*sittliche Weltregierung*) sufficient to inspire appropriate love of country that advances the common good and strives for ever-expanding progress and freedom. Previous educational strategy has failed to identify and animate the core of human life. It has failed to "penetrate to the root of what stimulates and moves life and to form this."<sup>8</sup>

The new education, by contrast, attempts to activate love for learning and pleasure in the good irrespective of self-interest precisely by facilitating students' discovery of their capacity for free, rational self-determination. The first step is to devise mental exercises designed to invigorate free self-activity and thus to energize students' spiritual nature. Equally important, these exercises should enable students to understand that free self-determination is always rule-governed. In this way, they com-

prehend how rational norms function, and understand that freedom and normativity are interconnected. Students are thereby inducted into the suprasensible world, and begin to recognize that rational rule following is undertaken by self-initiating acts from the suprasensible world—thus, as acts of libertarian freedom. In this sense, the new education lays the foundation for moral judgment and action. After all, freely initiated, rule-governed activity is the form of the moral will. What Fichte means is this: suppose I want to draw a circle. When I do so, I engage in an act of free self-determination. I initiate the act of drawing the circle, and I determine whether to draw a small circle or one that takes up an entire sheet of paper. But I must follow a strict rule of procedure when drawing the circle, and I must suppress any desire I might have to depart from the rule. Acting strictly in conformity with the moral law is a similar form of rule following for which the exercises of the new education are preparatory. The more I develop the discipline of freely acknowledging rational rules or norms, the more I am able to override desires and inclinations and act strictly as the moral law prescribes. Fichte writes: “By means of the new education, on the contrary, the formation of the pure will is to become primary. As a result, if subsequently self-seeking should be aroused internally or stimulated from outside, then this [motivation] comes too late and finds no place for itself in the mind which is occupied already with something different.”<sup>9</sup>

The new education, then, attempts to reorient one’s entire motivational system so that citizens can be confident that every person is committed to doing what is right and advancing the common good.<sup>10</sup> It attempts to graduate students who not only are (1) capable of autonomously projecting and acknowledging the rational and ethical authority of moral norms, but (2) consistently adhere to those norms when making moral decisions.<sup>11</sup> Fichte is committed to a strong reading of (2), which he takes to follow from (1). If one assumes self-interest as the motivational source for decision making, moral instruction, Fichte observes, takes the weak form of exhortation, which can only convince a person to reconsider what she is about to do. Once she returns to her self-interest, she will ignore the admonition, and she will do so precisely because the original moral exhortation leaves her core motivational system intact—she will still act from self-interest. By tying freedom to normativity, Fichte connects one’s willing that the moral law necessarily ought to be taken as authoritative with one’s necessarily taking it as authoritative and acting accordingly.<sup>12</sup> Moral self-development aims to cultivate a strong and

unwavering will, but to do so one “must produce with the same necessity the necessity that one intends” (282).<sup>13</sup>

James argues—without putting it this way—that Fichte’s theory of moral self-development is paradoxical. While based upon freedom and allegedly promoting the most expansive freedom possible, the theory claims to produce outputs in which individuals necessarily will the common good—or to repeat, act such that they “produce with necessity the necessity they intend.” The theory’s outputs are free, rational self-determining agents who cannot will and act otherwise than in support of the common good. James concludes that Fichte’s ethical theory in the *Reden* is a significant departure from the Jena ethics, undermines human freedom, and thereby is inconsistent with his political theory, which emphasizes one’s freedom—notably, in his theory of property.

James’s critique advances two major claims, the second following from the first. (1) Fichte’s new education attempts to fashion moral agents whose decision-making process is so rule-governed that all moral ambiguity, moral disagreement, and moral discretion—thus the need for conscience—are eliminated, precisely because citizens graduating from the new education necessarily will follow the same decision-making process with the same outputs. (2) Successful securing of (1) undermines human freedom.

Consider the case for (1). Moral judgment, as Fichte explains in the *System der Sittenlehre*, involves applying the moral law, which is normative for any action, to concrete decisions and actions. Moral judgment thus provides actions with moral content, and one must determine which action best fulfills the normativity of the moral law. This is the task of the reflective power of judgment, which is driven by one’s commitment to morality to find the appropriately moral act to perform. The reflective power of judgment thus wavers among alternatives until it identifies the appropriate action that accords with what the moral law demands. Identifying the appropriate action solidifies one’s judgment and is accompanied by a verifying feeling of certainty Fichte calls conscience.<sup>14</sup> By making conscience the criterion judging that what one has decided to do is the morally requisite thing to do, Fichte thus concedes the possibility of substantive moral disagreement and moral ambiguity—in short, of moral complexity—within the context of commitment to the full normativity of the moral law. And yet, according to James, Fichte’s position in the *Reden* construes the benign wavering of the reflective power of judgment as unacceptable moral indecisiveness: “Fichte goes beyond his earlier posi-

tion, however, when he implies that the wavering between different possible ethical judgments, which he considers to be a normal part of the process of moral judgment in the *System of Ethics*, should not even be allowed to occur when it comes to a person with a truly ethical will.<sup>15</sup> The textual evidence for this claim is unsurprising: to develop a strong and unwavering will one must “produce with the same necessity the necessity that one intends.”<sup>16</sup> I simply don’t find this argument convincing, precisely because it rests on an unsubstantiated and questionable premise, namely, that Fichte defends a comprehensive theory of moral judgment in the *Reden*. A more accurate reading, and one for which I think the rest of my paper provides convincing support, is that Fichte is concerned with something far more basic, that is, the capacity autonomously to project and acknowledge the normative authority of universal moral norms and then to develop the discipline to act on the basis of such norms. Unless the student commits to the full normativity of the moral law, and precisely that output is the aim of the new education, a more refined theory of moral judgment never gets off the ground. As with the Jena introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the *Reden* primarily concerns first principles.

Now consider the case for (2) as an independent claim. By turning the decision making into a “quasi-mechanical process,” Fichte undermines human freedom. James writes: “It is hard to see how Fichte leaves any space for human freedom in the making of ethical judgments: for he appears to deny not only that it is possible for a truly moral person, who has undergone the German national education he proposes, ever to will anything other than that which morality demands, but also to turn the act of moral judgment into a quasi-mechanical process.”<sup>17</sup> The problem, as James presents it, seems to be more Fichte’s alleged denial of moral complexity than a denial of freedom. The freedom of discretion in moral judgment presupposes moral complexity and thus moral disagreement. And yet, James clearly has in mind a stronger claim than that Fichte denies the freedom of moral discretion. Consider the following passage from the second speech: “[W]hoever has such a solid will that he wills what he wills for all eternity, and who in no possible case can will other than as he always wills, for him the freedom of will is destroyed and subsumed under necessity.”<sup>18</sup> Now considers James’s comment: “This passage appears to be at odds with one of the basic intentions behind the theory of right that Fichte developed during his Jena period, namely, that of guaranteeing persons a sphere in which they may exercise free choice, thus providing them with a basic condition of moral agency.”<sup>19</sup> I

contend that this is a complete misreading of the cited passage. Rather, the passage is an initial criticism of self-interest theories of moral agency, along with the view of freedom to which they are committed and thus a defense of freedom as autonomous, rational self-determination rather than its denial. In sum, James's critique misses the mark because (1) he mistakes rule-governed behavior for law-governed behavior and thereby fails to discern that "to will with the same necessity the necessity that one intends" is a normative principle—what ought to be the case and thus that for which we should strive perpetually; and because (2) he misreads the "destroy free will" passage. Both (1) and (2) are mistakes arising from the failure to grasp the more comprehensive debate motivating the *Reden*, namely, the continuation of the Jena case against dogmatism and the way in which each informs and underwrites self-conceptions at issue in moral theory.

Start with Fichte's ostensible rejection of free will in *Reden* 2. Fichte raises the issue initially in response to an anticipated objection to the new education: Why not simply exhort students to be virtuous and respect their free will? Fichte stresses that the objection assumes that exercising free will involves ( $\alpha$ ) oscillation between good and evil ( $\beta$ ) without adherence to or guidance from any moral principle. The new education, indeed, intends to "destroy" (*vernichtet*) this conception of free will, and replace it with a decision-making mechanism that will produce "necessity of *decidedness* and the impossibility of opposition in the will."<sup>20</sup> Consider the context of Fichte's discussion, namely, the rejection of an educational policy that presupposes self-seeking as the core component of human nature and the singular reason and motivation for human action. Here Fichte is attacking ( $\alpha$ ) because it presupposes ( $\beta$ ). He rejects the freedom of self-initiated action that is undisciplined or arbitrary, that is, that is disconnected from rule following. One way to construe the argument, as I mentioned at the beginning of the paper, is as a critique of libertarian free will often associated with compatibilist objections, again, that it renders free actions arbitrary and random. On the other hand, Fichte is most certainly a libertarian, and the real target of his criticism is the lack of *decidedness* (my rendering of *Entschliessung*) in one's commitment to the good that is inescapable for self-interest theories. If the motive force for action is self-interest, then one will oscillate between good and evil, even if one acknowledges objective moral norms, because one will hover over alternatives until she determines which one best furthers her self-interest. She will oscillate between upholding the moral law or not,

and whether the content of her decision conforms to the moral law will be utterly contingent since her motivational commitment is self-interest. And this will be the case whether libertarian freedom or compatibilism is true. The issue, then, is the status of one's commitment to the normative authority of the moral law.

Fichte's more extended discussion of freedom in *Reden 7* suggests a different construal of self-seeking freedom and thus a different critique. Here he connects this form of free will directly to classical compatibilism. Commonplace choices among alternatives are actually, Fichte contends, necessary outcomes of antecedent states of affairs. If one abstracts from logically possible outcomes, one is left with only one causally possible outcome, namely, the actual choice one makes. Appearances aside, choices are causally determined.<sup>21</sup> What justification does Fichte have for this rather unusual conclusion? Again, the context of discussion is self-seeking freedom. Add the implicit premise that one *always* acts in a self-seeking way, and we have classical compatibilism: an agent always acts on her strongest motivational influence whose content, in this case, is self-interest. An agent does what she wants to do without being externally inhibited or compelled, but what she does follows necessarily from her strongest internal motivation. Clearly, this is what Fichte has in mind, since he goes on to identify what he takes to be the core feature of any free act. The compatibilist, Fichte argues, might be able to hold that one can act freely in the sense that she, and not some external agent or force, initiates her action—she does what she wants to do. But since she always acts according to what most strongly motivates her, she is actually alienated from her action. There is nothing in her act that is “self-sufficient, original, or peculiarly her own”; rather, her act is something secondary—simply a result of an antecedent state of affairs.<sup>22</sup> In a genuinely free decision there is something further in the action, as it is observable, than what follows from the state of affairs immediately antecedent to the action. In any free action, there is a surplus that must be a component of any description of the action but isn't causally explicable from any antecedent state of affairs. This surplus—the self-initiated act of self-determination—is “what it is through itself, something truly first, original, and free.”<sup>23</sup> Fichte is therefore committed to a libertarian theory of free will, but he builds rule following into his concept of freedom. An act of free will is self-initiated—it arises spontaneously simply from one's act of will—but what one wills and then attempts to execute is rule-governed. Rule-following is thus built into the concept of free self-determination.

Fichte argues for a libertarian view of free will that construes freedom as rational autonomy: the capacity freely to project, acknowledge, and adhere to the rational and moral authority of universal norms—specifically, the normative authority of the moral law. His case in the *Reden* for libertarian freedom and his critique of self-interest accounts of freedom are part of a broader and more fundamental argument against philosophical dogmatism in moral theory. Fichte associates with dogmatism all that is inherently foreign (*Auslanderei*) to the true German spirit, whose exceptionalism is based upon its embodiment of freedom and originality. Transcendental idealism is grounded in and advances genuine libertarian freedom, whereas dogmatism, at best, entails compatibilism.<sup>24</sup> The two conceptions of freedom—compatibilist freedom of self-seeking views, and genuine freedom advanced by the new education—are underwritten by two basic self-conceptions. Self-seeking views represent dogmatism in moral theory, whereas the libertarian freedom targeted by the new education is the rational self-determination of transcendental idealism—more specifically, the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The future of German national identity, for Fichte, turns on which self-conception the revived state will embody and cultivate.

Fichte contends that one's core self-conception is grounded in the way in which one understands and translates her most fundamental drive (*Grundtrieb*). By drive, Fichte means an impulse or flow of activity as observed by the reflecting I. Since drive is an object of reflection, it is observed as given, as an already operative force within its domain of activity. By basic drive (*Grundtrieb*), Fichte means the primary, operative force or source of activity—in our context, the most fundamental basis on which one orients herself to the world and acts accordingly. There is the basic drive toward free, rule-governed, self-determining, self-activity, and there is the drive to self-interest or self-seeking. Fichte, of course, contends that the former is more basic, and the success of that claim Fichte assumes in the *Reden* to have been secured in earlier versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. One's self-conception is formed on the basis of what one takes as the animating principle in her life and what provides the primary motivation for action—thus, the essence of human nature. In this sense, one's metaphysical commitment, whether tacit or reflective, informs who one is and how one lives. Since a basic drive cannot be reoriented (414)—self-seeking will always be self-seeking—the new education must reanimate the rival drive for free self-determination and strengthen that drive's capacity to override self-seeking.

One possible self-conception is that of a person who understands herself as motivated by the pursuit of rational self-interest. Call this the self-seeking self-conception (SSSC). This is who she understands herself to be and what she sees as the normative authority for her actions. For the SSSC, self-interest forms a person's core identity; it is what she tacitly views as the permanent element within human nature. This self-conception, Fichte contends, is derived from a vague yet instinctive feeling underlying and motivating her actions—presumably, the instinct for self-preservation (302).<sup>25</sup> There is the possibility that a self-seeking agent might act on noble, though obscure ideas, but she will do so merely instinctively (and not as a result of education) and accidentally (the only way that she will raise herself above the rabble).

Fichte maintains that the SSSC is the offspring of philosophical dogmatism. How so? It begins with a conception of human nature as something fixed and permanent—one always advances her own rational self-interest—which becomes a firm, immovable limitation within which life is pursued and beyond which it cannot go. In sum, one's self-conception and life-orientation are based upon some fixed, permanent *thing*. In this sense, the SSSC is belief in death as the basis of all things: "It believes necessarily in death, as what is original and ultimate, as the fundamental source of all things and with them of life."<sup>26</sup> Fichte's point is that dogmatism is not an idle philosophical theory, and, when made the basis not only of moral theory but one's entire life-orientation, it will permeate one's entire understanding of herself. Fichte writes: "This presupposition [dogmatism] is one's actual and not his merely idle thinking. It is one's true sense, the point at which his thinking is immediately itself life and is the source of all his further thinking and the judgment of his race, in his past, which is history, and in his future, which is his expectations of it, and in his present, which is his life in himself and others."<sup>27</sup> Note Fichte's association of the SSSC with the belief in universal human sinfulness,<sup>28</sup> which is seen as a condition intrinsic to who a person is and to be unalterable except by gratuitous, divine grace. If a person views her core self as derivative, as a mere thing, then she will be so and live out of that self-conception. She will understand herself and all others simply to be the way they are, and she thereby will erect, perhaps unwittingly but surely affirmatively, a barrier to moral self-development, genuine community, and human progress.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Fichte describes dogmatism as "foreignism" (*Ausländerei*), since, as he insists, what is truly German is original and free.



The contrasting self-conception, which Fichte, of course, insists is one's core identity and captures the true nature of humankind, is that of a rationally and morally autonomous agent. Call this the rational autonomy self-conception view (RASC). Given the pervasiveness of self-interest and Fichte's conviction that the SSSC has become commonplace, the RASC must be ignited and cultivated by the new education. The RASC is distinctive and superior in at least three respects. (1) Whereas the SSSC is based upon the vaguely felt instinct for self-preservation, the RASC is grounded in lucid, though tacit, self-knowledge, which can be made explicit by self-reflection. (2) The self-knowledge inherent within the RASC places one firmly within an ethical order. And (3), this ethical order is what Fichte calls an a priori world that lies in the future,<sup>30</sup> that is, a normative world for whose realization moral agents are perpetually to strive.

What supporting evidence does Fichte provide for (1)? What type of self-knowledge is inherent to the RASC, and what is its content? This self-knowledge is performative; it is the immediate awareness of one's free self-determination in the act of freely determining oneself—more specifically, the immediate awareness of one's self-activity and that in acting one is following a certain rule in which one's acting is freely initiated but that one must act in a particular way. In the case of moral action, one is aware of freely determining oneself to act under the authority of the moral law. In sum, one is thus tacitly aware that her acting is self-initiated and that in so acting she is freely acknowledging and adhering to the normative authority of the moral law. She thus acts irrespective of instinct, and the act she performs, even if consistently upholding moral norms, is original and free, something peculiarly her own (*eigens*). To project, acknowledge, and adhere to the normative authority of the moral law is to place oneself within an ethical order shared with others who maintain the same commitment. To do so is to make the RASC one's life orientation and the animating force of all that one does. The ultimate realization of this ethical order, that is, a community of free and rational beings who "produce with the same necessity the necessity they intend" is a perpetual work in progress, as is the effort to give the moral order institutional embodiment in a political community. In this sense, the ethical order and its institutional embodiment have a normative function. As long as human perfectibility remains a work in progress, the full developed ethical order always lies in the future.

One's self-conception is a reflection of one's life. Unsurprisingly, Fichte identifies the RASC as both distinctively German and based upon

the principles of transcendental idealism. Only if one lives from a self-conception informed by the principles of transcendental idealism or, more specifically, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, is she genuinely German: “For its part, contemporary German philosophy is not German, but foreign . . . and thus this philosophy [transcendental idealism] only is rightly and authentically German, that is, original. And accordingly, if anyone would be a true German, he would not be able to philosophize in any other way.”<sup>31</sup>

The higher aim that guides the new education is the norm of full rational autonomy and a community whose citizens embody that norm. This is the singularity of common interest that Fichte stresses as a targeted outcome of the new education. And this is what Fichte means by a *Volk*, namely, a community of rationally autonomous individuals whose lives are ordered by the normativity of the moral law.<sup>32</sup> Now we have an idea of the way in which, for Fichte, love of Fatherland is to govern the state. Love of Fatherland can govern a state only if it provides a thicker motive for political consent and commitment than traditional social contract theories. And it must genuinely support and sustain freedom, that is, offer some institutional context in which freedom is fulfilled. Love of Fatherland can govern a state if and only if the state is a genuine *Volk*, which means if and only if it encourages and facilitates ever-greater degrees of freedom and expressions of originality. Only in this way, Fichte maintains, can there be true national renewal and national renewal that is, in a cosmopolitan sense, authentically German.

## Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

1. David James, *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

2. By libertarianism, I mean theories that maintain that free will is incompatible with determinism, that persons sometimes perform acts of free will, and that accordingly determinism, as a comprehensive theory, is false. An act of free will is a self-initiated act which does not follow necessarily from any antecedent state of affairs or, put differently, from the state of the world prior to the act. The principle of alternative possibilities (PAP) is not required for all acts of free will. An agent can act of her own free will in circumstances in which she could not do otherwise provided (1) that she could not do otherwise because of the person she is, and (2) that the person she is is the result of what Robert Kane calls self-formative acts (SFAs) acts of will for which PAP is required. I contend

that this distinction underlies Fichte's pedagogical goal of producing citizens who "will with necessity the necessity they intend." For an excellent and comprehensive defense of libertarianism, see Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

3. By classical compatibilism, I mean theories of free will that maintain that persons have free will, standardly construed as having the capacity to act without external constraint, and that determinism is true. A person thus can act freely in the sense that she can do what she wants to do precisely because she acts necessarily on the basis of, for instance, her strongest desire.

4. SW, VI, 276. "*Wir wollen durch die neue Erziehung die Deutschen zu einer Gesammtheit bilden, die in allen ihren einzelnen Gliedern getrieben und belebt sey durch dieselbe Eine Angelegenheit . . .*"

5. SW, VII, 288–89.

6. *Ibid.*, 369.

7. Fichte's case for (3) is actually his fundamental objection to self-interest theories and far more substantive than I have indicated so far. Succinctly stated, the objection is that self-interest theories presuppose a compatibilist view of free will. I offer a detailed assessment of Fichte's argument below in connection with James's criticisms.

8. SW, VII, 275. "*. . . bis zu Wurzel der wirklichen Lebensregung und Bewegung durchgreifen und dieser zu bilden.*"

9. *Ibid.*, 291. "*Durch die neue Erziehung soll umgekehrt die Bildung zum reinen Wollen das erste werden, damit, wenn späterhin doch die Selbstsucht innerlich erwachen oder von aussen angeregt werden sollte, diese zu spät komme und in dem schon von etwas andern eingenommen Gemüthe keine Platz für sich finde.*"

10. "In opposition to [the old education] the new education must be able to form and determine according to a certain and infallible rule the actual life-stimulation and life-movement of pupils" (SW, VII, 280–81). "*Im Gegensatz mit dieser müsse die neue Erziehung die wirkliche Lebensregung und Bewegung ihrer Zöglinge nach sicher und ohnfehlbar bilden und bestimmen können.*"

11. In the *Reden* Fichte never specifies any moral norms less general than the moral law itself. What I mean by a moral norm is a moral principle derived from the moral law, a principle resulting from the first step in applying the generality of the moral law to concrete moral decisions. Of course, disagreement about these principles is not precluded. Fichte's concern in the *Reden* is with the capacity for taking moral principles as rationally and morally authoritative (starting with the moral law itself) precisely because they are instantiations of the moral law, and then consistently adhering to them.

12. SW, VII, 281–82.

13. *Ibid.*, 282. "*. . . sie muss selber mit Nothwendigkeit erzeugen die Nothwendigkeit, die sie beabsichtigen.*"

14. James, 198.

15. Ibid.
16. SW, VII, 282. “. . . sie muss selber mit Nothwendigkeit erzeugen die Nothwendigkeit, die sie beabsichtigen.”
17. James, 198–99.
18. SW, VII, 282. “. . . wer ein solches festes Wollen hat, der will, was er will, für alle Ewigkeit, und er kann in keinen möglichen Falle anders wollen, den also, wie ere ben immer will; für ihn ist die Freiheit des Willens vernichtet und aufgegangen in der Nothwendigkeit.”
19. James, 196.
20. SW, VII, 281. “. . . Nothwendigkeit der Entschliessungen und die Unmöglichkeit des entgegengesetzten in dem Wille.” Emphasis mine.
21. Ibid., 370–71.
22. Ibid., 370. “Es ist darum in der Tat in ihm nichts selbstständiges, ursprüngliches, and eigenes, sondern er ist blosser Folge, also zweites, aus dem allegeminen Zusammenhange der ganzen Erscheinungen in ihren einzelnen Theilen. . .”
23. Ibid., 371. “. . . durch sich selbst, was es ist, ein wahrhaftig erstes, ursprüngliches und freies.”
24. Fichte, of course, argues throughout the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* that dogmatism entails the denial of freedom. For Fichte, though, any theory that concedes compatibility between freedom and determinism, much less affirms a strong version of that compatibility by claiming that freedom is compatible with the truth of determinism, entails the denial of free will.
25. SW, VII, 302.
26. Ibid., 361. “Es glaubt nothwendig an den Tod, also das Ursprünglich und Letzte, den Grundquell aller Dinge, und mit ihnen des Lebens.”
27. Ibid., 373. “Diese Voraussetzung ist sein wirkliches, keinwegs ein bloss gedachtes Denken, sein wahrer Sinn, der Punct, wo sein Denken unmittelbar selbst Leben ist; und ist so die Quelle alles seines übrigen Denkens und Beurtheilens seines Geschlechtes, in seiner Vergangenheit, der Geschichte, seiner Zukunft, den Erwartungen von ihm, und seiner Gegenwart, in wirklichen Leben an ihm selber und andern.”
28. Ibid.
29. “The actual basis for the distinction consists in this: whether one believes in something absolutely first and original in humanity itself, in freedom, in infinite improvability, in perpetual progress of the race, or one does not believe in all of this, indeed intends to view all too clearly and to conceive that the opposite of all of this is the case” (SW, VII, 374). “Der eigentliche Unterschiedungsgrund liegt darin: ob man an ein absolut Erstes und Ursprüngliches im Menschen selber, an Freiheit, an unendliche Verbesserlichkeit, an ewiges Fortschreiten unsers Geschlechts glaube, oder ob man an alles dieses nicht glaubt, ja wohl deutlich einzusehen und zu begreifen vermeinen, dass das Gegentheile von diesem alles stattfindet.”

30. Ibid., 304.

31. Ibid., 362. *“In diesem Theile ist nun die dermalige deutschen Philosophie nicht deutsch, sondern Ausländerei . . . Und so ist den diese Philosophie recht eigentlich nur deutsch, d. i. ursprünglich; und umgekehrt, so jemand nu rein wahre Deutscher würde, so würde er nicht anders den also philosophieren können.”*

32. “This is now, in a higher meaning of the word taken from the perspective of a spiritual world *simpliciter*, a Volk: the whole of humanity, living in community with one another and always producing that community from themselves naturally and spiritually, [a community] which altogether stands under a certain particular law of the development of the divine in them.” (Ibid., 381). *“Dies nun ist in höherer, vom Standpunct der Ansicht einer geistigen Welt überhaupt genommener Bedeutung des Wortes, ein Volk: das Ganze der in Gesellschaft mit einander fortlebenden und sich aus sich selbst immerfort natürlich und geistig erzeugenden Menschen, das insgesamt unter einem gewissen besonderen Gesetze der Entwicklung des Göttlichen aus ihm steht.”* I read “divine in them” as their capacity for free, rational self-determination exercised harmoniously with others exercising the same capacity.

## Fichte's Nationalist Rhetoric and the Humanistic Project of *Bildung*

MARINA F. BYKOVA

It is widely held that Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807–08) points to a significant shift in the philosopher's social and political thought, transforming his cosmopolitan view into nationalism. Yet there is no consensus among commentators on the precise nature of Fichte's "nationalistic turn." Fichte indeed stands at the crossroads between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. The two coexist within his thought in some way, though certainly not without an essential tension. His key ideas are rooted in the Enlightenment-era universalistic and cosmopolitan conceptions of the eighteenth century. In his *Characteristics of the Present Age* (1806),<sup>1</sup> he boldly embraces a cosmopolitan ideal, calling on the cultivated mind to "open his eyes to the light which true Knowledge throws"<sup>2</sup> and to fulfill "the true vocation and worth of Man,—that he, with all he is, has, and can do, should devote himself to the service of the [Human] Race."<sup>3</sup>

Fiercely criticizing monarchy and the aristocracy, Fichte argues for a republican government, and even proposes a proto-socialist economic system. Yet, a few years later, in response to shifting social and political situation, he apparently changes his mind. Viewing Napoleon's rise to power as a rejection of republican ideals, in his *Addresses*, he calls on his countrymen to become the beacon of progress to the world, carry out a nationalist awakening, and resist Napoleon's armies. This perceived shift in Fichte's writing from cosmopolitanism to nationalism became one of

the most contested points of his life. An endless source of dispute, his version of patriotism and nationalism cost him a lot of obscurity leading to misinterpretation of his best intentions.

The rise of nationalist sentiment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought Fichte to great prominence, venerating him as a prophet to the German nation and moving him into the budding pantheon of national heroes. His *Addresses* were mythologized as the pinnacle of patriotic fervor and the standard for nationalist rhetoric. This made the thinker malleable to a wide range of sometimes contradictory political ideologies and movements, which did not necessarily reflect his own convictions. One of such devastating consequences was a wrongheaded, hasty association of Fichte's views in the *Addresses* with twentieth-century National Socialism.<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps one of the most damaging ramifications, which has not been wholly resolved and still has a strong presence in the literature.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, Fichte's rhetoric throughout the *Addresses* may be somewhat responsible for this impression, and certain aspects of his lectures were particularly susceptible to misappropriation. In addition to his nationalist vocabulary and passionate style, Fichte's elevation of *Germanness* to a kind of metaphysical essence and his nationally oriented vision of society provided perhaps just the right combination of philosophical justification, populist appeal, and ideological malleability to make a compelling case. But there is enough valuable material in his *Addresses* (and also his other writings) that defies such reductionist reading.

In this essay, I not only reject a purely nationalistic reading of Fichte's *Addresses*, but also offer a more balanced and, I believe, more accurate interpretation of Fichte's lectures that takes into account both the development of Fichte's own philosophical ideas, especially the logic of progression of his practical philosophy, and the real social and intellectual context, to which Fichte responds.

I suggest that Fichte's *Addresses* are consistent with the chief ideas of his practical philosophy, in particular with his recognition of the importance of cultural and ethnic identities for the formation of individuals (their personality) and actual societies, and thus for the realization of a moral order in civil and political life. It is only that Fichte's cosmopolitan desire for the "cultivation of humanity [*Menschenbildung*]"<sup>6</sup> begins with an aspiration for the cultivation of the German nation. His *Addresses* are not a prophecy of German racial preeminence or ethnic superiority. Instead, he challenges his compatriots to take a lead in "cultivating the whole

man thoroughly and completely to humanity;<sup>7</sup> arguing that Germans are uniquely positioned, both spiritually and historically, to achieve their own national goals and to light the path for other nations. Fichte's ideal for the nation is not one intended for competition and combat with others, but is instead the vehicle for moral and spiritual betterment of those within the nation with the ultimate goal of improvement of humanity. And his appeal to patriotic feelings, his advocacy of national identity, is just a means toward this end. This end, however, is not new to Fichte and his readers. In fact, in the *Addresses*, Fichte advances his discussion of the vocation of man, who must shape himself and develop his "original drives" so he can realize himself by serving a greater (moral) good. Yet, here the thinker focuses on a self-realization that involves an individual's self-recognition within the nation. Man has to realize himself not merely as a single self, but as "a completely new . . . universal and national self"<sup>8</sup> who learns to identify himself with a group of people sharing common cultural and social characteristics and who is able to perceive himself as belonging to his ethnic community that "in all its individual parts is driven and animated by the same single interest,"<sup>9</sup> which is, as Fichte puts it, "the affairs of the whole."<sup>10</sup>

Such a self-realization toward "a natural whole"<sup>11</sup> of humanity is a journey of *Bildung*, an intricate process of self-cultivation, which necessarily involves enculturation to allow the individual to identify and bring himself in accord with his ethnos (nation), society, and, ultimately, with the world. Thus, it would be perhaps more appropriate to read Fichte's *Addresses* (along with some of his other late writings) in the context of the tradition of German humanism and interpret them as an attempt to offer a new and more elaborate account of *Bildung* in order to further specify and "adjust" the ideas of Fichte's practical philosophy to "a new age," which approach the thinker powerfully proclaims in the *Addresses*.

My analysis focuses on the two interrelated issues: first, I will discuss the place and role of the concept of *Bildung* in Fichte's system, particularly its role in the realization of man's vocation and universal goals, so he has the power to shape the new world, and second, I will comment on the relation between the individual's self-cultivation and the cultivation of the national self, which is the main topic of the *Addresses*. According to Fichte, the task of man and humanity in the changing political and social circumstances is not only a creation of "an entirely new order of things,"<sup>12</sup> but most importantly, "a complete transformation of the human race" itself.<sup>13</sup>



## I

To grasp the solution Fichte offers, it is worth considering the historical and cultural context associated with it. In the decades around 1800, the German public witnessed a substantial interest in questions of personal development and education, with contributions made by nearly every thinker of note. This interest was informed by a deep concern with individual self-cultivation in a society marked by an increasing division of labor and by the questions about the status and unity of (scientific) knowledge that were posed by Kantian epistemology. Historically, this discussion responded both to French expansionism with its ensuing destruction of the political structures of the German empire and to the failure of German institutional education and upbringing. The confrontation with revolutionary and later Napoleonic France intensified an ongoing German (and European) controversy about the final purpose of cultivation and nurturing of man: Should the processes of upbringing (*Erziehung*)<sup>14</sup> and education eventually be “cosmopolitan,” as Kant contended,<sup>15</sup> or should they rather have a national character and thus be tied to the process of a political and cultural unification of the nation? And if this development, widely understood as education, had to form, in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s words, the “pinnacle of all that is undertaken for the cultivation of the nation,”<sup>16</sup> how should it be shaped?

Fichte was acutely engaged with questions of education and other related issues from the very beginning of his philosophical career, as it is indicated by a number of writings focusing on man’s vocation and different pedagogical concepts.<sup>17</sup> But the *Addresses*, along with *Some Lectures on the Scholar’s Vocation* (1794), provide the most concise yet most pointed discussion of this problematic considered in a new social and political context. Both the *Addresses* and *Some Lectures* were part of Fichte’s serious intellectual struggle to identify the right tools with which to solve such central political questions of his time as social inequality, moral corruption, and war.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, the *Addresses* can be read as Fichte’s attempt to reformulate Kant’s notion of the rational public as a force for social reform developed in the master’s essay, *What Is Enlightenment?* On the other hand, the *Addresses* present the result of Fichte’s multifaceted engagement with both Rousseau and Pestalozzi. Fichte takes seriously Rousseau’s demand for a society of free equals, trying to combine it with Pestalozzi’s idea of equal access to education for each individual.<sup>19</sup> His assertion of learning and self-cultivating as essential to human nature and

crucial for social improvement seems to propagate something that both Rousseau and Pestalozzi put forward and in the lack of which they had seen the ills of modern society.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, in the *Addresses*, it becomes clearer than in *Some Lectures* or elsewhere that debate about man's upbringing and education should not be reduced to a narrowly understood didactic or any different kind of pedagogical efforts, but should be rather considered in terms of *Bildung*.

## II

While *Bildung* came into fashion at the end of the eighteenth century, giving voice to the intellectual discourse of the late Enlightenment, this neologism had ancient roots. Etymologically, the term combines two different ideas that are expressed by the two pairs of Latin words: *forma*—*formatio* and *imago*—*imitatio*. The former emphasizes the activity of producing or giving shape to a concrete object, and the latter points to a relationship between the original image (*Vorbild* or *Bild*) and its reproduction (*Abbild*), which imitates or resembles the original. Thus, *Bildung* means two things: first, a forming (*bilden*), in the sense of shaping a certain object according to specific rules or an arrangement that gives rise to a form, and, second, an imprinting (*ab-bilden*) by an image (*Bild*), that is, an imprinting in such a manner that the anticipated resultant product closely resembles the original model endowed with an absolute value.

Such a double meaning reveals a complexity of the concept of *Bildung*. It should be understood not only as the idea of formation or shaping the whole into a living whole, so that it is organized according to rules proper to life, in particular to a physical life. It also includes an idea of forming by a model, which should be reproduced and imitated in a certain type of form that can closely match the valuable *Vorbild*. The complex relationship between the model and its copy, between the original and its reproduction, introduces a crucial element into the concept of *Bildung*. Not only does it bring an important dynamic into the *Bildung*, but it also grafts an idea of perfection into it. The latter becomes a main criterion to measure how the resultant image corresponds to the model and also serves as an ultimate goal of the process of “forming,” which is progressing toward perfection.

The modern history of the idea and concept of *Bildung* has many stages and turning points. It proceeds from the mysticism of Eckhart,<sup>21</sup> in

which man as a divine image is reborn through his complete detachment from the world and his living self, through Böhme's reflections on man's choice of the divine image in his struggle against evil, to Pietism with its sensitivity for the Christian education that should be governed by the divine will. In all these cases, *Bildung* was interpreted as a theological concept and its spiritual dimension dominated all others. The Enlightenment brought significant changes to the German intellectual landscape and the discourse of *Bildung*. A number of ideas, including Shaftesbury's concept of "forming form," Leibniz's *entelechy* as the continuous internal process of becoming itself, and Lessing's powerful call for education of humanity without referring to a divine revelation, all help redefine the meaning of *Bildung* and its place in the existing system of philosophical categories as well as in the intellectual lexicon in general. Not only has it begun to be interpreted as self-cultivation of humanity, but it also acquired more dynamic features and progressive characteristics, which won respect for the concept in the wider intellectual circles.

However, the term had reached its peak only at the end of the eighteenth century, when *Bildung* was used to define a new attitude toward the world, culture, and humanity. Around that time, there had emerged a multitude of possible interpretations and usages of the term. It is at this point that a new literary genre, the *Bildungsroman*, was invented and steadily expanded first in Germany and later in Europe and throughout the world. Novels focusing on a man's personal journey through life in search of his individual growth and self-realization had fascinated readers and writers alike. The narratives that paid special attention to the individual's feelings and psychological experience prevailed especially in Germany, where a mode of sentimentality exerted major influence on all literary creations, including periodicals, poetry, and novels.<sup>22</sup> This not only contributed to a different outlook on the world, but also helped reformulate the concept of *Bildung* in more secular terms with emphasis placed on questions about finding an appropriate *Bildung's* model for shaping a new individual. The model to aim for was now presented as universal perfection, which is subject to precise rules. The great influence of Winckelmann and his concept of perfection allowed the move from the idea of unattainable moral perfection and the interpretation of a model in purely religious terms to a secular image of perfection, which, to some extent, could be calculated and defined in human terms and, therefore, is reproducible. At the same time, the very idea of perfection implies that such a model can no longer be defined based merely on personal inclina-

tions and aspirations. Rather, this model must be defined in *universal* (and not individual, singular) terms: a model that has an absolute value, and which presents itself as the ultimate achievement of humanity intended as an objective possibility.

The emphasis on universality is what distinguishes a specifically German humanistic tradition of *Bildung*, exemplified in both German modern literature and philosophy. One of the first to articulate the humanistic ideal of *Bildung* was Wilhelm von Humboldt. In his writings, the world appears as a living human world, in which everything that exists is not given and fixed, but is in a continuous change and in a nonstop process of formation. This never-ending transformation, the continuous replacement of forms, the unstoppable flow, is how the human world may be adequately illustrated. *Bildung* is conceptualized as a dynamic tract and a living impulse behind all these changes: the universe is viewed as animated by an internal energy, which breathes life into it and gives it rhythm and movement. The force that moves the world also acts upon man, pressing him to take action and express himself. And since man's irresistible desire is to live in a multiform way, his main aim is to realize his own talents and turn his own spirituality toward the world. Thus, the world, rather than the realm of merely existence, becomes the place for the individual's self-realization and manifestation of his freedom that allows him to elaborate new values, propose new goals, and in this way to fully express himself. According to Humboldt, man's most important objective must be the self-development toward a complete whole.<sup>23</sup> The process of human self-cultivation he calls *Bildung*, which is characterized by a never-ending enrichment of the individual through his continuous effort to acquire as much of the world as possible.<sup>24</sup> He even claims that the world as the unity of all things, and not just single things, is the only subject toward which the process of *Bildung* must be directed.<sup>25</sup>

In scholarly literature, *Bildung* is often explained in terms of learning or "education" as merely development of human potentials and capacities. Such a reading largely misrepresents the concept and place of *Bildung* in the classic German philosophical tradition. A specific meaning of *Bildung*, which marks a very important legacy of German idealism, is the meaning of *Bildung* as world-encountering that is understood as a necessary condition of human self-development. The core dimension of *Bildung* is neither the world as such nor the individual itself, but the specific interplay between the self and the world. The world in question is a universal and ideal realm that transcends every particular environment, everything

that is factually given. Therefore, *Bildung* does not imply simply getting beyond the present and the particular or just adapting oneself to a specific (“new”) culture. It, rather, involves acquiring transcultural views and developing universalistic norms and principles. This world-relatedness of *Bildung* is what grounds its difference from the concepts of learning and narrowly understood education. The latter focuses on the individuals’ interactions with their specific environments, and not with the world as such. While the world-reference central to *Bildung* assumes a universal attitude, learning and “education” are always tied to something particular (a situation, conditions, local practices or surroundings). Furthermore, they are concerned with the evolution of human qualities and potentials at the individual level, development of a singular personality. The semantic structure of *Bildung*, however, points to a radically distinct connotation. *Bildung* does not simply mean a constitution and development of a self, but it rather displays this process of development and crucial transformation as inherently interwoven with the opening of a world-horizon by and for the self. This essential link between an individual’s self-development and encountering the world, thought as a universal entity transcending cultural and contextual divides and combining them into a singular overarching concept of the whole, is what shapes the uniqueness of *Bildung*. Since the world in question is a human living world, the interplay between the self and the world inevitably includes the complex interactions among the active selves. Not only are these intersubjective interactions governed by universal (transcultural, cosmopolitan) norms and principles, but their development is regulated by the idea of the intrinsic worth and universal value of humanity. This is why the proper understanding of individual self-cultivation in terms of *Bildung* is the “self-cultivation of man toward humanity.” It is precisely this meaning of *Bildung* that Fichte and other post-Kantian German thinkers actively elaborated in their works. Yet Fichte was perhaps the first, who in response to the defeat of Prussia by France in 1806–07, in the *Addresses* and some other late lectures and writings, assigned to the very concept an important socially regenerative function.

### III

From the beginning of Fichte’s philosophical career, *Bildung* becomes a focus of his practical philosophy. It does not emerge from nowhere sim-

ply as a need of community for (equal) education (as it appears for the humanists, Rousseau, Pestalozzi) or a moral necessity (like in Kant). It is derived directly from the vocation of man. The idea of man stands at the foundation of Fichte's entire philosophy. His main concern is the question of what man is and how to understand and realize his real vocation. *Bildung* is a concrete response to this inquiry. Fichte's conception of *Bildung* gives answers to such questions as what man really is, what he should be, and how he should become this. In this sense, *Bildung* becomes one of the central topics of Fichte's writings. It plays an especially prominent role in *Some Lectures*, which offer a well-developed account of *Bildung*. Yet while in *Some Lectures* and other writings, Fichte provides a thematization of *Bildung* as self-cultivation toward one's self-awareness necessary for individual development, in the *Addresses*, he is, rather, concerned with *Bildung* at a broader social level. Here the discussion shifts to questions of building a nation and the state and achieving individual self-realization within those social constructs. This shift that points to an important social (communal) dimension of *Bildung* is an essential advance over Fichte's previous account of *Bildung*.

I would like to suggest that in the *Addresses* Fichte outlines a philosophical notion of *Bildung* that unifies an individual and communal (national and social) *Bildung*. Here, Fichte confirms the conception that, in its full version, can be successfully read as a philosophical anthropology. In this conception, Fichte formulates ideas that are of great significance for any theory of *Bildung*. His inquiry is about the "cultivation of the whole man to humanity"<sup>26</sup> and man's personal and social progression toward perfection. Such a focus on man's vocation assumes exploration in the field of practical philosophy, including ethical, social, and political views. In this sense, the shift in Fichte's thought manifested in the *Addresses* should not be taken as a sign of a radical change of his own stance in philosophy, as it is often argued. Instead, it reveals consistency in both his philosophical project and the way it is realized over years.

As Fichte pointed out in *Some Lectures*, man's universal goal is not a merely arbitrary choice; it is determined by the very essence of man, his vocation. Fichte distinguishes between the vocation of man "merely according to the concept of man as such,"<sup>27</sup> on individual level, and the vocation of man on social and communal level.

Here it is important to clarify in what sense Fichte uses the word *Bestimmung* (German original for "vocation"), which is polysemantic and has different connotations in German. The most common interpretation

of *Bestimmung* is to link it to the Latin word *determinatio*, meaning “logically assigning a distinction to a notion.”<sup>28</sup> In this case, it is conceived purely theoretically in the sense of distinctive mark or sign. But at the same time, *Bestimmung* is also understood as a task or goal. Taken in this connotation it has a practical meaning. According to Fichte, if one asks about the vocation of man (*Bestimmung des Menschen*), both meanings necessarily coincide, for the theoretical question of what man is can only be given a practical answer. Furthermore, Fichte promotes the idea of the “whole man,” who is the result of self-cultivation in both individual and communal terms. Thus, not only is the concept of *Bildung* grounded in the practical philosophy, but also the anthropology is essentially rooted in the latter.

For Fichte, man’s vocation is not a mere transcendental ideal, but rather a concrete regulative principle of practical reason. Man’s vocation is not just to be perfect, but to “*perfect himself without end*.”<sup>29</sup> Man “exists in order to become constantly better in an ethical sense, in order to make all that surrounds him better *sensuously* and—insofar as we consider him in relation to society—*ethically* as well, and thereby to make himself even happier.”<sup>30</sup> Here Fichte not only notices the significance of society for man in achieving his vocation qua individual man, but already points to another important vocation of man, his vocation as a communal being, or as a people. This is precisely how he discusses the vocation (and goal) of man in the *Addresses*. Building upon the romantic notion of glorifying nature as a link to the transcendent cosmos, in his Eighth Address Fichte proclaims that “[t]he natural impulse of man . . . is to find heaven already on this earth and to infuse his daily labors with permanence and eternity; to plant and to cultivate the eternal in the temporal.”<sup>31</sup> The only way of realizing this ambitious desire of eternity man finds in his people: “the totality of men living together in society and continually producing themselves both naturally and spiritually.”<sup>32</sup> This collective entity forms “the special spiritual nature of human surroundings,”<sup>33</sup> which despite being conceptually incomprehensible does truly exist, providing a necessary foundation for the continuous self-cultivation of humanity toward perfection.

Discussing a social dimension of the individual’s vocation in *Some Lectures*, Fichte concludes that “our social vocation consists in the process of communal perfection, that is, perfecting ourselves by freely making use of the effect which others have on us and perfecting others by acting in turn upon them as upon free beings.”<sup>34</sup> In the *Addresses*, he goes even farther by promoting the very idea of (ethnic) community and common

life as a nation. Linking the characteristics of the civilized nation to “the sense of community,” he sees the ills of the modern world in “individualism and selfishness”: “selfishness has destroyed itself by its own complete development, because it has thereby lost its self and the independence of that self,”<sup>35</sup> and, “[a] people can be completely corrupt—that is, selfish, for selfishness is the root of all other corruption.”<sup>36</sup> The only way out of such a demoralizing situation Fichte sees in a genuine *Bildung*, understood not merely as an individual but primary as a communal enterprise. Fichte writes: “The means of salvation . . . consists in cultivating a completely new self, a self that has hitherto existed perhaps as an exception among individuals, but never as a universal and national self, and in the cultivation (*Bildung*) of the nation . . . to a wholly new life.”<sup>37</sup> And farther down, echoing Rousseau and some other humanists: “Through the new education [*Erziehung* in the meaning of upbringing—MB] we desire to mold the Germans into a totality, which shall be driven and animated in all its individual members by the same interest.”<sup>38</sup>

It is important to notice that while Fichte's rhetoric in the *Addresses* is traditionally interpreted as having a well-established ethnic and even nationalistic flavor, Fichte's goal here is fundamentally different and much more profound than it might appear at first. Instead of being an attempt to rouse the German nation as a political force, the *Addresses* represent a challenge to point the way to the *moral* renewal of the German nation, with the cultivation (*Bildung*) of a new national self, “ushering in the possibility of a new age, in which the blind pursuit of self-interest will be replaced by the conscious willing of a collective interest.”<sup>39</sup> In the *Addresses*, Fichte is concerned with the cultivation of humanity as a whole (*Menschenbildung*), as it is identified in the first lecture.<sup>40</sup> This explains his focus on education, which he views as “[t]he art of cultivating humanity.”<sup>41</sup> Realizing the necessity of “healing sick humanity,”<sup>42</sup> suffering from individualism and selfishness, Fichte thus formulates the goal of a proposed system of education as forming the sense of community and of the greater whole, to which each individual man essentially belongs.<sup>43</sup> True to the moral principles formulated in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte views both the very recognition of this “greater whole” and cultivating oneself to a “universal and national self” as a moral duty of each individual. The idea that Fichte puts forward in the *Addresses* is that man cannot achieve harmony with himself, and man's vocation cannot be fulfilled if man perceives himself just as a single individual. “Each must first recognize and learn to love in the other their common humanity.”<sup>44</sup> Man has



to comprehend himself as a “universal” self, whose self-interest is tied to the interest of the whole and who views himself as being bound by a universal moral law.<sup>45</sup>

It should be clear that *Bildung*, for Fichte, is not merely education of an individual or a single nation in the sense of schooling or developing specific skills. While education is tied to a certain community (*polis*) and its concrete objectives, which are usually changing according to temporary goals of this community, *Bildung* has a more “universal” dimension and is linked to culture that “embraces all men,”<sup>46</sup> to civilization, and the human race in its totality.

However, the essence of “humanity” is sought not by recovering the historical meaning of objects outside the self, but by “cultivating” the self, by becoming conscious of the self’s true nature through disengagement with its particular guises and searching for something substantial that ties all historical appearances (phenomena) of the self together. *Bildung* is justified as a full self-realization of the self, complete harmony that the self must accomplish within itself. That, however, is not a matter of mere “results” and thus is not something that one can learn by rote. *Bildung* is essentially an activity, something that one has to do—and has to do for oneself. This is thus not just any activity, but the activity of the self toward its own self-cultivation and self-actualization. Fichte portrays *Bildung* as a process of becoming aware of one’s own selfness in the course of an ordinary human life. Although it is discussed in terms of the individual development of the self, its goal is to evoke and advance those qualities and faculties that characterize humanity on the whole. This is what Fichte means by “cultivating the whole man thoroughly and completely to humanity.”<sup>47</sup>

Fichte points out that true *Bildung* is achievable only through cooperation of men with each other within community, and the urge to cooperation is grounded in man’s nature: “men live together . . . because they were already a people beforehand by a far higher law of nature.”<sup>48</sup> The drive to perfection and complete harmony with oneself is ultimately a communal social drive. Moreover, it is man’s destiny to live with others and act toward the same end: he has to make sure “that the progress he has achieved endures in his people, for as long as his people endures, and becomes the abiding ground of determination for all its further development.”<sup>49</sup> Fichte links man’s vocation to his obligation not simply toward himself, but especially toward other persons, and his people (nation) in particular. The aim of man within community is to help others in their

search for perfection, so that all members of community can become more united “through the mutual unity by means of improvement.” The reciprocal relation of people, or, as Fichte puts it, their mutual improvement, has its ultimate objective in making the community and people living in it more perfect. For Fichte, the goal of the community is to treat everybody equally and enable everyone to find one’s own status freely and according to one’s own abilities, that is, to allow each person to realize her talents and to improve and “complete” herself that way. Yet, this joint activity of people toward improvement, their ability to freely act according to rational principles is nothing else but *Bildung*. Thus, the latter is understood as a universal way in which people in the community—be that a kind of union with shared laws, traditions and values (society) or an ethnically defined body of people (nation)—relate to each other. It is the basic relation that makes it possible to realize one’s essence (one’s vocation) together with one’s people. Man can be man only if he considers his relationship with others as a mutual improvement, mutual advance toward the complete harmony with oneself, that is, mutual *Bildung*. The latter is not just a tenet of social life associated with a certain social institution, family, or school. This is not a mere teaching activity (didactic) or particular skill training. Rather, it is the way of man’s living together with others in the real human world, the only possible way of becoming man.

In such an interpretation of *Bildung* Fichte not only integrates the results of the conception of *Bildung* introduced by Enlightenment thinkers (including Kant), but goes even farther. Since Herder, Pestalozzi, and Wilhelm von Humboldt,<sup>50</sup> *Bildung* has been considered as self-*Bildung*. The Enlightenment brings about a further development of the idea of *Bildung*: The process of self-*Bildung* now becomes defined in terms of rational autonomy. Kant argues that man’s “propensity and vocation to free thinking”—which he considers to be the aim of man’s existence<sup>51</sup>—could only be brought about by means of education. Furthermore, in Kant education becomes a *necessity* since only an educated person can reach the state of rational autonomy. Thus, for Kant, *Bildung* is not a mere theoretical concept; instead, he gives it a strong anthropological orientation. And, as we saw, Fichte successfully follows this path. Yet for Kant *Bildung* is more than only an educational ideal. It is primarily an answer to the question about the role of the individual in the emerging (civil) society. In this respect, the modern conception of *Bildung* has a political history as well.<sup>52</sup> In Kant, however, this political history is interpreted in the context of morality and in terms of the universal imperative. Fichte

brings *Bildung* back from the metaphysics of ethics (Kant) into the sphere of practical philosophy and politics. *Bildung* is no longer apprehended as something defined solely by the ethical sphere, awareness of duty, and the categorical imperative. Instead, its significance for man as well as its necessity is derived from the social and political nature of man and his life in the community with other people. Thus, *Bildung* appears in Fichte as a man's infinite activity of self-development and self-contemplation (toward complete harmony with himself). But this is the activity of improvement not only of oneself, but also, and perhaps even more so, of the improvement of one's nation and the human race in general. That occurs in and through human activity over historical time, and, as such, this is not a result of an individual enterprise, but a collective human undertaking that must be understood as the universal activity of enculturation (*Bildung*). This is some kind of intrapersonal, intersubjective activity which marks a transition to the sociocultural dimension of the individual life. Fichte makes it clear that *Bildung* is a concrete universal process in which we human beings necessarily participate and through which we become aware of ourselves and our natural and social environment. Yet, this process can take place only if an individual is not alone, but interacts with other individuals collectively pursuing their own goals. The man hence can acquire harmony with himself (and thus achieve his vocation) only in and through his own activity, an activity that is not just directed toward the world, but which is mediated through relation with others, and first of all, with his own people, with whom the man has joint (political and social) interests.



Now I shall briefly summarize some results of the above analysis, especially emphasizing those of Fichte's ideas that influenced the development of the modern theory of *Bildung* and, eventually, pedagogy.

First, there is an important link between human *Bildung* and man's vocation. And, without knowing where man's vocation lies, the idea of *Bildung* cannot be adequately described. It remains an abstract concept that has a rather narrow meaning (as in Kant, who interprets *Bildung* as the one of man's moral obligations). Thus, whoever wants to deliver a well-grounded conception of *Bildung* must first provide an answer to the question about man's vocation.

In Fichte (as well as in W. von Humboldt and Schiller), human self-cultivation (*Bildung* as such) is what constitutes man's vocation. The latter is identical with the former in the sense of the complete development and cultivation of man to humanity through the encounter with the living human world, which involves transcending of the momentary and particular and advancing into the universal. As a result, man's *Bildung* is here interpreted as a universal process of enculturation.

Second, the idea of *Bildung* can be formulated and well grounded only in connection to and in the context of a philosophical theory of *Bildung* that at the same time is both anthropology and practical philosophy (first of all, ethics *per se*). The identity of anthropology and practical philosophy is clearly shown in Fichte's First Address. Indeed, Fichte's anthropology is not of a physiological or pragmatic kind. He is not concerned with what man by his nature is and what natural laws he has to conform to. It is also not of interest to Fichte how man must introduce himself to society if he wants to achieve his ultimate goal. Instead, the central focus becomes for Fichte a question of what the man's essential goal should be and what he ought to do to achieve this goal. The anthropology that has this question as its theme is nothing else but practical philosophy.

Third, although still in general terms, Fichte already shows that the process of *Bildung* is not limited to the pure theoretical activity. It does not merely aim at gaining knowledge or a special skill. Instead, it is a practical activity of the rational beings who through their actions realize themselves. Only through practical engagement with other rational agents in the real world is man able to break free from his natural predetermination and achieve his higher and complete harmony as a free rational agent consciously striving for perfection.

Fourth, to cultivate or to perfect oneself does not merely mean to develop oneself as an isolated individual who is independent of any other influences and who finds its complete satisfaction in itself. Fichte argues that *Bildung* is not a solo enterprise. Man is a social being, and as such he has an internal drive not only to communicate with other equally developed free rational agents. He also has a desire and need to exchange his powers and abilities with other agents of social activity. And, only through this mutual interest in each other and then reciprocal influence on one another is he able to further develop and improve himself and therewith also significantly contribute to cultivating others. Here Fichte formulates the idea of the dialectic of individual and communal (collective

or social) *Bildung*: man's self-cultivation is possible within society through social interrelation with others. Moreover, since man is a rational being, this interaction must be directed by man's own interest and thus man has to be actively involved in and work on the *Bildung* of others. Man can cultivate himself only because others let him participate in the process of their *Bildung*, and in this way man can have a real impact on their development toward perfection. This is why the individual's desire for its own independence and self-determination is at the same time man's concern with the freedom and self-determination of others, and ultimately of his nation and humanity as whole.

In this way, Fichte formulates a very important pedagogical idea, namely, the idea of the regulative principle of human *Bildung*. According to Fichte, mutuality of people living in society, their communality (free reciprocal activity of rational beings within society) is what determines our attitude toward the world and also establishes the way we deal with each other. Thus, every pedagogical enterprise and every pedagogical theory must be built upon this principle. Only then could there be offered a new account of pedagogy as a concrete discipline within the practical philosophy. This is the concept of pedagogy that Fichte begins drafting in his lectures on *Scholar's Vocation* and is explicitly proposing in the *Addresses* in terms of the national education.

## Notes

1. Fichte viewed his addresses as a continuation of the discussion he had begun in the *Characteristics of the Present Age*, originally delivered as a series of seventeen lectures in the winter of 1804–05 (AGN, 3, 9.) This already provides a framework in which the *Addresses* should be read. In the *Characteristics*, Fichte outlines a speculative philosophy of history, analyzing the Enlightenment and defining its existing place in the historical evolution of humanity and human spirit. Yet he acknowledges that what he earlier “described as present is now past” and the current task—which he considers as “the purpose of these addresses”—is to reveal “a world thus constituted as a means of creating a new self and a new age” (AGN, 9, 10). Although I will provide page references to the above translation, I have modified it in some cases.

2. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte* (1848–49), trans. William Smith, 4th ed., vol. 2 (London: Trübner, Ludgate Hill: 1889), 252 (SW, 7, 222).

3. Ibid, 255 (SW, 7, 224).

4. Cf. Ernst Bergmann, *Fichte und der Nationaliszialismus* (Breslau: F. Hirt, 1933). Primarily a work of propaganda, the volume, which is a perfect example of the historical misappropriation and misuse of Fichte and his writings for political motives, blatantly portrays Fichte as the forefather of National Socialism.

5. Some scholars claim that as a philosopher Fichte was close to National Socialism in tone and spirit. In his recent book, *Hitler's Private Library* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), Timothy Ryback draws some parallels between Fichte and Hitler, which the author sees in calling for an overthrow of the political elite, drumming up support for a people's war, and dreaming of the unity of the German people (esp. p. 107). Attempts to demonstrate a connection between Fichte's ideas and Nazism are also undertaken by some other authors. See, for example: Micha Brumlik, *Deutscher Geist und Judenhass* (München: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2000); Emiliano Acosta, "Is It Still Possible to Recover Fichte's Reflections about Education? Notes on Fichte's *Aphorisms on Education* (1804)," in *Institutions of Educations, Then and Today: The Legacy of German Idealism*, ed. Paul Cobben (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 151–60.

6. AGN, 17.

7. Ibid., 38.

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Ibid., 19.

10. Ibid., 16.

11. Ibid., 103.

12. Ibid., 15.

13. Ibid., 118, cf. also 178.

14. The German term *Erziehung* is often inaccurately translated as "education." However, *Erziehung* has a strong connotation toward learning social norms as well as basic rules and principles of life. As such it can be appropriately rendered as "nurturing" or "upbringing." While the task of bringing up and nurturing a child necessarily includes a process of learning, it is not synonymous with education. The German word for education is *Ausbildung*. It refers to a more specific kind of learning related to gaining a special knowledge or a set of skills needed in order to have some kind of ability or knowhow (to operate a certain machine, to do computer programming, etc.). This term is usually used in relation to formal schooling or training (= education) that allows one to qualify for a specific job or position. It should be noticed, however, that in German there is one more term, *Pädagogik*, that in its connotations overlaps with the term *Ausbildung*. *Pädagogik*, which can be rendered as "pedagogy," is the practice of teaching, a specific didactical activity employed in the process of education. Thus, many German thinkers used the term as synonymous with education.

15. AA, 1/9, 448. At the beginning of his *Lectures on Pedagogy* (1803), Kant claims: "1) Parents usually care only that their children get on well in the world, and 2) princes regard their subjects merely as instruments for their own designs.

Parents care for the home, princes for the state. Neither have as their final end the best for the world [*das Weltbeste*] and the perfection to which humanity is destined, and for which it also has the predisposition. However, the design for a plan of education must be made in a cosmopolitan manner.” Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 442.

16. *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten von J. J. Engel, J. B. Erhard, F. A. Wolf, J. G. Fichte, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, W. v. Humboldt, G. F. W. Hegel*, ed. E. Müller (Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1990), 273.

17. See, for example, *Diary Concerning the Most Noteworthy Educational Errors that Have Come to My Attention* (1788), *Some Lectures on the Scholar's Vocation* (1794), *The Vocation of Man* (1800).

18. Cf. Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy (1762–1799)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Isaac Nakhimovsky, *The Closed Commercial State: Perpetual Peace and Commercial Society from Rousseau to Fichte* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

19. AGN, 119–27.

20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27–58.

21. Interestingly, there is a certain correspondence between the double meaning of the concept of *Bildung* discussed above and the two senses of *Bildung* that the medieval mystics derived from the specific passages in the Bible. The first concerns the act of creation, which is interpreted as an undertaking where something gives rise to a new entity. In this case, *Bildung* represents the dynamic introduced by the Latin pair *forma—formatio*. The fact that this creation occurs “in the likeness of God,” where God appears as a model or an original image, which is breathing life into a new form, coincides with the second meaning of *Bildung*. Here *Bildung* refers to the relationship introduced by the semantic pair *imago—imitatio*.

22. Cf. *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. Michel Delon (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), esp. 1215–17; first published 2002.

23. Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt, “Ideen zu einer Versuch die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I (Berlin: Reimar, 1903), 106.

24. Cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt, “Theorie der Bildung des Menschen,” *Werke in fünf Bände*, hrsg. von Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel. Vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 235.

25. *Ibid.*, 237.

26. AGN, 38.

27. J. G. Fichte, “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation,” *EPW*, 146 (*GA*, I/3, 28). Fichte explains that man as such or “simply *qua man*” is “man

isolated and considered apart from all the associations which are not necessarily included in the concept of man" (Ibid.).

28. "Bestimmung" *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe*, hrsg. von Arnim Regenbogen und Uwe Meyer. Begründet von Friedrich Kircher und Carl Michaelis, fortgesetzt von Johannes Hoffmeister, vollständig neu herausgegeben (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998).

29. *EPW*, 152, cf. also 160. Similar ideas are also expressed in the *Addresses*. Cf. *AGN*, 103, 136, 185, 195.

30. *EPW*, 152.

31. *AGN*, 101.

32. Ibid., 103.

33. Ibid., 102.

34. *EPW*, 160.

35. *AGN*, 4.

36. Ibid., 14.

37. Ibid., 17.

38. Ibid., 19.

39. David James, *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 172.

40. See *AGN*, 17.

41. Ibid., 18; cf. also 38.

42. Fichte to Johanna Fichte, June 2, 1807, *GA*, III/6.

43. Cf. *AGN*, 32.

44. Ibid., 136.

45. Ibid., 24.

46. Ibid., 149.

47. Ibid., 38.

48. Ibid., 167.

49. Ibid., 103.

50. Cf. *Das Fischer Lexicon: Pädagogik. Neuausgabe*, hrsg. von H.-H. Groothoff (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1978), 36.

51. I. Kant, "Über Pädagogik," in *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1982), 701.

52. Cf. H. Sünker, "Pedagogy and Politics: Heydorn's 'Survival through Education' and Its Challenge to Contemporary Theories of Education (*Bildung*)," in *The Politics of Human Science*, ed. S. Miedema, G. Biesta, B. Boog, A. Smaling, W. Wardekker, and B. Levering (Brussels: VUB Press, 1994).





## The Ontological and Epistemological Background of German Nationalism in Fichte's *Addresses*

RAINER SCHÄFER

According to Fichte, Germany is the only contemporary nation specifically enabled to serve the goals of freedom and universal reason, a position he attributed to Germany's extraordinary weak political power, the fragile historic situation, and vital characteristics of its language.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the popular *Addresses to the German Nation* have to be read in the context of the historical and political background around 1807–08, which is to say, in the context of the disappointment resulting from the period of terror during the French Revolution, Napoleon's coronation, his imperial status, and the Napoleonic European war, along with the institutional, governmental, disunited, and long historical weakness of Germany, which was for more than eight hundred years only a theoretical construction of the *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*.<sup>2</sup> With a slight allusion to the devil, Fichte calls Napoleon the "nameless," and describes him as an enemy of freedom and a traitor of the true ideals of the French Revolution (in this regard Fichte has the same view of Napoleon's development as Beethoven). According to Fichte, Napoleon turned evil because he declared his own private will to be the *volonté générale* of the whole world, thereby perverting morality, in the literal sense of "*per-versio*," since practical reason demands that the individual will conforms to universal laws. It is an irony of the history of philosophy that Fichte's Germanophile

and Francophobe description of Napoleon is in some regard in line with Rousseau's social theory. This shows that Fichte did not completely turn away from the ideals of the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Reading the *Addresses* only in the light of historic and politic development is, however, not sufficient. Reading the *Addresses* in the context of historical and political surroundings makes several ideas therein intelligible, but it may also result in a problematic neglect of the philosophical issues included in the *Addresses*. Since the *Addresses* claim to be popular philosophy, one should not only stress their popularity; the philosophical demands these speeches make have to be considered as well. They imply a superhistorical dimension, an idea in time, which is certainly spelled out in terms of history, religion, and politics, but there is also a guiding and ruling philosophical idea that provides their background. This paper will emphasize the philosophical aspects of the *Addresses*. The philosophical ideas in question include: Fichte's henologic idea of divinity, freedom as being original and authentic, the relation of appearance, spirit or mind and the "One," the intellectual aspects of language, the somewhat Montesquieuesque political and ethical idea that each nation incorporates specific virtues, and Fichte's transformation of Kant's doctrine of postulates of practical reason from the second *Critique* (immortality, freedom, and god) in the context of politics and history. The *communis opinio* of Fichte research is therefore correct, namely, that it is impossible to separate his popular writings from his scientific works. But it is nevertheless true that the simplifications contained in his "exoteric" popular writings cause misunderstandings and seem to imply differences between these and his more scientific or "esoteric" works.

Only the scientific and philosophical background ideas can explain why Fichte develops a chauvinist version of Germany in his popular writing. The universality he claims for Germanness has to be regarded in the light of his concept of the narrow connection of divinity and appearance. Divinity, or in Fichte's henologic term the "One," is reason; more precisely, it is freedom and practical reason—an inheritance of the Kantian priority of the practical. But Fichte's nexus of freedom and appearance is stricter than in Kant's. The arena for the appearance of the divine "One" is history and politics, at least as far as these are understood as a history and policy of freedom. That not each policy is an appearance of freedom is obvious from Fichte's interpretation of Napoleon, who, since becoming a conqueror, operated on a policy of bondage. The notion of politics is wider than the notion of freedom. Therefore, a sufficient appearance of the

“One” or practical reason is the actualization of freedom within nations and politics. The political appearance of freedom cannot be particular, since the standards of freedom and practical reason are universal, therefore only a universal nation can display the “One.” According to Fichte, universalized Germanness is, strictly speaking, a pleonasm, as well as a historical necessity.

In this paper, I want to analyze a contradiction in Fichte’s *Addresses*, one that is implicit in the previously mentioned philosophical background ideas. This contradiction consists in Fichte’s claim that Germanism is, on the one hand, an assemblage of particular characteristics, such as loyalty, solidity, profoundness, faithfulness, honesty, poetry, freedom, love for the German language, thorough thinking, vitality, etc. and, on the other hand, that Germanness is universal and that Germany is the only truly cosmopolitan nation (*AGN*, 90f.). This makes Germany, according to Fichte, the one and only genuine nation, the nation per se, in opposition to which all other nations are only foreigners, aliens, and imperfect collections of people. The contradiction consists in the incompatibility between the specific determinations and the demanded universality, since universality or real cosmopolitanism must, in my view, abstract from national specifications. Universality implies abstract rules, such as those associated with human rights. This kind of necessary moral abstraction is always implied if an imperative is a universal norm. To be sure, such moral abstraction has its own problems, as critics have often noted, including formalism and the absence of specific features or contents. But I maintain that the more general a determination is, the more abstract it has to be, and in this regard abstractness and formality are not a weakness of universalizable rules and laws, but rather their strength and an indication of their coherence. In this regard, I follow the traditional logical doctrine of the reciprocity of content and extension of concepts, and I apply this reciprocity to ethical and political rules or virtues. This is the justification of Kant’s ethical formalism in his categorical imperative and in his basic rule of right (and, in our era, of universal human rights). Fichte goes beyond this, trying to reach a universality that includes specific content, which is the self-defeating idea of a concrete universality, or, spelled out in political terms, “universalized Germanism.” Fichte demands this because he is trying to avoid an empty, vain, and meaningless universality or notion of cosmopolitanism. The desolate consequences of a meaningless cosmopolitan we can see, for example, in Cronenberg’s film *Cosmopolis*.<sup>4</sup>

The *Addresses* have the character of a vocation, since the empirical Germans around 1808 did not see their own German ideal determination, because they lived in the era of what Fichte described as “perfect sinfulness.” This is also why the *Addresses* have the character of a performative speech-act, for what they claim is produced in the very moment the *Addresses* are spoken. They produce and perform as speech-act their own reality. Fichte could claim that this holds for the other German virtues that he demands as well. He could, for example, claim that his description of Germanness in the *Addresses* is profound, honest, faithful, etc. There is no arguing that it was courageous of Fichte to stand up at that time and deliver such a provocative series of lectures, openly calling for freedom and for rebellion against the French occupation.

In regard to the particular characteristics of Germanness one can criticize Fichte for his dependence upon Tacitus’s *Germania*, since Tacitus’s characterization of the Germans closely resembles Fichte’s and since Fichte refers directly to Tacitus.<sup>5</sup> Tacitus’s version of Germanness is itself a fragile construction, probably constructed for an ideological and propagandist goal. His characterizations of German directness, simplicity, self-sacrificing devotion, and radical striving for morality and freedom were perhaps useful for arguing against the patrician decadence back home in his contemporary Rome. It is thus the case that concepts of Germanness are always accompanied by propaganda, ideology, projection, fear, and fantasy, which obviously holds even if they are produced by opponents of the same. But this is perhaps a necessary amalgamate for every variety of chauvinistic nationalism or patriotism, since we find it in ancient political chauvinism as well, for example, in ancient Greek or Roman chauvinism, which was even stronger than Fichte’s.

This type of problem is, however, not what I want to analyze here; instead, I will focus on the above-mentioned contradiction between universality and particular characteristics, which constitute two horns of a dilemma. The contradiction is actualized whenever Fichte makes both claims at the same time and in the same regard. This topic is of interest not only with regard to the history of ideas, but also in regard to a more systematic point, namely, the analysis of the phenomenon of chauvinist nationalism in general, for the incoherent connection of universality, or a universal vocation of a nation and the national particularities, could be observed in (nearly) every version of patriotic chauvinism. Fichte’s version is, in this regard, of special interest, because he seems to be at least to some degree conscious of the problem implicit in the combination of particular-

ity and universality, and it is this degree of self-consciousness that, along with his genius as a philosopher, distinguishes him from the garden-variety political chauvinist. Fichte seems to be striving for a solution to this problem when he argues for the implication of universality and cosmopolitanism in political freedom; but it becomes incoherent when he treats it as a specific feature of Germans. Therefore, one finds two different concepts of ideal Germanness in the *Addresses*. First, that ideal Germanness that is an “open nation,” open to everyone who strives for freedom, and second, that ideal Germanness that is described in terms of exclusion of otherness, as well as by more specific features such as the German language, profundity, faith, inclusion in the intellectual tradition of Germany, etc. In the latter case, there is an inclusive and an exclusive ideal conflict.

### The Chief German Contradiction

The above-described chief contradiction is actualized, like all contradictions, in the very moment when the opposing claims are asserted at the same time and in the same regard (*AGN*, 96f.). This is the case when Fichte claims that it is one specific and particular determination of Germany to be the only real cosmopolitan nation, meaning that only Germans can be universal and display the universality of freedom and humanity. Fichte does not always say that it is only the Germans who can reach this goal of universality and cosmopolitanism. Several times he seems to proclaim that the ancient Greeks and to some extent the ancient Romans achieved this goal as well, albeit according to their specific form of a people.<sup>6</sup> Universality is the feature that unites ancient Greeks and Fichte’s proclaimed Germans. It would be a too obvious self-contradiction if Fichte would proclaim that only Germans could *ever* be universal. But he does claim that this is the case during this specific historical era, during which only Germans can actualize universality and real cosmopolitanism. The fact that only Germany can be universal is thus not a conceptual or logical necessity, but is a consequence of historical development.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, in Fichte’s *Addresses* the chief contradiction is more complicated and operates on a completely different level than it does in the case of the common national chauvinism, for Fichte sees and tries to avoid a trivial contradiction of universality and particularity of a nation. According to him, the combination of particularity and universality can be determined in a positive and coherent way by freedom.

The problem becomes obvious when Fichte comes close to asserting something that is characterized in Fichte-research as “nationalist solipsism.” This is a proper term to describe the problem, since, for Fichte, with specific regard to the German essence and due to particular historic developments, only Germans have the ability to be a cosmopolitan nation, one that must avoid foreignness. In several passages of the *Addresses*, Fichte says that Germans are the one and only people, the folk per se or in general, the paradigm and forerunners—to use a French word: the “avant-garde,” in the literal sense—of all humanity (cf. passages such as AGN, 42f., 81, 85, 96ff.).

Here, we have the problem in a nutshell: it is a particularity of Germanness to be universal, and the particular characteristics of Germanness are a result of a historic process as well as a consequence of decision by the intelligible free will. But as an effect of historical developments, the particular determination of the Germans does not constitute a specific essence (“deutsches Wesen”), but rather more a kind of family resemblance. Fichte seems to think that political freedom implies cosmopolitanism. This was first stressed in Kant’s philosophy of right. But this idea becomes problematic when Fichte applies it to a particular nation. If it really were a specific characteristic of Germans to be cosmopolitan and free, then one could not blame other nations for not being cosmopolitan or free, since how could they be cosmopolitan or free if they lack this determination in their very essence? Alien nations, by their very nature as different nations, cannot express the nature or essence of Germanness. One could only solve this problem or try to defend Fichte by declaring that when any nation becomes cosmopolitan or free it automatically becomes German. But then there must be something like an analytical connection of Germanness and freedom or cosmopolitanism, implying that in the case of becoming cosmopolitan or having insight into freedom, the difference between “we and the others” is transcended or abandoned. Fichte does not really prove this, and it seems evident that the connection of being German and being cosmopolitan, universal, and free is only an empirical synthetic connection.

In at least some passages of the *Addresses*, Fichte follows the above-mentioned strategy of identifying each member of an alien nation who is cosmopolitan and free with Germans (AGN, 96f.). In doing this, he obviously has a concept of an “open nation” with universal inclusiveness. He could then claim that among empirical persons one might find, for example, Frenchmen who are more “German” than some real Germans,

for the former may love liberty and cosmopolitanism more than the latter. But in that case he has to argue, then, that such Frenchmen have eradicated their Frenchness in favor of his Germanness. This is where Fichte asserts that Germany is the one true nation and that it is absolutely open to each and every human to become Germanized. That certainly sounds quite liberal, and Fichte's striving for freedom surely deserves to be taken seriously. What Fichte is striving for is not a phony liberalism and merely apparent kind of freedom.

But here the problem involved in the chief contradiction appears once again, since one must ask how such cosmopolitanism is compatible with the more specific but determinative characteristics of Germanness, for example, the use of German language? Does the Frenchmen from our example automatically start speaking German when he becomes a cosmopolitan? Does he automatically start to have the profundity and loyalty of the idealized German? But if Fichte would argue that is not necessary for the Germanized Frenchman to have all other particular German characteristics, this implies that the more specific characteristics are obviously not necessary conditions for the very essence of Germanness, and if this is the case, it implies that the more specific characteristics constitute only an amalgamation by coincidental chance and that there is no necessity in Germanness seen as a synthetic whole of several characteristics. Germanness as a whole would instead be only a family resemblance in Wittgenstein's sense, which could not be Fichte's intention. Occasionally, Fichte appears to concur, since he generously says that for a foreigner it is not necessary to speak German in order to be Germanized, if only he/she is a free being capable of insight into real and radical freedom. Now that this problem is clear now, it is not necessary to go through all the other German particularities in order to show their incompatibility with the alleged universality of a Germanized foreigner. For the sake of German profundity, however, I would like to go deeper into the philosophical background of the chief contradiction. In the next two parts of my paper I will examine Fichte's concepts of language, nation, and the relation of appearance and the "One."

### Language and Nation in Relation to the Chief Contradiction

To illustrate the problems of the main contradiction further, I will now describe the function of German language and Fichte's concept of nation.



The importance of language for Fichte's claims concerning German superiority in Fichte's *Addresses* is well known.

In the *Addresses*, language constitutes the community of a nation. Therefore, Fichte's nationalism is a cultural determination and not a biologic, ethnic, naturalistic, topologic, or constitutional category.<sup>8</sup> A nation is a language community, with its particular language games, expressing a particular way of life and a specific determination of the mind. The closer a language is connected to life and the specific spirit of a community, the more authentic and vivid is the community itself.<sup>9</sup> The developed language of a people reflects, according to Fichte, both the interactive plurality of concrete personalities in history and a normative unity, a more particular "synthesis of spirits," executing rules with the final goal of a moral law. Therefore, we find habit and ethos (*Sitte und Sittlichkeit*) in oscillation between the plurality of historical appearances and an a priori unity in what ought to be, namely, the moral virtues. In language as the constituting principle of a nation, what is a priori and what is a posteriori mingle. But this does not make Fichte Foucault; unlike Foucault, he has no "historic a priori," since, according to Fichte, the insight and recognition of the unity of a moral law have to be accomplished by pure practical and universal reason. Historic reality alone is not able to evaluate the criteria of morality and normativity; this can be only performed by universal reason. What is (empirically) real is not therefore also reasonable. Is and ought should not be identified in a simple manner. Thus, Fichte, in the *Addresses*, can respect the Humean is-ought distinction.

Fichte's notorious German chauvinism derives from his view that in modern Europe only the Germans are faithful and loyal to their language roots (along with several other Nordic populations, though Fichte is not specific which ones he has in mind). Due to their neo-Latin languages, the rest of Europe is uprooted from its cultural identity and thereby abandoned to superficiality, since Latin is a dead language and Roman languages are just a pale reflection of life. Fichte is no learned linguist; he possesses only a kind of "knowledge by accident" and adopts the common opinion that German with its Indo-German language root is older and different from Roman languages. (In this context one might also think of Schlegel's studies in Sanskrit, published in 1808 and of his foundation of Indology as a science.)

According to Fichte, the depth of understanding the world is measured by the grade of vitality and ingeniousness of the spoken tongue by

means of which the world is expressed. "Mind and world" are mediated by language. But Fichte goes farther, and advances from this semantic account to an ontotheological determination of language, since language not only depicts the empirical, sensible world by referring to it, but is also a manifestation of freedom and divinity, since language *is* our intellectual life. Language is an intellectual and essential force of the intelligible life of understanding itself (AGN, 51ff.). The connection of intellectual life and language is not superficial, but is an immediate and original unity. A folk that is separated from its original tongue has only a shadowy existence. According to Fichte, the ancient Greek and Romans also possessed a vital language, and thus their poetry and thinking (*Dichten und Denken*) were original as well; but contemporary nations, communicating in a dead tongue, lack any connection to the authenticity of intellectual life.

Here one can observe a strategy of strictness in Fichte which is also a strategy of immunization against criticism. Fichte very rigorously and as it seems coherently concludes from the opposition of original and vital language-use in German and the indirect and necrotic language use in Latinate tongue, that only Germans actually can understand Germans. Consequently, no foreigners are competent to criticize Germanness. (Here Fichte follows the same strategy he employs in his argument against determinism: a determinist does not even understand what a free person is talking about when he/she talks about liberty.) But, how is this extensive exclusion compatible with the important German characteristic of inclusion?

In this regard, one can see that in Fichte's claim the particular German virtues or characteristics perform a specific type of synthesis, since they ought to include each other; for example, the vitality and continuation of loyalty to the German tongue is linked with thorough thinking. (Fichte certainly would criticize me for talking about Germanness in English.) The virtue of loyalty offers the possibility for the Germans to preserve their origin in a vital language, and one can see Fichte's paradigm of this in Martin Luther, who made God speak German by translating the Bible. But as historical reality shows, other nations, speaking in the Roman language, can have their Martin Luthers too, with their dreams of freedom. From a more systematic point of view, Fichte's conception of language is certainly confusing, since a vital language on the one hand implies change and creative development, which Fichte claims for the

German way of dealing with language, and on the other hand Fichte emphasizes the preservation or conservation of the original language (AGN, 50f.). If one compares Fichte's spoken German to Middle High German one will find that they are very different; indeed, I doubt that Fichte would be able to understand the Middle High German poems of Walther von der Vogelweide immediately without translation into his contemporary German. This discontinuity and difference could be interpreted either as a sign of vitality or as symptom of uprooting.

Another, more amusing aspect of Fichte's chief contradiction in regard to the subject of language is that he just explains Germanness in a work with the title *Addresses to the German Nation* and by the term *nation* Fichte makes use of a word originating from the disrespected and dead Roman language. How can this use of a neo-Latin word in the title and throughout the entire work be justified? Was Fichte here "Frenchified," disloyal to Germanness? No, he was not, since very often the terminology he employs to describe the core of his chauvinist version of Germanness originates from neo-Latin languages. This holds for the terms *act*, *politic*, and *patriotism*. To be sure, the majority of terms Fichte uses to describe Germanness are typical German words such as *Treu und Redlichkeit* (loyalty and honesty), *Dichten und Denken* (poetry and thinking), *weltbürgerlich* (cosmopolitan), *Vaterlandsliebe* (patriotism). What about the word *German*? Fichte himself was aware of the fact that the word *German* originates from Roman sources, for example, Julius Caesar<sup>10</sup> and Tacitus, which is why he prefers the term *Deutsch*.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the influence of Tacitus in Fichte's characterization of Germanness is somehow problematic as well, because Tacitus's description of the Germans very likely had political and propagandistic Roman goals. Is it so original and patriotic to be positively influenced by a member of the former enemy alien nation? Adopting characterizations from the enemy is alienation. Therefore, even if Fichte intends or tries to avoid it, his own concept of what constitutes a nation is "infected" with alienation. So this turns out not only to be amusing but to be serious as well, making the chief contradiction more evident in its concrete application to language as a characteristic feature of Germanness. Fichte himself puts strong emphasis on language as an expression of the vitality of the national spirits and intellectual life. Thus, according to his own theory, the German spirit is dead if it is necessary to describe it in Roman terms, as he himself so obviously does.

### The Philosophical Background of the Henological Religion within the *Addresses* as Root of the Contradiction

Fichte tries to avoid a Platonic duality and the *chorismos* of empirical, historical reality and the unity of pure practical reason not only in the *Addresses* but also in the scientific writings on the science of knowledge. I want to argue for this anti-Platonic point of view, even if Fichte himself uses Platonic terms, and even if it is a well-justified and common insight in Fichte research that there is a kind of Platonic turn in the later Fichte. Nevertheless, I maintain that the nexus of appearance on the one hand and the higher transcendental reality of the universal moral normativity and the unity of the “One” on the other would be only superficial according to the later Fichte’s argumentative standards if both were not mediated by a rational and therefore unifying reason.<sup>11</sup> The “Hiatus” of appearance and the “One” has to be justified from the perspective of unity, which could be called Fichte’s updated version of Platonism. The Fichtean relation of appearance and the “One,” as it appears in the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1804, is not separated by a *chorismos* or an ontology of two worlds in the manner that is typical for Platonism; instead, it is explainable in terms of a direct manifestation, rather than as a copy by chance, accident, or coincidence. The duality of appearance and the “One” is more the result of two different perspectives than of two different ontologies. Fichte’s position has thus become a “transcendental ontology.” At the apex of the 1804 *WL* in lectures 14 and 15, Fichte argues for the identity of “One,” “Being,” and “We” (“we” meaning the synthesis of spirits or the structure of transcendental interpersonality). This “three-oneness” is manifest in the appearance. In the 1804 *WL* the doctrine of truth and the phenomenology are systematically united as two different ways or methods of one and the same structure: namely, self-producing and free knowledge. Appearance and transcendental unity, which is, for later Fichte, the “One,” are only two different perspectives upon one and the same self-vitalizing process of freedom and knowledge.

To apply this idea of immediate connection to the concrete linguistic and political surrounding of the *Addresses* means that both vivid language and the nation are the direct expression of universal moral laws or virtues linked to divinity. The more necrotic a language becomes, the more unable it is to express moral virtues and rules directed to the “One” as its appearance. Indeed, one could go even farther: Since the language one

employs is the direct manifestation of the moral law of a community or of a particular synthesis of spirits, it is an act of morality (or immorality) to speak this or that language. Thus, it would make it immoral to speak English or French, since by doing so one would express his/her addiction to death.

In Fichte's *Addresses*, we find a seemingly Platonic or Neo-Platonic concept of the difference and unity of historical reality (the world of appearances) and the moral law. The difference becomes intelligible because the moral law expresses the divine, which is beyond individuality and historicity and is the universal vocation of mankind. The unity of history and divinity becomes intelligible, because expression in this context means manifestation; the performance of language acts is the divine performance of freedom. The divine sphere is characterized by reason, namely, freedom, unity, universality, simplicity, and lawfulness. Fichte synthesizes these features of reason in his characterization of the "One." We therefore find both identity and difference in the relation of appearance and the "One." The theoretical arguments for this are explained in the 1804 *WL*, whereas the concrete application of the same may be found in the *Addresses*.

There, Fichte addresses the basic law of appearance (*Grundgesetz der Erscheinung*; *AGN*, 93f.): The "One" performs a self-splitting into the manifold. This self-diversification is the creative production of manifoldness, showing the "One" as a creative "first," and freedom as prior to everything else. Freedom is originality, firstness (*AGN*, 94f.). The manifold is an infinite number of singularities, the sphere of the visible. Insofar as this infinity of singularities is a self-split "One," it is not only unconnected and separated but can be seen, on the one hand, as a whole and on the other as parts. Seen as particularization, the single appearances within the field of manifoldness are interactive and determinable. Each single part is determinable through other parts, as well as through the whole or a greater context in which other manifolds appear. A good example is the connection between cause and effect. The "One" marks the sphere of the invisible, the manifold the sphere of visibility and infinity. Visibility here is Fichte's popular metaphor for appearance. The self-splitting diversification of the "One" is the reason for two possible perspectives on knowledge, namely, one can see him/her self and every other entity only as a singularity within the visible sphere, in which case one becomes an empiricist, fatalist, materialist, determinist, nihilist, or, in our age, a naturalist, dominated by perpetual change and an infinite number of constantly disap-

pearing appearances. In this sphere, death and nothingness rule. Or one could see him/her self and every other entity as visible in connection to the whole of appearances and to the invisible sphere. Thereby, this perspective is connected to the “One,” to freedom and its basic rule of appearance. In this context, Fichte proposes an ingenious motto, which comes close to Cantor’s mathematical idea of infinity. Fichte says that the “One” is “more than all infinity” (AGN, 97). This seems to be paradoxical, but it is intelligible if one thinks, for example, that the unity of natural numbers is not on the same level as that of the infinite natural numbers themselves. The class of the natural numbers unifies its elements. Making the single natural numbers one class is a performance of a higher order. Therefore, one transcends the infinity of single natural numbers by cognizing the very essence of each natural number, by insight into what is common to them all.<sup>12</sup> If one cognizes the unity within the notion of natural numbers or what is in common to all natural numbers, he/she makes the transcending step from a “wholization” to the “One.”

Divinity, or the “One,” cannot manifest itself in the manifold immediately, because it needs a medium that already possesses the super-individual form of unity. The strongest form of unity, the “One,” needs a kind of prepared ground on which it might appear. Otherwise, unity and manifold would collide directly; the opposition would be too strong for a productive *parousia*. According to the *Addresses*, the nation is this preparing unified ground for the appearance of the “One,” a kind of airbag or blocker. In opposition to the manifold, the super-temporal unity of divinity is organized in a lawful way. This law is depicted by the super-individuality of the nation. Each people is a kind of given law for the individual. The lawfulness of the nation consists in the above-mentioned characteristics of a nation, forming, for example, the German virtues of loyalty, profundity, etc. These national virtues constitute a sedimentation of habits. In this regard, one finds a typical Platonic line of argument in later Fichte, in opposition to which we also find the coherent, but anti-Platonic, idea that if there is to be something like a duality of empirical world and the unified ideal reality of reason and the “One,” then we would have a guiding duality, since duality has the power to separate the “One” from its appearance. In this case, however the principle would be not the “One” but duality. Duality, then, would guide the “One,” directing it to a specific sphere.

This is an incoherent problem in traditional Platonism, which is often underestimated or not even noticed; but it is seen very clearly by Fichte. By avoiding this incoherence he connects appearance and “One”

much more closely than Platonism would be able to do. Immediately, the “One” is the appearance, both are only two different views of the same. Appearance is the “view from now-here,” and the “One” is the “view from nowhere.” Only a transcendental philosophy can show this immediate connection, for only a transcendental view has the methodology and ability to “geneticize” (*Genetisierung*) appearances, as Fichte calls it in the *Wissenschaftslerhe* of 1804. Because of its lack of this transcendental methodology, Platonism is unable to explain the relation between the “One” and appearance. The “One” in itself has the tendency and striving to appear. As a kind of thought experiment, one can try to imagine an appearance separated from the “One.” This would show that if we really had a duality we would have to think of this appearance as completely lacking all determinations of unity and oneness, a pure manifold. But, at that same moment one would be forced to apply laws of nature, categories, or schemata to this pure manifold and thereby unify it. Such acts of imposing unity upon the manifold are unavoidable for our thinking, since thinking is nothing other than synthesizing, unification. This thought experiment shows that a pure manifold is a mere abstraction, nothing to us, and in need of the manifestation of the “One.”

Another incoherence in the thought experiment of pure manifoldness consists in the following problem: if one thinks of a manifold, this means that there are many separated singularities. But it is implicit in such singularization that each single thing is one, and thus we have already applied oneness. Another incoherence in this thought experiment is that we already apply the “one” when we summarize the many singularities all together in the one class of the “manifold.” Appearance is thus essential to the “One,” just as the “One” is essential to the appearance. This philosophical insight could be applied to the relation of divinity and nation, making Fichte’s high estimation of the nation more intelligible.

But what seems to be reasonable for theoretical reasons becomes problematical in the field of politics, since the aforementioned “wholizing” perspective is the philosophical reason for the chauvinist political and nationalistic “universal Germanization.” Moreover, on the theoretical level one also has to be aware of the self-contradiction involved in claiming that this perspective unifies and separates at the same time, composing thereby a universality that contains particular determinations. The self-splitting “One” creates a concrete universality. According to Fichte, abstract universality only belongs to the understanding (*Ver-stand* in the literal German sense), not to reason (*Vernunft*), to which a concrete universality belongs.

The concrete universality implies what I called above the chief contradiction. Spelled out in political terms, each free human is automatically a German and this unity of freedom within Germanness separates the “land of the free” from the alien terrorists around the whole globe who are addicted to determinism, nihilism, and death. The “wholizing” perspective is able to connect the single appearance to a first, or to an original being, the absolute beginning or fundamental freedom, demonstrating its creativity by its self-divorcing multiplication within the production of manifoldness. This insight into originality is contrary to the first, particularizing perspective within the manifold. In the field of politics, the pluralized perspective and the wholizing one become enemies. The perspective of freedom and life and the necrotic perspective are intransigent and imply directly, to use Carl Schmitt’s terms, the political fundamental distinction of “friend and enemy.”

As one can see, there is a nonpolitical and nonnationalistic part of the story, but Fichte applies it to political issues: one has to see both language and nation as visible, sensible appearances of the invisible divinity. In one regard, each nation is an appearance of the “One” and of freedom, expressing this by ways of a specific moral law (AGN, 103), but in another regard Fichte is committed to the view that the more vivid a people is, the closer it comes to divine freedom; whereas, the more necrotic, or singularized it sees itself or expresses itself through language, the more deterministic, fatalistic, and nihilistic a people becomes (ibid., 97ff.). Nihilism and addiction to death are an apostasy from liberty, an original sin in the political and historical context. According to Fichte, the fatherland (*Vaterland*) is sensualized, “earthly eternity” (ibid., 105). Real patriotism is the striving for eternity, not only in the sphere of intelligible invisibility, but also in the visible sensuous sphere. The nation becomes an “earthly eternity” (ibid.).<sup>13</sup>

The nation mediates an a priori super-historic level of freedom, shared intelligence, and collective self-determination and an a posteriori empirical reality of individuality. Fichte’s nation stands as a cultural community mediating between what is a priori and what is a posteriori, and it possesses characteristics of both and lacks several typical characteristics of both. On the one hand, the nation is not in the sense of an individual a posteriori. It goes beyond individuality, but as a historical entity it is in space and time. Super-individuality and collective unity have their reason in the very essence of the specific language this community performs. Anticipating late Heidegger and Gadamer, Fichte interprets language as



speaking the individual, not the individual as speaking the language. Individuality vanishes in the super-individuality of the nation. People or folk and nation are the intellectual context that constitutes the individual. In relation to the individual, the nation has the characteristics of a constituting principle. But the nation is also not a pure a priori determination, since communities and languages go through historical transformations, being a vivid and synthetically open expression of meaning.

Fichte's transformation of Kant's doctrine of the postulates of practical reason from the second *Critique* is included in Fichte's idea of a nation (AGN, 102ff.). Fichte makes Kant's doctrine more concrete and tries to give it a more specific determination, since the super-individuality of the nation creates the possibility of a concrete realization of immortality for the individual, who transmits his/her intellectual features and achievements to his/her successors, transcending thereby his/her own lifetime. On this point, I agree with Fichte's idea of a kind of "empirical secularized immortality" by means of the continuation and transmission of traditions. (We find the same idea of having a concrete afterlife within the memory of the successors in several plays by Sartre, and Sartre's conclusion is that one is only actually dead if he/she vanishes into oblivion.) It is an act of anticipated recognition if one tries to transmit his/her thoughts to future generations. This act of recognition holds not only in the direction of future times, but also in the direction to the past, since if we try to understand and interpret valuable treasures of intellectual traditions—for example, Fichte—we also recognize and respect their achievements. Trying to be learned implies the moral recognition of other, former minds: a practical and historical "proof" of other minds. (Perhaps this is the reason we feel disrespect and moral indignation regarding philosophers who are ignorant of the history of ideas; they show a lack of respect and recognition, though this surely does not mean that each engagement in a subject from the past is an act of positive recognition.)

Returning to Fichte's transformation of Kant's three postulates of practical reason (immortality, freedom, god): for the single person, the realization of freedom is, due to his/her limitations, too restricted and in need of achievements and recognition by others; therefore, the single person needs cooperation and interaction in a community, which Fichte spells out in terms of national unity. In regard to the dependence of the individual upon a community, there is no disputing Fichte's insight, but his concrete application to nations is once again problematic, since one cannot prove that there are national dispositions that enable only special

nations to achieve interpersonal recognition on the grounds of their spoken language. Recognition is not possible only in German. According to Fichte, this appearance of shared intelligence, immortality, and freedom is a divine unity. Here, one can have a problem, but since this Fichtean version of a religion has a foundation in practical reason, this divinity is not a stipulated dogmatic metaphysical entity or substance, but is completely different from the creationist deity of our days. Fichte claims this divinity is nothing but the “synthesis of spirits” worthy of moral recognition: “god is the moral order within us,” a transcendental, restricted divinity. Fichte obviously had this concept of transcendental secularized religion ever since the “atheism dispute.” The problem only becomes virulent if Fichte applies it to the context of politics and history, and especially to Germany, for then the claims of practical reason lose their universal validity for all humans. From this loss of coherence, Fichte gains concreteness.

By declaring the appearance of language and nation to be the cultural manifestation of the “One,” Fichte integrates in his concept of nation a pluralism within a monism, which is—notwithstanding the fact that he describes it in henologic and Platonic terms—far beyond Platonism, since the connection between appearance and the “One” is rather strict in Fichte’s conception of concrete universality. He tries, on the one hand, to rescue the difference of is and ought, essential for morality and freedom—as Kant once said: if the distinction of appearance and *noumenon* is suspended, freedom is completely lost—and, on the other hand, to make intelligible a necessary unity of appearance and the universal unity of reason. This implies a higher valuation of the appearance than one finds in traditional Platonism. There is, for Fichte, no unbridgeable *chorismos* between appearance and being/oneness. This is why he distinguishes two types of appearance: an appearance that is a free appearance, showing its link to freedom by an original and authentic particularity (*Eigenheit*; Fichte calls this the “supreme law of the spiritual world”; *AGN*, 172), and an appearance that is not associated with freedom, a nivellating appearance. He also claims that each appearance is as good as the other, despite the fact that a free appearance has a higher moral dignity than illiberal heteronome appearances. In the political setting, this equal leveling perspective could be easily confused with tolerance.

These ideas are the nonpopular or we can say the “esoteric” philosophical background within the popular and “exoteric” *Addresses*, composing the background of the chief contradiction. In my opinion, one can only avoid the chief contradiction by abstracting from national characteristics

while constituting real free cosmopolitanism and the moral sphere of normativity. Hence, abstraction protects one from chauvinism. The negative lesson of all of this is to avoid national chauvinism. Positively, Fichte teaches us that freedom implies universality and a moral recognition of vital traditions in a people, and that this gives us the possibility of a secularized but meaningful afterlife. This form of abstract tolerance could be esteemed as a direct manifestation of universal freedom. Contemporary globalization does not meet this standard, since it thinks of a “global” perspective as still limited by a terrestrial view. Globalization could be a means to conquer chauvinist nationalism, but it is still only on the path to the actual universality of the claims of practical reason. The positive aspect of Fichte’s idea of freedom is a cosmopolitan “view from nowhere,” and Fichte only goes astray where he tries to integrate in this “nowhere” a “now-here,” namely Germanness.

### Notes

1. Fichte’s nationalist ideas show important parallels to Herder’s anthropology (cf. *Treatise on the Origins of Language*, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002]). Herder considered the weakness and unspecialized constitution of man to be the chief thing that distinguishes him from animals and concluded from this weakness that reason is the monopoly of mankind and that mankind therefore can spread globally. Herder argued that the development of reason and language in mankind occurred because of this weakness.

2. The Holy Roman Empire was established in AD 962. The title *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation* (*Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation*) was first mentioned in 1474; since 1512 it became the official title; it was abrogated in 1806 by Napoleon’s victories.

3. Martial Gueroult, “Fichte et la Révolution française,” in Martial Gueroult *Études sur Fichte* (New York: 1974), 152–246.

4. As far as I see, only in Husserl’s late *Crisis*-writing do we find the same problem, namely, when Husserl asserts the “Europeanization of mankind.” This is certainly problematic, like Fichte’s claim of Germanness, but by claiming “Europeanization” Husserl may come one step closer to truth, insofar as the real cosmopolitan and universal validity of the rules of freedom are invariant to national or continental particularities. Husserl, being a strict conservative German nationalist, gave in 1917 a so-called *Kriegsnotvorlesung*, a kind of lecture particularly designed for wartime, on Fichte’s *Addresses*. He did so in order to motivate

the German youth during the war time. Husserl was proud of his own sacrifices for the German nation, namely that one of his sons died in World War I and the other became disabled. In Fichte research, the specifications of Germanness have been profoundly analyzed, and within these one can find contradictions too. For example, there are historical situations where loyalty and striving for freedom exclude each other, or the love for German language and profoundness or solidity, since there may be epistemological problems that require an other language for the sake of profundity, if the problem one wants to analyze is better expressed in a different tongue or by use of technical terms, as in Gettier cases. Above all, one could have scruples if Fichte's specific characteristics of Germanness are correct. Along with these problems, it is obvious that Fichte sometimes mixes up in the *Addresses* the real empirical Germans and the ideal metaphysical (normative) Germans. But Fichte's idea of Germanness is a normative determination, and therefore he can argue that he is not defeated even if no single empirical real German meets these ideal characteristics, because like all moral virtues, they conduct an ideal life in the sphere of normativity, which ought to exist, even if empirical reality is light years away from meeting them.

5. AGN, 176, where Fichte refers to the *Annals*, cf. also *Beiträge zur Berichtigung . . .*, in *SW*, 6, 199; there Fichte refers to Tacitus's *Germania*.

6. AGN, 90f.; Fichte argues here that ancient Greeks and Germans have the spiritual characteristics of universality and cosmopolitanism in common.

7. It is a typical feature of chauvinistic nationalism to claim that only this one nation has the feature of universality by its particularity. We find it in Dostoevsky's description of the Slavophile's, too, where Dostoevsky, half ironically and half seriously, writes that only Russians, by means of their original religious orthodox faith, the extraordinary irrationality, combined with the defiance of death, and being accustomed to suffering from bondage for hundreds of years, are able to save the whole world, thereby demonstrating Slavic and especially Russian superiority above all other nations. Dostoevsky's most extreme description of radical Russianness, in *The Demons*, was the source of "inspiration" for Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels quoted in his dissertation from 1921, written in Heidelberg, the passage of Dostoevsky's *Demons* where he describes the strength of a nation as an irrational sympathy to death. Dostoevsky there expresses the opinion that only if a nation or people is willing "to go to the end and beyond" for its faith by despising reason does it obtain dignity. Goebbels not only used this as the motto for his dissertation, but was, according to his own statement, impressed and inspired by these words of Dostoevsky's. One finds a similar line of argument in Thomas Mann's *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, from 1918, written when he still was a strict German nationalist, and Mann too directly admits that he was inspired by Dostoevsky. According to Dostoevsky, the chief characteristic of Germanness is Protestantism, which he rejects as a superior characteristic,

whereas Mann esteems this highly in his characterization of Germanness. Like Fichte, Mann argues in an antithetic manner against Frenchness. An antithetic structure of thinking seems to be an ingredient of nationalism as well.

8. The nation is a cultural unity, which has to be separated from the unity of a state, described in terms of constitution, right, law, and governmental institutions, just as national unity has to be distinguished from biologic or ethnic unities such as “blood and soil.” An important shift in Fichte’s later doctrine is that, compared to his earlier conception, according to which right and morality are—as in Kant—two separate and coordinated spheres of practical reason, his later writings assign to morality a dominating function, to which the philosophy of right is subordinated. This dominance of practical reason and freedom is the reason why I disagree with the view that Fichte’s cultural nationalism collapses into an ethnic nationalism. The article by Arash Abizadeh, “Was Fichte an Ethnic Nationalist? On Cultural Nationalism and its Double” (*History of Political Thought* XXVI, no. 2 [2005]: 334–59), analyzes this problem as it appears in the *Addresses*. There, it is argued that this collapse from cultural nationalism to ethnic nationalism may not be Fichte’s intention, but that it is a matter of fact in his conception, since the immortality and the approach to self-transcendence on the part of the individual seem to be possible in Fichte’s conception only on the basis of the of nation constituted of the blood or soil (*Blut und Boden*) of the population. But for Fichte “blood and soil,” ethnic or biological features, are not sufficient for the immortality of the individual soul, for they are external or at least only a necessary condition (in the weak modern sense) for immortality, never a sufficient reason, because it is our particularly body and blood that makes us mortal. The sufficient reason for Fichtean immortality is, instead, the cultural tradition transmitting the innovations of art, poetry, thinking, and language, performed by the creativity of the mind, which cannot be guaranteed or transmitted by “blood and soil.” The ethnic connection of “blood and soil” is inconsistent with Fichte’s strict antibiologic and antinaturalist approach. According to Fichte, the “blood and soil” connection one finds, for example, in the French or English nation, is much stricter, but they are the best examples of national decline. It is precisely Fichte’s argument that “blood and soil” in Germanness is extremely weak, and that is precisely what qualifies Germans to become the savior of freedom. One would have to ignore the nucleus of Fichte’s argumentation in order to assume here an ethnic nationalism, and in the idealist theory design of Fichte’s political philosophy it would be self-defeating if in the end the unity of a nation were to be dependent on biological or ethnic foundations. According to Fichte, one must say that in the case where the transgression of the “. . . ness” of a nation were performed by “blood and soil,” then there would be no more “. . . ness,” and the “. . . ness” would then vanish. Fichte stands in opposition to the Nazi ideology of “blood and soil” and to the culture-hostile biologism and naturalism of Nazi ideology. In this regard, Fichte is no forerunner of Nazism, but rather an

opponent, because if the Nazis, in their well-known abuse of Fichte, could have seen that in the very core of Fichte's nationalism stand freedom and cosmopolitanism, their indignation would have been enormous. It was a perversion and shows a misconception when Bruno Bauch and Arnold Gehlen—in their strict National Socialistic writings during the 1930s—used Fichte's *Addresses* for their purposes (cf. Rainer Schäfer and Marion Heinz, "Die Fichte-Rezeption im Nationalsozialismus am Beispiel Bauchs und Gehlens," *Fichte-Studien* 35 [2010]: 243–65). Interpreting thinkers such as Plato, Fichte, Hölderlin, Hegel, or Nietzsche as a source of inspiration for Nazism makes the same mistake Heidegger committed for several years after 1933 to the fantasy that Nazis could be influenced or were guidable by philosophical ideas; but they were instead criminal scum. And to accuse thinkers of this high level of being misused by the Nazis is a little bit like accusing a raped woman for being raped.

9. It is, again, an irony of history that Fichte, the strict opponent of "Frenchness," in the time of the *Addresses* obviously follows the same line of argument as Montesquieu in his *Spirit of the Laws*, where we find already several of Fichte's ideas, but expressed in a much more liberal and tolerant way. A critical argument here may be that Fichte's conception of nation and language includes circular reasoning, since on the one hand language constitutes the community and on the other hand the community determines the language. That a kind of "linguistic turn" occurred in classical German philosophy can be confirmed by noting the increase of works on linguistic topics, for example, by Herder, Humboldt, Schlegel, and Reinhold.

10. Julius Caesar, in *De bello gallico*, calls the land east of the Rhine "Germany." According to recent research "German" originates from the Latin *germānus*, meaning corporeal, authentic, true.

11. That Plato himself was conscious of the problems implied in the *chorismos* could be seen in the *Timaios*, for there the connection of the reality of ideas to the empirical physical world is explained only in terms of a possible story and a myth, showing that in Plato's theory empirical science cannot maintain the high level of philosophical knowledge of pure reason. Strict epistemology, according to Plato, is only possible in the dialectical sphere of relations of pure ideas. Due to the restrictions of human knowledge, we can apply pure knowledge to the cosmos only in a probabilistic manner. Obviously, this is a simple catch for skeptics.

12. This makes clear that the Fichtean "One" as well as the Neo-Platonic "One" is something completely different from the natural number "1."

13. One can associate this quite easily with parallel arguments in Carl Schmitt's *The Nomos of the Earth* in combination to his *Political Theology*.



## Fichte's Imagined Community and the Problem of Stability

GABRIEL GOTTLIEB

And so what we have understood by Germans in our description thus far finally stands out in perfect clarity. The proper ground of distinction lies in whether one believes in something absolutely primary and original in man himself, in freedom, in infinite improvability, in the perpetual progress of our race. . . . All who either live creatively, bringing forth the new themselves, or . . . at least decisively abandon things of vanity and keep watch to see whether somewhere they will be caught by the stream of original life, or . . . at least have an inkling of freedom and do not hate or fear it, but love it: all these original men; they are, when viewed as a people, an original people, the people as such: Germans.

—Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*

Their [i.e., foreign or un-German philosophers'] feeling, which is the sole authority to which they can appeal, seems to them infallible. . . . In this respect, German philosophy of the present day is not German, but a foreignism.

—Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*

Hamann, “an un-German spirit.”

—Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*



Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* should strike anyone familiar with his earlier theoretical and practical writings as, if not a complete aberration of the principles of freedom, mutual recognition, and respect articulated in these earlier works, an unexpected abandonment of his liberal commitment to the principles of freedom, self-determination, and right. The *Addresses*, for instance, argue for a nationalized education that aims to instill in the people a national character, one that is presented as superior to the character of other nations. This education "completely annihilates freedom of the will" and "strives to bring forth a fixed, definite, and permanent being" (AGN, 23). Such remarks appear far removed from the ideals of respect and mutual recognition, as well as the characterization of humanity as infinitely formable and free that one finds in the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, *System of Ethics*, and the *Foundations of Natural Right*. Any interpretation of Fichte's *Addresses* must account for this apparent aberration or abandonment, whether it is by reconciling his *Addresses* with his earlier work or by acknowledging how and why the *Addresses* depart from it.

My approach to this vexed interpretive issue, one that aims at reconciliation, is limited in scope and might be considered an outline or sketch of one reasonable model of reconciliation. My first move is to acknowledge that the *Addresses* constitute a nonideal work of social and political philosophy, a work that is concerned with effecting social and political change rather than outlining an ideal sociopolitical order and the principles that would regulate that order.<sup>1</sup> If ideal theory entails theorizing about a well-ordered society and its governing principles under idealized conditions in which agents are strictly compliant with and abide by the established principles,<sup>2</sup> then nonideal theory, as John Rawls explains, deals with how this well-ordered society, given that agents in an actual social and political context are only partially compliant, "might be achieved or worked toward, usually in gradual steps. It looks for policies and courses of action that are morally permissible and politically possible as well as likely to be effective."<sup>3</sup> Appreciating the nonideal nature of Fichte's *Addresses* requires an understanding of the work as a response to its social, political, and philosophical context. My aim, then, is to outline how the work is a response to its historical moment and how some of the key philosophical claims of the *Addresses* are best understood within this nonideal and transitional framework. The second move, my reconciliation claim, is to account for how, underlying the *Addresses*, there is a concern for freedom after all, a conception of freedom (what I refer to as

an existential commitment to freedom) that is compatible with his earlier views as articulated in the *Wissenschaftslehre* and elsewhere.

In developing this view, I argue that Fichte's German nation is an imagined community—one that is imagined in response to a crisis.<sup>4</sup> By an imagined community, I mean a community that imagines itself in a particular way, as having a unified identity. Fichte's suggestions for how this community is and ought to be imagined are central to a related point, the problem of stability. I suggest the *Addresses to the German Nation* are largely concerned with the *stability* of a newly emerging social formation Fichte terms *die neue Welt*, or what we might identify as "modernity" (AGN, 80). The new or modern world was ushered in by two revolutionary forces, the French Revolution and Kantian philosophy; however, by 1807, Fichte recognized that the future prospects of these revolutionary forces remained in doubt. I argue that Fichte's *Addresses*, delivered during the winter of 1807–08, constitute his response to a dual-natured crisis in the emergence of modernity, one that is both political and philosophical. The central concern of the *Addresses*, I suggest, is that of stability, the stability of a political, social, and philosophical form of life that modernity was only beginning to usher in. Fichte's *Addresses* articulate a way of imagining a social and political body in order to stabilize certain social, political, and philosophical achievements for the purpose of offering the grounds for an ultimate realization of a form of life that instantiates an approximation of the ideals of freedom and reason.

### Fichte and the Problem of Stability

The dissolution of The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (*Das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation*) and, more particularly, Napoleon's triumphs in Austerlitz and Jena constitute the core of the *political* dimension of the crisis and represent to Fichte, especially the Napoleonic "world-spirit," an abandonment of the orienting principles of freedom, the principles of right and self-sufficiency, established in the political arena by the French Revolution. Fichte clearly understands the Revolution in progressive terms as having established principles of right and freedom. In his 1793 work defending the French Revolution, Fichte boldly asserts its universality: "The French Revolution seems to me important for all of humanity" (B, 81). The Revolution, Fichte continues, is a "rich painting about a great text: the right of man [*Menschenrecht*] and worth of man [*Menschenwert*]" (ibid.).

Once the Revolution lost its footing and its achievements became uncertain, Napoleon's ascension to power did not give Fichte much confidence that its principles would be preserved. Incensed by Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz, Fichte is reported to have addressed an audience in an exalted voice, admonishing them that "not a year will pass by before one immensely regrets this defeat" (*GA*, III/5, 365). The *Addresses*, as Fichte acknowledges, "considers and heeds the situation and circumstances common to us all" and hopes to inflame "German souls to decision and action" (*AGN*, 10–11). The action the Germans must strive to achieve is, in Fichte's words, "the establishment of the perfect state," one based on reasoned philosophical principles, a task which the French took to with "fiery boldness [*feuriger Kühnheit*]" only to abandon it prior to its complete realization (*ibid.*, 80). Napoleon, whom Fichte compares to a "monster" [*Ungeheuer*] at the end of his Thirteenth Address, marks a decisive betrayal of the Revolution's ideals. As the historian Lynn Hunt observes:

Napoleon's contradictory interventions showed that rights need not be seen as forming a single package. He introduced religious toleration and equal civil and political rights for religious minorities wherever he ruled. Yet at home in France, he severely limited everyone's freedom of speech and basically eliminated freedom of the press. The French emperor believed that "men are not born free. . . . Liberty is a need felt by a small class of people whom nature has endowed with nobler minds than the mass of men. Consequently, it may be repressed with impunity. Equality, on the other hand, pleases the masses." The French did not desire true liberty, in his view; they simply aspired to rise to the top of society.<sup>5</sup>

In response, as he addressed the German people in Berlin under French occupation, Fichte hoped to "turn this nation back from the wrong path it has taken" (*AGN*, 84). As he recognizes in his Seventh Address, the Germans of the modern world are "stimulated by the incomplete and superficial efforts of foreign lands [the French] to undertake more profound creations [achievements of the Revolution] and develop them from its own midst" (*ibid.*, 85).

The *Reich's* undoing along with Napoleon's imperial aspirations and ascension to power raised for Fichte an important political question of stability: How does a people, sociopolitical body, nation, or state embody-

ing the principles of freedom established by the Revolution constitute, stabilize, and preserve itself? I will call this *the problem of stability*: How does an *emerging* political body, nation, or state, founded on principles of right and self-sufficiency, secure its stability when its very existence is threatened by competing interests and factions? Is reason sufficient to preserve the principles of right and self-sufficiency? Will passion and commitment suffice? Is force and coercion necessary? I suggest that a central concern of Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* is the stability of a rational state, what in the Sixth Address he calls "the perfect state" (AGN, 80); and his solution to the problem of stability should be judged against Napoleon's attempt to secure the achievements of the Revolution through war, coercion, and force. Fichte's so-called nationalism constitutes his response to the problem of stability. As Fichte claims, it is "solely by means of the common trait of Germanness [*Deutscheit*] that we can avert the downfall of our nation threatened by its confluence with foreign peoples and once more win back a self that is self-supporting and incapable of any form of dependency" (AGN, 11).

The problem of stability is not only a political concern; it also extends to the philosophical domain. Kant, whom Fichte considers the "real founder of German philosophy," not only dissipated the anxieties brought about by Humean skepticism (AGN, 80), but also established the objective validity of absolute freedom, something Fichte had previously thought impossible (EPW, 357). A sociopolitical formation embodying reason would embody the true form of freedom and reason, one modeled on Kantian philosophy (and Fichte's own model of such a philosophy). The problem of stability, then, is not simply a concern with the stability of a political or economic structure, but a concern with the stability of reason as instantiated in and expressed by the social and political structures of a certain society, so that, to put it in the terms Fichte uses throughout the *Addresses*, "spiritual culture intervenes in life" (AGN, 61). Spiritual culture is given a determinate sense in the Fifth Address: "When we are speaking of spiritual culture [*geistiger Bildung*], this should be taken to mean first and foremost philosophy [*Philosophie*]" (ibid.). By philosophy, Fichte has in mind not just any philosophy, though he does disdainfully employ out of obligation the Greek or "foreign name" for philosophy, *Philosophie*, instead of his preferred *Wissenschaftslehre*, since Fichte's German neologism never "found favor with the Germans" (ibid.). As Fichte understands matters, there is a single common good, "one end in itself, beyond which there can be no others" and that is "spiritual

life" (ibid., 62). If spiritual culture, or philosophy, has yet to intervene properly in life as *Wissenschaftslehre* and its realization is threatened (in Fichte's case by the Napoleon world-spirit), then its stability is certainly in question.

Now, a modern state embodying reason and spiritual life, Fichte believes, cannot be constructed haphazardly or artificially "out of any old material that lies to hand" (AGN, 81); instead, it must be constructed with purpose according to a rationally conceived plan that includes a national education. A people or nation must be prepared, "cultivated and educated" for the achievements of the Revolution, right, freedom, self-sufficiency, and *Wissenschaftslehre* to not wash away in the face of a political crisis or transition. While the Revolution is important to all of humanity, only a "complete education of the nation to humanity," to *Wissenschaftslehre*, will "solve" the problem of "the perfect state" (ibid.), the problem of stability.

The problem of stability resembles what Arash Abizadeh identifies in his essay "Was Fichte an Ethnic Nationalist?" as the "question of *motivation*."<sup>6</sup> While the question of motivation is closely related to the problem of stability, I will distinguish the two and identify why the problem of stability better captures the set of concerns underlying Fichte's *Addresses*. The question of motivation asks: What is capable of motivating individuals to mobilize "in favor of the common good"?<sup>7</sup> Abizadeh understands Fichte to answer the question of motivation with "love of *Vaterland*, not the constitution and laws, for it is the nation, not the state, that solves the motivation problem."<sup>8</sup> Love for *Vaterland* seems to be an appropriate motivating factor as it is not a material motive, a motive that mobilizes one to seek reward and avoid punishment, but a spiritual motive, a motive that mobilizes one to seek moral approval rather than disapproval.<sup>9</sup> One reason a material or "sensuous motive of fear or hope"<sup>10</sup> is insufficient, as Fichte sees it, is that a material motive promotes the very self-interest Fichte's *Addresses* identify as a failure of the past social and political order and which contributed to the present crisis.<sup>11</sup> A "spiritual motive of moral approval or disapproval," one that is constituted by an affective response to spiritual confusion and spiritual disorder, will mobilize individuals to act to realize the common good, not out of one's own material self-interest, but as a kind of aesthetic of satisfaction, what should be considered a moral or aesthetic sense for harmony. As Fichte puts it:

[S]o too can man's inner eye be habituated and trained in such a way that the mere sight of his own and his tribe's confused

and disordered, unworthy and dishonourable existence can cut him to the quick, irrespective of whatever fear or hope for his sensuous well-being it may inspire, that this pain gives the possessor of such an eye, once again independently of sensuous fear or hope, no respite until he has brought to an end, insofar as he is able, the disagreeable state and replaced it with one that can please him alone. (AGN, 17)

Fichte's proposed national education is meant to develop, though Abizadeh does not exactly put it this way, a cultivated moral and aesthetic sense for harmony that will motivate individuals to act for the common good. It is important to notice that the moral and aesthetic sense Fichte identifies here is not that of an atomistic self; such a model would fit better the self underlying the material or sensuous motive. Fichte, rather, speaks of the interest of an "extended self" whose self-awareness requires meeting a non-atomistic condition, that it is "aware of itself only as part of the whole" (AGN, 17). Furthermore, the interest is one of aesthetic satisfaction as the self "can only bear itself when the whole is agreeable" (ibid.).

I do not intend to deny the importance of the question of motivation; instead, my suggestion is that it only partially articulates the set of concerns underlying Fichte's *Addresses*. The question of motivation does not properly account for the philosophical dimensions of Fichte's so-called nationalism, since love of *Vaterland* does not necessarily entail love of *Wissenschaftslehre*. The problem of stability is distinctive in that there can be better ways to realize the common good, ways that lead to the stability of the good in society. The political structures of the state, a constitution and set of rights, do not guarantee the stability of the good, a rational state in which freedom can be actualized. Fichte concludes that "only that nation which has first of all solved the task of educating the perfect human being, through actual practice, will solve that of the perfect state" (AGN, 81). Now, this "perfect" human being or perfect self, what Fichte sometimes calls "a completely new self," may have previously been instantiated in some individuals "but never as a universal and national self," never as an extended self (ibid., 17). The new self Fichte promises is not created *ex nihilo*; in fact, Fichte believes that in all of its essentials it already exists. The new component of the self is an extension of the self as a national self or a self whose very self-understanding is mediated by its being an authentic member of the whole and understanding itself as such. Fichte's language of "preservation" is important in this respect: "What I

am proposing is the complete reform of the current educational system as the only means of preserving the existence of the German nation” (ibid.). Fichte’s response to the question of stability is to promote a unifying mechanism, a national education that will cultivate and form the *Volk* into a reasoned self-sufficient nation, a nation of cultivated, extended selves who have a *sense* for freedom and self-sufficiency.

Although the language of stability does not pervade his *Addresses*, it is in his brief discussion of German statecraft that Fichte’s views on the problem of stability are at their clearest. German statecraft, as Fichte acknowledges, “desires *stability, security* and independence from blind and irresolute nature,” and rather than relying on a “fixed and certain” cultivated prince who guarantees the realization of a spiritual culture, a form of statecraft that is always foreign or un-German, German statecraft promotes the *cultivation of a fixed and certain spiritual culture* that, due to its cultivated sense of freedom, guarantees the *stability of the rational state* itself, for whenever confusion and disorder develop the spiritual stirrings of the nation will seek its resolution (AGN, 90; my emphasis). While Fichte’s national education operates as a spiritual motive to realize the common good, a rational state (constitutionally and culturally), it also aims to provide the framework for the state’s social, cultural, and political stability.

### Fichte’s Imagined Community

To draw out the importance of the concept of stability in the *Addresses*, it will be helpful to comment on the shifting cultural terrain conditioning the emergence of so-called nationalist imaginaries. When Fichte began his lectures in 1807, under French occupation, a German nation did not exist, and the *Reich* itself had consisted of only a loosely connected set of independent and semi-independent territories lacking in homogeneity beyond the fact that German was the prevailing vernacular language. Fichte’s so-called nationalism operates to unify the diverse German *Volk*, yet in doing so it must imagine the every unity and bonds it will assert as natural, historical, authentic, and real. For this reason, I consider Fichte’s German nation an *imagined community*, one that is imagined and projected upon a people with a purpose to educate, unify, and stabilize the social and political climate in order for the achievements of modernity

as embodied in the spiritual culture of *Wissenschaftslehre* to be grounded, preserved, and to intervene in life.

The concept of an imagined community, as I employ the term, stems from Benedict Anderson's classic work *Imagined Communities*, in which he develops a theory of nationalism that argues for treating nationalism not as "an ideology" like "liberalism" or "fascism" but as a communitarian concept like "kinship" or "religion" (*IC*, 5). While there is certainly a communal aspect to Fichte's so-called nationalism, there is a philosophical component as well, *Wissenschaftslehre*, that does not exactly fit the category of ideology, just as "science" fails to count as an ideology in Anderson's sense. For this reason, Fichte's so-called nationalism occupies a unique position between nationalism as ideology and nationalism as a communitarian bond. Fichte's so-called nationalism is essentially a philosophical nationalism defined by, as I will argue, an existential commitment to a philosophical conception of freedom.<sup>12</sup>

Before developing this existential commitment further, I want to examine more closely Anderson's conceptions of an imagined community, as I find it useful for bringing into view Fichte's so-called nationalism. Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community," one that is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (*IC*, 6). To say that a nation is an "imagined political community" means: (1) the members of the community never know or meet most of each other though they imagine living in "communion" as a unified nation; (2) the community is imagined as having finite and elastic boundaries;<sup>13</sup> (3) the community is imagined as sovereign; and (4) independent of any actual inequalities or hierarchical differences the community is imagined as living in "horizontal comradeship" (*IC*, 6–7). While much more can be said about what each of these four points entails, I want to suggest that Anderson's model of an imagined community illuminates some of the underlying assumptions at work in Fichte's conception of the German Nation. Anderson's work is useful for appreciating, in particular, the cultural shifts conditioning Fichte's *Addresses* and why his response to the problem of stability calls for the formation of a new extended self or national identity that is defined by virtue of its commitment to freedom.<sup>14</sup>

Anderson's perspective on the emergence of nationalist imaginaries identifies a shift in the cultural landscape of Europe, one in which two "cultural systems" lose their grip on the minds and imaginations of Europeans (*IC*, 12).<sup>15</sup> The two systems he has in mind are the *religious*



*community* and the *dynastic realm*. The decline of these two systems is apparent in Fichte's *Addresses* and Fichte's response to the problem of stability should be appreciated within their context. While the decline of both systems is relevant to Fichte's *Addresses*, I will focus primarily on the decline of the religious community as a unifying mechanism of identity formation.<sup>16</sup> What is of particular interest is the parallel between the role language plays in unifying religious communities and the role Fichte attributes to it in unifying the German community.

Religious communities have tended to spread across the globe with little respect for territorial boundaries. While Christendom, for instance, extended in some sense from "Paraguay to Japan," Anderson suggests, Christendom itself was imagined as a unified tradition in part linked "through the medium of a sacred language and written script" (*IC*, 13).<sup>17</sup> The language of their texts served as an imagined link not only between the distant religious communities but also between these communities and some "superterrestrial order of power" (*ibid.*).<sup>18</sup> Literate Muslims from different lands who spoke distinct vernacular languages were able to imagine themselves as part of a unified community linked to one another by virtue of their sacred language, Arabic (*ibid.*). The coherence of these religious communities declined in the late Middle Ages as explorations revealed opposing traditions and prompted comparative reflections that challenged the presumed authority and cosmic centrality of some communities, thereby laying the ground for a "territorialization of faiths" (*ibid.*, 17). Print-capitalism contributed to the decline of sacred languages, most importantly Latin for Europe, by setting the conditions for the printing of books and other texts in vernacular languages. Print-capitalism, by promoting the standardization and stabilization of vernacular languages contributed to the formation of a national consciousness.<sup>19</sup> Religious communities that were at one point linked by sacred languages, as they relied on vernacular languages, "were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized" (*ibid.*, 19). Part of Anderson's thesis is that as religious communities became fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized so that their "frames of reference" could no longer be taken for granted, and as sacred languages gave way to vernacular Bibles and the standardization of vernacular languages, a space was opened for a new imaginary to take hold and connect a people, one in which the unifying mechanism, language, was secularized, and eventually, nationalized.

Fichte's reasons for grounding his imagined community, the original people of the German nation, in the linguistic dimension of the commu-

nity become evident when contextualized in the shifting cultural landscape of Europe and, more particularly, the secularization of language, the weakening grip of the religious community, and, of course the emergence of the age of reason, particularly as understood as reaching its apogee in Kantian philosophy. Consider Fichte's focus on the secularization and naturalization of language. As Fichte argues in his 1795 essay "On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language" and takes for granted in the *Addresses*, language is a medium for designating objects, thoughts, and intentions for the purpose of intersubjective communication and the coordination of action. However, in contrast to philosophers such as Süßmilch, whom Herder took to task for arguing that language stems from divine origins, Fichte develops a naturalistic understanding of the origin of language in his 1795 essay, one he continues to endorse in his *Addresses*. While there appears to be a tension between the two texts, particularly with respect to Fichte's endorsement of the arbitrary nature of the sign, they both clearly endorse a naturalistic, not a supernaturalistic, understanding of language.<sup>20</sup> Take, for example, the varying ways in which the two writings determine what defines a language. In 1795, Fichte defines language as the "expression of our thoughts by means of arbitrary signs" that are grammatically combined (*OL*, 120, 134), and "the linguistic capacity" as the "ability to signify thoughts arbitrarily" (*ibid.*, 120).<sup>21</sup> Here, Fichte endorses a thesis about the arbitrary nature of language, and in doing so takes it for granted that the sign is not divinely inspired, but possesses an arbitrary relationship to what it signifies: for instance, "I might say the word 'fish' to someone else—a sign which has no resemblance whatsoever to the object that it is supposed to express—or I may draw a fish for him, a sign which does of course resemble what it signified" (*ibid.*, 120). Since both signs can, under the right conditions, elicit a representation of a fish in another person, neither sign has a necessary relationship to the representation itself; they are both arbitrarily related to the signified. One might be tempted to argue that there is a nonarbitrary relation of the sign to the signified in the 1795 essay since language there is indebted to an *Ursprache* or Hieroglyphic language that models linguistic signs on how nature presents itself to the senses. Fichte even suggests that "the communication of thoughts was itself a voluntary matter, as must be the case in every language, but the manner of this communication was not: it was a matter of my own volition whether I wanted to signify my thoughts to another or not; *but there was no choice involved as to the sign itself*" (*OL*, 125; emphasis mine). One may arbitrarily choose

to communicate one's thought through signs; however, at the stage of the *Ursprache* there is no choice about the sign, as the sign, whether visual or auditory, directly imitates nature.<sup>22</sup> Fichte, however, appears to be of two minds here. While "the lion, for example, was expressed through imitating its roar, the wind through imitating its howling," and "fish and nets" signified by signs made with gestures or drawn in the sand, there is no reason to think "speakers" of the *Ursprache* were forced by some necessity within nature or reason to employ one animal sound or gesture over another. When Fichte acknowledges this *Ursprache* was "easily invented," he seems to draw back from asserting unequivocally the nonarbitrariness of the sign in the *Ursprache*. Different signs can imitate the same bit of nature, and their contents can be isomorphic; that one sign is chosen over another, say the cat's meow over its purr, would presumably introduce an arbitrary factor, even if it possesses a property taken to imitate a property of nature. However, as Fichte notes, the word *fish* in no way imitates or resembles nature, so even if some signs are imitative, other signs are completely arbitrary. Note that there are two dimensions to Fichte's understanding of the arbitrary nature of language in 1795: (1) signs can be arbitrarily related to what they signify, and (2) whether one represents one's thoughts linguistically is arbitrary. Nevertheless, if *fish* is the sign used to designate a fish in my language, I cannot voluntarily choose the sign *cat*, since if language possessed that amount of arbitrariness, if it resembled a private language, intersubjective communication would be impossible.

Fichte's 1795 conception of the arbitrary nature of the sign stands in contrast to the understanding at work in sacred languages. Anderson remarks, "If the sacred silent languages were the media through which the great global communities of the past were imagined, the reality of such apparitions depended on an idea largely foreign to the contemporary Western mind: the non-arbitrariness of the sign" (*IC*, 14). Prior to the popularization of vernacular Bibles in German, church authorities stood squarely against printing Bibles in German. Archbishop Berthold of Mainz, "prohibited the publication of German Bibles because the poverty of the German language did not mediate the real meaning of the holy biblical texts of the Vulgate."<sup>23</sup> Languages such as Latin and Arabic were understood as "emanations of reality, not randomly fabricated representations of it" like vernacular German (*IC*, 14). The essential idea of the nonarbitrariness of language stems from the idea that, as Anderson remarks, divine "ontological reality is apprehensible only through a single, privileged system of re-presentation" (*ibid.*).

Twelve years later in the *Addresses*, Fichte's account of language remains naturalistic, though his position on the arbitrary nature of the language appears to have shifted and come to resemble the nonarbitrary conception of sacred languages, although presented under a secular and naturalistic guise: "Since language is not the product of arbitrary arrangement but breaks forth as an immediate force of nature from rational life, a language that has continued to develop without interruption according to this law also has the power to intervene directly in life and to stimulate it" (AGN, 53). Note the difference between sacred conception of language and Fichte's conception. Rather than language emanating from a divine ontological reality, it emanates from "rational life," from reason itself. Although language emanates from reason, the *Addresses* defend a broadly naturalistic view of language in which, according to a fundamental law of nature, "each concept is expressed by this sound and no other" (ibid., 49). Language is not the product of "arbitrary decrees and conventions" but the result of a "fundamental law" that determines the sign used to represent the signified (ibid.). As Fichte puts it, "It is not really man who speaks; human nature speaks through him" (ibid., 50). Not unlike the essay on the origins of language, Fichte acknowledges an *Ursprache* without naming it as such, since, as he puts it, "there is but one language and this language is absolutely necessary"; it is a "pure human language" which conditions, along with climate, the speech organs, and perhaps other factors, the empirical and non-pure offshoots (ibid.). Notice that once language is identified as a rational force of nature subject to the natural conditions of the environment and the natural development of the speech organs, language ceases to be of divine provenance, and so we have, not only a naturalization of language, but also its secularization, as language is not identified as intrinsically divine or a link to some "superterrestrial order of power," but is the product of rational life (*IC*, 13). On my view, Fichte's conception of language is natural since it develops according to a law of nature and is affected by factors of nature, and secular since it is a product of rational life, rather than divine reality.

Fichte grounds his conception of the people [*Volk*], as is well known, in language, and particularly his theory of a natural and rationally organized *Ursprache*, one that is "absolutely necessary." What connects a people is not a sacred language of a religious community that transcends any territorial boundaries however fixed or porous, but a natural language that derives from the rational *Ursprache* and is conditioned by the same factors residing external to the *Ursprache* itself. As Fichte puts it, "We call

a people those men whose speech organs are subject to the same external influences, who live together and develop their language in continuous communication” (AGN, 50). There is a spatial and temporal dimension to Fichte’s conception of the *Volk*. A people, on his model, is co-extensive with language spatially, a community that lives together in a certain environment, and temporally, the continuity of communication through time. It is with the recognition of these spatial and temporal components of the *Volk* that the imaginary component operates, through the linking medium of language, to unite the contemporary members of the *Volk* living in distinct geographic locations with each other and to bind the present *Volk* with their ancestors as being essentially one and the same linguistically. On a first glance, then, Fichte’s imagined community is a community that is imagined as a holistic unity grounded in a common language. But, is this imagined linguistic identity enough to solve the problem of stability? As I will suggest, it is largely incidental on Fichte’s view, even though it has played a central role in the reception of the *Addresses*.

### Freedom as an Existential Commitment: A Reconciliation

Fichte’s reliance on language as a unifying mechanism works, it seems, to imagine and shape a German identity, but the identity is not exactly an ethnic identity or ethnic nationalism that is prevalent in some nineteenth-century and many twentieth-century forms of nationalism, in which a commitment to the nation-state and ethnic descent is prominent; and neither is it simply a cultural identity constituted by narratives, literature, common experiences, or foods, for instance.<sup>24</sup> Linguistic identity is, in fact, a secondary concern. A more fundamental identity is Fichte’s primary concern. The more fundamental identity, to recall Fichte’s remarks quoted at the outset, is an existential identity that is philosophical at its basis and involves a commitment to “something absolutely primary and original in man himself;” that is, “freedom,” or as Fichte explains, the “infinite improvability” and “the perpetual progress of our race”; it is an existential commitment to living “creatively” and “bringing forth the new,” a commitment to abandoning “things of vanity [*das nichtige*]” (AGN, 96).

To understand the nature of this existential commitment, a commitment that constitutes the very being of the subject, it is important to connect Fichte’s imagining of both the Germans as a people constituted by an existential commitment to the norms of freedom and reason and

the foreignism of the French who are sullied by their commitment to sentiment or feeling to his well-known distinction between idealism and dogmatism. In the "First Introduction" to his 1797 *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte claims:

The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it. Someone whose character is naturally slack or who has been enervated and twisted by spiritual servitude, scholarly self-indulgence, and vanity [*Eitelkeit*] will never be able to raise himself to the level of idealism. (*IWL*, 20)

Fichte's distinction between idealism and dogmatism captures at an epistemic level the same underlying philosophical and existential commitments captured by his more historical and sociopolitical distinction between Germans, as an original people, and the French, who are derivative, sentimental, and lacking spirituality.<sup>25</sup> Idealism, like dogmatism, provides an explanation of the possibility of objective experience, how it is possible for a subject to represent an object, according to a "feeling of necessity," or objectively (*IWL*, 8). The difference between idealism and dogmatism turns on the explanatory principles to which they appeal. Idealism appeals to the principle of the I, the "acting of the intellect, which it considers to be something absolute and active, not something passive" (*ibid.*, 25), while the dogmatist appeals to the principle of causality, which entails that the intellect along with its representations "has been caused" (*ibid.*, 21). "The dispute between the idealist and dogmatist," as Fichte observes, "is actually a dispute over whether the self-sufficiency of the I should be sacrificed to that of the thing, or conversely, whether the self-sufficiency of the thing should be sacrificed to that of the I" (*ibid.*, 17). The dispute, in other words, is over whether or not the freedom of the I is possible and should play an explanatory role in accounting for the objectivity of representations. Fichte prefers idealism, since he thinks it can account for the dual-natured or "double series" of consciousness at work in self-consciousness, a necessary condition of objective representation. Briefly, since dogmatism relies on the principle of causality, it can only explain one aspect of the double series of consciousness, the way in which an object affects the subject; the causal principle cannot

explain the second series of consciousness, the reflexive relationship the I has to itself and which allows for the endorsement or denial of what is presented in consciousness by virtue of the first, causally affected, series (ibid., 20–23). The idealist explains the second series as a result of the I's freedom, and this explanation occupies much of Fichte's attention in his *Wissenschaftslehre*. The *Wissenschaftslehre*, particularly its foundational component, is very much a theory of the I's freedom. In contrast, as Fichte acknowledges, "every consistent dogmatist must necessarily be a fatalist. . . . He entirely rejects the self-sufficiency of the I," which is to say the dogmatist rejects the explanatory principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, what Fichte understands as "spiritual culture" in his *Addresses*.

While it is one thing to acknowledge the similarities, and particularly the existential similarity, between idealists and dogmatists, as articulated in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and Germans and Foreigners, as described in his *Addresses*, it is another thing to see the former distinction at work in the *Addresses* and informing his understanding of the German people. We can see as much when Fichte writes in his Seventh Address that

[f]irst and foremost and above all else: man does not form his scientific view freely and arbitrarily, one way or another. Rather, it is formed for him by his life and it is actually the internal root of his life itself, otherwise unknown to him, manifested as an intuition. That which you really and inwardly are steps before your outward eye, and you are unable ever to see anything else. To see differently, you would have to become different from what you are. Now, the intrinsic nature of the foreign—that is to say, non-originality—is the belief in something final, fixed, immutably permanent; the belief in a limit, on this side of which free life pursues its sport but which life is unable ever to break through, to dissolve and flow into. . . . He necessarily believes in death as the first and the last, as the original source of all things—even life. (AGN, 86)

In both passages, Fichte claims that one's "philosophy" or "scientific view" is not arbitrarily chosen; it is, rather, an expression of one's "soul," one's "life," one's "internal root." One's philosophy or scientific view is determined by a foundational commitment to a certain way of life whose fabric is seamlessly woven together by an internal principle that often remains implicit, but which can become explicit through reflection. This internal

principle is a principle of *intelligibility* that informs what you “see” and, to see differently, would require an upheaval of the internal principle that holds together the very intelligibility of one’s way of life. For the idealist and the German, the principle of self-sufficiency is a principle of intelligibility in that it provides the most intelligible explanation of objective experience and it accounts for the essential moral nature of humanity; it explains, in other words, what it means to be distinctively human. To be German, then, is to be committed to a way of life that has as its internal principle, its principle of intelligibility, the principle of self-sufficiency or freedom, “to determine ourselves consciously, purely and simply through concepts, indeed, in accordance with the concept of absolute self-activity” as Fichte puts it in his *System of Ethics* (SE, 52). While the principle of self-sufficiency or freedom is the orienting principle and source of authority or normativity for the Germans, “feeling” is the “sole authority,” or principle of intelligibility, upon which the foreigners can rely.

One should wonder why Fichte calls the German philosopher Hamann “un-German,” and why he implies the same about Jacobi (AGN, 64, 87). When considering Fichte’s so-called nationalism in light of his distinction between dogmatism and idealism one is positioned to respond to such a query. Not only is Hamann an important influence on Herder’s understanding of language and culture as well as a defender and lover of the German language and its poetry, Hamann, as least as mediated through Herder, is certainly an influence on Fichte’s conception of the *Volk*, even if Fichte’s naturalistic and secular reflections on language stand in contrast to some of Hamann’s more religiously reflected ruminations. Of all philosophers, Hamann would certainly count as German, especially if “German” is meant to entail an ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identity. Hamann, however, due to his unique combination of Hume and Lutheranism, embodies (1) the fight against rationalism and the authority of reason, (2) the embracing of *Empfindlichkeit*, or the passivity of sensibility and feeling, and (3) the privileging of faith over reason. These three points entail that Hamann is a dogmatist, since freedom and reason cannot provide an explanatory account of experience. For Hamann, the authority of feeling is privileged over reason; hence, Hamann is a foreigner, un-German.

It is clear, from these considerations, that Fichte has reimagined the meaning of German. Fichte’s reimagining of the German perverts and twists its meaning and associations for his own purposes. Given his previous claims about the role of language in characterizing a people,



Fichte's reimagining appears to overturn the privileged role of language and descent he attributed to the German people:

Those who believe in spirituality and in the freedom of this spirituality, who desire the eternal progress of this spirituality through freedom—wherever they were born and whichever language they speak—are of our race, they belong to us and they will join with us. Those who believe in stagnation, retrogression and circularity, or who even set a dead nature at the helm of world government—wherever they were born and whichever language they speak—are un-German and strangers to us. (AGN, 97)

While this passage is compatible with Fichte's calling Hamann "un-German," it seems to fly in the face of his claims that a people, the Germans, consist of those individuals "who live together and develop their language in continuous communication" (AGN, 50). Could a Frenchman born and raised in France and lacking any knowledge of German, yet who is existentially committed to freedom and the self-sufficiency of the I be a German in Fichte's sense? While it is clear that such an individual would count as a German when German is conceived under the guise of idealist, it is not entirely clear why such an individual would count as German if language is the primary determining feature of Germanness.

To resolve this quandary, I want to insist on the primacy of idealism over language in Fichte's philosophical nationalism. To see this, I want to return to the issue of language, and in this case, its relationship to freedom as conceived by Fichte in the *Addresses*. There is an important connection, even if imagined, between freedom and language, for Fichte, and this connection provides part of the reason why he believes the Germans in general, rather than the French, are suited to complete their "superficial efforts" and to "undertake more profound creations" (AGN, 85). Due to the imagined purity that results from the continuity of the German language with the original rationally constituted *Ursprache*, an *Ursprache* that is an expression of rational nature itself and not the arbitrary choices of primitive speakers, Fichte considers German a language bounded less to the sensuous nature of experience and suited particularly well to symbolically expressing or indicating the supersensuous demands of reason.<sup>26</sup> The role of language is to designate an idea or concept, and it can designate an arbitrary concept, one that is indebted to sensuous experience, or it

can designate a necessary concept, one constitutive of reason itself. A dead language, one in which there is a break in the continuity with a more original *Ursprache* and which no longer expresses its orienting principle of normative authority, a language that has admitted a foreign "intuition" into the people's experience and way of life, "an intuition" as Fichte says, that no longer "coheres with all the others in an interlocking system," is a language incapable of clearly and distinctly indicating the orienting supersensuous ideas constitutive of the very fabric of that community or people who speak the language. If the foundational ideas of a community cannot be grasped and properly understood by the language of the people, then that community is condemned to arbitrariness and vanity, to a kind of inauthentic self-understanding.<sup>27</sup> Such a linguistic community is incapable of communicating the constitutive values of its very way of living; it is incapable of achieving an authentic self-understanding. Such is the fate of the French, but not the Germans.

One way of formulating Fichte's thought is to suggest that the conceptual framework according to which a people understands itself does not lend itself to authentic and transparent expression within a language that has incorporated words that are associated with alternative conceptual frameworks. Consider, for instance, the way in which the term *democracy*, a concept borrowed from the Greeks, better captures their political framework, a direct democracy constituted by *demes*, but fails to express accurately and authentically the American political framework in which we lack *demes* and elect representatives that vote on behalf of the people. Fichte's thought, when extended to the term *democracy*, is that the term gives expressions to a sense of freedom in the *polis* that is foreign to the American political system, and while Americans can use the term to name its system, they do so in a more opaque and confused manner, without expressing the underlying values that are constitutive of the American system. The American system never was and still is not a political system in which the people, the citizens, have the power, as the term *democracy* suggests.

The German *as* idealist holds fast in his commitment to the principle of self-sufficiency, the orienting intuition of the Germans, and which Germans who speak the language are well suited, as Fichte imagines it, to express. Similar to the way a sacred language is suited to give expression to the divine order, the German language is suited to give expression to the rational order that constitutes the very life and soul of the German people, where by "German" Fichte means idealist. Fichte's reflections on

freedom and language raise an important question about which of the two, self-sufficiency or language, *takes priority*. As I understand Fichte, language is merely an instrument for the intersubjective designation of ideas and objects, and so an instrument for the practical realization of freedom. If this is right, the existential commitment to freedom takes priority over language. To be German is not primarily to speak a certain language, but to have a certain existential commitment.<sup>28</sup> Lacking this commitment, as in the case of Hamann, one fails to be German.

I noted the varying factors that make an imagined community, imagined on Anderson's model, and I want to return to the first one: the members of the community never know or meet most of each other though they imagine living in "communion" as a unified nation. I've argued that Fichte's account of the German language and his understanding of Germans *as* idealists entails that the members of his imagined German community live in communion as a unified people by virtue of imagining themselves as a people oriented by the principle of self-sufficiency. Language and a national education operate as a unifying mechanism to promote the internalization and expression of this imagined existential commitment, rather than firsthand knowledge by acquaintance. This leads me to comment on Fichte's response to the problem of stability. An emerging social and political order in which there is a commitment to freedom, rights, and self-sufficiency can break forth in a people in whom there is a commitment to these rational ideals, but it can only be preserved and stabilized when the commitment is more than a theoretical commitment—it must also be a practical, or existential commitment. The French, and the Napoleonic world-spirit, failed to live out practically such a commitment since, in Fichte's view, it never penetrated or came to pervade their very existence, to operate as a principle of intelligibility in their practical orientation.

While the essential reconciling link between the *Addresses* and the work of his Jena period is found in his claims about the German as idealist and the existential commitment to freedom, there are no doubt important concerns about whether or not his nonideal recommendations are truly capable of being reconciled with his more liberal political philosophy articulated in the *Foundations of Natural Right*, for instance. One clear incompatibility would emerge if the *Addresses* operated as an ideal theory, but since it is a work of nonideal philosophy, any incompatibility must lie elsewhere. It is not, as I've argued, found in his view that freedom is

a fundamental requirement of a just social and political order. However, whether his core and peripheral recommendations for transition and stability in the *Addresses* are ultimately compatible with his earlier views on freedom and the state remains a fertile domain of questioning.

To conclude, Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* should be considered a work of nonideal political philosophy, one that proposes a policy of national education that is meant to promote and develop within the people an existential commitment to freedom. It is by virtue of this commitment that Germans are capable of imagining themselves a unified community, regardless of whatever other differences might divide them, even if that difference is a linguistic one. Fichte's aim is to turn back the tide of feeling, sentiment, and the antipathy toward freedom and self-sufficiency. In principle, even if in a limited capacity, he remains committed to the republican ideals that informed his earlier writings on the *Wissenschaftslehre*, right, and ethics. When he notes in the *Addresses* "that the German nation is the only modern European nation that has for centuries shown . . . that it is capable of supporting the republican constitution," he is claiming that the German, under the guise of idealist, is suited to support the achievements of the Revolution in the face of social and political instability (AGN, 83), thereby laying the groundwork for humanity's *striving* to realize the ideals of freedom by bringing the nonideal world in greater compliance with the idea of freedom itself.

## Notes

1. My use of the distinction between ideal and nonideal theory stems from the work of John Rawls, and in particular *A Theory of Justice*, *Justices as Fairness: A Restatement*, and *The Law of Peoples*. See also, Simmons, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory," and Valeniti, "Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map."
2. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, 13.
3. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 89.
4. Throughout, I use a few additional abbreviations: *OL* = Fichte, "On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language"; *B* = *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urteile des Publikums über die französische Revolution*, *IC* = Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; *JF* = Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*; and *PL* = Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.
5. Hunt, 180.
6. Abizadeh, 341.
7. *Ibid.*

8. Ibid.

9. Abizadeh, 345.

10. *AGN*, 17.

11. Abizadeh, 345.

12. See Keohane, "Fichte and the German Idiom" for a similar view that emphasizes Fichte's cosmopolitanism. About the philosophical dimension of Fichte's so-called nationalism, Hans Kohn writes: "Fichte was at no time a 'nationalist' in the sense that he would have ascribed to nationalities or to nationalism any value in themselves. His guiding principle was philosophic, a universal, rational philosophy" (Kohn, 324).

13. Fichte is less concerned with external boundaries of nation-states than he is internal boundaries: "To begin with, and above all else, the first, original and truly natural frontiers of states are undoubtedly their inner frontiers" (*AGN*, 166). He is also willing to consider all of humanity as potential members of the German nation, though he does not expect all will meet, in reality, the standards for being truly German. Although Anderson writes "The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation," one might argue that Fichte does in fact imagine such a universal German nation (*IC*, 7).

14. See also Helmut Walser Smith, "The Mirror Turn Lamp: Senses of the Nation before Nationalism."

15. Anderson does identify a third cultural root, a shift in conceptions of time. See Anderson, *IC*, 22ff.

16. Fichte's championing of the French Revolution and his 1793 essay on "*Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, who have hitherto Suppressed it*" signaled his commitment to decline of the dynastic realm.

17. Anderson writes: "Few things are more impressive than the vast territorial stretch of the Ummah Islam from Morocco to the Sulu Archipelago, of Christendom from Paraguay to Japan, and of the Buddhist world from Sri Lanka to the Korean peninsula" (*IC*, 12).

18. Anderson does not pretend that these sacred languages exhausted the linkages between these communities that allowed for the imagined bond, since "their readers, were, after all, tiny literate reefs on top of vast illiterate oceans. A fuller explanation requires a glance at the relationship between the literati and their societies" (*IC*, 15). For a brief account of this relationship, see Anderson's discussion in *IC*, 15ff.

19. See *ibid.*, 37–45. See also, Smith, 49–50.

20. Forberg's reflections on the debate about the origin of language in "Concerning the Origin of Language" (1795), published about six months after the appearance of Fichte's essay, reflect the growing concern to defend a naturalistic explanation of language: "There remains only the naturalistic hypothesis

from which to explain the origin of language in a satisfactory way. Here there is a choice among three naturalistic principles of explanation: arbitrary choice, perception, and reason. The first would be casualistic, the second an empirical, and the third a rational principle of explanation" (169).

21. A hieroglyphic *Ursprache*, or any language for that matter, is not a language proper, for Fichte, unless it permits the grammatical "combination of several words for the signification of a determinate meaning. By virtue of this combination, by the place which they occupy in relation to several others, the individual words first achieve complete indelibility" (*OL*, 134).

22. See Suber's helpful discussion of Fichte's account of the arbitrary nature of the sign, pp. 53–55.

23. Gritsch, 62.

24. My understanding of Fichte's nationalism stands in contrast to Abizadeh's "*mediated or crypto-ethnic nationalism*" (Abizadeh, 336) and resembles more Keohane's "cosmopolitical" reading (Keohane, 318). My interpretation places an emphasis on what I'm defining as an existential commitment to freedom as philosophically developed in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and so should be understood as a philosophical nationalism. I will suggest below that this is the best way to make sense of Fichte's claims about (1) language as an emanation of rational life, (2) Germans such as Hamann and Jacobi being un-German, and (3) speakers of languages besides German being German. It is this existential commitment that underwrites Fichte's claims about cosmopolitanism and humanity found throughout the *Addresses*.

25. Moore also makes the connection between idealism/dogmatism and German/French in his "Introduction" to his translation of the *Addresses* (Moore, xxvii).

26. For a critical discussion of the linguistic purity thesis Fichte defends see Martyn, "Borrowed Fatherland: Nationalism and Language in Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*."

27. It is worth noting that Fichte does not hold to a strong constitutive thesis about thought, unlike Hamann, in which thought or reason itself is constitutively linguistic. While thought may not be strongly linguistic, for Fichte, he does accept a weaker thesis about its discursivity, or conceptual nature.

28. My view stands in contrast to a common view that is clearly expressed by Andrew Fala in his "Fichte and the *Ursprache*." Fala writes, "The German spirit is conceived by Fichte in terms of language" (185). See also Kedourie: "With the spread of nationalism, natural frontiers came to mean the frontiers of a nation as determined by a linguistic map. This, as has been seen, was Fichte's view" (116). On my view the German spirit and nation is conceived in terms of an existential commitment to freedom to which the German language is, on his view, uniquely positioned to give expression.

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## Rights, Recognition, Nationalism, and Fichte's Ambivalent Politics

An Attempt at a Charitable Reading of the  
*Addresses to the German Nation*

ARNOLD L. FARR

### Introduction: Overcoming Myth and Embarrassment

I can't for speak for the majority of Fichte scholars; however, I think that I can speak for a fair number of us when I say that this volume gives us an opportunity to confront and grapple with what has been a source of embarrassment for some of us in our early years as students of Fichte. How often have we whispered to ourselves, while talking to non-Fichte scholars about our work, "I hope they don't ask me about Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*?" If the *Addresses* were not mentioned in the course of our conversation we felt a sense of relief. If they were mentioned, which they often were, we had to prepare ourselves with fear and trembling to defend Fichte. My personal approach was to separate the *Addresses* from Fichte's overall philosophy. This strategy is still used today when mention is made of the racism and sexism that finds its way into the texts of some of our favorite philosophers. Because of my experience with and disapproval of scholars who try to save their favorite philosophers from accusations of racism and sexism by separating the racism and sexism of one text from the overall philosophical system of these philosophers,

I have become a bit embarrassed by my own strategy regarding Fichte's *Addresses*. My former strategy was the result of my own lack of maturity as a scholar and philosopher.

One feature of this strategy for protecting our favorite philosophers from some of their problematic and perhaps embarrassing claims is to separate what we take to be their philosophical system from their personal views. Fichte presents us with an interesting case. We know that to understand Fichte's philosophy one must always be cognizant of the difference between the standpoint of life and the standpoint of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> However, once the philosopher enters the areas of social and political philosophy can it possibly be the case that the standpoint of life and the standpoint of philosophy cannot be completely separate? It seems to me that there is at best some kind of dialectic between the two standpoints wherein they mutually influence each other. The philosopher must engage in a moment of abstraction whereby he or she abstracts from the real, concrete, material manifestations of life to inquire about the necessary conditions for life, thought, knowledge, right, etc. However, this abstracting already has a place of origin. That is, abstraction is never the abstraction from nowhere, to play on Thomas Nagel a bit; rather it is an abstraction from somewhere. So, one question here is how does this "somewhere" affect, shape, influence, the very process of abstracting. This is a level of analysis that needs consideration but cannot be done here. Nevertheless, it is still connected to the issue that I do want to dwell on here. That is, social and political philosophy may require a form of abstraction, but by their very nature they must return to that from which they were abstracted. Social and political philosophy begins with a concern for the social/political organization of material and perhaps spiritual life. The purpose of abstraction in this case is to achieve some kind of knowledge about the proper social and political organization of human material and spiritual life. Abstraction is necessary because it discloses to us the proper life for the human in general without reinforcing the forms of life that already exists in the empirical world, forms of life that may prohibit proper human living. However, after this moment of abstraction the philosopher must return to the real world of particular forms of material and spiritual life and their specific organization. Hence, the standpoint of philosophy is temporary. However, a form of knowledge or insight can be achieved from the standpoint of philosophy that informs and influences how we interpret life and how we live within the standpoint of life. This is the practical function of philosophy.

There is one other problem that must be addressed before I get to my examination of Fichte's social/political philosophy and the place of the *Addresses* within it. Clarification is needed regarding what I at one point found embarrassing about Fichte's *Addresses*. At one level, there is the content of the *Addresses*. At another level, there is the public reception and interpretation of the *Addresses*. These two distinct problems can be confused. As a young scholar I suspect that I was more influenced by the public reception and interpretation of the *Addresses*. This influence hindered my own study of the text. More than the text itself, it is the social/political context of its revival during wartime in Germany that has led to its problematic reception during the post-World War I and World War II era. I will not go into detail here regarding the literature on this wartime revival since that has been done by others<sup>2</sup> and will take us too far away from the main concerns of this paper. Suffice it to say that the revival of Fichte as a national hero and advocate of German nationalism at a time when Germany was engaged in a world war and an attempt to exterminate Jewish people is enough to be suspect of his name and the text that was the item of interest. The context of this wartime Fichte revival encouraged the taking out of context of Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*.

This taking out of context of the *Addresses*, once again, occurred at two distinct levels. The first is the actual social/political situation in Germany at the time that Fichte wrote the *Addresses*. The second context is the context of Fichte's entire social/political philosophy. In the remainder of this paper, I will try to demonstrate that a charitable reading of Fichte's *Addresses* demands that it be returned to both of the above-mentioned contexts. The result would be not only a more charitable and even accurate reading, but a rewarding reading that still discloses certain problems that present and future social/political philosophers must grapple with.

### Mutual Recognition as the Necessary Condition for the Existence of Right: Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Right* as the Basis for His Later Political Philosophy

I am in complete agreement with David James when he claims that the *Addresses to the German Nation* was a continuation of the project begun in "Some Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the Scholar." In chapter 5 of his *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue*, he writes:

Although the *Addresses to the German Nation* clearly does constitute an attempt on Fichte's part to shape a German national identity, in what follows I focus on the question of the relation of this attempt to shape a German national identity to Fichte's ideas concerning the moral vocation (*Bestimmung*) of the scholar (*der Gelehrte*) in society, and on the means that Fichte employs to achieve the end of shaping a German national identity. By so doing, I draw attention to at least two elements of continuity that must be thought to exist between the period of Fichte's professorship at the University of Jena and his *Addresses to the German Nation*, which were delivered and then published in the period 1807–1808, in the wake of Napoleon's defeat and subjugation of Prussia, while Fichte was in Berlin without an academic position, having moved there in 1799 after losing his professorship at Jena in the wake of the Atheism Controversy. These two elements of continuity are as follows: the important role that Fichte assigns to the scholar in society, which we have already touched upon in relation to his theory of ethical duties; and the need for a social or political form of virtue of the kind discussed in the previous chapter; a need which here takes on a particular urgency, because of the humiliating and precarious situation of the German nation in the face of French hegemony. In the *Addresses to the German Nation*, Fichte no longer defines a state's natural frontiers in terms of its need to become self-sufficient, as in *The Closed Commercial State*. He instead defines them in linguistic terms.<sup>3</sup>

While I am in agreement with the above, I want to stress a different continuity that is still consistent with the position taken by James. My claim is that there is also continuity between Fichte's early presentation of his social/political philosophy in the *Foundations of Natural Right* and the *Addresses to the German Nation*. James has focused on the pedagogical element in Fichte's philosophy, especially with regard to virtue, while I am more concerned here with the political, especially with regard to rights and recognition. The *Addresses*, on the surface, seem to be a denial of the kind of universality regarding rights and recognition that Fichte seems to stress in the *Foundations*. I warn the reader here that my interpretation of the relationship between the *Foundations* and *Addresses to the German Nation* is based more on the *spirit* of Fichte's philosophy than the *letter*.

That is, Fichte himself does not articulate in writing the connection that I am about to make. However, to understand Fichte's philosophy (any philosophy, for that matter) demands understanding and addressing the logical implications of that philosophy. Since Fichte did not abandon the theory of right and recognition that he developed in his early social/political philosophy we must examine the influence that his early theory had on his later practical social/political philosophy.

My focus on the political rather than the pedagogical and the teaching of virtue suggests more of a concern with the role of the state than with the role of the scholar, although one must be mindful of the important relationship between them. In the *Foundations*, Fichte's theory of the State is developed only after his deduction of the concept of right. The concept of right has its origin in the experience of a summons by another rational being such as myself to limit my freedom for the sake of the other. That is, individual human beings all inhabit only a part of a general sphere of freedom. Freedom is possible only to the extent that every person chooses to limit his or her freedom for the sake of the other. Entailed in this moment of recognition is a theory of intersubjectivity wherein the freedom of each individual is intertwined with that of another. My very identity as human is intersubjectively constituted within the context of recognizing the other as a being like myself. On the basis of this recognition I am able to comprehend the other as a willing being like myself. The "other" and I both recognize each other as being capable of making claims on the world and on each other. It is in the context of mutual recognition whereby each person limits his or her freedom so that each person may occupy some part of the overall sphere of freedom where the concept of right is established. This moment of mutual recognition is the formation of a community of rational beings. However, it is here where a possible problem arises.

After deducing the concept of right we must determine if and how the concept of right can be applied. At this level, there is a tension between dependence and independence that must be resolved. Fichte writes:

Persons as such are to be absolutely free and dependent solely on their will. Persons, as surely as they are persons, are to stand with one another in a state of mutual influence, and thus not be dependent solely on themselves.<sup>4</sup>

According to Fichte, the task of the science of right is to explain the apparent contradiction between these two propositions. The concept that

links the two above propositions in a noncontradictory way is recognition. While the above propositions appear to contradict each other, actually one cannot exist without the other. The first proposition makes a claim that is true yet impossible. Its possibility lies in the truth of the second proposition. The first proposition does not claim that *a* person as such is to be absolutely free and independent, but rather, “*persons*<sup>5</sup> as such are to be absolutely free and dependent solely on their will.”<sup>6</sup> That “person” is pluralized is key. It is simply not possible for more than one person to be absolutely free. Hence, if there is to be any freedom at all then this freedom must be shared or somehow distributed among members of a community of rational beings. This carving up of the sphere of freedom requires mutual influence and self-limitation.

However, it is possible that one person refuses to limit his or her freedom for the other. In this case one has also refused to enter the community of free and rational beings. This refusal does not delegitimize the principle of right. In fact, the principle of right holds even when it does not seem to hold. Fichte’s solution to this problem is what I call the principle of forfeiture. One who refuses to limit his or her freedom for the other is no longer protected by the principle of right and thereby forfeits his or her own freedom. In this situation, the other has a right of coercion against the first person. The injured person is no longer obligated to limit his freedom. The possible outcome of this situation reminds one of the Hobbesian state of nature where all are engaged in a war of all against all. How is this problem to be resolved?

### The State as the Necessary Condition for the Protection of Property and Right

Although the injured party in a relationship has the right to coercion, coercion cannot be carried out by the injured party. The state emerges as a third party that is to mediate between two parties or persons in conflict. There is no time here to explore the details of Fichte’s argument and full deduction of the state. For my purpose it is enough to examine briefly the relationship between property and right as well as the form of contract that is established for the protection of property and right. On a Fichtean account, freedom requires property. To be free is to be efficacious in the world, that is, to have an effect on the order of things. Such efficacy requires the use of things in the world (property). Fichte writes:

As we have shown above, original right consists essentially in an ongoing reciprocal interaction, dependent only on the person's own will, between the person and the sensible world outside of him. In the property contract, a particular part of the sensible world is allocated exclusively to each individual as the sphere of his reciprocal interaction with it; and this part of the sensible world is guaranteed to each individual under these two conditions: (1) that he refrain from disturbing the freedom of all others in their spheres, and (2) that, in the event that these others are transgressed against by some third party, he will contribute towards their protection.<sup>7</sup>

The second condition mentioned here is the result of the "unification contract" discussed by Fichte in the prior section. This contract is the unification of the "property contract" and the "protection contract." Regarding the property contract, "each individual pledges all of his own property as a guarantee that he will not violate any of the others' property."<sup>8</sup> However, the promise embedded in this contract is not enough. It seems that more is required for the establishment of civil society and community. Hence, a second contract follows. This is because the property contract must be secured by a coercive power in the event that it is violated. Fichte writes:

Such coercive power has not been established is—as we have shown—the will of each contracting party remains merely negative in relation to the other's property. Therefore, since the contract we are describing is supposed to be a civil contract, there would have to be yet a second contract joined to the first (i.e. to the property contract); and in this second contract, each individual will promise to all the other individuals (who are still regarded as individuals) that he will use his own power to help them protect the property that is recognized as theirs, on the condition that they, for their part, will likewise help to defend his property against violation.<sup>9</sup>

This contract is of course, the "protection contract." This contract overcomes the mere negativity of the first contract. The protection contract gives one a positive duty to protect the rights and property of others. The two above contracts are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a civil



contract. It is with the conjoining of the two above-mentioned contracts into a unification contract that we get something like a general will or a commonwealth. The protection of the economic rights of each member of the commonwealth requires a closing of borders so that outside influence will not jeopardize the ability of the state to protect its citizens. This is the theme of *The Closed Commercial State*.

### The Role of Recognition and the Security of Property and Right in Fichte's *Closed Commercial State*

If the state is to protect the right to property of all of its citizens, then, how must the state be structured and what should its relationship be to other states? It is the task of the *Closed Commercial State* to answer these questions. As Anthony Curtis Adler points out in his introduction to the English translation of this text, for Fichte, political justice requires economic justice.<sup>10</sup> There are two significant problems that occur here. First, it seems that the form of recognition here is a coerced form of recognition. If this is the case, then there is no recognition at all.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, if the commercial state is a closed one, what happens to Fichte's cosmopolitanism and the universality of recognition and right? My view is that they are maintained as regulative ideas that are to be actualized. However, the actualization of these regulative ideas must go through the fire of particularity first.

In the *Foundations* and in *The Closed Commercial State*, Fichte can be seen as struggling with a dialectic between the universal and the particular. That is, the role of the state, as well as the principles on which it is based, is universal insofar as it should apply to any rational state. However, each state is separate and distinct from all other states. Hence, the universal prescription of the *Foundations* becomes more and more particularized as we move from the *Foundations* to *The Closed Commercial State* to the *Addresses*. We move from the closing of economic and political borders to a focus on the uniqueness of German history, culture, and language. There are a couple of passages that anticipate this move. Fichte writes:

Accordingly, the highest and universal end of all free activity is to be able to live. Everyone has this end; therefore, just as freedom in general is guaranteed, so too is this end.<sup>12</sup>

And so we arrive at a more detailed description of the exclusive use of freedom that is granted to each individual in the property contract. To be able to live is the absolute, inalienable property of all human beings. We have seen that a certain sphere of objects is granted to the individual solely for a certain use. But the final end of this use is to be able to live. The attainment of this end is guaranteed; this is the spirit of the property contract.<sup>13</sup>

In *The Closed Commercial State*, Fichte makes a claim almost identical to the above with one small addition. He writes:

The purpose of all human activity is to be able to live. All those whom nature has put to life have the same rightful claim to this possibility of life. Therefore, the division must first of all allow everyone to exist. Live and let live!

Everyone wishes to live as pleasantly as possible. Since everyone demands this as a human being, and no one is more or less human than anyone else, everyone has an equal right in [making] this demand. In accordance with this equality of their rights, the division must be made in such a way that one and all can live as pleasantly as is possible when so many men as they exist next to one another in the given sphere of efficacy. Each, in other words, must be able to live about as pleasantly as the other. I say: be able to, and not have to. Should someone live less pleasantly than he is able, the reason for this must lie with him alone and not with anyone else.<sup>14</sup>

Like the passage from the *Foundations of Natural Right*, the above passage stresses the right that everyone has to live and to have the necessary resources for maintaining one's life. However, here Fichte adds the desire for and right to a pleasant life. This is important because here we have not only a negative duty to not harm others or take their property. We have a positive duty to see to it that the other has the necessary resources to live a pleasant life. At this point, Fichte still seems to advocate some kind of cosmopolitanism since this right to a pleasant life applies universally. However, we must turn now to the two problems that I raised above. That is, the problem of coercion and the problem of cosmopolitanism.

I have already talked about the coercive function of the state in my discussion of the *Foundations of Natural Right*. Not much more needs to be said here. However, I do want to briefly mention the criticism by Robert Williams of Fichte's theory of the state. Williams argues that the theory of recognition in the early chapters of the *Foundations of Natural Right* is abandoned when Fichte develops his theory of the state and its coercive power. According to Williams, right is not established by mutual recognition, but rather, by the power of the state. I have addressed this criticism in other places.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that within the context of the political we might understand the function of recognition at two distinct levels. First, there is the level wherein human subjectivity is constituted by an encounter between two or more potentially rationally beings. At this level, we are simply constituted as a human individual in relation to another. Secondly, there is recognition in terms of the establishment of right. At this level, we recognize the other as a willing being like ourselves and voluntarily choose to limit our freedom so that the other may have some freedom. However, since it does not naturally follow that one individual will limit his freedom for the other, this type of recognition can be put under erasure. That is, the summons embedded in this form of recognition can take the form of an anti-summons. I have argued elsewhere that this anti-summons piggybacks on a summons.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, real, uncoerced, mutual recognition must remain as a regulative idea to be cultivated and brought to fruition. To some extent this is the function of the state. Fichte seems to hold out hope that one day humanity will embrace mutual recognition and the rights of all without coercion. We must be prepared for this future.

Here, I want to agree again with David James when he claims that in the *Addresses to the German Nation* Fichte is continuing the project developed in *Some Lectures Concerning the Vocation of the Scholar*. In those lectures Fichte claims that the purpose of the State is to make itself superfluous.<sup>17</sup> In a pedagogical sense, the state is responsible for the type of moral education that would bring about a transition from the political notion of right to the moral. However, the idea of mutual recognition is an ideal that can come to fruition only as the result of a certain type of moral and political striving. The purpose of the *Closed Commercial State*, in a way that adumbrates Marx, is to explain the material conditions necessary for freedom and right. It is the role of the state to bring about these material conditions as well as to educate its citizens.

That one state should be closed to all others is not blind nationalism. It is an acknowledgment of the limitations of the state. It would take us

too far beyond our topic of interest here for me to go through all of the arguments that Fichte offers for the closed commercial state. My goal is to show how Fichte's entire political philosophy is an attempt to bridge the enormous gap between the cosmopolitan ideal that he advocates and the particular social and political conditions that hinder the development of a humanity based on cosmopolitanism, mutual recognition, and freedom. This struggle continues in the *Addresses*. Here I will just mention a few of Fichte's concerns to give the reader a sense of what is at stake.

Fichte makes an important distinction between the actual state and a rational state. This distinction and the explication of it already connect *The Closed Commercial State* to the *Foundations of Natural Right*. He writes:

Pure Right of state lets the rational state arise under its eyes according to the concept of Right, by presupposing men to be without any of the relations that, resembling rightful relations, had previously existed.<sup>18</sup>

He continues:

With the actual state, the question is not merely, as with a rational state, what is *right*, but: how much of what is right *can be carried out* under the given conditions? If we give the name of *politics* to the science of government of the actual state according to the maxim just indicated, this politics would then lie halfway between the given state and the rational state: it would describe the continuous path [*Linie*] through which the former changes into the latter, and will itself terminate in pure Right of state.<sup>19</sup>

These passages suggest two things that I want to address with respect to the role of the state in the three political writings by Fichte that I'm concerned with in this paper. First, the patriotism (or one might even say "particularism")<sup>20</sup> and the cosmopolitanism in Fichte's work is not an either/or dichotomy. They stand in a dialectical relationship. Secondly, I've mentioned that while David James's work was focused on Fichte's pedagogy and I am focused on the political, these two stand in dialectical relationship.

If we take the goal of cosmopolitanism to be the ideal for humanity, the question becomes, To what degree does the real approximate the ideal? Contemplating the necessary conditions for cosmopolitanism, universal

human rights, and mutual recognition demands contemplating the present order of things and what conditions must be met to actualize the ideal. This is where things get a bit messy. Ideally, human beings would achieve the level of moral development that would make mutual recognition between individuals almost a natural thing. However, as we have seen above, this is not the case. Therefore, the state emerges to ensure the protections of rights in cases where one individual refuses to properly recognize the rights of another. However, what about mutual recognition between states or governments?

Fichte worries that commercial relations between states might compromise a state's ability to protect its own citizens. Within a state there is a means to protect the right of each citizen. However, there are no means in place to establish the right of one state or government against another. Given this condition, trade among different nations can truly become trade anarchy. As each state seeks its own advantage it becomes less concerned with the citizens. Even if the intention of a government is to increase its national wealth, this creates a situation that undermines its ability to protect its citizens. In fact, a situation is created that turns individual citizens into commodities. The attempt by one government to steer trade to its advantage creates what Fichte calls "a secret trade war of all against all."<sup>21</sup> This situation may increase the wealth of a stronger nation while creating poverty in another.

### Philosophy and the Prophetic Tone of the *Addresses to the German Nation*

If it seems that Fichte's cosmopolitan vision has receded behind a form of particularism in *The Closed Commercial State*, then it seems even more so in *Addresses to the German Nation*. This text has a more prophetic tone than philosophical. To say that something is prophetic does not mean that the prophetic utterance is a prediction of the future. Something may be prophetic and not be religious since the prophetic voice is simply a call for some kind of social or personal transformation. In this case, Fichte issues a prophetic call to the German people to transform their system of education, their attitudes, and themselves. It is also a call for the German people to take the lead in global social transformation.

It should not seem strange that the philosopher should become prophet, especially Fichte. From the beginning to the end of his career, Fichte tried to use his philosophy to encourage social change. In his intro-

duction to the *Addresses*, George Kelly writes: "The business of philosophy is to show how the world is possible, also to show how it should become. The first task is 'theoretical'; the second 'practical,' or what might better be called a theory of practice."<sup>22</sup> In the case of political philosophy, once the philosopher has discovered in thought the necessary conditions for a rational society, it is not such a leap for the philosopher to attempt to bring others into the "truth." The prophetic voice, whether it be religious or philosophical/secular is often raised to encourage a people to actualize their potential and rise above their present situation. In this case, we are concerned with the range of the prophetic call. Does the prophetic call go out to all people, or just to a people?

### Between Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism: Fichte's Ambivalent Politics

How can a philosopher who in most of his political writings seeks to develop a theory of human freedom write a text that seems replete with a kind of blind nationalism? A careful reading of *Addresses to the German Nation* reveals that it does not advocate a blind and mindless patriotism like the kind that one might find on any street corner in the United States. It is a patriotism that strives for something beyond itself. That is, Fichte's patriotism is a means to an end. In this section, I will take a look at some of the claims made in the text and then interpret them within their broader context.

First, we must keep in mind the absolute importance of an independent state that is able to protect the rights of its people. This is the message of *The Closed Commercial State*. At the time that Fichte wrote the *Addresses*, Germany was certainly not unified nor independent in a way that would assure its citizens that their rights would be protected. First, as we have seen, Germany was constituted by several provinces and principalities. Secondly, at the time of the *Addresses* Germany was under the rule of an alien power. Fichte wrote as if Germans were experiencing something like an identity crisis. They had lost a sense of identity and mission.

It follows, then that the mean of salvation that I promised to indicate consists in the fashioning of an entirely new self, which may have existed before perhaps in individuals as an exception, but never as a universal and national self, and in the

education of the nation, whose former life has died out and become the supplement of an alien life, to a completely new life, which shall either remain its exclusive possession or, if it must go forth from it to others, shall at least continue whole and undiminished in spite of infinite division. In a word, it is a total change of the existing system of education that I propose as the sole means of preserving the existence of the German nation.<sup>23</sup>

Through a new educational system Germany will be awakened to its real identity and mission. There are several things that this new education is supposed to accomplish. However, for our purpose I will focus on one. That is the building of community and the role of recognition. Fichte's new educational program has as its goal the unification of the German people and the development of a moral community.<sup>24</sup> This is where things get a bit strange. Fichte seems to claim that the goal of the new educational system is to create a new moral community for the German people. It would be the kind of community that would overcome the egoism which led to their falling under the hands of an alien power. It seems that this would be a community based on mutual recognition. However, Fichte's argument seems to presuppose a prior community based on recognition. The new form of education would remind the German people of this prior unity or community.

It is here where Fichte advocates a form of patriotism that seems to be based on some form of national and racial essentialism. This is problematic for many reasons. There is no time to address the many problems with Fichte's view. I will just say that scholars are right to question the historical accuracy of Fichte's account of what makes the German people different or exceptional.<sup>25</sup> The problematic nature of Fichte's claims will have to be addressed in another paper. My purpose here is to provide a charitable reading as possible for the sake of understanding what Fichte was up to and how the *Addresses* is connected to his earlier, more emancipatory writings.

### The Three Moments of Recognition: Constitutive/Regulative, Political, Cultural/Linguistic

There are so many issues and questions that should be raised regarding what Fichte was up to in the *Addresses*. I have avoided many of them,

because my particular interest in this paper is what happens to Fichte's very important concept of recognition in this part of his project. Unlike Robert Williams, I do not believe that Fichte abandons his theory of recognition. I do believe, however, that what recognition is and how it works get altered in different parts of the system. What recognition is is never fixed, but rather, it is given a new mission as Fichte encounters a new problem. I spoke earlier about the difficulty of trying to unify the actual and the rational.

My claim in this section of the paper is that there are at least three forms of recognition in Fichte's work. I have discussed briefly Fichte's theory of recognition as it was developed in *Foundations of Natural Right*. This text begins with what I would call an ethical anthropology, which lays the grounds for a political theory of right and then disappears. The anthropological element lies in Fichte's description of the nature of the finite human I. The ethical element refers to the intersubjective constitution of the I as well as the summons of one I by another wherein the I is made aware of its duty toward the other. However, part of this anthropology also shows that the I is driven not only by duty but by sensual impulses that may override duty. Any individual I may very well choose to not do his or her duty toward the other. Hence, the ethical anthropology is complemented by the development of a political order, the state, that protects the rights of all.

Before saying more about the political, I must explain the constitutive and regulative function of recognition. Recognition is constitutive insofar as without it at some level there is no individual I. Fichte makes it clear that even the concept of individuality requires another I by whom I am recognized as an I. It seems that recognition has two functions here. First, it is the means by which the individual is constituted. Here, recognition is a form of intersubjectivity. Secondly, it reveals the moral law via a summons from the other. It is with regard to the summons that recognition becomes regulative.

Regarding the first function of recognition, it seems that there is a primordial community of which one becomes a part simply by establishing oneself as an individual in relation to a being like oneself. My awareness of myself as an individual is possible only by distinguishing between myself and another like me. This distinction is at the same time a sameness. This is established in the *Foundations of Natural Right*. However, a community of rational beings based on this initial form of recognition or the intersubjective constitution of the individual is ultimately a regulative idea.<sup>26</sup> The community of rational beings based on mutual recognition is



an ideal that must somehow be made to materialize in the material world. But the ability of some individuals to not limit their freedom for the sake of the other makes the development of this community of rational beings based on mutual recognition a goal and not a reality. Hence, we end up with the state as an enforcer of rights.

The state produces a form of political recognition in the place of recognition motivated by moral considerations. The prospect of coercion by the state makes recognition at this level something less than mutual recognition for the other because the welfare of the other is not necessarily the concern of any individual. The contract that is based on some notion of the common will is actually based on universal egoism.<sup>27</sup> Hence, all we have here is political recognition, which is incomplete when compared to the moral ideal of mutual recognition.

While there is no clear theory of recognition in the *Addresses* there is an implicit call for recognition. As I mentioned in the previous section, Fichte proposes a new plan for the education of the German people that is supposed to produce a moral community. However, his argument presupposes a prior community built on culture and language. Hence, recognition in this case would be cultural and linguistic. The egoism that weakened the German people would be due to a failure to recognize this prior bond and community. Fichte's new education would recreate a community by disclosing to the German people their uniqueness as a people. The evidence that Fichte gives is questionable but may have a prophetic and regulative function. This is the position defended by David James in his critique of Fichte's use and abuse of history. James focuses on the pedagogical intention of Fichte's claims.

It would seem that in the *Addresses* Fichte's cosmopolitanism has been abandoned. However, there seems to be a tension between Fichte's patriotism and his cosmopolitanism which suggest not an either/or but a both/and. That is, it seems that the goal of universal mutual recognition is not possible without first establishing recognition at a local level. In *The Closed Commercial State*, this requires that the state see to it that all of its citizens have access to the necessary material resources needed for self-development and self-determination. The strategy for recognition in the *Addresses* is completely different since the goal there is a system of education that will reveal to the German people a primordial bond on the basis of language and culture, a bond that will create a greater sense of community and duty. However, what remains very problematic is Fichte's

claim that the German people are somehow special or occupy a special place in the development of humanity. Fichte writes:

The old world with its glory and its greatness, as well as its defects, has fallen by its own unworthiness and by the violence of your fathers. If there is truth in what has been expounded in these addresses, then are you of all modern peoples the one in whom the seed of human perfection most unmistakably lies, and to whom the lead in its development is committed. If you perish in this your essential nature, then there perishes together with you every hope of the whole human race for salvation from the depths of its miseries.<sup>28</sup>

It seems that Fichte still has in mind the salvation of all of humanity. If this is the case, then his cosmopolitanism has not been abandoned. However, his tone is such that it seems that the German people somehow have a special role to play in the salvation of humanity. So, his patriotism is necessary to establish a certain unity among the German people so that they may fulfill their calling in the salvation of all of humanity. This position still is problematic insofar as it is Eurocentric, and also so particularistic that it seems to support a form of national and racial bigotry. On one hand, there may be no legitimate way to save Fichte from accusations of Eurocentrism and national bigotry. However, I promised to offer a charitable reading in order to be as fair as possible to Fichte. So, on the other hand, a contextualization of the *Addresses* and a look at twentieth- and twenty-first-century views that are similar may shed some light on Fichte's position. This I will do in the next section.

### Particularism Guided by a Cosmopolitan Logic: Some Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Issues

Is it possible to formulate a universal cosmopolitan ideal while avoiding what I have called particularism? The tension between cosmopolitanism and particularism goes well beyond Fichte. In this section I want to take a look at a couple of twentieth- and twenty-first-century issues that remind one of the problems that Fichte faced. Interestingly, these twentieth- and twenty-first-century issues have nothing to do with Nazism. It

is unfortunate that Fichte's *Addresses* were misused and misinterpreted in the twentieth century. However, this complicated combination of cosmopolitanism and particularism (patriotism or nationalism, in Fichte's case) lends itself to a wide range of uses and interpretations.

What I have called particularism has at least two functions. One is the sinister function of creating group solidarity among people who have certain traits in common for the purpose of dominating other groups. The other function is the create solidarity among individuals who are members of the group that is dominated or oppressed by another group. In Fichte's case, Germany was fragmented and concerned about French hegemony. In the twentieth century, the tension between particularism and cosmopolitanism has occurred in many forms. I will briefly discuss a couple.

In an essay entitled "The Conservation of Races," W. E. B. DuBois argues for the uniqueness of each of the human races. Each race has a distinct contribution to make to the overall development of the human race. No race is superior to any other, they just have different gifts. Du Bois also claims that some races have already made their contributions while others have yet to make their contribution. Those who have not yet made their contribution eventually will but must not be hindered by the other races. He even mentions the German people as he lists contributions made by various peoples. He writes:

The English nation stood for constitutional liberty and commercial freedom; the German nation for science and philosophy; the Romance nations stood for literature and art, and the other race groups are striving, each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long, that "one far off Divine event."<sup>29</sup>

DuBois goes on to discuss races who have not yet made a contribution but eventually will. He goes from there to a discussion about the "Negro" race. The "Negro" race has not yet given its message to the world (with the possible exception of Egyptian civilization). He writes: "For the development of Negro genius, of Negro literature and art, of Negro spirit, only Negroes bound and welded together, Negroes inspired by one vast ideal, can work out in its fullness the great message we have for humanity."<sup>30</sup>

DuBois even called for the establishment of a "Negro Academy" for the cultivation of "Negro" talent and genius.

We see in the cases of Fichte and DuBois a kind of prophetic call for a particular group to develop its gifts so that it may make its own unique contribution to the development of humanity in general. Although Fichte seems to call for German nationalism, others who have felt stifled by the hegemony of another group have done the same. Black nationalism is a response to white hegemony in the United States. However, I distinguish between the nationalism or particularism called for by black nationalists and the form of particularism advocated by Fichte and DuBois. Black nationalism is rarely cosmopolitan insofar as black nationalists do not tend to see their particularism as necessary for the development of all humanity. Their concern is solely with the emancipation of their group.

Another example of particularism guided by a cosmopolitan logic is found in recent multicultural initiatives, identity politics, recognition struggles, and politics of difference. While all of these movements are similar, each is also distinct in some ways. There is no time to go into that now. Their common feature is the attempt to recognize and celebrate group difference as a positive thing. The liberal idea that we are all the same has been found vacuous. While we are all human and of equal value and may deserve equal opportunity, we are still socially situated in terms of certain identity markers that are often group-based identity markers. These identity markers and the way in which we have been situated give us a unique perspective and put each of us in a position to make a unique contribution to the development of humanity.

It is not at all uncommon today to hear groups who are struggling for emancipation to call for group solidarity. This group solidarity establishes mutual recognition within a group for the sake of fighting for greater recognition within the human species. This seems like a logical position as long as it does not become an argument for separatism. This is the failure of black nationalism. Separatism seems to maintain a war of all against all situation. There are moments when Fichte's nationalism sounds almost separatist. However, Fichte did provide guidelines for interaction between nations. Of particular importance is the role that the scholar is to play in communicating across borders. At the end of the day, there are still many things in Fichte's *Addresses* that are problematic. But, just as the individual I must strive to bring the real and the ideal as close together as possible, so it is with the philosopher/prophet. It is wrongheaded to

simply toss out the *Addresses* because of its misuse in the early twentieth century. It is the work of a serious theorist who was striving to advance a cosmopolitan ideal in a particular situation. This required a theory of rights based on recognition that was applicable universally. However, as we saw above, the universal in its becoming as such must go through the fire of the particular. This may be the point where Fichte and Hegel meet.

## Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the distinction between the standpoint of life and the standpoint of philosophy in Fichte's philosophy see Daniel Breazeale's "The 'Standpoint of Life' and 'The Standpoint of Philosophy' in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*," in *Transzendentalphilosophie als System: Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen 1794 und 1806*, ed Albert Mues (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989), 81–104.

2. See H. C. Engelbrecht, *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: A Study of his Political Writings With Special Reference to his Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933).

3. David James, *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 162–63.

4. *FNR*, 79.

5. My italics.

6. *FNR*, 79.

7. *Ibid.*, 183.

8. *Ibid.*, 170.

9. *Ibid.*, 171.

10. See Anthony Curtis Adler, "Interpretive Essay," in J. G. Fichte, *The Closed Commercial State*, trans. Anthony Curtis Adler (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), 8.

11. Robert Williams has argued that in the *Foundations of Natural Right* recognition is displaced by coercion. The community based on recognition is displaced by a community that is an instrument of coercion because once right is violated trust and confidence cannot be restored. See Williams, "The Displacement of Recognition by Coercion in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*," in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 47–64.

12. *FNR*, 185.

13. *Ibid.*

14. J. G. Fichte, *The Closed Commercial State*, 93.

15. See Arnold Farr, "Fichte's Master/Slave Dialectic: The Untold Story," in *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), 243–58.

16. Ibid.

17. Fichte writes: "Despite what a very great man has said, life in the state is not one of man's absolute aims. The state is, instead, only a *means for establishing a perfect society*, a means which exists only under specific circumstances. Like all those human institutions which are mere means, the state aims at abolishing itself. *The goal of all government is to make government superfluous*. Though the time has certainly not yet come, nor do I know how many myriads or myriads of myriads of years it may take (here we are not at all concerned with applicability in life, but only with justifying a speculative proposition), there will certainly be a point in the a priori foreordained career of the human species when all civic bonds will become superfluous" ("Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation," *EPW*, 156).

18. J. G. Fichte, *The Closed Commercial State*, 87.

19. Ibid.

20. In his book on Fichte's political philosophy, *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: A Study of His Political Writings with Special Reference to His Nationalism*, H. C. Engelbrecht examines the dichotomy between cosmopolitanism and patriotism in Fichte's work. However, he begins chapter 7, "Fichte's Nationalism," by making a distinction between particularism and cosmopolitanism. This distinction is important for understanding the political context in which Fichte was writing and for clarity about the German situation. Engelbrecht says the following: "Fichte's Germany was a geographical expression. It was split up into a host of kingdoms, provinces, and principalities each of which claimed sovereignty and the loyalty of its subjects. What devotion there was to one's native land was restricted to these various sections. This was particularism" (147). The fact that Germany was not a unified nation but only a multiplicity of kingdoms, provinces, and principalities makes Engelbrecht's use of "particularism" correct. However, he uses this to make a somewhat problematic claim. He writes: "As compensation for the lack of a larger national loyalty, German intellectuals had taken the world to their heart. Humanity was their love" (ibid.). The overcoming of provincialism to focus on Humanity is what Engelbrecht calls cosmopolitanism. This claim is a bit of a stretch since a cosmopolitan love for Humanity also arose in other places (nations) at other times. However, for my purposes I will use "patriotism" and "particularism" interchangeably since patriotism/nationalism elevates a particular people.

21. J. G. Fichte, *The Closed Commercial State*, 156.

22. George Kelly, "Introduction," in J. G. Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1968), xix.

23. J. G. Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, 10–11.

24. It is so strange that the philosopher of freedom actually claims that this new education is to destroy free will and replace it with necessity. I suspect that some kind of defense can be made on Fichte's behalf. However, that would take us too far beyond the scope of this paper.

25. See David James, *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue*. Particularly important is the section entitled "Fichte's (mis) use of history," 168–87.

26. See Arnold Farr, "Rights, Recognition, and Regulative Ideas: On the Relationship between Fichte's Theory of Rights and Contemporary Liberation Philosophies," in *Rights, Bodies, and Recognition: New Essays on Fichte's Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Tom Rockmore and Daniel Breazeale (Hampshire, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 240–55.

27. *FNR*, 134.

28. *AGN*, 227–28.

29. W. E. B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races," in *The Idea of Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lott (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), 112.

30. *Ibid.*

## How to Change the World

### Cultural Critique and the Historical Sublime in the *Addresses to the German Nation*

MICHAEL STEINBERG

None of Fichte's mature writings is bound to its place and time more than the *Addresses to the German Nation*, yet their very topicality keeps them relevant today. Writing as the modern era of individualism and capitalist modernity began to take shape, Fichte drew a concrete program of action out of an interplay between his mature *Wissenschaftslehre* and the philosophical history outlined a few years before in *The Characteristics of the Present Age*. In doing so he confronted head-on the central problem of conscious social transformation: How can someone formed and living in one social order act to bring about another? This question is as pressing today as it was two hundred years ago.

As surely as Hegel was at the battle of Jena, Fichte was confident that he was witnessing a moment of world historical importance, one of the turning points of human history. In this they were hardly alone. Theirs was an age of revolution, after all, and of even more revolutionary hopes, but it was also a time of terrifying violence and the fear that there was no clear path from the present to the future. Eelco Runia has noted the longing for sublime historical change, founded in an act that does not issue from but which itself transforms thought, a longing evident in Schiller's early *Sturm und Drang* dramas and in Faust's pronouncement



that in the beginning came the deed.<sup>1</sup> This is one element in the context of the deeply radical program of the *Addresses*. But Fichte was no partisan of the *acte gratuite* and he could not determine what action was needful without problematizing the process of social change itself. Like Marx's early theory of revolution, which likely owes much to Fichte's thinking, his is a demand for actions that are both sublimely unprecedented and historically necessary.

Anyone seeking a different world must answer two questions. One concerns the form of the envisioned future world while the other inquires into the work that must be done to bring that world about. For many theorists and advocates of social transformation these are hardly separate questions at all. They have the answer to the first and the second is simply a matter of strategy and tactics. Fichte takes a different course, however; almost all of his attention is lavished on the second question. Besides a few references to *The Closed Commercial State* there is little in the *Addresses* that suggests what the future world should be like. By contrast, his treatment of the national educational system that he sees as the way toward that future is altogether more specific. Its character is set out in great detail and much of what he omits can be developed from the writings of Pestalozzi. In the *Addresses*, then, these two questions remain distinct, and it can be argued that Fichte's essential point is to be found in the recognition that these are indeed two different questions, at least in certain historical junctures. The moment of the *Addresses* is one of these junctures, and I would argue that Fichte's analysis remains valid; we are still at such a moment.

Fichte conveys his point as much through rhetorical strategies as through philosophical analysis, and what follows is focused on both. His reputation in the English-speaking world, however, is such that it is, unfortunately, still necessary to start off by commenting on the conventional caricatures of the *Addresses*—that they are a foundational text for German nationalism or worse and propose a barracks state in which the educational system serves to grind down free individuals so that they become obedient cogs in the machinery of an all-powerful government. These are profound misinterpretations. It would take this essay too far afield to consider Fichte's nationalism, but it is a linguistic affair, not a racial one, and his remains a philosophy of freedom. He does not use the word *freedom* as if it were Newspeak. He does use it, however, in a Kantian sense, as the ability of an autonomous being to initiate a chain of events, the power to be an uncaused causal agent subject to one's own

self-given laws, and this is a definition of freedom with implications that often ring strangely in our ears.

Fichte does indeed write that the aim of his schooling is to annihilate “the freedom of the will and produce . . . strict necessity in decision,”<sup>2</sup> but anyone familiar with the *Wissenschaftslehre* in general and the *System of Ethics* in particular will recall that for Fichte, as for Kant, the only free actions are those determined by the moral law and that for Fichte, at least, the moral law always speaks with a single voice; two equally moral options are never to be found. Since Fichte, unlike Kant, did not admit that any act could be morally neutral, there is thus always only one course of action one can take consistent with her freedom as a moral agent.

Yet there is always only one course of action one can take as a determined, unfree being. For Fichte, the freedom of will in the sense of an unfettered choice thus turns into an existential decision between two ways of life and the actions those dictate. Both of these are outlined in the *Addresses*. One is an indecisive wavering among objects of action in the realm of appearances, which is no true freedom at all; choices will always be dictated by the lower power of desire, leaving the agent enmeshed in the web of cause and effect in which everything is determined.<sup>3</sup> The other is the life “where essence itself enters into the appearance of a decision of the will directly, and as it were, in person and not by proxy.”<sup>4</sup>

That “essence” is what Fichte also calls Reason—“the first law of the life of a race of men, as of all spiritual life,” as he defines it in *The Characteristics of the Present Age*.<sup>5</sup> This is not to be confused with discursive rationality in any of its forms. In the *Wissenschaftslehre* Reason is identified with the self-manifesting activity of the Absolute, a movement that constitutes, transforms, and dissolves individuals and social forms alike. It is not a template or a heuristic but an activity, and the only universal activity at that:

[T]here is everywhere but one animating power, one Living Reason;—not, as we are accustomed to hear the unity of Reason asserted and admitted, that Reason is one homogenous and self-accordant faculty and property of reasonable beings, who do nevertheless exist already upon their own account, and to whose being this property of Reason is only superadded as a foreign ingredient, without which they might, at any rate, still have been;—but, that Reason is the only possible and self-sustaining existence and life, of which all that seems to

us to exist and live is but a modification, definition, variety, and form.<sup>6</sup>

Reason is what makes and dissolves the totality of things in this essentially pantheist vision, and in the present text its movement is often evoked by the many changes Fichte rings on the famously untranslatable word *Bildung*. Most immediately present in the moral law, Reason's activity in social process is evident in "the bond of free, mutual give and take" that Fichte evokes near the close of both the *Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation*<sup>7</sup> and *The Vocation of Man*. It is never an object of discursive knowledge.

Reason is progressively embodied in but forever unexhausted by appearances, and ethical striving seeks to realize it. Ethical acts are thus directed toward a state of being not yet in existence, imaged in *Vorbilder*, or prefigurations of the world as it must be. In a real rather than metaphorical sense their causality runs backward, from the future to the present, and actions in pursuit of these ends are thus uncaused in terms of the phenomenal world. They are therefore free in the Kantian sense.

Fichte's denial of free will cannot to be confused with a subjugation to the will of another, then. It is allied on the one hand to the freedom of the Christian in Luther's *Of Christian Liberty*, which is surrender to the will of God, and on the other looks forward to Heidegger, for whom authentic life "snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities . . . and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate*."<sup>8</sup>

The collective and intersubjective nature of Reason's realization forecloses the dangerous doctrine that an inspired leader could embody and express the movement of history. At the same time, however, Reason's endlessly transformative activity negates anything resembling "scientific socialism" and renders hopeless all attempts to plan out a new world through research, logic, and law. Fichte's era was all too familiar with such attempts:

Foreigners have lightly and with fiery boldness seized on another task of reason and philosophy facing the modern world—the establishment of the perfect state—only shortly thereafter to abandon the same, so that they are compelled by their current situation to condemn the mere thought of the task as a crime and would have to strain every nerve in order, if they could, to expunge those endeavors from the annals of their history.<sup>9</sup>

Such attempts at Actually Existing Perfect States must always fail, not just because they do not proceed from perfected human beings but because at present the worlds dreamt by imperfect human beings merely carry forward the nightmares of the past. “[T]he state based on reason cannot be built by artificial measures out of any old material that lies to hand,” he writes. “[R]ather, the nation must first be cultivated and educated for it. Only that nation which has first of all solved the task of educating the perfect human being, *through actual practice*, will also solve that of the perfect state.”<sup>10</sup>

This is a philosophical conclusion, not one of mere political prudence. In a remarkable anticipation of a famous passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, but with even more radical implications, Fichte continues:

Man does not form his scientific view freely and arbitrarily, one way or another. Rather, it is formed for him by his life and it is actually the internal root of his life itself, otherwise unknown to him, manifested as an intuition. That which you really and inwardly are steps before your outward eye, and you are unable ever to see anything else. To see differently, you would have to become different from what you are.<sup>11</sup>

The makers of previous utopias could not disentrall themselves from their historically limited intuitions. This was enough to undermine even their best intentions. Those who have not passed over into the life where essence itself enters into their decisions can produce not *Vorbilder* but *Nachbilder*, at most sanitized, corrected, or idealized versions of the present. These frame no real future at all, only blurred copies of the present with some of its inherent logic disarranged, and this will doom any utopian project that they formulate. As Fichte will imply, the construction of a new world is so beyond the capacities of the present age that we ourselves cannot take a single step in that direction.

At the same time, of course, we are called upon to act and to change the world—never more so, in Fichte’s eyes, than when Germany’s sovereign states have been abolished and its very existence as a nation and culture is at risk of extinction. We are in a dilemma, to be sure, and one that seems to arrest our action right when the stakes are their highest. Just below the surface of the *Addresses*, driving its high rhetoric and

oracular tone, is the fear of stasis, decline, and perhaps even collapse. If the present generation fails to make a break with the past, Fichte warns, it must “perforce leave behind a posterity even more degenerate and the next generation one more degenerate still.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, “all the hopes of the entire human race for salvation from the depths of its misery perish.”<sup>13</sup>

One rarely has to look long or hard for examples of rhetorical overkill in Fichte’s writing, but the apocalyptic tone of the *Addresses* is grounded in nothing less than a full-blown philosophical history. This is found in his 1804–05 lecture course published as *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, to which, he tells us, the *Addresses* are a kind of sequel. It has been argued with good reason that the analysis there sets out both a five-stage and a two-stage interpretation of historical process and that the *Addresses* rely predominantly on the first of these. Yet these two interpretations are not at all incompatible and both are explicitly at play in the present text. Furthermore, the two-stage progression highlights the hidden asymmetry in the five-stage program and explains a good deal about the historical crux that motivates the program of the *Addresses*.

There is a satisfying circularity about the five-stage theory that brings to mind M. H. Abrams’s *Natural Supernaturalism*.<sup>14</sup> In both the first and last of Fichte’s stages Reason is implicit in human conduct; at the dawn of human history it spontaneously orders humanity and at its culmination humanity spontaneously orders itself, art as self-conscious nature returning itself to itself. The second and fourth stages also mirror one another, if less obviously. In one, Reason is expressed as the will of an aristocracy. In the other, it is known and honored as a science, and all seek to follow its laws. In both stages, however, human activity is consciously bent to an external command rather than being guided from within. Even in the fourth stage Reason appears as a second nature, not as human nature itself.

This leaves the present age, the third of Fichte’s stages, in which Reason itself is rejected and abandoned:

Reason, in whatever shape it reveals itself, whether as instinct or as knowledge, always proceeds upon the life of the race, as a race; —Reason being thrown off and extinguished, nothing remains but the mere individual, personal life. Hence, in the third age, which has set itself free from Reason, there is nothing but this latter life; nothing wherever this age has thoroughly manifested itself and arrived at clearness and consistency, except

pure, naked egoism; and hence it naturally follows that this inborn and established common sense of the third age can be nothing else, and can contain nothing else, than the wisdom which provides for mere personal well-being.<sup>15</sup>

Fichte's contemporaries, like ours, prided themselves in their deep commitment to rationality, but instrumental or even ethical rationality of any form is not to be confused with the supra-individual and ceaselessly active Reason, and Reason is utterly excluded in any world where the "mere individual, personal life" is the highest good, no matter how much lip service is paid to rational discourse. A refusal to engage with its movement is what marks lives and scientific thought alike in the third age, and this above all is what precludes its inhabitants from the foundational work of the future. They do not believe in the very existence of Reason, except superficially, and along with Reason both the social world and any connection with historical process have vanished from their ken. Their future disappears with their past.

Since it is only in dialogue with an ungraspable Reason that humanity moves forward, the third age is an age of stasis and inertia, of a uniform deadness that gradually affects all of its institutions and habits. "An age without the Idea," it is "a weak and powerless age; and all it does, all wherein it shows any sign of life, is accomplished in a languid and sickly manner, and without any visible manifestations of energy." It is marked by "universal superficiality and fickleness."<sup>16</sup> Even its one incontestable achievement, the demand for clarity instead of indistinct intuition, is ultimately counterproductive. Resignation to the supposed sinfulness of men had always been unsettled by the belief in human freedom, "But clarity perfects this wickedness and rounds it off within itself; clarity adds to it cheerful resignation, the peace of a good conscience, self-complacency."<sup>17</sup>

This brings us to Fichte's two-stage account, for it is at this low point in the drama that the two philosophical histories join up. Unlike the five-stage scenario, the two-stage one has no trace of the cyclic. It is overtly progressive. In it humanity passes from ancient to modern eras, both defined through religion. The ancient world is marked by a fear of the divine, experienced as the will of capricious and often cruel gods. In the modern world the Johannine Jesus shows instead that "Man can never disunite himself from the Godhead."<sup>18</sup> We come to see that we are always already saved, eternally in the presence of the divine, true manifestations of the incomprehensible process whose movement we know as Reason.

One might think that the transition between these two comes with the life or resurrection of Jesus or, at the latest, with the writing of the Gospel according to John. But this would be an error. The crucial historical moment is the present day of the *Addresses*. They are being delivered at the close of the third of the five ages, but in them Fichte writes, “[A]t present the race stands at the true midway point of its life on earth, between its two principal epochs.”<sup>19</sup>

The passage from the third to the fourth of the five ages is thus far more problematic and significant than any of the others, because it is also the final passage between the ancient and the modern in the two-stage analysis. It is the coming into awareness of something eternally active but never previously grasped in its truth, closely akin to Marx’s transition from prehistory to history and quite as fraught with difficulties, and Fichte makes this transformation even more difficult because Reason must triumph within a world from which Reason itself has been ejected. We must start from a culture trapped by its individualism, its refusal to see past appearances, and its alienation from the past and the future alike, and from this unpromising beginning fashion one where the opposite of each of these characteristics holds sway.

The sharpness of Fichte’s dilemma comes from the difficulty of this progress-through-reversal. The motives that propel human history from the first age through the third one are obvious and plausible. In fact, they appear to be a fairly accurate guess at the large-scale movement of human history from hunting bands through agriculture-based class societies to the so-called Age of Democratic Revolutions. Primitive egalitarianism gives way to chiefdoms, oppression eventually overreaches itself, and the equality of humanity is proclaimed and, in juridical terms at least, is put into effect. But there the explanations stop. What takes humanity from the third age to the fourth?

In *The Characteristics of the Present Age* Fichte had identified an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the sterile individualism of the contemporary world; he points to the obscurantist fantasies of what he labels mysticism as evidence of this unease.<sup>20</sup> He appears to have assumed that the *Wissenschaftslehre* could speak to that discontent and that through it the world would soon begin the apprenticeship to Reason that marks its fourth age. In the *Addresses*, though, he no longer nurses that confidence. “Philosophy must insist that our age surrender the world it has inhabited until now and find for itself an entirely different one,” he writes, “and it is no wonder if such an exacting demand proves fruitless.”<sup>21</sup>

Yet he still lectured. For all of his theoretical denial of free will Fichte was a voluntarist in practice:

Rain and dew, fruitful and unfruitful years, may well be made by a power unknown to us and beyond our control; but the quite special time of man, human affairs, is made only by men themselves and not by any external power.<sup>22</sup>

It is now politics that provide the spur. After the shock of the French conquest Fichte dares to hope that his audience will take up the task at hand, seeing at long last that if they do not do so they will send the world not into light but into ever-deepening darkness.

And this returns us to the problem of conscious social change and its two aspects: what the future should be like and what we must do to bring that about. Fichte's argument implies that our age is so self-estranged from Reason that we cannot answer the first of these questions. We are neither called upon to build up the new world nor capable of doing that. Formed and caught up by the present age, we cannot overleap Rhodes.

We *can* answer the second question, however. Our mission is to educate people who can answer the question that we cannot. We can create a generation that is not as spiritually and imaginatively crippled as ours is. "Philosophy must give up on the present race; but in order that it not remain idle until then, it shall now take on the task of forming the race to which it belongs."<sup>23</sup> This is accomplished, of course, through the national education.

Fichte's curriculum is often thought of as indoctrination, but it is exactly the opposite of that. It *cannot* be indoctrination, because in a deep sense we do not know what the students must learn. It is more a spiritual discipline than a course of study in any event, designed to turn its students toward the infinite future and to liberate them by inoculating them against both selfishness, or identification with egocentric wants, and the delusion that the world is to be apprehended through knowledge of fixed and permanent entities. The mind-forged manacles of the present age are to be broken so that the generations to come can recognize their inmost being as the life of the divine and can live in the light of the world as it must and will be, remade in the image of Reason itself.

Attentiveness and intuition must be cultivated, not knowledge itself: "The proper and immediate aim of the new education is to stimulate regular and progressive mental activity. Knowledge results . . . only



incidentally, but as an inevitable consequence” once students grasp “the laws conditioning the possibility of all mental activity.”<sup>24</sup> The ongoing movement of that activity will then be bodied forth in each individual as *Vorbilder* of the “a priori world . . . that exists in the future and remains ever in the future,”<sup>25</sup> and the structures of the future world will grow naturally as graduates strive together to realize those images.<sup>26</sup>

Fichte’s focus on process and attentive presence leads him to the startling claim that reading and writing “have hitherto been the real instruments of wrapping men in fog and shadow”<sup>27</sup> and might best be postponed until the end of the curriculum:

Reading and writing can bring no benefit for the duration of the national education, indeed can prove positively harmful, because they might easily lead the pupil astray from immediate intuition to the mere sign; from the state of attentiveness, which knows that it grasps nothing unless it grasps it here and now, to one of distraction, which consoles itself by scribbling things down on paper and intending some day to learn from those scraps of paper which it probably never will learn; and, just as reading and writing have always done, generally seduce him into the daydreams that so often accompany our dealings with the written word.<sup>28</sup>

For all his talk of images, there remains something distinctly corporeal and embodied about the national education, shown both in Fichte’s references to the drives and his fascinating suggestion that language itself might take second place to an ABC of sensations.<sup>29</sup> The child is first to be led to the highest degree of attentiveness to her own embodied experience, from which the “reflective and free I” develops and can be seen to develop, and “completion of this intuition must precede familiarity with the word-sign.”<sup>30</sup> One might almost say that the aim of the national education is to cultivate ignorance—not the happy stupidity of the peasant in the Paraguayan missions but the supple and perfected *docta ignorantia* of the saint who trusts in the evidence of things not seen, grasping the realm of appearances not as “permanent and given being” but in “the form of onward-flowing life.”<sup>31</sup>

The national education thus promotes genuine *Bildung* in both individual and cultural terms. Its students become in truth what they always were. By surrendering themselves with love to their common life and to

the open-ended, infinite future, they become a people, “the totality of men living together in society and continually producing themselves out of themselves both naturally and spiritually; which collectively stands under a certain special law that governs the development of the divine within it.”<sup>32</sup> This is the reciprocal interaction of each with all which Fichte refers to in the third part of the *Vocation of Man*, and thus it is not just the mark of national identity but the grounding characteristic of humanity and of Reason as it manifests itself in and as the world.

Everything affirmative in the *Addresses* is associated with terms evocative of flowing, infinite movement, and unboundedness. This is never more obvious than in Fichte’s tendentious and frankly unconvincing distinction between living and dead languages, which closely parallels his distinction between the life of future ages and the static and sterile life of the present. The problem with a dead language, like the problem with the present age, is that its connection with the movement of Reason has been cut off. It is a finished product, and the activity that made it is no longer apparent. Only those who speak a living language are engaged in the originary processes that produce both a people and its speech, and only they can look past the words to the generative process itself. Speakers of German, in other words, are uniquely able to unweave and reweave the spell of language, because its foundations are supposedly present in the vocabulary itself.

The distinction between dead languages and living ones—all too obviously a distinction between French and German—parallels the distinction between the third age and the ages of Reason that follow it. This is especially clear in the most interesting of Fichte’s linguistic arguments: that language itself is one of the vehicles through which Reason acts and manifests itself. He devotes several pages to emphasizing this point in different ways: “Men are formed by language far more than language is by men”; “It is not really man who speaks; human nature speaks through him and announces itself to others of his kind”; “It is not really the people that express their knowledge, but rather knowledge that expresses itself through the people.”<sup>33</sup>

Through all of this, which is much more than a mere anticipation of Heidegger, the linguistic theories of the *Addresses* line up with the historical analyses of the *Characteristics of the Present Age*. The present age is the very archetype of a world constituted by a dead language. The burgeoning life of the future ages, by contrast, can form only within the unimpeded activity of a living one, which is why speakers of German

are to lead the way. Their language is always moving forward, continually speaking new individuals within new forms of social life. A dead language, by contrast, can form only a dead people. Its movement has been permanently arrested, and the individuals it gives rise to can move to the limits of that language and no farther.<sup>34</sup> Fichte generously allows foreigners a role in historical progress, but this is limited to the transmission of ideas derived from its borrowed antique past which they cannot bring to fruition on their own.

To kill a living language is thus to murder Reason. Whenever a nation adopts a foreign tongue, either forcibly through conquest or voluntarily through emulation of a supposedly superior culture, the specific approach toward Reason that is implicit in its original form of speech is stopped in its tracks. Were Germany to be absorbed, in fact, all of humanity (which of course is Europe) would perish; "The hitherto constant flow of the culture of our race would indeed come to an end; a state of barbarism would return and, in the absence of salvation, advance until like wild beasts we all dwelt in caves once more and preyed on one another."<sup>35</sup> Here, too, we see the specter of stagnation and decline that so frightens Fichte throughout these talks.

Fichte frequently claimed that the *Wissenschaftslehre* was the only philosophy that could grasp activity and movement, and the same claim could be made for both the German language as he imagines it to be and the national education of the *Addresses*. The new education is to the schooling of the present age what the philosophy of seeing is to traditional philosophy, for schools as they have been do no more than constrain their pupils within the fixed boundaries of preexisting knowledge. They are the letter that kills. Fichte's pupils will imbibe the spirit that giveth life. They will see things as they must be, paradoxically because they have abandoned the delusion that reality can be grasped from the standpoint of discursive, individual knowledge. They live in the fifth age, then, not the fourth.

The fit between Fichte's two philosophical histories seems close here but not exact. But Fichte had already announced the end of the third age at the outset of the *Addresses*, and it may be that the fourth age is as brief as it is necessary, defined and exhausted by a single daunting act. Like the Israelites of the Exodus, who could not enter the Promised Land because they had been degraded by slavery, we must remain exiles in the wilderness. Marx was to castigate those who saw education as the

path to a new world because they forgot to ask who could educate the educators. Fichte was quite aware of this problem, and its insolubility is essential to his proposals in the *Addresses*. In a real sense, we cannot teach the women and men of the new world. All we can do is create the conditions under which they can educate themselves. (The Rousseauian roots of this idea are too obvious to need elaboration.) Our own ethical action is still mandatory, but as the twelfth of the *Addresses* shows, the ethical obligation on the present generation is a kind of inner emigration, an abstention from acts that might pollute the minds of our successors and betters. We are the spiritually dead, and as Jesus told his disciples the dead are to be left behind. We can bury ourselves.

Every prior generation has sought to educate its youth and every age has demanded or at least hoped that its youth would emulate and carry forward the life of the community. This is just what Fichte warns against:

If we possess one spark of love for [our children], we must remove them from our foul atmosphere and build a more salubrious abode for them [and] we must not let the children back from this society into our own until . . . they have learned to loathe the full extent of our corruption and are thereby rendered completely immune to any contamination.<sup>36</sup>

This is why the regimen of his national education is so strict, even draconian. It is not that children are sinners who need to be whipped and molded into shape; Fichte reserves some of his richest invective for those who make this claim. It is that the students must be saved from the world of their parents, the people whom by nature they most wish to please. No half measures will do. For the sake of the future they must be torn from their homes, fated to return only as strangers.

It need not remain this way forever. In a world populated by perfected human beings there would surely be no need for such rigor, and in a few places Fichte does suggest that in future generations the severity of the national schools will likely be relaxed.<sup>37</sup> But in keeping with his general silence about the shape of the world to come he does not elaborate on those suggestions.

Fichte's answer to the second question, then, is twofold. We must not only fashion the people who can make the future world as it should be. We must also renounce our authority as parents and the specific shape

of our hopes for the future. We must consent to our own irrelevance and wish our own world into extinction. The new world can form itself only in isolation from or even in opposition to the old one.

This is an extraordinary demand, but both it and the historical analysis that gave rise to it have a considerable afterlife. In his early writings Marx, too, insisted that he had “no business with the construction of the future or with organizing it for all time.”<sup>38</sup> Although he does not ask the bourgeoisie to give up anything—the proletariat will shortly take matters into its own hands, after all—he also sees the opposition between past and present that Fichte describes. The agent of history in Marx is a class that is radically dispossessed and utterly disconnected from the life of the day. That deprivation alone is what brings the proletariat face to face with the real foundations of humanity. The proletarian revolution will bring about a Fichtean inversion, as the universally deprived class becomes the liberator of all, and this progress-through-reversal will reveal (to adopt Fichte’s words) “the laws of Reason, according to which the Race is to order its relations by means of its own unconstrained Activity and Art.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, because the revolutionary process will be grounded in mutuality and conscious action it inaugurates a world of common self-creation and “free, mutual give-and-take.”

In hopes of creating the New Soviet Man (and Woman) the early Soviet Union experimented with communal child rearing and education, and the Israeli *kibbutzim* did the same. Both projects had motives very close to Fichte’s; their proponents hoped to break habits formed through ages of oppression. Also close to Fichte’s problematic, though, is something that cast far more of a spell over the nineteenth century than any political theory ever did, for the dilemma with which the *Addresses* wrestle is also that of Wotan in Wagner’s *Ring*. To borrow the title of a recent philosophical analysis of the music dramas, Wotan, too, is preoccupied with finding an ending. His is a world of discursive reason, of independent agents binding themselves externally through contracts and treaties. It is also a world of power, managed and negotiated but still always on the verge of exploding into chaos, and Alberich’s ring is both the ultimate prize for Wotan and an existential threat to his world; contracts and treaties cannot survive an infinite concentration of power.

What Wotan comes to see in the course of *Die Walküre* is that he cannot act to recover or neutralize the ring without compounding the very problems that he is trying to solve. The world of power will and must end and his only freedom is to end it in such a way that its replacement is an

improvement. He must will the cancellation of his own willing. The gods thus meet their end thanks to the acts of Siegfried, a hero who should not have been born, and of Wotan's own disobedient daughter Brünnhilde. Brünnhilde, in turn, will consummate the passing of ages by renouncing the power of the ring and her life along with it. The peroration at the end of *Götterdämmerung* suggests the end of the realm of exteriority and power relations and the dawn of a world of mutuality and love which none of the characters of the *Ring* itself can inherit.<sup>40</sup>

Little of this would have been much to Fichte's taste, I am sure—I can hardly see him as a Wagnerian. But if he survived the shock of Bayreuth he might have recognized that, just as *Die Meistersinger* realizes his dream of a history of the free cities of Medieval Germany which “transport[s] us right into the midst of the life of those times,”<sup>41</sup> so the *Ring* cycle dramatizes the impossibility of carrying on business as usual and the imperative that the world be made anew by those whose dreams are unhaunted by the traditions of all the dead generations.

Fichte's philosophical history may not be genuinely historical, but it offers a persuasive analysis and context for what is merely an inchoate yearning in Wagner (and Schiller, too). In his analysis, moreover, the terrors of the historical sublime are tamed by the national education and its grounding in the unity of Reason. Future generations will have learned to follow the moral law out of love, not fear, and the world they will build together is thus one of freedom, equality, and fraternity. The early Marx offers a similar pairing of historical analysis with a theoretically grounded confidence that what lies beyond is not chaos but the emergence of an imminent order. He had no use for Fichte's Reason or anyone's Absolute, but humanity was unified in structurally similar ways through its common labor; relations of production are nothing if not supra-individual, and individuals are formed and form each other through them. Just as strikingly, Marx saw the absolute deprivation of the proletariat and their enforced reliance one on another as a schooling in the same virtues that the national education was to develop. Capitalism, then, created not only its own gravediggers but something akin to Fichte's schools.

Wagner, though, could rely on nothing but a vaporous invocation of Love, and after him came the deluge. Rupert Brooke was not the only one who welcomed the outbreak of World War I—he praised the God who had “matched [him] to the hour” and had invited him to go “into cleanness leaping”—and we all know how that turned out. Yet something like the historical sublime continues to enchant many. Greg Grandin identifies it

in the politics of Henry Kissinger, which he argues came out of beliefs that echo what Runia saw in Schiller: “Action creates our perception of reality; the past has no meaning other than what we in the present assign to it; the future is undetermined; and the greatest of great statesmen are aware of this radical ‘freedom’ . . . and thrive on ‘perpetual creation, on a constant redefinition of goals.’”<sup>42</sup> What is missing remains Reason, or whatever one wishes to call the actual processes whereby individuals make each other and are made. As a result, the Kissingerian sublime opens not on a realm of human freedom and common life but on one of endless crime.

The persistence of the historical sublime, though, suggests that Fichte has brought to light the root of that longing and demonstrated that it issues from a real dilemma, one that shows itself to anyone who suspects the rationality of the world that took shape through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which today holds sway as a fusion of individualism, rights-based political discourse, parliamentary democracy, and industrial capitalism. At the center of capitalist modernity is precisely what Fichte identified as the reigning characteristic of the third age. Isaiah Berlin, whose caricature of Fichte is all too familiar, idealized it as negative liberty, but Mrs. Thatcher expressed it with her customary bluntness. “There is no such thing as society,” she said. The modern world consists of nothing but individuals, and no standard of judgment exists beyond that of their independent judgments added together. If it is not limited to the family, that most problematic of havens in a heartless world, the possibility that individual lives derive from and cannot be separated from their common activity appears only as mysticism or as a fraudulent and ultimately destructive communitarianism forged on the basis of religion, language, geography, or ideology.<sup>43</sup> Even the most daunting common problems, such as those posed by uncontrolled global warming, can be met only by appeals to individual self-interest or, at best, individuals’ sense of responsibility. As Fichte wrote in the *Characteristics of the Present Age*, the concept of humanity as a whole has become a “mere empty abstraction, which has no true life except in the artificial conceptions of some individual, founded only on the strength of his own imaginings; and there is no other whole, and indeed, no other conceivable whole, except in a patchwork of individual parts, possessing no essential and organic unity.”<sup>44</sup> It follows from this that transformative political action is all but impossible to imagine, let alone to carry out. If we are not at the end of history we are, at the least, in a period of arrested development.

Fichte's philosophical history was thus more perspicacious than is often thought, and his analysis of the foundational crises of modernity is equally worth revival. Everything in the world of capitalist modernity arises from the individual and her inherent rights and self-determined needs, but what Fichte argues, against Mrs. Thatcher, is that there are no such things as individuals, only individualizing sub-processes within a complex totality. This is implicit in the *Wissenschaftslehre's* original insight: that self-consciousness can arise only through a parsing of experience into I and not-I, and that this is an activity, not a reflection of a real separation. What emerges with clarity as Fichte develops this theme is that the activity that produces the experience of an "I" cannot be the activity of an I. This insight is the root of the anti-individualism of Fichte's later philosophy, not any desire to subject preexisting individuals to the discipline of an external idea or state.

Set in the context of that insight, the fatal flaw in the modern world is that the Fichtean *Tathandlung* is placed beyond investigation and critique. The act which is both self-making and world-making, the very object of the *Wissenschaftslehre's* philosophy of seeing, is rendered doubly invisible. We see only the appearance of separation that results and that separation is enshrined as the very foundation of personal life and social analysis; it "stands before our outward eye" in both perception and introspection. As a result, we are cut off from the movement which continues to form individuals and society alike; indeed, we constitute ourselves in opposition to that movement. And as Fichte was right to fear, we thereby condemn ourselves to stasis, imprisoning ourselves within a mode of experience that places strict limits on the realm of possible and even thinkable alternative worlds.

In spite of its technological dynamism and its generosity toward individual differences that do not threaten the economic order, modernity forecloses any possibility of real social change, any act that casts in doubt the ironclad separation of sovereign individuals from the world that in reality makes them and is made by their common effort. Fichte's national education was meant to do one thing above all: to raise a generation that would be free of that illusion of separation and which could thus escape the traps of individualism. They would then be able to make a world that was at once free, self-aware, human, and common to all. Its graduates would indeed look on us as strangers.

Fichte's students may sound a bit too much like Stalin's New Soviet Men and Women for our comfort—if they do not sound like the children



of the damned in the science fiction films—but his refusal to construct a future, and more than that his insistence that we of the present age renounce our desire to shape that future, should separate him from all those who would present a vision of the true way of life and impose it on others, be those nationalists, fascists, Bolsheviks, or religious fundamentalists. His confidence that this would be a conscious process separates him as well from organicists such as the thinkers of the German historical schools and those Burkean conservatives who appeal to the unconscious wisdom of tradition. His remains a genuinely progressive vision and his concrete program in the *Addresses* grows out of an engagement with a real problem: how a social transformation can be possible when the foundation of social order lies in the very construction of experience itself. More specifically, it asks how fundamental social change can be possible in an age that justifies its order not by a specific assertion about the character of common activity but on a denial that such activity exists or has any meaningful effect on individual experience. It is hard to say much in favor of the solution he came up with, but, as so often with Fichte, his great achievement was to recognize the problem in the first place. It has not gone away.

### Notes

1. Eelco Runia, *Moved by the Past: Discontinuity and Historical Mutation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), esp. ch. 5, “Thirsting for Deeds: Schiller and the Historical Sublime.”

2. AGN, 83; SW, VII, 281.

3. AGN, 165; SW, VII, 370–71. The process as a whole remains free, but in this instance the human agent is merely an unfree moment in the larger process, no different from non-human animals. This is the appearance of the will by proxy that he refers to in the next quotation.

4. AGN, 165; SW, VII, 371.

5. Fichte, “The Characteristics of the Present Age,” in *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, trans. William Smith (London: John Chapman, 1859), Vol. 2 (henceforth = CPA), 6; SW, VII, 8. I have removed Smith’s italics and most of his capitalizations.

6. CPA, 21; SW, VII, 23. That this was nothing new in Fichte’s post-Jena philosophy can be seen by comparing this passage with the “Second Introduction” to the *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* of 1797, which makes exactly the same point in almost exactly the same language: IWL,

90; *SW*, I, 505.

7. “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation,” *EPW*, 160–61; *SW*, VI, 311.

8. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 435; H. 384.

9. *AGN*, 149; *SW*, VII, 353.

10. *AGN*, 149; *SW*, VII, 353–54; emphasis added. Schiller comes to mind, but Fichte is not arguing that the population must be elevated through education to become worthy of a rational state. His point is that the creation of such a state can be done only by those who have been properly educated.

11. *AGN*, 157; *SW*, VII, 360.

12. *AGN*, 216; *SW*, VII, 421.

13. *AGN*, 288; *SW*, VII, 498–99.

14. It is set out in most detail in *CPA*, 6–10; *SW*, VII, 8–12.

15. *CPA*, 65; *SW*, VII, 66.

16. *CPA*, 72; *SW*, VII, 72–73.

17. *AGN*, 168; *SW*, VII, 373–74.

18. *CPA*, 197; *SW*, VII, 190.

19. *AGN*, 104; *SW*, VII, 306.

20. The mystical and millenarian ideas of the period deserve attention; they are too often either ignored or dismissed as a counter-Enlightenment or mere irrationalism.

21. *AGN*, 209; *SW*, VII, 412.

22. *AGN*, 278; *SW*, VII, 487.

23. *AGN*, 107; *SW*, VII, 309.

24. *AGN*, 88; *SW*, VII, 288.

25. *AGN*, 103; *SW*, VII, 304.

26. *AGN*, 238; *SW*, VII, 444.

27. *AGN*, 198; *SW*, VII, 404–405.

28. *AGN*, 199; *SW*, VII, 405–406. What Fichte would have thought of smartphones can be in no doubt.

29. *AGN*, 200–201; *SW*, VII, 407.

30. *AGN*, 200–202; *SW*, VII, 407–409.

31. *AGN*, 103; *SW*, VII, 304.

32. *AGN*, 176; *SW*, VII, 381.

33. *AGN*, 113; *SW*, VII, 314–15.

34. This parallels the distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism in the *System of Ethics*. The former moves toward the Symbol and stops there (in German the same word means both “symbol” and “creed”) while the latter starts from the Symbol and moves toward an infinite future: *SE*, 230–33; *SW*, IV, 241–45.

35. AGN, 138; SW, VII, 365.
36. AGN, 216–17; SW, VII, 421–22.
37. AGN, 200, 230; SW, VII, 407, 436.
38. Karl Marx, “Letter to Arnold Ruge of September, 1843,” in Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Livingstone and Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 207.
39. CPA, 63; SW, VII, 64.
40. The sole exceptions are the Rhine maidens, but they are scarcely characters in their own right.
41. AGN, 153; SW, VII, 357.
42. Greg Grandin, “The Kissinger Effect,” *The Nation* 301, nos. 13 and 14 (Sept. 28–Oct. 5, 2015), 30. Grandin identifies this as the product of the usual suspect, “an antirationalist and extremely subjectivist strain of German metaphysics.”
43. Fichte’s own linguistic theory certainly runs the risk of collapsing into nationalism, but it can be argued that the underlying aim of the *Addresses* is a genuine cosmopolitanism, and the anti-imperialism of his other writings is nowhere repudiated.
44. CPA, 24; SW, VII, 26.

## Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* and the Philosopher as Guide

TOM ROCKMORE

Two themes come together in Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*: the problem of reason and faith, and the idea of taking the philosopher as a guide to the good life. The former theme concerns progress toward Enlightenment, as distinguished from specific historical phenomena associated with the Enlightenment, and which, depending on the point of view, may or may not culminate in Kant. The latter conception, which goes back in the tradition at least until Plato, is illustrated early in the nineteenth century by Fichte and more than a century later in very different ways by Lukács, Heidegger, as well as other less widely known thinkers. In Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*, this problem is illustrated on two levels: for itself as a specific set of issues but also within Fichte's larger intellectual trajectory.

The Hegelian way of reading the history of philosophy suggests to many observers, especially the Young Hegelians in the 1840s, that philosophy is intrinsically teleological. We are used to a linear conception of philosophy as culminating in a particular historical figure, set of doctrines or conceptual tradition. Yet philosophy does not always progress or advance, in going from triumph to triumph, but also declines.

Elsewhere, I have argued that Fichte's position develops during his time in Jena but later declines. I do not want to repeat that argument here. Suffice it to say that in my view Fichte's *Addresses* belong to the

period of his decline from an early peak reached during the Jena period. Fichte left Jena under a cloud due to the accusation of atheism. A crucial change after the Jena period lies in the “recentering” of his position on a theological basis. Everything happens as if he transformed his position, which was never atheist in either theory or practice, in a way that removed even the possibility of atheism.

If self-demonstrating reason is central to the Enlightenment, then Fichte’s later retreat from self-justifying reason to a pre-Enlightenment effort to base reason in faith represents a decisive change in his position.<sup>1</sup> In the *Addresses* and in other writings after he left Jena, Fichte’s position evolves from a strongly rationalistic, largely successful early effort to improve on Kant in a less rationalist, on occasion even irrational way. One way to put the point is that, instead of continuing to build on the Kantian Enlightenment view that reason successfully justifies itself, he turns increasingly toward the pre-Kantian counter-Enlightenment view that reason, which is not self-justifying, is justified through faith only.

The *Addresses* provides a faith-based account. Though it does not anticipate nor in any obvious way lead to National Socialism, this text has a clear, dangerous similarity to Heidegger’s later thinking in the light of being, or even, shall we say, “national being.” Fichte’s *Addresses* exhibit a turn from an orthodox Kantian perspective, which Fichte claims early and later to follow faithfully. In the *Addresses*, Fichte embarks on a counter-Enlightenment trajectory in casting the philosopher in the role of the conceptual priest. Kant calls attention to the Enlightenment as featuring the idea of daring to know (*sapere aude*) as an indication of reaching an individual’s majority or intellectual maturity. In the *Addresses*, Fichte returns to the pre-Kantian view of the conceptual “minority,” in short to those who in Fichte’s account are unable to think for themselves.

### On the Evolution of Fichte’s Position

The evolution from a religious to a secular approach to cognition is a key achievement in modern philosophy. Descartes, who is often but perhaps incorrectly cast in the role of the first modern thinker, offers a position in which, despite his protests, cognition is finally based on the Cartesian circle. In other words, early in the modern tradition Descartes still bases reason on revelation. Though he limits reason to make room for faith, Kant’s position is secular in that its claims for knowledge, are at least in theory, self-demonstrating, in short, based on reason alone.

Though he began his career through a text on religion, Fichte quickly begins to advance a secular approach to experience from the perspective of the subject in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte's position later reverses this trajectory in evolving from a conception of philosophical reason as self-grounding or perhaps self-justifying, better known in Hegel's theory, to his later view of reason as grounded in faith.

Fichte's view, which is bolder to begin with, rapidly changes after he left Jena in becoming more cautious, and for that and other reasons philosophically less interesting. The Kantian transcendental subject is not based on finite human beings, but rather deduced as the final phase within the transcendental deduction, as the highest point of the critical philosophy, at the cost of depicting the subject as what is sometimes called a mere conceptual placeholder. Fichte, who inverts the relation of cognition to the subject, begins with a view of the latter as a finite human being able to think for itself. Later, he seems to have changed his mind in coming back to his religious roots.

### Spirit and Politics in the *Addresses*

After his expulsion from Jena (1799) on charges of atheism, Fichte developed a complex view of spirit in subordinating his initially secular philosophy to contemporary religious views. According to Fichte, who describes a Kantian dualism, from the perspective of faith the individual belongs to a sensuous as well as a spiritual world, where he operates through the will.<sup>2</sup>

Spirit is an important theme in post-Kantian German idealism. In *The Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu argues for a general spirit influenced by climate, religion, laws, and government.<sup>3</sup> Herder, Kant's former student, but later an important adversary of the critical philosophy, maintains that we understand a particular people through the study of that people's language.<sup>4</sup> His approach is carried farther in views of linguistic relativism due to Wilhelm von Humboldt,<sup>5</sup> who regards language as "a formative organ of thought,"<sup>6</sup> resulting in "differences of representing the world,"<sup>7</sup> the linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, and so on.

In the post-Kantian debate, spirit is important for several reasons: as a transition from a single individual to a plural subject, as a further development of cognition not on an abstract philosophical but on a practical anthropological basis, and with respect to the relation of theory and practice. It is also important in pointing to the link, which Kant combats but

Fichte concedes, between a philosopher and one's historical moment, for instance between Fichte and what we can call the contemporary German spirit. After he left Jena, Fichte believes, like Herder, that a people, for instance, the Germans, has an intrinsic spirit that animates the nation and is manifest in language.<sup>8</sup> In the *Addresses*, Fichte applies his new theory of spirit to politics.

The changes in Fichte's position after his expulsion from Jena also concern his political views. In his very early writings during the 1790s he defends freedom of thought and the French Revolution, if necessary, as he notes, against Napoleon himself. This implies an enthusiasm for French politics. But in the *Addresses*, after the defeat of Prussia by the French at the battles of Jena and Auerstadt, he becomes an ardent defender of Germany against France. Everyone knows these battles were decisive for another German philosopher as well. Hegel, who was an eyewitness, and who, unlike Fichte, admired Napoleon for his historical role, famously remarked that in seeing the French emperor he saw world history on horseback.<sup>9</sup>

### On the Argument in the *Addresses*

The *Addresses* continue and strengthen Fichte's lifelong effort to apply philosophy to politics in the widest possible sense. In this work, Fichte sketches what has been called romantic (or messianic) nationalism in anticipating the question of what it means to be German before that country even existed. The *Addresses* were written three years after *The Fundamental Characteristics of the Present Age*, where, distantly following Kant, Fichte suggests life should be organized according to reason.

The latter work presents a philosophical eschatology. In Fichte's opinion, a providential world plan unfolds in human history leading to progressively greater degrees of freedom and rationality. In the *Characteristics*, he presents in five stages his own version of the traditional Christian view of the return from Athens to Jerusalem. According to Fichte, in the present "age of completed sinfulness" we are poised between a period of blind obedience preceding the Enlightenment and the epoch of liberation where reason will be grasped as knowledge, hence on the verge of being able to think for ourselves, so to speak.

In the *Addresses*, Fichte sketches a view of philosophy as delivering a religious message, a theme wholly absent in the original version

of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In the latter text, Fichte begins to formulate a view of the self-developing subject culminating in the claim, better known in Hegel, but clearly already anticipated in Fichte, that full individuality requires mutual recognition, or recognition by others.<sup>10</sup> In the *Addresses*, following on *The Closed Commercial State* and other writings, Fichte situates human development within the modern state.

Adam Smith, the first great theoretician of capitalism, published the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. The *Addresses* were written only several decades later during the very early days of capitalism. The text begins with the assertion, which sounds surprisingly contemporary, that in the present period everything turns on pernicious materialism. According to Fichte, individuals concerned with acquisition succeed only at the price of losing themselves, in short, in forfeiting the independence of the self. The *Addresses* repeats the view expressed in the *Characteristics* and elsewhere that the solution lies in creating a new age, which already exists as a theory, and which, apparently on the premise that ideas realize themselves, can be realized by describing it.

The argument, such as it is, supposes, that if not all humanity, at least the Germans are specifically threatened, since they are supposedly at a turning point in world history. But with the help of philosophy, above all Fichte's brand of philosophy, the day can be saved by developing, if not all peoples, at least the Germans, or more precisely the German race, that is, those who speak German. This is a unique language, alone among natural languages the primordial tongue of those supposedly selected for a special destiny at this crucial historical moment.

It goes without saying that historical phenomena can be interpreted from divergent perspectives. Fichte reaches this inference in the difficult situation that prevailed early in the nineteenth century. In the 1930s, Heidegger makes a similar argument in identifying with National Socialism in another crucial historical moment.

Fichte, who radiates self-confidence, seems to have few moments of doubt. He appears to be unaware that rational disagreement with his view is possible. It is clear to him that the situation after the Battle of Jena is a historical turning point. There is no premonition that there could be a different way of reading the historical situation, no inkling that a historian should not work only on the a priori plane but must attend to the historical record. In the *Addresses*, he writes: "The true vocation of the human race on earth, I said in those lectures [i.e., the *Characteristics of the Present Age*] whose sequel these addresses are, shall be this, that it fashions itself



with freedom into that which it really and originally is. . . . We are of the opinion that, with respect to time, this time is now, and that at present the race [*Geschlecht*] stands at the true midway point of its life on earth, between its two principal epochs. With respect to space . . . we believe that it falls first and foremost to the Germans to inaugurate the new age, as pioneers and exemplars for the rest of humanity.”<sup>11</sup>

Many things could be said about this passage in which Fichte presents the main orientation of his text. Since Fichte’s day, the historical wheel has continued to turn. Most observers now concede that the biological term *race* (and its synonyms or near-synonyms) is fraught with difficulty for a variety of different reasons, including its association with the alleged superiority (or inferiority) of certain human subgroups.

Perhaps Fichte thought that at the time he was writing the human race as a whole stood at a turning point. Since many observers like to think they are special, this kind of claim is invoked from time to time. It is specifically invoked by Heidegger, perhaps under Fichte’s influence, during the 1930s as Germany was going down the road to World War II. But is less often asserted on a priori grounds, in which case it is even harder to defend, since it would seem that a realistic defense of the exceptional character of historical circumstances, or again a particular people, must appeal to history, which is necessarily a posteriori.

Observers now often think that the very idea of “race” is simply indefensible on biological grounds as well as obviously very dangerous. Gobineau, writing later in the nineteenth century, makes this abundantly clear through his racist theories.<sup>12</sup> Gobineau’s denial that the different races he identifies are all fully human regularly returns from time to time to haunt us. The theme of race regularly intrudes into politics. There is perhaps not a lot of difference between, say, the Rwandan massacres and Heidegger’s dismal references, even before Nazism emerged, to what he dismissively describes from his anti-Semitic standpoint as the “Jewification of the German spirit” (*Verjudung des deutschen Geistes*) and so on.<sup>13</sup>

The dismal history of German philosophical anti-Semitism has often been discussed. Fichte’s overt anti-Semitism, which was prominent at the beginning of his career, later receded. It should neither be denied nor defended. Yet Fichte, who is not a philosopher of being, is also not a racist in Heidegger’s sense. It is useful to revisit this theme, which is a commonplace in the debate, since recent publication of Heidegger’s so-called black notebooks directs attention to the nature and extent of Heideggerian anti-Semitism. Heideggerian anti-Semitism has become clearer, though

perhaps still not wholly clear, through the availability of long-withheld materials, recently in an important discussion by Trawny.<sup>14</sup> This points to the dangers created when philosophers leave the library in virtue of their desire, as Jaspers said about Heidegger, to lead the leaders. Though the Heidegger bibliography is already enormous and rapidly growing, at the time of this writing there is still no general account of his so-called black notebooks.

A century after Fichte, in the period between two world wars, when Heidegger was still early in his career, the debate had clearly taken on a much more violent and clearly more dangerous form. Suffice it to say here that it is plausible to think that Fichte can make all the points he makes in the *Addresses* in alluding to “race” (or its synonyms) in referring in different ways to selected ethnic, religious, or other groups.

This general theme has a prominence now in the debate that it did not have when Fichte was active. Ideas of race and nationalism (and, if there is a difference, patriotism or perhaps jingoism as well) are commingled in more recent debates. Fichte, who died in 1814, had not been active for decades when “race” was theorized by Gobineau in the middle of the nineteenth century. The latter, the first major theoretician of racism,<sup>15</sup> preceded and influenced Spengler, Chamberlain, and others. Gobineau mainly focuses on the superiority of the “white” race, and by implication the inferiority of the “black” and “yellow” races. He was succeeded by and influential on H. S. Chamberlain,<sup>16</sup> a prophet of *völkisch* anti-Semitism influential in National Socialism, especially on Hitler and Goebbels.

Gobineau, who was a philo-Semite, was not an anti-Semite. Fichte and other German idealists, possibly including Kant, were anti-Semitic. Today, Fichte would arguably qualify as a racist for his anti-Semitic views, but the ideology of racism, which was worked out after he died by Gobineau and others, does not apply in the same way to Fichte, who preceded that sorry intellectual chapter.<sup>17</sup> Fichte's form of racism needs to be understood in the historical context. I come back to this theme below.

Fichte, like Heidegger after him, apparently thinks that the Germans are very much like a chosen people. In both cases, a view of Germans in the biblical role that Christianity seems to assign to the Jews is linked to a robust form of nationalism. The glorious German intellectual tradition is widely known and justly celebrated. It is obvious that the Germans have made a special contribution to Western culture through their accomplishments in art, philosophy, literature, and so on. But Fichte, who does not argue in this way, and who needs to identify the “Germans” in order to

analyze their supposedly special historical role, does so in terms of the supposedly special virtues of the German language.

Fichte's claims about the German language apparently reflect the widespread, familiar German Graecophilia prominent since Winckelmann, in terms of which Germany is supposedly the sole authentic heir of the Greeks. Fichte's linguistic claim is based on the supposedly unique resources of the German language, a view Heidegger also shares. When Fichte was active, modern linguistics was just in the process of emerging. Fichte, who had no special knowledge of linguistics, apparently also lacked a wide acquaintance with foreign languages. Yet he does not hesitate to make linguistic generalizations. Thus, he presupposes without any linguistic basis that German is a so-called originary or primordial tongue, whose only competitor is ancient Greek. He further insists without argument of any kind that the other modern languages are simply "dead."<sup>18</sup>

Confidence in or lack of confidence about the natural language one happens on contingent grounds to speak varies. It is perhaps not widely known that at the end of the Qing Dynasty there was serious debate in China about abandoning the ancient Chinese language, which at the time was widely regarded, not least by Chinese native speakers early in the twentieth century, as linguistically deficient. Fichte's conviction about the superiority of German is later echoed by Heidegger, who believes that philosophy worthy of the name can only be done in two languages: modern German and ancient Greek. Suffice it to say that this observation would come as surprising news in France, where it is an item of faith, widely believed but also indemonstrable, that, in part because of the cult of the so-called *mot juste*, French is more precise, hence comparatively better as an instrument of communication, than other natural languages.

Fichte's view that "Germanness" is rooted in the German language raises an interesting point. It seems hard to deny that we experience our world through different natural languages. It is obvious that each natural language has its own special resources but also possible deficiencies with respect to chosen standards. Chinese, for instance, which mainly lacks relative clauses in the Western grammatical sense, accommodates Western philosophy only with difficulty. It is false that anything that can be said in any natural language cannot be said in any other natural language. Yet it is certainly easier, though by no means impossible, to qualify precise meaning, which is a constant Western philosophical concern, in a language in which the relative clause is an important feature. It is historically true that the Western tradition began in ancient Greece, hence in ancient Greek.

Heidegger, who holds that basic concepts, such as the Greek *energeia*, is misrendered in the Latin *actus*, implies but does not and cannot show that Latin or any other natural language cannot accommodate anything that Greek can.

### Fichte and Nationalism

Fichte is clearly an early German nationalist, but equally clearly also more than that. It would make no sense to try to preserve everything in his thought. The task now with respect to his theories is, as for any position in the philosophical tradition, to save what can still be saved. Kant's conception of the subject as the final element, the copingstone, as it were, of the transcendental philosophy, is among other things intended to signal that the philosopher is not in the world but rather insulated from it as a source of a priori knowledge.

As concerns the subject, Fichte differs basically from Kant. Fichte's view of the philosopher, hence of philosophy, as dependent on who one is, hence as not independent of, but rather as rooted in one's historical moment, is both more interesting, more descriptive of who philosophers actually are, and further in evidence in Fichte's effort to locate a way out of the then-present historical predicament.

It is no secret that early in the last century Fichte was deemed interesting by reactionary German political elements. The extent of his possible anticipation of National Socialism is a matter of debate. According to Hans Sluga, "He [i.e., Fichte] added his call for the discovery of the true philosophical order, the resolution of the crisis through a new system of education, the total education of students through service in science, practical labor, and the military. Joining all these ideas together into a single political-philosophical discourse, he anticipated the full array of themes on which philosophers like Heidegger would draw in their speeches and other public declarations in 1933, and in this sense at least, Fichte can truly be called a forerunner of what happened under the Nazis."<sup>19</sup>

Fichte was clearly unlucky in that regard. No one, including Fichte, chooses one's later philosophical reception. Yet though he was an involuntary forerunner of what later happened under the Nazis, it is perhaps still not widely known that he was also a forerunner of, in fact a template for, Heidegger's political turning. It is known that Heidegger was interested in and taught Fichte's writings.<sup>20</sup> Yet the nature and extent of

Heidegger's interest in and dependence on Fichte has not often been studied.<sup>21</sup> Heidegger seems to rely on Fichte, not only in the infamous rectoral address (*Rektorsrede*), delivered when he assumed the rectorship (*Rektorat*) of the University of Freiburg i.B. as Hitler's man in the German academy, but in many other things he said and did during this terrible historical moment.

Kant, who distinguishes between scholastic and cosmopolitan models, proposes what he calls a cosmopolitan theory of philosophy. The latter is at least in principle intrinsically related to the aims of human beings, relevant to human life. Fichte, who distinguishes between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, defends the former view. In "Patriotism and its Opposite," a dialogue written in 1806, just before the Battle of Jena, he observes that, if cosmopolitanism is "the will that the purpose of life and of man be reached in all humanity," then patriotism is "the will that this purpose be reached first of all in that nation whereof we are members."<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to distinguish clearly between nationalism, patriotism, and jingoism, its extreme form. Nationalism includes the defense of the nation, hence national independence, cultural autonomy, and self-determination. Among the many guises of nationalism there is rooting for one's national team, which is surely innocent, as well as the idea of world domination, which is not innocent at all.

One way to characterize the development of philosophy is as an effort to define and defend human reason, which is so often misleadingly cast as reason, reason itself, pure reason, and so on. As concerns nationalism, both Fichte and Heidegger, who is strongly influenced by his predecessor, are clearly embarked on a retreat from reason, criticized by many, including Lukács,<sup>23</sup> which has meanwhile given way to an irrational faith in things German. Certainly, philosophers, who are never reluctant to put themselves forward as a guide to history, do not seem to be any better than anyone else in learning from history nor in undertaking political action.

Fichte and Heidegger agree that the Germans are the chosen people. This kind of view is not unique to reactionary Germans. The analogous view that Americans are a chosen people with a manifest destiny is bound up with the early Puritan tradition. Perhaps the most famous reference occurs in a sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," which was delivered by the Calvinist John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on the *Arabella*, the ship bringing him to the New World. In the sermon, he asserted that the Puritan colonists, who were emigrating to

the New World, had a special pact with God to create a holy community. The reference to the city on the hill alludes to Matthew 5:13–16, in which Jesus compares a believer to a city on a hill.

In his sermon, Winthrop makes two points, both of which seem to have been widely believed by the Puritans: Americans are God's chosen people, and the rich must look after the poor. The first point, which is still very influential in American politics, continues to echo through American history. It is regularly invoked, albeit in implicit fashion, in the idea that in whatever it does the United States is engaged in bringing democracy to the world. This suggests a responsibility of individuals to God. Unfortunately, the second point was quickly forgotten. This latter point indicates a responsibility of individuals to each other, or of the more fortunate to the less fortunate, of the rich to the poor, which runs against the supposition underlying liberal capitalism that the system itself will take care of everyone.

There is not much difference between the Fichte's faith in a higher being apparently uniquely accessible to him, who steps forward in the time of need as, in effect, a philosophical guide, and the amorphous Heideggerian faith in being, which, like the Hegelian view of being that opens the *Logic*, seems to have no qualities at all. The similarity between Fichte's view of Prussia as besieged by France and Heidegger's vision of Germany in the mid-1930s caught between the pincers of the Soviet Union and the United States, between communism and capitalism, is startling and troubling. Both philosophers think we are at a historical turning point in which philosophy in general and a single philosophical position in particular have a crucial role to play in saving the Germans, a supposedly unique people in world history, who are besieged by their enemies in an unfriendly world. Fichte and Heidegger each believe that the German nation has an unprecedented historical role to play. Each comprehends the Germans as speaking a language whose only historical anticipation lies in ancient Greek. Both follow the fraught lead of Plato's *Republic* in which only a philosopher really *knows* in casting himself in the role of the philosophical guide to political salvation.

Nazism, obviously, did not yet exist when Fichte was active. Heidegger's public turn to Nazism, several years after his private political conversion, only occurs in the infamous speech on assuming the rectorate of the University of Freiburg on May 1, 1933. Since he was publicly identifying with National Socialism, this speech is obviously more pernicious than anything Fichte ever wrote. According to Sluga, who points to the

themes of crisis, nation, leadership, and order, Heidegger clearly modeled his carefully constructed speech on Fichte's *Addresses*.<sup>24</sup> The deeper genesis of the talk lies much earlier, in the Platonic view that philosophers have an indispensable political role to play.

Philosophers do fine when they are merely talking about the possibility of acting. Yet they often get into trouble when they go beyond the sanctuary of the library in taking to the streets. In their respective efforts to import philosophy into politics, both Heidegger as well as Fichte fell prey to a fateful Platonic temptation: the claim to know in a way that politicians do not and cannot know, which Aristotle denies, or again the claim to be an unimpeachable source of indispensable knowledge for the good life.

Heidegger, like Fichte, was concerned to realize his philosophical theories in the political world. In retrospect, it is astonishing how many of the things Heidegger either said or did in the 1930s during his overt Nazi period were drawn from, modeled on, or inspired by his illustrious predecessor.<sup>25</sup> They include the work camps Heidegger helped to set up during his period as Hitler's rector in the University of Freiburg, the efforts to remodel the educational system that he shared with Jaspers, the view that he could defend reason in striving to realize the Nazi view of human being, his anti-Semitism, which was long denied but has recently been confirmed through the recent publication of the so-called *schwarze Hefte*, and so on. Yet Heidegger goes well beyond anything Fichte ever did, in his shameful denunciation of colleagues, in the infamous denial of the difference between agricultural technology and racial extermination, in the decades-long hidden effort to rewrite his texts to direct attention away from secretly held views, and so on.

### Germanness in Question

It was noted above that Fichte is best understood in his historical context. According to G. A. Kelly, the two main themes in the *Addresses* are realizing the full potential of Germanness and the justification of the German mission.<sup>26</sup> This supposes that the Germans have a potential unlike that of any other people, and that they, further, have a mission all their own. Since the Germans are a people unlike any other people, by implication they should be handled differently.

It appears legitimate to think a national entity should be defended in cases of aggression, but illegitimate to think it should be defended because it is special in specifiable racial, national, or theological ways. The related idea that a certain segment of the population on religious, racial, or other grounds does not and should not qualify for equal treatment is now rightly viewed as questionable. Yet when Fichte was active, religious freedom, which was not yet in fashion, was not widely favored. We tend to forget that the poet Heine left Germany for France on grounds of religious freedom, and that the young Marx and his entire family were baptized in order to escape religious discrimination. At the time, philosophers were not more but often less liberal. Thus, Kant, the apostle of reason, was in favor of the "euthanasia" of Judaism.<sup>27</sup>

Fichte held similar views. The identity of the chosen people is as mysterious as the claim. The Old Testament suggests that the Jews have a covenant with God. Fichte indirectly attacks this idea near the beginning of his career. In an early work from 1793 dealing with the ideals and politics of the French Revolution, entitled "Contributions to the Correction of the Public's Judgment concerning the French Revolution," he infamously calls Jews a "state within a state" that could "undermine" the German nation.<sup>28</sup> In regard to Jews getting "civil rights," he writes that this would only be possible if one managed "to cut off all their heads in one night, and to set new ones on their shoulders, which should contain not a single Jewish idea."<sup>29</sup> Yet the record is mixed, since during his period in Berlin he later prominently intervened on behalf of a Jewish student.

This is not the place to discuss the long history of German anti-Semitism. Suffice it to say that Fichte was not alone in finding it difficult to accept anyone who deviated from his view of the religious norm, in this case Christianity. Suffice it to say that he was particularly noteworthy for his stubborn inability to change his mind in this respect. Anti-Semitism is a pernicious, particularly persistent form of racism. German philosophical racism was by no means confined to Fichte. Kant, for instance, initially embraced a racism centered on the supposed superiority of Caucasians, a view he later abandoned.<sup>30</sup> Yet the significance of this view is unclear, since he inconsistently but persistently defended equal rights for all races.<sup>31</sup>

Though it is an item of religious belief, there is probably never sufficient evidence to infer that, say, a certain religious sect, group, or so on is favored by the deity. This and related views depend on logically prior claims, which are not demonstrable, but rather, like religious dogma in



general, asserted on the basis of faith. Joseph Ratzinger's suggestion that dialogue with other faiths is not possible, since that would presuppose one is searching for the truth, whereas the particular religion he favors in fact possesses it, suggests religious dogma is not merely believed or ought to be believed but is in fact true.<sup>32</sup> Roughly the same view is at work in the regrettably frequent refusal of Darwinian evolution on grounds of religious faith.

Fichte's adoption of the very idea that one subpopulation should be defended in preference to another points to a deep difficulty. If all individuals are equally worthy, since all are made in God's image, then it becomes difficult to grasp why in ordinary or even in extraordinary situations, such as war, famine, or the like, one should defend some segment of the population and not others. One could object that for contingent reasons we are sometimes forced into moral triage, so that members of one religion should be interested in or in difficult situations give preference to their religious brethren on strictly practical grounds. Yet from the religious point of view such a choice is obviously impossible to justify, hence inadmissible.

The nationalistic attachment to "Germanness," or the mere fact of being German, or, again, even speaking German is obviously open to question. It seems utterly fantastic to think that, say, Germans should be defended because they are Germans and not because human beings everywhere should have the same basic rights, which can and should be enforced. This is arguably the central message of the French Revolution, a message that just as arguably has in the meantime been forgotten, in France as well as elsewhere. It is unfortunate but true that in contemporary France there is considerable difficulty in acknowledging other peoples are worthy of equal consideration on all the different levels that make up modern life.

## Conclusion

Fichte's *Addresses* is an occasional writing prepared in a time of national catastrophe. But it remains interesting for its obvious nationalism, its place in the evolution of his position, and its relation to the times in which it was written. Above, it was noted that Kant's secular conception of the Enlightenment turns on the progression from human minority to human

majority, or the point in which individuals are finally empowered to think for themselves. I have argued that after he left Jena, Fichte holds a version of the Platonic view that only philosophers really know, that he reverses the Enlightenment emancipation of reason from faith in founding reason in faith, or politics in religion, and that his view of faith is politically dangerous.

Though he claims to be a genuine Kantian, after the end of the Jena period Fichte distantly but firmly follows the Platonic view that only the philosopher knows. He, paradoxically, understands the philosopher as someone who freely reasons in independence of external authority as well as the source of the authorized Christian message. This view regresses with respect to Kant's suggestion that the moral individual can and indeed must decide individually in framing a rule that applies to everyone, and with respect to Hegel, who appeals to a plural subject in basing ethical action on a shared ethos.

Fichte is a philosopher of freedom, whose model changes when he leaves Jena from a secular to a religious approach, in which philosophy increasingly stands in for organized religion in guiding the individual. There is a deep tension, even a contradiction, between Fichte's interest in freedom and his authoritarian appeal to a religious model as a necessary condition of the fulfilled life. Fichte's desire, in the wake of the Napoleonic invasion, to apply philosophy to Prussian politics, accords with his consistent aim to join theory to practice. Yet this step forward in his position is assorted with a step backward. For he depicts the philosopher as someone who intervenes on behalf of true religion in order to bring about the Christian realm on earth. This is a retreat behind the modern effort to free reason from faith.

Whether we are enthralled or repelled by Fichte's suggestion that the possibility of being an authentic individual depends on seeking guidance from the philosophical community depends, as Fichte himself notes, on who one is. Philosophy is probably never wholly independent of, but rather mostly, perhaps always, dependent on normative concepts. This points to an important question, which remains to be answered. I think we must ask: In Fichte's retreat from independent philosophical reason in his return to religion, in his philosophical return from Athens to Jerusalem, does he undermine what he earlier accomplishes? For when the debate has ended, philosophy's home lies not in Jerusalem but in Athens.

## Notes

1. See Tom Rockmore, “The Traction of the World, or Fichte on Practical Reason and the *Vocation of Man*,” in *Fichte’s Vocation of Man: New Interpretive and Critical Essays*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 145–54.

2. See *Book Three: Faith*, in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Roderick M. Chisholm (Indianapolis: LLA, 1950), 83–154.

3. See Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. David Wallace Carrithers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 289.

4. See *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, in J. G. Herder, *Ideen zur Kulturphilosophie*, ed. Otto Braun and Nora Braun (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1911), 260.

5. See Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language. On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and Its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

6. “*Das bildende Organ des Gedankens*,” in Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte-Schriften*, vol. VI, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: B. Behr’s Verlag, 1907), 152.

7. *Verschiedenheit der Weltansichten*, in J. G. Fichte, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 4, 27.

8. See the Seventh and Eighth Addresses in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. George A. Kelly (New York: Harper, 1968), 92–130.

9. See Hegel’s letter to Niethammer, October 13, 1806, where Hegel writes: “I saw the Emperor—this world-soul—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it.” *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christine Seiler, with commentary by Clark Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 114.

10. See Robert R. Williams, *Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

11. See J. G. Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. Gregory Moore (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

12. See J. A. de Gobineau, *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1856; rpt. Garland, 1984).

13. See, for discussion, Ulrich Sieg, “*Die Verjudung des deutschen Geistes*,” *Die Zeit*, December 22, 1989, 50. See further Martin Heidegger, “*Mein liebes Seelchen!*,” in *Briefe Martin Heidegger an seine Frau Elfriede 1915–1970*, ed. Gertrude Heidegger (Munich: DVA, 2005), 51.

14. See, for discussion, Peter Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann Verlag, 2014).

15. See Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* (1853–1855), trans. Adrian Collins (London: Heinemann, 1915).

16. See H. S. Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), trans. John Lee (London: John Lane Company, 1911).

17. See Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

18. See, for discussion, Jere Surber, *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1996).

19. Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 41.

20. See Martin Heidegger, *Der deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart* (Summer semester 1929), ed. C. Strube. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997.

21. See, for recent discussion, Mário Jorge de Carvalho, "Fichte, Heidegger, and the Concept of Facticity," in *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. Violetta L. Waibel, Daniel Breazeale, and Tom Rockmore (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 225–60.

22. See J. G. Fichte, "Patriotism and its Opposite," trans. G.H. Turnbull. *Educational Theory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), 160–70.

23. See Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1981).

24. Sluga, "Heidegger's Use of the Themes of Crisis, Nation, Leadership, and Order Derived, in Fact, Directly from Fichte's *Addresses*," in *Heidegger's Crisis*, 31.

25. For an analysis of the *Rektoratsrede*, see Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1992), 55–73.

26. See Fichte, *Addresses to The German Nation*, ed. George A. Kelly, xxviii.

27. Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 9.

28. J. G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* I/1. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 292–93.

29. Ibid.

30. See Pauline Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Colonialism," in *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 43–67. Kleingeld points out that in the *Anthropology* lecture notes from 1781–82: Kant holds that only the white race "contains all incentives and talents in itself"; the American indigenous people, by contrast, are said to be indifferent and lazy and to acquire no culture; the "Negro race . . . acquire[s] culture, but only a culture of slaves; that is, they allow themselves to be trained"; the "Hindus" finally "acquire culture

in the highest degree, but only in the arts and not in the sciences. They never raise it up to abstract concepts” (AA 25:1187). In the 1798 *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* he alters his view as he comes to realize that race cannot have any pragmatic relevance, but concerns no more than physiological knowledge of the human being, more precisely “what *nature* makes of the human being”; such knowledge has no direct bearing on our pragmatic knowledge of the human being, which is concerned with what man “as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself” (AA 7:119). Yet he also inconsistently defended the equal rights of non-Caucasians.

31. See S. M. Shell, “Kant’s Conception of a Human Race,” in *The German Invention of Race*, ed. S. Eigen and M. Larrimore (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 55–72.

32. See Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, trans. Michael Moore (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

## World War I, the Two Germanies, and Fichte's *Addresses*

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When World War I erupted in 1914, the consequences of the conflict varied in magnitude. One of the lesser but telling consequences concerned the unfortunately named Basil Cameron Hindenberg, conductor of the Torquay Municipal Orchestra in Devon, England. Deciding that it would be prudent to drop his family name, he made a public announcement that henceforth he would be known simply as Basil Cameron.<sup>1</sup> His was hardly the only change of this sort provoked in Britain and America by the hostilities: from the British royal house to the street signs of Chicago and Cincinnati, name changes were the order of the day. And the reason for this was obvious: German names, and indeed connections to anything German, had become a liability. This antipathy expressed itself in the philosophical world of Britain and America just as it did in other parts of British and American life; it also played a perhaps insufficiently appreciated role in the history of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy. It is not surprising, then, that German philosophy occupied a central place in public discussions of the intellectual background of the then-contemporary German regime, and Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* was among those works adduced both by those who attempted to make the case that the philosophical ancestry of the German empire could be traced to the classical idealist tradition of the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries as well as by those who argued

that the outlook of contemporary Germany was rather the result of an utter rejection of that tradition. It is a mistake to expect probing, or even accurate, interpretations in most of the genealogical debates involving these works, but nevertheless the observer finds here a fascinating use of philosophical texts for wartime purposes, with results for philosophy that extended far beyond the time period of the conflict.

At the time of the outbreak of World War I, many in Britain and America felt close attachments to Germany. While some of this is to be accounted for by, say, the large numbers of German immigrants the United States had received both before and after 1848, and by beliefs that the English and Germans shared a common ethnic heritage, academic connections were to prove even more significant in the context of the present discussion. Germany had in recent times become the recognized European leader in scholarship, a destination for those who aspired to absorb the spiritual context that provided the framework in which such scholarly activity proceeded, or who at least aimed to master the emerging scientific methodology in fields ranging from psychology to theology. "Between 1820 and 1920 almost nine thousand Americans studied in German universities—the majority during the last decades of the nineteenth century—either receiving advanced training as part of an American doctoral program or, more typically, taking a German Ph.D. degree."<sup>2</sup> These connections often developed in more informal ways, too, as the case of Benjamin Jowett and his students exhibits: he traveled to Germany in the 1840s, reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in the original on the way and meeting with Erdmann in Dresden with the aim of ascertaining the best manner of approaching Hegel's works.<sup>3</sup> Even decades later when his enthusiasm for Hegelian metaphysics had somewhat cooled, Jowett could still write to Lord Arthur Russell with warm gratitude for the receipt of a bust of Hegel to which he was glad to give a position of distinction in the library at Balliol: "The bust arrived safely and was unpacked safely. I like it very much. Hegel looks quite a gentleman, and as you are kind enough to promise us a bust of Kant, he will not be altogether forlorn in the College Library, where he will observe (to his surprise) that his works in twenty-one volumes have been well worn and have inspired some generations of Englishmen."<sup>4</sup> For it was Jowett who had steered both Thomas Hill Green and Edward Caird toward German philosophy and taught them "their Hegelian alphabet."<sup>5</sup> Visits to Germany by the new generation of idealists were common; some, such as Josiah Royce and Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, spent extended periods of university study there, whereas others gained access to Germany's philosophical tradition

through less formal visits. Close relations with Germany were supported by leading British scholars, including prominent idealists, in nonacademic contexts as well. For example, Caird and J. H. Muirhead were members of the Anglo-German Friendship Society that sprang up in 1905 in the wake of the strained relations resulting from the Boer War.<sup>6</sup> Thus, while the Great War led some, like the University of Chicago historian William E. Dodd, to feel almost ashamed that their academic credentials had been bestowed by a people who were now regarded as “the enemy of mankind,”<sup>7</sup> others were naturally inclined to defend the land to which they felt indebted.

The typical defense against the attacks that were all too soon in coming took the form of drawing distinctions, distinctions between good Germans and bad Germans or between the good Germany and the bad Germany. The literary scholar C. H. Herford gives an example of drawing distinctions within the populace itself; he noted that it was commonplace to divide “the German people into two alien hosts”: on the one hand, “the thinkers, the idealists, the science-workers, the musicians, and the millions of kindly men and women” whose natural *Gemütlichkeit* charmed and disarmed their visitors; on the other, the “brutally aggressive military caste.” But he also noted that the division can be formulated in geographical terms as well, for he observed that the distinction was often made by “postulating a fundamental contrast between Prussia and the rest of the German nation.”<sup>8</sup>

However, the distinction that most concerns us is not that between “good Germans” and “bad Germans” circa 1914, and while it involves a contrast between the “good Germany” and the “bad Germany,” it is not exactly that between Prussia and the remainder of the country, either. Rather, the distinction is a historical one, with the age of Goethe, Beethoven, and Kant, on the one hand, contrasted with the age of Treitschke, Bernhardt, and the Kaiser, on the other. Above all, in the manner that will concern us the most, it is the distinction and indeed an opposition between German idealism and what was regarded as German militarism. The dispute that takes place at the time of World War I, a dispute in which Fichte's *Addresses* have a prominent role to play, is a debate as to whether this distinction is tenable: Were German idealism and German militarism opposed to one another or was the latter the natural outgrowth of the former?

Those who favored the view of an opposition between an earlier “good Germany” and the more recent “bad Germany” were not helped by German academics themselves, for in October 1914 ninety-three prominent German scholars published a so-called “Manifesto of the Intellectuals



of Germany,” whose signatories included such figures as Rudolf Eucken, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, and Wilhelm Windelband, along with other leading figures in the arts, humanities, and sciences. The Manifesto contains a strong denial of the charges of brutal and illegal behavior in Belgium and of the charges that Germany was responsible for the war in the first place. What is of most importance here, however, is the Manifesto’s claim that German civilization and German militarism have been inextricably connected with one another: “*It is not true* that the combat against our so-called militarism is not a combat against our civilization, as our enemies hypocritically pretend it is. Were it not for German militarism German civilization would long since have been extirpated.” In the eyes of the authors of the Manifesto, this war of 1914 is just one more effort aimed at the preservation of the precious German cultural heritage, a heritage that owes its continued existence to the protection of the German army. They conclude by affirming the civilized means that will continue to be used to protect and preserve this heritage: “Believe that we shall carry on this war to the end as a civilized nation, to whom the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven, and a Kant is just as sacred as its own hearths and homes.”<sup>9</sup> Needless to say, the Manifesto was not well received in Britain and America; at the very least, it was regarded as evidence that the connection between German culture and German militarism was indissoluble.

As Engelbrecht noted in 1933, “While the Germans generally invoked more militant prophets than Fichte to lead them during the War, Fichte was a welcome target for the allies.”<sup>10</sup> He was also, however, appealed to by those who sought to identify German idealism with the “good Germany.” The different directions that interpretation of classical German philosophy and its relation to the catastrophic events of 1914 offered can be seen particularly well in the alternative readings given to a few passages from the last lecture of Fichte’s *Addresses*. This peroration proved irresistible to those seeking to bring Fichte into the current conflict. Fichte has already imagined how these addresses might entreat the young and old, the statesmen and thinkers and princes of Germany; he now imagines how their forefathers, uniting with these addresses, would entreat all Germans. In a memorable passage, these forefathers insist, “Nor, since things are as they are, shall you conquer them with weapons of steel; your spirit only shall rise up before them and stand tall. Yours is the greater destiny, to found the empire of spirit and reason, and to annihilate completely the crude physical force that rules the world.”<sup>11</sup> This text, quoted wholly or in part, was to garner considerable attention from numerous authors.

In the early fall of 1914, G. Dawes Hicks, professor of moral philosophy at University College, London, published an analysis of the intellectual developments that had led to the current attitude to be found within much of Germany.<sup>12</sup> He certainly makes the distinction, among his continental contemporaries, between the “bad Germans,” those who have succumbed to the effects of the Prussianization of German society by Bismarck, and the “good Germans,” who continue to work in the spirit of an older and better tradition. On the one hand, he observes how Prussian militarism has stifled humanistic culture, depriving the citizen of freedom and initiative, with the result that his “individuality is crushed out of him by police and soldiery.” On the other, he contrasts this state of affairs with his own experiences of four years of study at Leipzig in the 1890s: “The kindly helpfulness of its teachers, their unfailing support and encouragement in the work one was attempting to do, their genial hospitality, their continued friendship in after years—these are experiences by which life for me has been immeasurably enriched, and without which it would be an infinitely poorer thing.”<sup>13</sup> However, the focus of the essay is to identify and defend the historical distinction between the good Germany of German idealism and the bad Germany of Prussian militarism and those postidealist philosophers who had prepared its way. The speculative materialism of Feuerbach and Marx was accompanied after mid-century by a sort of practical materialism: “The old ideal of a *Kulturstaat* sank into the background, and Bismarck’s faith in brute force gained more and more the ascendancy.” The result, however, was “retrograde and hollow,” for although Bismarck “had created a huge army and stimulated the rush for wealth, he could not bring back to Germany the days of Kant, of Goethe, of Fichte, and of Hegel.”<sup>14</sup> While Schopenhauer and Nietzsche also have their part to play in this account of the de-moralizing of German culture, we return to Fichte’s *Addresses* and his call on his contemporaries “to found the empire of spirit and reason.”

We will revisit the fact that Hicks quotes not only the sentence including the line just mentioned, about founding an empire of mind and reason, but also the preceding sentence, which he renders as, “Strive not to conquer with bodily weapons, but stand before your opponents firm and erect in spiritual dignity.”<sup>15</sup> Inclusion of this makes it clear that, for Hicks, Fichte was opposing bodily weapons and physical power to a more spiritual realm that would overcome these material forces. Fichte—“wise and honest patriot as he was”—was thus urging his countrymen “[n]ot to vain military conquest or display, but to the task of carrying forward

the great spirit of civilization.”<sup>16</sup> Fichte was calling his fellow Germans to a cultural accomplishment that they in an important measure had in fact achieved. “His belief in the power of the German people to devote themselves to the construction of a spiritual empire was genuine and sincere, and the subsequent history of German *Wissenschaft* shows him to have been no false prophet.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, for Hicks, the spiritual empire of Fichte contrasts with the material empire of Bismarck: the freedom that formed the philosophical basis of that spiritual empire—“that by spiritual individuality man was raised above the dominance of mere material power, and could attain a level of independence from which the natural world could be moulded to his ideas and purposes”<sup>18</sup>—had been under attack by the postidealist philosophers and finally, at least for many of Hicks’s German contemporaries, extinguished by the Prussian state, whose military successes accompanied, and to a certain extent produced, a coarse economic equivalent in Germany’s commercial accomplishments.

George Santayana, in his neutrally titled 1916 survey of *Egotism in German Philosophy*, makes his orientation clear from the outset: “During more than twenty years, while I taught philosophy at Harvard College, I had continual occasion to read and discuss German metaphysics. From the beginning it wore in my eyes a rather questionable shape. Under its obscure and fluctuating tenets I felt something sinister at work, something at once hollow and aggressive.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is hardly surprising that when he looks at the text we have just been considering, he did not read it in the same way. Omitting the first sentence, he paraphrases the second as follows: “The dominion of unorganised physical force must be abolished by a force obedient to reason and spirit.”<sup>20</sup> We should not, however, be led to conclude from this that Fichte is at all interested in contrasting spiritual with physical forces, as was the case with Hicks. Rather, Santayana sets up this statement by noting, in regard to a life of Fichtean duty, “We must not suppose that this prescription of austere and abstract aims implies any aversion on Fichte’s part to material progress, compulsory *Kultur*, or military conquest.” Because the mission of German idealism was identified as the consecration of the world, revealing every part of it as an organ of the spirit, Santayana interprets Fichte in this passage as giving “us prophetic glimpses of an idealistic Germany conquering the world.”<sup>21</sup> Santayana appears to seek to reconcile this view with the passage under consideration by reading “*die rohe körperliche Gewalt*”<sup>22</sup> (“crude physical force” in Moore’s translation, “rude physical power” in Hicks’s) as “unorganized physical force.” By so doing, the opposition becomes not that

between the physical and the spiritual but rather between disorder and order. "Natural freedom," on Santayana's account of the Fichtean view, "is a disgraceful thing, a mere medley of sensual and intellectual impulses without any principle of order."<sup>23</sup> He is thus able to represent Fichte as the advocate of the German conquest of disorder by the imposition of order by a force that, while "obedient to reason and spirit," is only too happy to achieve this goal by "compulsory *Kultur*, or military conquest," should those options be available. And the conquest begins at home, for, notes Santayana, "[i]f the people are disinclined to obey the Idea, the government must constrain them to do so."<sup>24</sup>

A passage from the final lecture of the *Addresses* that also attracted much attention comes from its very conclusion: Fichte strikingly places the burden of the salvation of the human race squarely on his German contemporaries, insisting that "[t]here is, then, no way out: if you sink, all humanity sinks with you, without hope of future restoration."<sup>25</sup> Hicks quotes this passage, granting that Fichte draws upon some "extravagant assumptions" in making his case for the special role allotted to the German people. He insists, however, that "Fichte's patriotism may, in this particular, have overreached his calmer judgment, but it had in it nothing of the noisy pomp of political self-esteem."<sup>26</sup> This, of course, is in keeping with his theme that Fichte was opposing the empire of mind and reason to the brute force of military power. J. H. Muirhead also entered the fray, offering a series of lectures at the University of Birmingham aimed at showing that the current militaristic state came about not as the natural development of German idealism but as a result of the radical reaction against it in the course of the nineteenth century. Published with a forward dated "February, 1915," Muirhead's brief treatment of Fichte takes off from J. R. Seeley's *Life of Stein* (first published in 1878). Seeley interrupts a passage he is quoting from Stein's autobiography where Stein speaks of "the great effect upon the feelings of the cultivated class" that Fichte's *Addresses* achieved.<sup>27</sup> Seeley then devotes several pages to the ideas of the *Addresses*, culminating in a description of Fichte's work that Muirhead was himself to quote: "I should not have lingered so long over this book if it did not strike me as the prophetic or canonical book which announces and explains a great transition in modern Europe."<sup>28</sup> Muirhead quotes the close of the *Addresses* at length, including the passage under consideration, remarking that Fichte succeeded not only "in summoning the creative spirit in politics from its long slumber in the German people" but also in his personal impact: "The actual course of the new constructions

was largely fashioned by men who were steeped in Kantian and Fichtean ideas,” men such as Stein, von Schön, and Humboldt.<sup>29</sup> The “creative spirit in politics” reached its highest philosophical expression, in Muirhead’s view, in the work of Hegel, and Muirhead writes at greater length of Hegel’s view of the state and the individual, insisting that his teaching is mistakenly thought to be reflected in the contemporary German state: “It is not in Hegelianism, but in the violent reaction against the whole Idealist philosophy that set in shortly after his death, that we have to look for the philosophical foundations of present-day militarism.”<sup>30</sup> Muirhead’s history of this “violent reaction” treats of pessimism, materialism, Darwinism, and egoism, discussing many of the same figures that appear in the historical sketch provided by Hicks, but includes a further chapter on Nietzsche, Treitschke (the nationalist historian), and Bernhardt (the Prussian general whose *Germany and the Next War* had been published in English translation in 1913). At the conclusion of this latter chapter he writes, “It is not my business here to discuss the truth of these ideas. By their fruits ye shall know them. Philosophy, I have already claimed, is justified—or condemned—of her children. My task has been to show that they are not the offspring of what is commonly known as German Philosophy [by which he means German idealism], but, on the contrary, are the legitimate issue of a violent reaction against all that German Philosophy properly stands for.”<sup>31</sup> Again, we see the distinction between the good Germany, the Germany of the idealists, and the bad Germany, the immoral militarists who advance their ideas only by rejecting all that the good Germany of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel represents.

Also in February 1915, John Dewey delivered three lectures at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill which were published shortly thereafter; their subject was *German Philosophy and Politics*. The discussion of Fichte’s *Addresses* is of particular interest because both the passages we have been examining enter into its treatment. The text that foresees the Germans establishing an empire of spirit and reason is placed in its larger context of contrasting Germanic with Roman principles. The Germans of old saved the world from the Roman Empire of antiquity; the task of the Germans of the present day is to save the world from the new Romanism—presumably represented by Napoleon—by establishing, in Dewey’s rendering, “once for all the Kingdom of the Spirit and of Reason, bringing to naught corporeal might as the ruling thing in the world.” That the situation in 1915 is still understood as a contest between Germanism and Romanism Dewey makes clear by immediately

adding that "this antithesis of the Germanic and the Roman principles has become a commonplace in the German imagination."<sup>32</sup> Dewey points out that Fichte sees the triumph of Germanism over Romanism as "no selfish gain" but a triumph for the human race, thus explaining the appearance of the second passage we have been considering at the conclusion: (in Dewey's translation) "There is no middle road: If you sink, so sinks humanity entire with you, without hope of future restoration."

A striking point about the contrast of the way Hicks interprets the passage about the empire of spirit and reason and the way that Santayana and Dewey interpret it lies in the fact that, as noted, Hicks includes the preceding sentence, while neither Santayana nor Dewey does. That sentence reads, in Moore's translation, "Nor, since things are as they are, shall you conquer them with weapons of steel; your spirit only shall rise up before them and stand tall." Naturally, Hicks sees fit to include this sentence, for it supports his reading of Fichte as advocating spiritual rather than martial means and aims, as I remarked earlier: recall his statement that Fichte was calling his countrymen to advance the great spirit of civilization, not to pursue military conquest or display. Just as naturally does Santayana omit it, for its inclusion would complicate his presentation of Fichte as eager to employ compulsion and military force to impose order on disorder. (Of course, Santayana could have read the clause "since things are as they are" as suggesting that in other circumstances an appeal to military force would be welcomed, but such an interpretation would still be complicated by the opposition of weaponry and spirit that follows.) Dewey's reasons for omission are, I think, similar to Santayana's but more carefully worked out.

Dewey follows his quotation of Fichte's call to save humanity with a paragraph that deserves to be quoted at some length. It is reminiscent of the overview of modern cultural history Fichte presents in the Sixth Address,<sup>33</sup> but with added flourishes regarding the state and the military that are Dewey's own.

The premises of the historic syllogism are plain. First, the German Luther who saved for mankind the principle of spiritual freedom against Latin externalism; then Kant and Fichte, who wrought out the principle into a final philosophy of science, morals and the State; as conclusion, the German nation organized in order to win the world to recognition of the principle, and thereby to establish the rule of freedom

and science in humanity as a whole. The Germans are patient; they have a long memory. Ideas produced when Germany was divided and broken were retained and cherished after it became a unified State of supreme military power, and one yielding to no other people in industrial and commercial prosperity. In the grosser sense of the words, Germany has not held that might makes right. But it has been instructed by a long line of philosophers that it is the business of ideal right to gather might to itself in order that it may cease to be merely ideal. The State represents exactly this incarnation of ideal law and right in effective might. The military arm is part of the moral embodiment. Let sentimentalists sing the praises of an ideal to which no actual force corresponds. Prussian faith in the reality and enforcement among men of the ideal is of a more solid character.<sup>34</sup>

This follows immediately on the paragraph in Dewey devoted to the exposition of Fichte's *Addresses* and quoting extensively from them, but it is very peculiar considered as exegesis. Germans may have a long memory, but Dewey does not: while he remembers that Fichte tells his countrymen that they will establish the kingdom of the spirit and of reason, he forgets (or in any case neglects to mention) that Fichte maintains that the kingdom will be established not by physical but by spiritual means. Indeed, in the passage Dewey (along with Santayana) has conveniently omitted Fichte himself emerges as what is here described as a sentimentalist, who quite clearly *does* sing the praises of an ideal to which no actual force corresponds. In fact, Fichte not only sings the praises of such an ideal, he forecasts the "greater destiny" of his own generation, for while bereft of "weapons of steel," their spiritual and rational weapons are nevertheless going to succeed in annihilating that crude, merely physical force that Napoleon's armies represent. Not for Dewey and Santayana the Fichte who writes, "The armed struggle is ended; now there begins, if we so will it, the new battle of principles, of morals and of character";<sup>35</sup> rather, Dewey joins Santayana in leaving out the passage in which Fichte opposed spiritual to material weapons and predicted the victory of the former over the latter for what would seem to be the same, clear reason: it does not fit his narrative of Fichte as one of the philosophers counseling Germans to gather might to themselves so that their military can enforce the ideal.

Dewey is clear that authors such as Hicks and Muirhead who attempt to find the source of the current German situation in developments aris-

ing since the age of idealism read their history in a naive and mistaken fashion. In this case, the German notion that history presents us with the progressive unfolding of ideas that ever more explicitly realize their inner meaning is entirely accurate, and the militaristic idea embodied in the contemporary German regime is nothing more than the maturation of ideas earlier implanted by the likes of Fichte and Hegel. "Since his [Hegel's] day, histories of philosophy, or religion, or institutions have all been treated as developments through necessary stages of an inner implicit idea or purpose according to an indwelling law. And the idea of a peculiar mission and destiny of German history has lost nothing in the operation. Expressions which a bewildered world has sought since the beginning of the war to explain through the influence of a Darwinian struggle for existence and survival of the fittest, or through the influence of a Nietzschean philosophy of power, have their roots in the classic idealistic philosophy culminating in Hegel."<sup>36</sup>

It would of course be mistaken to think that discussion of German philosophy during the war focused only on Fichte's *Addresses*, or indeed only on Fichte. As previous remarks make clear, other German philosophers, from Kant to Nietzsche, entered into the debate. As we have just seen, German idealists beyond Fichte certainly played a central part in the controversy. To take but two further examples. On September 21, 1914, a letter to the editor of the (London) *Times* appeared from an author identified only as "Continuity."<sup>37</sup> Entitled "The New Barbarism: A Prophecy," the letter begins with a lengthy quotation from Heine telling how the restraining force of Christianity has decayed in Germany; when once "the taming talisman, the Cross, breaks in two," predicts Heine, the door will then open to a new outbreak of "the senseless, Berserker fury." The letter writer then concludes, "So wrote Heine 80 years ago, and he foretold that at the head of the barbarians would be found the disciples of Kant, of Fichte, and of Hegel, who, by a regular logical and historical process, which he traces back to the beginnings of German thought, had shorn the 'talisman' of its power." The blame for the current situation here lies squarely on German idealism, which, by undermining Christianity, has succeeded in undermining its civilizing influence as well.

The second example that sees German idealism, but not specifically Fichte, as importantly responsible for the attitude of contemporary Germany cannot be discussed in any detail, though it is perhaps the best-known attack from the time on German idealism, namely, L. T. Hobhouse's *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*.<sup>38</sup> Its dedication to the author's son, an R.A.F. pilot, leaves no doubt that the book (originally a



series of lectures delivered at the London School of Economics in 1917) is intended as a contribution to the war effort, for the war being waged by the Germans is connected with the ideas emanating from the book Hobhouse had been studying, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: "In the bombing of London I had just witnessed the visible and tangible outcome of a false and wicked doctrine, the foundations of which lay, as I believe, in the book before me." He describes his task in a way that ironically recalls one of the passages from Fichte whose treatment we have been documenting: "but 'to make the world a safe place for democracy,' the weapons of the spirit are as necessary as those of the flesh." He concludes his dedication by declaring to his son that "in our different ways we are both fighters in one great cause."<sup>39</sup>

While it is impossible here to follow Hobhouse's attack on Hegel's theory of the state, it is important to recognize that it is not an assault on Hegel, or even German idealism, alone. As the title and the text make clear, the target of the attack is only in part the idealism of Hegel; it is also the idealism of those Anglophone philosophers influenced by German idealism, in this case the political philosophy of Bernard Bosanquet, the author of *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. Hobhouse holds too that idealism is implicated in the creation of the current German regime, although he thinks Hegel started the process, a process involving "the most sinister developments in the history of Europe": "It is fashionable to conceive German militarism as a product of the reaction against a beautiful sentimental idealism that reigned in the pre-Bismarckian era. Nothing could be more false. The political reaction began with Hegel."<sup>40</sup> And, it is especially to be noted, the poison has spread: "It has permeated the British world, discrediting the principles upon which liberal progress has been founded."<sup>41</sup> The point to make is that those who claimed that the Germany of German idealism was ultimately responsible for contemporary German militarism were simultaneously impugning, often quite intentionally, those contemporary philosophical movements, widespread (and if Paton is to be believed, still ascendant)<sup>42</sup> in Britain and America in 1914, whose inspiration clearly came from German idealism. And, on the other hand, those who distinguished the good Germany of German idealism from the bad Germany of German militarism, such as Hicks and Muirhead, did so in part because of their allegiance to that same British idealist movement.

A particular point of interest about Anglo-American idealism concerns its demise: again and again in the literature one reads that Anglo-American idealism was not the victim of philosophical refutation.<sup>43</sup> While it had been subjected to numerous criticisms prior to the war, none

at the time seemed fatal, or even particularly serious. The critiques of Moore and Russell are remembered today, but are remembered as more effective than they seemed then or as they have seemed to contemporary historians of philosophy who have revisited these debates. As Thomas Baldwin, to take one example, has succinctly put it, "It is a myth that Moore and Russell refuted Kant, Hegel, and Bradley."<sup>44</sup> Rather, idealism seems to have succumbed from a large number of wounds inflicted by extraphilosophical factors, World War I being prominent among these.<sup>45</sup> A variety of reasons were at work here: in Britain at least, the loss of a generation of students created a divide that made the idealists seem quaint to those who reached adulthood during the Jazz Age (Gilbert Ryle comments on this);<sup>46</sup> idealism seemed uncomfortably connected to no longer fashionable ideas of empire and progress; and it seemed ill-equipped to cope with the increased prestige of science following the war, a prestige that had already attained considerable heights in the preceding century. But of all the causes connected with the Great War that led to the decline of idealism, one of the most significant was the guilt by association that arose from the fact that, if idealism was undeserving of the too-narrow title "British Hegelianism," it still had an obvious and freely acknowledged debt to German idealism. The guilt by association is not difficult to document. For example, L. P. Jacks, principal of Manchester College, Oxford, and for many years the editor of *The Hibbert Journal*, wrote an intriguing article in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1915 in which he outlined a change of attitude that was taking place in Britain. "But I do suggest that the war will deepen and possibly complete, so far as Great Britain is concerned, the revolt against German dominance in thought. . . . I should not be surprised, therefore, if in the near future we have to witness a marked reaction from all movements of thought which are known to have a German origin."<sup>47</sup> Some were almost gleeful at the prospect. As Ralph Barton Perry wrote in 1918, "This counter-idealistic movement . . . has gained great impetus from the war. There is a natural disposition at present to view with suspicion anything that came out of Germany; and idealism having formerly been addicted to ancestor-worship and having loudly proclaimed its descent from the tribe of Kant, is finding itself on the defensive."<sup>48</sup> If ever an example were required to demonstrate that the history of philosophy needs to attend to more than merely intramural philosophical discussions in order to understand why one philosophy or style of philosophizing succeeds another, the decline of Anglo-American idealism provides it in spades. But that is another story.

It is at least clear, then, that the critiques and defenses of Fichte's *Addresses* at the time of the Great War occur in a larger context, one in which not only the reputation of Fichte and of German idealism but also of Anglo-American idealism was at stake. Whatever the merits of the negative critiques, and those seem to me rather limited, they ultimately carried the day, or at least made their contribution to the end result. By the 1930s, idealism in the English-speaking world, if not refuted, was passé. And if, as I think, idealism performed a cultural function that subsequent Anglo-American philosophy has been ill-equipped to carry out—that of mediating between the religious fundamentalism and the scientism that were already rising to prominence—the cultural cost of following philosophical fashion has been considerable indeed.

### Notes

1. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 77; "Basil Cameron—the Quiet Maestro," [http://h2g2.com/edited\\_entry/A22917440](http://h2g2.com/edited_entry/A22917440).

2. Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 17.

3. Geoffrey Faber, *Jowett* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1958), 178, 180.

4. Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett* (London: John Murray, 1897), 2 Vols., Letter of January 26, 1885, 2: 249.

5. The phrase comes from Faber, *Jowett*, 180.

6. Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics 1914–1918* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 14, 236.

7. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, 70.

8. Quoted in Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany*, 31. Herford did not himself endorse all these distinctions.

9. "To the Civilized World, by the Professors of Germany," *The North American Review* 210, no. 765 (Aug. 1919): 285.

10. H. C. Engelbrecht, *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: A Study of His Political Writings with Special Reference to His Nationalism* (New York: AMS Press, 1968 [1933]), 183.

11. AGN, 193–94.

12. G. Dawes Hicks, "German Philosophy and the Present Crisis," *The Hibbert Journal* 13, no. 1 (October 1914): 89–101.

13. *Ibid.*, 100.

14. *Ibid.*, 97.

15. *Ibid.*, 90.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 91–92.
18. *Ibid.*, 92.
19. George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons/New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d. [1916]), 5.
20. *Ibid.*, 79.
21. *Ibid.*, 78.
22. *SW*, 7, 496.
23. Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy*, 79.
24. *Ibid.*, 80.
25. *AGN*, 196.
26. Hicks, "German Philosophy," 91.
27. J. R. Seeley, *Life and Times of Stein, or Germany and Prussia in the Napoleonic Age* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 3 vols., 2, 28.
28. *Ibid.*, 2, 41.
29. J. R. Muirhead, *German Philosophy in Relation to the War* (London: John Murray, 1915), 26–27.
30. *Ibid.*, 39; see also 35–36.
31. *Ibid.*, 93.
32. John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Henry Holt, 1915), 87.
33. *AGN*, 81.
34. Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 87–88.
35. *AGN*, 174.
36. Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 120.
37. CONTINUITY. "The New Barbarism: A Prophecy," *Times* [London, England], 21 Sept. 1914, 9. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. May 7, 2014.
38. L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1918).
39. *Ibid.*, 6, 7.
40. *Ibid.*, 23.
41. *Ibid.*, 24.
42. H. J. Paton, "Fifty Years of Philosophy," in *Contemporary British Philosophy: Personal Statements*, Series III, ed. H. D. Lewis (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961), 341.
43. See, e.g., G. J. Warnock, *English Philosophy Since 1900*, 2nd ed. (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 7; D. C. Band, "The Critical Reception of English Neo-Hegelianism, 1914–1960," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 26 (1980): 228; H. D. Lewis, "The British Idealists," in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Patrick Sherry, and Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1988), 3 vols., 2, 273; Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 105; W. J. Mander, "Introduction," in *Anglo-American Idealism, 1865–1927*, ed. W. J. Mander (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 14; and W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 526.

44. Thomas Baldwin, "Moore's Rejection of Idealism," in *Philosophy in History: Essays in the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. Richard Rorty, Jerome B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 357. See also Steward Candlish, "The Status of Idealism in Bradley's Metaphysics," *Idealistic Studies* 11, no. 3 (Sept. 1981), and *The Russell/Bradley Dispute and Its Significance for Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

45. For discussion of the impact of the war on the fate of idealism, see the works by Band and Lewis mentioned above (note 43). Mander's *British Idealism* has a substantial discussion on the topic (552–56). See also John Morrow, "British Idealism, 'German Philosophy' and the First World War," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 28, no. 3 (Dec. 1982): 380–90, and Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany*, 52–53.

46. Gilbert Ryle, "Fifty Years of Philosophy and Philosophers," *Philosophy* 51 (1976): 383.

47. L. P. Jacks, "The Changing Mind of a Nation at War," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 4, 1915, 543–44.

48. Ralph Barton Perry, *The Present Conflict of Ideals: A Study of the Philosophical Background of the World War* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1918), 199.

## Fault Lines in Fichte's *Reden*

GEORGE J. SEIDEL

The *Addresses to the German Nation*, given in 1808 in Berlin, was not Fichte's first foray into the arena of political philosophy. There was the *Naturrecht* of 1796, the *Foundations of Natural Right*, right at the head of which he writes that the concept of state (*Recht*) is that of the necessary relation of free beings one to another. As he says, "I limit myself in dedication to freedom in such a way as to [freely] allow for the freedom of the other, of others" (SW, III, 8).<sup>1</sup> Later he adds that the aim of the concept (*Zweck der Begriff*), namely that of the state, does not lie outside me but within—freedom—it lies outside me only in the sense that it is also the concept of the community (*Gemeinschaft*); it lies also in the society. Herein, in his view, rests the possibility of a German nation (*ibid.*, 48). The society, as such, is non-self; but it is also selves. He clearly distinguishes between society, the people, and state. As he later notes, the state (*Staat*) is itself an abstract concept; only the citizens as such are acting persons (*ibid.*, 371). If this sounds like Karl Marx's dictum that the state is an abstraction; it is the people alone that is concrete,<sup>2</sup> one must remember that the Left-Wing Hegelians, with their intense dislike of Hegel, went back and studied Fichte. Nevertheless, one can see here one of the fault lines in his political philosophy as it will later get reflected in the *Addresses*. How does one get a state, an abstract entity, yet one constituted of concrete selves who have sacrificed some of their freedom in order to allow for the freedom of their fellow citizens, and thereby generate a nation?

At this point, something may be mentioned about fault lines. They occur where there is a discontinuity between two tectonic plates that cannot glide and flow easily past each other, and all movement is stopped. Stress builds up in the rocks, and when the strain threshold is reached, there is an instantaneous release—an earthquake. There are subduction zones and transformation faults, though trying to read such modern geological niceties back into Fichte's philosophy would be even more anachronistic than finding fault lines before there was tectonic theory. Suffice it to say, the use of the term relative to Fichte means simply that there are serious discontinuities in the *Addresses*.

Also among his earlier writings in the realm of politics, there is *The Closed Commercial State* of 1800, which may appear an exercise in socialism, long before the politico-economic system had any real traction. He reprises a bit of this in the *Addresses* when he pronounces against world trade (SW, VII, 466–67). (One can only imagine what would have been Fichte's reaction to globalization.) But there were also the early political pamphlets, in one of which, "On the French Revolution" (1793), he envisions a thoroughly secular state ("*Der Staat, als Staat, ist ebenso ungläubig als ich*" [ibid., VI, 276]). It may be noted that upon assuming the chair of philosophy at Jena, Fichte had to promise to eschew such political pamphleteering.

There were other matters going on in the period prior to the *Addresses* that provide a context for them. For one, there were the lectures Fichte gave in Berlin (1804–05) on the *Characteristics of the Current Age*, in which he indulges in a bit of *Universalgeschichte*, the sort of armchair history that became one of the penchants of the period, especially among the Romantics. Also in the context, there was the opening line in Hegel's "Criticism of the German Constitution" (1800–02): *Deutschland ist kein Staat mehr*. What Hegel was saying was that given the antagonism between Prussia and Austria, a German state had been rendered virtually impossible. The Holy Roman Empire was still around, but only in bits and pieces. And Hegel would later argue that Napoleon had merely written out its death certificate in 1806. At the time, "Germany" was a conglomeration of *Einzelstaaten*, miniscule principalities. Indeed, part of Napoleonic policy at the time was to use the divisions and rivalries between and among these sundry fiefdoms, playing one off against the other, to his own political advantage. Fichte alludes to this in the *Addresses*, when he speaks of "foreigners" exploiting local differences (SW, VII, 461).

Of course, the early German Romantics had an entirely different take on the then-current age and what should transpire. In his classic work on the Romantic School, Rudolf Haym describes the Romantics as “apostles of political enlightenment and national progress.”<sup>3</sup> Well, yes and no. August-Wilhelm Schlegel, for example, urges a Holy Germanic Empire in place of the Holy Roman Empire, while his brother Friedrich expresses a longing nostalgia for the “heroic mythology” of the Middle Ages. Likewise looking back to the past was Novalis's *Christenheit oder Europa*, written in 1799 but circulating widely in Romantic circles long before it was published in 1826. Fichte does look back to the past, but only to point up the superiority of the burgher class in late medieval German society, not to urge a return to it, but, instead, to contrast its virtues of piety, honor, modesty, and a sense of community with other European societies of the time (SW, VII, 356). What is needed, in Fichte's view, is not *Nachbilder* but *Vorbilder* (ibid., 254), not looking back to the past but forward to the future.

In Fichte there is little in the way of nostalgia for the past. His longing is for a future in which there would be free men in a free state. As he says, one whose life is possessed by truth has become life direct from God, is free and *believes* [italics mine] in freedom in himself and in others (SW, VII, 372). Though one would have to say that such a future is posited far off into the future. In 1806–07, after he had delivered the *Addresses*, he toyed with the writing of a constitution for Germany. However, one should note the time frame envisioned for its inauguration in the title: “The Republic of the Germans in the Early 22nd Century under its Fifth President.”<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Plato in his ideal Republic—a just man in a just society (justice writ large and writ small)—Fichte puts forward a mechanism for social change, that is, the implementation of the ideal of free men in a free state, namely, through education. Granted, Plato also advances a mechanism for social change in the Republic. Education and the role of education looms large in the Republic. Still, there is a difference between *paideia*, passing on the culture, and *Bildung*, inculturating the culture, as there is a difference between inculcating justice and inculcating freedom in a society. There is yet another difference. Fichte is convinced that if you can manage to change people's hearts and minds you can change society, though with the added credo of German idealism as old as Kant's 1784 essay “On Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” namely



that spiritual revolutions precede actual ones. The role of education for Fichte, then, is forming perfect men to form a perfect (*vollkommen*) society (SW, VII, 354). And the “perfection” here is freedom.

The educational system he proposes is adapted and modified, according to his own lights, from that of the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. The idea was, basically, to produce self-starters. As Fichte says, the educational system is to stimulate and train the free mental activity of the pupil’s mind (SW, VII, 403), stimulated (*angeregt*) to project a picture of a human social order as it should be (*ibid.*, 297), an ethical world order never actually there, but ever to be (*ibid.*). In Fichte’s *Addresses*, everything, including the fault lines, harkens back to the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the central role played by the imagination in its swing between the finite self and the infinite ideal self, the finite self and the nonself, the *Anstöße*. And who, or what, are the obstacles (*Anstöße*) to the attainment of such an ideal nation?—the French, the damnable Papists, an educational system that is hopelessly based on rote memory, provincialism, religion, etc. In typical Fichtean idealistic fashion (finite) self-seeking (*Selbstsucht*) must be replaced by (infinite, absolute, ideal) self-seeking (*ibid.*, 275), replacing selfishness and self-contempt with self-esteem (*ibid.*, VII, 416), self-advancement toward an ideal. Its possibility? He asks rhetorically: How should education establish morality in the child if it were not originally, and prior to all education, already in him? (*ibid.*, 414). This is simply Kant’s moral law within,<sup>5</sup> as the basis for the success of such a possible moral education.

Again, the educational ideal is to produce self-starters, creative people, entrepreneurs: the teacher gives the student a problem to solve to be worked out on his or her own (SW, VII, 294).<sup>6</sup> Further, it is universal education, education for all. Well after all, he asks rhetorically, is there not compulsory military service? So why not compulsory education? (*ibid.*, 436). It is also co-ed (*ibid.*, 422); there are trade schools (*ibid.*, 423); and art is included in the curriculum (*ibid.*, 410). The cost? Cheap by comparison with the budgets for the military, he says. Also, a standing army of the educated is far better than building prisons or poorhouses (*ibid.*, 431–32). His suggestion regarding how to pay for it all is, in the end, a combination of public and private funding (*ibid.*, 443).

Another of the fault lines in the *Addresses* is that of education itself. For Fichte is torn between nationalism (nationalism without a nation, patriotism without a patria) and internationalism. After all, one of the hallmarks of Fichtean idealism is the moral betterment of humankind, but

this he would have brought down to the national, to the local level. Still, there is another theme in Fichte to the effect that the Germans should be the educators of the whole of Europe, indeed, the source for the transformation (*Umschaffung*) of the whole human race. So which is it? Do we move from humankind to the not-yet German nation or from a not-yet Germany to the world? And Fichte's answer seems to be: by all means!

There was, of course, another possible option, and that was to tap into French civilization and culture. Indeed, Hegel takes this route when, as editor of the *Bamberger Gazette* (1806–07), he urges the Germans to fashion a nation-state and a mode of governance on the model of France. This would have been anathema to Fichte, as it was to many of Hegel's readers, since the French were occupying Berlin and wide swaths of Germanic territory at the time.

At this point, one might consider the reasons why it was simply not possible to have a political and/or social revolution in the French manner in the Germany of the period. In order to have broad-based bourgeois revolution, one would need a bourgeoisie; and one would need a single absolute ruler to revolt against, both of which were lacking in a not-yet-nation at the time. Of course, one could argue, as Fichte and others did, in favor of a "spiritual" revolution that would precede actual social and political change. Still, one may register the doubt that a "spiritual" revolution will, of itself, actually change political conditions on the ground.

Well into the work, indeed not until the twelfth lecture, does Fichte finally get to the three questions raised in the *Addresses*: (1) Is there a German nation? (2) If there is, is it worth maintaining? And (3) If it is worth maintaining, what means would be required to do so? (SW, VII, 44). In terms of the organization of the work, one might appropriately ask: Is this not where the *Addresses* should have begun? However, it is that final question that leads into the third major theme of the *Addresses*, and another fault line, namely, language. Put simply: to have a nation, in Fichte's view, one needs a national language. (Though, as one knows, there are two official languages in Canada, four in Switzerland.) However, to get a national language one needs a national government to establish the language and somehow press its usage. It's a Catch-22 situation. In order to get a national language one needs a nation, and, according to Fichte, to get a nation one needs the language. Though Fichte's point and approach is, perhaps, well taken. Dante's *Divine Comedy* may have established the Florentine dialect as official Italian. Italy as a nation came only much later.

It is in the fourth address that Fichte seriously takes up the issue of language. His basic principle on this score is that men are formed by language far more than language is formed by man (*SW*, VII, 314). In a people with a living language mental culture influences life, he says, bearing upon the way things get seen. Spirit, presumably here the German Spirit, speaks immediately and directly in the language that is spoken, as one person speaks to another (*ibid.*, 332). The basic elements comprising this German *Geist* are *Blut*, *Volk* (from which all German culture derives [*ibid.*, 355]), and *Boden* (*ibid.*, 357) or *Erdscholle* (*ibid.*, 393). In this latter connection he observes that the natural boundaries of states are “without doubt” their internal boundaries (*ibid.*, 460). (Two observations: the Allemanisch dialect is spoken across the Rhine in France and to the south in Basel in Switzerland. Also, the same dialect is spoken in Westfalen as across the border in Holland.) Something else that is curious: while Fichte offers an encomium to Luther (*ibid.*, 347ff.)—the Protestant Reformation happened in Germany—he does not emphasize the importance of Luther’s translation of the Bible for the formation of the German tongue. This may be because he is not all that keen in stressing the importance of religion. Instead, he highlights the second main branch for the formation/culture of a people: the poet (*ibid.*, 333), and other creative users of the language, such as the philosopher! They are the ones who embed ideas and the cultural ideals into the language.

So, will language succeed in fashioning, or, perhaps better, maintaining the German nation?

To answer the question it is necessary to examine how, from Fichte’s perspective, the Germans came to their present pass, their then current *Schicksal*. In his view all the evils that have brought us to ruin are of foreign origin (*SW*, VII, 337); and all those foreign systems are animated by a foreign spirit (*ibid.*, 368–69). The Greeks corrupted the Romans; the Romans attempted, but failed, to corrupt the Germans; and, of course, the French (who speak a Latin-based or Romance language) corrupted everybody. However, the implication that Fichte draws from this is that if we the Germans managed to resist the Roman influence, then we can also resist the Latinate French, and all those foreign systems animated by a foreign spirit (*ibid.*).

There is a whole body of present-day literature on nation building, the pros and cons regarding its possibility, the elements that must be present, or be developed, for it to be successful, the price tag, etc. There are examples where it has worked (the rebuilding of Germany and Japan after

World War II) and where it has not—one may fill in the blanks with current failed, and still failing, states. The basic question, of course, is: Who is going to do it? Will it be done, or attempted, by some foreign power or group of nations, or indigenously. Fichte is not about to look elsewhere for help or deliverance. Indeed, he argues that if the causes of Germany's most recent plight (*letztes Schicksal*) lie in ourselves, then laying the blame on others will not fix the problem (*SW*, VII, 474–75)—even though he clearly does blame “foreigners” and their deleterious spirits—nor can others be expected to rectify a situation that derives from our own stupidity and indolence (*Unverstand und Trägheit*, *ibid.*, 476). We cannot hope for a better future, he says, except from ourselves (*ibid.*, 434). We broke it, so we own it. The current task? To keep ourselves alive until the time of the complete and basic improvement (*Verbesserung*) of our race (*ibid.*, 459).

We are, of course, familiar with the genre of the conclusion to the *Addresses*, above all if we are in academe. We hear it every spring when some eminent personage delivers the commencement address. The graduates are exhorted to go forth and change the world on the basis of the education they have been afforded. Similarly, in the conclusion to the *Addresses* Fichte exhorts four different groups: the young, the old, scholars and writers, and princes (*SW*, VII, 488). I have often thought that the work was mistitled: it should have been entitled *Predigten* instead of *Reden*. Indeed, its conclusion may strike one as in the style of an Italian *ferverino*. For what he tells the groups he is preaching to—and it's not the choir!—is: pull yourselves together, summon up your strength (*zusammenezunehmen*, *ibid.*, 486). Though given the reality of the situation in Germany at the time a more accurate translation of *zusammenezunehmen* might be: pull yourselves up by your own bootstraps.

Regarding Fichte's *Addresses* to the not-yet-extant German nation, one may say, in the end, what the Immortal Bard puts into the mouth of Hamlet: “Words, words, words” (Act II, scene 2). Though Fichte insists: but words are important, and I, Fichte, speak them (*SW*, VII, 339–400). In other words, someone has to tell it not only like it is, but how it can, how it should, indeed, how it must ideally be.

### Summary

The paper begins with a consideration of the historical context within which Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* were first presented, as

also its place among earlier efforts on his part in the arena of political philosophy. It then discusses the principal themes found in the work: the notion of a nation, the role of education, and that of language in the formation of a people. However, there are serious fault lines in each of these motifs: the difference between a people (society) and a state; education as passing on the culture or as active learning and problem solving; as also the problem of fashioning a common language amid a plethora of Germanic dialects. The paper concludes with the serious difficulty, then as now, of nation building of any sort.

### Notes

1. References to *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämtliche Werke*, as edited by his son (Berlin: Veit, 1846), cited simply by volume and page number, will be found in the text.

2. "Der Staat ist ein Abstractum. Das Volk allein ist das Konkretum." *Marx-Engel Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1959), I, 229.

3. Rudolf Haym, *Die Romantische Schule* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 850–52.

4. Cf. the summary in Xavier Léon's *Fichte et son temps* (Paris: Colin, 1959), II/2, 84–92.

5. Cf. G. J. Seidel, "The Fate of Innate Ideas in Fichte," *Idealistic Studies* 30 (2000): 79–89.

6. It is of note that in a recent issue of *Scientific American*, August 2014, an article by Barbara Kantrowitz, "The Science of Learning," (pp. 68–73) emphasizes the importance of just such an "active learning" approach, giving the students problems to solve, instead of simply lecturing, in order to interest them in the pursuit of a career in science.

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## PHILOSOPHY

One of J. G. Fichte's best-known works, *Addresses to the German Nation* is based on a series of speeches he gave in Berlin when the city was under French occupation. They feature Fichte's diagnosis of his own era in European history as well as his call for a new sense of German national identity, based upon a common language and culture rather than "blood and soil." These speeches, often interpreted as key documents in the rise of modern nationalism, also contain Fichte's most sustained reflections on pedagogical issues, including his ideas for a new egalitarian system of Prussian national education. The contributors' reconsideration of the speeches deal not only with technical philosophical issues such as the relationship between language and identity, and the tensions between universal and particular motifs in the text, but also with issues of broader concern, including education, nationalism, and the connection between morality and politics.

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**SUNY**  
PRESS  
State University of  
New York Press  
[www.sunypress.edu](http://www.sunypress.edu)

ISBN: 978-1-4384-6255-4

