

# PEDAGOGY AND PATERNALISM IN FICHTE'S ADDRESSES TO THE GERMAN NATION

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**SÍNTESE** – Os Discursos à Nação Alemã de Fichte foram considerados durante muito tempo uma importante contribuição para o desenvolvimento do nacionalismo alemão e do pensamento nacionalista em geral. Todavia, embora os Discursos continuem sendo lidos como um prenúncio das aspirações nacionalistas alemãs, grande parte de seu conteúdo substantivo é hoje ignorado. Neste artigo, o Autor examina um aspecto deveras negligenciado dos Discursos, a saber, o “sistema de educação nacional” neles propostos e que merecem séria consideração pelo modo como Fichte concebe e articula o papel e função da intelligentsia em busca de salvação nacional. Argumenta-se, de modo especial, que é através da exaltação da educação que Fichte legitima sua proposta de governo por uma elite erudita, um tipo de despotismo esclarecido. Mostra-se ainda que o escopo dos privilégios concedidos aos “eruditos” na reforma educacional de Fichte solapa seu potencial radicalmente igualitarista, e que sua proposta termina por mostrar-se incoerente e inconsistente em seus próprios termos, na medida em que os propósitos explícitos de seu sistema e os resultados prometidos invalidariam completamente, se levados a cabo, a reivindicação dos esclarecidos de governar, se não a necessidade de tais governantes.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** – Educação. Fichte. Filosofia política. Idealismo alemão. Nacionalismo.

**ABSTRACT** – Fichte’s Addresses to the German Nation have long been regarded as a major contribution to the development of German nationalism and nationalist thought in general. Yet while the Addresses continue to be read as an early statement of German nationalist aspirations, much of their substantive content is ignored today. In this article, I examine one long neglected aspect of the Addresses, namely the “system of national education” which they propose, and which, I argue, warrants serious consideration for the way in which Fichte conceives and articulates the role and function of the intelligentsia in the quest for national salvation. Specifically, I argue that it is by means of an exaltation of education that Fichte legitimizes his proposal for rule by a scholarly elite, a kind of enlightened despotism. I further argue that the scope of the privileges granted to the “scholars” in Fichte’s educational reform undermines its radically egalitarian potential, and that his proposal ultimately proves incoherent and inconsistent on its own terms, insofar as the avowed aims of his system and the promised results would, if realized, wholly invalidate the scholars’ claim to rule, if not obviate the need for rulers as such.

**KEY WORDS** – Education. Fichte. German idealism. Nationalism. Political philosophy.

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Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* have long been regarded as a major contribution to the development of German nationalism and a landmark in the evolution of modern European nationalist thought in general. Indeed, referring to their reception among the German people, Immanuel Hermann Fichte, the philosopher's son and posthumous editor, would go so far as to dub them "the political book of devotion of the Germans".<sup>1</sup> While today such an estimation of the *Addresses'* impact rightly strikes us as far-fetched, the history of their appropriation by the nationalists who would invoke them throughout the latter part of the nineteenth-century and early part of the twentieth<sup>2</sup> suggests that they did exert an appreciable influence on the emerging nationalist sentiment among Germans. Not surprisingly, the needs of such an appropriation dictated a partial reading of the

<sup>1</sup> Cited in H.C. Engelbrecht, *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: A Study of His Political Writings With Special Reference To His Nationalism* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1968), p. 112. The younger Fichte's appraisal evidently owes more to an inherited taste for rhetorical overstatement than any fidelity to the historical record. In any case, few dispute Fichte's importance for the development of German nationalism. For example, Engelbrecht himself concludes that "Fichte was... one of the founders of modern German nationalism" (p. 158). Indeed, admirers and detractors alike seem to take as much for granted. Meinecke, for instance, states that Fichte's work made an "immense contribution to the development of the idea of the nation and of the national state in Germany" (Friedrich Meinecke, *Cosmopolitanism and the National State*, trans. Robert B. Kimber (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 94). Karl Popper, on the other hand, a thinker who dismisses Fichte as a "clown" and "windbag", and who cites the opinions of Schopenhauer, Kant, Schiller, Goethe and others to lend authority to his own disparagement of Fichte, writes that "it was Fichte who provided German nationalism with its first theory." He also describes Fichte as "the man whose 'windbaggery' has given rise to modern nationalism" (Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), II, pp. 53-54. With respect to their stature as a major statement of nationalist thought, it is instructive to note that no less an authority than the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967) lists the *Addresses to the German Nation* in its concise bibliography on nationalism, grouping it among the subject's "classic expositions."

<sup>2</sup> Engelbrecht, op. cit., ch. 8. The *Addresses'* influence did not begin until several decades after their delivery in 1807-1808. Yet, "after 1862 [the one-hundredth anniversary of Fichte's birth and, therefore, year of numerous commemorations] there could be no doubt that Fichte counted among the great national prophets of Germany" (Engelbrecht, p. 171). But to what extent did the *Addresses* themselves contribute to the growth of the malignant form of later German nationalism? Although Reinhold Aris's contention that Fichte "had nothing to do with nineteenth-century imperialism" (*History of Political Thought in Germany: From 1789 to 1815* [New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1965], p. 348) is, no doubt, essentially correct--after all, the *Addresses* themselves contain passages condemning imperialistic impulses, notably in the thirteenth *Address*--it remains true, nonetheless, that not a few of Fichte's more "nationalistic" declarations invite interpretations congenial to "imperialistic" outlooks. Consider, e.g., the passage from the *Addresses'* peroration where Fichte speaks of the German people as, "...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" (*Addresses*, op. cit., p. 228). At any rate, despite Fichte's excesses, there would seem to be little grounds for the view held by Joseph B. McAllister, who in 1940 wrote: "[...] although Hitler borrowed from many philosophies...he drew more from the beliefs and aspirations that were lurking in the deeper consciousness of the German people. It is my conviction that those beliefs and aspirations were largely attributable to Johann Gottlieb Fichte" (Joseph B. McAllister, "The Influence of Immanuel Kant's Concept of Liberty", *Proceedings of the Catholic Philosophy Association*, 16 (1940), pp. 38-52). (As Engelbrecht's survey of the history of the *Addresses'* reception makes clear, such views were by no means exceptional earlier in the century, let alone during war-time. He cites an article from 1915 by one E. Goblot, titled, "L'origine philosophique de la folie allemande.[!] Les Discours a la Nation Allemande de Fichte" (Engelbrecht, op. cit., p. 183).

*Addresses*, as a result of which much of their substantive content came to be ignored in favor of those features which more readily satisfy the rhetorical and ideological desiderata of nationalist ends.<sup>3</sup> If the *Addresses* continue to enjoy a certain renown it is almost entirely due to the *reputation* arising from this history: to allude to the *Addresses* today is to evoke their extravagant exhortation to national self-assertion, that exalted expression of nascent German nationalism permeating countless passages.

One consequence of having acquired such a reputation is that those who occupy themselves with the *Addresses to the German Nation* today tend to read them almost exclusively with an eye to their significance as an early statement of German nationalist aspirations; insofar as they are read, studied, cited and anthologized, the focus is directed at this, admittedly striking, facet of Fichte's lectures.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the benefits of adopting this orientation in reading the *Addresses*, it is clear that such an approach inevitably leads to a neglect of the lectures' concrete prescription for reform, Fichte's vaunted "system of national education", whose exposition is one of the lectures' principal immediate aims.

Now, while it is not without good reason that the *Addresses'* educational program has been given short shrift – Fichte's ideas were neither original (he himself emphasizes his debt to the theories of the Swiss educator Heinrich Pestalozzi), nor influential – to neglect Fichte's proposals is to neglect a crucial dimension of the lectures. For one thing, there is Fichte's own appraisal of the system of national education, which he regards as "the highest and [...] only urgent concern of German love of fatherland".<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is scarcely an overstatement to say, as does more than one commentator,<sup>6</sup> that a certain "pedagogical mania" informs the lectures. Such components of the *Addresses* as the notorious exposition of the supposed metaphysical superiority of the German language serve, in the last

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<sup>3</sup> "[...] Fichte praised the actual and historical German nation and established its claim to European and world leadership. It was this latter part, and not the demand for the total re-education of the Germans into rational and perfect human beings, which German nationalism read into his *Reden*" (Hans Kohn, "The Paradox of Fichte's Nationalism", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, June, 1949, p. 337).

<sup>4</sup> Exemplary in this regard are *The Political Thought of the German Romantics 1793-1815*, Ed. H.S. Reiss (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955) and *The Course of German Nationalism*, by Hagen Schulze (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The former excerpts the thirteenth Address, while the latter contains a brief extract from the fourteenth (i.e., final) Address.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. R.F. Jones and G.H. Turnbull (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 160. Cf. the judgement of Rienhold Aris: "...his famous addresses to the nation were really a comprehensive dissertation on the question how public education is to be organized and what results would follow from a wise educational policy" (Aris, op. cit., p. 352). One virtue of Alexis Philonenko's treatment of the *Addresses* in his survey of Fichte's works is precisely that it emphasizes the importance of this aspect of the *Addresses*: "Le grand sermon a la Nation allemande devient alors un livre a deux dimensions. La dimension principale est l'education comme philosophie de l'avenir" (*L'oeuvre de Fichte* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1984), p. 178).

<sup>6</sup> G.A. Walz (author of *Die Staatsidee des Rationalismus und der Romantik und die Staatsphilosophie Fichtes*), as cited in Engelbrecht, op. cit., p. 134, and George Kelly in his "Introduction" to Fichte, *Addresses*, op. cit., p. xxix, both use this phrase to characterize Fichte's preoccupation with education in the *Addresses*.

analysis, merely to demonstrate the validity of the system's presuppositions (namely the Germans' special receptivity and potential), and thus the possibility of its realization and success, its practicability. For another, besides the place of the system's exposition in the lectures and the sheer amount of space devoted to its description and elaboration, the components of Fichte's educational scheme are notable for their concreteness in what is otherwise by and large a highly abstract series of observations and recommendations.

Over and above these reasons, however, this feature of the *Addresses* warrants serious consideration for another reason altogether, namely the way that Fichte conceives and articulates the role and function of the intelligentsia in the quest for national salvation, and the relationship between education and redemption generally. The novelty of Fichte's approach lies in the fact that *it is by means of an exaltation of education that Fichte legitimizes his proposal for rule by a scholarly elite, a (collective) enlightened despotism*. As we shall see, Fichte considers the agency of the "scholars" paramount for the (correlative) tasks of national salvation and the propagation of his ideal of cosmopolitan patriotism.<sup>7</sup> In Fichte's plan, the scholars, as a corporate body or estate, are to govern both the "system of national education" and the German nation (the two becoming in some sense synonymous); this system will produce national regeneration and, ultimately bring forth universal salvation. Therefore, insofar as the scholars are to implement and manage the system of national education, and it is this system that will give rise to regeneration and salvation, salvation through education comes to mean salvation through the intervention of the scholars, salvation due to the intellectuals.

This identification of a scholarly elite with the promise of national regeneration and liberation ultimately stems from a coupling of two premises which, if found in political theory as early as Plato, have gained increasing currency since Fichte's day: the premise that some part of the intelligentsia, such as Fichte's class of "scholars", is the sector of society most suited to advance the interests of society and promote national salvation or liberation; and the premise that national and political progress require an intensive (re-)education of the nation's populace. As for the function of the first premise in the *Addresses*, it is Fichte's contention that the scholars' claim to rule derives from their special insight and training, in a word their privileged access to truth. As for the function of the second, the perceived urgency of educational reform makes an exaltation of education as such seem most reasonable, and it is this exaltation which in turn justifies the generalization of properly educational institutional structures of authority, hierarchy and the like to society as a whole. The German people will advance by means of revo-

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<sup>7</sup> Fichte provides a succinct formulation of what a "cosmopolitan nationalism" represents in the *Patriotische Dialoge* (1806-1807): "Cosmopolitanism is the will that the purpose of life and of man be attained in all mankind. Patriotism is the will that this purpose be attained first of all in that nation of which we are members, and the wish that this light may radiate from this nation over all mankind. ...In reality cosmopolitanism must necessarily become patriotism. ... Every dominant will...can only become active in its surroundings.... Thus every cosmopolitan necessarily, through his limitation by a nation, becomes a patriot" (cited in Engelbrecht, op. cit., pp. 96-97).

lutionary educational reform, but this reform requires the leadership and authority of the scholars. Consistent with these assumptions, the logic of the *Addresses* serves to justify the establishment of a scholarly despotism, a sort of dictatorship of the professoriat, as it were. For, as we shall see, as articulated in the "system of national education" these ideas amount to a prescription for authoritarian rule by a scholarly elite, who are themselves accorded the status of a privileged aristocracy in control of state power.

Hence it is also in connection with the system of national education that the most *political* dimension of the *Addresses* takes shape: Fichte's vision of a political order for the future Germany is concretized in the system of national education.<sup>8</sup> The system national education is likewise the key to Fichte's conception of the relationship between nationalism and the intelligentsia.<sup>9</sup> While the extravagantly

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fichte's claim in the sixth Address: "Only the nation which has first solved in actual practice the problem of educating perfect men will then solve also the problem of the perfect state" (*Addresses*, p. 87). In his "Introduction" to the most recent American edition of the *Addresses*, op. cit., George Kelly writes, "[...] it is significant that the political components of the future Germany glimpsed in the *Addresses* are exceedingly vague" (p. xxii). Likewise Hans Kohn, in the article cited, concludes: "In his *Reden* [i.e., *Addresses*] Fichte had no clear vision of a political future for Germany" (p. 340), while Engelbrecht suggests that the *Addresses* "are hardly even political speeches, but rather educational and pedagogic advice" (p. 123). Observations of this sort abound in the secondary literature on the *Addresses to the German Nation*. Contrary to this general sentiment, however, I would submit that commentators find the *Addresses*' "political components" overly vague because they seek them in the wrong places - in Fichte's homilies and explicit references to history and politics, rather than in the structure of his program for educational reform. Indeed, in this respect we would do well to bear in mind Meinecke's observation: "[...] for our purpose of showing how nonpolitical ideas entered into the political life of Germany, there is no more significant figure among the pure thinkers than Fichte" (Meinecke, op. cit., p. 84). At any rate, in the case of George Kelly this failure to attend to the many political ramifications of the system of national education is all the more surprising in that his editorial commentary acknowledges, however summarily, that Fichte's proposals have significant, and not altogether benign, political implications. In a footnote to the tenth address, for example, he remarks, apropos Fichte's description of the functions proper to the scholars and non-scholars, "A characteristic division of labor for a philosophy of perfectionism, with important political overtones" (*Addresses*, op. cit., p. 158). Similarly, he remarks in a footnote to the sixth Address: "This capitulation of politics to pedagogy means, in effect, a supersession of legalism or constitutionality by the 'spirituality' of leadership" (*Addresses*, p. 87). Nevertheless, in his "Introduction" he devotes but one page to reflection on the political significance of this dimension of the *Addresses*, and this despite his own assertion, likewise in the "Introduction," that "insofar as the *Addresses* are informed by a central 'political theory,' it is that of the state as mirrored in the organization of the school" (*Addresses*, p. xxx). In fact, Kelly even acknowledges that "[...] the transfer of the school ideal to the state nevertheless inspires the picture of a rigid two-class system of enlighteners and pupils, with the former possessing a moral sanction. This is indeed the outcome of Fichte's whole field of speculation [...]" (*Addresses*, p. xxxi). "That future society would include both egalitarian and authoritarian strains" (*Addresses*, p. xv). It is striking that he does not think these issues worthy of more extensive commentary, especially in light of the tension that these two contradictory "strains" generate in the *Addresses*.

<sup>9</sup> In the *Addresses to the German Nation* Fichte's properly "nationalistic" remarks refer to two quite distinct manifestations of national grandeur: he glorifies both the *actual* superiority of the German people, which they owe to their possession of certain attributes (e.g., their language, "typically" German traits, etc.) that endow them with a "natural" superiority; and he glorifies the *potential* superiority of the German people, a superiority whose realization depends upon the complete implementation of, and adherence to, the program embodied in the system of national education.

nationalistic rhetoric and linguistic essentialism are, of course, disturbing and ominous, the nature of Fichte's scheme and the new structures of domination that would attend its implementation, this conflation of the pedagogical and the political, prove no less disturbing, no less ominous. This is one of the less obvious yet most unsettling consequences of the *Addresses'* apotheosis of education and its attendant elevation of the status of the scholar.

To be sure, whether viewed solely as a proposal for educational reform or as a model for social organization, the system of national education is not without its democratic moment, as we shall see. In the end, however, the scope of privileges granted to the scholars completely undermines Fichte's potentially profound democratization of education, re-stratifying the citizenry into a two-tier system of scholars and pupils, rulers and subordinates, leaders and lead. Not only is this reinstatement of hierarchy at odds with the radically egalitarian, even levelling thrust of his plan as a whole; it is on Fichte's own terms *unnecessary* given, on the one hand, the character of the German people (which means, in the last analysis, the nature of their language<sup>10</sup>), and, on the other, the character of the new

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Without the actualization of this potential superiority, their actual superiority is of little value: after all, the realization of their potential superiority coincides with their request for national salvation. Yet, as it is the scholars whose guidance is to ensure the success of the system of national education and thereby produce national salvation, and the second expression of national grandeur requires this redemption, the second expression of nationalism depends on the intervention of the scholars, whose knowledge is, therefore, "a precious possession of the nation" (*Addresses*, p. 158).

<sup>10</sup> Since Fichte's notorious metaphysics of language only indirectly bears on the issues which I wish to address in this paper I have decided to dispense with any discussion of his theory in the main body of the text. Still, a brief rehearsal of the argument may be in order here.

According to Fichte, two facts distinguish the Germans from all other Teutons: the Germans have remained in the homeland occupied by their distant ancestors rather than migrating, and they have retained their ancestral language (whereas the other Teutons adopted the languages, such as the "neo-Latin" tongues, current in the regions in which they ultimately settled). For Fichte, only the latter difference proves of real significance. By retaining their original language, he argues, the Germans have "remained in the uninterrupted flow of a primitive language which develops itself continuously out of real life" (*Addresses*, op. cit., p. 72). A common, continuous stream or thread therefore unites the language of present-day Germans with that of their ancestral forebearers, as a result of which these present-day Germans still enjoy access to the living roots of their language, "where ideas stream forth from spiritual nature itself" (*Addresses*, p. 73). Thus it is not the case that Fichte extols the nature of the German language *as such* over against other languages; rather "the importance lies solely in the fact that in the one case something native is retained, while in the other case something foreign is adopted" (*Addresses*, p. 48). Modern Germans may draw on the accumulated experience of the supersensuous of their people, whose designations thereof are preserved in the German language. This immediate, original access to a store of designations of the supersensuous and this prior experience of their people informs their contemporary experience, nourishing, elevating, and ennobling both their experience of the supersensuous and the designations with which they seek to record this experience. In contrast, by adopting a foreign tongue the other Teutonic tribes forfeited this experience; they appropriated another people's designations, and hence original experience, of the supersensuous. For them, "the verbal image contains a comparison with an observation of the senses, which they have either passed over long ago without the accompanying mental development, or else have not yet had, and perhaps never can have" (*Addresses*, p. 57).

Having established this distinction, Fichte proceeds to generalize it to the level of cultures, opposing "living-language" cultures to "dead-language" cultures and assigning certain typical

education itself, whose principal aim is to promote all pupil-citizens' innate potential to discern "the supersensuous", to recognize, and act in accordance with, their true interests: the new system is nothing if not an education to perfect rectitude, a moral autonomy invariably inclining one to the good. What is more, if the educated, reformed nation is to comprise "the this-worldly embodiment of moral totality",<sup>11</sup> Fichte effectively posits an order of rank in the very domain where all such distinctions are to be overcome, there being no such differentiation of human worth in the kingdom of ends.

In the following pages I propose to examine these aspects of the *Addresses to the German Nation* in detail. To do so it will first be necessary to rehearse briefly both the substance of Fichte's proposed system of national education and his conception of the scholars. Subsequently, I shall attempt to show, first, how given this conception of the scholars and the qualities which allegedly entitle them to rule, Fichte's exaltation of education serves to further justify their claim to supreme political authority; and, second, how Fichte's main proposal ultimately proves incoherent and inconsistent on his own terms, insofar as the avowed aims of his system and the promised results would, if realized, wholly undermine the scholars' claim to rule, if not obviate the need for rulers as such.

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characteristics and capacities to each. Where a living-language obtains, people want mental culture to influence life; no rigid division exists between the educated and the popular classes because all are capable of some degree of education, and the educated wish to popularize their discoveries; mental activity is esteemed; the expression of genius is possible; honest diligence and earnestness are the norm. The values and conditions that typify a dead-language culture are just the opposite (with an easy-going and carefree adriftness replacing honest diligence and earnestness) (*Addresses*, pp. 60-61). These are, Fichte emphasizes, necessary consequences of the fundamental difference, and they suffice to explain, for instance the greater receptivity to education found among Germans, and their greater appreciation of cultural life.

Of course, if it is the case that the Germans owe their special status to their possession of a living language and not to *Deutschtum* as such, one is hard pressed to understand why Fichte should regard them as a normative people. Should not all peoples who have preserved their "original" language enjoy this distinction? Interpretive difficulties are only exacerbated by the fact that Fichte uses the term "German" in two very different senses in the *Addresses*. At times he uses the term in a more or less conventional sense (to denote, for example, residents of the German states, those who speak German as their mother tongue, or descendants of one group or the other). On other occasions, however, he attaches his own singular, highly idiosyncratic connotation to the term, as, for instance, when he includes within the category of "Germans" all those who "believe in something absolutely primary and original in man himself, in freedom, in endless improvement, in the eternal progress of our race" (*Addresses*, p. 107); or when he declares that "whoever believes in spirituality and in the freedom of this spirituality, and who wills the eternal development of this spirituality by freedom, wherever he may have been born and whatever language he speaks, is of our blood" (*Addresses*, p. 108). In short, on several occasions Fichte's usage of the word "German" becomes not merely idiosyncratic, but arbitrary, totally ahistorical, and metaphysical. When propounding his theory of language and detailing the spiritual advantages accruing to those peoples who have preserved an "original language" Fichte uses "German" in a more or less customary sense. Which people, then, is the normative people--the Germans in a narrow, historical sense? All those who have preserved their original language? or the Germans in the ahistorical, idealized, metaphysical sense (as defined in the passages cited above)?

<sup>11</sup> Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 188.

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In the *Characteristics of the Present Age*, a series of lectures delivered three years before the lectures that would be come to be published as the *Addresses to the German Nation*, Fichte had undertaken to present "a philosophical picture of the Present Age."<sup>12</sup> This picture had identified the present age, in accordance with Fichte's outline of universal history, as the Third Age, "the age of completed sinfulness." Although the *Addresses* are ostensibly a sequel to and continuation of the previous lectures, the progression of world history obliges Fichte to go beyond mere description and classification, for since the conclusion of the earlier lectures self-seeking, the definitive hallmark of the period of "completed sinfulness," has brought about its own self-destruction and thus completed its own development.

But because self-seeking is the essence of the age, the destruction of self-seeking caused the destruction of the age itself, a total negation. Self-seeking precipitated the downfall of the nation because it eventually came to dominate the nation's leaders; once subject to this motivation they were easy prey for the enticements of foreign powers. Driven by self-seeking, the German leaders worried less about the subjugation of their countries to foreign powers than their own personal interests and well-being (which, under the sway of self-seeking, they failed to identify with the interests of the nation as a whole). Napoleon's conquest of Prussia merely signals the culmination of self-seeking. Since, therefore, this age has reached such a catastrophic conclusion Fichte now finds himself obliged to offer prescriptions as well as descriptions, both diagnosis and remedy. Interpretation must be accompanied by recommendations. Yet the traditional remedies or forms of recuperation promise little efficacy in this case on account of the German people's subjection to, and determination by, a foreign power. On the other hand, since the interests of this foreign power do not coincide with its own true interests, it can hardly accept submission to this heteronomous determination of its destiny.

Given these conditions, the nation's only hope lies in "the creation of a totally new order of things",<sup>13</sup> an order which will redress the causes for the previous order's downfall. If the fatal defect of the old order and cause of its collapse arose from the divorce of, and necessary conflict between, individual and national (i.e., collective) interests, a breach resulting from the predominance of self-seeking, national regeneration will require the establishment of an order in which individuals identify their own interests with those of the nation (whose true interests prove to be universal in nature).

"It follows, then, that the means 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

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<sup>12</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, trans. William Smith (London: John Chapman, 1849), II, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, p. 8.

the nation [...]. 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>14</sup>

The object, then, is to harmonize the interests of the individual with those of the nation, to secure an adequation of the particular and the universal, and to this end Fichte proposes profound educational reform, nothing less than an "absolutely new system of German national education."<sup>15</sup>

Fichte defines his proposal for reform largely in opposition to the "old" or traditional education, of which the lectures elaborate a multifaceted, if diffuse, critique. For in addition to his general condemnation of the grossly undemocratic, elitist character of the old education, over against which he demands universal compulsory education, Fichte emphasizes a number of specific, substantive criticisms, the most decisive of which are the following. The old education cultivated a sheerly instrumental appreciation of both the acquisitions of knowledge and the value of the good; ignoring the supersensuous world, it contented itself with imparting skills of use only in the pursuit of ends proper to the sensuous world; it proceeded from the assumption that students do not naturally tend to the good; the students' motivation to learn was based on fear and the hope of ultimately obtaining some material advantage or recompense for their exertions; as a rule students did not enjoy the process of learning; the knowledge acquired remained distant from life.

At bottom, nearly all of the differences between the old system or style of education and the alternative proposed by Fichte stem from the fact that the two systems begin from antithetical ontological and anthropological assumptions, as Fichte himself repeatedly emphasizes. Summarizing this discrepancy regarding ontological premises, Fichte states:

"As a rule, the world of the senses was formerly accepted as the only true and really existing world; it was the that was brought before the pupil in education. From it alone was he led on to thought and, for the most part, to thought that was about it and in its service. The new education exactly reverses this order. For it the that is comprehended by thought is the only true and really existing world, and into this it wishes to introduce the pupil from the very beginning."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11. For all Fichte's commitment to, and interest in, educational policy, the *Addresses* at times give the impression that his insistence on radical educational reform as the only "means of national salvation" is more a tactical decision, as it were, than an article of faith, as though he were making a virtue of necessity by exploiting the only opening that remains to the German people. On the one hand he observes that the forces of occupation will ignore, or at most ridicule, initiatives in this sphere, on the false assumption that they cannot serve as a means to national regeneration. Thus it is that after elaborating all of the powers which the German people have lost to their conquerors in the eleventh Address, he exclaims, "It is only of education that one has thought; if we are looking for an occupation, let us seize this!" (*Addresses*, p. 165). For Fichte it also constitutes the surest, safest form of self-help. Aris notes, "When Fichte delivered these lectures in 1808, there remained very little for a man who wanted to take part in public affairs to do except to exhort his fellow countrymen to improve their intellectual standard" (Aris, op. cit., p. 352).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

The world "that is comprehended by thought" is, of course, the realm of the supersensuous. As only the existence of this world is absolutely real and true, and education, if it intends to provide the student with knowledge of real worth, must concern itself exclusively with the real and true, it follows that a worthy education will treat only of that which pertains to the supersensuous.

Accordingly, the new education (which is to be applied to all without exception) will proceed from the principles of transcendental philosophy, as this education aims to transmit knowledge bearing on those laws "which condition all possible mental activity",<sup>17</sup> knowledge "which transcends all experience, which is abstract, absolute, and strictly universal, and which includes within itself beforehand all subsequent possible experience".<sup>18</sup> In a word, the new education aims to acquaint the student with a priori knowledge. To this end, the new education will develop the students' natural inclination and ability to create mental images spontaneously, availing itself of the tendency to "clearness and order"<sup>19</sup> that, as children, they enjoy as a natural aptitude in this realm of mental images. The promotion of this mental capacity, a necessary precondition for the development of the pupils' moral capacity, as we shall see presently, is the centerpiece of the system of national education and its paramount concern.

As for his properly anthropological assumptions, Fichte contends that the old education presupposed that students feel a natural aversion to both the process of learning and the demands entailed by an adherence to the good. Over against this notion, Fichte argues that it was the method of the old education and its goals that disaffected the student, noting that "the eternal, universal, and fundamental law of man's mental nature, [is] that he must directly engage in mental activity".<sup>20</sup> Fichte's plan, on the other hand, proceeds from the assumption that all persons naturally desire to devote their energies to mental engagement and stimulation; insofar as they incline to self-seeking and the pursuit of material gains this is only because their basic needs remain unsatisfied. By directly stimulating pupils' natural, spontaneous activity from the beginning, the new education will promote their inborn desire to learn, generating a love of learning, which love forms the basis of all knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

The old education's emphasis on the instrumental value of education was of a piece with its supposition that students do not enjoy learning: students were assured from the first that the knowledge acquired through their education would be of later use as a means of attaining some goal or other, and that *this* consideration justified the demands made of them. The old educators failed to grasp that such a method was unnecessary, for all desire to engage in mental activity and the experience of this activity generates a pleasure in knowledge as such. Students were not

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

taught to take pleasure either in learning as such or in knowledge for its own sake. This instrumentalization of knowledge necessarily corrupted the old education.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, in the system of national education the student will not be taught that the product of learning may serve purposes in the world of sense perception. It will thus preserve the mental sphere free of all corruption by "material motives", thereby extirpating "the root of immorality".<sup>23</sup> Instead, through their constant, lively engagement with "mental images" the students will come to love knowledge as such, and through this love of knowledge seek ever more mental activity for its own sake. Central to Fichte's system of education is the assumption that "there is at the root of man's nature a pure pleasure in the good, which can be developed to such an extent that it becomes impossible for him to leave undone what he knows to be good and to do instead what he knows to be evil."<sup>24</sup> The ultimate purpose of Fichte's program consists in just such a development.

Given this natural inclination to the good, the system's core instruction, devoted largely to cultivating student's awareness of and sensitivity to the supersensuous, serves at the same time as a preparation for this ultimate purpose – moral training – for it is this mental capacity that must be harnessed to stimulate a vivid conception of the moral order of life, namely life as it ought to be, life in accordance with the laws of reason. The thorough training with mental images furnishes a "means of applying moral training to the pupil"<sup>25</sup> by enabling students to attain a vivid conception of the kingdom of ends, from which they may deduce the possibilities for its instantiation as a temporal "moral world-order". It is in this regard that the value of an apprenticeship in the production of mental images becomes eminently clear: a facility in the generation of mental images affords the student the abilities necessary for the formation of moral prototypes. By seeking first to foster and exploit a material motivation and only subsequently to teach pure morality, the old education doomed itself from the start.<sup>26</sup> To train students first to a pure will, on the other hand, renders them immune to any subsequent enticements to self-seeking.

Therefore, having provided a profound initiation into the supersensuous, the system of national education will culminate in an education in pure morality; as such, it will furnish nothing less than a "reliable and deliberate art for fashioning in man a stable and infallible good will".<sup>27</sup> In this fashion the system of national education succeeds in assuring a clarity of the understanding (theoretical reason) and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Cf. the tenth Address (p.147): "How then could education ever implant morality in the child, if morality did not exist in him originally and before all education?"

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> "The existing education...has not only assumed, but has also taught its pupils from early youth onward, that man has a natural aversion to God's commandments, and, further, that it is absolutely impossible for him to keep them. What else can be expected of such instruction...than that each individual should yield to his absolutely unchangeable nature, should not try to achieve what has once been represented to him as impossible, and should not desire to be better than he and all others can be?" (Fichte, *Addresses*, pp. 41-42).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

a purity of will (practical reason).<sup>28</sup> Yet it is more, for inasmuch it instills a love of the good for its own sake, and because its knowledge never becomes divorced from but rather always influences life, the new education will likewise be an “education to true religion”.<sup>29</sup> Finally, this moral training promises to foster a “true and all-powerful love of fatherland”.<sup>30</sup> as the students come to grasp and appreciate the eternal in their fellow Germans, they will develop a boundless love for the nation and commitment to its well-being.

With regard to the system of national education’s actual organization and curriculum, here it will suffice to note only the most general features. First of all, pupils are to be kept at a distance from the larger community and isolated from any contact with it, lest they discover, for instance, that their “vital impulses and actions can be directed toward [their] maintenance and welfare, [or] that learning may be of some use for that purpose”.<sup>31</sup> In addition to being self-contained, the educational community is to be completely self-sufficient, producing practically all of the goods necessary for its proper functioning. Virtual self-sufficiency will be possible because pupils will combine their studies with the performance of various manual occupations; their education will involve both “intellectual” and “perceptual” exercises. Accordingly, all students will receive instruction in agriculture, gardening, and cattle-rearing-at once manual occupations and tasks whose execution makes self-sufficiency possible. Finally, all students will undergo a rigorous physical education, a systematic training and discipline of the body.

As a system of *universal* national education the program summarized above is to be offered to all Germans; all are to pass through it, including the future “scholars”. However, because they are to assume the governance of society, those selected as future scholars-owing to their “excellent gift for learning and a conspicuous inclination for the world of ideas”,<sup>32</sup> – receive an additional, special training open to them alone (whereas for the rest of the citizenry all formal education necessarily ends with the completion of the national education). Moreover, even within the “universal” segment of the system of national education their training differs in certain crucial respects from the curriculum provided for all other students. For, since their vocation requires sustained “mental self-activity”, prolonged “solitary reflection” and the accumulation of much learning that would be of no use to non-scholars,<sup>33</sup> and since these activities require a vast allotment of time, the scholars’ regimen exempts them from the performance of manual labor (though not physical exercises). During the hours that the other pupils devote to manual work the future scholars will apply themselves to the studies necessary for their profession. Also, and for much the same reason, the scholars are introduced

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 26. It should be noted that Fichte never specifies the expected duration of the universal education.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-158.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

to writing at an earlier age than those enrolled solely in the universal national system. Considering the centrality of the scholars' role in Fichte's educational theory and political theory as outlined in the *Addresses*, it is remarkable how little discussion of the scholars and their guiding role in the regeneration of the German nation appears in the lectures. Since, however, an understanding of the scholars' status in Fichte's thought is crucial if one is to grasp the full political implications of the lectures, it is most helpful, if not absolutely necessary, to consult his treatment of the scholar in two earlier works, likewise based on "popular" lectures, in which an analysis of the scholar as such is his explicit theme: *The Vocation of the Scholar* (1794), and *The Nature of the Scholar* (1806).<sup>34</sup>

In the first lecture of *The Nature of the Scholar* Fichte defines the scholar in the following terms:

"In every age, that kind of education and spiritual culture by means of which the age hopes to lead mankind to the knowledge of the ascertained part of the Divine Idea, is the Learned Culture of the age; and every man who partakes in this culture is the Scholar of the age."<sup>35</sup>

In other words, the supersensuous culture of an age, as it were, constitutes its learned culture, and all who participate in this culture may properly be reckoned scholars. The scholars are those committed to attaining the maximum understanding of the Divine Idea, conceived as the essentially noumenal ground of all natural appearances,<sup>36</sup> possible in a given age. Elsewhere in the same lecture Fichte propounds an even more general, more inclusive definition of the scholar, when he suggests that the life of the scholar is both attained and maintained by an "all-engrossing love for the idea".<sup>37</sup>

In further elaborating this conception of the scholar Fichte distinguishes between "finished scholars" and "progressive scholars". The finished scholars include all those who have achieved the consummate expression of their vocation, having "actually laid hold of the whole Divine Idea insofar as it is attainable by man".<sup>38</sup> In contrast, a progressive scholar is essentially any student who shares the passion of the finished scholars and aspires to their vocation. The progressive scholar "strives and struggles to attain a clear insight into the Idea generally" but cannot as yet unite the "sparks of light" into "one indivisible whole".<sup>39</sup> Both may

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<sup>34</sup> *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte*, op. cit., pp. 169-363. According to Fichte's preface, *The Nature of the Scholar and its Manifestations*, by far the more instructive work as regards his conception of the scholar, "may also be considered as a new and improved edition" of the *Vocation* (*Popular Works*, p. 241).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247. For Fichte, one who participates in the learned culture without thereby attaining to some understanding of the Idea embodies the worst condition of all, being "an equivocal mongrel between the possessor of the Idea and him who is altogether supported and borne up by common reality [...]" (*Popular Works*, p. 249).

<sup>36</sup> "This concealed foundation of all appearance may, in its greatest universality, be aptly named *the Divine Idea...*" (*Popular Works*, p. 247; italics in original).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

claim some understanding of the Idea, but whereas the former enjoys a firm, clear possession of the Idea, which, consequently, “strives to flow forth in living words and deeds”, in the latter the Idea is “still active only within himself”, lacking the clearness and “firm consistency” that would enable it to flow forth.<sup>40</sup>

Although most progressive scholars will ultimately become finished scholars, it remains impossible for them to know with certainty whether or not they will eventually acquire the comprehension of (and relationship to) the Idea unique to the scholars.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Fichte maintains that it is not possible to determine from mere external appearances whether or not one who presumes to be a scholar is in fact a scholar, since that which truly defines the scholar, namely that singular approximation to the Idea, does not admit of empirical verification. Thus, even the true – i.e., “finished” – scholars only attain to the Idea with time, and their achievement is known to themselves alone.

“Whether in any given case this end [i.e., attainment of knowledge of the divine Idea] has been attained or not, can never be determined by common observation, for it is quite blind to the Idea, and can do no more than recognize the merely empirical fact whether a man has enjoyed or has not enjoyed the advantage of what is called Learned Culture.”<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, Fichte takes pains to caution against taking appearance for reality in the case of a putative scholar.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, among the finished scholars themselves there emerges another kind of distinction, stemming from the division of labor among the scholars. Scholars assume their vocation either as “pure” scholars or a “pragmatic” scholars, depending on whether they dedicate themselves to the pursuit of Ideas for their own sake and to communicating their insight to others, or to the application of their insight to the affairs of the world. The latter “fashion the world [...] after these [supersensuous] Ideas; perhaps to model the Legislation, – the legal and social relations of men to each other [...]”;<sup>44</sup> yet it is the “pure scholars” whom Fichte regards as the highest expression of the scholarly vocation, the scholars “properly and preeminently so called”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 249. It is far from clear in the *Nature of the Scholar* whether all progressive scholars who truly love the Idea will eventually become finished scholars or not. In the first lecture (*Popular Works*, op. cit., p. 254) Fichte suggests that all ultimately will become finished scholars, while in the fourth lecture (p. 289) his claim seems to be that their final status depends more on whether or not they were destined for such a vocation.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 325. Even assuming that there exists a perfect continuity in Fichte's thought from the *Nature* (1806) to the *Addresses* (1808), this background, while helpful, hardly resolves all ambiguity regarding the connotation that Fichte attaches to “scholar” in the *Addresses*. For, given his analyses in *The Vocation of the Scholar* and *The Nature of the Scholar*, there arise two different possibilities of interpretation in the *Addresses*: either Fichte identifies the “scholars” with the aggregate of all who pursue the Idea, whether progressive or finished scholars, or in speaking of the scholars he is referring only to the finished scholars. (It would seem untenable to hold that he

Having reviewed both the substance of the system of national education and the essence of Fichte's conception of the scholar, it should now be easier to grasp the insurmountable contradictions, already anticipated above, between the system's emancipatory, utopian pretensions and its inherently necessary tendency to perpetuate domination and a rigidly hierarchical regimentation of social life, in the form of a scholarly despotism.

Let us begin with Fichte's justification of the scholars' claim to (political) sovereignty. However indefinite the other aspects of Fichte's conception of the scholars, he leaves little doubt as to what he regards as the basis of their claim to rule. In a word, their claim to political authority derives from their privileged access to truth, their superior understanding of the Idea. Indeed, in the *Vocation of the Scholar* Fichte calls the scholar "a priest of truth", for "there is in all men a feeling of truth, which indeed is not sufficient in itself, but must be developed, proved, and purified; – and to do this is the task of the Scholar".<sup>46</sup> In the *Vocation's* chapter titled, significantly, "Of The Scholar As Ruler", Fichte formulates this grasp of truth – and hence, for him, justification of authority – in terms of a capacity for a singularly clairvoyant comprehension of the whole: "the true vocation of the Scholar... [consists in] the most widely extended survey of the actual advancement of the human race in general, and the steadfast promotion of that advancement".<sup>47</sup>

Fichte's basic proposition receives an even more explicit, more categorical formulation in the *Staatslehre* (lectures from 1813), where he declares: "No one has an external right against reason. The highest reason has therefore a right to compel all to follow his insight."<sup>48</sup> In formulations such as these the quasi – providential sanction of the scholars' authority becomes especially apparent. In keeping with this motif, Fichte will speak of the "holiness" of the scholars' vocation and designate the scholar as the "highest, truest man".<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in the *Nature of the*

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means only the "pure" branch among the finished scholars, since, after all, the scholars are to govern the new order and this responsibility will require the application of their special insight to worldly affairs. In short, the sovereignty of the scholars necessarily implies the inclusion of the "pragmatic" scholars among them. The allusion to professional differentiation among the scholars that occurs near the end of the tenth address [p. 158] likewise suggests that the sovereign scholars will comprise both pure and pragmatic scholars.)

As it turns out, however, only the former construction appears really tenable, for the finished scholars emerge from the ranks of the progressive scholars. Let us recall that the *Addresses* propose only two educational tracks: the universal curriculum, and the curriculum *cum* supplementary education provided to the scholars. Since all of the potential scholars will have to receive a scholar's education and the group of potential scholars is identical to the group of progressive scholars, all who belong among the progressive scholars will have to receive a scholar's education.

<sup>46</sup> Fichte, *Popular Works*, op. cit., pp. 224, 221.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

<sup>48</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Comments on the Theory of the State," in *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, ed. H.S. Reiss (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), p. 122.

<sup>49</sup> "What is the vocation of the Scholar? or what is the same thing, as will appear in due time, the vocation of the highest, truest, man?" (*Popular Works*, op. cit., p. 176). Fichte discusses the scholars' holiness in the seventh lecture of the *Nature of the Scholar*.

*Scholar* Fichte posits the scholar as the true locus of mediation between the human and the divine, the finite and the eternal. The scholar

“looks upon his vocation as the Divine Will with regard to the Human Race; [...] he recognizes in himself one of the first and immediate servants of God, – one of the material organs through which God communicates with reality”.<sup>50</sup>

Yet this ultimate justification for the sovereignty of the scholars is brought to bear only implicitly and indirectly in the *Addresses*: despite their frequent allusions to the divine ground of reason, the *Addresses*' method for legitimizing the scholars' rule does not consist in a direct, explicit appeal to the theological expression of the scholars' sanction. Rather, in the *Addresses* Fichte derives the scholars' right to supreme political authority by equating education with the development of reason through an engagement with the supersensuous. The emphasis on this aspect of education serves to justify Fichte's glorification of education in general and his own system in particular, which in turn warrants his elevation of the scholars. As they possess the most education, on the one hand, and the pedagogical responsibility for the rest of society, on the other, the scholars represent the supreme achievement of education, and hence the highest expression of reason, too. Again, the *Staatslehre* furnishes Fichte's most explicit formulation of these fundamental premises: “They [the scholars] have already beforehand proved themselves the best educators of the people, and this gives them the right and the claim to govern the people as well.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise,

“compulsion is justified only by education for future insight; this alone permits the person who compels to take it on his own conscience. He can therefore be only the most educated person or he whom all must consider to be the most educated person. Only thus can he obtain a right to power.”<sup>52</sup>

Having established education as both the supreme (institutional) social good and the German people's primary national concern, Fichte can proceed to invoke the basic educational institution, *the school*, as the essential institutional or structural framework for the regeneration of the German nation. This, in turn, allows Fichte to generalize the institutional basis of the scholars' authority from the school to society as such. The qualifications that recommend the scholars' authority and require their supremacy within an educational institution are now regarded as entitling them to political sovereignty as well. Supreme pedagogical authority thus becomes supreme political authority.

Moreover, by formulating all of his proposals in terms of educational institutions not only can Fichte dispense with any appeal to what constitutes for him the ultimate ground for the scholars' claim to authority (discussed above); this approach also enables him to legitimate the concrete institutional mechanisms on the basis of which the scholars will be able to exercise their authority. However

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<sup>50</sup> *Popular Works*, op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>51</sup> *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

compelling their claim to political authority, the scholars can hardly hope to achieve the regeneration of the German nation without an institutional basis; hence the virtue of remodelling society after the school. In addition, once the school, as the primary institutional locus of formal education, is equated with society as a whole, every undertaking in this sphere of society bears on the whole of society. Educational reform therefore loses its semi-autonomous character; it necessarily constitutes essential social and political reform, too. It is only on account of this conflation of the pedagogical and the political that Fichte can identify revolutionary educational reform with the task of total regeneration.

In this fashion the *Addresses*' inordinate exaltation of education justifies both the legitimacy and the necessity of the scholars' regimen. Lest there be any doubts as to the scope of this authority, it is well to bear in mind the relevant remarks in the *Nature of the Scholar*, in which Fichte asserts the scholars' political preeminence in no uncertain terms.

"No one, I may remark in passing, ought to intermeddle in the direct guidance and ordering of human affairs, who is not a Scholar in the true sense of the word; that is, who has not by means of Learned Culture become a participator in the Divine Idea. With labourers and hodmen it is otherwise: – their virtue consists in punctual obedience, in the careful avoidance of all independent thought, and in confiding the direction of their occupations to other men."<sup>53</sup>

This is, in essence, the underlying logic of the *Addresses* with respect to the political status accorded to the scholars. Yet, although Fichte seems completely unaware of the problem, the fact is that he cannot on his own terms affirm both the unqualified sovereignty of the scholars and the system of national education as described in the *Addresses*. Put simply, the thrust of the knowledge imparted by

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<sup>53</sup> *Popular Works*, op. cit., p. 250. To be sure, it is hardly unthinkable that in this regard Fichte's thought underwent a transformation as a result of the Napoleonic conquest of Prussia; yet there is nothing in the *Addresses* themselves to suggest that he modified his view of the common people's role in political affairs. It is useful to bear in mind in this regard that "all who get through only the universal national education are intended for the working classes" (*Addresses*, op. cit., p. 155). Commenting on the ramifications of adopting the national system, Eugene Anderson writes: "If everyone were educated up to the limit of his capacity, as Fichte demanded, caste distinctions soon would be obliterated. ... So with privilege and nationalism: no obstacle should be left to impede the development of the individual for the sake of the nation..... As the instrument of the divine, the nation should function perfectly; therefore, if must be reorganized in accordance with freedom in reason. Caste must go, privilege must go, an organic, national society must take their places" (Eugene Anderson, *Nationalism and the Cultural Crisis in Prussia, 1806-1815* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), pp. 54-56). In fact, the new system would continue to be rigidly hierarchical, albeit without the hereditary "caste" privileges to which Anderson alludes. That he could fail to perceive the deeply authoritarian implications of Fichte's proposals is amazing. (As for the scholars' actual execution of their governmental responsibilities, consider Fichte's general remarks in the *Staatslehre*: "[...] the Republic of Scholars who, from among themselves, are to elect the sovereign ruler. He will always be an elderly man but he has been thinking about the state during the whole of his life [...]. The senior government servants, the ministers, must also come from this highest sphere of intelligence. Planned education of the people and planned government are one and the same thing; legislation pronounces in accordance with those things to which the scholars educated the legislators" (*The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, op. cit., Reiss, p. 122).)

the system of national education, its substantive content, is such that it undermines the basis of the scholars' claim to rule. As will become increasingly evident, we need only take Fichte at his word, we need only accept his own description and definition of the new education and his own claims regarding its necessary results, to conclude that the system of national education completely invalidates Fichte's justification for the sovereignty of the scholars.

Let us recall, to begin with, that the system of national education is above all an education in true perception. Accordingly, it consists essentially in the promotion of the pupils' knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the supersensuous: the new education seeks above all to familiarize pupils with the Idea, so that all can perceive the ethical imperatives contained therein. Which is to say, the purpose of the new system of education is, in fact, the universalization of "learned culture", to use Fichte's own terminology. But if this is indeed the case, if the system succeeds as envisioned by Fichte and all who undergo the education come to participate in the learned culture, does it not follow that even the citizen who passes solely through the universal (i.e., non-scholarly) period of instruction will emerge as "a Scholar in the true sense of the word; that is, [one] who has [...] by means of Learned Culture become a participator in the Divine Idea"<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, one cannot escape the conclusion that in the system of national education every pupil becomes a scholar of sorts, given the connotation that Fichte attaches to the term in 1806. For, does not every student finish his or her education in the condition of at least a "progressive" scholar, convinced of the primacy of the supersensuous, enamored of the Idea? In fact, insofar as a fundamental distinction separates those who pass through a scholarly education from those who undergo the general education alone, it would seem to be best characterized in terms of a distinction between "finished" scholars and "progressive" scholars. But if a distinction such as this one results from the implementation of the system of national education, if all citizens, even those "who get through only the universal national education [and] are intended for the working classes",<sup>55</sup> attain to such an understanding of the supersensuous, what factors justify the preservation of scholarly privilege and the sovereignty of the scholars?

In this regard it is crucial to bear in mind that in the *Addresses* Fichte goes so far as to claim that those who pass through the universal program alone will develop talents comparable to those of the scholars produced by the old education. In his own words, the new education assures the

"easy development of the faculty of knowledge and the successful cultivation of the fields of science; a result that is certain and premeditated in this education, but which was formerly attained by chance in the case of a few specially favoured persons"<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> *Popular Works*, op. cit., p. 250.

<sup>55</sup> *Addresses*, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146. Cf. Fichte's remarks in the tenth Address: "If we should once get our national education, experience will show how the majority of those scholars [produced by the old education] will fare, with their purchased learning, against, I will not say the scholar trained in the new school, but even against the ordinary man produced by it" (*Addresses*, p. 157).

Yet, if all the beneficiaries of the new education are to reach those heights formerly attained only by the privileged, fortunate few, namely the outstanding scholars of old (who by Fichte's own admission were excellent), why insist on their subordination in principle to the scholars? Why establish a rigid political hierarchy between what are, in effect, progressive and finished scholars?

Considerations such as these prove all the more significant when we view Fichte's proposals as the practical application of a theory of meritocracy,<sup>57</sup> as is often done. For, it should be noted, first of all, that in Fichte's scheme the scholars need not prove their merit: they enjoy their authority by virtue of their profession, and the acquiescence of the rest of the populace is not voluntary, but juridically enjoined. It would, therefore, be a grave misunderstanding to construe Fichte's scholarly elite as a variation of the Jeffersonian conception of meritocracy, or rule by an "aristocracy of virtue and talents", for Fichte asserts the right of the scholars as a corporate body to rule, and the members of this body are to be selected in their youth on the basis of their promise alone.

Let us examine these questions in more detail. Fichte's argument presupposes that the scholars will necessarily constitute a meritocracy by virtue of their training, for there is no mention of any requirement that they first distinguish themselves by demonstrating their talent and virtue. The basis of their claim to rule derives from their status as scholars, and not from a record of worthy, admirable achievement. As though this criterion were not problematic enough, the method of selecting the scholars outlined in the *Addresses* calls for identifying them at a relatively young age (presumably at the beginning of adolescence), on the basis of their "excellent gift for learning and [...] conspicuous inclination for the world of ideas".<sup>58</sup> Consequently, insofar as the demonstration of merit actually matters for the composition of the future meritocracy, it is merit that is demonstrated at a young age, merit that suffices for one to be selected as a scholar; no matter how much merit – that is, talent plus effort – a non-scholar manifests, he or she is necessarily denied the possibility of becoming a meritocrat. Assuming that all who pass through the universal national education become at least progressive scholars, the process of selecting scholars at a young age appears particularly arbitrary. And this selection process appears almost totally arbitrary if we recall Fichte's contention that the qualities which truly define the scholar never manifest themselves outwardly – let alone when the individual is still a youth. To the contrary, "scientific talent usually unfolds itself more slowly, the higher and purer its essential nature, and its clear development waits for mature years and manly strength".<sup>59</sup> (What is more, as was noted above, it is not even the case that all those who are trained to be scholars eventually become true – i.e., "finished" – scholars.)

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<sup>57</sup> I use the term as defined by Roger Scruton in *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 297, "to denote government by those *thought to possess* merit [...]. 'Merit' means, roughly, intelligence plus effort, both of which capacities are early identified and selectively nurtured through an education system designed to advance 'merit' as rapidly as possible, so that it will emerge in the form of an elite prepared to take charge of government."

<sup>58</sup> *Addresses*, op. cit., pp. 157-158.

<sup>59</sup> *Popular Works*, op. cit., p. 322.

These issues lead us to the question of the formal basis for the scholars' authority: What kind of consent would legitimate the scholars' meritocracy? In one aside in the tenth Address Fichte mentions the two "very different ways of subordinating the personal self to the community".<sup>60</sup> The first, he explains, consists in a juridically enjoined subordination to the community's constitution; the second, in voluntary self-sacrifice for the good of the community. According to Fichte, the second is the higher virtue, and the only one worthy of special approbation. Nevertheless, to all appearances the rule of Fichte's scholars would rest on the *first* principle of self-subordination, i.e., enjoined obedience. Given the nature of the system of national education and the importance of morality therein, on the one hand, and the higher value that Fichte attaches to the second kind of self-subordination, on the other, it is odd that Fichte does not insist on the need for the scholars to earn the latter type of authority. (Presumably one's obedience to a Jeffersonian-style meritocracy consists in the second type of self-subordination, that is, voluntary consent resting, in the last analysis, on a recognition of the meritocrats' proven right to authority.)

In any event, even if it were the case that some sort of distinction between the scholars and the rest of the citizenry make the former uniquely qualified to rule, one has to wonder: Does this question not become irrelevant given the caliber of the human beings that the system of national education will yield? After all, if Fichte's plan promises a "regeneration of the human race", and "once this generation is in existence, everything that we can long for in our boldest wishes will come into being of itself from the very existence of that generation",<sup>61</sup> one is hard pressed to see what need might exist for the continuation of government by, and subordination to, the scholars.

In the end, however, we need not even take remarks such as these at face value in order to make the same point; it suffices to appreciate the preeminently moral character of Fichte's project. Again, the new system comprises an educa-

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<sup>60</sup> *Addresses*, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187; 175. Such remarks abound in the *Addresses*. Fichte speaks of "a complete regeneration of the human race" (pp. 133; 187); "the new human race which would arise" (p. 167); "founding a new race" (p. 173), etc.

We might also note here that certain qualities that Fichte ascribes to the German people, in addition to making them especially receptive to the curriculum contained in the system of national education (such as their special appreciation of "mental culture", due in the last analysis to their possession of a "living language"), tend to diminish the barrier between the representatives of "mental culture" and the rest of the citizenry. Indeed, even under the old education there existed a closer relationship between the representatives of "mental culture" and the rest of the nation in Germany than in most other nations. (See note 10.)

On the other hand, will not the Germans, as the people who most cherish freedom (*Addresses*, pp. 107; 109) resist such constraints as their subordination to the scholars require, especially when, having undergone the national system of education, their own rectitude renders these constraints completely unnecessary? "This much is clear," Fichte declares in the eighth Address, "that an original people needs freedom, that this is the security for its continuance as an original people, and that, as it goes on, it is able to stand an ever-increasing degree of freedom without the slightest danger." (*Addresses*, p. 119) As an "original people", is it only freedom from other *nations* that the Germans need?

tion for perfect rectitude. If, however, this is the case, if by means of their training pupils come to an understanding and appreciation of their true interests – which coincide with universal interests – such that it becomes impossible for them to act contrary to the good, what needs justify the preservation of scholarly authority and political paternalism? If, acting autonomously, the graduates of Fichte's system invariably obey the moral laws, what need will they have for *scholarly* tutelage? As Reinhold Aris puts it, alluding to the implications of Fichte's thought in the *Characteristics of the Present Age*, "If all individuals realized that perfect morality could be achieved by subjection to the moral laws, no State would be required."<sup>62</sup>

In this connection it is also well to recall Fichte's claim that, far from being a cognitive or intellectual crisis, the source of the national degeneration and decline which brought the Third Age to a catastrophic close and plunged Germany into its national crisis was essentially *moral* in nature – the ascendance and eventual preponderance of self-seeking – and that it is for this reason that the German people stand in need of moral guidance in the first place. Indeed, if the problem were not at bottom moral in nature, could one expect it to respond to a moral remedy? If the German nation's major defect were not one of moral ignorance, how could a primarily moral education bear a utopian promise? In short, then, the realization of the new education's primary goal would render superfluous the guidance of the scholars. Their authority would lose its justification.<sup>63</sup>

Thus it is that the supposed results of the system of national education, the very results which, according to Fichte, most recommend its urgent implementation, prove inconsistent with his demand for rule by the scholars. Unfortunately, Fichte himself remains unaware of this fundamental contradiction in the *Addresses to the German Nation*, insisting on both the necessity (and desirability) of these results *and* the institutional preconditions of scholarly sovereignty. Consequently, the potential for radical democratization contained in the most progressive elements of the system of national education – compulsory education for all citizens, an identical curriculum for both sexes, the overcoming of the mental labor/manual labor dichotomy, the method of actively involving pupils in the learning process, and so on – is fatally undermined from the start. Such are the some of the momentous implications of Fichte's division of the polity into scholars and non – scholars in the *Addresses to the German Nation*.

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<sup>62</sup> *History of Political Thought in Germany*, op. cit., p. 350. It should be noted that Fichte nowhere gives the impression that the scholars' domination is to be transitional, a phase merely attending the establishment of the new system of education.

<sup>63</sup> In the *Staatslehre* Fichte formulates this justification as follows: "Therefore [...] those men shall rule whom the others at least think capable of this insight [i.e., recognition of the moral law], so that they can obey their authority without receiving any special account of their actions or intended actions" (*The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, pp. 118-119).