German History in Documents and Images

Volume 2. From Absolutism to Napoleon, 1648-1815
Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807/08)

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) was a distinguished post-Kantian philosopher and notorious intellectual radical who was stripped of his Jena professorship in 1798 after allegations of atheism and Jacobinism were raised against him. Finding refuge in Prussia, he was appointed professor at the new University of Berlin, a post he held from 1810 until his death, four years later, at the age of 52. His addresses have been stigmatized as expressions of intolerant and megalomaniacal German nationalism. In reality, their worst fault is intemperate anti-French sentiment, not surprising in the era of the Napoleonic domination of Germany. These excerpts display Fichte's inclination to interpret "Germanness" as a philosophical disposition that includes a drive toward the attainment of freedom and a liberal state (though he does not advocate a single German nation-state). The text displays the influence of German liberal historicism, Kantian moral-political philosophy, and Herderian concerns with national identity.

Addresses to the German Nation

Johann Gottlieb Fichte

Seventh Address

A Closer Study of the Originality and Characteristics of a People

In the preceding addresses we have indicated and proved from history the characteristics of the Germans as an original people, and as a people that has the right to call itself simply *the* people, in contrast to other branches that have been torn away from it; for indeed the word "*deutsch*" in its real signification denotes what we have just said. It will be in accordance with our purpose if we devote another hour to this subject and deal with a possible objection, viz., that if this is something peculiarly German one must confess that at the present time there is but little left that is German among the Germans themselves. As we are quite unable to deny that this appears to be so, but rather intend to acknowledge it and to take a complete view of it in its separate parts, we propose to give an explanation of it at the outset.

We have seen that the relationship in which the original people of the modern world stood to the progress of modern culture was as follows: the former received from the incomplete, and never more than superficial, efforts of foreign countries the first stimulus to more profound creative

acts, which were to be developed from its own midst. As it undoubtedly takes times for the stimulus to result in a creative act, it is plain that such a relationship will bring about periods of time in which the original people must seem to be almost entirely amalgamated with foreign peoples and similar to them, because it is then being stimulated only, and the creative act which is to be the result has not yet forced its way through. It is in such a period of time that Germany finds itself at the present moment in regard to the great majority of its educated inhabitants; and that is the reason for those manifestations of a love of everything foreign which are a part of the very inner soul and life of this majority. In the preceding address we saw that the means by which foreign countries stimulate their motherland at the present time is philosophy, which we defined as free-thinking released from all fetters of belief in external authority. Now, when this stimulus has not resulted in a new creative act–and it will result thus in extremely few cases, for the great majority have no conception of what creation means–the following effects are observable. For one thing, that foreign philosophy which we have already described changes its own form again and again. Another thing is that its spirit usurps the mastery over the other sciences whose borders are contiguous with philosophy, and regards them from its own point of view. Finally, since the German after all can never entirely lay aside his seriousness and its direct influence on life, this philosophy influences the habits of public life and the principles and rules that govern it. We shall substantiate these assertions step by step.

First and most importantly: man does not form his scientific view in a particular way voluntarily and arbitrarily, but it is formed for him by his life, and is in reality the inner, and to him unknown, root of his own life, which has become his way of looking at things. It is what you really are in your inmost soul that stands forth to 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. Now, the inner essence of non-German ways, or of non-originality, is the belief in something that is final, fixed, and settled beyond the possibility of change, the belief in a borderline, on the hither side of which free life may disport itself, but which it is never able to break through and dissolve by its own power, and which it can never make part of itself. This impenetrable borderline is, therefore, inevitably present to the eyes of foreigners at some place or other, and it is impossible for them to think or believe except with such a borderline as a presupposition, unless their whole nature is to be transformed and their heart torn out of their body. They inevitably believe in death as alpha and omega, the ultimate source of all things and, therefore, of life itself.

[. . .]

Altogether different is the genuine German art of the state. It, too, seeks fixity, surety, and independence of blind and halting nature, and in this it is quite in agreement with foreign countries. But unlike these, it does not seek a fixed and certain thing, as the first element, which will make the spirit, as the second element, certain; on the contrary, it seeks from the very beginning, and as the very first and only element, a firm and certain spirit. This is for it the mainspring, whose life proceeds from itself, and which has perpetual motion; the mainspring which will regulate, and continuously keep in motion, the life of society. The German art of the

state understands that it cannot create this spirit by reprimanding adults who are already spoiled by neglect, but only by educating the young, who are still unspoiled. Moreover, with this education it will not turn, as foreign countries do, to the solitary peak, the prince, but to the broad plain which is the nation; for indeed the prince, too, will without doubt be part of the nation. Just as the state, in the persons of its adult citizens, is the continued education of the human race, so must the future citizen himself, in the opinion of this art of the state, first be educated up to the point of being susceptible to that higher education. So this German and very modern art of the state becomes once more the very ancient art of the state, which among the Greeks founded citizenship on education and trained such citizens as succeeding ages have never seen. Henceforth the German will do what is in form the same, though in content it will be characterized by a spirit that is not narrow and exclusive, but universal and cosmopolitan.

[. . .]

Eighth Address

What is a People in the Higher Meaning of the Word, and what is Love of Fatherland?

The last four addresses have answered the question: What is the German as contrasted with other peoples of Teutonic descent? The proof to be adduced by all this for our investigation as a whole is completed when we examine the further question: What is a people? This latter question is similar to another, and when it is answered the other is answered too. The other question, which is often raised and the answers to which are very different, is this: What is love of fatherland, or, to express it more correctly, what is love of the individual for his nation?

If we have hitherto proceeded correctly in the course of our investigation, it must here be obvious at once that only the German–the original man, who has not become dead in an arbitrary organization–really has a people and is entitled to count on one, and that he alone is capable of real and rational love for his nation.

The problem having been thus stated, we prepare the way for its solution by the following observation, which seems at first to have no connection with what has preceded it.

Religion, as we have already remarked in our third address, is able to transcend all time and the whole of this present sensuous life, without thereby causing the slightest detriment to the righteousness, morality, and holiness of the life that is permeated by this belief. Even if one is firmly persuaded that all our effort on this earth will not leave the slightest trace behind it nor yield the slightest fruit, nay more, that the divine effort will even be perverted and become an instrument of evil and of still deeper moral corruption, one can nonetheless continue the effort, solely in order to maintain the divine life that has manifested itself in us, and with a view to a higher order of things in a future world, in which no deed that is of divine origin is lost. Thus the apostles, for example, and the primitive Christians in general, because of their belief in heaven

had their hearts entirely set on things above the earth even in their lifetime; and earthly affairs–the state, their earthly fatherland, and nation–were abandoned by them so entirely that they no longer deemed them worthy of attention. Possible though this is, and to faith not difficult, and joyfully though one must resign one's self, once it is the unalterable will of God, to having an earthly fatherland no longer and to being serfs and exiles here below, nevertheless it is not the natural condition nor the rule of the universe; on the contrary, it is a rare exception. It is a gross misuse of religion, a misuse of which Christianity among other religions has frequently been guilty, to make a point of recommending, on principle and without regard to existing circumstances, such a withdrawal from the affairs of the state and the nation as the mark of a true religious disposition. In such a condition of things, if it is true and real and not merely the product of fitful religious zeal, temporal life loses all independent existence and becomes merely a forecourt of true life and a period of severe trial which is endured only out of obedience and resignation to the will of God. Then it is true that immortal souls, as many have imagined, are housed in earthly bodies, as in prisons, for their punishment. But on the other hand, in the regular order of things this earthly life itself is intended to be truly life, of which we may be glad and which we may enjoy in gratitude, while, of course, looking forward to a higher life. Although it is true that religion is, for one thing, the consolation of the unjustly oppressed slave, yet this above all is the mark of a religious disposition, viz., to fight against slavery and, as far as possible, to prevent religion from sinking into a mere consolation for captives. No doubt it suits the tyrant well to preach religious resignation and to bid those look to heaven to whom he allows not the smallest place on earth. But we for our part must be in less haste to adopt this view of religion that he recommends; and we must, if we can, prevent earth from being made into a hell in order to arouse a greater longing for heaven.

The natural impulse of man, which should be abandoned only in case of real necessity, is to find heaven on this earth, and to endow his daily work on earth with permanence and eternity; to plant and to cultivate the eternal in the temporal–not merely in an incomprehensible fashion or in a connection with the eternal that seems to mortal eye an impenetrable gulf, but in a fashion visible to the mortal eye itself.

Let me begin with an example that everyone will understand. What man of noble mind is there who does not earnestly wish to relive his own life in a new and better way in his children and his children's children, and to continue to live on this earth, ennobled and perfected in their lives, long after he is dead? Does he not wish to snatch from the jaws of death the spirit, the mind, and the moral sense by virtue of which, perchance, he was in the days of his life a terror to wrongdoing and corruption, and by which he supported righteousness, aroused men from indolence, and lifted them out of their depression? Does he not wish to deposit these qualities, as his best legacy to posterity, in the souls of those he leaves behind, so that they too, in their turn, may some day hand them on again, increased and made more beautiful? What man of noble mind is there who does not want to scatter, by action or thought, a grain of seed for the unending progress in perfection of his race, to fling something new and unprecedented into time, that it may remain there and become the inexhaustible source of new creations? Does he not wish to pay for his place on this earth and the short span of time allotted to him with

something that even here below will endure forever, so that he, the individual, although unnamed in history (for the thirst for posthumous fame is contemptible vanity), may yet in his own consciousness and his faith leave behind him unmistakable memories that he, too, was a dweller on the earth? What man of noble mind is there, I said, who does not want this? But only according to the needs of noble-minded men is the world to be regarded and arranged; as they are, so all men ought to be, and for their sake alone does a world exist. They are its kernel, and those of other mind exist only for their sake, being themselves only a part of the transitory world so long as they are of that mind. Such men must conform to the wishes of the noble-minded until they have become like them.

Now, what is it that could warrant this challenge and this faith of the noble-minded man in the permanence and eternity of his work? Obviously nothing but an order of things which he can acknowledge as in itself eternal and capable of taking up into itself that which is eternal. Such an order of things, however, is the special spiritual nature of human environment which, although indeed it is not to be comprehended in any fixed notion, nevertheless truly exists, and from which he himself, with all his thoughts and deeds and with his belief in their eternity, has proceeded–the people, from which he is descended and in whose midst he was educated and grew up to be what he now is. For, though it is true beyond dispute that his work, if he rightly claims it to be eternal, is in no wise the mere result of the spiritual law of nature of his nation or absolutely the same thing as this result, but on the contrary is something more than that and in so far streams forth directly from original and divine life; it is, nevertheless, equally true that this “something more,” immediately on its first embodiment in a visible form, submitted itself to that special spiritual law of nature and found sensuous expression for itself only according to that law. So long as this people exists, every further revelation of the divine will appear and take shape in that people in accordance with the same natural law. But this law itself is further determined by the fact that this man existed and worked as he did, and his influence has become a permanent part of this law. Hence, everything that follows will be bound to submit itself to, and connect itself with, that law. So he is sure that the improvement achieved by him remains in his people as long as the people itself remains, and that it becomes a permanent determining factor in the evolution of his people.

This, then, is a people in the higher meaning of the word, when viewed from the standpoint of a spiritual world: the totality of men continuing to live in society with each other and continually creating themselves naturally and spiritually out of themselves, a totality that arises together out of the divine under a certain special law of divine development. It is the subjection in common to this special law that unites this mass in the eternal world, and therefore in the temporal also, to a natural totality permeated by itself. The significance of this law itself can indeed be comprehended as a whole, as we have comprehended it by the instance of the Germans as an original people; it can even be better understood in many of its further provisions by considering the manifestations of such a people; but it can never be completely grasped by the mind of anyone, for everyone continually remains under its influence unknown to himself, although, in general, it can be clearly seen that such a law exists. This law is a “something more” of the world of images, that coalesces absolutely in the phenomenal world with the “something more”

of the world of originality that cannot be imaged; hence, in the phenomenal world neither can be separated again from the other. That law determines entirely and completes what has been called the national character of a people–that law of the development of the original and divine. From this it is clear that men who, as is the case with what we have described as the foreign spirit, do not believe at all in something original nor in its continuous development, but only in an eternal recurrence of apparent life, and who by their belief become what they believe, are in the higher sense not a people at all. As they in fact, properly speaking, do not exist, they are just as little capable of having a national character.

The noble-minded man's belief in the eternal continuance of his influence even on this earth is thus founded on the hope of the eternal continuance of the people from which he has developed, and on the characteristic of that people as indicated in the hidden law of which we have spoken, without admixture of, or corruption by, any alien element which does not belong to the totality of the functions of that law. This characteristic is the eternal thing to which he entrusts the eternity of himself and of his continuing influence, the eternal order of things in which he places his portion of eternity; he must will its continuance, for it alone is to him the means by which the short span of his life here below is extended into continuous life here below. His belief and his struggle to plant what is permanent, his conception in which he comprehends his own life as an eternal life, is the bond which unites first his own nation, and then, through his nation, the whole human race, in a most intimate fashion with himself, and brings all their needs within his widened sympathy until the end of time. This is his love for his people, respecting, trusting, and rejoicing in it, and feeling honored by descent from it. The divine has appeared in it, and that which is original has deemed this people worthy to be made its vesture and its means of directly influencing the world; for this reason there will be further manifestations of the divine in it. Hence, the noble-minded man will be active and effective, and will sacrifice himself for his people. Life merely as such, the mere continuance of changing existence, has in any case never had any value for him; he has wished for it only as the source of what is permanent. But this permanence is promised to him only by the continuous and independent existence of his nation. In order to save his nation he must be ready even to die that it may live, and that he may live in it the only life for which he has ever wished.

So it is. Love that is truly love, and not a mere transitory lust, never clings to what is transient; only in the eternal does it awaken and become kindled, and there alone does it rest. Man is not able to love even himself unless he conceives himself as eternal; apart from that he cannot even respect, much less approve of, himself. Still less can he love anything outside himself without taking it up into the eternity of his faith and of his soul and binding it thereto. He who does not first regard himself as eternal has in him no love of any kind, and, moreover, cannot love a fatherland, a thing which for him does not exist. He who regards his invisible life as eternal, but not his visible life as similarly eternal, may perhaps have a heaven and therein, a fatherland, but here below he has no fatherland, for this, too, is regarded only in the image of eternity–eternity visible and made sensuous–and for this reason also he is unable to love his fatherland. If none has been handed down to such a man, he is to be pitied. But he to whom a fatherland has been handed down, and in whose soul heaven and earth, visible and invisible

meet and mingle, and thus, and only thus, create a true and enduring heaven–such a man fights to the last drop of his blood to hand on the precious possession unimpaired to his posterity.

So it always has been, although it has not always been expressed in such general terms and so clearly as we express it here. What inspired the men of noble mind among the Romans, whose frame of mind and way of thinking still live and breathe among us in their works of art, to struggles and sacrifices, to patience and endurance for the fatherland? They themselves express it often and distinctly. It was their firm belief in the eternal continuance of their Roma, and their confident expectation that they themselves would eternally continue to live in this eternity in the stream of time. Insofar as this belief was well founded, and they themselves would have comprehended it if they had been entirely clear in their own minds, it did not deceive them. To this very day there still lives in our midst what was truly eternal in their eternal Roma; they themselves live with it, and its consequences will continue to live to the very end of time.

People and fatherland in this sense, as a support and guarantee of eternity on earth and as that which can be eternal here below, far transcend the state in the ordinary sense of the word, viz., the social order as comprehended by mere intellectual conception and as established and maintained under the guidance of this conception. The aim of the state is positive law, internal peace, and a condition of affairs in which everyone may by diligence earn his daily bread and satisfy the needs of his material existence, so long as God permits him to live. All this is only a means, a condition, and a framework for what love of fatherland really wants, viz., that the eternal and the divine may blossom in the world and never cease to become more and more pure, perfect, and excellent. That is why this love of fatherland must itself govern the state and be the supreme, final, and absolute authority. Its first exercise of this authority will be to limit the state's choice of means to secure its immediate object–internal peace. To attain this object, the natural freedom of the individual must, of course, be limited in many ways. If the only consideration and intention in regard to individuals were to secure internal peace, it would be well to limit that liberty as much as possible, to bring all their activities under a uniform rule, and to keep them under unceasing supervision. Even supposing such strictness were unnecessary, it could at any rate do no harm, if this were the sole object. It is only the higher view of the human race and of peoples which extends this narrow calculation. Freedom, including freedom in the activities of external life, is the soil in which higher culture germinates; a legislation which keeps the higher culture in view will allow to freedom as wide a field as possible, even at the risk of securing a smaller degree of uniform peace and quietness, and of making the work of government a little harder and more troublesome.

To illustrate this by an example: It has happened that nations have been told to their face that they do not need so much freedom as many other nations do. It may even be that the form in which the opinion is expressed is considerate and mild, if what is really meant is that the particular nation would be quite unable to stand so much freedom, and that nothing but extreme severity could prevent its members from destroying each other. But when the words are taken as meaning what they say, they are true only on the supposition that such a nation is thoroughly incapable of having original life or even the impulse toward it. Such a nation–if a nation could

exist in which there were not even a few men of noble mind to make an exception to the general rule–would in fact need no freedom at all, for this is needed only for the higher purposes that transcend the state. It needs only to be tamed and trained, so that the individuals may live peaceably with each other and that the whole may be made into an efficient instrument for arbitrary purposes in which the nation as such has no part. Whether this can be said with truth of any nation at all we may leave undecided; this much is clear, 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. This is the first matter in respect of which love of fatherland must govern the state itself.

Then, too, it must be love of fatherland that governs the state by placing before it a higher object than the usual one of maintaining internal peace, property, personal freedom, and the life and well-being of all. For this higher object alone, and with no other intention, does the state assemble an armed force. When the question arises of making use of this, when the call comes to stake everything that the state, in the narrow conception of the word, sets before itself as object, viz., property, personal freedom, life, and well-being, nay, even the continued existence of the state itself; when the call comes to make an original decision with responsibility to God alone, and without a clear and reasonable idea that what is intended will surely be attained–for this is never possible in such matters–then, and then only, does there live at the helm of the state a truly original and primary life, and at this point, and not before, the true sovereign rights of government enter, like God, to hazard the lower life for the sake of the higher. In the maintenance of the traditional constitution, the laws, and civil prosperity there is absolutely no real true life and no original decision. Conditions and circumstances, and legislators perhaps long since dead, have created these things; succeeding ages go on faithfully in the paths marked out, and so in fact they have no public life of their own; they merely repeat a life that once existed. In such times there is no need of any real government. But when this regular course is endangered, and it is a question of making decisions in new and unprecedented cases, then there is need of a life that lives of itself. What spirit is it that in such cases may place itself at the helm, that can make its own decisions with sureness and certainty, untroubled by any hesitation? What spirit has an undisputed right to summon and to order everyone concerned, whether he himself be willing or not, and to compel anyone who resists, to risk everything including his life? Not the spirit of the peaceful citizen’s love for the constitution and the laws, but the devouring flame of higher patriotism, which embraces the nation as the vesture of the eternal, for which the noble-minded man joyfully sacrifices himself, and the ignoble man, who only exists for the sake of the other, must likewise sacrifice himself. It is not that love of the citizen for the constitution; that love is quite unable to achieve this, so long as it remains on the level of the understanding. Whatever turn events may take, since it pays to govern they will always have a ruler over them. Suppose the new ruler even wants to introduce slavery (and what is slavery if not the disregard for, and suppression of, the characteristic of an original people?–but to that way of thinking such qualities do not exist), suppose he wants to introduce slavery. Then, since it is profitable to preserve the life of slaves, to maintain their numbers and even their well-being, slavery under him will turn out to be bearable if he is anything of a calculator. Their life and their keep, at any rate, they will always find. Then what is there left that

they should fight for? After those two things it is peace which they value more than anything. But peace will only be disturbed by the continuance of the struggle. They will, therefore, do anything just to put an end to the fighting, and the sooner the better; they will submit, they will yield; and why should they not? All they have ever been concerned about, and all they have ever hoped from life, has been the continuation of the habit of existing under tolerable conditions. The promise of a life here on earth extending beyond the period of life here on earth–that alone it is which can inspire men even unto death for the fatherland.

So it has been up to now. Wherever there has been true government, wherever bitter struggles have been endured, wherever victory has been won in the face of mighty opposition, there it has been that promise of eternal life which governed and struggled and won the victory. Believing in that promise the German Protestants, already mentioned in these addresses, entered upon the struggle. Do you think they did not know that peoples could be governed by that old belief too, and held together in law and order, and that under the old belief men could procure a comfortable existence? Why, then, did their princes decide upon armed resistance, and why did the peoples enthusiastically make such resistance? It was for heaven and for eternal bliss that they willingly poured out their blood. But what earthly power could have penetrated to the Holy of holies in their souls and rooted out their belief–a belief which had been revealed to them once for all, and on which alone they based their hope of bliss? Thus it was not their own bliss for which they fought–this was already assured to them; it was the bliss of their children and of their grandchildren as yet unborn and of all posterity as yet unborn. These, too, should be brought up in that same doctrine, which had appeared to them as the only means of salvation. These, too, should partake of the salvation that had dawned for them. This hope alone it was that was threatened by the enemy. For it, for an order of things that long after their death should blossom on their graves, they so joyfully shed their blood. Let us admit that they were not entirely clear in their own minds, that they made mistakes in their choice of words to denote the noblest that was in them, and with their lips did injustice to their souls; let us willingly confess that their confession of faith was not the sole and exclusive means of becoming a partaker of the heaven beyond the grave; nonetheless it is eternally true that more heaven on this side of the grave, a braver and more joyful look from earth upward, and a freer stirring of the spirit have entered by their sacrifice into the whole life of succeeding ages. To this very day the descendants of their opponents, just as much as we ourselves, their own descendants, enjoy the fruits of their labors.

In this belief our earliest common forefathers, the original stock of the new culture, the Germans, as the Romans called them, bravely resisted the on-coming world dominion of the Romans. Did they not have before their eyes the greater brilliance of the Roman provinces next to them and the more refined enjoyments in those provinces, to say nothing of laws and judges' seats and lictors' axes and rods in superfluity? Were not the Romans willing enough to let them share in all these blessings? In the case of several of their own princes, who did no more than intimate that war against such benefactors of mankind was rebellion, did they not experience proofs of the belauded Roman clemency? To those who submitted the Romans gave marks of distinction in the form of kingly titles, high commands in their armies, and Roman fillets; and if they were driven out by their countrymen, did not the Romans provide for them a place of refuge

and a means of subsistence in their colonies? Had they no appreciation of the advantages of Roman civilization, e.g., of the superior organization of their armies, in which even an Arminius did not disdain to learn the trade of war? They cannot be charged with ignorance or lack of consideration of any one of these things. Their descendants, as soon as they could do so without losing their freedom, even assimilated Roman culture, so far as this was possible without losing their individuality. Why, then, did they fight for several generations in bloody wars, that broke out again and again with ever renewed force? A Roman writer puts the following expression into the mouth of their leaders: “What was left for them to do, except to maintain their freedom or else to die before they became slaves.” Freedom to them meant just this: remaining Germans and continuing to settle their own affairs independently and in accordance with the original spirit of their race, going on with their development in accordance with the same spirit, and propagating this independence in their posterity. All those blessings which the Romans offered them meant slavery to them, because then they would have to become something that was not German, they would have to become half Roman. They assumed as a matter of course that every man would rather die than become half a Roman, and that a true German could only want to live in order to be, and to remain, just a German and to bring up his children as Germans.

They did not all die; they did not see slavery; they bequeathed freedom to their children. It is their unyielding resistance which the whole modern world has to thank for being what it now is. Had the Romans succeeded in bringing them also under the yoke and in destroying them as a nation, which the Roman did in every case, the whole development of the human race would have taken a different course, a course that one cannot think would have been more satisfactory. It is they whom we must thank–we, the immediate heirs of their soil, their language, and their way of thinking–for being Germans still, for being still borne along on the stream of original and independent life. It is they whom we must thank for everything that we have been as a nation since those days, and to them we shall be indebted for everything that we shall be in the future, unless things have come to an end with us now and the last drop of blood inherited from them has dried up in our veins. To them the other branches of the race, whom we now look upon as foreigners, but who by descent from them are our brothers, are indebted for their very existence. When our ancestors triumphed over Roma the eternal, not one of all these peoples was in existence, but the possibility of their existence in the future was won for them in the same fight.

These men, and all others of like mind in the history of the world, won the victory because eternity inspired them, and this inspiration always does, and always must, defeat him who is not so inspired. It is neither the strong right arm nor the efficient weapon that wins victories, but only the power of the soul. He who sets a limit to his sacrifices, and has no wish to venture beyond a certain point, ceases to resist as soon as he finds himself in danger at this point, even though it be one which is vital to him and which ought not to be surrendered. He who sets no limit whatever for himself, but on the contrary stakes everything he has, including the most precious possession granted to dwellers here below, namely, life itself, never ceases to resist, and will undoubtedly win the victory over an opponent whose goal is more limited. A people that is

capable of firmly beholding the countenance of that vision from the spiritual world, independence, even though it be only its highest representatives and leaders who are capable of perceiving it–a people capable of being possessed by love of this vision, as our earliest forefathers were, will undoubtedly win the victory over a people that is used, as were the Roman armies, only as the tool of foreign ambition to bring independent people under the yoke; for the former have everything to lose, and the latter merely something to gain. But the way of thinking which regards war as a game of chance, where the stakes are temporal gain or loss, and which fixes the amount to be staked on the cards even before it begins the game–such a way of thinking is defeated even by a whim. Think, for example, of a Mahomet–not the Mahomet of history, about whom I confess I have no opinion, but the Mahomet of a well-known French poet. He takes it firmly into his head once for all that he is one of those exceptional beings who are called to lead the obscure and common folk of the earth, and in accordance with this preliminary assumption all his notions, no matter how mean and limited they may be in reality, of necessity seem to him, just because they are his own, great and sublime ideas full of blessings for mankind; all who set themselves against these notions seem to him obscure and common people, enemies of their own good, evil-minded, and hateful. Then, in order to justify this conceit of himself as a divine call, he lets this thought absorb his whole life; he must stake everything on it, and cannot rest until he has trodden underfoot all who refuse to think as highly of him as he does of himself, and until he sees his own belief in his divine mission reflected in the whole contemporary world. I will not say what would happen to him if a spiritual vision, true and clear to itself, entered the lists against him, but he is sure to be victorious over those gamesters with limited stakes, for he stakes everything against them and they do not stake everything. No spirit drives them, but he is driven by a spirit, though it be but a raving one, the violent and powerful spirit of his own conceit.

From all this it follows that the state, merely as the government of human life in its progress along the ordinary peaceful path, is not something which is primary and which exists for its own sake, but is merely the means to the higher purpose of the eternal, regular, and continuous development of what is purely human in this nation. It follows, too, that the vision and the love of this eternal development, and nothing else, should have the higher supervision of state administration at all times, not excluding periods of peace, and that this alone is able to save the people's independence when it is endangered. In the case of the Germans, among whom as an original people this love of fatherland was possible and, as we firmly believe, did actually exist up to the present time, it has been able up to now to reckon with great confidence on the security of what was most vital to it. As was the case with the ancient Greeks alone, with the Germans the state and the nation were actually separated from each other, and each was represented for itself, the former in the separate German realms and principalities, the latter represented visibly in the imperial connection and invisibly–by virtue of a law, not written, but living and valid in the minds of all, a law whose results struck the eye everywhere–in a mass of customs and institutions. Wherever the German language was spoken, everyone who had first seen the light of day in its domain could consider himself as in a double sense a citizen, on the one hand, of the state where he was born and to whose care he was in the first instance commended, and, on the other hand, of the whole common fatherland of the German nation. To

everyone it was permitted to seek out for himself in the whole length and breadth of this fatherland the culture most congenial to him or the sphere of action to which his spirit was best adapted; and talent did not root itself like a tree in the place where it first grew up, but was allowed to seek out its own place. Anyone who, because of the turn taken by his own development, was set at odds with his immediate environment, easily found a willing reception elsewhere, found new friends in place of those he had lost, found time and leisure to make his meaning plainer and perhaps to win over and to reconcile even those who were offended with him, and so to unite the whole. No German-born prince ever took upon himself to mark out for his subjects as their fatherland, with mountains or rivers as boundaries, the territory over which he ruled, and to regard his subjects as bound to the soil. A truth not permitted to find expression in one place might find expression in another, where it might happen that those truths were forbidden which were permitted in the first. So, in spite of the many instances of one-sidedness and narrowness of heart in the separate states, there was nevertheless in Germany, considered as a whole, the greatest freedom of investigation and publication that any people has ever possessed. Everywhere the higher culture was, and continued to be, the result of the interaction of the citizens of all German states: and then this higher culture gradually worked its way down in this form to the people at large, which thus never ceased, broadly speaking, to educate itself by itself. This essential security for the continuance of a German nation was, as we have said, not impaired by any man of German spirit seated at the helm of government; and though with respect to other original decisions things may not always have happened as the higher German love of fatherland could not but wish, at any rate there has been no act in direct opposition to its interests; there has been no attempt to undermine that love or to extirpate it and put a love of the opposite kind in its place.

But what if the original guidance of that higher culture, as well as of the national power which may not be used except to serve that culture and its continuance, the utilization of German property and blood–what if this should pass from the control of the German spirit to that of another? What would then be the inevitable results?

This is the place where there is special need of the disposition which we invoked in our first address–the disposition not to deceive ourselves wilfully about our own affairs, and the courage to be willing to behold the truth and confess it to ourselves. Moreover, it is still permitted to us, so far as I know, to speak to each other in the German language about the fatherland, or at least to sigh over it, and, in my opinion, we should not do well if we anticipated of our own accord such a prohibition, or if we were ready to restrain our courage, which without doubt will already have taken counsel with itself as to the risk to be run, with the chains forged by the timidity of some individuals.

Picture to yourselves, then, the new power, which we are presupposing, as well-disposed and as benevolent as ever you may wish; make it as good as God Himself; will you be able to impart to it divine understanding as well? Even though it wish in all earnestness the greatest happiness and well-being of everyone, do you suppose that the greatest well-being it is able to conceive will be the same thing as German well-being? In regard to the main point which I have put

before you today, I hope I have been thoroughly well understood by you; I hope that several, while they listened to me, thought and felt that I was only expressing in plain words what has always lain in their minds; I hope that the other Germans who will someday read this will have the same feeling–indeed, several Germans have said practically the same thing before I did, and the unconscious basis of the resistance that has been repeatedly manifested to a purely mechanical constitution and policy of the state has been the view of things which I have presented to you. Now, I challenge all those who are acquainted with the modern literature of foreign countries to show me one of their poets or legislators who in recent times has ever betrayed a glimmering of anything similar to the view that regards the human race as eternally progressing, and that refers all its activities in this world solely to this eternal progress. Even in the period of their boldest flights of political creation, was there a single one who demanded more from the state than the abolition of inequalities, the maintenance of peace within their borders and of national reputation without, or, in the extremest case, domestic bliss? If, as we must conclude from all these indications, this is their highest good, they will not attribute to us any higher needs or any higher demands on life. Assuming they always display that beneficent disposition toward us and are free from any selfishness or desire to be greater than we are, they will think they have provided splendidly for us if we are given everything that they themselves know to be desirable. But the thing for which alone the nobler men among us wish to live is then blotted out of public life; and as soon as the people, which has always shown itself responsive to the stirrings of the noble mind and which we were entitled to hope might be elevated in a body to that nobility, is treated as those to whom we are referring want to be treated, it is degraded and dishonored, and, by its confluence with a people of a lower species, it is blotted out of the universe.

But he, in whom those higher demands on life remain alive and powerful and who has a feeling that their right is divine, feels himself set back, much against his will, into those early days of Christianity, when it was said: “Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man will take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.” The latter is well said, for, so long as he sees that thou still hast a cloak, he seeks to pick a quarrel with thee so as to take this from thee also, and only when thou art quite naked wilt thou escape his attention and be left in peace. To such a man the earth becomes a hell and a place of horror, just because of his higher mind, which does him honor. He wishes he had never been born; he wishes that his eyes may be closed to the light of day, and the sooner the better; his days are filled with everlasting sorrow until he descends to the grave, and for those whom he loves he can wish no greater boon than a dull and contented mind, so that with less suffering they may live for an eternal life beyond the grave.

These addresses lay before you the sole remaining means, now that the others have been tried in vain, of preventing this annihilation of every nobler impulse that may break out among us in the future, and of preventing this degradation of our whole nation. They propose that you establish deeply and indelibly in the hearts of all, by means of education, the true and all-powerful love of fatherland, the conception of our people as an eternal people and as the

security for our own eternity. What kind of education can do this, and how it is to be done, we shall see in the following addresses.

Source of English text: Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Address to the German Nation,* ed., George Armstrong Kelly. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968, pp. 92-129.

Source of original German text: J. G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe Werkeband 10* [*Complete Works Volume 10*]. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: F. Frommann, 1988-2000, pp.183-212.