Was Fichte Heidegger's Political Fürsprecher?
Fichte and Heidegger on Language

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I explore a possible interpretation of Heidegger's Nazism, viz., that Heidegger read or interpreted Nazism's program in terms of the program Fichte expressed in Addresses to the German Nation. I regard Fichte as a Fürsprecher for Heidegger's politics, and claim that Heidegger appropriated Fichte's thought in a similar manner to the way that he appropriated Kant's thought in Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics. In this sense, what we may have is a retrieval of Fichte's political and educational suggestions for Heidegger's political views.

RESUME: Dans cet article j'explore une interprétation possible de l'adhésion heideggerienne au nazisme, en prétendant que Heidegger aborde le programme nazi à partir du programme fichtien, tel que présenté dans les Discours à la nation allemande. Je considère Fichte comme le Fürsprecher, le porte-parole, de la politique heideggerienne, et soutiens que Heidegger se serait approprié la pensée de Fichte, de la même façon qu'il s'est approprié la pensée de Kant dans Kant et le problème de la métaphysique. En ce sens, l'on pourrait reconnaître que Heidegger a puisé à même la philosophie fichtéenne de la politique et de l'éducation afin de nourrir ses positions politiques.

Both Hans Sluga and Raymond Geuss have noted that Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Addresses to the German Nation had become quite popular among the German intelligentsia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It appears that the academic community was seeking a means to establish a national identity, and Fichte's political writings contributed well to this search. Regardless of whether Fichte would have agreed with the direction these scholars were taking with his political thought, the fact remains that Fichte's thought was appropriated by them.

I want to explore a possible interpretation of Heidegger's Nazism that has not been taken seriously enough, and that Derrida, in the name of spirit, glosses over, viz., that Heidegger read or interpreted Nazism's program in terms of the program Fichte expressed in Addresses to the German Nation. In other words, I want to regard Fichte as a Fürsprecher for Heidegger's
politics, and claim that Heidegger appropriated Fichte's thought in a similar manner to the way that Heidegger appropriated Kant's thought in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. In this sense, what we may have is a retrieval of Fichte's political and educational suggestions for Heidegger's political views.

To explore this possibility, I will initially encapsulate Heidegger's views of the Nazi program, and then examine more closely the elements of Fichte's *Addresses* that bear directly on Heidegger's thought. My point here is neither to replace Heidegger's thought with Fichte's, nor to claim that Fichte was a National Socialist, nor to deny that Heidegger had other influences on his political thought. Instead, I want to see how Heidegger appropriated Fichte's politicized educational project. Further, I want neither to excuse nor to justify Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism. Instead, I want to question some of the current perspectives regarding Heidegger's political involvement and claim that Heidegger read Nazism in terms of Fichte's political views.

To see whether Fichte's educational project influenced Heidegger, I want first to review briefly Heidegger's view of education, as presented in his Rectoral Address of 1933, and then to take up Heidegger's view of language as presented in *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The Rectoral Address, entitled "The Self-Assertion of the German University," was Heidegger's attempt to involve the German university system in the National Socialist's program, or, more emphatically, to involve the German university system in what Heidegger believed ought to be the National Socialist program. Heidegger contended that this program involved changing the destiny of the German people. The faculty and student body were to become involved in the changing destiny by choosing to "will" the essence of the German university in such a way as to reshape the *Dasein* of the German people (Neske, 5).

For Heidegger, the will to determine the German university's essence ought to occur through "self-administration" (Neske, 6). However, self-administration "can only exist when it is grounded upon self-examination," which "can only take place in the strength of the German university's self-assertion" (*Selbstbehauptung*) (Neske, 6).

The task of self-assertion is four-fold. First, Heidegger wanted the Nazi party to allow the German university the freedom to establish its own task, and thereby direct, or administer, itself. The task was to be rooted in Heidegger's sense of questioning the meaning of being. In other words, Heidegger is asking for the National Socialists to allow the German university to take up the task of fundamental questioning. Second, self-assertion is there to "expose science to its innermost necessity," and its innermost necessity is questioning (Neske, 6). As Heidegger says, questioning is the "essence of science," and "the highest form of knowing" (Neske, 8). Third, self-assertion involves the ability of the German people and the university to stand their "ground while German destiny is in its most extreme distress" (Neske, 6). Fourth, self-assertion involves bringing the German higher educational system into the struggle for establishing the new German destiny through the creation of a "Wissendienst", or "Knowledge Service" (Neske, 10).

The four-fold task of self-assertion was needed because, as Michael Zimmer points out, "the Nazi ideologues did not see a need for philosophy in their revolution," and Heidegger wanted to show the Nazi ideologues what philosophy's place was in the grand scheme of things (Zimmer, 2). Heidegger's place for philosophy was no less than the determination of the destiny of the German people, which could only arise through allowing the German university to ask the basic questions of existence. For this to be possible, the German university had to be allowed the freedom to question.

In the Rectoral Address, Heidegger claimed that the Knowledge Service was coequal with the Labor Service and Military Service. But, in my reading, I see Heidegger placing the Knowledge Service in the privileged position, since it is in this service that the people bring being into question and come to their own self-understanding. The professions can only "effect and administer that highest essential knowledge of the people concerning its entire existence" (Neske, 11). Hence, the Knowledge Service exposes the destiny of the people in their "spiritual mission" (Neske, 11). The spiritual mission entails the people becoming "primordially attuned" to and resolved upon "the essence of being" (Neske, 9). The other professions only take up the spiritual mission and actualize it. It is in this context of willing the essence of the university and developing the Knowledge Service that Heidegger speaks of the battle in which faculty and students need to be engaged.

To get to the spiritual mission of the German university, which is its self-assertion, Heidegger wants to retrieve "the original Greek experience of science" (Neske, 9), since the Greek beginning is also the "beginning of Germany's spiritual-historical existence" (Neske, 6). The original Greek experience of science is a knowing that recognizes its own impotence in the face of what is and that lets entities be. In this sense, science was to be "the questioning standing one's ground in the midst of the constantly self-concealing totality of what is" (Neske, 8). In other words, *Gelassenheit* is the key to the essence of the university.

While Heidegger does not explicitly refer to the centrality of language in the Rectoral Address, the reference to the Greeks suggests that its centrality is always there in the background. Language enters as a central component of our authentic existence, and without coming to know the way things emerge in terms of language, the German destiny would remain cut off from its own spiritual-historical mission.

The Rectoral Address is very future oriented, since Heidegger refers to the destiny that the German people should resolutely strive for. Nonetheless, destiny is also a historical phenomenon, and, as Heidegger claims, we only move toward what we always already have been. Thus, the project of...
fundamental questioning and its historical context must be developed. Heidegger develops the historical connection in *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger takes up the challenge he presented in the Rectoral Address for the Knowledge Service by taking up the fundamental question, viz., “why are there entities rather than nothing,” which he shows to be rooted in a more basic question, “how does it stand with being.” (Wie steht es um das Sein?) (IM, 32). However, early in IM, and in reference to the idea of fundamental questioning, the role of language arises in the following way. In trying to recapture a sense of being, Heidegger contrasts φύσις and *natura*, the Greek and Latin words for ‘nature.’ Heidegger claims that the Latin translation “thrusts aside” the meaning of the Greek words and that this translation has its own history of concealment as it developed through the Christian Middle Ages into the modern period (IM, 13). By a history of concealment, Heidegger means that the Greek experience of φύσις as “self-blossoming emergence” was covered over and altered when *natura*, or birth, was utilized as the Latin translation (IM, 13). For Heidegger, this mode of translation was a “process of deformation and decay” (IM, 14). In light of this deformation and decay, we ought to attempt to regain the unimpaired strength of language and words; for words and language are not the wrapping in which things are placed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are. For this reason the misuse of language in idle talk, in slogans and phrases, destroys our authentic relation to things. (IM, 13-14).

As Heidegger points out, there is something great in the beginning, and “what is great can only begin great” (IM, 15). But to maintain the beginning would require one “to stand in the truth” and to be resolved to remain there (IM, 21). Hence, one has to be resolved to let beings be (IM, 21).

To shirk back from this resolve is to allow the beginning to decline and conceal itself. The shirking back seems to be the result of the loss of the original language and the translation of it into Latin. However, it is not with the mere fact of the translation that Heidegger is concerned; instead, it is with the Romans lack of taking the resolve to let entities be. The Romans appropriated the Greek language without being involved in the Greek destiny. Thus, the Romans are cut off from the experience that gave rise to the emergence of entities and being within the Greek language.6

For Heidegger, to retrieve the greatness that began with the Greeks and to place oneself in that history and to question involves a retrieval of language in its original power. As Heidegger says, the way the Greeks came to φύσις was “through a fundamental poetic and intellectual experience of being” (IM, 14). This fundamental poetic and intellectual experience allowed entities to emerge in terms of their being, and hence was involved with unconcealment.

As opposed to the powers of America and Russia during the 1930s, which did not seek to ask the fundamental question but remained caught up in the technological frenzy, Germany was, for Heidegger, “the most metaphysical of nations” and as such had to ask the fundamental question and retrieve “the beginning of our historical-spiritual existence, in order to transform it into a new beginning” (IM, 39). This questioning retrieval was not for the purpose of imitation but to begin “again more radically” (IM, 39). There is a need for Germany to “win back its roots in history” and if a people could retrieve its history, Heidegger believed that the “darkening” of the spiritual world would be overcome (IM, 45).

As Heidegger points out, because the “destiny of language is grounded in a nation’s relation to being, the question of being will involve us deeply in the question of language” (IM, 51). The point here is to move from a “worn out” and “used up” language to a retrieval of the sense of language that brings us to the meaning of being and to a people’s historical-spiritual destiny.

The way that Heidegger views education and language does not emerge in the philosophy of Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Spengler or Jünger. Instead, Heidegger’s views on this issue appear in Fichte’s thought. What are the parallels between Fichte and Heidegger?

Fichte’s views regarding education and language emerge in his *Addresses to the German Nation*. His point in the *Addresses* is to bring the German nation together and make it come to greatness, which Fichte understood as “the creation of a totally new order of things” (Fichte, 8, 272). Fichte understood this new order in terms of a spiritual program that would create a new “universal and rational self” (Fichte, 10, 274). Such a creation of the new self required a new educational system directed toward this creation.

The Fichtean educational program is political. Fichte desires to see a unified nation arise out of the plurality of states that existed during this time. As such, his educational program is aimed at creating citizens, or a people, who will desire to create and maintain this new German spiritual order. This move amounts to the “preservation of the German nation” (Fichte, 11, 274). Thus, what Fichte presents is both a new creation and a preservation.

Fichte wants to fashion his new educational program along quasi-Kantian lines, in the sense that Fichte understands the new order in terms of a new moral order that will create “an infallible good will” (Fichte, 19, 283). Such a will would always do the right act. This is strange idea, given that the infallible will is a perfect will. I will assume that the creation of an infallible good will is Fichte’s teleological approach to education, since such a good will is in fact impossible. But Fichte’s point is to move the German people away from arbitrariness to moral action (Willkür to guter Wille).
However, beyond the mere moral education, Fichte wants to educate the German people to take “pleasure” in the good (Fichte, 19, 284). Fichte wants to move pleasure beyond the merely sensible and for the people to take delight in the supersensible. Hence, there is an aesthetic dimension at work in Fichte’s education. The ability to take pleasure in the good requires the creation of an “image” of the condition that the German people should be drawn toward (Fichte, 20, 284). Moreover, since such a condition does not yet exist, the image that must be created must be a “prototype” (Vorbilder) of the new reality (Fichte, 20, 284). The original image will be created by the students.

While Fichte does not explicitly raise the issue, there is at work in his educational thought a sense of the Kantian productive imagination that is set in service of the new order to come. The imagination is to create a new image of the good life in which the mind can take pleasure and toward which the mind can move as the people try to actualize the image.

Fichte presents an interesting idea here because the image is, in a sense, prior to the original, and such an image is a poetic creation. Undoubtedly, for Fichte, the student needs rules, and the rules produce knowledge of the general and infallible laws that the student will actualize in life. But the image will reveal a moral “social order” that will be a life lived “in accordance with the laws of reason” (Fichte, 27, 292).

Fichte links education to “the real destiny of the human race on earth,” which involves the freedom of the human race “to make itself what it really is originally” (Fichte, 40, 306). However, the Germans are “called upon to begin the new era as pioneers and models for the rest of mankind” (Fichte, 40, 306).

The reason Fichte gives the Germans a place of priority is due to their focus on a priori knowledge, as opposed to English and French philosophy, and the fact that the Germans “retained and developed the original language of the ancestral stock” (Fichte, 47, 313). So the difference and priority is handed over to the German “branch of the Teutonic race” (Fichte, 45, 311), and is due to the difference between “Teutonic primitive custom” and the “Roman method” of government (Fichte, 47, 313).

The change of dwelling is “unimportant” for Fichte, as long as the original language remains intact (Fichte, 47, 313). As Fichte says, and this foreshadows Heidegger, “men are formed by language far more than language is formed by men” (Fichte, 48, 314). In the original language, “something native is retained,” while in the adoption of a foreign language, “something foreign is adopted” (Fichte, 48, 314). The original language must remain spoken.

Fichte is not a nominalist, since he does not understand words as arbitrary designations. Instead, Fichte contends that language accords “with a fundamental law,” which is that “every idea becomes in the human organ of speech one particular sound and no other” (Fichte, 48, 314). Fichte understands language analogously to perception. Just as someone perceives an object’s “definite form,” so an idea has “definite sound” (Fichte, 48, 314). Thus, as Heidegger will later contend, words allow things to come into being.

Fichte makes this claim because he believes that “nature speaks in man and announces itself to others of his kind” (Fichte, 48, 314-315). Hence, “it is not really man who speaks,” but nature, or being perhaps, that speaks.

Ignoring the tenability or untenability of this stance, the question is: how does one account for different languages? Fichte answers this question by claiming that the locality of a people has a direct impact on the “organ of speech” and on the way “objects were observed and designated” (Fichte, 48, 315). However, given that it is nature that speaks in us, and there is only one nature, then there is in fact only one “pure language” (Fichte, 49, 315). All the diverse languages are only variations from that pure language.

Based on this non-empirical account of language, Fichte defines what a people, or Volk, is. A people is a group of persons “whose organs of speech are influenced by the same external conditions, who live together, and who develop their language in continuous communication with each other” (Fichte, 49, 315). In other words, a common, living language defines the boundaries of a people, and not a people’s geographical boundary or their blood ties. Thus Fichte can claim that the language of a given people “is necessarily just what it is, and in reality this people does not express its knowledge, but its knowledge expresses itself out of the mouth of the people” (Fichte, 49, 315).

Nonetheless, a people’s language changes, or progresses, over time. Hence, you might think that degeneration, or outside influences, would alter the language. However, Fichte says that if the changes of a language occur in an interrupted development, then the development of the language occurs naturally and necessarily, and the language remains pure.

Fichte measures progress in terms of the way a people moves from its sensible state toward its supersensible destination. Language expresses the turn to the supersensible through the employment of sensible images. In other words, the more a people can utilize sensible concepts to depict supersensible ideas, the more a people has progressed. This means that a people who has not progressed very far remain mired in sensible concepts and images, while a people who has progressed well sees or understands the supersensible ideas in the language. Thus, Fichte might maintain that the British have not progressed too far, since they remain mired in empiricism, while the Germans have progressed well, since they see the supersensible ideas as expressed in their lingual concepts.

To illustrate his point, Fichte shows how sight words symbolize supersensible ideas. He has us recall that ïðåã in Greek and Gesicht in German, both of which are words that can mean what we literally see, are also used to speak about what is perceived by the mind’s eye, or spirit (Fichte, 51,
Hence, sensible words point to a supersensible destination and meaning. I claim that Fichte’s use of this example is not neutral. Instead, the example suggests a unique association between the Greek and German languages. I will return to this issue later on in the text.

Fichte considers this process of the development of a living language, and thereby a people, to be a natural law. As long as a people uphold the law, or maintain their living language, they will move from their sensible state to their supersensible destination. The purpose of the living language is to stimulate the supersensible within us. Note that a living language can possess “no arbitrariness” (Fichte, 52, 318). Instead it both stimulates and creates the life of the people.

For a people who give up their original language and adopt a foreign tongue, the continuous development that led the people from their sensible condition to their supersensible condition is cut off. As a result of this disruption, language becomes a bunch of arbitrary signs. This means that the people’s experience has been interrupted and that the sensible images have been dissociated from life. Thus, these symbols do not “stimulate life” (Fichte, 54, 321).

Furthermore, even if, after a couple of generations, the adopted language becomes a living language, i.e., a language the children have been raised in by parents who speak the language fluently and think with the language, the fact that these people were not a part of the “language in its original emergence from life as a force of nature” means that the people remain cut off from its life (Fichte, 55, 321). According to Fichte, the break, or the lack of continuity, cannot be mended.

Strangely enough, what Fichte is getting at in this context is the problem of translation, and his point is that only if the sensible meanings of words make sense to the people can the words begin to convey supersensible meaning to the people. If the experiential or sensible component is cut off, then the supersensible meaning cannot emerge. To illustrate his point, Fichte cites some words that were coming into vogue during his time period, by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic influence in Europe at the time. The words humanity, popularity and liberality, good Latinate terms, are assumed to convey some of the virtues of the modern world. But, as Fichte points out, the words mean something totally different to a German than they would to someone who spoke the Latinate language. The literal translation of the word humanity into German, using the terms Menschlichkeit or Menschlichkeit, conveys that people are men and not beasts, and the idea of humanity is missed. There is no literal translation of popularity and liberality into German. The meaning of the terms in German suggest a baseness that the Latinate terms are trying not to convey. As Fichte translates the meaning of the terms, popularity means “striving for favor with the mob,” while liberality means “not having the mind of a slave” (Fichte, 56, 323). The sensible connection for the move to the supersensible in the German mind set is lacking in such terms. Hence, a loss of meaning results.

According to Fichte, the problem arises in the fact that the neo-Latinate words are neither Latin nor German, and hence remained closed off from their “mother tongue” and are “incomprehensible” to the speaker (Fichte, 58, 324). The continuity of the neo-Latinate languages has been disrupted, and the movement from the sensible to the supersensible has been lost.

Fichte makes an interesting claim at this point. He contends that a people who speak a living language can investigate past living languages more thoroughly than a people who speak a derived language can. The reason for this is that the speaker of the living language understands what it means to be within a living language and is capable of making the spiritual connections, while the speaker of a derived language has lost the spiritual connection. The former understands the life of the language for a people, while the latter only understands the language in terms of arbitrary connections. So, for Fichte, a German speaker can understand Latin better than a neo-Latinate speaker can understand Latin.

However, the connection I want to point to is that Fichte makes a strong bond between Greek and German. Greek was a living language for its time, and Fichte considers it to be the founding language for all the classical languages. Hence, a special connection is made between Greek and German. While Fichte does not develop the connection in the Addresses, his example that I alluded to before regarding Ἰδία and Gesicht exposes some of the affinity Fichte sees between the two languages.

However, Fichte does speak about the appropriation of antiquity, whereby the “part of the’ vigorous nation which has gone abroad and adopts the language of antiquity thereby acquires a closer relationship to antiquity” (Fichte, 74, 340). Fichte’s idea is that the modern nation’s living language has an essential connection to the language of the ancient culture. When the vigorous nation studies the ancient culture that possessed a living language, the vigorous nation will reach a point where the primordial connection between the two languages will reveal itself and the revelation will stimulate the life of the people studying the ancient language. The people will not mimic the older culture but will originally appropriate what the two cultures can share in terms of their spirituality. At the end of the Fifth Address, Fichte employs Greek imagery in order to use it to stimulate the German spirit. As such, history is not dead for the Germans, nor is it merely repetitive. Instead, history is a people’s spirit unfolding itself and “creating what is entirely new” (Fichte, 101, 368).

According to Fichte, a living language influences the “mental culture” (Geistesbildung) of the people (Fichte, 60, 327). As such, the people who possess a vital culture desire and seek out this spiritual influence and possess an “honest diligence and earnestness in all things” (Fichte, 61, 327). Due to
this desire, Fichte claims that the vast majority of the people have the ability to be educated.  

The telos of this education is the “spiritual life,” which is a life based upon the findings of philosophy, or Wissenschaftslehre (Fichte, 63, 329). In this context, Wissenschaftslehre functions as first philosophy, the fundamental sense of science. This fundamental science is “life perpetual in itself” (Fichte, 63, 331), or spirit’s “eternal activity” (Fichte, 64, 330). Further, it is the science that grounds all the other sciences.

However, philosophy is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition for spiritual life. Spiritual life, or the eternal activity, “receives its pattern (Musterbild) from science,” but science needs art “to form itself according to the pattern” (Bild) (Fichte, 64, 330). Thus a poetic or artistic element of spirit arises that will bring a people to its fulfilment, or destiny. However, both science and art need to come together and become religion, if the education of a people and its spiritual life are to be complete. Religion is the “final task of the new education” (Fichte, 33, 298).

Regardless of the religious end product, what I find interesting in Fichte’s thought is the connection between art, or poetry, and the living language of a people. For Fichte a living language gives rise to symbols, hypotyposes, that represent the spiritual strength and fullness in the life of a people. But the symbols do this in such a way as to move the people away from the sensible world toward the supersensible realm. As such, “spirit speaks directly and reveals itself as man does to man” in a people who possess a living language (Fichte, 66, 332).

However, if the symbol is to have the power to move the people from the sensible to the supersensible, the thinker must be a poet. The images of thought given in language are bound to sensibility, but the thinker must be able to transform his/her images and move the people beyond the sensible world. Poetic imagery is what makes this movement possible. In this way, poetry is the “means of introducing into the lives of all the thought that has begun in the life of the individual” (Fichte, 67, 333).

True poetry can occur for Fichte only in a living language, where the images that are created receive their “appropriate share of the new spiritual ennoblement” (Fichte, 68, 334). In this way, the images are kept alive and meaningful to a people, and new images keep arising that are “ever refreshing and renewing the youth” and the people (Fichte, 68, 334). Further, the power of the living symbols conveys a unified meaning to the people. In this way, a people with a living language are all capable of being educated, since a common meaning emerges and sustains itself.

Derived languages are incapable of transmitting living symbols, and hence do not transmit consistent meaning through the symbols. As such, there are no true poets in a non-living language. What is lacking in the derived language is the capacity for genius, and “charm” becomes substituted for poetry (Fichte, 68, 334).

Genius is the capacity of the poetic thinker, or thinking poet, to transform the sensible images into supersensible symbols. As such, genius is an “original drive” (ursprünglicher Antrieb) in the human being that stimulates “the power of the imagination” to create symbols (Fichte, 72, 338). Symbols generate “poetic enthusiasm” which suggests that genius is linked to the sublime, since the sublime discloses our moral destination (Fichte, 68, 334).

In other words, the symbol, or aesthetic idea, stretches the power of the imagination to its snapping point and awakens reason.

Fichte wants to see all the people driven by genius. As he says,

[... ] in a living language, if only life is really lived, the words and their meaning increase and change continually, and for that very reason new combinations become possible, and the language, which never is, but eternally is becoming, does not speak itself, but he who wishes to use it must speak it himself in his own fashion and creatively for his own needs. (Fichte, 73, 339)

In other words, a people must be resolved to look into their world and to allow what they see to emerge in their language. Further, the people must do this in such a way that it enhances the life of the people by revealing their true destiny, which for Fichte is a moral destiny that the people create out of their resolve.

Granted Fichte’s views of what it means to be a German people, I must point out a tension in Fichte’s sense of the people that arises in the Addresses, a tension that will show itself to have a connection to Heidegger’s position. This tension already arose when Fichte stated that the geographical location was unessential to a people’s essence. The tension is that, on the one hand, Fichte wants to separate the German people from the non-Germans in terms of race, and on the other hand, Fichte ties being German to a cosmopolitan point of view.

We need to keep in mind that Fichte bases his notion of race more on his sense of language more than on blood, even though the primordiality of a living language and its continuous progress suggests something akin to blood ties. After all, the purpose of the new education was to awaken “the German love of the Fatherland,” which suggests both a geographical and blood tie (Fichte, 132, 398).

Yet, as Fichte says, a German is “whoever believes simply 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, he is one of us, and will come over to our
Thus, a person of non-German birth can become one of the people (the chosen people) through spirit, and such a person can even come to claim to possess a blood tie to the original people. A tension arises between the empirical ties a people has to the land and its language and the spiritual ties that bind all people together. This tension appears to be unreconcilable in Fichte's thought.

The parallels between Heidegger and Fichte in terms of their politicized educational strategy are too striking to be merely coincidental. First, they both emphasize the purity and primordiality of the German language. The fact that Fichte understands language in terms of the movement from the sensible realm to the supersensible realm, and that Heidegger understands language in terms of the movement from the concealment to the unconcealment of the meaning of being does little to alter the primordial role they both give to language. After all, the act of retrieval for Heidegger is never one of mere mimicry but one of exposing how the meaning of being is present in a past thinker's thought. Fichte is appropriated along this line of retrieval.

Second, they both agree that the neo-Latinate languages are inadequate for true philosophy and science, and claim that German and Ancient Greek have a spiritual connection. For Fichte, both German and Greek are taken as being living languages and mother tongues, while for Heidegger, German and Greek are both attuned to the meaning of being. Even in the Der Spiegel interview, Heidegger continued to maintain that a study of German and Greek was suited for the Aufhebung needed to overcome European nihilism.

Third, both Fichte and Heidegger see the need for a national education system that will awaken the spiritual destiny of a people. Further, for both thinkers the real change in the destiny of a people can only come about through education.

Fourth, the place of poetic thinking in both thinkers is too similar to be discounted. Both Fichte and Heidegger see that great poetry allows for the emergence of truth and moves a people toward its spiritual destiny.

Fifth, both Fichte and Heidegger understand a people more in terms of language than in terms of blood ties, and contend that the people need not be geographical. For Fichte, a believer in the true spirituality of a people with a living language can become a member of the people, while for Heidegger, whoever takes up the question of the meaning of being in a resolute manner would be one of the people. Of course, we all know Heidegger's claim that the French speak German when they "begin to think" (Neske, 63).

Sixth, there is one point of comparison between Fichte and Heidegger that I have not alluded to previously that I need to draw out, and that is their view of religion. This item is rarely considered when it comes to Heidegger and does not appear in either his Rectoral Address or Introduction to Metaphysics. Fichte viewed religion as the end product for the people and believed that the state should strive for the creation of a national religion. While Heidegger does not speak about a national religion, in the Der Spiegel interview, Heidegger does say that philosophy cannot "bring about a direct change of the present state of the world," and that "only a god can still save us" (Neske, 57). Gadamer claims that Heidegger understood his sense of National Socialism in terms of "the preparation of a new religion of humankind," and that one of the reasons Heidegger became disillusioned with the movement was that the "spiritual and moral strength" that was needed in a true movement did not occur (Neske, 142). Hence, even Heidegger's end product for his educational plan involved the creation of new religion that would bolster the people morally and spiritually.

Granted that the ways Heidegger and Fichte approach these issues in terms of their respective methods is different. However, Fichte can still be said to be Heidegger's political Fürsprecher in terms of the way that Heidegger combined and presented his political views. While I do not believe the evidence shows that during his political time period, Heidegger was a lapsed idealist, I do believe that Heidegger tried to retrieve the possibilities he saw within idealism for his time.


Heidegger’s view of the Knowledge Service to the two other services and to the professions is similar to the relationship of fundamental ontology to regional ontologies and the positive sciences that Heidegger developed in Being and Time.


I do not see philosophers getting too excited about the philosophical discourse that emerges during the Roman period. For example, even though Stoicism had an immense impact on future history, its actual philosophy is of minor interest. Further, the basis of Stoicism lies in Greek thought.


People who do not speak a living language have the opposite characteristics.

Fichte points out that Germany has not adopted the German term “Wissenschaftslehre” in place of the foreign term “philosophy.”

Fichte says that religion is simply the knowledge of life’s fundamental issues (Fichte, 34, 299). Hence, religion is not practical, but it does serve as a motive for moral development.

Fichte notes that genius is a foreign name, but no German word seems to be adequate for genius. So a strange issue arises here. On the one hand, Fichte notes that a derived language has no genius. On the other hand, a derived language supplied the name. So what’s up? It seems as if the idea of genius is not truly German, based on Fichte’s own argument. Fichte wants to replace the term genius with the expression “German spirit,” but German spirit does not convey what the term genius means (Fichte, 73, 339).

Fichte understands this sense of love in terms of Kant’s sense of enlightenment. The love is presented as a “release from guardianship,” or from immaturity, and the need to grow up and to become responsible for ourselves (Fichte, 132, 398).

The term translated as “blood” is Geschlecht. While blood may not be the best translation, Fichte suggestion is that the lingual tie makes one of the same race or family, as if one were of the same background or blood.

Fichte calls the Germans the “original man,” or “the people simply” (Fichte, 107, 374).

A translation of the Der Spiegel interview appears in Gunter Neske’s and Emil Kettering’s text, Martin Heidegger and Nationalism Socialism: Questions and Answers.

As Heidegger says, it “was not German idealism that collapsed; rather, the age was no longer strong enough to stand up to the greatness, breadth and originality of that spiritual world” (IM, 45).