During the winter of 1807–8, Fichte delivered a series of lectures, *Addresses to the German Nation*, that were intended to inspire the German people to struggle against the tyranny of French occupation. In these lectures Fichte, the transcendental philosopher par excellence, addresses a political audience in a rhetorical voice. He intends to inspire his audience as much as he intends to educate them. Indeed, in these addresses Fichte deliberately muddies the distinction between inspiration and education: in order to create the conditions for the possibility of a new German spirit, Fichte must inspire the people to create a new form of education. Given the political context in which Fichte delivered his *Addresses*, it is easy to understand why he might occasionally overstate his case about the virtue of the German spirit. It cannot be denied, however, that Fichte's *Addresses* contain a nationalistic tone that appears to be at odds with the transcendental concerns of his systematic philosophy.

Much of the argument in the *Addresses* is centered on the relation between the nation, politics, language, and culture. His conclusion in the *Addresses* is to call for the rebirth of the German nation from out of its bondage to the French invaders of 1806. Fichte claims: "Only a complete regeneration [Umschaffung], only the beginning of an entirely new spirit [eines ganz neuen Geistes] can help us."¹ Fichte concludes by criticizing his fellow Germans for not being level-headed enough to see that French domination did not result in liberation. Fichte goes so far as to claim that enthusiasm for the French ought to sound ludicrous when uttered in the German language because the German language itself is "formed to express the truth": "No! Good, earnest, steady German men and countrymen, far from our spirit [Geist] be such a lack of understanding, and far be such defilement from our language, which is formed to express the truth [zum Ausdrucke des Wahren Gebildeten Sprache]!"² This nationalistic rhetoric finds its basis in Fichte's understanding of language and its connection to politics.

The implicit theory of language we find in the *Addresses* is thus different from Fichte's earlier theory of language as developed in his 1794 essay...
"On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language." There are three main differences:

1. In 1807 Fichte extends his consideration of language in an explicitly political direction, explicitly linking language to the concept of the nation.

2. In the Addresses, Fichte revises his earlier theory of the Ursprache (i.e., primal language) by linking the Ursprache more explicitly to the concept of spiritual freedom.

3. Finally, in the Addresses, Fichte ties his whole argument about the political nature of language around his view that language is, in a sense, the transcendental ground for the possibility of both nationality and individuality.

In 1794, as Fichte wrote his essay on language, he was caught up in an attempt to discover the transcendental ground of language. In 1807, as Fichte addressed his German audience under the French occupation, he was concerned with finding a way to renew the German spirit and inspire the creation of the German nation. While these two projects are quite different in intent, the second is only possible on the basis of the first. The German spirit is conceived by Fichte in terms of language; it is not primarily a racial or geographical concept. The spirit of a people is the connection between its language and the original source of language which, Fichte maintains, is the human need to communicate. Fichte goes so far as to explicitly define "spiritual culture" (geistige Bildung) as "thinking in an Ursprache" because such a primal language remains linked to the living root of human life. This living root is human intersubjectivity and freedom. In an Ursprache, Fichte continues, spiritual culture "is itself the life of one who thinks in this way."

Although Fichte’s comments on language in the Addresses represent the changed focus of his thought toward very practical political matters, he does not reject the conclusions of his earlier transcendental account of language. In 1794 Fichte understood the transcendental basis of language in terms of the intersubjective nature of human reason. This pointed him toward a social interpretation of language that he left undeveloped in the 1794 essay. In 1807 Fichte extended this reflection on language and reached the radical conclusion that language is the basis of both nationality and individuality. It would not have been possible to reach this conclusion if he had not already rejected an asocial theory of language in 1794. In the early essay, Fichte rejected both the view that language was given to man by God and the view that language evolved from primitive animal instinct. Instead, he understands language as a necessary conse-
quence of the social nature of the human spirit. Thus Fichte’s social interpretation of language in the *Addresses* stems from the view which he developed in 1794 that the transcendental ground of language is the intersubjectivity of human freedom.

While Fichte’s specific nationalistic conclusions about the virtue of the German *Ursprache* must be taken with a grain of salt, his general consideration of language in the *Addresses* deserves to be taken seriously for the following reasons.

1. He links his transcendental account of the origin of language to empirical/historical manifestations of language. This may give us some insight into Fichte’s transcendental idealism, especially the connection between theory and practice in his thought. In the *Addresses*, Fichte seems to hint that the history of language can influence the history of philosophy and vice versa.

2. Fichte also admits that philosophy must be articulated in real historical languages and that different languages are more or less philosophical. Fichte’s philosophy of language in the *Addresses* thus attempts to explain why people fail to comprehend the truth of transcendental philosophy. Thinking that occurs in dead languages, which do not speak an *Ursprache*, is unable to reach the depth of transcendental philosophy.

3. Finally and more generally, Fichte’s philosophy of language redefines the relation between thought, language, individuality, and culture. Fichte rejects the view that individuals are atomic selves who come up with ideas prior to language and who then search for words with which to express their thoughts. Rather, Fichte has a social interpretation of thought, language, individuality, and culture. Fichte claims that spirit speaks through individuals and that individuality must thus be understood in relation to a given historical culture, language, and philosophical tradition.

From 1794 to 1807

Jere Surber’s excellent translation and analysis of Fichte’s 1794 essay, “On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language,” raises a number of questions for those of us interested in Fichte’s political writings and Fichte’s place within the history of German politics and philosophy. This is especially true since Surber links Fichte’s essay on language to a tradition of reflection on the political nature of language that culminates in Habermas. Surber claims that Fichte’s analysis of language was based upon a sensitivity to the “transcendental-political context” of language. 6
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Indeed, Surber claims that according to Fichte, “the development of language, far from appearing as a potential obstacle to political freedom, must be seen as its absolute precondition.” Surber concludes by claiming that with regard to Fichte’s 1794 essay on language, “what is most important to notice is his explicit recognition that linguistic considerations always have political implications and that political questions cannot be adequately treated without an acknowledgment of the centrality of language to the discussion.”

Surber bases these claims on Fichte’s repeated recognition of the transcendental basis of language in the communicative nature of free human beings: language originates in the human desire to communicate with and be recognized by other human beings. In other words, the transcendental basis of language can be found in the intersubjective nature of human freedom. Fichte claims that human freedom is tied to a drive to communicate with and be recognized by another human being. As Fichte says in the 1794 essay, “as soon as he has actually encountered a being of his own kind in a reciprocal relation, it is precisely this drive that would have to produce in him the wish to indicate his thoughts to the other with whom he has become connected, and, on the other hand, to be able to obtain from the other a clear communication of the other’s thoughts.”

Fichte argues for the intersubjective basis of language throughout his essay. Moreover, he makes it clear that intersubjectivity, the transcendental condition for the possibility of language, has different levels of empirical expression. In the early essay, Fichte distinguishes two different levels, the family and the tribe. Fichte understands the empirical development of language as a development from family to tribe: signs develop and are used within a family; these signs are then exported to the larger community of the tribe. The social and political development of empirical languages can be traced back to an original *Ursprache* which is the first way in which human beings express thoughts to one another. In this early essay, Fichte understands the *Ursprache* as giving voice to the basic level of intersubjective communication grounded in the human drive to communicate. Fichte claims that the aim of language is “signification [*Bezeichnung*] ... for the sake of mutual reciprocity of our thought.” He further clarifies this by stating that “through association with human beings, there awakens in us the idea of indicating our thoughts to one another through arbitrary signs—in a word, the idea of language.” This basic desire to communicate is the ground of the *Ursprache*, the immediate expression of inner thought which is developed further in both familial and tribal interaction.

In this early essay, however, Fichte leaves unanalyzed the explicitly political development of language, that is, the development of diverse na-
tional languages. He does not extend his account of the development of language beyond a primitive tribal level and does not consider the connection between language and the modern nation-state. While he does point beyond the *Ursprache* to a more advanced, more "spiritual," cultured, or civilized language, he leaves this undeveloped. Almost at the end of the 1794 essay, Fichte claims that a more culturally advanced language would eventually "supplant" (*verdrängten*) the *Ursprache*: "For as the nation [*die Nation*] advanced further in its culture, it would necessarily have to find new forms adequate to its concepts and soon forget about the older ones while using the new ones." Here Fichte uses, for the first time in this essay as far as I can tell, the word "nation" (*die Nation*) and indicates, if only in outline, the direction that his thinking on language would take in his politically inflammatory *Addresses to the German Nation*.

This direction can be roughly indicated as follows. In the *Addresses*, Fichte extends the political context of language to an explicit consideration of the link between the nation, its language, and the spiritual development of its culture. Fichte says in the *Addresses* that it is crucial for a nation to remain in touch with its proper linguistic heritage. A nation's spiritual life flourishes when the people speak a "living language" (*lebendige Sprache*): "Among the people with a living language, spiritual culture [*Geistigesbildung*] influences life; whereas among a people of the opposite kind, mental culture and life go their separate ways." Fichte here attempts a taxonomy of peoples based upon the *lebendigkeit* of their various languages.

As we shall see in the next section, the criterion of Fichte's taxonomy represents a crucial shift away from his analysis in the 1794 essay. Before we turn to this crucial difference, let us note that, in the *Addresses*, Fichte was still concerned with something that could be called the transcendental condition for the possibility of language and that this transcendental condition is still the intersubjective nature of human reason. In the *Addresses* Fichte stressed the fact that human progress is transcendentially grounded on the creative activity of human being: "The real destiny of the human race on earth . . . is in freedom to make itself what it really is originally." Fichte here emphasized the creative power of human freedom. In the *Addresses*, however, Fichte extended the notion of intersubjectivity in a radically political direction. What is important in the *Addresses* is that Fichte recognizes that the creative power of human freedom is always tied to some empirical basis in space and time, most importantly the nation. Fichte continues: "This making of itself deliberately, and according to rule, must have a beginning somewhere and at some moment in space and time. . . . In regard to the space, we believe that it is first of all the Germans who are called upon to begin the new
Fichte’s goal in the *Addresses* is to link the project of freedom to the German nation and especially to the German language. Fichte thus continues to maintain that the intersubjective nature of human freedom is the transcendental ground of empirical languages, but in the *Addresses* he recognizes that these empirical languages vary according to national differences. He concludes that the German language is the language that is closest to the completion of the project of human freedom because it alone remains clearly linked to the transcendental ground of language. German is the proper language in which to comprehend the essence of human freedom because German remains tied to the “force of nature” (*Naturkraft*) from which language first issued forth. In other words, in evaluating national differences among languages, Fichte’s criterion remains linked to the nature of human freedom and its need to communicate with other human beings—this is the “force of nature” of which Fichte speaks. He concludes that German is the language in which the connection between language and human freedom remains clear.

**German Destiny and the Ursprache**

Given that Fichte remained committed to Kant’s universal morality, one wonders why Fichte felt it was necessary to specifically address the German nation. After all, Fichte was aware that the history of culture is a European, if not a global, affair: his first “Address” locates the *Addresses* within the context of his speculations about European or world history as found in *The Characteristics of the Present Age*. However, for Fichte the decisive moment which confronted world history in 1807 was uniquely German: it was the Germans who were to usher in a new epoch in history by creating a new, more spiritual world. In the *Addresses* Fichte both attempts to prove that the proper manifestation of the new spiritual world is the German nation and attempts to show the, as yet, nonexistent German nation how it might come to create this new world. The means of creating the new world are political, philosophical, and poetic. The new era will be a German era, Fichte argues, because only in the German language and culture are politics, philosophy, and poetry united.

While there are certainly chauvinistic and contingent historical reasons why Fichte’s *Addresses* are addressed specifically to the Germans, he attempts to provide a philosophical justification for the fact that “it is first of all the Germans who should be recognized as those who begin the new era—as forerunners [*vorangehend*] and exemplars [*vorbildend*] for the rest [*für die übrigen*] [of the human race].” In this formulation of the German task, it is clear that Germany is not to be a conquering nation but an ex-
emplar for the rest of the human race that will then lead humanity forward into the new epoch of history. Fichte's German nationalism is thus more than naively chauvinistic; it is based on a philosophical claim about progress in history. Fichte claims that to Germany alone belongs the spiritual destiny of bringing forth a new epoch in world history because Germany is the highest exemplar of the European spirit.

Fichte's philosophical justification of his claims about the unique historical mission of Germany is based on what he claims is the uniquely philosophical nature of the German language and way of thinking. Germans speak a living primal language, an *Ursprache*, in which alone truth can be authentically thought. The *Ursprache* connects living German speakers with their original destiny and provides the means for completing this destiny, the means for making life into that which it ought to be. Most significantly, this *Ursprache* is a living connection between theory and practice, between life and thought:

In this way, I say, spiritual culture [*geistige Bildung*]—and here is meant especially thinking in a primal language [*Ursprache*]—does not exert an influence on life; it is itself the life of him who thinks in this fashion. Nevertheless it necessarily strives, from the life that thinks in this way, to influence other life outside it, and so to influence the life of all about it and to form this life in accordance with itself. For, just because that kind of thinking is life, it is felt by its possessor with inward pleasure in its vitalizing [*belebenden*], transfiguring [*verklärenden*], and liberating [*befreienden*] power.  

Fichte claims that theory and practice are united in the spirit of the *Ursprache*. Thinking in the *Ursprache* leads to the real invigoration, transfiguration, and liberation of political life. This connection between theory and practice only occurs within the *Ursprache*, the primal language which Fichte elsewhere characterizes as a “living language” (*lebendige Sprache*) and a “mother-tongue” (*Muttersprache*).

Fichte had developed the notion of the *Ursprache* in the 1794 text on language. The differences between this early account of the *Ursprache* and Fichte's account in the *Addresses* are significant. In the early text, Fichte described the *Ursprache* as a primitive language that was a direct imitation of nature: “Just as nature signified something to men through sight and hearing, exactly thus did they have to signify it to one another in freedom. One might call a language constructed on this basic principle the *Ursprache* or Hieroglyphic language.” In the early essay, Fichte did not claim any special ontological or spiritual status for the *Ursprache*. While all languages remain connected to their origin in some way, this connection to the origin of language is gradually effaced by the progress of culture.
Fichte claimed in 1794 that as culture progresses, the *Ursprache* “will gradually perish and be replaced by another which carries in itself not even the slightest trace of the former.”\(^{22}\) This progress occurred as the original words of the *Ursprache* “were replaced by signs which better corresponded to the civilized spirit of the people.”\(^{23}\) In this early text, then, Fichte sees the overcoming of the *Ursprache* as a sign of spiritual progress.

This is not so in the *Addresses*, where progress is understood as reviving the spiritual power of the *Ursprache*. In the *Addresses*, Fichte claims that German culture is progressive because the actually existing German *Ursprache* affords Germans the most comprehensive appropriation of the original “force of nature” that is at work in language. This claim is in direct contradiction to his earlier claim that the *Ursprache* is overcome by civilization. Fichte even goes so far in his early text on language as to claim that, with regard to grammatical rules about the placement of adjectives, French “has a decided advantage over the German.”\(^{24}\) In the *Addresses*, Fichte does not have a single kind word to say about the French language. Indeed, he indicates that the demise of European culture can be blamed in part on the “mongrelization” of culture that has occurred in Romance languages like French that have appropriated Latin and thus remain tied to a dead language.\(^{25}\)

Fichte's reevaluation of the value and power of the *Ursprache* is based on three factors. First, Fichte seems to have reestimated the political, philosophical, and poetic power of language. This makes sense, since the goal of the *Addresses* is to use the poetic power of language to inspire the German spirit and bring forth the German nation. In 1794 Fichte was concerned with language and its ability to represent objects. In 1807 Fichte was interested in the creative power of language to generate new developments in history. In both 1794 and 1807, Fichte maintained that the transcendental condition for language, the “force of nature” that gave rise to language, was human freedom. In 1807 Fichte emphasizes that this force is a creative and not merely a representational activity. In the *Addresses* Fichte states that in a living language, the highest thoughts remain tied to sensuous life. Only in an *Ursprache* is living philosophical thought possible because in such a living language, “the symbol is directly living and sensuous; it re-presents [wieder darstellend] all real life and so takes hold of and exerts an influence on life.”\(^{26}\) Creative advancements in thought must be tied to real life and this is only possible when such thought is articulated in an *Ursprache*.

Second, in 1807, after the failure of German politics and the French invasion, Fichte is forced to recognize that the uniqueness of German culture is not political but cultural. The German culture has always existed beyond the confines of a political state in the shared spiritual milieu of
those who speak the German language. This leads Fichte to conclude that the spirit of the German nation is found in the unifying power of the German language. He claims that what is unique about German as opposed to French or English is its link to its own etymological past. Fichte emphasizes that German possesses both Latinate and Germanic words that are synonymous. However, he claims that the Germanic terms are more powerful stimuli to thought and action because they do not require translation into sense images. Fichte claims that there is a "national power of imagination" (Nationaleinbildungskraft) and that words in the Ursprache (as opposed to foreign words introduced into this language) stimulate this imagination directly.

Third, in 1807, Fichte understands progress in terms of a living connection to the origin of human culture. This only happens in a living language in which philosophical, artistic, and even political investigations are linked to the transcendental ground of language in "spiritual nature itself" (geistigen Natur selbst). This connection is, Fichte claims, only found in the German spirit and Germany thus ought to be the forerunner of progress in history. French civilization seems to have failed to live up to its promise by exchanging the ideals of revolution for the lust of empire. Fichte links the failure of French culture to the remnants of imperial Roman culture in the French language. The German language remained unpolluted by Roman culture. Instead, it remains linked, as an Ursprache, to the basis of language in the intersubjectivity of human freedom.

Language, Politics, and Poetry: The Golden Age

Fichte's comments about the importance of the Ursprache are significant for both his political and philosophical agendas. He claims that philosophy and all of spiritual culture grow out of real, historical, political life and that only a certain type of political life will lead to the full fruition of philosophy. In particular, for Fichte, making the German people into a real political nation in which thinking in the Ursprache can proceed without external constraint will open the possibility for the completion of a living mediation between politics and philosophy. For the living truth expressed in the Ursprache to become self-conscious and complete, this truth must be made real by way of real political transformations in the lives of those who speak the Ursprache. In short, the philosophical truths which can only be thought in the Ursprache will be completed and comprehended when the Germans are politically and spiritually free. This will, in turn, be an example for the rest of mankind, who will then follow Germany into the new epoch in which mankind will freely "fashion itself by means of itself" (die Menschheit
sich selber durch sich selbst erschaffen). One can see here the linkage to Fichte's more theoretical work in which freedom is understood as the ego positing itself. Fichte understands the new German epoch as a philosophical epoch because such freedom can only be enacted “through knowledge” (durch die Erkenntnis). Such philosophical self-determination can only occur within an Ursprache because only within such an Ursprache is thinking organically connected to its origin in freedom.

When the living truth that is implicit in the Ursprache is finally allowed to express itself, when thought determines itself in accord with its origin, it will do so, Fichte claims, by means of the transformative power of poetry. Fichte agrees with his contemporaries Schiller, Schelling, and Hölderlin when he claims that “the thinker [der Denker] . . . is a poet [Dichter].” A truly original thinker re-presents in images, as the poet does, the truth of sensual life and in this re-presentation actually overcomes the old world and creates a new one. Within an Ursprache in which thought and life are organically connected, poetic thought thus has direct political consequences: “To such a language, therefore, poetry is the most excellent means of flooding the life of all with the spiritual culture that has been attained.” We can see, then, that Fichte justifies his own flurries of poetic rhetoric by stating that poetry is at least as useful as philosophy for transforming people's lives. Fichte thus moves beyond Kantian rationalism in claiming that political transformation will occur, not by reasoned argument as Kant might claim, but by the power of persuasive speech and the poetic art of imagination.

Fichte concludes his remarks on language with a brief account of “the golden age.” This golden age would be reached when life, language, and thought interpenetrate each other mutually. Fichte notes, however, that with such a completion comes a subsequent decline. He acknowledges that it is possible for poetry, politics, philosophy, and life to be completed at a given stage of historical development. However, such completion inevitably results in death; after a people celebrates its golden age, “the source of poetry runs dry.” This source is the force of nature that leads us to strive to produce new poetry, philosophy, and politics, that is, it is human freedom. In the Addresses, Fichte concludes that at the present stage of historical development, the German spirit alone remains close to this source and thus has a unique task in the future of the development of the human race. Indeed, Fichte states that the criterion for being called “German” is whether or not “you believe in something absolutely primary and original in man himself, in freedom, in endless improvement, in the eternal progress of our race [unsers Geschlechts].” German politics, philosophy, and poetry thus point beyond the golden age promised by spiritually dead languages toward the eternal progress that is the work of freedom.
Conclusion: Fichte's Philosophy of Language

What then is Fichte’s philosophy of language as articulated in the Addresses? As we have seen, this question is not tangential to his project in the Addresses. Indeed, Fichte explicitly states that “a consideration of the nature of language in general [das Wesen der Sprache überhaupt]” is necessary as part of his larger project of inspiring the German people. Fichte’s philosophy of language can be summed up in the following epigram: “Men are formed by language far more than language is formed by men” (Mehr die Menschen von der Sprache gebildet werden, denn die Sprache von den Menschen). There are two ways in which Fichte develops this view, a strong way and a weak one. In both of these he is arguing for a reversal of the commonsense view of the relation between language and individuality, language and the community, and indeed language and thought. The commonsense view holds that individuals, communities, and thoughts exist prior to language and that we learn particular languages in order to express our inner thoughts to other members of our community. Such, for example, is Augustine’s view (famously used as a foil by Wittgenstein at the very beginning of the Philosophical Investigations) that both will and thought are prior to language and that we learn language in order to be able to express our thoughts and our wills.

In the Addresses, Fichte rejects this theory of language. In the strong version of his theory, he claims that language is the basis of individuality, community, and thought. He states that with regard to individual language speakers, “They do not form language, it is the language that forms them” (So bilden nicht sie die Sprache, sondern die Sprache bildet sie). Individuals, even in their most deeply held thoughts, are all formed by language. Fichte further elaborates this claim in a more political direction: “The people does not express its knowledge, but its knowledge expresses itself out of the mouth of the people” (Nicht eigentlich dieses Volk spricht seine Erkenntniss aus, sondern seine Erkenntniss selbst spricht sich aus aus demsel-ben). This claim is, in turn, explained by the following: “It is not really man that speaks, but human nature that speaks in him and announces itself to others of his kind” (Nicht eigentlich redet der Mensch, sondern in ihm redet die menschliche Natur, und verkündet sich anderen seines Gleichen). According to this strong claim, individuals are merely conduits for the life of spirit that is found in the totality of language and community.

The weaker form of Fichte’s claim can be found in the following:

What an immeasurable influence on the whole human development of a people [eines Volkes] the character of its language may have—its language, which accompanies the individual into the most secret depths of his mind in
thought and will and either hinders him or gives him wings, which unites within its domain the whole mass of men who speak it into one single point and common understanding [gemeinsamen Verstanden], which is the true point of meeting and mingling for the world of the senses and the world of spirit [der Sinnenwelt und der Geister], and fuses the ends of both in each other in such a fashion that it is impossible to tell to which of the two it belongs itself.44

Here Fichte moderates his view slightly and recognizes that there is a mutual interplay between the individual and the spirit of his or her community. Nonetheless, language is crucial for it acts as the medium in which individual and community are interrelated. Indeed, Fichte concludes above that there is no way to dissolve the mediating function of language and that we cannot tell whether the individual or the community is prior to their juncture in language. Thus, even this weaker claim, which allows some room for the individual beyond language, still results in a subordination of the individual to language. In both versions of this theory, then, it is clear that Fichte rejects the view that individuals and their thoughts are somehow prior to language.

Fichte provides us with two arguments for the priority of language: a transcendental argument and a practical-moral argument. The transcendental argument is similar to the argument he made in the 1794 essay on language. In that essay, Fichte claimed that language originated in the human drive to be recognized by another human being: the transcendental condition for the possibility of language is the intersubjective nature of human freedom. In the Addresses, Fichte claims that language originates in a force of nature which is unitary and necessary: “It ever remains nature’s one, same, living power of speech, which in the beginning necessarily arose in the way it did” (Bleibt es immer dieselbe Eine, ursprünglich also ausbrechenmüssende lebendige Sprachkraft der Natur).45 He even goes so far as to claim that there is a “fundamental law” according to which “every idea becomes in the human organs of speech one particular sound and no other.”46 Fichte does not explain this fundamental law in any detail but it might, perhaps, be explained as a law of onomatopoeia wherein human speech originates out of an imitation of sounds in nature.47 Behind this must be, however, the transcendental condition of human intersubjectivity which makes the imitation of nature in speech necessary to begin with. In the Addresses, this transcendental condition seems to be what he calls the “force of nature,” which he refers to as “language in its original emergence from life” (der ursprüngliche Ausgang der Sprache).48 Language emerges from the intersubjective basis of human freedom. It is thus prior to individuality because individuality can only form on the basis of communication between selves which is itself only made possible by language.

The practical-moral argument is linked to Fichte’s call for a new form
of education. Fichte's *Addresses* are dedicated to inspiring the German nation. This will occur, he claims, when Germany creates a new form of education for its youth. According to Fichte, there could be no such thing as moral education if the individual were a selfish atom which comes into existence somehow prior to his or her community. If it were true that children were naturally selfish and viewed themselves as atomic selves, it would be impossible to educate them:

Nothing can be created from nothing, and the development of a fundamental instinct, no matter to what extent, can never make it the opposite of itself. How then could education ever implant morality in the child, if morality did not exist in him originally [*ursprünglich*] and before all education? It does, therefore, actually exist in all human children that are born into the world; the task is simply to find out the purest and most primitive form in which it appears.\(^{49}\)

Fichte claims that he knows that children have this fundamental moral disposition both as the result of empirical observation and as the result of his own speculative philosophical thought. Speculative philosophy in the *Wissenschaftslehre* reaches the conclusion that the self and the not-self mutually determine one another and that the self strives to recognize and to be recognized by the not-self. In the *Addresses* Fichte explains this as “the most primitive form of morality,” which he calls “the instinct for respect.”\(^{50}\) He further elaborates this: “The bond, therefore, which makes men of one mind, and the development of which is a chief part of education for manhood, is not sensuous love, but the instinct for mutual respect.”\(^{51}\) This instinct for mutual respect is linked to the intersubjective nature of human freedom and thus to Fichte's discussion of language. Language is the medium which allows individuals to respect one another. According to Fichte, then, we do not acquire language because we are pre-formed homunculi looking for the means of expressing our selfish desires. Rather, language occurs because we are moral and social beings whose basic instincts require that we create a medium in which we can respect one another.

The details of Fichte's view on language thus changed significantly between 1794 and 1807 while its underlying kernel did not. Fichte revises his estimation of the *Ursprache* and argues that the best language is the language that stays closest to its roots in the intersubjective nature of human being. Nonetheless, Fichte retains his view that language originates in intersubjectivity. In the later text he argues more vigorously for the view that language is prior to the development of finite individuality and that society is thus, in some sense, prior to the individual. Finally, in the later text, he explicitly claims that the German language is the modern language
that has stayed closest to its roots in the human Ursprache and in which the intersubjective truth of human nature can best be developed. While this is obviously a nationalistic exaggeration on his part, it is clear that this exaggeration is dependent, in part, on the historical context in which he offered his Addresses. Indeed, this exaggeration might be expected because the Addresses and the oppressed German people to whom they were addressed formed part of the ongoing political struggle for recognition and mutual respect which Fichte found at the basis of language itself.

Notes

1. AGN, 243; FW7:476.
2. AGN, 247; FW7:480.
3. Fichte says, for example: “Let the original people [Stammwolke] who speak this language incorporate as many individuals of other races [Stamme] and other languages; if they are not permitted to bring the sphere of their observation up to the point from which, from now on, the language is to develop, then they remain dumb in the community and without influence on the language, until the time comes when they themselves have entered into the sphere of observation of the original people” (AGN, 62; FW7:319–20, translation modified).

4. AGN, 78; FW7:333.
5. AGN, 78; FW7:333.
7. Surber, Language and German Idealism, 62.
8. Surber, Language and German Idealism, 64.
9. For example, Fichte writes: “As these [supersensible] ideas now become clearer and clearer to a human being, the drive to acquaint others with what he had discovered would begins to stir in him, for never is the drive to communicate livelier than in the case of new and sublime thoughts” (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language,” in Surber, Language and German Idealism, 132).

15. AGN, 73; FW7:329.
16. AGN, 46; FW7:306.
17. AGN, 46–47; FW7:306.
18. “The difference [between Germans and other Teutonic people] arose at the moment of the separation from the common stock and consists in this, that the German speaks a language which has been alive ever since it first issued from the force of nature [dass der Deutsche eine bis zu ihrem ersten Ausstromen aus der Naturkraft lebendiges Sprache redet]” (AGN, 68; FW7:325).
19. AGN, 47; FW7:306.
20. AGN, 78; FW7:333.
25. AGN, 84–87.
26. AGN, 76; FW7:332.
27. AGN, 67.
28. AGN, 65; FW7:322.
29. AGN, 86; FW7:339.
30. AGN, 86; FW7:339.
31. AGN, 46; FW7:306.
32. AGN, 46; FW7:306.
33. AGN, 78; FW7:333 (my translation).
34. AGN, 78; FW7:334.
35. AGN, 80.
36. AGN, 80; FW7:335.
37. AGN, 125; FW7:374.
38. AGN, 55; FW7:314.
39. AGN, 55; FW7:314.
40. "But I, by longing and cries and broken accents and various motions of my limbs to express my thoughts, that so I might have my will and yet unable to express all I willed, or to whom I willed, did myself, by the understanding which Thou, my God, gavest me, practice the sounds in my memory. When they named any thing, and as they spoke turned towards it, I saw and remembered that they called what they would point out by the name they uttered. And that they meant this thing and no other was plain from the motion of their body, the natural language, as it were, of all nations" (Augustine, Confessions, trans. Edward B. Pusey [New York: Collier Books, 1961], bk. 1, p. 16).
41. AGN, 62; FW7:320.
42. AGN, 56; FW7:315.
43. AGN, 56; FW7:314–15.
44. AGN, 69; FW7:326.
45. AGN, 57; FW7:315.
46. AGN, 56; FW7:314.
47. This seems to be a new twist in the Addresses. The 1794 essay on language emphasized written language at the expense of spoken language, and indeed interpreted the Ursprache in terms of written hieroglyphics. In the Addresses, Fichte seems more interested in the spoken word. The political and hermeneutical context of the Addresses might explain this difference: in the Addresses, Fichte is himself speaking German and is acutely aware of the power of his own voice to inspire the German people.
48. AGN, 63; FW7:321.
49. AGN, 172; FW7:414.
50. AGN, 172; FW7:414.
51. AGN, 174; FW7:416.