Fichte and the "Humanist Fascism" in the Characteristics of the Present Age

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Abstract

The argument I develop in the following pages is based on the identification of a humanist form of life. There are at least three forms of humanism: individualistic, hedonistic and collectivistic. Of these, the collectivistic humanist is one who makes the development not only of himself but of humanity as a whole (albeit through gradually expanding groups) the purpose of his life. My first goal is to show that collectivistic humanism is well represented in authors such as Johann Gottlieb Fiche, and especially, though not exclusively, in his *The Characteristics of the Present Age*(1806). My second aim is to show how this humanism in the German philosopher is driven by the fascist principle of the sacrifice of the individual to the state. This particular realisation of the life of a community I call it ‘humanist fascism’.

Keywords: Fichte, Humanism, Form of Life, Fascism, People, Intersubjectivity, Nation.

1. Introduction

The argument I develop in the following pages is based on the identification of a humanist form of life. There would be no particular form of life if it were not governed by a common principle that drives the behaviour and attitudes of its subjects. Textual evidence and historical data point to the maximisation of the integral development of the human being as the guiding principle of humanism as a form of life. This principle makes it possible to understand the actions of a given community of subjects identified with it. However, this principle can be concretised in at least three forms of humanism: individualistic, hedonistic and collectivistic.

Of these, the collectivistic humanist is the one who makes it the aim or purpose of his life to develop not only himself but humanity as a whole (albeit through gradually expanding groups). Of course, this type of humanist would reject the exclusivist pursuit of individual pleasure, but he would also reject the pursuit of collective pleasure in the sense of enjoyment, since his purpose is to develop the multiple and complex human faculties for their own sake, not for the sake of the resulting pleasure.

My first purpose is to show that this collectivistic humanism is well represented in authors such as Johann Gottlieb Fiche, and especially, though not exclusively, in his *The Characteristics of the Present Age*(1806). My second aim is to show how such humanism in the German philosopher is driven by the fascist principle of the sacrifice of the individual to the state. In this way, humanism as a guiding principle subsumes fascism, instrumentalising it for the ultimate goal of the development of humanity. These two levels are also constitutive opposites, for only by assimilating and subsuming the State as an abstract entity requiring self-sacrifice can humanity advance towards its own ends. This particular realisation of the life of a community I have called 'humanist fascism'. It might be confused with mere nationalism, but that is to reduce the scope of Fichte's theory and the form of life it proposes. Nationalism would be temporary at best, since each nation's state would be subordinated to humanity's ultimate goals, as well as its intellectual, emotional and social development.

2. Humanism and Humanist form of life

I call *humanist* the form of life that seeks to maximise human development, not because of the cultural and literary movement of the Renaissance, although this form gained great importance at that historical moment, but because in its ontological structure it is the way of being and acting in which man realises himself as a human being, as opposed to an abstract entity from whose supposed demands he flees. This is the meaning I give to the humanist form of life, partly in accordance with what contemporary humanism means by it, as I briefly discuss below.

Despite the explanatory note, it is only in the Renaissance, as a historical period in the West, that this humanist form of life comes to the fore, especially in the Italian fifteenth century. This does not mean, however, that it corresponds to an image of human beings never before conceived and realised. Indeed, there was an earlier historic realisation of it in ancient Greece and in other civilisations such as China and India.[1] His anthropical image is known as the *uomo universale* or universal man. According to Burckhardt, the humanist ideal was to become an 'all-sided man', i.e., to be a complete human being.[2] To this end he developed all aspects of his personality in accordance with the constraints of his society. His interest was in personal development, and he did this both through the acquisition of external goods and through the development of his internal faculties. That is, through business, sexual and culinary pleasures at meals and feasts, as well as through singing, playing musical instruments, learning languages, writing and reading, and so on. The image of a human being was that of someone who had conquered every possible area in which a human being could distinguish himself and stand out. It must be noted that, in contrast to the religious form of life, it was personal glory that was sought. A personal glory that was known in the discourse of the time as fame. Fame, in Burckhardt's words, was the outward correlate of the individual's personal development ('its outward distinction').[3]

This image of the human being that I have described, however, had its counter-image. Ontologically, without this counter-drive towards self-interest and self-benefit there would be no religious form of life. But the religious form of life is only one of many that are governed by the maximisation of the interests and glory of an abstract entity. When the humanist pursues his own benefits, he is not only haunted by the divinity, sin, guilt and possible punishment of the religious institutions that represent divinity on earth, but in certain situations the abstract entity from which one escapes without ever quite

succeeding is the state (as figuratively expressed by Kafka in *The Trial*, or the 'Big Brother' of George Orwell's novel *1984*). Logically, this is only the case when such a form of life is institutionalised by a government or ruling elite as the proper (form of) state. It must be noted that there are communities that may lead a similar life but remain on the margins and do not constitute the nation of a state. In this case, the secularisation of medieval theocratic governments gave way to secular governments separate from ecclesiastical power, particularly in Quattrocento Italy.[4] These governments constitute states in which the institutionalised form of life is the opposite of the religious, i.e. the humanist form, now not in opposition to the religious entity represented by the Church, but to the state as a secular entity. This historical interpretation of the shift from theocratic to secular government is based on the ontological structure that I have described in terms of the dialectic inherent in the form of life and its negative constitutive.[5]

The imposition of the humanist form of life in the Italian republics of the Quattrocento, to take a specific example for which there is much historical evidence, led to the institutionalisation of the *uomo universale* as the image of human beings. According to Burckhardt, the pursuit of personal development and personal glory was rooted in the person of the head of state and his immediate entourage (his court), but its influence extended to the other subjects, whose freedom to pursue individual interests was enhanced.

> *Despotism, as we have already seen, fostered in the highest degree the individuality not only of the tyrant or Condottiere himself but also of the men whom he protected or used as his tools—the secretary, minister, poet, and companion (…) even the subjects whom they ruled over were not free from the same impulse (…) all these conditions undoubtedly favoured the growth of individual thought, for which the necessary leisure was furnished by the cessation of party conflicts. The private man, indifferent to politics, and busied partly with serious pursuits, partly with the interests of a dilettante, seems to have been first fully formed in these despotisms of the fourteenth century.*[6]

It should be pointed out that, according to Burckhardt, it was precisely at this time and in this European country that this humanist form of life became institutionalised with unusual force. The most important thing, however, is that it appeared in despotic states, where the government was that of a tyrant or a despot.[7] This is of great importance since, according to the ontological pattern under consideration, a humanist form of life, in order to thrive, must escape the demands of an abstract entity. It is in these despotic states, and not in the Italian republics of the time (where the organisation was still linked to the Church), that the change in form of life is initiated. The active striving for personal development and the pursuit of one's own interests were against the background of the power of the State and its demand that each individual be at its service and pursue its glory. In other words, the humanist was always in danger of falling prey to the power of the state. The requirement or demand (exercised by the community) that everyone should seek the benefit and glory of the state is the form of life that I have called 'fascism'. Fascism as a form of life, and therefore as an ontological structure, is timeless, but historically realised in a particular way. For instance, Petrarch, the great humanist, advises Lord Carrara on how to run his state of Padua. Let us see if this is not fascism, according to the definition given:

> *Thou must not be the master but the father of thy subjects, and must love them as thy children; yea, as members of thy body. Weapons, guards, and soldiers thou mayest employ against the enemy—with thy subjects goodwill is sufficient. By citizens, of course, I mean those who love the existing order; for those who daily desire change are rebels and traitors, and against such a stern justice may take its course.*[8]

Children are bound by the authority of the father, and subjects by the authority of the tyrant and his government, which, as a quasi-paternal authority, knows better than the subjects what they need. It is interesting to note, however, how those who did not identify with the order (form of life) established by the tyrant (the elite) were seen as traitors. Thus, for some, subjugation comes from outside and by force, while for others the will of the tyrant is self-imposed, and they become his subjects voluntarily. It is not the interests of the state that are preserved, but the individual interests of the tyrant and his followers.

Fascism, as a form of life, can be seen as the constitutive and necessary opposite for the flourishing of the humanist form of life, which is not a form of life of freedom and equality (do not misunderstand my point), on the contrary, it is the 'imposition' of the elites (starting with the despot or tyrant himself) to 'develop personally' in order to remain a subject of the community. In a word, it was the imperative to 'seek both your inner and outer benefits'. But this imperative led to an insurmountable paradox, not only for the followers, but also for the elite itself, including the head of state, who came to embody the image of the humanist ruler. The paradox is that in the pursuit of his personal development and self-interest, he distances himself from the demands of the state, its benefits and its glory.

The tyrant, like all his followers, seeks to use the state for his own ends: 'their enjoyment of life was enhanced and concentrated by the desire to obtain the greatest satisfaction from a possibly very brief period of power and influence'.[9] That tyrant who really promotes his own self-improvement is the one who does not merely flee from the demands of the state, but who, by refusing to accept them, adapts to his own self-improvement the form of life which maximises the benefits of the State. In short, he puts the State and its subjects at the service of his personal interests. This explains why the tyrants of the Italian city-states remained in power for only a short time and were replaced by others who also sought fame and self-interest at the expense of the state.[10] Perhaps this is why Machiavelli, as early as the sixteenth century, suggested this change of perspective and form of life, succinctly expressed in the motto 'mantenere lo Stato'. For him, it was not the benefits and personal development of the tyrant that mattered, but the benefits and interests of the state. Everything and everyone, including the person of the tyrant or prince, was to be placed at the service of the state, in one of the first formulations and realisations of what can be called fascism as a form of life:

> *This must be understood to mean that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things for which men are held good, since it is often necessary, in order to maintain the state [**mantenere lo stato**], to act against faith, against charity, **against humanity**, against religion.*[11]

I believe that this dialectic can reformulate the terms in which this period is conceived. But this is obviously not my main concern. I want to examine how the humanist form of life is necessarily to be understood in opposition to religious life and

fascism. But if the former is a precondition of the latter, what is the difference between them? Both religious life and fascism require the maximisation of the benefits of an abstract entity and the individual's service to it, but whether that entity is divinity or the state is obviously not the same thing. As I said, the fundamental difference is external, since the fascist form of life can only be realised under a state, while the religious form of life can be imposed on non-state communities. But other differences are based on the nature of the two ontological principles: divinity as an abstract entity demands a repentant and self-sacrificing individual seeking perfection in holiness, while the state demands an individual seeking perfection as a patriot loyal to the dictates of the state.

In the first case, the individual instrumentalises himself for the glory of an invisible (or symbolically visible) divinity only as a projection of the community that incarnates his religious principle, and his faults are considered sins that require a spiritual satisfaction of repentance and contrition; in the second case, the individual instrumentalises himself for the glory of a visible state only in the government that institutionalises the fascist principle, and his faults are crimes of treason that require a legal and criminal punishment. The ontological kinship between the two forms of life does not fail to evoke that religious sense found in fascism, which almost seems to make the state a religion. [12]

At this point, I have to clarify that I am trying to define humanism along the 2 most closely related ways of being: fascism and the religious form of life. The 2 mentioned are constitutive opposites of humanism. I want to show how collectivistic humanism can be negatively grounded in some kind of fascism.

3. Individualistic vs. Collectivistic Humanism

Another necessary distinction regarding humanism is that of a form of life that seeks collective human development. The latter is often confused with individualistic humanism. However, phenomenological analysis reveals its distinctive ontological structure. In the first case, the individualistic humanist seeks personal development in competition with other subjects who also seek their own development and self-interest. In the second case, the collectivistic humanist seeks to maximise the benefit of humanity (or a part of it), and his competition is in any case to put himself at the service of humanity in the most efficient and perfect way.

In the first case, the individual does not seek to unite with others in order to improve the planet and the well-being of humanity;[13] his only aim is to improve his well-being and his abilities. His justifying discourse (as in all forms of life) is based solely on preaching the goodness of a life dedicated to personal development. The collectivistic humanist, on the other hand, aims at the betterment of humanity (or a part of it); and his discourse consists in making ever larger groups aware of the need to preserve the interests of humanity and to extend them by universalising social, material and spiritual well-being. Their actions and activities avoid placing the destiny of humanity in the hands of an abstract entity.

Thus, if the individualistic humanist is in constant internal conflict with the service and sacrifice of his life for the glory and interest of an abstract entity such as God, Nature or the State, the collectivistic humanist is equally haunted by that entity, which no longer seeks to put the individual at its service, but the whole of humanity. The collectivistic humanist does not believe in predestination and places a supposedly universal human condition at the centre of his discourse. He seeks the

equality of all human beings in such a way that he rejects the individual development of some over the less advantaged. In short, the humanist makes humanity his religion.

From what has been said above, the difference between the two ways of being and acting is vast. The collectivistic humanist is one who promotes a kind of religion of humanity. This was most prominent in the nineteenth century. The American Unionists and others such as the Freemasons embraced and promoted this form of life. Many philosophers of that century advocated a kind of religion of humanity, from Fichte, Krause, Hebert, Stuart Mill to the founder of positivism, Auguste Comte. The latter famously rejected metaphysics and theology as primitive stages of human society. His philosophy was intended to mark a move towards the use of positive science as a means for humanity to take its future into its own hands in response to its collective interests. In Stuart Mill, ethical utilitarianism, with its precept of seeking 'the greater good for humanity' in every action, became another means of propagating this form of life.[14] This humanism clearly has little to do with the humanism that prevailed in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. On the contrary, they are different forms of life, with their own constitutive opposites. In this way, the pursuit of one's own development and interests can never be equated with cooperation with the development and interests of others, especially when the latter constrain the former and establish themselves as inexhaustible competitors.[15]

3.1. The Collectivistic Humanism and the State: Fichte's 'Humanist Fascism'

As mentioned above, the collectivistic humanist seeks to free himself from this dependence on God, Nature, or the State, and in any case to assimilate and embrace this constitutive negativity for greater impetus in his service to humanity. I would like to bring in the figure of Fichte at this point, because in his work, especially in *The Characteristics of the Present Age*,[16] a complexity is created in which at least three of these forms of life are related and contrasted: the individualistic humanist, the collectivistic humanist and the maximisation of state interests. What follows is a brief and synthetic exposition of the aforementioned work by Fichte, in order to analyse how, for this philosopher, collectivistic humanism entails a certain fascism, in what can be defined as the subjugation of the individual to the state for the sake of human progress.

According to Fichte, humanity has to pass through five stages of progressive development before it reaches its state of fullness.[17] Each stage is superior to the previous one. As it progresses, humanity evolves by realising with greater perfection what he calls the 'Idea of life according to reason' (*das vernunftgemäße Leben*). This idea reflects human nature.[18] To realise this Idea, therefore, is to unfold our nature ever more fully. But it is not by chance that this nature is called Idea, for it requires that it be understood in its laws and principles,[19] and that it be realised through actions and institutions in the world. What has been said so far refers to a form of life in which humanity is to develop as a collective entity. This is an image of the human being that Fichte sees as the realisation of the humanity's true nature (*Das Eine*).[20] This humanity can only be partially realised through the various human groups, what Fichte calls the Race (*Die Gattung or Leben der Gattung*). Here race —although it may attract attention for racism and other reasons today— refers to the image or Idea that a people have of what is to be human —the human race—,[21] and is expressed through the culture common to a people.[22]

Humanity as the true and eternal nature (*Leben der Einheit*) is realised through the peoples of the earth and their cultures (*Leben der Gattung*). To this end, the path of cultural progress has had to pass through several stages: the first is what he calls the stage of instinct, which roughly corresponds to what I call the survival form of life. The second is what he calls the stage of authority, which corresponds to the religious and State form of life and 'which demands unquestioning faith and obedience'.[23] The third is that of individual experience and the pursuit of self-interest over authority. This third stage of humanity is what Fichte claims to be proper to his historical time, the nineteenth century, 'the time in which we, who now live and think and speak to each other, do actually exist and live'.[24] And it is equivalent to the individualistic humanist form of life we have been examining. Fichte defines it as that of who '(he) thinks and does solely for himself and for his own peculiar advantage'.[25] But this stage is not the last. Already in his historical epoch the foundations were being laid for the next stage, that of the knowledge or recognition by the subjects of the laws and principle of the Idea (image) of the human being which constitutes their nature (again, *das vernunftgemäße Leben*). Now individual existence has become a life sacrificed to the idea of what it is to be human (life in the Idea or *das Leben in der Idee*), for 'is the end of the earthly life of the human Race to order all its relations with freedom according to reason'.[26] He who has lived intensely for his own ends, in this fourth stage, comes to understand the inadequacy of this way of living, because it is self-destructive, which necessarily leads him to detachment from himself by realising an ideal of living for the common ends of a people.[27] Obviously, Fichte counts himself among those who have contributed to this insight, which would lead to the next fundamental stage for the full realisation of humanity, namely the artistic stage; but his name should not lead to misunderstandings, because art is identified with the activity of the state, in that its function is to apply or impose the form of life that has been recognised as proper to our nature. This is what he calls 'life according to reason', and is in line with my definition of collectivistic humanism above.

Fichte's presentation of life according to reason, which is the collective life of the race, serves as evidence of the latter: 'the life according to reason consists herein, that the individual forget himself in the race, place his own life in the life of the race and dedicate it thereto'[28] and the race is manifested in the community, thus 'the individuality of each absolutely disappears in the community of all; and each one receives back his contribution to the common power, strengthened by the united Powers of all the rest'.[29] According to this, art is to be understood as the application of knowledge. And the state he comes to define as 'an artistic institution intended to direct all individual powers towards the Life of the Race (…) and to realize and manifest in individual life the general form of the Idea [of humanity]'.[30] In order to make sense of the latter, it must be understood that the state refers to that of every human society, so that the people, in their particularity and through the image they have of themselves, may realise the idea of humanity: 'What does the State hold as the representative of the Race? All its citizens, without a single exception'.[31] For this task, and in order to overcome the stage of (humanist) individuality once and for all, the state has to impose a form of life proper to a human group which has recognised what the laws and intrinsic principle of humanity are, and has therefore understood in which direction it is to develop. This form of life is for Fichte a higher culture, because it expresses the eternal idea of human nature. The purpose of the state is such a culture.[32] The state is the enforcer of what I have called the form of life of collectivistic humanism, in which the benefit and development of humanity is maximised in each national community:

> *The State which has to direct a necessarily finite sum of individual powers towards the common purpose, must*

> *regard itself as a completed whole; and as its common purpose is identical with that of the Human Race, it must regard the aggregate of its citizens as the Human Race itself.*[33]

It is worth noting, however briefly, that such a form of life is not primarily a coercive imposition by the state. Rather, it is an appeal or summons (*Anstoβ*) to people to freely recognize in the image of the human being projected upon them the way they wish to live.[34] In this recognition, the role that Fichte attributes to education, especially in his*Addresses to the German Nation*, is indisputable.[35] Notwithstanding this, the state has the responsibility to guide individuals, and therefore the right of coercion to impose itself on those who have not freely adopted the 'civilised' attitude to life which should bring humanity as a single community closer to its ultimate destiny.[36]

In the brief summary I have just given of Fichte's view of human progress and the forms of life proper to humanity, it interests me to note that he also speaks of different images of being human and even of different types of life.[37] Above all, however, he stresses the collectivistic humanist form of life, which he calls the idea of humanity realised in the race. Secondly, that Fichte's humanism is opposed to individualistic humanism, since whoever puts himself at the service of humanity must sacrifice his individual life: 'in the Perfect State no just individual purpose can exist which is not included in the purposes of the community'.[38] Thirdly, that the individualistic (humanist) form of life is expressly called the 'rejection of authority' stage,[39] which implied the oppression of an abstract entity over the individual, so that in the collectivistic humanist form of life, the former forms are overcome without being completely eliminated. Fourth, because of the latter, the collectivistic humanist form of life or the idea of Humanity in the Race has to be imposed by the state, so that the form of life of service to the state is assimilated and instrumentalised by the humanist form of life, which ultimately has in the state as an abstract entity its constitutive opposite. Only by assimilating such a state for the purposes of humanity, which might otherwise become tyrannical, can such a collectivistic humanist image or idea of race be realised: 'the existent of a state at all depends simply on the dedication of the individual Powers to a purpose of the race'.[40] This implies that the state has ceased to have a function for itself or for its own benefit through the instrumentalisation of the community (which, as we have seen, is fascism).

The problem, however, is that an identification is made between the state and the race (expressed through the national community), which leads to the insurmountable trap of fascism allied to nationalism. In order to escape from this trap, it is necessary to emphasise that the state consists of the government and the form of life it imposes on the individuals, who only become a nation when they impose this form of life on themselves. Thus, the state and the national community are clearly separated, so that serving the state as a fascist form of life means realising the form of life imposed by the government for its benefit and interest. This is the opposite of collectivistic humanist life, for it means the instrumentalisation of the community by the government through the imposed fascist form of life, rather than the instrumentalisation of the government to promote the interests and benefits of the community. On the contrary, for Fichte, the state should only be an instrument of collective humanity. And this instrumentalisation must be temporary, although its temporality seems to extend into an indefinite future, when humanity will have been reunited in a single community with a fully developed humanist form of life. On this point he writes elsewhere: 'The state is, instead, only a means for establishing a perfect society, a means which exists only under specific circumstances. Like all those human institutions

which are mere means, the state aims at abolishing itself. The goal of all government is to make government surperfluous'.[41] In a dialectical way, the human collective, which has been driven and directed by the state throughout its stages of development, must finally in the 4th and 5th stages free itself from it in order to give itself the laws of its own actions.[42]

4. Conclusion

In the previous sections, we have presented the analysis of humanist fascism as a concept already very significant in Fichte's work, and probably in German idealism as a whole. We can see in it the foundation of a deep-rooted tendency in social and political thought, a kind of ideal: the state subsumed by the real ends of humanity. Is not this humanist fascism the basis of another kind of state imposition for the purpose of the progress of humanity through race?

Significantly, the state's promotion of the realisation of the idea of humanity (by living according to reason) in a people is opposed to those other people who do not live according to this idea and are considered barbarians;[43] these are treated with pity.[44] The idea of humanity enters gradually, so that its progressive development in certain communities inevitably leads to the idea of that which does not fit into this idea or does not want to enter it, namely that which remains on the margins and resists assimilation (from this perspective, the uncivilised).[45] This also leads him to say that the state must be restrictive towards those who do not identify with the idea of race and therefore do not contribute of their own free will to the purpose of humanity in the race. This idea of humanity, which is the life according to reason, as conceived by Fichte, is still a particular image of humanity that is desired and must be imposed on others. This also allows us to question this collectivistic humanist conception that believes it knows human nature and promotes international institutions and state organisations to defend and promote this universal idea of humanity. Just as we saw in the Italian Renaissance that the individual humanist form of life was bound in this dialectic to the service of an abstract entity, God or the State, we see with Fichte that the collectivistic humanist form of life can hardly escape the state, be it aristocracy, democracy or dictatorship,[46] and that its effectiveness depends precisely on the assimilation it makes of it (the elite of the human community is identified with the state structure).

But, finally, it must be stressed that, if in a sense it is the state, as an apparatus of government, that is inextricably linked to this collective humanist form of life, from the standpoint of ontology, this inextricable dependence is on the form of life that places humanity (or the particular national polity) at the service of the state, insofar as it is this form of life that the humanist flees from but never quite succeeds, for he cannot live without his constitutive opposite. It is therefore impossible to impose a collectivistic humanism without the shadowy presence of the demand of an abstract entity, be it God, Nature or the State, from which the community constantly seeks to make its life independent, but to which it also owes the guarantee of its existence.

In this way, the state, as proposed by Fichte (and later by Hegel), haunts a particular human society (the race),[47] as a constricting force that can tyrannically put the individual and the community at its service, but at the same time, if properly assimilated and instrumentalised, it can become the driving force behind a form of life that promotes the material and

spiritual development of all individuals of the nation-community, and thus of an integral part of humanity.[48] For Fichte, all individuals must place themselves at the service of the state, and the state, from the point of view of the government, must be at the service of the development of the community, so that it cannot compel or impose anything other than what each individual has already imposed on themselves.[49] In Fichte, we undoubtedly have one of the paths that the collectivistic humanist form of life can take in its realisation. At the same time, we must bear in mind that the collectivity, in its development and integration, can be a threat to other communities, since the development of humanity can hardly take place simultaneously except through the partial contribution of what Fichte calls the Race (against the barbarians and the uncivilised), that is, of each people or nation, and through the dependence of the latter on the state, with the ghosts of fascism and nationalism that it evokes. Thus, the Fichtean vision of human life makes the free development of the humanity as a whole compatible and mutually necessary with the guiding impulse of the authoritarian state, which demands the submission and free sacrifice of the individual in a sort of humanist fascism.

Footnotes

[1] Andrew Copson, 'What is Humanism', in *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism*, ed. by Andrew Copson and A. C. Grayling (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 1-34 (p. 5). 'In spite of this recurrence, they do not constitute a tradition in the sense of an unbroken handing on of these ideas down the generations – humanism arises in human societies quite separate from each other in time and space and the basic ideas that comprise humanism can be discerned in China and India from ancient times as much as in the ancient Mediterranean and the modern West'.

[2] Jakob C. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Period of the Renaissance in Italy* volume 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), p. 190.

[3] Jakob C. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Period of the Renaissance in Italy* volume 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), p. 197.

[4] Burckhardt, *The Civilization,* p. 184.

[5] Although more documents and historical and sociological evidence would have to be presented to establish it as empirical knowledge, a philosophical ontological perspective can offer an overview that contributes to its understanding.

[6] Burckhardt, *The Civilization,* pp. 183-84.

[7] Burckhardt, *The Civilization,* p. 16.

[8] Quoted in Burckhardt, *The Civilization,* p. 12.

[9] Burckhardt, *The Civilization*, p. 183.

[10] Burckhardt, *The Civilization*, pp. 15-16.

[11] Translation is mine. Niccolò Macchiavelli wrote in *Il Principe*: 'hassi da intendere questo, che un Principe, e massime

uno Principe nuovo , non può osservare tutte quelle cose per le quali gli uomini sono tenuti buoni, essendo spesso necessitato, per *mantenere lo Stato*, operare contro alla fede, contro alla carità, *contro alla umanità*, contro alla Religione' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 305. Italics are mine

[12] See Daniel Rueda Garrido, *Forms of Life. Ideology and Propaganda* (Cambridge: Ethics Press, 2023), pp. 226-227.

[13] Howard Radest, 'Humanism as Experience', in *What is Humanism and Why Does It Matter?*, ed. by Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 2-27 (p. 24).

[14] Radest, 'Humanism as Experience', p. 7.

[15] The capitalist form of life is derived as a connotation of this individual humanism in such a way that personal development is put at the service of the maximisation of human capital though economic profit and its consequent social status.

[16] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, in Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, volume 2 (London: Trübner & Co, 1889).

[17] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, pp. 70, 88-89.

[18] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, pp. 58, 61-62, 85.

[19] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 26.

[20] Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age,* p. 25. In this translation, it is rendered as 'The One Life'.

[21] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, pp. 24-25.

[22] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 164.

[23] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 20.

[24] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, pp. 18-19.

[25] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, pp. 71-72.

[26] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 69.

[27] This is better articulated in the First Address, 'The Preliminary remarks and overview' in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 13-15. His judgments seem to have been influenced by the experience of the French invasion, because of which, he will argue, the individualistic and selfish life hitherto led by the Germans will succumb to the control of others, from which they can only be liberated by rebuilding and reaffirming the unity of the national character in accordance with the dictates of reason.

[28] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 36.

[29] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 162.

[30] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 160.

[31] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 162.

[32] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 164.

[33] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 161.

[34] Farr, Arnold, 'Fichte's Master/Slave Dialectic: The Untold Story'. In Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore,*Fichte, German Idealism and Early Romanticism* (New York: Rodopi, 2010) pp. 243-259 (p, 253).

[35] Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*. In the First Address, he was adamant when he wrote: 'This new education would add to the old one by probing to the root of the stirrings and motions of life, something that has been lacking until now, and just as the old education had at most to cultivate a part of man, so the new one would cultivate humanity itself, and make this culture by no means, as has been the case hitherto, a mere possession, but rather an integral component of the pupil'. (p. 18)

[36] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 163.

[37] Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age,* p. 64. Fichte uses the term 'Lebensform' twice to refer to the particular forms into which the One Life (Das Einen) enters. In the original, it reads: 'Die verschiedenen Gestalten in welche das Bild der Einen ewigen Urtätigkeit innerhalb unseres Bewußtseins sich bricht' [The various forms into which the image of the One eternal primordial activity is refracted within our consciousness] In *Die Grundzüge des gengenwartigen Zeltalters* (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1908), Vierte Vorlesung, pp. 70-71.

[38] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 164.

[39] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 70.

[40] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 161.

[41] Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 'Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation'. In Fichte:*Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. By Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 156.

[42] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 70.

[43] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 202.

[44] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 31.

[45] In Fichte the relationship with the Others is substantivized, he does not conceive it as a product of a form of life's perspective, but that those who do not live a life in accordance with Reason are uncivilised: 'The civilized must rule and the uncivilized must obey, if Right is to be the law of the world' (p. 49). He does not realise that he is falling into his own

trap and that, in his defence of reason, he is simply acting 'irrationally' in favour of the form of life with which he identifies and which he would like to impose.

[46] Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age,* pp. 172-73. According to Fichte, any government is legitimate if it is directed to the good and development of the community (collectivist humanism), and therefore does not subjugate the social group for its own benefit in the person of one or a few. That is to say, in my terminus, it is legitimate as long as the government imposes a form of life which the whole community imposes on itself at the same time, and this form of life empowers and develops the subjects collectively in relation to a universal image of humanity.

[47] Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age:* 'the State, in itself, is an unseen Idea; just as the race has been described' (p. 163).

[48] Fichte, The Characteristics of the Present Age, p. 255.

[49] Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age,* p. 190. According to Fichte this is the coincidence between the will of the subject and the law. This coincidence is a form of life in terms studied by Agamben: life of the subject and rule.

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