

“A Related yet Foreign Element”. Schleiermacher Reviews Fichte’s *The Destination of Man*

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Abstract: This essay focuses on a review of Johann G. Fichte’s *The Destination of Man*, published by Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher in the journal “Athenæum” in 1800. The author places the book within the context of the debates on the critical function of reviewing that took place between the Schlegel brothers and the Enlightenment writers of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. Schleiermacher’s *Notiz* can indeed be seen as a genuine attempt at a *mise en abîme*: a review of the value of reviewing. Distancing himself from Fichte’s rationalistic approach, and in line with Heinrich Jacobi’s philosophy of religion, Schleiermacher rejects the universal concept of destination in favour of a morality based on the principle of existence (as openness and contact with the infinite). However, unlike the Schlegel brothers, he does not settle for a solipsistic and aestheticizing conception of man. Instead, he presents a theory that focuses on the progressive social formation of the original essence of the individual. The critical act of reviewing as a means of establishing formative relationships (*bildende Beziehungen*) with others.

Keywords: Review, criticism, individuality, Schlegel, Fichte, Jacobi.

1. A. W. Schlegel and the critical function of reviews in Enlightenment periodicals

The first issue of the “Athenaeum”, which appeared in May 1798, contains an essay by August Wilhelm Schlegel entitled *Contributions to the Criticism of Recent Literature*, which echoes and expands on the journal’s brief preface, the *Vorerinnerung*, describing the journal’s aim.¹ In fact, the *Beyträge* focus on the philosophical vision and cultural purpose of the “Athenaeum”, placing the journal in opposition to the kind of scholarly discourse that prevailed in German literary periodicals in the second half of the eighteenth century. The tensions between the strategies and cultural goals of Enlightenment journals are most evident in the passages on the function and value of the activity of reviewing. In fact Ernst Behler wrote that the authors of the “Athenaeum” conceived their forum “wie ein rezensierendes Institut” (Behler 1983, 19). This statement is more evaluative than descriptive, since the first reviews appeared in the fourth issue (August 1799), while the previous three contained essays, dialogues, rhapsodic reflections, and aphoristic fragments. And yet Behler was not wrong, for the

¹ Cf. Schlegel 1798b, and Schlegel 1798a.

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different types of text that appeared within the pages of the “Athenaeum” were intended by its founders to serve as contrasting articulations of the same “critical function”, that of reviewing *par excellence*. Thus any text that fulfils the same critical function, regardless of its literary or narrative form, can be regarded from this perspective as a kind of review.²

According to August Wilhelm, the presence of the *Notizen* explains the popularity of scientific journals, as they provide an effective way to communicate and reach as many people as possible. In fact, they not only reach a wide readership among those who are already interested in cultural issues, but also build a new and previously non-existent literary audience, thus increasing the number of scholars and influencing contemporary life. In order to achieve this, however, the journals and reviews, which constitute the most important element, must not only inform, explain, and comment, but also *be critical*, and this in a completely new way from the literary traditions that prevailed, for example, in the famous “Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek” founded in Berlin in 1765 by Friedrich Nicolai. Schlegel thus began to introduce some elements of marked departure and dissent from the Enlightenment mentality, distinguishing between two meanings of criticism that reflected two different intellectual functions. This was how he described the kind of criticism that was typical of traditional periodicals:

When reviewing, one puts on official clothes: one no longer speaks in one’s own name, but as a member of a community. Those who have their own unique spirit must subordinate it to the purpose and tone of the institution; and one wonders whether sharing in the dignity of the institution can compensate for the sacrifice, since one is always bound by a collective spirit. This can easily lead to a certain rigidity and conformity to rules, which is at odds with the animated freedom that is the common thread running through their creativity and sensitivity to what they produce. Moreover, this formal discourse claims a general validity, which can only be produced by the scientific application of scientific truths, but can in no case be extended to such things that only achieve definition in the mind of those who examine them thanks to a singular play of internal forces (Schlegel 1798a, 146–7).

Those who review, *sacrifice* their own name and wear official clothes, subordinating their voice to that of a corporation. Although he does not mention it, Schlegel was thinking of the style of the “Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung”, the journal founded in Jena in 1785 by Friedrich Justin Bertuch, Christian Gottfried Schütz, and Cristoph Martin Wieland, to which the most important scholars of the time contributed: Kant, Humboldt, Fichte, Bruno Bauer, and he himself. In the “Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung”, all reviews were anonymous, not only to protect the authors from possible censorship or retaliation, but above all because anonymity gave them scientific authority.³ In the eyes of the readers of the time,

² Cf. Mastrogregori 1997.

³ Cf. Napierala 2007, 97-113 and Conrad 2021.

the absence of any identification was proof of the impersonality of the judgement expressed in the review and thus guaranteed its claim to truth. The 'author' should speak neither in his own name nor in the name of the institution, but only in the name of the 'collective spirit', as an 'intellectual' embodying a universal function. Authorship could then be shifted from the voice of the individual to the voice of a supra-individual intelligence, which would ensure the transition from 'opinion versus opinion' to a shared truth, from sectarianism to objectivity.⁴

Only when these conditions were met could the magazine be perceived as a cultural device capable of transcending any biased perspective. For most people the review was convincing if the writers and the recipients shared the same principles; the former could be replaced by anyone else without harming the article, because the judgement was considered valid not as something personal, nor the expression of an intellectual circle, but as an expression of the dictates of reason.⁵ Under the contemporary cultural conditions, Schlegel wrote, reviews were "institutions of general criticism" in which "despite all the differences of opinion, a certain uniformity still prevails" and the textual form of the review, which is its most important part, "must measure the most diverse things by the same criterion" (Schlegel 1798a, 144).

2. The principle of the individuality of criticism in the "Athenaeum"

The founders' intention was to distance the "Athenaeum" from this approach and to reject the magic circle of anonymity, impersonality, and universal validity of judgement. August Wilhelm, as the excerpt quoted above states, countered it with the "animated freedom of creativity and sensitivity" of individual scholars or well-defined circles of intellectuals. In this way, it became clear that the value of culture stemmed from an entirely individual element, an expression of the "unique play of inner forces" of the human soul. The new concept of 'criticism' therefore had to be rethought based on those same assumptions, grounded in specific conceptions and rooted in a profundity of life. The reviews were intended to represent the particular point of view of the group of intellectuals who edited the journal and, beyond a certain point, even of the individual scholars who were contributors to it.

The positions taken by August Wilhelm in the *Beyträge* had both a history and practical consequences that need to be briefly recalled. The polemic against the anonymity of the critic or against the rationalist conception of criticism was very widespread in the *Frühromantiker* circle. To give just one example, Friedrich Schlegel wrote the following to the editor of the "Philosophisches Journal", Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, on the 27th of March 1796: "I hate anonymity and, strange as it may seem, I would not be able to judge so freely anonymously" (Schlegel 1988, 294). In fact, while the protection of anonymity may have en-

⁴ Cf. Pabst 2004a.

⁵ Cf. Pabst 2004b and Kronick, 1988.

sured ‘freedom’ from censorship or controversy with the authors of the books evaluated, it also imposed the observance of ‘common sense’ and a common standard. August Wilhelm nevertheless remained true to the position he had taken in the first issue of the “Athenaeum”. In a short article dated the 30th of October 1799, which appeared in supplement 145 of the “Intelligenzblatt der Allgemeinen Literatur-Zeitung”, he announced the severing of ties with Wieland’s journal. The decision was motivated not only by the “increasing number of inconsistent reviews” that appeared in the journal, which “took criticism back thirty years”, but above all by the “incompatibility” between the principles that guided its conception and the views of its editors (Schlegel 1799a). In the *Clarification of the aforementioned farewell*, the editors of the “Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung” adopted a very calm tone, insisting on only one issue:

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate some of the principles that we have publicly stated for some time and which we still adhere to: “The authors do not in any way seek to impose an agenda on those who write the reviews; each contributor is free to follow his or her own convictions” (Editors of A.L.Z., 1181).

Thus it was clear to the editors of the “Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung” that the “incompatibility of principles”, to which Schlegel had referred in his farewell address, was due to a different understanding of the critical function of reviewing, leading the editors to defend themselves against the accusations by saying that they had never imposed general points of view on the contributors and had left them free to write according to their personal convictions.⁶ The reply still needs careful consideration today, because it overturns a persistent *cliché*. Basically, it claimed that anonymity ensured a plurality of viewpoints and not the alignment of contributions to the editors’ desired approach, even less to a universal logic. Schlegel was thus challenged on his own grounds, rebutting the analogy between anonymity and universal reason he had posited in the *Beyträge*, and the accusation he had levelled at the “Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung” was thrown back at the “Athenaeum”. In the *Vorerinnerung*, in fact, it had been stated that internal voices would be given free rein, but external ones would only be accepted if it was felt that they could be sustained “*wie unsre eigenen*”, as if they were their own (Schlegel 1798b, IV). Furthermore, already in the founders’ correspondence regarding the purpose of the newly established journal, Friedrich had spoken of an ‘individual-communal’ character, of an “*Einheit des Geistes*”.⁷ In fact, the authors who contributed to the “Athenaeum” all belonged to the same circle, and while this was in keeping with the cultural strategy chosen, it also placed a limit

⁶ The matter was extensively discussed in correspondence between the members of the *Frühromantiker* circle and with Goethe, cf. Härtl 1989 and Behler 1983, 13–58.

⁷ F. Schlegel and A. W. Schlegel, 5. December 1797: “Durch Einheit des Stoffs kann ein Journal wohl eine gewisse Einheit erreichen, aber es wird dadurch aber sicher monoton – und [...] uninteressant, wie es doch selbst bey dem Philos. Journ. von Fichte verhältnißmäßig der Fall ist. Einheit des Geistes würde ein Journal zu einem Phönix s[einer] Art machen” (Schlegel 1986, 56).

on the principle, so strongly proclaimed, of opening the pages of the new platform to the perspectives of individuals. In short, individuality was allowed only for some, but not for everyone. And here lay the essence of the implicit connection: if individuality is violated even in a single case, it fails in general because it is itself, we might say, nothing more than the 'always different'.

August Wilhelm's farewell was published in the "Intelligenzblatt" on the 13th of November. A few days later, on the 21st of the month, an open criticism of the "Athenaeum" by Ludwig Ferdinand Huber appeared in the "Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung".⁸ August Wilhelm's last formal act before departing, however, was the publication at the end of the fifth issue of the "Athenaeum" of the complete list of the reviews he had written between 1896 and 1899 for Bertuch and Wieland's journal, so that they could finally be identified and traced back to him.

By this time, however, the column *Notizen* (literally 'notes') had already been introduced, fulfilling the criteria set out in the *Vorerinnerung* and *Beyträge*. In his introductory article, Friedrich Schlegel announced it as an "archive of time" and "to our taste", containing categorical and individual rather than formal and general judgements (Schlegel 1799b, 288). Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote four contributions to the column: a review of Kant's anthropology (Schleiermacher 1799), a review of Christian Garve's moral writings (Schleiermacher 1800a), and, in the sixth and last volume, he discussed both *Der Philosoph für die Welt* (1775) by the popular philosopher Johann Jacob Engel (Schleiermacher 1800b) and *The Destination of Man* (1800) by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (Schleiermacher 1800c). The reviews of Kant and Garve are unsigned, while the latter bear the initials 'S-r' at the bottom. However, to be fair, in the index of the last issue of the "Athenaeum" all the *Notizen* are signed with the initials of the authors' names. This is what August Ferdinand Bernhardi had wanted, who in that issue discussed Johann Gottfried Heder's *Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1799), initially meeting with resistance from both August Wilhelm and Schleiermacher, who did not consider it necessary because, as we know, they deemed it sufficient for each of them to declare their loyalty to the intellectual line of the journal. It is clear that the issue was very complex, oscillating between the assertion of a spiritual fraternity of individual character and the independence of each member of the circle, which should not be sacrificed to superficial agreement.

Irrespective of the discussion on the desirability of initialling the *Notizen*, to which we shall return at the end of this essay, Schleiermacher's paper on *The Destination of Man* must be seen as part of the polemic between the Schlegel brothers and the "Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung". Not only because he agrees with August Wilhelm and Friedrich's views on the need for criticism to be individual and based on life experience, but also because the content of the discussion of Fichte's book presents itself as an illustration and development of the theoretical demands made by Schlegel in the debate on anonymity. This is a *mise en abîme*, a review that speaks or implies a reference to the concept of reviewing.

⁸ Cf. Huber 1799.

3. Jacobi's discussion of *Atheismusstreit* and Fichte's response

The previous section adopted an 'intellectual history' perspective, situating Schleiermacher's text within the contemporary debate on the critical function of reviewing and the relationship between intellectuals and the public. A brief reconstruction, in terms of the history of concepts, of the context in which the review appeared is now appropriate, with particular emphasis on Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's discussion of Fichte's speculative philosophy. This will be followed by an examination of the structure of Schleiermacher's text from a narratological point of view, in order to link it with the analysis of its conceptual content. As we shall see, Schleiermacher's theses in many respects bring Jacobi's criticism into greater focus.

The *Destination of Man* can be read as a transitory culmination of the controversy over the atheism of speculative philosophy, an accusation that forced Fichte to resign his chair at the University of Jena. The author had responded to the accusation of atheism levelled against him in his essay *Appellation an das Publikum* (1799), in which he called on Jacobi to testify to and support the compatibility of his philosophy with the Christian faith. The latter thus collected in a short paper, *Jacobi an Fichte*, three letters dated the 3rd, 6th, and 21st of March 1799, in which he defended Fichte from the accusation of atheism, but made a clear distinction between his own religious conception and the moral concept of faith advocated in the last Fichtean essays, according to which God is the impersonal *ordo ordinans* of the human world (Jacobi [1799] 2004).⁹

The March letters made clear the inescapable difference between the 'truths' (*die Wahrheiten*) of reason and the 'true' (*das Wahre*) of faith. The latter could never become an instrument of knowledge, and whilst Fichte was undoubtedly to be regarded as the one who had made the transcendental system elaborated by Kant fully coherent, not even his perfect and accomplished idealism, his all-embracing philosophy, could erase this distinction. The true (*das Wahre*) consists, in fact, of an anticipatory understanding of one's own life and, at the same time, of a pre-reflective certainty of being.¹⁰ The two aspects, the understanding of personal existence and the understanding of being, are grouped together in Jacobi's religious perspective because they are, when properly considered, the result of a single event, which consists in the perception (*Vernehmen*) or presentiment (*Anahnung*) of the *primary relationship* between the self and the personal God. They can only be separated from a didactic point of view, whereas in a concrete sense they are intuitively given as the two extremes of a relationship, the two sides of a double-faced herm. The perception of 'reason' (*Vernunft* from *vernehmen*) and 'sense' are completely distinct from the concepts and meanings produced by intellection and precede the philosophical system of knowledge and morality. This is precisely the point of greatest disagreement with Fichte,

⁹ All the documents on *Atheismusstreit* are collected in Röhr 1991.

¹⁰ Cf. Ivaldo 2017.

whose philosophical framework, according to Jacobi, enshrines consciousness, life, and existence - in a word, religion - within Egoity (*Ichheit*) or the 'impersonal personality' of the intellect. The human heart, Jacobi wrote, is replaced in Fichte's philosophy by the 'living corpse of rationality':

For the sake of the certain progress of science, you must subjugate - oh, you cannot do otherwise - consciousness (the conscious mind) to the living corpse of rationality and make it *blindly* observant, deaf, dumb, and insensitive. You must sever to the very last fibre the living root, the heart of man (Jacobi [1799] 2004, 212).

Jacobi does not deny the sublimity of a moral doctrine of pure reason, the perennial conformity of man to himself in the conceptual sphere. He fully acknowledges this elevation above the sentient dimension and the sphere of material desire in the letters, where adherence to the anti-eudaemonistic perspective inaugurated by Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is clearly stated. His disagreement with Fichte lies rather in the fact that, unlike the latter, he identifies the moral perspective with the living root of faith, with the very principle of life itself, which is ontological and not gnoseological or practical in nature:

This unity [of morality] is not in itself the being, it is not the true. Alone, it is desolate, deserted, and empty. Therefore, the corresponding law can never become the heart of man [...] Transcendental philosophy must not rip this heart from my breast to replace it with a pure impulse of mere Egoity (*Ichheit*) (Jacobi [1799] 2004, 212).

Fichte carefully assessed Jacobi's objections to the structure of his philosophy and understood exactly what was at stake. The crux of the matter was the shift in the discourse on faith from the theological to the existential and ontological plane. The new need that arose in the field of ethical reflection was therefore not to align moral reason with dogma, as per the religious precepts of the eighteenth century, but with life and existence. In a draft reply to Jacobi's letters found among his papers, Fichte wrote: "I really do not know how and where we stand as adversaries. We agree on science and also on life" (Fichte [1799] 1979, 194). However, in the light of his interlocutor's remarks, he began to see the need to restructure the moral system from the concrete individuality of each person, by means of a rational deduction. The culmination in *The Destination of Man*, composed in the last months of the year, arose from an attempt to address this problem.¹¹ In short, it was necessary to show that freedom and the realm of moral ideas emanate from the very centre of existence. In his *Sittenlehre* of 1898, Fichte had already completely abandoned the Kantian notion of the conflict between the practical and the sentient spheres, between causality through freedom and *Begehrungsvermögen*. Jacobi's reflections now required him to move from the systematic level to the psychological and introspective

¹¹ On the complex history of the concept of "the destination of man", cf. Macor 2013.

level in order to focus on the genesis of the moral sense from the propulsive dimension. In the book published in 1800, we read “Unser gesamtes Denken ist durch unser Trieb selbst begründet” (Fichte [1800] 2018, 95).¹² Following the narrative norms of popular philosophy, his aim was to show the anthropological genesis of freedom, how it emerges in the immanent process of the development of the will, through the reflection that each subject is able to carry out on the impulses and doubts that it generates.

To this end, Fichte placed the ‘individual’ at the beginning of the process, characterising it as an empirical unit, a nexus of material needs, in which ‘Egoity’ (*Ichheit*) is already embedded as a potential. If freedom takes root in the individual through a series of finite actions, it cannot be understood as a “conscious knowledge” that opposes and suppresses existence, but must be understood as the self-determination of the subject, which is capable of enhancing life: “My will is mine, and it is the only thing that is entirely mine and depends entirely on me, and through it I am already a fellow citizen of the realm of freedom and of the activity of reason itself” (Fichte [1800] 2018, 123).¹³ Precisely because the moral realm is not alien to existence, but is the expression of the will arising from it, its realisation does not take place in the sphere of speculative knowledge, but in that of ‘faith’. That is, it is built on the foundation of existence itself, it is the knowledge of that foundation, the transmission onto an ideal plane of existential agreement and the certainty of one’s own presence. In fact, in the third book, *Faith*, of *The Destination of Man* we read:

I have found the organ by which to apprehend this reality, and probably all other. It is not knowledge [...] It is faith, that voluntary reposing on the views naturally presenting themselves to us, because through these views only we can fulfil our destiny (Fichte [1800] 1846, 73).¹⁴

4. Schleiermacher reviews *The Destination of Man*

Schleiermacher met Fichte personally in July 1799 in Berlin, where the latter had moved following his expulsion from the University of Jena. In the notes and essays before 1796 (which remained unpublished until they were included in the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*) Fichte’s name never appears, whereas the correspondence shows that the study of the moral system and the writings on reli-

¹² The bibliography on Fichte’s book is extensive, so I will limit myself to mentioning Fonnesu 1993 and Münster 2011.

¹³ Book III, *Der Galube*: «Mein Wille ist mein, und der ist das einige, das ganz mein ist, und vollkommen von mir selbst abhängt, und durch ihn bin ich schon jetzt ein Mitbürger des Reiches der Freiheit, und der Vernunfttätigkeit durch sich selbst».

¹⁴ «Ich habe das Organ gefunden, mit welchem ich diese Realität, und mit dieser zugleich alle andere Realität, ergreife. Nicht das Wissen ist dieses Organ [...] Der Glaube ist es; dieses freiwillige Beruhen bei der sich uns natürlich darbietenden Ansicht, weil wir nur bei dieser Ansicht unsere Bestimmung erfüllen können; er ist es». In this instance, an English translation of the book has been used, but see Fichte [1800] 2018, 92.

gion began in the summer of 1798.¹⁵ That same year, in fact, Friedrich Schlegel had commissioned him to write an essay on Kant and Fichte, which was replaced by the review on empirical anthropology (Schleiermacher 1799). In the *Historische Einführung* to a volume of his works, Günter Meckenstock (1988) traced the genesis of the *Notiz* on *The Destination of Man*. It had been requested by August Wilhelm and Friedrich in December 1799, at the end of the most productive year of Schleiermacher's intellectual activity. In April he had finished and published the *Reden über die Religion*, and in November he had written the *Monologues*, the manifesto of Romantic Ethics, which was to be distributed in January 1800, only a few days after Fichte's book.¹⁶

Writing this review took the author much time and effort. He started in May and finished it two months later. In a letter dated the 28th of June to Friedrich Schlegel, he attributed the difficulty to the fact that *The Destination of Man* presented itself as a "verzwicktes verdammtes Buch", a devilishly complicated book (letter to A. W. Schlegel, 28. 6. 1800, n. 898, Schleiermacher 1994, 114). On closer inspection, however, it was not only due to this, but also to the apparent affinity between Fichte's doctrine and the moral conception set out in the *Monologues*. It cost Schleiermacher an extraordinary effort of concentration to allow the external dimension of his perspective to emerge through the critique, which was the main intention of the review. As Wilhelm Dilthey wrote in what is perhaps the most substantial book yet on Schleiermacher's thought: "die Kritik ist wie im Kampf mit dem Verwandt-Fremdartigen des Buches" (the criticism seemed to be almost in conflict with the related yet foreign element). (Dilthey 1870, 344). Another 19th-century scholar, Rudolf Haym, aptly expressed the complexity of the article submitted to the "Athenaeum":

In fact, it was so refined that one could hardly have understood it without a thorough familiarity with the author's philosophical perspectives, so sophisticated as to reveal the reviewer's hard work and the battle he waged with each line between conflicting considerations (Haym 1870, 728).

Reflecting on his own writing in a letter to Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher stressed "the art of saying the most between the lines". By this he was not referring to the use of metaphorical or allusive language, but to the complex rhetorical-narrative construction of the review, the technique of "*Supplieren*" and "*Combinieren*" with which the different parts of the text are interwoven (letter to F. Schlegel, 8. 8. 1800, n. 928, Schleiermacher 1994, 190). The formal structure of the note was not a mere dressing, but a carefully considered syntactic articulation capable of conveying the content. The mockery or devilry ("Teufelei") or, as the *Frühromatiker* put it at other times, the sublime impudence ("erhabene

¹⁵ Cf. letter from F. Schlegel, July 1798, n. 483 (Schleiermacher 1999). For an accurate reconstruction of the relationship between the two scholars, see Meckenstock 2022.

¹⁶ In Italian literature, the most accurate reconstructions of these works can be found in Moretto 1979, 157-317; Brino 2007, 13-125; Giacca 2015, 13-175; Bondi 2018.

Frechheit”) of reviewing, which became the hallmark of the literary production of the “Athenaeum”, lay in this particular case precisely in the connection between content and narrative structure.

The Destination of Man is divided into four parts: a preface and three chapters, entitled *Zweifel*, *Wissen*, and *Glaube*: doubt, knowledge, and faith. Schlegel called the book a *Mono-Dia-Monolog* because the first and last chapters were written in the form of a monologue of the *Ich* and the second in the form of a dialogue between the *Ich* and the *Geist* (F. Schlegel to Schleiermacher, wohl Anfang August 1800, n. 922, Schleiermacher 1994, 179). In the review Schleiermacher does not offer a description, explanation, or commentary on the text, but, as Manuel Bauer observed, proposes a formal mimesis of the book under review, repeating its narrative structure and using the same lexicon.¹⁷ Through this hermeneutic ploy, he takes up Fichte’s challenge to the reader to identify with the protagonist in order to retrace all the stages through which the *Ich* passes until the triumph of Egoity (*Ichheit*). If the *transference* Schleiermacher proposes succeeds, not only is the book understood, but it is also demonstrated that an ‘other’ individual, and thus every individual, regardless of his or her peculiar nature, can take the same path and reach the common moral destination. On the other hand, when they do surface, the objections immediately appear alienating and caricatured, and the attempt at identification results in a total reversal that could not have the same force in any other situation. The criticism does not come from the outside: the evidence is shattered from within by the failure of a living witness who has become entangled in the difficulties. For example, at the end of the second part of the review, which corresponds to the chapter entitled *Zweifel*, if the reader, confronted with the doubt provoked in him by the contrast between the “mechanistic view of reality” and the “consciousness of freedom” (the third Kantian antinomy), does not manage to make the qualitative leap that would allow him to transcend the sentient state and reach the sphere of reason, as the *Ich* does successfully in Fichte’s book, it follows that the reader’s path will not be the same as the protagonist’s, and therefore their destination will also be different. The former would remain entangled in doubts that do not diminish: “so stehen meine Zweifel noch immer und wollen sie miteinander nicht zerstören” (Schleiermacher, Friedrich D.E. 1800c, 289), and therefore it would be better for him to take a different path.

The dissonance with Fichte’s approach thus manifests itself in the reader-reviewer’s abortive attempt to identify with the book’s protagonist on a structural and narrative level. It is precisely the impossibility of empathy or *Einfühlung* that demonstrates that individuals have an untransferable ontological consistency¹⁸. Then again, if they were interchangeable, they would become mere means or instruments of reason’s overall plan. *Existence* or *life*, which Fichte posited as necessary at the beginning of the process, would then be reabsorbed into the common goal:

¹⁷ Cf. Bauer 2011, 243–57.

¹⁸ Cf. Moretto 1991 and Thouard 2007, 163–68.

I still cannot entirely rid myself of the unease that the title causes me [...] For how can one who believes in freedom and independence, or who even wants to believe in them, even ask himself about the destination of man? And what can this question still mean after the other has been asked: what am I? Should the destination of man refer to a doing, for which I must exist, or to a becoming? A contingent becoming within me, set in motion by an external determination? Impossible! If, then, the whole of existence exists only for reason, then doing and becoming also only exist for reason [...] By now the personality [of the individual] has long since disappeared and sunk into the perception of the goal; it is now considered, honoured, and loved only as one of the instruments of the infinite rational purpose (Schleiermacher, Friedrich D.E. 1800c, 286-287 and 295).

About a century later, according to Désiré Roustan's notes, Henri Bergson inaugurated a course at the École Normale Supérieure in 1898 with these words: "The crux of Fichte's early philosophy is the 'I' [...] Why [...] this designation, the 'I'? In fact this concept has nothing personal, nothing individual about it" (Bergson 2003, 29). Yet for Schleiermacher freedom always remained inseparable from individuality, from the question "What am I?". Therefore, there cannot be a common destination; rather it must be pursued by each individual according to the specific destination engraved in his or her own existence. In the *Mono-logues*, the scholar admitted that he himself had once believed in the equality of existence and the common moral purpose:

For a long time, too, it was enough for me to have found only reason, and, venerating the equality of the single existence as something unique and supreme, I believed that there was only one right way for everyone, that behaviour had to be the same for all, and that each individual differed from the other only because each was assigned his or her own condition and place. It was only in the diversity of external actions that humanity showed itself to be different; man, the individual, was not a peculiarly constituted essence, but a single element and everywhere the same (Schleiermacher [1800] 1988, 17).

However, he eventually abandoned this conviction: "It has become clear that each man must represent humanity in his own way, through a peculiar blending of his different attributes, so that he can reveal himself in every way and realise, in the fullness of infinity, all that can flow from his breast" (Schleiermacher [1800] 1988, 18). Commenting on these words, Claudio Cesa (2010, 623) said: "The particularity of each individual does not lie in infinite instances of an entity called man, but in the fact that each man 'represents' humanity in all its specific characteristics".

One might wonder whether this approach does not lead to ethical individualism, eventually enclosing ethics in the sphere of the individual and separating it from the social dimension¹⁹. However, this is not the case because according

¹⁹ Cf. Brino 2002.

to the doctrine set out in *Reden* (1799), each individual is constituted through a nexus of ‘co-participation’ with the infinite that guarantees the individual an original openness. The infinite itself exists exclusively in the particularity of the finite, and so the latter cannot be included as part of a larger totality or be subordinated to any universal plan²⁰. It is precisely the inherently open nature, guaranteed by the fundamental relationship between consciousness and the absolute, that underlies the individual’s ethical need to flourish in the world. To this end, Schleiermacher introduces the concept of the ‘highest good’, which he had first examined in an essay in 1789 (Schleiermacher [1789] 1984). Even then, the term was understood in the sense given to it by Aristotle, rather than that in Kant’s reconsideration of it in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. For Schleiermacher, the highest good is not a reward for our virtue to be obtained in the hereafter, but the quintessence (*Inbegriff*) of worldly moral achievements, the curved line of all moral goods that we can attain in this life. In striving for the ‘highest good’, without ever being able to attain it definitively, the individual expresses his potential, becoming more and more himself through moral behaviour that connects him with other beings constituted like himself. “The individual does not open himself to others just to understand, appreciate, and love them,” wrote Giovanni Moretto (1979, 271), “above all, he opens himself to them because only in union with them can he form (*bilden*) his own individuality and make it perfect”.

As mentioned earlier, there is a very close link between the philosophical position that emerges from Schleiermacher’s text on *The Destination of Man* and the concept of reviewing itself. Reconnecting to its existential foundation, to the particular feeling of each individual, reviewing must fulfil a critical function as a living testimony of the work brought to the level of an individual reflection. Only in this way does it leave the court of reason, though in truth not to attain the status of genius and be raised to the aesthetic plane of the creation of works, of “works of art”, as the Schlegel brothers sought (Schlegel 1799b, 285). Instead, it leaves the courtroom to allow for a free attempt to understand the other within the horizon of a productive ethics. Whatever the reasons for that strange acronym ‘S-r.’, for us it could be seen as a sign of a moral conception of individuality that is distinct from the aesthetic meaning the Romantic circle gave to the term. When Friedrich Schlegel read what his *synphilosophiren* friend had written, he made the following comments in a letter:

Your critique of Fichte interested me more than anything else, I will read it again and again, there is much to learn from it. Perhaps another *Mono-Dia-Monolog* could be written from it. In fact, I have never seen or heard such a review (F. Schlegel a Schleiermacher, wohl Anfang August 1800, n. 922, Schleiermacher 1994, 179).

Schleiermacher was aware that his text would not be well received by Fichte, and he repeatedly expressed his concern to August Wilhelm and Friedrich that it might spoil the relationship between the *Frühromantiker* and the author of *The Destina-*

²⁰ Cf. Vattimo 1968, 37–66.

tion of Man. The latter never made his displeasure known to Schleiermacher himself, but in a letter dated the 16th of August 1800, he wrote to Friedrich Schlegel:

I did not speak to Schleiermacher either before or after the publication of his critique of the *Bestimmung des Menschen*. I do not understand some of the remarks, but I still see that he has placed the final outcome of the third book too close to what you call 'Spinozism', quite contrary to my intention. In my view, that mysticism belongs entirely in the realm of transcendence, which man no longer understands. For me, faith in freedom and autonomy remains inviolate in the finite thinking of man. According to form. Depending on the matter, a plan of what I am to become is mapped out and defined for me. Now, there is no external force pushing me towards it, not even that of infinity, rather it is I who push myself towards it (Taken from Meckenstock 1988, LXXXX).

For the group of Romantics the affair was brought to an ideal conclusion by August Wilhelm's full approval on the 20th of August: "As for the [review of] *Destination*, it is a masterly piece of finesse in irony, parody, and seemingly respectful archdevilry" (A. W. Schlegel to Schleiermacher, 20. 8. 1800, n. 933, Schleiermacher 1994, 207).

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