

# A Journal at the Second Power: Fichte's Project of a Review Journal

Matteo Vincenzo d'Alfonso, Maurizio Trudu

**Abstract:** This article has two aims. First, it situates Fichte's project of a review journal within its historical and cultural context. Second, it shows how this project is consistent with his broader philosophical orientation. The reviews are considered not only as tools of critical analysis but also as expressions of the "spirit of the age," embedded in the philosophical and literary debates of the late eighteenth century. By examining these texts and the editorial projects connected to them, the article reconstructs the intellectual dynamics of a complex period and clarifies the role of reviews in shaping contemporary discourse.

**Keywords:** J. G. Fichte, Reviews, Philosophy, Idealism, Romanticism.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

With this contribution, we aim to achieve two main objectives. On the one hand, we wish to outline the historical and cultural context in which Fichte conceived the project of a review journal; on the other hand, we intend to show how this project fits within the horizon of his philosophical aspiration. As we shall see, reviews are not merely instruments of critical analysis, but embody the "spirit of the age," constituting an indispensable element of the philosophical and literary reflection of the time. By examining the reviews and the editorial projects connected with them, it becomes possible to reconstruct the intellectual dynamics of a complex historical period, reweaving the threads of a debate as lively as it was decisive (Sgarbi 2025). To understand the context in which Fichte's project developed, a quotation from Schelling proves particularly illuminating. In his essay *Über die Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (1800), Schelling elevates "criticism" to a necessary element in the search for truth:

<sup>1</sup> The introduction, paragraph 2 (*The Historical Context*), paragraph 3 (*Romantic Editorial Plans*), paragraph 4 (*Fichte and the Journal at the Second Power*) as well as the conclusion, were written by Matteo Vincenzo d'Alfonso; Maurizio Trudu wrote paragraph 5 (*The Plan*).

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Every dispute that is carried on in the service of truth, whatever form it may take, is something good, meritorious, and a blessing for science itself. This is the principle and conviction of every upright person devoted to truth. And this principle extends even to those controversies that are undertaken and conducted out of error or obscuring intentions, for they compel those who see and defend the better cause to gather their strength, to examine their doctrines more sharply, and, where necessary, to prove them with greater rigor (Schelling 2004, 70–1).

Hence the attention given to the review is conceived as an indispensable critical instrument. In other words, to understand one's own time means to subject it to a rigorous examination, so that criticism becomes the point of departure for a shared search for truth. Fichte's project of developing a review journal must be situated within the broader historical sensibility that permeated the age. The Romantic context, in fact, is characterised by an ambitious drive towards the elaboration of various editorial enterprises, which Horst Fuhrmans describes as a "great editorial plan" (Schulte-Sasse 1971, 44–51; Johannes and Conter 2006, 7–24). This design took concrete form in a multiplicity of initiatives and diverse projects. Let us now seek to understand the context in which these initiatives in general, and Fichte's project in particular, developed.

## 2. The Historical Context

The literary journals of the late eighteenth century represented a significant force within the literary world. Their considerable influence on public opinion is evident, for example, in the 1772 volume of the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen*, which participated in the fierce literary controversies sparked by reviews published in such journals (Berghahn 1985, 10–75). Another clear example is the *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung* (ALZ), founded in 1785, whose importance soon eclipsed that of all competing periodicals due to its innovative character. By the end of the eighteenth century, the ALZ occupied the undisputed leading position among the reviewing organs in Germany.<sup>2</sup> In its orientation, it differed, for instance, from the contemporary *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, directed by Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, which possessed a strongly rationalistic outlook of a pre-Kantian kind. Its frequent failure to comprehend modern literature prevented it from achieving a success comparable to that of the ALZ. As we shall see, the various Romantic projects for review organs—and specifically that proposed by Fichte—would de-

<sup>2</sup> For the foundation of the ALZ, see first and foremost Haym 1920, in which the author, over several chapters, discusses the history and character of the journal, the participation of August Wilhelm Schlegel and his relationship with Romanticism in general, as well as the transfer of the ALZ to Halle in the autumn of 1803. Furthermore, see Schönfuß 1914, who provides an accurate overview, especially of the external events and circumstances surrounding the foundation of the ALZ and its development up to 1795. His investigation constitutes a point of reference for studies in the field. Indeed, it was the first to draw on numerous sources (memoirs, letters, notes), which make it possible to construct a picture of the ALZ that remains unsurpassed. For further references, see Wistoff 1992 and Kisser, 2001, 29–66.

velop in opposition to this periodical. The *ALZ* had been founded by the professor Christian Gottfried Schütz and by Weimar Johann Justin Bertuch.<sup>3</sup>

To understand its aims and to grasp the significance of its foundation, it is sufficient to recall what Wieland wrote in August 1784 in the *Teutscher Merkur*. Wieland argued for the necessity of a new literary journal, since the increase in book production had made it impossible to keep up with every new publication. The reviews of the *ALZ* would therefore make it possible to take account of the boundless growth of printed works through regular, comprehensive, and reliable criticism. In short, the purpose of the *ALZ* was to inform the reading public through impartial reviews of all German literary productions worthy of attention. The reviews were divided into sixteen scientific sections, organised according to a previously published system of the sciences, that the reviewers were required to follow strictly. This systematisation began with the *Realwissenschaften* (real sciences), which were divided into *bloß nützliche* (theology, jurisprudence, medicine, philosophy, mathematics) and *Historische* (history and geography). The *nützlichen Realwissenschaften* were followed by the *Schönen Wissenschaften* (philology, literary history, and miscellaneous writings). The fundamental principle that was to guide the reviews was objectivity. For this reason, no book could be reviewed by its own author, personal judgements were not permitted, and both praise and criticism had to be measured. The first issue of the *ALZ*, published on 3 January 1785, was preceded by a preface in which the principles of the journal were reaffirmed, and the editors reiterated the reasons for their choice of anonymous reviews—namely, that the reader should pay attention solely to the content and not to the name of the reviewer. Moreover, this practice had already been observed in the best journals, since for twenty years the impartiality of reviewers and the comprehensiveness of the survey of the book market had been recognised as essential virtues. The editors of the *ALZ* took advantage of the public's dissatisfaction with the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, promising that the rigorous implementation of those principles—which had become increasingly difficult for the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* to uphold—would be fully realised by the *ALZ*. Nicolai himself reflected in 1801 on the foundation of the *ALZ* and emphasised the kinship of that journal with his own *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (Nicolai 1801, 1–45). More generally, it may be said that the *ALZ* was conceived according to principles close to those of the German Enlightenment, whose promotion was, for the editors, both a general objective and a guarantee of the journal's lasting success. The first issue, published on 3 January 1785, contained a review on a theological subject, probably written by Johann Jacob Griesbach. A few days later, the philosophical section was opened with a review of *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity* by Kant and by Herder. These reviews immediately became a source of complaints. Herder, for example, was infuriated by the Kantian review of his *Ideas*

<sup>3</sup> They are the ones cited by Goethe (1825). Gruber, Böttiger, and Schiller (1989, 142–50) also name Christoph Martin Wieland among the journal's founders.

for a *Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, an emblematic fact that helps to understand the overall position of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (ALZ), which indeed played a decisive role in spreading Kant's philosophy. Elfriede Naumann draws attention to the fact that, as early as 1782, Schütz gave lectures on genius and on Lessing's writings, during which he supported the strongly Kantian positions that would later appear in the ALZ (Naumann 1934, 2). In fact, Schütz, as the founder of the ALZ, was a fervent supporter of Kantian philosophy and gathered around himself collaborators who shared this orientation. Works were reviewed from this philosophical standpoint, and every attempt to go beyond it was rejected and refuted. In conclusion, although it soon gave up its claim to completeness, the ALZ quickly gained notoriety and prestige thanks to its large number of distinguished contributors and established itself as the leading critical journal in Germany. When, in 1795, the first reviews of Romantic works appeared in its pages, it could already be regarded as an undisputed authority.

Among the reviewers of the ALZ, a position of undisputed prominence in the final decades of the eighteenth century was held by August Wilhelm Schlegel, who joined the journal in 1796 at the request and wish of Schiller, who himself had been an active contributor until 1794.<sup>4</sup>

However, it was precisely Schlegel's gradual departure from conventional aesthetic positions and his orientation towards Romanticism that led him, over time, to increasingly oppose most of the ALZ's contributors, who based their reviews predominantly on a Kantian-rationalistic standpoint. The episode that prompted Schlegel to end his collaboration with the ALZ occurred on 26th October 1799. In that year, a review appeared of Friedrich Nicolai's novel *Vertraute Briefe von Adelheid B an ihre Freundin Julie S\** (ALZ 1799, 4, 245–48). Nicolai had long made a name for himself as a critic of Idealism, harshly attacking Kant, Goethe, and Fichte alike, whom he classified as "aberrations" of the German spirit. In the ALZ, Ludwig Ferdinand Huber praised the novel as a substantial and witty work; however, Schlegel read this review as a direct attack on himself and on the *Athenäum*, which he published. Although no names were mentioned in the review, it unmistakably included the Schlegel brothers and the Romantic circle. This episode is emblematic of the conflict that arose between the Romantics and the ALZ milieu, and even more emblematic is the statement that Schlegel had published in the ALZ on 13 November 1799, entitled *Abschied von der Allg. Lit.-Zeitung*. In it, he excluded any future collaboration, adducing the following reasons:

Partly, the ever-increasing number of insubstantial reviews, for whose proximity I have often had cause to be ashamed, and of which several now in particular betray, not obscurely, the endeavour to throw the state of criticism back by some thirty years; but far more, I find the considerations and intentions by which the editorial board is unmistakably guided to be irreconcilable with my own principles (A. W. Schlegel 1847, 427).

<sup>4</sup> Schiller's reviews were, in 1788, Goethe's *Egmont*; in 1791, Bürger's *Poems*; and in 1794, Matthisson's *Poems*.

Evidently, these two conflicting episodes appear to have served as triggering factors within a broader context in which antagonistic tendencies were intertwined. On the one hand, there was growing discontent among the younger authors towards the *ALZ*, which reviewed the works of Romantic poets and philosophers in an unsympathetic, hostile manner. On the other hand, there was the journal's structural incapacity to move beyond its own aesthetic-normative standpoint and to grasp the significance of the Romantic revolution. In short, an open conflict arose between the Romantics and the *ALZ*. Friedrich Schlegel, for example, mocked the *ALZ* in the *Athenäum*; Tieck, who until then had not contributed to the journal, was regarded as an undesirable collaborator and, in 1800, announced in the first issue of his *Poetisches Journal*, that he would no longer write reviews for the *ALZ*. Schelling, irritated by the negative and narrow-minded review of his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* in the *ALZ*, sided—supported by Fichte—with August Wilhelm Schlegel, and in 1800, in the first issue of his *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, he published a polemical piece of no fewer than forty-eight pages against the *ALZ*, accusing it of being the stronghold of resistance against the spirit of the new age. Finally, the philosopher of nature Henrik Steffens also sided with the Romantics, not least because Schelling had recommended him as a reviewer for the *ALZ*, but the editorial board had rejected him at Nicolai's instigation. Although the editors of the *ALZ* had endeavoured to maintain a calm and balanced tone until then, in 1802 they deemed it necessary to respond sharply. In the reviews of some of Schelling's works, polemical remarks were inserted that echoed malicious rumours according to which he had, in some way, caused the death of Caroline Schlegel's young daughter, Auguste Böhmer, through inadequate medical treatment during her illness. Offended, Schelling replied with a vehement twenty-eight-page pamphlet, published by August Wilhelm Schlegel under the title *An das Publikum*, in which he condemned the *ALZ*'s defamatory accusations—and which was immediately reviewed unfavourably by Schütz. At the same time, Friedrich Nicolai joined the *ALZ*'s side, offering it strong support in its struggle against the Romantics. In a sixty-four-page review, he praised the *ALZ* and defended it against attacks from the progressive camp, particularly those directed against the *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, which in 1801 had launched fierce assaults, first against Schelling and then against Fichte.

From these personal disputes it clearly emerges that what was at stake was not merely the gaining or losing of readership, nor solely the defence of personal reputation, but also the reputation of the conception of art that each of the contenders represented.

### 3. Romantic Editorial Plans

As has already been observed, the editorial projects that arose within the Romantic *milieu* were intended to replace the most influential review organ of the time, the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. Of particular interest is the period between 1798 and 1802, during which several central figures of the philosophical

and literary debate emerged, among them Schelling (1775–1854), Fichte (1762–1814), the brothers August and Friedrich Schlegel (1767–1845; 1772–1829), and Schleiermacher (1768–1834). These editorial ventures reflect an acute awareness of living in an age of profound transformation in spiritual and social life, and of the necessity of acting as promoters of such change by engaging broader, educated, and educable segments of society. Consequently, they were characterised by a strong pedagogical and formative ambition, accompanied by pronounced intransigence towards the public's expectations and reading habits. However, most of these initiatives failed—not only because of external resistance and low circulation figures, but also owing to conceptual and personal divergences among editors and authors. Many of them ended after only a few years, and in some cases, after just a few issues.

Such was the case with *Die Horen* (1794–1798), which brought Schiller into conflict with Fichte and August Wilhelm Schlegel (Weber 2010, 201–14); with the *Athenaeum* of the Schlegel brothers (1798–1800), hindered by disputes with the publisher; with Goethe's *Propyläen* (1798–1800), whose circulation remained limited; with Ludwig Tieck's *Poetisches Journal* (1800), which came to an end after a single issue; and with Friedrich Schlegel's *Europa* (1803–1805). In the same context belong Achim von Arnim's *Zeitung für Einsiedler* (1808) and *Phöbus* (1808) by Heinrich von Kleist and Adam Müller (Schmitz 1991, 247–313). The *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft deutscher Gelehrter*, edited by Niethammer and co-edited by Fichte from 1797 onwards, did not survive the Atheism Controversy and ceased publication in 1800 after five years. The *Erlangen Literatur-Zeitung* managed to maintain itself as an organ of the new philosophers and writers only between 1799 and 1802, before being forced to reduce its format under pressure from its opponents, among them the aforementioned Friedrich Nicolai, until its definitive closure. Schelling's journals—the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, and the *Neue Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*—likewise had only a brief existence. Nevertheless, the analysis of these projects makes it possible to grasp more deeply the meaning of the period and the various theoretical claims that underpinned it. The beating heart of these editorial enterprises was the review.

#### 4. Fichte and the *Journal at the Second Power*

Let us now turn to Fichte's project. To understand his plan to publish a major critical journal, it is necessary first to consider the Jena *milieu*. When Fichte was called to Jena in 1793 to succeed Reinhold, he came into contact with the Jena cultural *élite*. Among the many figures to be mentioned are Niethammer; Schad (who became professor of philosophy at Jena in 1799); Schütz, editor of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*; Schiller, holder of the chair of history at Jena; von Hardenberg, Hölderlin, August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Tieck, Bernhardt, and finally, of course, Schelling.

In this context—particularly in the house of August, Caroline, and Dorothea Schlegel—there developed what came to be known as the *Jenaer Kreis*, the

nucleus of the proto-Romantic movement. Equally fundamental, in view of its biographical consequences for him, was the relationship that Fichte established with Niethammer, with whom he co-edited the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*. For Fichte, the *Philosophisches Journal* represented an important publishing vehicle, as demonstrated by the *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre*. However, in his view, the journal remained too indeterminate and too broadly structured to consistently pursue a clearly defined philosophical direction.

Although Niethammer intended to continue the discussion on the method of philosophy and on the difficulties of a philosophy founded on a first principle, he considered such a philosophy to be, at the same time, both superfluous and impossible. In any case, Niethammer was not a supporter of the *Doctrine of Science* [*Wissenschaftslehre*], and, in fact, the relationship between the two co-editors was only apparently amicable. In the first volume of the *Philosophisches Journal* (1795), Niethammer published the programmatic essay *Von den Ansprüchen des gemeinen Verstandes an die Philosophie*, which, according to his own words, was directed against Fichte's system, questioning the very necessity of a systematic conception of philosophy. Fichte, by contrast, soon conceived the project of a rigorously structured journal through which it would be possible to conduct effective philosophical work. Within the Jena intellectual *milieu*—characterised by a strong commitment to criticism and by the discussions arising from the presentation of the *Doctrine of Science* and the emergence of Idealism—the project of a shared journal could take shape and develop. It was to intervene in the philosophical debates of the time with a broad critical outlook, defending the transcendental standpoint inaugurated by Kant, while at the same time aspiring to exert an influence on the spirit of the age, then shaped by the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* (NADB), the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (NBM), and the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (ALZ).

The break with the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (ALZ), carried out by Schelling and A. W. Schlegel in the autumn of 1799 with the approval of the other members of the circle, made Schelling all the more insistent towards Fichte regarding the project of a new journal. On 1 November 1799, Schelling asked Fichte not only for “a few vigorous contributions” to his own polemic against the ALZ—which, according to Fichte's proposal, was to be entitled *Annals of the Philosophical Tone, Second Part, or History of Two Reviews of the ALZ*—but also invited him to come to Jena “so that we may think about the execution of our plan” (Schelling 2001, 242). Fichte replied on 19th November 1799 (Schelling 2001, 245), reporting, among other things, that the publisher Johann Friedrich Bohn of Lübeck had expressed the opinion that the moment was ripe to launch an attack on the ALZ.

## 5. The Plan

On 4 December, Fichte arrived in Jena, and on 23 December he presented to the Schlegel brothers a first *Entwurf zu einem Plane über ein zu errichtendes*

*kritisches Institut* (*Draft of a Plan for the Establishment of a Critical Institute*). Fichte immediately introduced the project in a solemn tone, presenting it as a direct critique of the contemporary cultural context. He wrote:

1) Above all, we must bind ourselves—each of us to himself, and to one another—by a sacred pledge that no ulterior or secondary intention shall exert any influence upon our plan, but that we shall aim solely at carrying out, in the best possible way, that which we ourselves recognise as the best. The execution will in any case fall short of the plan; but errors in the plan itself, however insignificant they may appear, would in execution lead us immeasurably far from the right path ...] Let us consider:

a) that in the field of half-measures and bungling we ourselves are the worst bunglers, and that, when it comes to patching up, cobbling together, or trying to improve in execution something clumsily undertaken, those who have spent their whole lives doing nothing else will always surpass us, who strive for perfection; b) that if we ourselves should come to doubt the feasibility of the proposed plan (which I believe to be the only truly thorough one), it would be far better to do nothing at all than to fail, thereby preventing any future realisation of such a plan, and at the same time giving ourselves a dubious reputation for other undertakings (Fichte 1973, 169).

In his exposition, Fichte addresses his friends and collaborators, proposing the formation of a “sacred” pact: the common project should not be tainted by secondary or personal interests but should be directed solely towards the realisation, in the best possible manner, of what they themselves recognised as the best. He insists that the execution, however careful, could never fully equal the ideal contained within the plan, and that even seemingly minor errors in the initial conception would, in practice, lead to serious deviations that would be difficult to correct. To clarify this requirement, Fichte emphasises two points. First, he acknowledges that those who aspire to perfection are precisely the ones most likely to prove clumsy in “patching up” or correcting a poorly conceived initiative; in such operations, they would inevitably be surpassed by those who have never pursued anything other than compromise and accommodation. Secondly, he warns that, should doubts arise concerning the feasibility of the plan (which he considers to be the only truly well-founded one), it would be preferable to undertake nothing at all rather than risk a failure that would fundamentally jeopardise any future possibility of realisation and cast a shadow of discredit upon other similar endeavours.

As for the project’s content, Fichte explains that it should not be a fragmentary or occasional work, but rather a *Pragmatic History of Literature and Art*. From this idea stem the fundamental lines of the undertaking. According to him, the enterprise is articulated in two stages. First, it is necessary to establish clearly the point of departure: to formulate a determinate concept of science and of art in general, together with the “spirit” that animates them, and to assess the epoch from which the proposed review begins—an epoch that could conveniently be situated at the end of the eighteenth century—in relation to this normative

idea. In other words, it is a matter of determining what has been achieved up to that point, what deficiencies remain, and in what direction the human spirit ought to advance. To this first part also belongs a reconstruction of the history of criticism (literary and public), with the identification of the dominant prejudices that have conditioned its development. From this first stage there follows, according to Fichte, the second: the systematic examination of everything that is produced in the literary and artistic fields. Each new work must be classified under specific categories and headings, examined according to the previously established criteria, and assigned its proper place within the overall history of criticism.

The second task of the project, he observed, follows directly from the first. Everything that is published must be examined according to rigorous criteria, systematically classified into categories and sections, and assigned a place based on the resulting critical judgment. From this orientation, an important consequence arises: the plan leaves no room for isolated individual reviews. Fichte rejects the idea of discussing a book merely on occasion, to introduce personal allusions, scattered insights, or momentary impressions. It is precisely this "realm of mere hints and suggestions" that is to be brought to an end; it therefore cannot form any part of the project itself. The enterprise must retain the form of a systematic and organic synthesis, and not degenerate into a mere collection of episodic observations.

Any possible "mercantile" justification—namely, the attempt to conform to the book market and its conventions—is likewise excluded. Having deliberately renounced, from the outset, every "secondary intention," it would be contradictory to try to compete with mediocre institutions on their own ground. Rather, the goal must be to replace them in the future, but on solid foundations, ultimately to supplant them entirely. From this perspective, even the economic argument loses its force: the public, Fichte observes, will quickly grow accustomed to a new form—apparently unfamiliar, yet in reality far more appropriate and fruitful—through which it will be offered what truly possesses value. The criterion of the "pragmatic history of the time" is then further specified: the publication rhythm is to follow that of the book fairs.

Thus, for example, at the Easter Fair of 1802 there should appear the report of the Easter Fair of 1801; and at the Michaelmas Fair, the account of that of the previous year, and so on. Fichte acknowledges that it would be desirable to reduce the interval between the event and its treatment to six months rather than a full year. Yet he also explains that, as will become clear from subsequent considerations, this is not practically feasible. The principal object of the work, Fichte insists, is and must always remain the history of the present age. For this reason, the first instalment of the work must contain not only the introductory volumes but also the report of a book fair that actually belongs to the period under consideration. Finally, Fichte also suggests an editorial strategy: the work should make its authors stand out, not the other way around. He therefore proposes that nothing be announced in advance—not even orally—but that work proceed in silence, so that the project may suddenly appear as a fully initiated

enterprise. The effect, he observes, would then be quite different and far more striking. Having defined its method and purpose, Fichte proceeds to outline the internal structure of the undertaking. The work is to be organised into thematic sections corresponding to the principal domains of the spirit and of culture.

- 1) "General State of the Scientific Spirit and the Artistic Sense". The aim here is, first of all, to describe the overall condition of science and art. This initial overview will serve as a point of reference: subsequent developments will naturally emerge from the periodic reports. Fichte suggests, however, that at regular intervals—every five years, for instance—specific reports should be drawn up on the state of public criticism, prevailing opinions among scholars, and similar matters.
- 2) "Philosophy". In this domain, no fixed subdivision is envisaged: the classification must follow the needs of the time. At that historical moment, Fichte notes, everything is connected with the persistent conflict between dogmatism and idealism, accompanied by a widespread desire to rid oneself of philosophy altogether, and to lapse either into the crudest empiricism or into forms of mysticism. This tension runs through every branch of the discipline.
- 3) "Mathematical Sciences". In this section, what is already established is taken as given. Particular mention is due, for the recent past, to certain discoveries in astronomy and in combinatorial analysis. It is emphasised, however, that there is a lack of a philosophy of mathematics and that this absence entails significant drawbacks: the history of the age must record this limitation until it is overcome.
- 4) "Scientific Physics in All Its Branches and Related Disciplines". The central focus of the treatment must be the prevailing tendency of the age, and in particular the conflict between empiricists and apriorists, which constitutes the true key to interpreting contemporary physical science. Therapeutics in the strict sense (*materia medica*, clinical practice) is not included here; its possible placement within the Institute will be discussed later.
- 5) "History". Fichte distinguishes between *descriptive history* (natural and geographical sciences) and *narrative history* in the proper sense. The introduction must clarify what history ought to be; the history of the age must then continually compare actual production with this idea until progress is achieved. This section includes: universal history (together with the question of whether such an undertaking is possible); the history of culture in general; the history of states, both general and particular; the history of opinions—that is, literary and philosophical history; learned theology, understood as the historical exposition of Christian doctrine (with the practical aspect excluded); and jurisprudence, conceived as the history of what has been, and is, regarded as law (juridical evaluation properly belongs to philosophy, while practical application will be treated later).
- 6) "Auxiliary Sciences". Among these are philology (as the science of language, distinct from pure history) and hermeneutics, both as autonomous discipline and as source of linguistics. Constant attention is required for the changes undergone by living languages—particularly the mother tongue—viewed

not as matters of art or style but as linguistic phenomena. Non-binding observations may also be made concerning the possible future development of such transformations.

- 7) "Art". A distinction is made between the expressive and the visual arts. *Pure arts*: poetry, music, painting, sculpture. The introduction should provide an overview of the present state of the arts and of their tasks; the history of the age will then judge works in the light of this criterion, highlighting the most significant productions from various countries. *Applied arts*: style in general—philosophical, historical, descriptive. The evaluation of style constitutes one of the Institute's principal tasks: works already judged on scientific grounds may be re-examined from the stylistic point of view, especially when they are exemplary, whether positively or negatively. Theoretical treatises on art are also included here.
- 8) "Mechanical Arts". This group includes therapeutics (materia medica, surgery etc.), technology, agriculture, and economics in general, as well as the military sciences. In addition to books dealing with these subjects, the history of the age must also record historical reports concerning new inventions, both national and foreign.
- 9) "Pedagogy (in the Broadest Sense)". This refers to the education of the young, with attention given both to both book production and information concerning educational institutions at various levels, as well as to the state of domestic instruction. The section also includes the question of popular education: through the Church (practical theology—sermons, catechisms, agendas, and theoretical writings on the subject); and through the State (the practical aspect of jurisprudence and politics, theoretical writings, and historical reports on new constitutions, laws, and regulations).

In the concluding part of the project, Fichte addresses the question of internal organisation and the relationship with the publishing sector. According to him, the first necessity is the appointment of a chief editor, responsible for the entire enterprise: it is his task to order the whole, to prepare the introductory section on the state of the scientific and artistic spirit, to appear publicly as the sole representative, to conclude the contract with the publisher, and to be answerable, ultimately, to the public, the publisher, and the other collaborators. Alongside this general role, there must be section editors, each presiding over a specific discipline. Their task is to organise the material within their respective domains; they independently select their collaborators and communicate exclusively with them, without being required to disclose their names to the chief editor. Each section editor also possesses the full right to modify, cut, and rework the texts received, to obtain a coherent whole; the same authority belongs to the chief editor with regard to the contributions submitted by the section editors. The system of remuneration is conceived hierarchically: the publisher recognises and remunerates only the chief editor, who in turn distributes the fees to the heads of the various sections, and these, in their turn, to their respective collaborators. The idea is that each volume of the work, regardless of its length,

should have a fixed price for the public, and that from this figure the fees for all levels of work should be calculated. Fichte also proposes an estimate of the necessary personnel. In addition to the chief editor—who might also serve as the head of the philosophical section—at least thirteen editors are required for the various fields. In total, therefore, there would be fourteen coordinating figures, to which should be added around twenty collaborators, distributed across the different sections, and a certain number of correspondents charged with providing news and materials from various cultural areas. The idea is that each volume of the work, whatever its length, should have a fixed price for the public, and that, based on this figure the fees for all levels of work should be calculated. Fichte also provides an estimate of the necessary personnel. In addition to the chief editor—who might also serve as the head of the philosophical section—at least thirteen editors are required for the various fields. In total, therefore, there would be fourteen coordinating figures, to which should be added around twenty collaborators, distributed among the different sections, and a certain number of correspondents responsible for supplying news and materials from various cultural areas.

An appendix to the project concerns relations with the publishing industry. Fichte stipulates that the publisher of the critical work must hold a right of pre-emption over the collaborators' manuscripts. If he accepts the terms another publisher has already granted to the author, the publication shall belong to him. In return, he is obliged to examine and to publish, under fair conditions agreed upon with the editors, the manuscripts recommended by the Institute. Scholars not formally belonging to the group may also submit their works for evaluation and a recommendation for publication, and in such cases the publisher shall enjoy the same right of pre-emption. All this is to be secured by means of a formal contract, guaranteed by an arbitral body, so that legal recourse may be possible in the event of violations. In the immediate term, Fichte observes, the search for a publisher is not a priority. The project, as conceived, is so solid and promising that any person of means and intelligence—whether a bookseller or not—would embrace it with enthusiasm. The true urgency, rather, lies in finding qualified individuals, organising them coherently, and ensuring their loyalty to the enterprise. It is precisely for this reason that Fichte insists once again on the absolute necessity of secrecy: rumours of similar initiatives are already circulating, and premature disclosure could irreparably compromise the project.

This document represents the most detailed formulation of the grand project. Owing to the difficulties—partly unforeseen—that hindered the ambitious journal plan, Fichte Fichte, as early as 8th February 1800, in a letter to Reinhold, presented scaled-down version: “to collect and publish a plan for the review of existing critical journals”. A journal that would review only other journals—the so-called *Journal in der zweiten Potenz* (Journal at the Second Power). On 8th February 1800, Fichte wrote to Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823), proposing that he co-edit the initiative. The idea was that there was no longer any sense in continuing to produce mere reviews of books, for by then, it was not books that had the greatest impact on the educated public,

but the reviews themselves. "The general public does not read books", Fichte says; "the reviews are its book".

Thus, if in the past works such as *Letters on Literature* (Lessing), the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, or the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* had influenced culture through the reviewing of books, it was now necessary to take a further step: to intervene upon the reviews themselves, for it was there that public opinion was now being formed. For this reason, Fichte speaks of a "journal at the second power": not reviews of books (first power), but reviews of the reviews (second power) the very place where the spirit of the age now "resides." Fichte therefore came to conceive the *Journal in der zweiten Potenz* as a publication entirely devoted to the critical examination of journals already in existence. The idea also arose in response to external circumstances, and in his letter to Reinhold he formulated it in the following terms:

I conceive it thus: since, in this field, one can no longer act according to a fixed plan (as would have been the case in that first draft), but, as it were, only by chance, the time is now past when, through book reviews, that powerful influence once exercised by, for example, the *Letters on Literature*, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, or the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* could still be maintained. The great public does not read books at all; the reviews are its book. It is here, therefore, that one must take up the matter: the age no longer stands at the first, but at the second power (Fichte 1973, 212).

The motivations underlying this modification of the editorial project lay in the practice of philosophical reviewing in the various journals, whose number had by then become excessive. Fichte considered it necessary to intervene as soon as possible to expose the abuse of the reviewing practice. In this way, the public would lose its superstitious respect for reviews, and the journals devoted to criticism would either improve their quality or be destined to disappear. In this letter, Fichte formally asks Reinhold to assume the direction of the *Revisionsblatt*, so that the project might acquire the necessary prestige. The principal work was to be carried out by Fichte and Schelling. At the same time, the Schlegel brothers—with whom Fichte at that time maintained strained relations—were to be included only as subordinate collaborators. The project would also make it possible to establish a working group that could later be transferred to a broader editorial enterprise, extending beyond the mere field of reviews. However, at that time Reinhold was distancing himself from Fichte and drawing closer to the thought of Bardili, for whom he was preparing a highly favourable review of the *Grundriß der ersten Logik*. In his reply of 1st March 1800, Reinhold raised several objections—some of a practical nature, such as the difficulty of collaboration due to geographical distance, but also more substantive issues:

As is well known, we are by no means in such agreement concerning the tone to be adopted in judging those who think differently that either of us—you or I—would wish to make the other's judgment on this tone his own, without first knowing that judgment and the matter judged (Fichte 1973, 235).

And to this he added a more general reflection:

But how, and by what means, is it to be secured and guaranteed that this supreme guidance and direction of literature itself be correct; that the producing as well as the receiving public be not led astray instead of being guided; and that criticism—intended to remedy the defects of the literary sphere—does not itself become a new and the greatest of those defects? (Fichte 1973, 235).

After Reinhold's negative reply, Fichte appears to have definitively abandoned the *Revisionsblatt* project. One of the reasons for the failure of Fichte's editorial plan was that, while he was developing it in the first half of 1800 in Berlin, A. W. Schlegel was simultaneously making preparations in Jena for a critical journal of his own. Fichte was deliberately excluded from the invitations to collaborate on A. W. Schlegel's journal. Although it was intended that he should eventually be informed of the project, this was to happen only once all the preparations had been completed. The deeper causes of this divergence may be found in a remark contained in a letter from A. W. Schlegel to Schleiermacher, dated 21 April 1800:

In Fichte's proposals for a critical institute, as he has presented them to us both orally and in writing, everything is conceived on the model of a monarchical constitution and general subordination. This might well serve his own purposes, since he would aim entirely at system and systematic form; but within our entire circle, it would be quite impossible for him to find his account in such an arrangement. (Schleiermacher 1992, 486–87).

This critique of Fichte's method—founded upon a hierarchical structure—is closely connected with the Schlegels' rejection of the priority accorded to systematic form in philosophy, of which Fichte was at that time the most authoritative representative. Although Friedrich Schlegel recognised in the *Doctrine of Science* a peculiar status, there was a clear opposition to Fichte's systematic model. Already at the beginning of 1800, in two letters to Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schlegel had expressed doubts about Fichte's (and Schelling's) critical abilities. This point is particularly significant, since, as A. W. Schlegel wrote, "criticism is an indispensable organ of the great revolution against the immense mass of dullness, superficiality, dogmatism, pacifism, and sheer stupidity". These conceptual and methodological divergences thus lay at the root of the Schlegels' refusal to collaborate with Fichte and contributed to the failure of his editorial project. On 6th September 1800, Fichte wrote a letter to Schelling in which he explicitly declared that he did not wish to undertake any permanent commitment to the Schlegels' project. In a subsequent letter, dated 13th September 1800, Fichte expressed himself with even greater clarity, having just received a letter from Schelling dated 3rd September. In it, Fichte stated that he had never abandoned the idea of the editorial project as such, but had merely considered the proposed mode of realisation impracticable—a fact that at least Friedrich Schlegel ought to have been aware of. The letter also contains his more general criticism of the Schlegels: although he acknowledged their talent, Fichte did not regard them as qualified to assume the direction of a journal capable of exerting

a significant influence. For Fichte, indeed, the management of a philosophical-scientific periodical required solid scientific training, and the absence of such competence rendered the Schlegels unfit for a position of such responsibility.

This conviction was also the reason why Fichte warned Schelling of the danger of collaborating with A. W. Schlegel, who, in his view, had by then discredited himself through his manoeuvres. According to Fichte, it was precisely Schlegel's ambiguity and opportunism that had undermined the realisation of the great editorial project originally conceived in Jena. The failure to implement that plan represented, for Fichte, a serious loss for the philosophical debate in Germany, since a genuine forum for critical discussion ought to have ensured the rigour and systematic coherence necessary for the development of philosophical and scientific thought. By contrast, the Schlegels' journal, although addressing both artistic and scientific subjects, would not, in his estimation, have been equal to such an undertaking.

At the beginning of October 1800, in response to a letter from Schelling, Fichte once again mentioned a further plan that he wished to carry out together with him. In the months that followed, both began to take concrete steps towards bringing this new editorial project to life. However, despite this renewed attempt, the joint plan of Fichte and Schelling also encountered insurmountable difficulties: financial problems, the lack of a suitable publisher, and, above all, the fragmentation of the German philosophical and academic *milieu* made it impossible to realise a *kritisches Institut* that was truly worthy of Fichte's expectations.

This phase marked the definitive failure of all the editorial plans: Fichte was unable to bring to fruition his project of a rigorously scientific and systematic journal. Schelling, for his part, gradually distanced himself from both Fichte and the Schlegels, embarking on his own independent philosophical path. Finally, the Schlegels' project—although it did reach publication—remained far removed from the ideal of a systematic and unified journal that Fichte had envisaged.

The whole episode thus reveals the fragmentation of the German intellectual debate of the time: while Fichte sought to preserve a rigorously systematic framework, the Schlegels and Schleiermacher favoured a more fluid and pluralistic conception of thought and criticism. In the end, the dream of a great critical journal capable of guiding the philosophical debate in Germany remained unrealised, and the failure of these editorial ventures also marked the definitive separation between Fichte and the Jena Romantic circle.

Between October 1800 and the spring of 1801, Schelling, who was in Jena for his university lectures, was completing the formulation of his own philosophical system. In January 1801, he published a short work in which he sought to clarify the role of the philosophy of nature within the idealist system. In the spring, Schelling sent Fichte the manuscript of his *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (published in May 1801), with the explicit intention of obtaining Fichte's assessment. This request marked the beginning of the final stage of their collaboration: the debate on the integration between transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature became a point of rupture. Between the spring and summer of 1801, their correspondence developed into a genuine

philosophical controversy, at the end of which their irreconcilable divergence of views became evident. This conflict ended their friendship. The journal project, which was to have been launched in the spring of 1801, was once again discussed between April and May, after a long period of silence on Schelling's part. During the winter of 1800/01, in fact, Schelling did not refer to the journal, as he was entirely absorbed in elaborating his own system of transcendental philosophy. At that point, Fichte began to feel the necessity of publishing the journal, also to respond to the criticisms and discussions that were beginning to develop around his new works on the *Doctrine of Science*. On 29th April 1801, Fichte wrote to Cotta, lamenting Schelling's silence:

I have received no news from Schelling concerning the journal that we had agreed upon during the winter. I therefore do not know where we stand. It is absolutely necessary that such a journal be published—perhaps even during this summer semester—in order to observe the reactions to my recent works on the *Doctrine of Science* (Schelling 2010, 340).

This letter reveals Fichte's impatience, as he felt the urgent need to publish a journal to defend and promote his thought, yet found himself without a response from Schelling and without clear editorial support. In the end, his ambition to found a rigorous and critical journal was never realised. The failure of the journal was not merely an editorial episode, but a symbol of the rupture between Fichte's transcendental idealism and Schelling's new orientation. This separation marked a decisive turning point in German philosophy of the period, preparing the ground for Schelling's rise as an independent thinker and, subsequently, for the emergence of Hegelian thought. Schelling, who still hoped for a philosophical rapprochement with Fichte, saw in his *Antwortsschreiben an Herrn Professor Reinhold* the long-awaited sign of a philosophical reconciliation in prospect, and he promised serious participation in the project, now postponed until the autumn of that year.

However, in October–November 1801 and then again in January 1802, the definitive philosophical break between the two occurred, rendering the joint publication of the planned critical journal entirely obsolete. The journal that eventually saw the light of day and was published by Cotta at the beginning of 1802 was not directed by Fichte and Schelling, but by G. W. F. Hegel and Schelling: the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*. Hegel, who had arrived in Jena at the beginning of 1801 to take up a teaching position in philosophy, had written to his friend Schelling on 2nd November 1800, expressing his desire for a public exposition and activity—an intention that could exert an even greater influence on Schelling's editorial plans since, through their joint stay in Jena, a (though temporary) convergence in their philosophical paths was achieved. The new *Journal*, as shown by the programmatic declaration contained in its editorial announcement, was conceived as an organ intended to bring philosophy back to the depth of its own centre amidst the philosophical dilettantism of an indistinct multitude. The task of philosophy was to restore all particular interests—and, more generally, all separations that had gradually arisen among the individual

parts of this living whole—to totality, so that every particularity would be annihilated. This philosophical programme, expressed in general terms, must be read against the background of Hegel's decision to embark upon an academic career in philosophy at Jena and, together with Schelling, to attempt to transcend Fichte's transcendental philosophy.

## 5. Conclusion

Let us now draw together the essential meaning of what has been said. First, the distinctive character of Fichte's position within the Jena circle clearly emerges, both conceptually and historically. Although Fichte is often identified with the epithet *Geist von Jena*, his stance was highly autonomous and can hardly be assimilated to a uniform speculative current. What Schleiermacher called "Fichte's monarchical constitution" [*Fichtes monarchische Anlage*] refers to the systematic structure of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which, centred on the *Ich* as absolute principle, provoked considerable controversy and proved problematic both in theoretical terms and in relation to the reactions of the academic and intellectual milieu of the time. Fichte's editorial plan, moreover, mirrors his philosophy in every respect. A further crucial aspect lies in the motive that drove Fichte to undertake this philosophical initiative. The *Wissenschaftslehre* is not merely a speculative system; it also responds to a specific pedagogical need. It aims to form not only knowledge but also the knowing subject itself, establishing the basis for intellectual and moral education in a radical sense. One might even say that, for Fichte, philosophical thought is inseparable from the need to preserve and institutionalise a space of autonomous reflection, in which knowledge is not merely transmitted but actively and responsibly constituted by the subject. Both these tensions converged in the project of a *journal at the second power*, which, although it never came to fruition, remains an emblem of Fichte's philosophical framework.

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