



# **THE RELEVANCE OF ROMANTICISM**

Essays on German  
Romantic Philosophy

EDITED BY  
DALIA NASSAR

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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Frequently cited works have been identified by the following abbreviations.  
Johann Gottlieb Fichte

- GA *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Edited by Reinhard Lauth et al. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962–2012.
- FW *Fichtes Werke*. Edited by Immanuel Hermann Fichte. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1971.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

- FA *Sämtliche Werke* (Frankfurter Ausgabe). Edited by H. Birus et al. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–1999.
- LA *Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. Edited by D. Kuhn et al. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1947.
- MA *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens* (Münchener Ausgabe). Edited by K. Richter et al. Munich: Carl Hanser, 1985–98.
- WA *Goethes Werke* (Weimarer Ausgabe). Edited by P. Raabe et al. Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1887–1919.

Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis)

- NS *Novalis Schriften: Die Werke von Friedrich von Hardenberg*. Edited by Richard Samuel, H.-J. Mähl, P. Kluckhorn, and G. Schulz. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960–88.

Johann Gottfried Herder

- HW *Johann Gottfried Herder: Werke in zehn Bänden*. Edited by Ulrich Gaier et al. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000.

## Friedrich Hölderlin

- HSW *Hölderlin: Sämtliche Werke (Kleine Stuttgarter Ausgabe)*. Edited by Friedrich Beissner. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1962.
- HFA *Sämtliche Werke. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurter Ausgabe). Edited by D. E. Sattler. Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1975–2008.

## Immanuel Kant

- AA *Gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaft. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900–.

## Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling

- HKA *Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. Edited by H. M. Baumgartner, W. G. Jacobs, and H. Krings. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1976–.
- SW *Schellings Sämmlliche Werke*. Edited by K. F. A. Schelling. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–1861.

## Friedrich von Schlegel

- KA *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Edited by E. Behler, J. J. Anstett, and H. Eichner. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–.

## Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher

- FSSW *Friedrich Schleiermacher's sämmtliche Werke*. Edited by O. Braun and J. Bauer. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1835–1864.
- KGA *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Edited by Günter Meckenstock et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980–2005.

All citations will contain volume and page numbers. In cases where there are separate parts to a volume, the volume number will be followed by a “/” and then the part number.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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Hegel's *Phenomenology*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50 (1): 85–110; and "Goethean Morphology, Hegelian Science: Affinities and Transformations," *Goethe Yearbook* 18: 159–82.

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**John H. Smith** is a professor of German in the Department of European Languages and Studies at the University of California, Irvine. His books include *Dialogues between Faith and Reason: The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought* (Cornell, 2011), and *The Spirit and Its Letter: Traces of Rhetoric in Hegel's Philosophy of Bildung* (Cornell, 1988). He was also coeditor of “Goethe

and Idealism: Art, Science, Religion, and Philosophy—1790 to 1817,” a special issue of the *Goethe Yearbook* (2011). He is the recipient of research awards from the Humboldt Foundation (1991–1992, 2004, 2010) and the Fulbright Commission (1998–1999), and was guest researcher at the Freie-Universität, Berlin in 2010–2011.

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## Introduction

"The romantic imperative," Friedrich Schlegel wrote in 1797–1798, "demands the mixing of all genres. All nature and science should become art—[and all] art should become nature and science.... Poetry should become ethical and ethics should be poetic" (KA 16, 134, no. 586). The attempt to bring together (to "mix") various disciplines and ways of knowledge, to make philosophy poetical and poetry philosophical, to introduce poetic insight into ethical norms, to bring art and science together—these were the aims of the movement that has become known as *romanticism*. Science and art, philosophy and poetry, the romantics repeatedly proclaimed, should become one. The various disciplines, as Schelling put it in the introductory remarks to the inaugural edition of his *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* (1800–1802), must "enter into one another in the most precise and closest alliance, in order to bring forth the highest, where the interest of art and poetry with science and vice versa begin to become absolutely one and the same" (HKA 1/8, 250–51). Hölderlin, Goethe, Novalis, Schelling, Schlegel, and Schleiermacher each sought to realize this ideal in his practice as a poet, philosopher, and scientist. Their aim was nothing less than developing a new way of knowledge and a new compendium of knowledge, a "bible" or an "encyclopedia," as Schlegel and Novalis called it, in which the different disciplines are united by common insights and goals.<sup>1</sup>

At a time of greater disciplinary specialization and rigid distinctions between ways of knowing, the romantic imperative seems both anachronistic and undesirable. Yet the last two decades can be described as nothing less than a genuine revival of interest in German romantic philosophy. Philosophers working in a variety of areas have embraced the ideas of the German romantics, disentangling them from false or misunderstood legacies, and reexamining them in light of contemporary debates. While this increase of interest began in Germany—with the publication of Manfred Frank's lectures *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* in 1987—since the 1990s, philosophical interest in romanticism has become an even stronger current within the Anglophone context.<sup>2</sup> What are the reasons behind this (apparently) sudden and (largely) unprecedented interest in philosophical romanticism?<sup>3</sup> Why have philosophers

from a number of fields—aesthetics, epistemology, social and political philosophy, philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, hermeneutics—turned to romanticism?<sup>4</sup>

The general historical interest in romanticism is, perhaps, not surprising. After all, the so-called romantic movement, which began in Germany in the 1790s, has had a lasting effect on Western culture. Romantic theories of literature, romantic conceptions of nature, and romantic interest in non-Western culture (especially Indian culture and language) have played significant roles in shaping both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the recent revival does not simply have to do with a desire to understand the past, or an attempt to grapple with the “romantic legacy.” For it is a specifically *philosophical* revival, motivated by philosophical questions.

Before discussing the reasons behind this philosophical interest, I want to note that, at least within the Anglophone context, philosophical romanticism has generally been regarded in the *wider sense* of the term “romantic.”<sup>5</sup> This is in contrast to the narrower sense that is usually associated with the Jena romantics, or *Frühromantik* in Germany, and specifically denotes the circle of friends and acquaintances in Jena who congregated around Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel and their journal, the *Athenäum*.<sup>6</sup> The recent (Anglophone) reception of romanticism almost always includes Hölderlin (who was only associated with the Jena group indirectly through Schelling and Hegel) and often includes Schelling,<sup>7</sup> as well as figures who were directly connected to the Jena romantics, but did not contribute to the *Athenäum*, such as Goethe.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the term *romantic*—at least within the Anglophone context—means something like an extended family of thinkers rather than a smaller coterie.<sup>9</sup>

There is, however, a second reason for widening the connotations of romanticism. A philosophical investigation into romanticism seeks, first and foremost, to understand the concerns of the romantic movement and its philosophical aspirations, as epitomized in the “romantic imperative.” The focus is thus on the questions, methods, and aims that a number of thinkers—spread throughout the German-speaking regions of the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries—share and that speak to us today.

Philosophers working on romanticism generally concur on its contemporary significance. Frank, for instance, has argued for the relevance of romantic theories of self-consciousness for the philosophy of mind, theories of individuality, and conceptions of the self.<sup>10</sup> While Frederick Beiser’s approach differs from Frank, he agrees that “many of the aims and problems of romantic philosophy are still vital today” such that philosophical romanticism is not only historically significant but also, as he puts it, carries “contemporary relevance.”<sup>11</sup> What are these aims and problems that underlie romanticism and remain (or have recently become) relevant?

The aim of this volume is to answer this question. By situating romanticism both in its historical context and in ours, the volume seeks to shed new light on romanticism as a distinctive movement in the history of philosophy as well as offer important insight into today's pressing questions and concerns. By drawing together the fruits of the intensive recent engagement with romanticism, the volume aims to stimulate and facilitate a dialogue on the significance of romantic philosophy and its continuing relevance for contemporary debates.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first consists in a debate between Frank and Beiser, in which they elaborate their differing interpretations of romantic philosophy and address their disagreement. Frank's "What Is Early German Romantic Philosophy?" recounts some of his key claims regarding both the development and the character of philosophical romanticism, by situating it within a realist and skeptical critique of Fichtean and Reinholdian foundationalist philosophy. Frank thus introduces an English-language audience to his long-held and influential understanding of romanticism as a distinctive philosophical movement that should not be identified with idealism. In contrast, Frank contends that romanticism was a realist movement that was opposed to the view that the "absolute" is knowable or attainable.

Beiser's chapter directly challenges Frank's interpretation of the romantics, particularly in relation to idealism. Beiser illustrates, contra Frank, that the romantics and idealists held many similar views, and argues that the differences between the two movements are not essential. Thus, these two chapters serve to situate the contemporary interpretations of romanticism and thereby introduce the reader to some of the most important questions concerning the meaning of romanticism and its significance in our time.

Each of the three following parts of the book focuses on a central concern of the German romantics: Part 2 considers history, culture, and education; Part 3 concerns aesthetics and mythology; and Part 4 investigates science and nature. As each of the chapters demonstrates, the "romantic imperative" motivates the romantic project, and guides the romantics' conceptions of truth and knowledge, beauty and reality. In every insistence, the romantics insist on uniting a poetic and philosophical way of knowing, of bringing aesthetic insight into our understanding of social and natural phenomena, and scientific knowledge into human life and art.

Part 2 focuses on romantic views of human culture and education. The romantic conceptions of history, language, and sociability, as well as the idea of *Bildung*, are considered in light of contemporary social and political thought. Karl Ameriks's "History, Succession, and German Romanticism" investigates the romantic notion of a "progressive universal poetry" and argues that it provides a useful framework for defining a distinctively romantic conception of history, one that is all at once political, philosophical, and aesthetic in a broadly

religious sense. Ameriks contends that, especially for our late modern age, this early German romantic conception has advantages over merely linear, circular, or chaotic conceptions. By situating the romantic model in the context of debates about the teleological and providential nature of history, as understood by Kant, Reinhold, and Hegel, and comparing it with views developed in later antiteleological writings by figures such as Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, Ameriks illustrates the ways in which the romantic model remains the most promising.

Michael N. Forster's "Romanticism and Language" challenges the common misconception that the German romantics were theoretical lightweights, by looking at their views on language. Building on Herder's revolutionary views about language—especially, his principles that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language, that meanings/concepts consist in word-usages, and that thoughts, concepts, and language vary profoundly between periods, cultures, and even individuals—Schleiermacher and Friedrich Schlegel, Forster argues, made vitally important and new contributions to the philosophy of language, linguistics, hermeneutics, and translation theory.

Kristin Gjesdal's "Hermeneutics, Individuality, and Tradition: Schleiermacher's Idea of *Bildung* in the Landscape of Hegelian Thought" sheds critical light on the view that there is a sharp, unbridgeable division between the romantics and Hegel, and between the emphasis on individuality, on the one hand, and the commitment to a philosophy of *Bildung*, that is, education in and through culture, on the other. She begins with an examination of Friedrich Schleiermacher's theory of interpretation, which is often viewed as a proto-example of aesthetic-romantic attitudes. In contrast to this view, Gjesdal illustrates that Schleiermacher's model addresses meaning and thought as expressed in the communal medium of language and thus regards *Bildung* and understanding as two sides of the same coin. Thus, Gjesdal shows that the chief difference between Hegel and the romantics is not that Hegel has a notion of *Bildung* and the romantics do not. Rather, the difference has to do with alternative conceptions of *Bildung*. Gjesdal examines these alternative conceptions and argues that while Schleiermacher's view differs from Hegel's, it in fact offers a necessary complement to Hegel's scheme, and is, as such, deserving of rehabilitation—be it within the field of interpretation studies or within the larger philosophical discourse of *Bildung*.

Jane Kneller's "Sociability and the Conduct of Philosophy: What We Can Learn from Early German Romanticism," describes the model of sociability developed by the early German romantics with the aim of showing its relevance to academic discourses that seek to be more diverse and inclusive. Kneller begins by linking the early romantics' conception of "symphilosophizing" to the art of "reciprocal communication" hinted at by Kant at the end of the "Critique