

## Romantic Theory of Art II

*Hölderlin and Novalis: idealist metaphysics and the theory of art. Friedrich Schlegel and romantic irony. Hegel's criticism of romanticism. Jean Paul Richter's romantic conception of mimesis.*

### Main reading

- C. Larmore, 'Hölderlin and Novalis', in K. Ameriks ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*. Good, analytical account of their philosophical interests and contribution.
- A. Bowie, 'German Idealism and the arts', in K. Ameriks ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*.

### Further reading – primary texts:

- 'The oldest system-program of German idealism' (1796), in F. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. T. Pfau; and in *European Journal of Philosophy* 3, 1995, 199-200, trans. E. Förster. A manuscript fragment of disputed authorship – probably the work of Hölderlin, but it has been attributed also to Schelling and Hegel.
- F. Hölderlin, 'The ground for Empedocles' (1799), 'On the operations of the poetic spirit' (1800), and 'On the difference of poetic modes' (1800), in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. T. Pfau.
- Novalis, 'Logological Fragments I' (1797-98), §§1-49, from *Philosophical Writings*. Fragmentary thoughts and passages from Novalis' notebooks, indicating his conception of philosophy and its relation to poetry.
- F. Schlegel, 'Ideas' (1800), in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow.
- Jean Paul Richter, *School of Aesthetics* (1804), §§1-5, §§21-5 in A. L. Willson ed., *German Romantic Criticism*, and §§6-15 in K. Wheeler ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*.
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (pub. 1840, from lectures given 1820's), vol. 3, *Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. Simson, pp. 506-10.

### Further reading – commentary:

- R. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy Since 1750*, ch. 3. Brief account of Schiller, Schelling and romanticism.
- F. Beiser, 'The Enlightenment and idealism', pp. 25-36, in K. Ameriks ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*. Brief account of the development of German philosophy from Kant.
- J. Kneller, 'Romantic conceptions of the self in Hölderlin and Novalis', in D. Klemm and G. Zöllner eds., *Figuring the Self: Subject, Absolute, and Others*.
- E. Behler, 'Early German romanticism: Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis', in S. Critchley and W. Schroeder eds., *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*.
- A. Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, chs 2-3.
- E. Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man*, ch. 3, 'The metaphysics of the romantic era'. Excellent, analytical account of the metaphysics of romanticism, referring to Schiller and Hölderlin.
- D. Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*. Detailed and intricate philosophical study of Hölderlin: see esp. pp. 133-6, and (arguing that Hölderlin's poems themselves

have philosophical content) 'Reflections', pp. 211-47.

- O. Walzel, *German Romanticism*, chs. 1-3.
- R. Wernaer, *Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany*, ch. 8. Introduction to philosophical aspects.
- W. Silz, *Early German Romanticism*, esp. ch. 8.
- R. Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism*, ch. 2. On Hölderlin.

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**Hölderlin.** 'The Oldest System-Programme of German Idealism': – 'all metaphysics will eventually be collapsed into morals'; 'the idea which unites all [previous ones], the idea of beauty'.

– 'I am convinced now, that the highest act of reason, which – in that it comprises all ideas – is an aesthetic act, and that *truth and goodness* are united as sisters *only in beauty*. The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic capacity as the poet ... Philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetic philosophy.'

– 'Thus poetry achieves a higher dignity, she becomes again in the end what she was in the beginning – *teacher of humanity*; for there no longer exists any philosophy, any history; poetry alone will survive all other sciences and arts.'

– 'We need a new mythology, however, this mythology must be at the service of the ideas, it must become a mythology of reason. Until we render the ideas aesthetic, that is, mythological, they will not be of any interest to the populace, and vice versa: until mythology has become reasonable, the philosopher has to be ashamed for it. Thus the enlightened and the unenlightened finally have to shake hands; mythology must become philosophical in order to make the people reasonable, and philosophy must turn mythological in order to make the philosophers sensuous.'

From Hölderlin's letters: – 'I seek to develop the idea of an unending progress of philosophy, I seek to show that the insistent demand that must be made of every system, namely, that it should unite subject and object in an absolute – Ego, or whatever one wants to call it – is indeed possible aesthetically, through intellectual intuition, but theoretically it is possible only through an endless approximation.'

– 'In the philosophical letters [that Hölderlin intended to write], I want to discover the principle which explains to me the divisions in which we think and exist, yet which is also capable of dispelling the conflict between subject and object, between our self and the world, yes, also between reason and revelation, – theoretically, in intellectual intuition, without practical reason having to come to our aid. For this we need an aesthetic sense, and I will call my philosophical letters 'New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man'. Also, I will move in [these letters] from philosophy to poetry and religion.'

Hölderlin's theory of art: (1) Account of *poetic subjectivity* ('the poetic operation', the 'operation of the poetic spirit').

Conflicts: (i) 'spiritual form', 'the most original postulate of the spirit which aims at [the] communality and unified simultaneity of all parts' vs. 'spiritual content', 'the other postulate which commands the spirit to move beyond itself and reproduce itself, within itself and others, through a beautiful progression and alternation'; (ii) 'subject matter', comprising a sequence of events or psychological states, vs. 'the ideal', which is generated out of a 'subjective foundation', such as a feeling or a striving. Reconciliation: 'in its last act ... in this act it [the subject] simply cannot and must not be understood through itself, nor become its own object ... [for] within it unity and opposition are inseparably linked and one, ... it can appear to reflection neither as an opposable unity nor as a unifiable opposition ... the poetic 'I' ... must be grasped neither as cognized by the cognizing 'I', nor as cognizing ... [it must be grasped] as comprehending in one the harmonious opposed, the opposition and unification'. (2) Theory of artistic genres (lyric, epic, and tragic) in terms of 'basic moods'.

Hölderlin on Schiller's theory of art: 'Much has already been said about the influence of the arts on the education of mankind, yet ... They only referred to its unassuming exterior appearance, which of course is separable from its essence ... one took it as play because it appears in the assuming figure of play.'

**Novalis.** – 'Up to now our thinking was either purely mechanical – *discursive* – atomistic – or purely intuitive – dynamic. Perhaps now the time for union has come?'

– 'It might well be possible that Fichte is the inventor of an entirely new way of thinking ... *Wonderful works of art* could come into being in this way – as soon as we have learnt to Fichtecize artistically.'

– 'Without philosophy a poet is incomplete ... Poetry elevates each single thing through a particular combination with the rest of the whole ... philosophy first prepares the world through its legislation for the active influence of ideas ... poetry is as it were the key to philosophy, its purpose and meaning ... poetry functions in respect of *life*. The individual lives in the whole and the whole in the individual. Through poetry there arises ... the most intimate *communion* of the finite and the infinite.'

– 'Poetry is the great art of the construction of transcendental health. The poet is thus the transcendental physician ... It mixes everything together for the sake of the purpose of all purposes – the *elevation of the human being above himself*.'

– 'The key to life lies in intellectual contemplation ... Only an artist can divine the meaning of life.'

**Friedrich Schlegel.** – 'all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one'.

– 'Poetry and philosophy are, depending on one's point of view, different spheres, different forms, or simply the component parts of religion. For only try really to combine the two and you will find yourself with nothing but religion.'

– 'Where philosophy stops, poetry has to begin.'

– 'Whatever can be done while poetry and philosophy are separated has been done and accomplished. So the time has come to unite the two.'

Romantic irony: – 'Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great.'

– 'If one becomes infatuated with the absolute and simply can't escape it, then the only way out is to contradict oneself continually and join opposite extremes together.'

– 'wherever philosophy appears in oral or written dialogues – and is not simply confined into rigid systems – there irony should be asked for and provided ... Only poetry can also reach the heights of philosophy in this way, and only poetry does not restrict itself to isolated ironical passages, as rhetoric does ... Internally: [irony is] the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius.'

– 'Socratic irony ... originates in the union of *savoir vivre* and scientific spirit, in the conjunction of a perfectly instinctive and a perfectly conscious philosophy. It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication. It is the freest of all licenses, for by its means one transcends oneself.'

– 'An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts.'

– 'As yet there is no skepticism worthy of the name. Real skepticism would have to begin and end with the assertion of and demand for an infinite number of contradictions.'

– 'You can neither explain nor understand the universe, but only intuit and reveal it.'

– 'the philosophy of our age [Fichte] has [not yet] reached the philosophy of philosophy: ... idealists often have only a one-sided, mathematical ideal of philosophy. Their theses in this regard are quite true, that is, philosophical: but the antitheses are missing.'

**Hegel on the German romantics.** – '[Irony] is a negative resting-place alone ... The subject here knows itself to be within itself the Absolute, and all else to it is vain; all the conclusions which it draws for itself respecting the right and good, it likewise knows how to destroy again. It can make a pretence of knowing all things, but it only demonstrates vanity, hypocrisy, and effrontery. Irony knows itself to be the master of every possible content; it is serious about nothing, but plays with all its forms.'

– 'elevation to God out of the occupation of the mind with temporal interests ... is only the Sunday of life, the workdays follow. Out of the cabinet of the interior, the human being steps out of the specific present and work, and the question is: how does the reflex of the divine, which is present in devotion, look in this [workday] world?'

– 'the middle in which ... morality, law, love, and every virtue has worldly presence, is missing'.

– '[romantic] subjectivity has cast itself into religious subjectivity. The utter despair in respect of thought, of truth, and absolute objectivity, as well as the incapacity to give oneself any settled basis or spontaneity of action, induced the noble soul to abandon itself to feeling and to seek in Religion something fixed and steadfast ... to inward subjectivity everything fluctuates and wavers ... Subjectivity signifies the lack of a firm and steady basis, but likewise the desire for

such, and thus it evermore remains a yearning. These yearnings are ... set forth in the writings of Novalis. This subjectivity does not reach substantiality, it does away within itself ... The extravagances of subjectivity constantly pass into madness.'

**Jean Paul Richter** (*School for Aesthetics*). 1. 'Poetic nihilism' (= Kantian idealism): rejection of imitation in favour of art as autonomous subjectivity; 'scorners of reality', who 'annihilate the world and the universe in order to create a space merely for free *play* in the void'. 2. 'Poetic materialism' (= artistic naturalism or realism): art as mimesis, mimesis as mere *empirical* imitation, 'prosaic aping of nature'; the dictum of copying nature 'hardly has any meaning', 'false stereotypes of nature'.

Richter's conception: *beautiful and spiritual* imitation of nature. Genius 'creates a new nature' and 'unveils the old one'. 'Nature is for man in an eternal process of becoming man.' Such poetry provides 'a union of the two [universality and particularity] in which every individual can find himself and in whose generality (since individuals exclude one another) each will find only his own individuality'.

The object of mimesis is conceived by Richter: (1) In terms of a two-world metaphysics, the finite/wordly and the infinite/divine; the true poet 'surrounds nature with the infinite of the idea'; the 'poetic world' governs the 'real world', as the 'spiritual kingdom' governs the 'physical kingdom'; a 'nature which comes into being when man ceases to be, and which he anticipates'; the physical world is 'mechanical' and accommodates no life or spirit in itself. (2) In terms of inner and outer: 'a double nature is being imitated: an outer and an inner one, each the mirror of the other'; 'External nature becomes something different in every inner nature, and this transubstantiation into the divine gives the spiritual poetic matter.'

Richter's historical account: 'The origin and character of all modern poetry can be derived from Christianity so easily that romantic poetry might as well be called Christian poetry.' Christianity generates romanticism because it i) articulates the antithesis of finite/infinite, ii) compels the shift to the inner: it 'dissolves from within the physical world by the increasing sunlight of abstraction', it 'destroyed the entire material world with all its charms, crushed it into a grave mound', iii) places the Infinite beyond the world, producing in place of Greek joy 'either infinite longing or ineffable bliss'. The residual effect of Christian metaphysics is felt in the present through the collapse of Christian faith: 'In an age when God has set like the sun, soon afterwards the world too passes into darkness'; 'Now we know hardly any but false gods. This cold age throws, as it were, a whole universe between man and his god'; man experiences 'the omnipotent, blind, solitary machine which roars about him mechanically and does not address him with any living tone'. Romanticism is 'beauty without limit, or *beautiful* infinity'; 'romantic poetry, as opposed to plastic poetry, delights in presenting the infinity of the subject in which the object-world loses its limits as in a kind of moonlight'; the 'truly romantic idea of the relationship between our poor finitude and the splendid palace room and starry heaven of infinity'; romantic poetry is 'a presentiment of a greater future than finds room here below'; 'the future will become ever more romantic ... and its distance from Greece ever greater'.

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For next week, if you wish to read ahead:

- F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. P. Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1978), Part Six, 'Deduction of a universal organ of philosophy, or: essentials of the philosophy of art according to the principles of transcendental idealism'. Reprinted in D. Simpson ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*. Explains the place of art in Schelling's metaphysics.
- F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art* (1804-5), trans. D. Stott, Introduction and Part I, 'General section on the philosophy of art': ch. 2, 'Construction of art as such and in general', and ch. 3, 'Construction of the particular, or of the form of art'. Amplified account of the philosophical significance of art and the derivation of its specific forms and features.