

precisione come tale trasferimento culturale sia avvenuto. Se il primo gruppo tende a perdere di originalità (alcuni dei testi sono rielaborazioni di pagine già pubblicate altrove e le varie bibliografie di riferimento tendono a risentirne), il secondo è decisamente prezioso. Per questo motivo l'editore avrebbe potuto dedicare maggiore spazio a questa parte del volume: il pubblico internazionale a cui il libro è diretto – lo si deduce facilmente dalla scelta linguistica di contenere testi per la maggior parte in inglese e in numero minore in tedesco – credo possa infatti essere maggiormente attratto da questa sezione rispetto alle altre, che raccolgono certo scritti di valore, ma la cui originalità impallidisce rispetto a quella di chiusura, che dimostra magistralmente l'influenza che le istituzioni scientifiche tedesche (e in misura minore italiane) ebbero in Ungheria sulla trasformazione della concezione dell'essere umano. Il testo di Gurka, in breve, offre delle preziosissime pagine a chiunque sia interessato ad indagare la storia della filosofia e del pensiero scientifico europei a cavallo tra XVIII e XIX secolo superando la pretestuosa idea che per farlo non sia necessario superare quella linea immaginaria che unisce Königsberg a Monaco di Baviera.

Giulia Valpione

Jacob Burda, *Das gute Unendliche in der deutschen Frühromantik*, mit einem Geleitwort von Bazon Brock und einer Replik von Manfred Frank, übersetzt von Martin Suhr, Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler, 2020², xv + 153 pp. ISBN 978-3-476-05098-4.

This volume by Jacob Burda is a wide-ranging, fascinating, and important study of the topic of infinity in Early German Romanticism. It was originally submitted in English for a PhD in philosophy at the University of Oxford, and appears here in an expanded form for publication, translated into German by Martin Suhr, with a preface by Bazon Brock (pp. ix-xi), and a detailed twenty-page reply to Burda's findings by one of the leading and pioneering scholars of philosophical romanticism, Manfred Frank (131-150).

Burda's book especially treats the three romantic thinkers Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Hölderlin in connection with the central idea of infinity, but there are many other ideas, figures, arguments, philosophers, and writers referenced in the book, including Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Spinoza, Goethe, Schiller and so on, and even the composer Beethoven. It is beyond the scope of this short review to summarize or do justice to them all. I will above all focus my review on Burda's new interpretation of infinity in the Early German romantic philosophers.

One of Burda's main claims is that the idea of "good infinity" (or "the good infinite") – a topic later made famous by Hegel's polemics against "bad infinity" – can already be explicitly found among the romantic philosophers. And it is precisely this idea of good infinity that best articulates the metaphysical foundations of romantic philosophy on the one hand, and permits a better accounting for the element of finitude in the world on the other. Instead of a prevailing research trend to read the romantics as putting forth a negative view of infinity as a form of unattainable yearning or nostalgic longing (which he labels as "defeatist"), Burda seeks to replace this with what he believes is a more productive, textually accurate, and reconciliatory theory. This latter theory of infinity is intellectually underpinned by the principle of *Wechselerweis*, i.e. a form of mutual confirmation or reciprocal proof (xiii).

Or as Bazon Brock puts it in the Preface, rather than a "dark" and depressed view of the romantics, this book argues for a modern "light" view of romanticism, which underscores the possibilities of harmony and unification more than division and insatiability (ix-x). This laudable aim also reveals a bit of world-historical irony, insofar as it was Hegel himself who initially was so influential in promoting the rather distorted but now outdated reading of *Frühromantik* as essentially obscure, irrational, and even unhealthy and ill.

It is good to see the author return to the original *philosophical* sources of the period and attempt to seriously evaluate the metaphysical views that are to be found in the writings of the romantics, compared to a widespread tendency to approach their works with older preconceived notions of what romanticism supposedly is and then projecting those obsolete interpretations on to a limited selection of fragments or texts.

Instead of the romantics taking refuge in a world beyond, i.e. in a transcendent realm of the absolute, Burda maintains (referencing the work of Charles Larmore) that there is only "one world" for the romantics and not two different opposing worlds that can never be reconciled. Here Burda helpfully recalls that the goal of "romanticizing the world" actually testifies to the romantics' interest in transforming *this* particular world, in the here and now, more than in any kind of unattainable world beyond (1-2). Accordingly, Burda's theory of good infinity is one in which the finite and infinite can be seen in reciprocal harmony, and not forever in conflict or antithesis. It involves an understanding of infinity as related to a living process of "eternally becoming" than to static nostalgia (2-3).

In chapter one Burda presents Hegel's notorious view of the romantics found in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* (10-15), and furthermore notes the manner

in which both the philosophies of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis directly engage with the Kantian-Reinholdian-Fichteian tradition of transcendental philosophy, specifically their theories of self-consciousness and being (*Sein*). This includes an awareness of Kant's emphasis on the synthetic unity of apperception as one of the highest points of the critical philosophy, as well as how the absolute I constitutes the *Grundsatz* or unconditioned first principle of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (15-20). Before putting forward his own interpretation of philosophical romanticism, Burda generously acknowledges, among others, the seminal significance of both Manfred Frank's influential reading of the romantics as non-foundational "ontological realists" and Frederick Beiser's diverging but likewise influential interpretation of the romantics as "objective idealists", in which the latter are inspired by the legacy of Platonism and Spinoza's definition of substance in the *Ethics* (20-24). Indeed, Frank and Beiser have so positively revolutionized the study of German romantic philosophy that any up-to-date interpreter worthy of the name must properly take into account their work and readings.

Despite supporting many other elements of Frank's conception of German romantic philosophy, Burda says he is not fully in agreement with Frank on one topic in particular: with the theory of the romantic absolute as a Kantian regulative ideal, so famously announced in the title of Frank's ground-breaking 1997 study: *unendliche Annäherung* – Infinite Approximation. Indeed, Burda explicitly states: "Es ist dieses Bild, das ich in diesem Buch in Frage stellen möchte" (It is this view that I wish to call into question in this book). (25) Why? Because for Burda, it leads to a split "two-world" conception of romantic philosophy and of ourselves as cognitive and feeling human beings that is extremely difficult to integrate. That is to say, a paradoxical and unfulfilled tension between the world of the absolute, infinite, or transcendental being on the one hand, and the world of self-consciousness, finitude and subjectivity, on the other (25).

In contrast, as mentioned, Burda defends a "one-world" theory of romanticism, in which the two sides of the human being, both the thinking and feeling and even "divine" elements of our own natures and the world, can ultimately be viewed in a unitary fashion, embodied in the idea of the "good infinite." He contends that it deserves the predicate "good" and not "bad" because: "sie ihr scheinbares Gegenteil, das Endliche, versöhnt, wodurch sie es *wahrhaft unendlich* macht" (it reconciles its apparent opposite, the finite, through which it is made *genuinely infinite*) (28). Indeed, drawing upon Friedrich Schlegel's *Philosophical Lectures*, Burda accordingly characterises the good infinite among the romantics as a conception of infinity that is able to mutually encompass both the infinite *and* the finite,

and not solely the former. Here again the principle of *Wechselerweis* comes into play (29). For Burda, therefore, the good infinite is not at all limited or logically defined by its opposite, the finite; one has to bear in mind that any kind of latter definition would result in a “bad” theory of infinity of the sort that Hegel criticized (cf. 49-51), and which Hegel thought he had found in the work of Fichte and the romantics (28).

Philosophically, Burda diverges from the interpretations of Beiser and Frank when arguing that ultimately the romantics should be classified neither as pre-critical idealists inspired by Spinoza nor as some kind of critical Kantian sceptics, but he takes up a suggestion by Fred Rush and prefers to see them more as precursors to the phenomenological tradition, in which the phenomena is self-revealing (33), and the departure point is the experiential existentiality of our feeling in this world (xiii, 5-6, 30-33).

Some of the other chapters in brief: chapter 3 (35-58) investigates Friedrich Schlegel’s reference to “incomprehensibility” and those aspects of the real world and consciousness that supposedly cannot be fully cognitively seized or described; likewise for Novalis’s *Hymns to the Night* and its claims of “inexpressibility” (55-56) and the themes of regret, despair, and longing in Hölderlin’s *Hyperion* (57-58). These texts are all examined in the context of an enlightening discussion about the limits of a romantic philosophy of feeling, the senses, and the role of intellectual intuition (e.g. 44-48). Here Burda contests Frank’s location of the romantics in the epistemological tradition of Kant, and rejects a reading of the romantic (Schlegelian or Novalisian) absolute as unattainable, or as “an isolated principle that is outside the sphere of human comprehension” (37). Chapter 4 tackles the issue of romantic methodology, scrutinizing in more depth the notion of *Wechselerweis*, which we saw for Burda is the methodical principle underlining the idea of the good infinite as such. He intriguingly poses the question as to what degree this principle could serve as a *Grundsatz* or “intermediary” first principle for romantic philosophy, and consequently how *Wechselerweis* should fit with the tradition of German idealism in terms of foundations and starting points (esp. 60-61, 67-72).

In the most substantial portion of his book, chapter five (87-126), Burda provides a detailed analysis of the debate concerning the romantics’ relationship to the good and bad infinite. The chapter contains many specific examples of how to understand this core topic and the positing of a conception of philosophy that “starts in the middle” (106), while he agrees with the romantic injunction to deploy romantic irony as the *mediating link* between the two poles of the finite and the infinite (115-122). For Burda: “In this way the good infinite and irony coincide” (124). Aesthetically, Burda’s

musical choice of the third movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 29 in B-Flat Major, Op. 106 (especially played by the pianist Igor Levit) as a concrete embodiment of the romantic good infinite is instructive and illuminating (8-9, 106-110). The Appendix contains reflections on the good infinite in Heidegger (127-130).

As mentioned, the book concludes with Manfred Frank's twenty-page reply to Burda (131-150). It's a wonderful, condensed, tour-de-force presentation on the topic of the infinite not only among the German romantics and idealists, but throughout the history of philosophy. Here Frank restates his reading of a number of key points, including his understanding of the opposition of a good and bad infinity, Hegel's polemic against the romantics, how he imagines a romantic response to Hegel's charges, and some final thoughts on what aesthetic alternatives remain open to the romantics.

Jacob Burda's book *Das gute Unendliche in der deutschen Frühromantik* is warmly recommended, because the intellectual debate unfolding on its pages between Burda and Frank on the topic of infinity continues to remain a central and burning issue for any reader or scholar of German romantic philosophy. This is because the debate on infinity encompasses and organically intersects with some of the weightiest metaphysical topics; such as the nature of the unconditioned, the eternal, the absolute, not to mention immortality, the divine, and the genesis of the world. Or the question of romantic epistemology: what exactly is the highest point of cognition for the romantics – sensibility, feeling, discursive rationality, sensible, aesthetic, or intellectual intuition? And of course, that ever-present and ever-contested problem of where to place the romantics in the history of philosophy: inside the Kantian and post-Kantian stream, outside it, or hovering on its boundary.

Finally, there remains the question of how to chart the intellectual orbit of the romantic movement *per se*, which of course reflects in turn on how to picture their conception of infinity. Is the process of romantic philosophizing geometrically linear (unending approximation towards an ideal point on the horizon), circular, or perhaps even cyclical? Or is Novalis's mysterious path to the inner and outer universes (55), and Friedrich Schlegel's theory of a polarity between consciousness and infinity (60), more accurately illustrated by some other scientific shape, like the elliptic oscillation around two poles? If the latter is indeed their true course, then Jacob Burda is perfectly right to conclude his "one world" interpretation by defining romantic philosophy as

an attempt to reconcile the two great antitheses of the inner microcosmic and outer macrocosmic worlds or poles (126).

David W. Wood