

## Editorial: Philosophical Orb

This latest issue of *Symphilosophie* is doubly commemorative. On the one hand, it presents new research on François Hemsterhuis, an important yet neglected Dutch philosopher. The year 2021 marked the tercentenary of Hemsterhuis's birth. On the other hand, it celebrates Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis). This year 2022 registers the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their births: Schlegel was born 10 March 1772, Hardenberg 2 May 1772.

The importance of the friendship between Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis for the emergence of early German romanticism is well-known. But what is often overlooked is that before they “Fichticized” together they already shared a crucial interest in Hemsterhuis. Friedrich Schlegel has recounted their first meeting at the University of Leipzig in 1792. In a letter to his brother, he writes as though the fates of Greek mythology, who spin the destinies of human beings, had played a part in this encounter:

Fate has placed into my hands a young man who is capable of everything. [...] The study of philosophy has given him the wonderful ability to fashion beautiful philosophical thoughts. He does not aim at the true, but at the beautiful. His favorite writers are Plato and Hemsterhuis. On one of the first evenings he ardently expressed his view to me that there is no evil in the world – and that everything is again approaching the Golden Age.<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore under the auspices of Hemsterhuis, the “Dutch Plato” as he was called by his contemporaries, that Friedrich Schlegel became acquainted with the person who would later adopt the pseudonym “Novalis.” The name *novalis* literally means in Latin fallow earth or unploughed land, *and* it echoes the idea of a new star in the heavens – a stellar explosion (*nova*). We will see that this connection between the earth and heavens, or rather, the amplitude of the adopted name and the exploration of unknown territories, is due in part to Hemsterhuis's philosophy.

The consecutive commemorations of the births of Hemsterhuis, Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, are an opportunity to revisit a key area of romantic philosophy that is still rather unknown. This is surprising, because

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, letter to August Wilhelm Schlegel, January 1792, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (henceforth: KFSa), eds. Ernst Behler *et al.* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987), vol. 23, p. 41. Cf. Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (henceforth: HKA), eds. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), vol. 4, pp. 571-572.

like with his compatriot Spinoza before him, Hemsterhuis's influence on his contemporaries was widespread and profound, especially in Germany.

The main thematic dossier of this issue has been put together by Daniel Whistler, Professor of Philosophy at Royal Holloway (University of London). Author of the brand-new monograph, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*<sup>2</sup>, whose aim is to reintegrate Hemsterhuis into the canon of modern thought, Daniel Whistler has also edited (in collaboration with Jacob van Sluis) the first ever English edition of Hemsterhuis's philosophical writings: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*. Two volumes of this three-volume edition were published at the beginning of this year and the third is in press.<sup>3</sup>

Daniel Whistler's introduction to the main dossier is a genuine essay in its own right. It includes intellectual vignettes of each of the figures who played a role in the reception of Hemsterhuis's work in Germany as well as a presentation of Hemsterhuis alongside the German romantics. A historical sketch of this kind has never been carried out in English before. The main dossier consists of seven new research articles. We believe the introduction and these seven articles will have a considerable impact on both Hemsterhuisian and romantic scholarship. Our deepest thanks go to Daniel Whistler, Kirill Chepurin, Viviana Galletta, Jocelyn Holland, Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña, and Gabriel Trop, for all their remarkable work.

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This fourth issue of *Symphilosophie* is titled "Cosmic Web." The image of a web plays a fundamental role in Hemsterhuis's metaphysics. In the opening pages of the first of his four great Socratic dialogues, *Sophylus, or on Philosophy* (1778), Hemsterhuis explicitly deploys the example of a spider web to define the essence and task of philosophy itself.<sup>4</sup> Philosophy's mission is to reveal

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis (eds.), *The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis, 1762-1773*, with introductions by Peter Sonderren, Jacob van Sluis and Gabriel Trop (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); et *idem* (eds.), *The Dialogues of François Hemsterhuis, 1778-1787*, with introductions by Daniel Whistler and Laure Cahen-Maurel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022). The third volume will be published shortly: *Philosophical Correspondence and Fragments*. It includes introductions by Claudia Melica, Henri A. Krop, Peter Sonderren, and Jonathan I. Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Arif Yildiz has also recently translated this dialogue of Hemsterhuis into Turkish. See: François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ya da Felsefe Üzerine*, trans. Arif Yildiz, *ViraVerita E-Journal: Interdisciplinary Encounters* 15 (2022): 292-320.

“unknown lands of an immense size”, and in this way to make “the universe and ourselves richer.”<sup>5</sup> Philosophy’s method of carrying out this exploration may be compared to the work of the spider. To weave its web, the spider first creates a circular frame from which rays emanate to give the whole a structure. This construction, which proceeds outwards from the center, allows the spider to move around its web in concentric orbs. Circles are continually added in order to better trap its prey. Similarly, philosophy for Hemsterhuis creates a form in movement. It is a sphere whose center is none other than we ourselves as thinking subjects. The framework of this orb is the profusion of possible paths of thought and the exercise of all our organs, allowing us to traverse ascending and descending layers of experience, to acquire an ever-greater wealth of knowledge.

However, in order to constitute the basis of a veritable philosophical quest and to attain “the remotest truths”<sup>6</sup> – like astronomical knowledge – the exercise of our own reflexivity must be freed of all prejudices, pre-established systems of thought, traditions, and abstract erudition. Like the spider secreting the silky web from its own glands so that it is able to extend its web up to lofty treetops and even across rivers, it is up to us to enter into ourselves, to follow the path of common sense to elevate ourselves and encircle the earth and the heavens. From the domain of the senses to that of the spirit; from inert matter and the mechanical movement that governs it, to the spontaneous active force of our free will and moral ends. In the same way that a spider’s web hardly possesses any weight compared to the captured prey but still holds it without breaking, the thread of our common sense may appear to be highly tenuous philosophically speaking, yet it nevertheless leads to discoveries of an unimaginable magnitude. “By this means” – declares Euthyphro in *Sophylus*, who is an avatar of Socrates – “we will go on to traverse the universe without danger. The thread of good sense cannot be broken.”<sup>7</sup>

This journey through the universe and the imperative call to a reflexive return into ourselves can be found in one of the most famous fragments of the entire romantic corpus, fragment 16 of *Pollen*. “We dream of journeys through the universe: but is the universe not already within us? We are ignorant of the depths of our spirit,” writes Novalis in this fragment, which poetically formulates the celebrated romantic motif: “the mysterious path

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<sup>5</sup> François Hemsterhuis, *Sophylus, or on Philosophy*, in: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, vol. 2, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

leads within.”<sup>8</sup> Yet the romantic philosopher also reminds us that we should not stay at this inner universe, there is the necessity of going out into the world again: “The second step must be an effective external look, a sustained and independent observation of the external world.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, for Novalis, the outer macrocosm and the inner microcosm reciprocally overlap and complement each other.

To be sure, Hemsterhuis’s notion of common sense is less prevalent in romantic philosophy, whose guiding thread is rather, for Novalis at least, the productive or creative imagination. Just like in Kantian and Fichtean transcendental idealism, the romantic *Einbildungskraft* should not to be confused with mere fantasy. The creative imagination is a faculty of connection or synthesis *par excellence*, whose regulated activity forms the hinges as it were that weld the real and the ideal. In this sense, romantic philosophy has the same goal as Hemsterhuis’s metaphysics: to traverse the universe in all the complexity and richness of its empirical manifestations.

This proximity with Hemsterhuis even plays itself out at the level of form. The singular style of romantic philosophy is well-known: it frequently appears an asystematic thought, consisting of scattered fragments devoid of center or unity. Yet at times it aims to weave an interconnected network as subtle as that of a spider’s web. Via the thread of the creative imagination, it philosophically strives to encompass distant elements and separate modes of knowledge. And like the spider’s construction, to interweave them in a way that is not at all random. The resulting whole is certainly fine, but at the same time extremely elastic and solid. As Novalis writes, it should be unlike “Penelope’s woven fabric”, which always had to be restarted again the next day.<sup>10</sup>

Here it should be recalled that the romantics expressly attribute to Hemsterhuis the philosophical inspiration for the idea of a “total science” – an idea underpinning for instance Novalis’s encyclopaedia project: “ENCYCLOPEDISTICS. We owe the most sublime truths of our day to contact with the long-separated elements of the total-science. Hemsterhuis.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, fragment 16, HKA 2, 417-419: “Nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, fragment 24, HKA 2, 423. This double inward and outward path is often forgotten, even among scholars; see Laure Cahen-Maurel, “Philosophical Paths”, in: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 409, HKA 3, 318; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, trans. D. W. Wood, 64.

<sup>11</sup> Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 199, HKA 3, p. 275; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 30.

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The cover artwork of this issue of *Symphilosophie* likewise invokes the important cognitive method of proceeding by interconnections. This detail from a painting of some flowers is by the artist Jan Davidszoon de Heem (1606-1683), a realist painter of the Dutch Golden Age and contemporary of Rembrandt. More precisely, an almost imperceptible element in this painting can arrest our gaze: that of the spider, element of the microcosmic life on earth, starting to spin its translucent and sticky thread, seeking to capture the bee, who is foraging in this silent life and external world of flowers and opulent colors. Using this web, the spider is repeatedly able to descend and ascend again “safely”<sup>12</sup> from the top of the flower bouquet to the bottom of the vase.

The concentric orbs of a completed spider’s web on earth may therefore be viewed as a mirror of the macrocosmic celestial orbs. Our title ‘cosmic web’ reflects these two aspects. Indeed, this expression has a technical meaning in present-day astronomy. The cosmic web designates the distribution of dark and light matter that forms the basis of the universe. Within this web-like structure, galaxies are distributed along a network of thin filaments of hydrogen gas. Voids occur between these filaments. Cosmological models created by scientists have long been able to predict the gas filaments from which galaxies form their first stars. But we had to wait until technical advances in the latest space telescopes to obtain images of the cosmic web and ascertain its empirical existence. We only have to recall the series of spectacular images provided by the Webb telescope that has dethroned Hubble. Revealed to the general public only this year, these images have deepened our understanding of the most distant galaxies.

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As we saw, following the lead of Hemsterhuis, around 1800 romantic philosophy similarly sought to venture into unknown worlds, to pass from terrestrial space to the stars. However, among these unknown lands there is a domain less explored than that of the celestial bodies and sidereal universe: the intriguing Hemsterhuisian conception of the “moral face of the universe”, which presupposes a specific sense or organ to apprehend it – the “moral organ.”

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<sup>12</sup> François Hemsterhuis, *Sophylus, or on Philosophy*, p. 46.

A number of the articles in this issue investigate the romantic exploration of the world in its cosmological dimension (Viviana Galletta, Kirill Chepurin), and in its moral dimension in the Hemsterhuisian sense (Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña, and Gabriel Trop). While the central themes of the ‘moral organ’, ‘moral astronomy’, not to mention the ‘elasticity’ of thought (Jocelyn Holland), are all addressed.

These research articles are accompanied by a set of translations carried out by Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis, and James Reid respectively. Daniel Whistler has produced a previously unpublished English translation of excerpts from five letters of Hemsterhuis to his ‘Diotima’ Princess Gallitzin. These letters concern the mythological figure of Prometheus (partly inspired by Goethe’s poem of the same name). Jacob van Sluis, former subject librarian of the University of Groningen, who was responsible for the critical edition of Hemsterhuis’s *Œuvres philosophiques* published by Brill in 2015, has kindly transcribed for us two very early German notices on Hemsterhuis’s *Lettre sur les désirs* and *Lettre sur l’homme et ses rapports* that were published in Frankfurt in 1772. In addition, he and Daniel Whistler have translated these two notices into English. We have furthermore included the original French of Hemsterhuis’s text *Lettre sur les désirs*. The introduction briefly describes the background to Herder’s influential 1781 German translation of it. Finally, the translation dossier ends with James Reid’s first complete translation into English of Novalis’s “Hemsterhuis Studies” (1797). We would like to express our gratitude to Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis, and James Reid: these pieces provide a vibrant illustration of the reception of Hemsterhuis in Germany across three key decades.

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The “Miscellaneous” section celebrates the 250th anniversary of the births of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis with articles by Giovanna Pinna and Jack Haughton. Pinna’s paper sheds new light on a theme relatively neglected in romantic aesthetics studies: the role played by the Kantian sublime in Schlegel’s formulation of the beautiful. While Haughton’s article tackles from a novel avenue the pietistic legacy in Novalis’s conception of the self and his philosophy of religion. Next is a piece that is a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in its own way, an article by Daniel McClennan on the Kleistian reception of Kant’s philosophy. McClennan develops the Kantian concept of actuality and its re-articulation as a problem in Kleist’s work, with quotations from *Das Erdbeben in Chili* and *Penthesilea*. The paper includes several original drawings by the author himself.

The “Miscellaneous” section also contains two new translations of writings by Friedrich Schlegel. Maurizio Malimpensa provides an Italian version of a little-known text – the draft of an intervention envisaged by Friedrich Schlegel (but not published) in the public Atheism Controversy in Germany in 1798-99. In this text Schlegel defends Fichte after the latter was accused of atheism and eventually dismissed from his position at the University of Jena. The second translation is an English rendering by Joseph Carew of an excerpt from the “Introduction” to Friedrich Schlegel’s lectures on *Transcendental Philosophy* which were held at the University of Jena during the winter semester of 1800 / 1801. These lectures are among texts by Friedrich Schlegel for which full translations are still lacking in the English, French, and Italian languages. We warmly thank Joseph Carew for this translated excerpt from his forthcoming edition of the complete text.

This issue of *Symphilosophie* includes two review essays. One by David W. Wood: “Window to Goethe’s Colour Revolution.” It considers the philosophy of polarity in three recent publications on J. W. Goethe and the romantic scientist J. W. Ritter. Wood supports the idea that Goethe’s scientific thought too contains a subterranean engagement with Hemsterhuis’s metaphysics of the cosmos. In order to also celebrate the Novalis-Schlegel anniversary, the second review essay by Laure Cahen-Maurel takes up the notions of “symphilosophy” and encyclopaedism in two commemorative publications, and briefly assesses the present state of the editions of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis.

Five book reviews complete this issue. Three of them – by Luigi Filieri, Alexander Knopf, and Victor Béguin – have already been published as preprints on the journal’s website. The fourth book review is by Anne Pollok, who has reviewed one of the most important editions of 2021, the anthology: *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, published by Oxford University Press, edited by Dalia Nassar and Kristin Gjesdal, with translations by Anna C. Ezekiel.

Here we would like to say that we are extremely pleased to announce that Anne Pollok will be the guest editor of the next issue of *Symphilosophie*. Issue 5 is devoted to the topic of aesthetics in connection with the problem of freedom, particularly artistic practice that works towards the emancipation of women. The call for contributions is open and will close on 31 March, 2023.

Lastly, the fifth book review concerns a publication relating to the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the births of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, a book that has received a lot of press: the publication, consecutively in English in September and in German in October, of Andrea Wulf’s, *Magnificent Rebels: The First*

*Romantics and the Invention of the Self*.<sup>13</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, one of the pioneers of philosophical studies on romanticism has critically reviewed Wulf's book. Among others, he raises the question of the genre to which the book belongs. We are grateful to F. C. Beiser for permitting us to republish his review in German. His text originally appeared in English in November in the online journal *The Marginalia Review of Books*.<sup>14</sup> We thank the journal's editors, Samuel Loncar and Alexandra Barlyski, for allowing us to reprint the review in a German language version. Our gratitude also goes to Erich Fuchs and Levin Zende, who have kindly checked the translation.

In conclusion, we are thankful to all our external reviewers for their precious expertise, and our entire editorial team for their invaluable help. As this issue 4 hopefully shows, in the universe of romantic philosophy there remains much fallow land still to be ploughed.

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As we finished writing the above words, we received the news of the passing of Dieter Henrich, an eminent figure in the contemporary reception of classical German philosophy. Among his many important contributions, we would especially like to underscore his method of *Konstellationsforschung*.<sup>15</sup> Our knowledge of the philosophical debates and so-called minor figures in the last years of the 18th century, would be poorer without this method. Scholarship on philosophical romanticism is therefore immensely indebted to him. Even this volume, whose title points to real and metaphysical constellations, evokes his work and method of research.

Bonn & Padua, December 2022

Laure Cahen-Maurel  
Giulia Valpione

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<sup>13</sup> Andrea Wulf, *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self* (New York: Knopf, 2022); *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2022). This book has also been translated into Spanish and Dutch.

<sup>14</sup> See Frederick C. Beiser, "Inheriting Autonomy: The German Romantics Reconsidered", 11 November 2022, in *The Marginalia Review of Books*: <https://themarginaliareview.com/magnificent-rebels-beiser/>

<sup>15</sup> See Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991).