

# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## On Kant

*Novalis*

Introduced and translated by David W. Wood\*

It is often not realized that the German romantic thinker Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772-1801), more widely known by his pseudonym *Novalis*, placed his own philosophy of magical idealism directly in the heritage of Immanuel Kant's transcendental project. This genealogy is highlighted in one of the 1798 *Teplitz Fragments*:

Voltaire is a pure empiricist, like many French philosophers – Ligne imperceptibly inclines towards the transcendent empiricists. These form the transition to the dogmatists – from there we arrive at the enthusiasts or the transcendent dogmatists – then to Kant – from there to Fichte – and finally to Magical Idealism.<sup>1</sup>

Novalis only dared to continue and transform the conceptions of Kant and Fichte, because he had already closely studied the history of philosophy, writing down in his notebooks hundreds of pages of reflections and reactions to the thinkers in question. Some of the most detailed philosophical notebooks, such as his *Kant Studies*<sup>2</sup>, *Fichte Studies*<sup>3</sup>, and the 1798 / 99 *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*<sup>4</sup>, have long been available in complete English translations.

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<sup>1</sup> Novalis, *Teplitzer Fragmente*, no. 375 (HKA II: 605).

<sup>2</sup> Novalis, “Kant Studies”, translated by David W. Wood, *Philosophical Forum* 32 (2001): 323-338.

<sup>3</sup> Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, edited and translated by Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, edited and translated by David W. Wood (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007).

DAVID W. WOOD

For this special issue on Romanticism and its Kantian Legacy, the following pages merely aim to provide a brief sample in English of some of Novalis's principal references to the critical philosopher. They are presented in four small groups:

- I. Diaries and Letters
- II. Fragments
- III. Kant Studies
- IV. Romantic Encyclopaedia

Naturally, this selection is not exhaustive. It includes some lesser-known and previously untranslated passages and fragments. The origins of the German source texts are indicated in the footnotes.

# Texts

## I. Diaries and Letters

Theatre: Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, original.

Philosophy: Schiller, Herder, Lessing, myself, Kant.

Jurisprudence: Pütter.

Statesman: Herzberg.

Poets: Wieland, Ossian, Klopstock, Goethe, Schiller, Bürger.

History: Schiller, Tacitus, me.

Novel: original: Wieland, Ardinghello.<sup>1</sup>

Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* is a lovely legal specimen – a carefully crafted tissue of chicanes. Kant has become *juristic* – something you accused Leibniz of – and he has been like this from the very beginning. The philosophical faculty (like the most blatant sinner) is the best to defend. The philosophical presentation of this conflict could have been an incredibly beautiful defence of the philosophical faculty. In relation to the Bible, Kant is not *à la hauteur*.<sup>2</sup>

I can't recall if I've already told you about my dear *Plotinus*. He is a philosopher born for me, and I've just learned about him from Tiedemann – I was struck by his similarity to Fichte and Kant – his *idealistic* similarity to them. He is dearer to my heart than those two. Somebody told me that my discovery isn't new and that this wondrous conjunction has already been mentioned in Maimon's *Life*. But why didn't it cause a stir? There is so much that has not been ploughed in Plotinus – and a fresh proclamation would be certainly worthwhile. Regarding the *Athenaeum*'s new format, and if it really continues, I'll probably contribute some *literary epistolary news* in a fleeting and light style. – Perhaps I'll start off by saying something about Plotinus as well etc.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diary, Jena, 1791 (HKA IV: 4).

<sup>2</sup> Novalis to Friedrich Schlegel, 7 November, 1798 (HKA IV, 264). Cf. *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 173.

<sup>3</sup> Novalis to Friedrich Schlegel, 10 December, 1798 (HKA IV, 269). Cf. *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 183.

## II. Fragments

In general, the categories necessarily contain the possible matter – the real form, the necessary I or both together.

Kant established the possibility, Reinhold the reality, and Fichte the necessity of philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

The Kantian categories exist merely for the accidental substance.<sup>5</sup>

The more narrow-minded a system is, the more it appeals to smart people. Thus, the materialists' system, Helvetius's doctrine, and even Locke, have garnered the most praise among this class. This is why Kant will always find more disciples than Fichte.<sup>6</sup>

This principle of perpetual peace presses in upon us from all sides, and soon there will only be one science and one spirit, just as there is one prophet and one God.<sup>7</sup>

On the Kantian and ante-Fichtean treatments of philosophy on the whole – the classification of the soul forces, reason (*Vernunft*) as their unifying and centering principle – unification of the forces of the soul and nature – unification of their central monads – the highest central monad.<sup>8</sup>

A joke about Kant and his followers.<sup>9</sup>

Similarity and dissimilarity between Asmus and Ligne and Voltaire. Even Jacobi belongs among the transcendent empiricists. An empiricist is: someone whose manner of thinking is an effect of the outer world and fate – the passive thinker – whose philosophy is given to him. Voltaire is a pure empiricist, like many French philosophers – Ligne imperceptibly inclines towards the transcendent empiricists. These form the transition to the dogmatists – from there we arrive at the enthusiasts or the transcendent dogmatists – then to Kant – from there to Fichte – and finally to Magical Idealism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Fichte Studien*, no. 69 (HKA II: 143).

<sup>5</sup> *Fichte Studien*, no. 584 (HKA II: 277).

<sup>6</sup> *Blüthenstaub (Pollen)*, no. 113 (HKA II: 461, 463).

<sup>7</sup> *Logologische Fragmente*, no. 16; (HKA II: 527).

<sup>8</sup> *Poëticismen*, no. 86; (HKA II: 543).

<sup>9</sup> *Poëticismen*, no. 90; (HKA II: 543).

<sup>10</sup> *Teplitzer Fragmente*, no. 375 (HKA II: 605).

(In accordance with its nature, all *explanation* must *descend*, be analytic, and proceed as Kant has constructed motion in the phoronomy.)<sup>11</sup>

(Kant's procedure with metaphysics – which for him is synonymous with philosophy. His famous question). (It is the question regarding the possibility and method for the construction of philosophical genius).<sup>12</sup>

Kant's theory of the gradual vivification of forces put to a practical use. In general, the theory of stimulation is still a rich source for mechanical improvements. The attempt to mechanically explain the organic will perhaps not be realized until one has successfully attempted to organically explain the mechanical.<sup>13</sup>

### III. Kant Studies

*Critique* develops the organ of reason by directing our attention to this organ. – We obtain through the critique a more *secure sense* for the organ of reason so that we learn to deploy it and strictly distinguish its functions from all the others.<sup>14</sup>

Philosophizing is none other than *doing science*, the thinking through of thoughts / cognizing knowledge – and treating the *sciences* in a scientific and *poetical* manner. Are *practical* and poetical one and the same? – And does the poetical absolutely signify the practical *in specie*?<sup>15</sup>

The concept of *sense*. According to Kant, pure mathematics and pure natural science relate to the forms of outer sensibility – What science then relates to the forms of inner sensibility?

Does *extra-sensory* knowledge really exist? Might another path be available through which we can move outside of ourselves in order to reach other beings and to become affected by them?<sup>16</sup>

Kant posits the *fixed*, stationary, law-giving *a priori* power *within us* – whereas earlier philosophers posited it outside us. In other words, the inverted procedure was deployed in philosophy compared to the one in astronomy. In astronomy, *the earth* was first thought to be stationary with the heavens

<sup>11</sup> *Freiberger Naturwissenschaftliche Studien, Großes physikalisches Studienheft* (HKA III: 61-62).

<sup>12</sup> *Freiberger Naturwissenschaftliche Studien, Arithmetica Universalis* (HKA III: 168).

<sup>13</sup> *Technische und Mechanische Bemerkungen* (HKA III: 740).

<sup>14</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 388).

<sup>15</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 390).

<sup>16</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 390).

revolving around it – whereas in philosophy the I (*Ich*) was first conceived in motion, as though it orbited around objects. – The revolutionary aspects of these two sciences have subsequently become interchanged.<sup>17</sup>

The entire Kantian method – the entire Kantian manner of philosophizing, is one-sided. – It would not be wrong to designate it as *scholasticism*. It is undoubtedly a maximum of its kind – one of the most remarkable phenomena of the human spirit.<sup>18</sup>

#### **IV. Romantic Encyclopaedia**

COSMOLOGY. From now on, God and nature must be separated – God has nothing to do with nature – God is the goal of nature – the entity with which nature should one day be in harmony. Nature should become *moral* and then an entirely new light will be shed on the Kantian moral God and morality. The moral God is far superior to the magical God.<sup>19</sup>

Kant's concept of *schema*.<sup>20</sup>

*Criteria = characteristics*. So far in both philosophy and natural history people have always started from individual *criteria*. This has led to the construction of *one-sided series of systems* – where a single characteristic is a logical *unity* (*I*) so to speak. – And if the characteristic is either countable or comparable (gradual) – we end up with an arithmetic or a gradual (geometric) series of systems. Of course, many of the criteria were chosen without a critique and the result is now a confused system. Thus, a critique of philosophical criteria is of the utmost importance for philosophy – just like a critique of natural historical criteria is for natural history. Kant tried to supply the former. Kant's principles of critique and a *report of his undertaking*. [...] The elements or single characteristics are planets – which revolve around a central characteristic, the sun. Their theory encompasses the laws of their relations and mutual motions and variations, since all theory is astronomy. Their natural system is their life system – the system of their mechanism. The errors of Ptolemy and Tycho de Brahe have likewise dominated here. A single, subordinate characteristic became the main characteristic which generated wrong one-sided systems. The optical illusion similarly dominated where the

<sup>17</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 391).

<sup>18</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 392).

<sup>19</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 60 (HKA III: 250).

<sup>20</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 350 (HKA III: 303).

celestial body with all its worlds seemed to orbit round the one single characteristic. Many people became obsessed with this and it resulted in false conclusions. Kant here played the role of Copernicus, declaring the empirical I (*Ich*) along with the external world to be a planet, and placing the center of the system in the moral law or moral I – while Fichte is Newton, the discoverer of the laws of the inner celestial system – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Copernicus.<sup>21</sup>

PHILOSOPHY. The true philosophical system must contain the pure history of philosophy. The latter applied to the special chronicle of the development of philosophy among humanity – yields the history of human philosophy. Fichte is the reviser of the Kantian critique – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kant – the higher organ, insofar as Kant is the lower organ. To what extent has he perfected this? He sets the reader down at the point where Kant takes them up. His *Wissenschaftslehre* is therefore the philosophy of the critique – its introduction – its purer part. It contains the principles of the critique. Yet to my mind, it is still greatly lacking in this ideal. It only encompasses one part of the philosophy of the critique – and is just as incomplete as the critique itself. – It was Kant's plan to supply a universal – an encyclopaedic critique – yet he was not able to fully carry this out, and with respect to its individual elements, he wasn't so fortunate in his execution. The same is true of the Fichtean revision of the Kantian plan for the critique.<sup>22</sup>

One could picture a highly instructive series of specific presentations of the Fichtean and Kantian systems, e.g., a poetical, a chemical, a mathematical, a musical presentation etc. A presentation, where one studies it as a scientist of philosophical genius – a historical presentation, and so forth. I have a large number of fragments on this.<sup>23</sup>

ENCYCLOPEDISTICS. The theory of right is nothing but political logic. Just as logic is nothing but juridical philosophy. Metaphysics is related to logic, as ethics is to the theory of right. (On the rights of morality in the State—and inversely, on the morality of rights). (Are laws moral?) Logicized metaphysics and the metaphysics of logic. Kant appears to have treated ethics *juridically*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 460 (HKA III: 333-335).

<sup>22</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 463 (HKA III: 335-336).

<sup>23</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 464 (HKA III: 336).

<sup>24</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 472 (HKA III: 339).

## NOVALIS

A critique of human intelligence (as the *highest degree of the meter* that we possess) must be the propaedeutic, as it were, of every other critical discipline. (The lower sensible – higher sensible, general sensible etc. faculty of knowledge). The critique of the entire human being differs from this – perhaps it requires the foregoing along with the critique of practical reason, as Kant calls it.<sup>25</sup>

(Critique of the critique = philosophical critique). (Perfection of one *critique by means of the other*).<sup>26</sup>

Kant's question: "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?" may be specifically expressed in the most varied manner.

- e.g. = Is philosophy an *art* (dogmatics) (science)?
- = Is there an art of invention without data, an absolute art of invention?
- = Can diseases etc. be created at will etc.?
- = Can we conceive verse according to rules, and insanity according to fundamental principles?
- = Is perpetual motion etc. possible?
- = Is genius possible—can genius be defined?
- = Can the circle be squared? –
- = Is *magic* possible?
- = Can God, freedom and immortality be demonstrated?
- = Does a calculation of the infinite exist?
- and so on.<sup>27</sup>

There is a great deal worth objecting to in Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*. (Relation of the will to the productive imagination).<sup>28</sup>

The genuine gain with Fichte and Kant lies in the *method* – in the *regularization of genius*. Here flashes of inspiration and methods are exhausted, so to speak, and arranged into a system. The individual results were almost already entirely present – however, the spirit of the system – the *critical* spirit was lacking, and without it the entire possession was unstable and unmanageable. The spirit becomes represented – through the purposeful reunion of the elements – through criticism – a process uniting *sense* and *will*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 540 (HKA III: 359).

<sup>26</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 541 (HKA III: 360).

<sup>27</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 650 (HKA III: 388).

<sup>28</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 782 (HKA III: 421).

<sup>29</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 921 (HKA III: 445).



With respect to the majority of his results, Plotinus was already – a critical idealist and realist. / The method of Fichte and Kant is not yet complete or presented precisely enough. Both still do not know how to experiment with facility and diversity – absolutely not *poetic* – Everything is still so awkward, so tentative.

The *method for freely generating* truth may yet become greatly broadened and simplified – thoroughly improved. There now exists a true art of experimenting – The *science of active empiricism*. (*Theory* arises from *tradition*). (All *theory* relates to art – praxis).

We must everywhere call to mind the truth – everywhere be capable of *presenting* it (in the active, productive sense).<sup>30</sup>

Kant is a fine observer and experimenter.<sup>31</sup>

On pluralism and omnism. / Kant's warning [in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*] against self-observation / His defective explanation of naiveté / His incorrect elucidation of the *remarkable plurality in public language* / – like “you” [ihr], “they” [sie] etc. (On the *soul's* courting of the *body* –).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 924 (HKA III: 445).

<sup>31</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 1002 (HKA III: 457).

<sup>32</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 1004 (HKA III: 457).