

TEXTS IN GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

On the History of Modern Philosophy

On the History of Modern Philosophy is a key transitional text in the history of European philosophy. In it F. W. J. von Schelling surveys philosophy from Descartes to German Idealism and shows why the Idealist project is ultimately doomed to failure. The lectures trace the path of philosophy from Descartes through Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi to Hegel and Schelling's own work. The extensive critiques of Hegel prefigure many of the arguments to be found in Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

This is the first English translation of *On the History of Modern Philosophy*. In his introduction Andrew Bowie sets the work in the context of Schelling's career and clarifies its philosophical issues. The translation will be of special interest to philosophers, intellectual historians, literary theorists, and theologians.

TEXTS IN GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

General Editor: RAYMOND GEUSS

The purpose of this series is to make available, in English, central works of German philosophy from Kant to the present. Although there is rapidly growing interest in the English-speaking world in different aspects of the German philosophical tradition as an extremely fertile source of study and inspiration, many of its crucial texts are not available in English or exist only in inadequate or dated translations. The series is intended to remedy that situation, and the translations where appropriate will be accompanied by historical and philosophical introductions and notes. Single works, selections from a single author, and anthologies will all be represented.

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F. W. J. VON SCHELLING
**On the History of
Modern
Philosophy**

Translation, Introduction, and Notes

by

Andrew Bowie

PROFESSOR OF EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY
ANGLIA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, CAMBRIDGE



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FOR MANFRED FRANK

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Translator's Preface

The diversity of German Idealist and Romantic philosophy has still to be fully appreciated in the English-speaking world. In the light of the revival of interest in the philosophy of German Idealism there is an obvious need for more translations of work from this tradition. Too much discussion of modern European philosophy still takes place on the basis of the limited number of already translated texts and therefore neglects questions posed by other texts that have as yet not been translated. F. W. J. von Schelling's Lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, translated here for the first time, are a crucial addition to the list of works of nineteenth-century German philosophy translated into English. The Lectures are particularly valuable because they outline most of the key philosophical ideas of Schelling's later work, virtually none of which has appeared in English. The later Schelling, while remaining true to some of the aims of German Idealist philosophy, rejected central aspects of that philosophy. In so doing he was probably the first to establish many key themes in European philosophy that reappear in the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, and others.

The Lectures were not published until after Schelling's death, and he did not, as far as we know, prepare a definitive version for publication. However, the distinguished Schelling scholar Horst Fuhrmans is sure that the text is authentic, even if its exact date is not certain (the date would seem to be either 1833–4 or 1836–7). The text translated here was compiled by K. F. A. Schelling, Schelling's son, from his father's own manuscript of the Lectures, to which he appended a few relevant supplementary texts from other work by his father. I have taken the text directly from the edition of Schelling's works prepared by K. F. A. Schelling, which appeared between 1856 and 1861, soon after Schelling's death in 1854, and which has been the standard text of Schelling's work ever since. Virtually all the extant Schelling manuscripts, including the manuscript of the Lectures, were destroyed during the Second World War, in the air raids on Munich in

July 1944 (a few texts survived in Berlin). I have made no attempt to produce a new edition of Schelling's text, a task that must be left to the editors of the new edition of Schelling's works,¹ working on the basis of surviving lecture notes made by others at Schelling's lectures. The Lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy* are unlikely to appear in that edition for some considerable time.

The use of the existing text, instead of a modern edition with a critical apparatus, is not necessarily a disadvantage: decisions about what is the "real" text of an author can be made on the basis of many differing criteria. The present translation is of the text which was available to Schelling's successors, and it is undoubtedly the work of Schelling himself. The reliability of the text is testified to by its substantial correspondences to versions of Schelling's account of modern philosophy from other sources, such as lecture notes made by members of his audience in the late 1820s, the 1830s, and the 1840s, and other parts of the son's edition. Every effort has been made to provide an accurate translation of the original and to explain, in translator's notes, obscurities that might hinder understanding. Whenever there was the serious possibility of any ambiguity I have added the German text in brackets. The only omissions in the translated text are of the son's own occasional cross references to other parts of his edition, which are of little or no help, even to a reader of the German original. I have tried to preserve Schelling's sentence structure as far as possible, and most of the idiosyncratic typographical emphases have been reproduced in italic and boldface type.

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I should like to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for enabling me to complete my work on Schelling in Tübingen. I am very grateful indeed to Manfred Frank, whose essential work in restoring the philosophical reputation of Schelling was my main inspiration for undertaking this project, and whose friendship, advice, support, fine wines, and congenial company made the work in Tübingen all the more enjoyable. Liz Bradbury's company, forbearance during my protracted absences, persuasive defenses of Hegel, and support in the midst of crises were vital. Raymond Geuss took on the project and made vital editorial suggestions, as well as persuading me to write a separate book on Schelling, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* (London, 1993). Peter Dews and I discussed many of Schel-

¹ The *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, im Auftrag der Schelling-Kommission der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, edited by H. M. Baumgartner, W. G. Jacobs, H. Krings, Stuttgart, 1976-.

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Andrew Bowie