

## THE INNOVATIONS OF IDEALISM

This collection of essays, first published in German in 1995, has been written by Rüdiger Bubner, the foremost representative of the hermeneutical approach in German philosophy. It offers an original interpretation of the tradition of German Idealist thinkers – Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel.

Professor Bubner casts fresh light on the genuine philosophical innovations in the complex of issues and aspirations that dominated German intellectual life from 1780 to 1830. His major question is: In what way did the Idealists change philosophy, reformulate traditional issues, and, especially, reinterpret traditional figures? His answer involves focusing on the literary and cultural spirit of the time, thus broadening the question of philosophical innovation and locating it within the wider framework of innovations and continuities of the Western intellectual tradition itself. Professor Bubner thus pays due attention to Plato and Aristotle, Rousseau, Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Goethe.

In this fine translation by Nicholas Walker, *The Innovations of Idealism* will be of special interest to students of German philosophy, literary theory, and the history of ideas.

Rüdiger Bubner is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg.

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RÜDIGER BUBNER

*University of Heidelberg*

Translated by Nicholas Walker



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## FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

I am particularly gratified to see the completion of a long and difficult project with the appearance of this collection of essays. Even in our age of instant electronic communication, philosophical texts continue to present persistent problems for the ongoing task of hermeneutic appropriation. Despite all difficulties, Terence Moore at Cambridge University Press has always remained committed to the task of making these essays on the philosophy of German Idealism available in English translation. Robert Pippin, the editor of the Modern European Philosophy series, has also encouraged the project, and I am most grateful for his friendly assistance throughout. I would also like to express my appreciation to Terry Pinkard for his moral and intellectual support.

Above all, I am indebted to the translator, Nicholas Walker, who has undertaken the painstaking and challenging task of appropriate linguistic adaptation and transformation. I feel that the English translation has effectively succeeded in both capturing the thought and reflecting the style of the original essays. To reproduce a specific argument faithfully within the appropriate conceptual framework, and to present it without distortion in another language at once so close to and so remote from German, is no mean achievement.

These considerations are broadly practical in character. But I would also like to make a further point in this connection. The question of the relationship between so-called Continental philosophy and the so-called analytic tradition involves a range of fundamental problems of understanding that, despite the familiar contemporary rhetoric of communicative reason and the universally shared discourse of modern sciences and disciplines, are by no means easy to clarify. My hope was, and remains, carefully and cautiously to suggest something of the deeper potential unity behind the real diversity of approaches that characterise

these philosophical traditions. There is no question of assuming some pre-existing unity that could simply be exposed by technical, procedural or purely scholarly means.

During the eighteenth century, philosophy originating from the British Isles exercised a very considerable influence on German thought up to, and of course including, Kant. And German classical philosophy in turn certainly left its mark on many thinkers in Britain and North America in the latter half of the nineteenth century before this tradition was radically challenged in the name of a resurgent and emphatic empiricism by G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. The subsequent influence of the emigrant neo-Positivists of the Vienna School also helped to strengthen and intensify this development even further. During the 1960s, I was able to hear Peter Strawson's lectures on Kant, which would result in an important book (*The Bounds of Sense*). It was largely thanks to Strawson that the founder of classical German philosophy became the subject of significantly fresh attention and renewed interest at this time.

The Canadian, Charles Taylor, later helped to initiate a similar breakthrough in relation to Hegel's idealism, which was still widely regarded as little more than an apologetic expression of conservative ideology. Richard Rorty, our highly valued academic guest at the University of Frankfurt in the 1970s, has continued throughout the last two decades to play a key role in building bridges between our different philosophical cultures. And, of course, a number of other thinkers have also lent their voices to the further development of this dialogue.

The once familiar mutual accusations of rationalism and obscurantism have thankfully begun to fade in the light of a genuine exchange of relevant views and perspectives. It is naturally impossible to predict the shape that the emerging philosophy of the new century will take. But one thing at least is clear: without a living re-examination and re-evaluation of the tradition, our philosophical prospects will surely remain unnecessarily limited. As contemporary thinkers, we must be prepared to assume the role of mediators here. And this is a task that is more demanding than it may initially sound.