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ARTICLE

Speaking with Forked Tongue: Irony in Contention between Schlegel and Hegel

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the nature and relevance of irony, especially so-called "romantic irony" closely associated with the ideas of the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, by investigating the controversy that erupted at the beginning of the nineteenth century between Schlegel and G.W.F. Hegel. The philosophical, moral, social and political ramifications of Schlegel's theories regarding irony are the main topics of discussion. These were the elements of Schlegel's theory that drew Hegel's severe criticism, which has had a significant impact on the subsequent scholarly discussion of the subject. Many European and American intellectuals have intervened in and developed the field of irony in the aftermath of the disagreement between these two well-known German thinkers. The so-called "irony debate" is of continuing interest because this early contretemps between Hegel and Schlegel on the battlefield of "irony" foreshadowed many features of current and ongoing scholarly debates among postmodernists, poststructuralists, materialists, Marxists, liberals and conservatives. This study differs from most philosophical analyses of the controversy by emphasising the gendered aspects of both Schlegel's and Hegel's positions.

Keywords: Friedrich Schelling; Friedrich Schlegel; G.W.F. Hegel; irony; romantic irony; romantic movement

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to investigate the meaning and significance of irony, in particular so-called "romantic irony" by examining in some detail the contretemps that broke out on the subject between Friedrich Schlegel and G.W.F. Hegel around the turn of the nineteenth century. The focus will be on the philosophical, ethical and political implications of Schlegel's theorising about irony. These were the aspects of Schlegel's theory that attracted Hegel's critical response, which has become extremely influential in shaping the ensuing academic discourse on the topic. The so-called "irony debate" between these two prominent German thinkers has been significant in framing subsequent academic analysis of irony, a subject that has provoked participation, intervention and development by a long line of European and American intellectuals, including Søren Kierkegaard (1989), Paul de Man (1983; 1996), Richard Rorty (1989), Gary Handwerk (1985) [1-5] and many others. Rorty has noted "our increasingly ironist culture" (1989, 94) [4], and it will be evident in what follows that many aspects of contemporary academic debates among poststructuralists, postmodernists, materialists, liberals, neoliberals, conservatives and Marxists were prefigured in this early confrontation between Schlegel and Hegel on the battleground of "irony".

I will begin with an abbreviated biography of Schlegel, he being the lesser known of the two original antagonists, and will then outline the main elements of Schlegel's philosophical approach to what he identified as irony. The essential arguments raised by Hegel against Schlegel's theory are then canvassed. In the Conclusion some final points about the significance of the dispute are

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addressed.

2. SCHLEGEL: BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) grew up in Hanover, where his father was a Lutheran pastor. After abandoning his university legal studies, Schlegel devoted himself entirely to literary work. In 1796 he moved to Jena, a small university town in the small German state of Saxe-Weimar, and began to frequent an intellectual coterie which included his older brother, August, and his wife, Caroline, together with Novalis (a.k.a. Friedrich von Hardenberg), Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Schelling, Clemens Brentano and Johann Fichte (Wulf 2022) [6]. At this time Schlegel was publishing on Greek and Roman history and literature, and was sought after by Goethe, for example, for advice on classical questions (Trevelyan 1972, 223-224) [7]. Together with his brother, in 1798 Schlegel started the periodical, the *Athenaeum*, as an outlet for the ideas of the Jena circle. In a letter to his brother, Schlegel expressed the hope that through their journal they could become "critical dictators of Germany" (Dane 1991, 117) [8]. Schlegel is generally acknowledged as the founder and main promoter of the romantic school of German literature, with which the Jena set was identified (Millan-Zaibert 2007) [9]. In these early years Schlegel was an atheist and a political radical who supported the French Revolution and republicanism.

In 1799 Schlegel published *Lucinde*, an unfinished and unconventional novel which provoked a scandal. Even his friends in Jena had discouraged its publication. *Lucinde* was a fragmentary and disjointed work which expressed some of the main themes of the romantic movement, such as the insistence on the idea of untrammelled individual freedom, especially in the form of free love. The work caused outrage because it was believed to be a depiction of the liaison, unsanctified by marriage, between Schlegel and Dorothea Veit, who had been married to a Berlin banker but left her husband to live with Schlegel. The novel was widely perceived to be an argument against marriage. Schlegel shocked society by claiming that "the rights of love are higher than the ceremonies of the altar" (Blanning 2011, 70) [10]. Though erotic and a little breathless in places, the book was not, *pace* Isaiah Berlin (2000a, 114) [11], pornographic. The novel was defended by Schlegel's friend, the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who emphasised what he saw as its divine qualities and called Schlegel a "priest of love and wisdom" (Thomas 1914, 120) [12].

The novel touched on the rights of women, especially their rights to sensual enjoyment. Schlegel had been influenced by what he saw as the classical Greeks' conceptions regarding women, expressed particularly in Plato's *Symposium* [13], where male and female were portrayed as two halves of what had originally been a complete human whole, and sexual attraction was seen as the desire for reunification. Schlegel was opposed to exaggerated versions of masculinity and femininity, and foregrounded instead the equality and complementarity of the sexes (Thomas 1914, 121) [12]. Although not emphasised in the academic literature to date, it is probable that Schlegel's feminist leanings contributed significantly to the widespread rejection of his work by contemporary society. His partner Dorothea Veit, daughter of Moses Mendelssohn, was also an accomplished writer; indeed there has been a suggestion that *Lucinde* might have been her work (Berlin 2006, 202) [14], and it is certainly possible that she contributed to the writing of it. They were eventually married in 1804.

The publication of *Lucinde* and the ensuing public outcry jeopardised Schlegel's future academic prospects. Throughout most of his life, he was unsuccessful in obtaining a stable post and a secure livelihood (Eichner 1970, 125) [15]. In 1808 Schlegel became a Catholic, and from that time he grew increasingly conservative. As his political views diverged from his early radicalism, Schlegel turned towards advocating monarchism and rule under a revived Holy Roman Empire (Eichner 1970, 130) [15]. He gained employment in the Austrian civil service and worked for the arch-conservative Prince Metternich, who wished to reinstate the pre-revolutionary European *status quo ante* after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. From 1814 Schlegel adopted the aristocratic signifier "von"; it has been suggested that by referring to him as "Friedrich von Schlegel" or even "Lord Friedrich von Schlegel", Hegel intended to mock such

baseless aristocratic pretensions (Eichner 1970, 125) [15]. In time Schlegel recoiled from his scandalous novel *Lucinde*, which was omitted from his collected works.

3. SCHLEGEL'S IRONY; OR, "TRIFLING WITH EVERYTHING" (HEGEL)

Schlegel developed his theory of irony in a series of so-called "fragments" published over the period from 1797 to 1800 in the *Lyceum* and later in the *Athenaeum*, the mouthpiece of the Jena romantics. They are indeed fragmentary, often enigmatic, interspersed among discussions of diverse other topics and probably themselves frequently ironical (De Man 1983, 211) [2]. Irony was also mentioned, very briefly, in *Lucinde*, in the form of a dialogue, full of paradoxes, between the protagonist, Julius, and a friend about the nature of friendship. This deliberate chaos in the modes of presentation has made it more difficult to reach any definite or unified understanding of Schlegel's concept of irony, and has resulted in an extensive range of different interpretations of his meaning. Indeed one of Hegel's jibes at the 'apostles of irony' associated with the Jena group was that they were "very familiar with such expressions as 'irony', but without telling us what they mean" (Hegel 1975, 69) [16]. Although Schlegel did use the expression "romantic irony" a few times in his unpublished papers, this terminology came into general use because it was subsequently attributed to Schlegel's theory by his followers and other commentators; it is often used as a rubric under which to refer to his thinking in this area and sometimes to his philosophy in general.

The following discussion of Schlegel's theory of irony is based on the Fragments, published under the title *Philosophical Fragments*, in Peter Firchow's translation [17]. This compilation contains the fragments originally published in the *Lyceum* and *Athenaeum* journals, arranged in three series. Following the convention adopted by most scholars working in this field, I identify the first series as the Lyceum Fragments, the second as the Athenaeum Fragments, and the third as the Ideas Fragments. To follow scholarly convention, and also to show respect for what I interpret to have been Schlegel's authorial intentions, quotations from Schlegel below are from this publication, and indicated by the series followed by the number of the fragment in that series.

In his discussion of the concept of irony, Schlegel firmly associates it with paradox and with self-contradictory statements, and goes so far as to make the claim that one should contradict oneself continually. Lyceum Fragment 48 states, in its entirety: "Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great." Schlegel affirms the value of holding contradictory thoughts together simultaneously, as a method of accessing truths impossible to attain employing a non-contradictory logic. Athenaeum Fragment 121 asserts that "An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts." Whereas other variants of the dialectic, including Hegel's, describe a movement towards a single, unified synthesis, Schlegel puts the emphasis on the continual, unending interchange between antitheses, thus theorising a non-synthesising dialectic. Schlegel proposed that it is useful to stay indefinitely in the in-between space between the antinomies of thought. This idea is closely related to the well-known concept of "negative capability", later expounded by the English romantic poet John Keats to refer to the ability to tolerate ambiguities (Ou 2009) [18]. Schlegel's theory of irony recognised the fruitfulness of contradiction well before Hegel developed this idea as a celebrated central element of his philosophical system; although it should be emphasised that Schlegel's concept of the dialectic differed significantly from that associated with Hegel.

Using language redolent of the contemporary neoliberal argot of "disruption" and "agility", Schlegel maintained that "Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos" (Ideas Fragment 69) [17]. Schlegel's stress on "clear consciousness" in this fragment underlines the importance in his theorising of consciousness, self-consciousness, awareness, reflection, and reflexivity, all preeminent and characteristic values in the German idealist tradition. Consistent with that tradition, he also describes "irony" as "the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius" (Lyceum Fragment 42) [17]. Yet, ironically, he also emphasises the importance of "instinct" (Athenaeum Fragment 51) [17].

Within the tradition of German idealism, self-consciousness is regarded as a source of freedom for the individual. Schlegel declared that irony "is the freest of all licences, for by its means one transcends oneself" (Lyceum Fragment 108) [17]. In this Fragment Lyceum 108, Schlegel sets out some of the antinomies that irony brings together, held in suspension: the "playful and serious", the "guilelessly open and deeply hidden", "*savoir vivre* and scientific spirit", a "perfectly instinctive and a perfectly conscious philosophy", and the "indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative". Schlegel warned that things would go badly if "the whole world were ever to become wholly comprehensible in earnest" (2002, 305) [19].

In Athenaeum Fragment 226, Schlegel applies himself to the antinomy of abstract concepts and empirical particulars, taking the occasion to offer recommendations on methodological and epistemological issues relating to the work of the historian:

> Since people are always so much against hypotheses, they should try sometime to begin studying history without one. It's impossible to say that a thing is, without saying what it is. In the very process of thinking of facts, one relates them to concepts, and, surely, it is not a matter of indifference to which. If one is aware of this, then it is possible to determine and choose consciously among all the possible concepts the necessary ones to which facts of all kinds should be related. If one refuses to recognize this, then the choice is surrendered to instinct, chance, or fate; and so one flatters oneself that one has established a pure solid empiricism quite a posteriori, when what one actually has is an *aprior*i outlook that's highly one-sided, dogmatic, and transcendental (Athenaeum Fragment 226) [17].

On this occasion Schlegel's line of argument tended to valorise self-consciousness over and above instinct.

As well as offering much advice for the deployment of irony in literary and historical works, Schlegel also applied his ideas about irony to the work of the philosopher. Schlegel especially resisted architectonic or system-building approaches to philosophy, of the kind that Hegel constructed and became renowned for (Athenaeum Fragment 242) [17]. Here also irony and paradox were called for. In Athenaeum Fragment 53, Schlegel proposed that "It's equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two." Schlegel believed that such fruitful equivocation belonged especially in the realm of philosophy: "Philosophy is the real homeland of irony, which one would like to define as logical beauty: for wherever philosophy appears in oral or written dialogues —and is not simply confined into rigid systems—there irony should be asked for and provided" (Lyceum Fragment 32) [17]. Referring to Immanuel Kant's hugely influential systematic philosophy, Schlegel took issue with its apparent certainty:

> I'm disappointed in not finding in Kant's family tree of basic concepts the category "almost", a category that has surely accomplished, and spoiled, as much in the world and in literature as any other. In the mind of natural skeptics it colors all other concepts and intuitions (Lyceum Fragment 80) [17].

In their work, the philosopher should aspire to irony, in the context of demonstrating a cosmopolitan sophistication: "To sacrifice to the Graces means, when said to a philosopher, as much as: create irony and aspire to urbanity" (Athenaeum Fragment 431) [17]. In Schlegel's thinking, urban sophistication was linked to self-consciousness and reflexivity. It is not surprising that Schlegel's assertions about philosophy and advice to philosophers were highly provoking to Hegel as the rising star of German philosophy.

4. HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF IRONY; OR, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

By the time he was mounting his critique of Friedrich Schlegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) had become the dominant influence in German philosophy. Born in Stuttgart, Hegel's early academic career was as a university student, a family tutor, and a private lecturer. He was in Jena in 1806, putting the finishing touches to his first major work of philosophy, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, when Napoleon demolished the army of Prussia, the most powerful

German state, at the Battle of Jena. Hegel became a life-long admirer of Napoleon, the beginning of his devotion to the "great men" of history. Hegel's publishing career had a slow start. He was 37 when *The Phenomenology of Spirit* appeared in 1807, and initially critical responses to it were lukewarm. His academic career was then interrupted by the French occupation. Hegel published his *Science of Logic* in three volumes in 1812, 1813 and 1816. In 1816 he was offered the position of Professor of Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. There he wrote the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, which outlined his philosophical system as a whole. As a result of these publications, Hegel's reputation had grown to the extent that the Prussian Minister of Education invited him to take up the prestigious professorial chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin, where he remained from 1818 until his death. Hegel published several more books and his academic status and influence were entrenched. In 1830 he became Rector of the university. Hegel gained large numbers of followers and disciples, and his philosophical ideas became the reference point for philosophers and other thinkers in the humanities during his later life, for many decades after his death, and to some extent up to the present day.

In his discussions of Schlegel's theory of irony, Hegel consistently adopted a dismissive – even sarcastic – tone. For example, he wrote in his *Aesthetics*: "This irony was invented by Friedrich von Schlegel, and many others have babbled about it or are now babbling about it again" (Hegel 1975, 66) [16]. He disparaged Schlegel's philosophical knowledge and his intellectual and speculative abilities (Hegel 1975, 63) [16]. Hegel's assault on romantic irony began as early as *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) where, in the section headed Morality, it took the form of a thinly-veiled allusion to Schlegel's concept of irony and identified it simply as "evil" (Hegel 1977, 394, 401) [20]. Hegel's references to Schlegel's irony were undisguised in his later works, and were consistently hostile and demeaning. As Judith Norman put it, Hegel portrayed Schlegel, and his associates, in diabolical terms as "the limit case of moral, artistic, and intellectual depravity" (Norman 2007, 310) [21].

Hegel's commentary on this topic, as on all other questions, is by no means clear, but demonstrates his characteristic sprawling and imprecise method of presentation and argumentation. Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks, Hegel's critique of Schlegel's general notion of irony, especially in his *Aesthetics*, is at times penetrating, and he makes some persuasive arguments. Therefore, it is with the *Aesthetics*, based on lectures Hegel delivered in the 1820s, that the exposition of Hegel's critique will begin.

Hegel saw the roots of Schlegel's "so-called 'irony'" in the philosophy of Johann Fichte, a fellow member of the Jena intellectual circle. According to Hegel, Fichte's epistemology put the ego at its centre as "the absolute principle of all knowing, reason, and cognition", as well as a repository of "abstract freedom and unity" (Hegel 1975, 64) [16]. Furthermore, the ego as theorised by Fichte has a relentless drive towards self-creation and self- expression: "the *ego* is a *living*, active individual, and its life consists in making its individuality real in its own eyes and in those of others, in expressing itself, and bringing itself into appearance" (Hegel 1975, 65). Fichte's philosophical position – developed as an objection to that of Kant – was that reality, the whole world of things-in-themselves, was created by the active human mind (Fichte 2021) [22].

The problem, as Hegel saw it, was that the ego, according to Fichte, is the source of all access to the real: "Whatever is, is only by the instrumentality of the *ego*, and what exists by my instrumentality I can equally well annihilate again" (Hegel 1975, 64) [16]. As Hegel interprets Fichte, this means that the individual can be aware only of a shadow or a show of reality: "everything genuinely and independently real becomes only a show, not true and genuine on its own account or through itself, but a mere appearance due to the *ego* in whose power and caprice and at whose free disposal it remains" (Hegel 1975, 65) [16]. In particular, for the artist, this means that there is always an ironical distance separating the producer of art from their work:

> on this principle, I live as an artist when all my action and my expression in general, in connection with any content whatever, remains for me a mere show and assumes a shape which is wholly in my power. In that case I am not really in *earnest* either with this content or, generally, with its expression and actualization (Hegel 1975, 65, italics in original) [16].

In Hegel's view this would make the work of art less satisfying for both the artist and the consuming public.

Hegel also stressed that Schlegel's theory of irony was elitist, in that it would effectively place the ironist in a superior position with respect to others who take her seriously: "they are simply deceived, poor limited creatures, without the faculty and ability to apprehend and reach the loftiness of my standpoint" (Hegel 1975, 65) [16]. Hegel's mockery of Schlegel's adoption of the aristocratic title "von" was related to this charge of elitism directed against Schlegel's philosophy of irony. In Hegel's view, the superior self-positioning of the ironist implies that law, morals, the demands of social responsibility do not apply to their "divine genius", but only to other people for whom these demands and responsibilities still count as "fixed, essential, and obligatory" (Hegel 1975, 66) [16]. For Hegel, this suggests that the standpoint of irony leads to social bonds being snapped, so that the ironist lives only in the solipsistic "bliss of self-enjoyment" (Hegel 1975, 66) [16]. According to Hegel, the attitude of irony will produce a sense of "the vanity of everything factual, moral, and of intrinsic worth, the nullity of everything objective and absolutely valid" (Hegel 1975, 66) [16]. The ironist will be floating groundlessly with no solid basis for establishing truth or moral good.

Clearly Hegel also saw political implications in Schlegel's theory of irony, in the form of a challenge to the existing social structure of law and morality. At this point in his commentary, Hegel suddenly evinces sympathy and compassion for the wielder of irony, whom he sees as suffering from a "craving for the solid and substantial", a yearning to escape this "unsatisfied abstract inwardness", and the "dissatisfaction of this quiescence and impotence" (Hegel 1975, 66) [16]. Hegel depicts the ego of the ironist as unreal, empty and, in the end, morbid (Hegel 1975, 67) [16]. Furthermore, when applied to artistic production the ironical standpoint, in Hegel's view, leads to "insincerity and hypocrisy" (Hegel 1975, 68) [16].

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, based on lectures given in the mid-1820s, Hegel reiterated his main arguments against Schlegelian irony, underlining his objection that irony trivialises all that is good or true:

> It is when subjective consciousness maintains its independence of everything, that it says, "It is I who through my educated thoughts can annul all determinations of right, morality, good, &c., because I am clearly master of them, and I know that if anything seems good to me I can easily subvert it, because things are only true to me in so far as they please me now." This irony is thus only a trifling with everything, and it can transform all things into show: to this subjectivity nothing is any longer serious, for any seriousness which it has, immediately becomes dissipated again in jokes, and all noble or divine truth vanishes away or becomes mere triviality (Hegel 1995, 401) [23].

In his *Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel directed arguments against Schlegel and against *Lucinde* in particular as representing a position opposed to marriage, "the view that the wedding ceremony is superfluous and a formality which might be discarded" (Hegel 1967, 263) [24]. Hegel's way of characterising Schlegel's position is that: "Surrender to sensual impulse is here represented as necessary to prove the freedom and inwardness of love – an argument not unknown to seducers" (Hegel 1967, 263) [24]. Hegel's discussion takes a moralistic position asserting the superiority of "the true and ethical character of the marriage relation" over "the contingency and caprice of bodily desire" (Hegel 1967, 114) [24]. The polemic against Schlegel at this point consists of a denigration of the physical body, the senses and sex, as contrasted with the elevated realm of *geist* (spirit/mind), with which Hegel's own system of philosophy was closely identified.

Hegel also claimed that for a woman, but not for a man, sexual relations outside of marriage means that she "loses her honour" (Hegel 1967, 263) [24]. Hegel here makes a strong point with respect to the prevalent social mores of early nineteenth century Europe, where the double standard regarding sexual behaviour was entrenched. In the absence of marriage, women could have been more exposed to ostracism, abuse and exploitation. However, Hegel's discussion of

these points is embedded in an essentialist and sexist discourse on the supposed physical, intellectual and ethical divergences between the sexes. For example:

> man has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself…Woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind (Hegel 1967, 114) [24].

Hegel does not present this merely as a description of the current social arrangements, of which as a general picture it was an accurate representation, but as an outcome of the inherent nature and qualities of the sexes.

In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel also addressed Schlegel's conception of irony, taking an approach similar to that which he subsequently developed in the *Aesthetics* and *The History of Philosophy*. Hegel characterised Schlegel's theory of irony as the "principle of subjectivity knowing itself as supreme", which in Hegel's assessment was an "exaggeration" (Hegel 1967, 101) [24]. In Hegel's view, Schlegel had taken subjectivism even beyond what Fichte had actually argued, making "subjective caprice a guiding principle in ethics" and in aesthetic judgments (Hegel 1967, 258) [24].

To summarise, in his commentary on both Schlegel's irony and Schlegel's ideas about social questions including marriage and women, Hegel's tone was generally contemptuous, even sarcastic, about both Schlegel and his followers. Hegel repudiated irony as conceptualised by Schlegel as elitist, unethical, psychologically damaging to its exponents, and philosophically unsatisfactory because of its inability to account for objective or material reality. Hegel rejected Schlegel's notions about marriage and free love, presenting arguments that were by turns pragmatic, moralistic and sexist. Hegel's critique of Schlegel was important in that it set the terms and parameters of the dispute. All subsequent debate on the matter has tended to take place in Hegel's shadow. The contretemps was framed in terms of subjectivity versus objectivity; and the claims of society as opposed to the claims of the individual.

5. CONCLUSIONS

I have used the term "contretemps" to describe the philosophical disagreement between Hegel and Schlegel, but it is notable that the dispute was very one-sided, in two senses: first, in that critique together with more personal barbs emanated only from Hegel's side; and second, in the sense that the social capital enjoyed by the two antagonists was clearly unbalanced, with the weight of social standing and approval resting very much on the side of Hegel. It is also worth noting that Hegel's critique was presented up to twenty years after Schlegel had expressed his ideas concerning irony, by which time Schlegel's own political worldview had turned much more conservative. Hegel was still criticising Schlegel's early formulations regarding irony – or Hegel's interpretations of them – only a couple of years before Schlegel died. It would seem that it was indeed a "contretemps" in the original French meaning of a fencing thrust made out of time. This seems to indicate that Hegel identified in Schlegel's ideas, and/or their development in the work of his followers, a significant threat, probably intensified by personal animosity. The perceived threat, in Hegel's eyes, could have been against the established social and political order, including existing gender relations, as many of Hegel's salvos discussed above would suggest; and/or the sensed threat could have been against the academic and social dominance of Hegel's own philosophical system, which by the 1820s was becoming firmly institutionalised.

In his various publications, Hegel failed to acknowledge adequately his intellectual indebtedness to Schlegel (and to others in the Jena circle, especially Schelling). Hegel had actually attended Schlegel's lectures in Jena at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Despite Hegel's attacks, Schlegel's theory of irony continued to be taken seriously, referenced and analysed, though not always endorsed, among literary scholars and critics. But it is only in recent years that philosophers have begun to recognise the importance of Schlegel's ideas within the history of philosophy. Ironically, this has occurred, in part, as a side effect of a huge revival of interest in the philosophy of Schelling, Schlegel's colleague at Jena and Hegel's early friend and,

after the publication of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, life-long rival (Hegel and Schelling fell out when Schelling objected that Hegel had not given adequate acknowledgement of his philosophical ideas in *The Phenomenology*). The neglect of Schlegel's contributions to philosophy can be largely attributed to the long reach of Hegel's commanding authority and influence, even among philosophers who differed from him on philosophical grounds.

The enduring impact of Hegel's denunciation of Schlegel can be seen, for instance, in the assessments offered by Isaiah Berlin, the Oxford-based liberal philosopher, who was by no means an admirer of the Hegelian philosophical system (Crowder 2025) [26]. Writing during the second half of the twentieth century, Berlin castigated "the cult of unbridled individualism of Schlegel's *Lucinde*" (2000b, 335) [25] and "the irrationalist notion of freedom" developed by "extreme romantics", most notably Schlegel (2006, 302) [14]. In his lectures and publications, Berlin repeatedly condemned the novel *Lucinde*:

> in which an infant kicking and screaming is suddenly presented as a symbol of absolute freedom, totally unconfined by laws, conventions, social bonds – and in which marriage is denounced, and freedom of association between the sexes is advocated…This is the ideal of violent anarchy (2006, 202-203) [14].

Berlin characterised *Lucinde*, incorrectly, as "a pornographic novel of the fourth order", "giving very violent descriptions indeed of various types of lovemaking" (2000a, 113-114) [11]. As can be seen, Berlin's commentary on Schlegel differed little from that of Hegel a century and a half earlier. One of the most influential European philosophers of the twentieth century, Berlin advocated for liberalism on the basis of the unavoidable diversity and pluralism of values – moral, intellectual and political. This might make his outraged rejection of Schlegel's conception of irony seem incongruous; but Berlin, like Hegel, was an acclaimed and satisfied member, and upholder, of the academic and social establishment.

By the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, romanticism was in general falling out of favour among educated circles in Germany. In this intellectual context, Hegel was motivated to distance his philosophy from the ideas and general orientation of the German romantic movement. Hegel wanted to differentiate his philosophy, to portray it as rigorous, disciplined and logical; and thus to demarcate it sharply from what was seen as the fluid, imaginative and even sentimental approaches of the romantics. There was clearly a gendered dimension to this representational schema. Hegel wished to emphasise the hard, muscular, masculine approaches and methods of his philosophical school, and to picture the romantics on the other hand, and especially Schlegel, as insubstantial, lazy, incoherent and effeminate. In his presentation of this binary schema, Hegel often made use of the name of Friedrich Schlegel as a signifier to stand in for the romantic movement as a whole. Hegel's demonisation of Schlegel was part of this rhetorical strategy.

Like Karl Marx and his followers who, as is well known, derived much of their philosophical grounding and methodologies from Hegel, Hegel was at pains to emphasise the scientific status of his philosophy. This can be seen, for example, in the titles of some of his major publications. This was a time when science was seen to be making huge advances, both theoretically and in terms of technological successes, and it would appear that Hegel was among those philosophers who wanted to give their work a scientific cast in order to share in the prestigious aura that increasingly surrounded the sciences. Strongly differentiating his approach from what was often characterised as the emotional swamp of romanticism, was an essential part of shoring up the scientific standing of his system. Hegel correctly perceived the disruptive, destabilising potential of Schlegel's theories of romantic irony – to Hegel's philosophy, to his academic stature, and to established social structures, including the system of gender relations. His responses to the challenge, in consequence, were both intense and virulent.

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