



The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795-1804

By Dalia Nassar

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The absolute was one of the most significant philosophical concepts in the early nineteenth century, particularly for the German romantics. Its exact meaning and its role within philosophical romanticism remain, however, a highly contested topic among contemporary scholars. In *The Romantic Absolute*, Dalia Nassar offers an illuminating new assessment of the romantics and their understanding of the absolute. In doing so, she fills an important gap in the history of philosophy, especially with respect to the crucial period between Kant and Hegel.

Scholars today interpret philosophical romanticism along two competing lines: one emphasizes the romantics' concern with epistemology, the other their concern with metaphysics. Through careful textual analysis and systematic reconstruction of the work of three major romantics—Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Schelling—Nassar shows that neither interpretation is fully satisfying. Rather, she argues, one needs to approach the absolute from both perspectives. Rescuing these philosophers from frequent misunderstanding, and even dismissal, she articulates not only a new angle on the philosophical foundations of romanticism but on the meaning and significance of the notion of the absolute itself.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Romanticism is a complex and many faceted phenomenon, and our understanding of (and wonder at) this fascinating movement can only gain by the multiplicity of perspectives with which scholars have approached it. Nassar’s book gives us one of the most interesting and insightful philosophical approaches I have read and will no doubt be a landmark in the scholarship for some time to come.”

(Judith Norman *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*)

“Modern scholarship on classical German philosophy has demonstrated the role of early Romanticism in defining the post-Kantian intellectual agenda. Dalia Nassar’s excellent study of three members of the movement, Novalis, F. Schlegel, and Schelling, provides an illuminating account of how their common concern to develop a philosophy of the ‘Absolute’, together with the conceptual challenges inherent to such a project, shaped their ideas and generated distinctive profiles. . . . For students approaching the subject for the first time, Nassar’s book provides a highly readable, reliable, and informative introduction to key themes and figures (including discussion of relations to Kant, Fichte, Jacobi, and—notably—Goethe). Seasoned scholars of the period will also find plenty to keep them thinking, in Nassar’s problem-oriented analyses and eye-opening comparisons. Required reading for those interested in the field.”

(Brady Bowman *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*)

“An engaging book on the philosophical movement known as German Romanticism. . . . Nassar’s treatment of her principal subjects is first-rate, and her grasp of both primary texts and recent secondary literature impressive. Her writing is clear and accessible despite the thorny technical vocabulary of her subjects. While this is not a comprehensive history of philosophical Romanticism, Nassar is deeply conversant with the intellectual and cultural milieus of the era and puts this knowledge to good use when contextualizing and illuminating her subjects.”

(D. C. Kolb *Choice*)

“*The Romantic Absolute* is an excellent book. Dalia Nassar has a superb command of the very difficult materials she deals with and makes a strong case for the significance of ‘romantic philosophy’ by offering extensive readings of Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Schelling. Not simply carving out a little niche but addressing *the* core issue in Germany around 1800, she thinks along with these thinkers, unfolding how they explore different versions of the ‘absolute.’”

(John H. Smith, University of California, Irvine)

“Dalia Nassar’s *The Romantic Absolute* is an excellent book. It focuses on the still relatively neglected topic of the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of German romanticism. Nassar argues for interpreting the leading romantics as constructive metaphysicians (a reading which leads her to include Friedrich Schelling as one of them). Her historical scholarship is first-rate, her critical discussion of other secondary literature consistently illuminating, and she writes with a rare combination of linguistic mastery and intellectual clarity that makes her book a pleasure to read.”

(Michael Forster, Bonn University)

“In *The Romantic Absolute*, Dalia Nassar explores the treacherous philosophical territory between Kant and Hegel, which is the reserve of the early romantics: the poet Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), the

classicist Friedrich Schlegel, and the boy-philosopher Friedrich Schelling. Danger lurks here. Without a reliable guide, the reader can quickly tumble into crevasses of incomprehension. Nassar provides such a guide. With articulate verve, she shows how the romantics construed nature and mind as identical, how in Schelling's terms nature was the poetry of mind and mind the outgrowth of nature. Following a careful path through thickets of disputing critics, she illuminates the darker areas of German romanticism and protects the reader from sliding into the slough of despond."

(Robert J. Richards, University of Chicago)

About the Author

Dalia Nassar is assistant professor of philosophy at Villanova University and an Australian Research Council Fellow at the University of Sydney. She lives in Sydney, Australia.

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