Good evening. This is Barbara Wahrheit, speaking to you from the University at Jena, where we have just been attending a memorial service for the great philosopher Immanuel Kant, who died yesterday in Königsberg at the age of seventy-nine. Professor Kant leaves behind him what has to be the greatest philosophical legacy of modern times. There is not a poet nor an intellectual in Germany who has not been deeply affected by his work, and in his memory, we have hurriedly put together a symposium of some of the most influential thinkers in Germany, to tell us about their reactions to Kant and the new directions in which they are taking his critical philosophy. We hope that this will be a fitting tribute to the man who has made Germany the center of philosophical life in Europe, probably for the rest of the nineteenth century.

We are sorry to announce that two of our invited speakers regret that they are unable to join us in honoring Professor Kant tonight. Friedrich Schiller, the great playwright, tells us that he is very ill and desperately trying to finish his latest play, Wilhelm Tell, which he describes as a Kantian drama of freedom. We also regret that the great poet Johann Goethe will not be with us. He explained to me that despite his great admiration of Kant, he thinks himself too poor an abstract thinker to do justice to the great philosopher.

With us tonight are six of the leading intellectual lights of German letters. All of them have expressed an abiding debt of gratitude to Immanuel Kant and many of them are beginning to call themselves “German Idealists,” to express their allegiance to the late Professor. They are:

[camera pans across the long table, then pans back and dollies in for tight close-up of each panelist as he is introduced]

Johann Fichte from Berlin, the most controversial of the neo-Kantians, was fired from the University of Jena in 1799 on a charge of atheism. And yet he sees his entire philosophy as an extension and a systematization of Kant’s Critiques. He became instantly popular throughout Germany, in fact, when his first published book, Critique of All Revelation, was mistaken for Kant’s new book on religion, back in 1792. By the time the mistake was corrected, Fichte had become a celebrity. He summarized his own views in his Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre), which has gone through several editions and revisions since 1794 to become one of the most influential books of the decade.
Introducing the German Idealists

On Professor Fichte's right is Friedrich Schelling from the University of Wurzburg, formerly professor at the University of Jena. Herr Schelling is the bright new star of German Idealism, who was offered a professorship at Jena at age twenty-three, when he had already published a half dozen books. He was once a close friend and disciple of Fichte, but he has now moved off in new directions, which I hope he will be willing to tell us about.

Next, we are pleased to introduce Karl Leonard Reinhold, professor of philosophy at Kiel University, who claims that his philosophy of "rational realism" is much more faithful to Kant than the new "idealism." We are told that an exciting battle is shaping up between the German Idealists and the more conservative Kantians such as Professor Reinhold. Professor Reinhold was once a student of Fichte himself, but he has recently attacked the younger idealists, particularly Schelling. And they have responded in kind. So this may turn out to be a lively evening as well as a fitting tribute to Kant.

Next, we meet Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who comes to us from the Academy of Sciences at Munich. He was a businessman for a while, but always considered himself first and foremost a philosopher. He has particularly upset many of the orthodox Kantians by taking Kant as a purely subjective idealist. Jacobi believes that Reality cannot be known or understood except through immediate feeling and belief, or Glaube. He has also upset the German Idealists by insisting that Kant's thought cannot be made into a coherent system, a goal busily being pursued by the Idealists.

Friedrich Schlegel is currently living in Paris as the editor of Europa, a literary magazine. He is the founder of das Romantik or Romanticism, which he bases on the philosophies of Fichte and Schelling. Herr Schlegel insisted that he is not a philosopher but a literary critic; it seemed to us appropriate, nonetheless, to include him here tonight. We have been warned, however, that there is some recent animosity between Schlegel and his one-time friend Schelling, who recently ran off with the wife of Schlegel's brother. Asked recently to define "Romanticism," Schlegel said, "Romantic poetry is progressive universal poetry. It shall not only unite all of poetry, but philosophy and rhetoric too. We will make poetry sociable and society poetic, and animate everything by the vibrations of humor."

Now we meet G.W.F. Hegel, currently a lecturer here at Jena. Herr Hegel is relatively unknown in the intellectual world but he has been highly recommended by Herr Schelling, and as the author of a harsh review of Reinhold (in the Critical Journal of Philosophy, which he edited with Schelling until last year) we thought it might be interesting to have him here tonight.

* * *

BW: Professor Fichte...

FICHTE: I'm not actually a professor at the moment.

BW: Herr Fichte, you probably knew Kant better than anyone else here tonight; tell us something about him.

FICHTE: Well, as you know, it was Kant who gave me my first big break and secured for me the chair at Jena. But as I became more popular, Professor Kant seemed to feel threatened by me and offended that I should suggest any changes in his supposedly eternal system. You may also know that in 1799 Kant published a rather unjust letter in which he declared that he was astounded that anyone—namely me—should think that his philosophy was not completely finished and perfect. So you see, with regard to his own work, which is how I knew him, Kant was not exactly generous.

REINHOLD: [interrupting] Perhaps that is because you betrayed him.

BW: [slightly flustered, but chooses to overlook the interruption] And you do think, Herr Fichte, that the Kantian system was imperfect and incomplete?

FICHTE: Definitely. I think in spirit it is indeed the best philosophy ever produced, but I think Kant was led astray by his love of Newton and science, and I think his emphasis on knowledge in the first Critique leads to disastrous consequences for the rest of his philosophy.

BW: For instance?

1. Open letter on Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre, August 7, 1799

   Public Declarations, No. 6; vol. xii, pp. 370-71

   . . . I hereby declare that I regard Fichte's Theory of Science [Wissenschaftslehre] as a totally indefensible system.

   I am so opposed to metaphysics, as defined according to Fichtean principles, that I have advised him, in a letter, to turn his fine literary gifts to the problem of applying the Critique of Pure Reason rather than squander them in cultivating fruitless sophistries.

   I renounce any connection with that philosophy.

   I must remark here that the assumption that I have intended to publish only a pro-
   paeutic to transcendental philosophy and not the actual system of this philosophy is incomprehensible to me. Such an intention could never have occurred to me, since
Once you recognize this, then Kant’s two worlds of knowledge and free action are not two worlds at all, but simply two different views of ourselves and the world.

BW: But Kant sometimes said they were two “standpoints.”

FICHTE: Yes, but he thought you necessarily adopted both of them. I see them rather as a choice; one can either view the world as a Newtonian machine, with ourselves as mere objects and victims of the laws of nature, or one can see himself as a moral agent, defender of the moral law, for whom the world is nothing but a stage on which we can act out our ethical struggles.

BW: Which view is the correct one?

FICHTE: Correct? I said one must choose, and the sort of philosophy one chooses depends on the kind of person one is. A philosophical system is not just a piece of furniture that one buys or throws away at will; it is rather animated by the soul of the person who holds it.

BW: Do you have a preference yourself then, Herr Fichte?

FICHTE: Of course; I prefer the moral viewpoint. The objective view, which holds the world of knowledge and ourselves as mere objects, I consider dogmatic and dehumanizing. It is a view that assumes that the world is just there for us, and we are just “there” too, as observers, as peculiar objects, but no more. The other view, which I call “idealism,” invites us to accept ourselves as moral agents and accept responsibility for the way the world is. There is no question in my mind which viewpoint is superior.

BW: And what about the world itself? Doesn’t it exist for you?

FICHTE: Of course it exists! It is a question of how it exists, for what purpose. And I say that the world exists in order for us to exert our moral wills, to present obstacles to be overcome, to accept causes to be fought and fights to be won.

BW: But do we “constitute” the world, as in Kant’s philosophy?

FICHTE: Yes, but not as objects for knowledge; we “posit” the world as an opposition to ourselves, as something to struggle in and against. We posit ourselves; we posit the not-Self; and we come to see that the not-Self is nothing but the self.

BW: So everything in your philosophy, and you think in Kant’s philosophy also, comes down to the self, to the “I”?

FICHTE: Yes, not an individual “I,” of course, but rather an absolute Self, which produces everything. And the purpose of philosophy, accordingly, is to recognize that the seeming opposi-
tion between ourselves and the world is our own doing, and that our task in life, or what I call the “vocation of man,” is to fight the good fight—the moral fight.

BW: I am sure you have been following the recent developments in France; do you look forward to the international battles that seem to be brewing?

FICHTE: Yes, I do, and I am hoping that one of the products of Napoleon’s manipulations in the German provinces will be the birth of a German state.

BW: I see. Let me ask you one more question about your relationship to Kant’s philosophy before we move on to the other speakers. You have said that the “thing-in-itself” is a travesty for the critical philosophy. What have you done with the “thing-in-itself”?

FICHTE: What have I done with it? Nothing at all. There is no such thing, and there is nothing in Kant’s philosophy that requires it.

BW: What about the world of freedom?

FICHTE: Once you agree that it is the active Self that is ultimately real, why do you need a world-in-itself over and above the world experienced by the self in action?

BW: What about the passivity of sensations? They have to be caused by something, don’t they?

FICHTE: Why? Don’t you see that according to Kant’s own view, causality is a concept within the world of experience and therefore can’t be used to explain the world of experience itself. No, sensations, too, are posited by us as hypothetical components of experience. Whatever is necessary in experience is necessary for freedom, and for no other reason.

BW: Thank you Professor—er, Herr Fichte.

FICHTE: I am surprised.

BW: Why is that, Herr Fichte?

FICHTE: You are the first reporter who hasn’t asked me if I am an atheist.

BW: Oh, are you an atheist, Herr Fichte?

FICHTE: No.

BW: Thank you again. [turns to next guest as camera pans and comes in for tight close-up] Professor Schelling, you have recently become a rather harsh critic of Herr Fichte’s philosophy, although you seem extremely close to it. What are the differences in the ways in which you have systematized Kant?

SCHELLING: Thank you. Yes, I began as an enthusiastic disciple of Fichte. In fact, my first major work, The “I” as the Principle of Philosophy, is a direct extension of Fichte’s work, as the title will tell you. I too take self-activity as the ultimate truth, and consider freedom to be both the beginning and the end of philosophy. But there the resemblance ends, even if some currently respectable philosophers can’t tell the difference. [Throws a scowl toward Reinhold, who is sitting next to him. Reinhold makes a hostile gesture in return] What is wrong with Fichte’s philosophy [Fichte frowns] is that he does not give nature and knowledge their due. Mother nature is not simply a “posi” of our moral selves; she is an independent existence and a source of marvel to anyone who does not find knowledge a tedious task compared to the heroism of revolution.

FICHTE: I object to . . .

BW: Please, Herr Fichte.

SCHELLING: So what I have done with Fichte’s philosophy is to return it to the true spirit of Kant, which includes the appreciation of knowledge and nature as well as the moral law. “The starry heavens above, the moral law within,” Kant said. But Fichte has sacrificed the heavens to the moral law.

BW: So you want to return to Kant’s celebration of knowledge and Newton?

SCHELLING: No, not at all. I agree with Fichte that Newton is offensive to our spiritual conception of ourselves, and I think mechanical explanations of the sort Kant talks about in the first Critique are the lowest level of understanding nature, hardly worth the name. It is Kant of the third Critique whom I find exhilarating. For there Kant, like Goethe, with whom I have had extensive discussions on the topic, and like Leibniz, our great German predecessor, takes a view of nature as a living force, as a purposeful “teleological system.” I do insist on a return to Kant and his appreciation of nature; but it is living nature, not dead mechanism, to which I want to return.

BW: Professor Schelling, you have become famous for the lectures you have been giving on science, which I understand include everything from physics and astronomy to zoology and psychology.

SCHELLING: Yes, I call this “the philosophy of nature,” but it is not so eclectic as you make it sound. Indeed, the core idea of my philosophy of nature is to comprehend the whole of science according to a single basic concept.

BW: What kind of concept?
SCHELLING: In a word, force.

BW: Force?

SCHELLING: Yes, although my concept is not to be equated with Newton’s mechanical concept of force (as mass times acceleration of a moving body). My concept of force ultimately means what we have called self-activity, a tendency to manifest itself, and this is to be found in everything from electricity and magnetism to the solar system and living things.

BW: Do you view the solar system as a living thing?

SCHELLING: Yes, I do.

BW: And the whole of nature, in the same manner?

SCHELLING: Yes I do, just as Kant did.

BW: But doesn’t that put you back in the same position for which Herr Fichte criticized Kant, namely, a two-worlds view of nature and free action which cannot be brought together? [Fichte nods heartily]

SCHELLING: Not at all. I too take the principle of Self and self-activity to be primary, but I see this Self, which I call the “world soul” (Weltseele) developing in two different aspects—one as self-conscious Self, as “spirit,” through philosophy, religion and art; the other as nature, which is also the self-development of the world-soul, but through matter, and not self-conscious.

BW: But these are ultimately the same?

SCHELLING: Yes, they are ultimately two aspects of one and the same Absolute self-activity.

FICHTE: An empty identity! It is a mere bandage over the problem of opposition! An excuse to avoid one’s responsibilities and moral struggles and retreat to the transcendental luxuries of the university!

SCHELLING: Herr Fichte, just because I don’t share your enthusiasm for clinking beer glasses and patriotic swords doesn’t mean that I have left the world behind me.

BW: Professor Schelling, let me ask you what this “world-soul” is; is it God?

SCHELLING: Yes, you can certainly say that. But it is a God who is one with his creation, and at one with all of us.

FICHTE: I was fired for saying that!

SCHELLING: Ah, yes, but that was because you were unfortunately less than unclear about the fact that it was not the individual ego that created the world, and you must admit that your God looks suspiciously like nothing more than the sum of human moral activity.

FICHTE: My God is the same as your God, the Absolute Self!

SCHELLING: Yes, but my God is also our creator, even if he is at one with his creation. God is the great artist who is creating himself, with nature as his material, infusing us all with his spirit. [Schlegel is heard to shout something unintelligible]

FICHTE: How can you get away with that!

SCHELLING: Because my piety has never been questioned.

BW: So, Professor Schelling, you see the universe as God creating Himself?

SCHELLING: Yes, I see art, not knowledge or moral action, as the highest form of human—and divine—activity; and I think this is what professor Kant intended in his third Critique as well.

BW: Well it certainly helps explain why you have become the patron philosopher of the romantic poets.

SCHELLING: Yes, I think poetic genius is the most divine human attribute. [Schlegel gives a cheer]

BW: Thank you, Professor Schelling. Professor Reinhold, I know you have some considerable disagreements with what has been said here so far.

REINHOLD: Yes, indeed I do. I see this squabbling between Herren Fichte and Schelling as a mere comedy of errors; their views are ultimately the same, and they are based on the same mistake—their very starting point, about which they are so cocksure. They assume that because philosophy begins with consciousness, there can be nothing other than consciousness. I say that they utterly confuse form and content. I agree that we supply the form to our experience through our own activities, but the content is given. There can be no content to our experience without empirical, sensory material, and their idea that somehow we supply this too is incomprehensible nonsense.

BW: But you do not deny the possibility that the “things-in-themselves” cause us to have sensations, which are the content of experience?

REINHOLD: No, I do not deny this, but I do not assert it either. What Kant has taught us are the limits as well as the possibilities for knowledge. He taught us how to practice “phenomenology,” to describe the world of our experience and its necessary structures. The thing-in-itself, and the knowing subject too, are ultimately unknowable and inconceivable. The thing-in-itself is a
pure abstraction, a “residue” of knowledge but itself not knowable.

BW: Would you say that you are doing psychology then?

REINHOLD: Emphatically not, nor ontology either. I am doing what Kant tried to do, to demonstrate the necessary features of experience. I should add that I am sorry that you have not thought it fitting to invite our Kantian colleague Jakob Fries, who is now in Heidelberg. He has indeed turned Kant’s program into a psychology, or perhaps what he calls an “anthropology,” in which he rejects the idea that we can deduce the necessary structures of experience. I very much disagree with him, but he would be another welcome antidote to these egomaniacs who think the Self makes everything necessary.

BW: So you do not believe that the Self is absolute?

REINHOLD: That is utter nonsense too. There is nothing like that in Kant, and our dear departed Professor must be fuming in his coffin to know that these two charlatans have been broadcasting their travesties into the twentieth century.

SCHELLING: Traveisties! You pedantic fraud, you know your only relationship to Kant is the fact that you licked his philosophical boots long enough to secure a professorship?

REINHOLD: You should talk!

SCHELLING: Goethe got me my chair; but I have proven myself worthy of it.

REINHOLD: You have proven yourself an able showman, you mean. You’ve published almost a dozen books in fewer years, all of them slapdash, all of them different; when are you going to decide that you really believe, if indeed you believe anything?

SCHELLING: You have your nerve—you are the monkish fox who started this whole business of “systematizing” Kant, and you are criticizing those of us who have actually done so. I agree with Herr Hegel’s review of you; you are wholly unappreciative of the nature of philosophy and just want to make yourself famous with a system you can publish in Kant’s shadows.

4. Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843). Fries had recently published a polemical critique of Reinhold, Fichte and Schelling and had just completed his own revision of Kant’s philosophy. He rejected the strong sense of “necessity” of Kant’s first Critique and turned the critical philosophy away from its transcendental aspirations. Soon after this he accepted a professorship at Heidelberg.

5. The reader may be somewhat dismayed by the unprofessional and sometimes harsh language of the symposium in addressing one another. Please be assured that nothing is included here which they did not in fact say. The insults included here are their own; they are not fabricated. Much of their commentary can be better understood in light of their sometimes bitter competition.

REINHOLD: My system is a system, at least; it makes sense out of Kant, instead of that mystical mumbo-jumbo about nature as a “posit” of the Self or nature as God’s creating Himself which you two are promulgating.

SCHELLING: You are just another dogmatist, as Fichte used that term; you are not a philosopher. You just assume the world exists, so why pretend to be a philosopher? Enough of your stupidities!

REINHOLD: I don’t assume anything! I just insist . . .

BW: Gentlemen, gentlemen. Please!

REINHOLD: I just insist on mutual tolerance and freedom of inquiry; that’s why I hate your idealism. It is only a matter of time until someone more powerful than you declares himself the sole spokesman for the Absolute.

BW: Professor Reinhold, you are well-known for your political liberalism; do you see a connection between Kant’s philosophy and his abiding enthusiasm for the French Revolution?

REINHOLD: Indeed I do, and I myself was a continuing supporter of the revolution. It is the critical spirit that makes possible both Kant’s great advance in philosophy and the enlightened atmosphere promised by the Revolution. My deepest regret is that that atmosphere has been poisoned by the kind of self-righteous tripe you have been listening to here. I agree that the philosophical problem of our time is the systematization of Kant, but that does not mean re-establishing the old philosophical dogmatism that Kant himself turned against and refuted.

SCHELLING: Are you calling us dogmatists?

REINHOLD: “If the shoe fits . . .”

FICHTE: Criticism presupposes authority; freedom presupposes limits.

JACOBI: I agree with Reinhold; your so-called “systems” smack of pantheism, the denial of freedom, the denial of God, and a too-strong suggestion of authoritarianism.

BW: Herr Jacobi, you have been on record as opposing the whole attempt to “systematize” Kant; why is that?

JACOBI: Well, first, let’s be clear what “systematize” means. We

6. Pantheism is the view that God is identical to the universe as a whole, but Jacobi was one of the philosophers in Germany to bring back the Dutch philosopher Spinoza (1632–1677), who was a determinist as well as a pantheist, and so the word took on harshly materialistic and atheistic connotations in German philosophy. Jacobi’s preference for Kant, whom he opposed to Spinoza, was precisely because of Kant’s emphasis on freedom and creativity, in the second and third Critiques.
have been throwing that term around as if it were something obvious to every schoolboy. But it is not; in fact, it is an arrogant and pretentious conception that finds no justification in Kant's own thinking. A system is a rational articulation of the whole of creation; an all-encompassing demonstration of the unity and purpose of the cosmos. Herren Fichte and Schelling, and Reinhold too, complain that Kant did not succeed in presenting us with such a "system" because he did not prove that our ultimate ideas about the universe are matters of knowledge. God, too, is not an object of knowledge, according to Kant. Well, I agree that Kant did not provide us with such a system, and for good reason: Kant showed once and for all that such a system is impossible. Herr Schelling, in particular, has argued as if Reason encompasses everything, but what Kant showed—and the very title "Critique of Pure Reason" proves this—is that reason has its limits, and the world as a whole cannot be rationally known. Thus a system is impossible, and there is no point in fighting about whose system is the "correct" one.

FICHTE: I agree that there are limits to knowledge, but are you saying too that we can have no moral contact with the world? That action alone determines our worth.

JACOBI: No, of course not. I agree with you that the first principle of philosophy is freedom, but I also think the world is given to us.

SCHELLING: But how then can we make sense of the idea that we do know the world as a unity, and as divine, as you yourself have often argued?

JACOBI: Through intuition, feeling, faith (Glaube). Kant showed us the limitations of reason; he didn't show us the limits of experience.

REINHOLD: You're wrong! Kant did argue the limitations of experience to the understanding and its application to sensibility.

JACOBI: Ah, that's playing with words. What would you call Kant's own vision of the universe as a living system, not mechanical but divine? He too believed in the experience of the Absolute, but he wouldn't call it "knowledge." I would say that Kant, despite himself, emerges as a subjective idealist who denies that we can know anything, but at the same time tells us that we must believe. We enter the first *Critique* assuming the existence of the thing-in-itself as a cause of knowledge, but we leave the *Critique* having it taken away from us. What Kant simply left out was the most important ingredient in knowledge, not particular sensations or the "manifold of intuition" but the immediate intuition of the Absolute. He accused my friend Hamann—his friend, too—of "irrationalism," but it was Kant, ultimately, who ended up with irrationality—the idea that we could not know the world-in-itself, the Absolute, the universe as itself a divine, living system.

SCHELLING: I, too, would call this ultimate knowledge "intuition," but where intuition (Anschauung) or "Glaube" marks the end of philosophy to you it marks the beginning to me, for once one has this initial intuition of the Absolute, then one can begin to articulate it and demonstrate its various forms.

JACOBI: There is nothing to demonstrate. One intuits the divine unity, and that's it. All the rest is poetry.

SCHLEGEL: Hear, hear!

BW: Herr Schlegel, you obviously have some stake in this dispute.

SCHLEGEL: Yes I do, even though I do not pretend to be a philosopher. I have always admired old Kant, but I also regret that he wasted his genius by trying to be rational about everything. Indeed, I agree with Goethe that the only part of Kant's philosophy that is genuinely brilliant is the third *Critique*, where he not only proclaims quite rightly that the poetic genius is free from all rules, inspired by his sense of unity with the universe, but he himself manifests some of that same genius in his descriptions of the universe as a *Bildung*, a development of infinity from finite matter. But it is not only that final vision, but rather the whole of the Kantian philosophy that should be seen as a metaphor, an allegory of experience, a representation of the infinite in everything finite.

REINHOLD: What unintelligible garbage!

JACOBI: Let him finish. I agree with him.

FICHTE: I am my greatest creation.

SCHELLING: [softly] No, I am your greatest creation.

SCHLEGEL: I am an unabashed subjective idealist; I believe that everything is a creation of the self, and we poets are therefore the more highly developed specimens of consciousness. I think rationality is mere inhibition, a lack of imagination, servile obedience to the rules.

SCHELLING: Even Goethe insists that genius is "freedom within limitations."

SCHLEGEL: Yes, but Goethe has become an old fuddy-duddy and considers our romantic movement "sickly." Can you imagine? He was one of the poets who inspired our movement!

7. Literally, an education, self-cultivation.
FICHTE: Freedom doesn't mean anything unless it is bound by the moral law.

SCHELLING: You believe that because you have no appreciation for art, Herr Fichte.

SCHLEGEL: And because you have no appreciation for the infinite, Herr Fichte, no imagination, and no sense of humor.

FICHTE: I didn't come here to have my ideas insulted, or my person.

REINHOLD: I agree. Surely these young idealists should learn some manners.

SCHELLING: You two will never understand the nature of . . .

SCHLEGEL: Genius! The genius of modern poetry. The recognition of infinity within oneself!

BW: Herr Hegel, you have not said a word so far. Do you have anything to contribute to this somewhat rowdy discussion?

HEGEL: I am afraid I am not much of a public speaker, and I am not sure that I could say anything that my good friend Schelling has not already said much better. But I think the one dimension that has been left out of the discussion so far, an essential dimension for everything we have been talking about, is history. I have criticized Professor Reinhold for what I call his ‘historicism,’ his treatment of the history of philosophy as if it were nothing but an exhibit of mummies in a museum. He thinks he can begin philosophy from scratch and create a ‘system’ all by himself, perhaps with some help from Kant. But I would make a similar comment about everyone here. I agree with Schelling that Fichte does not give due credit to nature, but I would argue too that he does not give enough attention to history, that freedom is not simply a given to be intuited, but has to be developed, fought for, and this has taken time, indeed, the whole of human history from the ancient tyrants of the Orient until the French Revolution and the modern constitutional state. Schelling, I know, has made a study of history as he has studied everything else, but I would argue that his philosophy does not take adequate account of development or what Schlegel called Bildung, however much he may say that his system is based on the notion of ‘self-activity.’

SCHELLING: But surely you do not want to give so much emphasis to the random contingencies of history!

HEGEL: Even random contingencies may yet have some sort of logic. I agree that the business of philosophy is to demonstrate the absolute unity of the human experience, including knowledge of nature and free moral action. What I am saying is that it must also take account of historical development.

REINHOLD: I think Immanuel Kant would be sympathetic with that suggestion.

HEGEL: Yes. As you know, one of his last works was a small book on history and the development of freedom and morality. I would want to see Kant himself as part of that historical development now, and Herren Fichte and Schelling too.

SCHLEGEL: And das Romantik too.

HEGEL: No, I see romantic philosophy as self-indulgent digression from history, a distraction from the hard work of philosophy . . .

JACOBI: Now you are being too hard! Perhaps the ‘hard work of philosophy,’ as you put it, is not ponderous thinking but opening oneself up to the universe.

HEGEL: I do not believe that philosophy can make any claim to knowledge except through ‘the concept,’ that is, through articulate description of the various steps that have already been made in philosophy, by the Greeks as well as modern thinkers, on the road to absolute knowledge, that is, the single unified system of experience for which we have all been searching.

JACOBI: But I do not believe that there can be such a system.

HEGEL: That is why you will be seen as a digression in the progress of philosophy, whatever posterity might think of romantic poetry.

JACOBI: You have your nerve, for someone whose entire career in philosophy consists of serving as Schelling’s apprentice.

HEGEL: I resent that!

SCHELLING: Perhaps I can defend you here, my friend, for we both know . . .

HEGEL: I can handle myself, thank you.

BW: Herr Hegel, can you give us a specific instance in which your view that history is important can illuminate our discussion.

HEGEL: Yes, there has been quite a controversy over who can quite properly call himself a Christian and who cannot, and as you know, Kant himself devoted his last, and in my opinion, perhaps his best book to this topic, his Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone. But what Kant discusses very little, and what we have said nothing whatsoever about this evening, is the actual history of Christianity, the personality of Jesus and the fate of his religion. How can we decide what it is to be a Christian or to believe in God without any reference to the historical nature of the religion and the history of God Himself? This isn’t just a question of pure or practical reason; it is also a
question of *origins*, and what is living, what is dead, in Christ and Christianity.

** SCHLEDEL**: That I can accept. Jesus was a genius, too.

**REINHOLD**: That’s blasphemous, but I agree that the history of religion is important. I also think that we must not forget that the whole purpose of the Reformation was to separate ourselves from the history of the Church, however, and to re-establish religion in ourselves, as a matter of personal faith.  

**JACOBI**: One of my colleagues has done some interesting work on this topic. Friedrich Schleiermacher, who is Professor of Religion at the University of Halle, has argued that Christian faith has nothing to do with reason or with history but is rather a separate faculty of feeling, an intuition that embraces “the All.”

**SCHLEDEL**: I know him—he used to write for our journal.

**SCHELLING**: It sounds like your own philosophy, Jacobi.

**JACOBI**: Of course. But I think his research of the life of Jesus and the history of religion might interest you.

**REINHOLD**: Really?

**HEGEL**: Hrumph.  

**BW**: It seems that we’ve covered a great deal of territory, but we have strayed almost entirely from the subject of the evening, the philosophy of the late Immanuel Kant. So let me ask all of you, and please keep your answers brief, for your estimation of Kant’s greatest contribution to Western thought. Herr Fichte?

**FICHTE**: The discovery of transcendental idealism, the absolute freedom of the ego in positing its own world.

**SCHELLING**: I agree, but I would add the discovery of the teleology of nature and the concept of purposiveness without purpose.

**REINHOLD**: The discovery of transcendental arguments and the overcoming of scepticism.

**JACOBI**: His “critique” of Reason.

**SCHLEDEL**: His suggestion that we can know the absolute through poetry.

**REINHOLD**: He didn’t say that?

**HEGEL**: His discovery of “dialectic.”

8. Reinhold’s first major works were defenses of the Reformation and the secularization of religion.

9. Years later, Hegel would remark that Schleiermacher’s view of religion as feelings of dependency made a dog a better Christian than any of us.

**BW**: What do you mean?

**HEGEL**: It’s a long story. We probably shouldn’t go into it here.

**BW**: Then let me ask you this, too: do you think Kant did or did not succeed in presenting us with a complete “system” of philosophy?

**FICHTE**: No, he did not. He ignored the absolute primacy of freedom.

**SCHELLING**: That’s not true; he recognized as you never have the importance of nature, but he never figured out how to combine it with freedom.

**FICHTE**: But your empty identity won’t do it either: you can’t just say that nature is the same thing as consciousness.

**BW**: Please, gentlemen. Professor Reinhold, may we hear your views?

**REINHOLD**: I think that Professor Kant did have the correct idea for a system, but it needed to be worked out.

**SCHELLING**: [sneering] By you, presumably...

**BW**: [quickly] Herr Jacobi?

**JACOBI**: I do not think Kant tried to have a complete system, and that is his greatest virtue.

**REINHOLD**: But he himself tells us in his third *Critique* that philosophy is a system of theoretical and practical reason.

**JACOBI**: He was carried away by his rationalist enthusiasm, that’s all.

**BW**: Herr Schlegel?

**SCHLEDEL**: Kant was a genius. He didn’t need a system.

**BW**: Thank you. Herr Hegel?

**HEGEL**: I think Kant had the right idea but he still needs to be put into a complete system.

**FICHTE**: *I* did that!

**SCHELLING**: No, *I* did!

**REINHOLD**: *I* did!

**HEGEL**: [softly] You’ll see, *I will.*  

**BW**: And because it seems to be one of the main themes of Kant’s philosophy, let me ask what you think of the Self as the absolute point of departure for philosophy.

**FICHTE**: Of course; absolutely correct!

10. Hegel had just begun work on The Phenomenology of Spirit, perhaps his greatest book.
Introducing the German Idealists

SCHELLING: Of course.

REINHOLD: Consciousness and reality as a polarity, yes, but Self alone, no.

SCHELLING: But that's what I mean, too!

REINHOLD: That's not what you say!

FICHTE: There is nothing in the ego that the ego doesn't put there itself.

JACOBI: I agree that the Self is everything, but philosophy doesn't much matter.

SCHLEGEL: Hear, hear!

HEGEL: Ah, but you make it sound as if the Self is just there. I say that Self—or “spirit”—has to evolve; it has to learn to recognize itself over a long, hard journey.

BW: And where do you think the Kantian philosophy will go from here, now that Kant is no longer with us to develop it himself?

FICHTE: It will become more political.

SCHELLING: It will become more creative.

REINHOLD: It will become more precise, if these clowns will leave it alone.

SCHELLING: If you weren't so much older than I am, I'd take you outside.

FICHTE: Now that's idealism in action.

REINHOLD: Idealist ruffians!

BW: Herr Jacobi, your prognosis?

JACOBI: Kant and Kantianism are about to become history.

BW: Herr Schlegel?

SCHLEGEL: Who cares?

HEGEL: I think that Kant is the basis and point of departure for the whole of modern philosophy. Nothing will proceed without him, but it will proceed, to the Absolute!

SCHLEGEL: I like your enthusiasm, if only you were a more interesting fellow.

HEGEL: Enthusiasm alone isn't worth much.

FICHTE: It's better than the academic tedium that most of you seem to think of as “philosophy.”

REINHOLD: Am I the only rational philosopher left?

JACOBI, SCHLEGEL AND SCHELLING [together]: Let's hope so!

A POST-KANTIAN SYMPOSIUM

HEGEL: But we haven't yet decided what the purpose of the world is.

SCHLEGEL: Trust me, Herr Hegel, trust me.

REINHOLD: God help us.

FICHTE: Only those who help themselves.

SCHELLING: On with philosophy!

JACOBI: A silly game.

HEGEL: But it's the only game in town, Jacobi.

FICHTE: You haven't heard about Napoleon?

SCHLEGEL: What does the coarse Corsican have to do with poetry?

FICHTE: You'll see.

HEGEL: [under his breath] I suspect that we shall.

BW: Thank you, gentlemen. It is not often that a television interviewer gets a chance to meet not only one but a half-dozen spokesmen for the Absolute in a single meeting. For those of you who may be confused, “the Absolute” seems to mean just about “everything,” and anything you want it to mean. But however much Professor Kant would have disagreed with much of what has been said tonight, it is his ideas and his defense of intellectual autonomy that made this gathering possible. In memory of the late Professor Immanuel Kant, this is Barbara Wahrheit, DBS news, signing off from Jena, February 13, 1804. And for those of you who missed the news earlier this evening, let me repeat that there are reports from Paris of still another plot to assassinate Napoleon Bonaparte; complete details on the eleven o'clock news later this evening. Stay tuned next for the first television performance of a new symphony by the young Viennese composer, Ludwig van Beethoven.