

“Philosophy Always Begins in the Middle”: Friedrich Schlegel’s Anti-Foundationalist Philosophy

“Felsefe Her Zaman Ortada Başlar”: Friedrich Schlegel’in Anti-Temelci Felsefesi

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Abstract: Schlegel’s philosophical thought is characterized by opposition to the thought of Fichte. Schlegel constructs an anti-foundationalist philosophy against Fichte’s foundationalist philosophy which claims to reach inevitable conclusions from a first principle. He develops a conception of philosophy that has no definite starting point and no absolute first principle. In this approach, each principle supports and validates the others. Much like poetry, philosophy starts from the middle. Schlegel argues that the principles are not one but many and that they mutually establish themselves in interaction. He emphasizes that everything, including all principles, is in a constant state of change and transformation. This highlights the awareness of the impossibility of ultimately reaching the Absolute. The Absolute will shape all our efforts, even though it will never be attainable. Nevertheless, the effort to reach the Absolute will not be abandoned and philosophy, which acquires a literary/poetic character, will become the center of this effort. Schlegel’s use of literary forms can thus be seen as a challenge. Aiming to erode the ways of philosophizing of his contemporaries, notably Fichte, Schlegel intends to establish a philosophy that gives life the respect it deserves. This new kind of philosophy will not remain a purely intellectual activity, but will be the central element in the effort to transform life and restore its lost enchantment.

Keywords: Early German romantics, Friedrich Schlegel, anti-foundationalism, Wechselerweis, philosophy and literature.



Introduction

Early German Romantic philosophers, especially Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, have recently received the attention they deserve. The emergence of texts by the German romantics that had remained unpublished for more than a hundred years and the serious studies and research conducted by thinkers such as Manfred Frank, Dieter Heinrich, Ernst Behler, Frederick C. Beiser, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Elizabeth Millan, Dalia Nassar, Andrew Bowie, and others have shattered the common, prejudiced image of the Romantics and made it possible to recognize the philosophical depth of these thinkers. Thanks to the recent surge of interest in and study of the early German romantics, the image of a ‘sick’ movement portrayed by one of the most iconic figures in German literature, Goethe, and the labeling of Romantic thinkers as forerunners of the Nazi movement have been shown to be demonstrably false. Thanks to a much better examination of the philosophical commitments of Schlegel and Novalis, it has become clear that *Frühromantik* (Early Romanticism) is a well-founded philosophy from which we have much to learn. In this article, early German Romantic philosophy, from which we have much to learn, will be analyzed within the framework of Friedrich Schlegel's views. This article will focus on the concept of “*Wechselerweis*”, the basic concept of his anti-foundationalist philosophy, and will try to access the meaning and nature of his effort to bring philosophy and literature closer.

Early German Romanticism, precisely in accordance with its own philosophical ideals, almost came out of nowhere, soared with the splendor of a comet, and disappeared with the same splendor. It happened so quickly that everything can be contained within the six-year period between 1794 and 1800. So much so that, according to some, it is even possible to place the entire early romantic movement in the so-called “Jena Wunderjahr” of 1794-95. However, *Frühromantik* continued and produced strongly after the *Wunderjahr*, but from 1800 onwards it, in a sense, gradually dissolved itself. Novalis died in March 1801 at the age of 29, and Schlegel gradually turned his back on the views to which he had once been so passionately and hopefully committed, converting to Catholicism with his wife in 1808, to the deep astonishment of all who knew him, and speaking with scorn and derision of his formerly atheistic early romantic period. Subsequent



critiques of the Romantics, particularly those directed at Schlegel, were founded on a subsequent image of the Romantics, namely that of the conservative Romantic. This image was exemplified by Schlegel, who subsequently renounced his youthful ideals and embraced a conservative stance, becoming an advisor to the conservative Austrian statesman and diplomat Klemens von Metternich. Romanticism as a phenomenon that we will analyze in this text is the early Romanticism, or *Frühromantik* in its original name, between 1794 and 1800-1801, when everything flashed and disappeared like a lightning.¹

Schlegel's philosophy has unfortunately not been well received. He was often seen as an amateur philosopher with original ideas, lacking coherent or profound philosophical insights. Indeed, Schlegel perhaps did not reach to the limits of his potential and even abandoned the intellectual movement he had started after a very short period of time. What remains of his notes is rather scattered, deliberately fragmentary and unsystematic. However, this was a conscious choice on his part. He opposed systematic philosophy and believed that traditional philosophical devices, such as definition, analysis, and proof, were obstacles to reaching the truth. Instead, he argued that philosophy could be expressed through various literary forms and for this reason he emphasized the importance of the fragment and even the novel as vehicles for philosophical thought (Beiser, 2002, pp.435-436).

Although he was ignored in his own time and his philosophy was left in darkness for decades, Schlegel's thought has received increasing attention in recent years. In a fragment, he states that attempts to destroy a philosophy actually do little harm to it, because if it is really a philosophy, it will be reborn from its ashes like the Phoenix (Schlegel, 1967a, p.180, fr.103). His philosophy, after decades of oblivion, was reborn from its ashes. It is as if he had foreseen the fate of the philosophy he had created. Indeed, the idea that the Romantics, Schlegel in particular, were not only literary figures, but also important philosophers, is becoming increasingly accepted. For example, two French philosophers, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, in their text on early German Romanticism, *The Literary Absolute*, emphasize that the Romantic movement was not just a

¹ For a detailed history of the Romantic movement see, (Ernst Behler, 1993).



literary movement. According to them, the romantics inaugurates another model of the work and way of thinking. This new way of thinking may allow us to grasp what Cartesian ways of doing philosophy cannot grasp (Jean-Luc Nancy & Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 1988, p. 40).

The first stimulus for Schlegel's philosophy, as for Novalis, was Fichte's philosophy. In an often quoted fragment he states that the great tendencies (*Tendenzen*) of his age were the French Revolution, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Goethe's *Meister* (Schlegel, 1967a, p.198, fr. 216). At first, this stimulus was of such a nature that he wanted to walk in the same direction with him. Soon, however, Schlegel would see Fichte's philosophy as a philosophy to be refuted and opposed, and would place it in opposition to his own philosophical ideals.

First of all, Schlegel argues that the principles which Fichte sees as inevitable conclusions and assumes to be self-evident, can easily be rejected (Schlegel, 1967e, p. 31, fr. 126). For example, it is not clear to him why one cannot conclude from Fichte's thought that the non-I posits the I instead I posits non-I. For this reason, Schlegel states that he came across people who admired Fichte, who knew him, who understood him, but he did not come across anyone who believed in him. In his eyes, Fichte is like a drunkard who keeps falling from one side to the other in an attempt to transcend (*transcendirend*) a horse (Schlegel, 1967e, p. 32, fr. 138). Moreover, he does not find Fichte sufficiently critical and states that he and Novalis are far ahead of him in this regard (Schlegel, 1967b, p. 31, fr. 134). In parallel with all these criticisms, Schlegel calls Fichte a mystic and states that, like all mystics, he begins his philosophy by assuming an Absolute. Assuming an Absolute will make things smooth, as it does for all mystics, because everything can be explained by relying on the Absolute. But the question that Fichte really needs to answer is what gives us the right to posit such an Absolute (Beiser, 2002, p. 440).

His criticism of Fichte is easily understandable since his own philosophical conception is almost radically different from Fichte's. He explains his difference with Fichte in a fragment as follows: "In my system the final cause is really a *Wechselerweis* [mutual proof]. In Fichte it is a postulate and an unconditional principle" (Schlegel, 1967c, p. 521, fr. 22). In order to focus on the epistemological dimension of Schlegel's philosophy, we need



to understand his original concept ‘*Wechselerweis*’, which has been frequently brought up by various philosophers in recent years.

Schlegel, like his close friend Novalis, reflects on the problem of beginnings and is seriously skeptical of the project of building philosophy on an absolute first principle. This skepticism basically develops against the philosophies of Reinhold and particularly Fichte, which aim to base Kant’s philosophy on a first principle. Schlegel opposes the views of Reinhold and Fichte, who argue that philosophy must necessarily begin with first principles that are self-evident and from which everything can be derived, and that without such first principles neither thinking nor science can be possible. For Schlegel, philosophy does not need an Archimedean point from which everything else can be derived. For this reason, he rejects the Fichtean idea of a first principle and the conception of philosophy as deductible from a first principle, and instead adopts *Wechselerweis* (Millán-Zaibert, 2007, p. 19).

The concept of *Wechselerweis* first appears in Schlegel’s corpus in his review of Jacobi’s novel *Woldemar*. In this review, Schlegel touches upon the positive and negative aspects of Jacobi’s thought. He treats Jacobi’s criticisms of rationality and “philosophizing reason (*philosophierende Vernunft*)” in a permissive tone, but still considers Jacobi’s doctrine of positive faith philosophically unacceptable. The important point here is that Schlegel brings up his own highly original views through Jacobi’s critique of philosophy. Jacobi strongly criticizes philosophies that proceed from a single fact and condemns philosophy itself because of this type of philosophizing. Jacobi’s criticism against philosophy, directly quoting Schlegel, is that “every proof (*Erweis*) presupposes something already proven (*Erwiesenes*)”. As Schlegel emphasizes, this criticism is valid only against thinkers who start from a single proof. “But,” says Schlegel, “what if the externally unconditional but mutually conditional and interdependent mutual proof (*Wechselerweis*) were the foundation of philosophy?” (Schlegel, 1967b, p. 72) In other words, Schlegel agrees with Jacobi’s criticism of philosophers’ obsession with starting from a self-evident first principle, but argues that this cannot be extended to the whole of philosophy since there is another conception of philosophy. This other conception of philosophy



comes to life in Schlegel's own philosophy. But what is *Wechselerweis*? What does Schlegel mean when he uses this concept?

A look at the meaning of the German word, which is a combination of two words, *Wechsel* and *Erweis*, is enough to give us a sense of what Schlegel meant. In German, *Wechsel* means transformation, change, and exchange, which implies reciprocity. *Erweis*, on the other hand, has meanings such as proof or evidence. Therefore, the concept of *Wechselerweis* means mutually proving or alternately proving. By introducing this concept into his philosophy, Schlegel aims to falsify philosophies that derive from first principles, that start from one place, expand in a certain direction and move towards a goal. For Schlegel states that the principles are not one but many and that they construct each other. In a fragment he states: "Principles are always plural and construct themselves under each other. There is never only one principle, as the foundation zealots (*Grundwüthigen*)² imagine" (Schlegel, 1967c, p. 105, fr. 910). This is a new way of doing philosophy, radically different from the way many philosophers have done it. Here, philosophy no longer starts from a first point and has no absolute ground.

What does this mean? In such a conception, how is it possible to ground something? Wouldn't this mean giving up one of the most characteristic features of philosophy, namely grounding, and thus giving up philosophy itself? To think so would be a great injustice to Schlegel's thought. He by no means aims to give up philosophy. What he tries to do is to change and transform philosophy. Giving up first principles is not the same as giving up principles. If we go back to Schlegel's text on Jacobi's *Woldemar*, where Jacobi finds the first principles problematic and puts the blame on philosophy and where he thinks that philosophy has insoluble contradictions, Schlegel thinks that this is not due to philosophy itself but to a certain philosophical methodology. As Nassar rightly points out, the conception of striving (*Das Streben*) which is one of the basic concepts of Schlegel's philosophy directly contradicts the ideas of stasis and

² Here I would like to briefly mention the word '*Grundwüthigen*'. In German, *Grund* means foundation, ground, while *wütig* means a person who is enraged. It is noteworthy that Schlegel presents those who want philosophy to begin with a foundation as people who desire this almost ravingly. Schlegel seems to see this as a sick attitude.



immutability. These are the problems that Schlegel thinks a philosophy derived from first principles suffers from. For where there is an unconditioned first principle, the unconditioned has a nature that must remain outside of conditions and never be determined by them. In contrast, the Schlegelian striving always involves transformation and opposition. This is why for Schlegel the concept of a first principle that is unchanging and independent of all conditions has no meaning. In his perspective, convergence to the infinite and the Absolute is attainable through a process in which opposites and principles determine and transform each other. The pursuit of the infinite can be realized through a system of a thought dominated by *Wechselerweis*. A system in which conditional principles support each other, form and transform each other is the most appropriate system for Schlegel (Dalia Nassar, 2014, p. 91). What Schlegel gives up, then, is not ‘principles’ but immutable, unconditional ‘first principles’, and what he gives up is not philosophy *per se* but a certain way of doing philosophy. In this new conception, he proposes, it is possible to justify views and even to form a system. To ground something, according to this new conception, would involve taking one principle back to another principle that has not yet established itself as absolute, and that principle back to yet another principle, and so on *ad infinitum*, constantly moving towards ‘non-absolute’ foundations. Philosophy cannot be supported by a single highest principle, because there is no principle that can do so on its own. It is only by mutually supporting each other that principles together produce something like the idea of unconditional validity (Frank, 2004, pp. 203-205).

By objecting to the prevailing ways of doing philosophy in his own time, Schlegel also calls into question the conception of a philosophical system prevalent at the time. His anti-foundationalism leads him to have deep doubts about philosophical systems. However, this does not mean that Schlegel does not believe in or pursue any system. Indeed, in a famous *Athenäum* fragment, Schlegel once again maintains his romantic position and states: “It is equally fatal for *Geist* (spirit) to have a system and not to have one. Therefore, it will have to decide to combine the two” (Schlegel, 1967a, p. 173, fr. 53). In other words, he points to an impossible border, so to speak, in terms of a system. In Schlegel’s thought, thinking oscillates between system and non-system, just as everything oscillates between each



other. Because having a system in the classical sense is of a nature that interrupts thinking and draws definite boundaries to concepts. On the other hand, coherence and unity are indispensable for thinking. For this reason, systematicity and unsystematicity coexist in his philosophy. Schlegel's aim is a way of thinking guided by the ideal of an organizing system. If we must have a system and at the same time we cannot have one, all that remains is to constantly strive for one. As in every aspect of his philosophy, the idea of striving emerges as a concept that can never be forsaken. For Schlegel, a system will appear as an organizing goal that we can perhaps come close but can never - and should never - fully obtain. Consistency would then become the fundamental criterion of the system and even of truth. Instead of correspondence with an unknowable domain of being and deduction from an unquestionable first principle, the only standard of truth is now the mutual support of propositions within a whole (Beiser, 2002, p.460). Thus:

The *Wechselerweis*, as a structure to understand how principles work together to lead us to truth, is related to Schlegel's holism and his endorsement of a coherence view of truth. For Schlegel, nothing is known in isolation but always as part of the whole of the parts that comprise it. All elements of our system of knowledge interact with one another. This denial of deducibility is Schlegel's metaphysical or methodological holism and is the central structure of Schlegel's antifoundationalist philosophy. The *Wechselerweis* is an open structure, one that allows philosophy to begin "in the middle," to pay due attention to both poles of reality, consciousness, and the infinite and thus free us from one-sided approaches to reality. (Millán-Zaibert, 2007, p. 137)

Each principle needs the other and through its mediation it develops itself. This is the epistemological manifestation of a conception that would later appear in Schlegel's view of nature. This is a philosophy in which everything needs another, in which everything constitutes itself while constituting something else. In the *Wechselerweis* conception, which can be seen as a refutation of the Cartesian tradition, no subject can constitute itself independently of others. One could even go further and say that being a subject means being with others and living in a world where everything mutually constitutes each other. As Millan-Zaibert points out, what



Schlegel is trying to point to with his references to *Wechselerweis* would be more like working on a puzzle than a deduction from a first principle to truths that follow this principle in a precise and almost mechanical way. The search for truth is like looking for the word that best fits a puzzle diagram. Each solution we give to the puzzle comes gradually and only makes sense when we find that it is compatible with the solution of the other parts of the puzzle. And this process emphasizes the infinite process of philosophy's becoming as endless cycle (Millán-Zaibert, 2007, pp. 19-20). Just like in a puzzle, every word/concept/principle we encounter will make sense with another, and when taken out of its context, it will not make any sense on its own. But unlike the puzzle, our search for truth in life will never be complete. Each word, each truth, each principle will require another, and thus philosophy will turn into an endless striving/activity in which everything touches each other and constitutes each other at a certain level.

Indeed, Schlegel envisions philosophy as a cyclical structure, not a linear one. He aimed to give a cyclical character to the philosophy of his time, which he believed was trying to proceed in a straight line. This is why he brings up the view that "Philosophy is still going too straight, it is not yet circular enough" (Schlegel, 1967a, p. 173, fr. 43). Philosophy should start from the middle, not from a first principle. In Schlegel's own words, "Subjectively viewed, philosophy always begins in the middle, like epic poetry" (Schlegel, 1967a, p.178, fr.84). However, here the middle is not the center of a straight line, but of a circular line. Starting from such a point means walking a line in which the beginning and the end are intertwined. Schlegel's point becomes clearer when we consider the structure of a poem. A poem does not need any justification. Each sentence makes sense within and with the whole. But it also has its own power, its own personality, independent of the whole. Moreover, no scene in poetry can be deductively derived from the previous one. Just like an epic poem, it is a structure in which all lines are both the beginning and the end.

For this reason, both Schlegel and his philosophical companion Novalis preferred to express their philosophies through fragments, which are both a portion but also have a unity. Schlegel defines his philosophy as follows: "My philosophy is a system of fragments and a progression of drafts" (Schlegel, 1967e, p.100, fr. 857). Indeed, he embodies his philosophy



through fragments. This kind of philosophizing would be the highest kind of philosophizing. Indeed, for Schlegel the fragment is a form for transcendental philosophy and a measure for true philosophy (Schlegel, 1967c, p. 93, fr. 771). This is precisely why Schlegel describes himself as “a fragmentary systematizer, a romantic philosopher, a systematic critic” (Schlegel, 1967e, p. 97, fr. 815). This emphasis on the fragment by the romantics, especially Schlegel, is related to the open-ended nature of fragments.

The fragment undoubtedly did not first appear with the early romantics. Its roots go back to Ancient Greece. However, the romantics emphasized that their fragments were different from the fragments of Ancient Greece. Schlegel puts it this way: “Many works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns [i.e., romantics] are fragments at the moment of their appearance” (Schlegel, 1967a, p. 169, fr. 24). As Schlegel points out, the fragmentation of the ancient fragment was formed under historical conditions. The ancient fragment has no intention and no purpose to be a fragment. But the romantic fragment is intentionally fragmentary. The fragment intentionally aims to remain fragmented and open, consciously resisting closure. Here the fragment is an outstanding example of resistance to a closed system.

The incompleteness of the fragment, far from being a deficiency in the eyes of these thinkers, is its most important and superior feature. In order to complete the incompleteness of the fragment (which in fact can never be finally completed), the reader takes new paths. It is as if the fragments enter into separate, highly personal dialogues with each reader. It is the richness of that which can never be completed. Of course, this kind of structure is very difficult, almost impossible to fully grasp, consume and absorb. But this inexhaustibility is precisely what romantic philosophers desire. Perhaps this is why Novalis states that the true reader must be an extended (*erweiterte*) writer (Novalis, 2010, p. 37). With its inexhaustibility and polysemy, the fragment brings one closer to the horizon of the infinite. Like life itself or a work of art, it throws the reader into the middle of an endless stream of interpretations. Just as the effort to reach the infinite will never end, the fragment can never be completed. It is complete in its incompleteness, or what completes it is precisely its incompleteness. The fragment bears the trace of the infinite in itself. There are no certainties,



determinations, completions here. There are only possibilities. In this sense, the fragment is like a work of art. As a matter of fact, Schlegel likens the fragment to a small work of art and states that the fragment has this kind of structure, just as a work of art closes in on itself (Schlegel, 1971, p. 189). However, both philosophy and literature failed to grasp the importance and depth of this genre. In this regard, Novalis argues that the true art of writing books has yet to be developed (Novalis, 2010, p. 31). Fragments are the seeds of the literary and philosophical form of the future, and these seeds are being planted in the ground with the romantics.

From this point of view, writing in fragments means breaking free from the uniformity imposed by a single principle. Fragments, like a symphony, create a harmony of different voices while allowing us to avoid the dominance of first principles and concepts that erase differences and subjectivities. Each part maintains its own distinct character and meaning since no part can be reduced to another. This reflects Schlegel’s call to transform our way of thinking. The fragment embodies Schlegel’s idea of simultaneously rejecting and desiring the system. On the one hand, the individuality of each part is preserved and not sacrificed for the sake of a system, and on the other hand, these diverse parts come together to form a whole.

Philosophy should also be like this. In Schlegel’s view, his own philosophy is a good example of a philosophy starting from the middle. Schlegel expresses this as follows: “Our philosophy does not begin, as others do, with a first principle in which the first proposition is the nucleus or the first ring of a comet and the rest is a long tail of vapor. - We start from a small but living seed, the nucleus/foundation (*Kern*) stands in the middle with us” (Frank, 1996, p. 413).³

³ Elsewhere, Manfred Frank describes the character of Schlegel’s philosophy in a very refined way: “According to its formation, philosophy must begin with infinitely many propositions (not with one)” (KA XVIII: 26, Nr. 93). Hence, we can conclude the following: genetically (“according to its formation”) philosophy cannot begin with one proposition; any arbitrary proposition could be its beginning point; therefore, philosophy can begin in *media res* (in the middle). And the impulse (*Antrieb*) to philosophizing from the middle is a reflection on “the infinitude of the drive towards knowledge.” The beginning of philosophy is therefore not a positive principle grasped by knowledge, but rather the feeling of a lack of knowledge. We can also express this in the following way: Knowledge is not



It is a radically different conception of philosophy, given the systematic philosophies of the period. The absolute truth that philosophers pursue is ignored. The absence of absolute truth is a possibility, a document of the freedom of thought and spirit. For, according to Schlegel, the perpetually moving spirit can only exist in activity. It would have to cease to exist if there were an unchanging absolute truth. But if there is no absolute truth, if truth is relative, we can leave ourselves in the arms of thinking with hope and courage, of constantly rethinking. Thus, every new pursuit will bring us closer to truth as a process that will never be fully finalized, while every philosophical endeavor will be nothing but a further development of the truth that will never be finally completed (Frank, 1996, p. 416).

However, it would be useful to draw attention to an important point here. Schlegel's views on truth should not lead us to make the mistake of equating him with contemporary relativists. The relativity of truth is not a relativity in the sense that contemporary relativists typically understand it. That is, relativity in the sense of being not bound to a particular worldview or conceptual schema. There is also no renunciation of the absolute in Schlegel's thought. It does not give up the idea of determining our thinking according to truth. The whole is still there. Therefore, the fact that the Romantics were skeptical of ideas such as immutable principles, certain grounds, absolute knowledge does not mean that they gave up on truth. This is not a movement that can be juxtaposed with today's 'anything goes' attitude. The Romantics' anti-foundationalism does not necessarily require them to abandon the conception of objective truth. The fundamental meaning of Romantic skepticism about foundations is not a rejection of truth, but a call to think more seriously about our epistemological limits (Millán-Zaibert, 2007, p.147). One cannot start by grounding truth in oneself like Descartes' subject. For our knowledge of truth or the Absolute is only possible allegorically, not evidentially. Approaching the Absolute goes hand in hand with knowing that it is always more than what is indicated. If the full comprehension of truth is not possible through the grounds that

given, but rather the feeling of an emptiness. This appears to reflection as an aspiration toward fulfillment, as a striving for what is lacking, as what Novalis called "a drive toward completion" (*Ergnzungstrieb*). Schlegel writes: "A person as individual is not completely, but only piecemeal there. A person can never be there (506, Nr. 9)" (Frank, 2004, pp. 188-189).



are supposed to give us the whole with certainty, because such grounds never exist, then truth can only be represented symbolically. This means that the infinite incompleteness of the search for truth can only be represented in the fullness of meaning of the symbol - as a work of art (Frank, 1996, pp. 416-417). It is in this vein that the Romantic conception of art takes shape, both for Novalis and for Schlegel. Their strong emphasis on literary forms is a manifestation of the philosophical power of art. The representation of the Absolute is possible precisely by renouncing the claim to a strict representation. The absolute can only be accurately and properly represented through artistic and literary forms.

The relationship between Schlegel's anti-foundationalist epistemology and his aesthetics becomes visible through the literary forms. As Beiser emphasizes, one should not despair, even though there are no first principles, no definitive proofs, no solid grounds, and no complete systems. There is still the possibility and probability of reaching the truth, of approaching ideals, in endless striving. In this respect, literary forms require being aware that truth is unattainable, yet striving towards it because it is the only possibility of attaining it (Beiser, 2003, p. 129). Thus, Schlegel's anti-foundationalism is accompanied by a firm commitment to overcoming the separation of philosophy from poetry (Millan-Brusslan, 2019, p. 212).

The term ‘poetry’ as used by the Romantics, includes a rich world of meaning. As suggested by Schlegel’s fragment mentioned above, romantic poetry covers a wide range of literary activity, from fragments to materials and even tendencies. In confirmation of this, the Romantics also refer to various disciplines as poetic. Novalis, for example, at one point says that the most perfect form of all sciences is poetic in nature (Novalis, 1997, p. 52, fr. 17), while at another he describes philosophy as the poetry of the faculty of understanding (Verstand) (Novalis, 1997, p. 54, fr. 24). Similarly, in *Gespräch über Poesie*, Schlegel, through the medium of Lothario, one of the protagonists of the text, states that the innermost mysteries of all sciences and arts are the property of poetry. Everything originated there and everything must flow back to it. In an ideal state of humanity, poetry would be the only thing that exists, because in this ideal state the arts and sciences would still be one. “In our case,” says Lothario, “only the true poet



will be an ideal man and a universal artist” (Schlegel, 1967b, p. 324). So poetry is a kind of source, and even in what seems most distant from it, there is a piece of it.

In this understanding, philosophy comes closer to literature and acquires new forms through literary styles. In this respect, Schlegel wishes to break down the current boundaries between art/literature and philosophy. Moreover, he seems to want to remove the boundaries between literature and life. Literature plays a vital role when it comes to re-enchanting the world, making it sacred again. For this reason, Schlegel makes an extremely radical demand, suggesting that literature and poetry should spread everywhere and infiltrate every field. In this context, Schlegel says that “all art will become science and all science will become art; poetry and philosophy will merge” (Schlegel, 1967d, p. 161, fr. 115). In this conception, none of these disciplines will be reduced to the other; they will reach a kind of originary unity in which all are equally important.

After all that has been said, it can be said that for the German romantics, when we speak of poetry, the concept permeates all literary genres and even life. In the romantic imagination, every artistic production and even every human production can be seen as a reflection of poetry. This view is not at all erroneous because, according to Schlegel, poetry is so deeply rooted in the human being that it manifests itself in many of our actions. The folk songs, stories and plays through which peoples once expressed themselves can be read as various expressions of the poetry rooted in us. Schlegel thinks that the prose genre that prevails in our unimaginative (*unfantastischen / fantasielosen*) age is also an expression of the poetry rooted in us (Schlegel, 1967b, p. 331). Thus, in the romantic vocabulary, poetry becomes the name of a genre that encompasses almost all human creations. Here poetry takes on a mystical character. Schlegel puts forward the idea that poetry does not need any human effort to exist, that it will always exist by itself.

It is not necessary that any one should endeavor to preserve and propagate poetry, or even to bring it forth, invent it, establish it, and give it punitive laws, as the theory of poetry would so much like to do. Just as the core of the earth clothed itself with formations and plants, just as life sprang forth of its own accord from the depths, and everything became full



of beings that multiplied happily; so poetry also blossoms forth of its own accord from the invisible elemental force of humanity when the warming ray of the divine sun strikes it and gives it a new life. (Schlegel, 1967b, p. 285)

In Schlegel's eyes, romantic poetry (*romantische Poesie*) is the art that has the power and competence to bring all genres together. Through romantic poetry, the disintegration of other genres, and finally of human beings, will come to an end. Through romantic poetry, literature and philosophy will intertwine to create a new 'border genre'. In the famous Fragment 116 of the *Athenäum*, F. Schlegel explains what romantic poetry (*Poesie*) means, how he understands it and what he expects from it. For him, romantic poetry is universal and progressive poetry. Its aim is not only to bring together independently existing types of poetry. Romantic poetry also aims to bring poetry together with philosophy and rhetoric. In this context, romantic poetry aims to bring together poetry and philosophy, prose and verse, genius and criticism, and 'art poetry' (*Kunstpoesie*) and 'nature poetry' (*Naturpoesie*). In this way, not only poetry would become more lively and social, but also life and society would become poetic and poeticized. Romantic poetry also aims to poeticize *Witz* (wit), to fill and saturate all areas of art with all forms of the good, the most important subjects of education, and the heartbeat of humor. Romantic poetry thus encompasses everything that is purely poetic. In Schlegel's terms, it encompasses everything that is merely poetic, from the greatest art system to the sigh or the kiss of a child. Only romantic poetry can hold up a mirror to the world that surrounds man and paint a picture of the age in which he lives. Above all other forms and genres, only romantic poetry can hover at the crossroads between the presenter and the presented (*Dargestellten - Darstellenden*); it can hover on the wings of poetic reflection, transcending all self-interest, real or ideal, and in this state it can multiply in an endless series of mirrors as it ascends to a higher level by constantly returning to itself. For Schlegel, romantic poetry among other arts is as indispensable as *Witz*'s position in philosophy or the position of love, friendship or society in life. Where all other art forms are finished and can only be analyzed, romantic poetry is still in a state of becoming. This state of being will always continue, because this never-ending and perpetual state of



becoming is the essence, the fundamental characteristic of romantic poetry. In this context, no theory can define and characterize the ideals of romantic poetry. Romantic poetry is eternal and independent because its first law emphasizes that the poet will not submit to any law except his inspiration and will. In this respect, for Schlegel, the romantic style of poetry is essentially poetry itself. Because according to him, all poetry and literature is ultimately romantic or should be romanticized (Schlegel, 1967a, p. 182-183, fr. 116). It seems that for Schlegel this is the basic formula that will make both philosophy and life richer.

Enchanting the world requires a unity, a togetherness. The Romantics explain this in terms of philosophizing together. This act, which they called *Symphilosophie*, is poetry extended to life. *Symphilosophie*, which for the Romantics was one of the *sine qua non* conditions for re-enchanting the world, could only emerge in a poetic atmosphere. In emphasizing the importance of *Symphilosophie*, Schlegel states that man alone cannot attain magic, but where other souls work together, a magical power will come into being. This is the power he believes will transform the world. "I trust in this power; I feel the spiritual wind blowing among my friends, I live not in the hope but in the confidence of the new dawn of new poetry" (Schlegel, 1967b, p. 310). According to Schlegel, poetry will bind all the hearts that love it together with invisible ties and turn them into friends. In Schlegel's words, even if these people "seek very different things in their own lives, even if one completely despises what the other considers most sacred, even if they misunderstand each other, even if they do not hear each other, even if they remain eternal strangers, they are still united and at peace in this region through a higher magical power" (Schlegel, 1967b, p. 284).

This privileged position given to poetry, its sanctification as the highest of all human acts, lies in the possibility that through it we can reach the Absolute. The Absolute is the unconditional, the limitless. To be able to reach the unlimited and unconditional is only possible by activating a faculty that is unlimited and unconditional. For the Romantics, reason, as a human faculty, lacks the power and authority to achieve this. The imagination, on the other hand, with its unconditionality and limitlessness, will have the opportunity to touch the Absolute even if it cannot grasp it in its totality. In this case, the work of art can touch the Absolute not because



of its content but because of its structure. “The imagination or creative faculty enables us to understand the Absolute, because the work of art presents absolute reality in its structure rather than in its content” (Euron, 2019, p. 84). What poetry reveals through its structure is not the Absolute itself or its infinity. In order to avoid misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that a poem, as finite writing, cannot directly reveal the infinity of the Absolute. But poetry, with its infinite possibilities of reference, always referring to other symbols, other poems, other books, other worlds, can show the Absolute in its only possible form, that is, in the finite form of conditioned reality, and in poetry the finite reality reveals its essential essence, its connection to infinity (Euron, 2019, p. 91). This is the demonstration of a relationship in which the Absolute is only shown by giving up being shown, pointed to by giving up articulating it, and therefore approached by giving up possessing it.

In conclusion, it can be said that Schlegel aims to develop a new philosophy against the way of doing philosophy of his predecessors, especially Fichte. This philosophy is not foundationalist, but rather anti-foundationalist. Here, philosophy does not have a zero point or a first principle, as Fichte wanted to establish. Rejecting absolute foundations, principles and starting points, which were seen as a *sine qua non* in philosophies of his time, Schlegel argues that a true philosophical system is not a structure derived from absolute foundations, but rather a structure in which elements mutually determine each other in a continuous relationship. Therefore, Schlegel wants to develop a philosophy in which principles are always in interaction with each other. To emphasize this, Schlegel also brings up the concept of *Wechselerweis*. Here, the elements are not mechanically but organically related to one another. All parts are both the cause and the effect of each other. For Schlegel, this is the horizon that enables philosophy and literature to emerge in an intimacy and relationality. Philosophy, like life, cannot come to the fore through self-evident forms. It is not possible to grasp the Truth / the Absolute by progressing gradually from a first principle through deduction. Philosophy, like poetry, begins in the middle. There is no definite beginning or end. It expands into areas that the philosopher cannot foresee. This philosophy is accompanied by the consciousness of acquiring the Absolute. It can only be pointed to. It is only through



such a philosophy that the Absolute, which in the final analysis can never be captured, becomes close to us.

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Öz: Schlegel'in felsefi düşüncesi Fichte'nin felsefesine karşıtlık ile karakterize edilir. Schlegel, Fichte'nin bir ilk ilkedan kaçınılmaz sonuçlara ulaştığını iddia eden temelci felsefesine karşı anti-temelci bir felsefe inşa ederek belirli bir başlangıç noktası ve mutlak bir ilk ilkesi olmayan bir felsefe anlayışı geliştirir. Bu yaklaşımda her ilke diğerlerini destekler ve kanıtlar ve felsefe tıpkı şiir gibi, ortadan başlar. Schlegel, ilkelerin tek değil çok olduğunu ve karşılıklı etkileşim içinde birbirlerini belirlediklerini ve oluşturdıklarını savunur. Tüm ilkeler de dahil olmak üzere her şeyin sürekli bir değişim ve dönüşüm halinde olduğunu vurgular. Bu da Mutlak'a nihai olarak ulaşmanın imkânsızlığının farkındalığını gösterir. Mutlak, hiçbir zaman ulaşılamayacak olsa da, tüm çabalarımızı şekillendirecektir. Yine de Mutlak'a ulaşma çabasından vazgeçilmeyecek ve edebi/şiiirsel bir nitelik kazanan felsefe bu çabanın merkezi haline gelecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erken Alman romantikleri, Friedrich Schlegel, anti-temelcilik, Wechselerweis, şiir, felsefe ve edebiyat.

