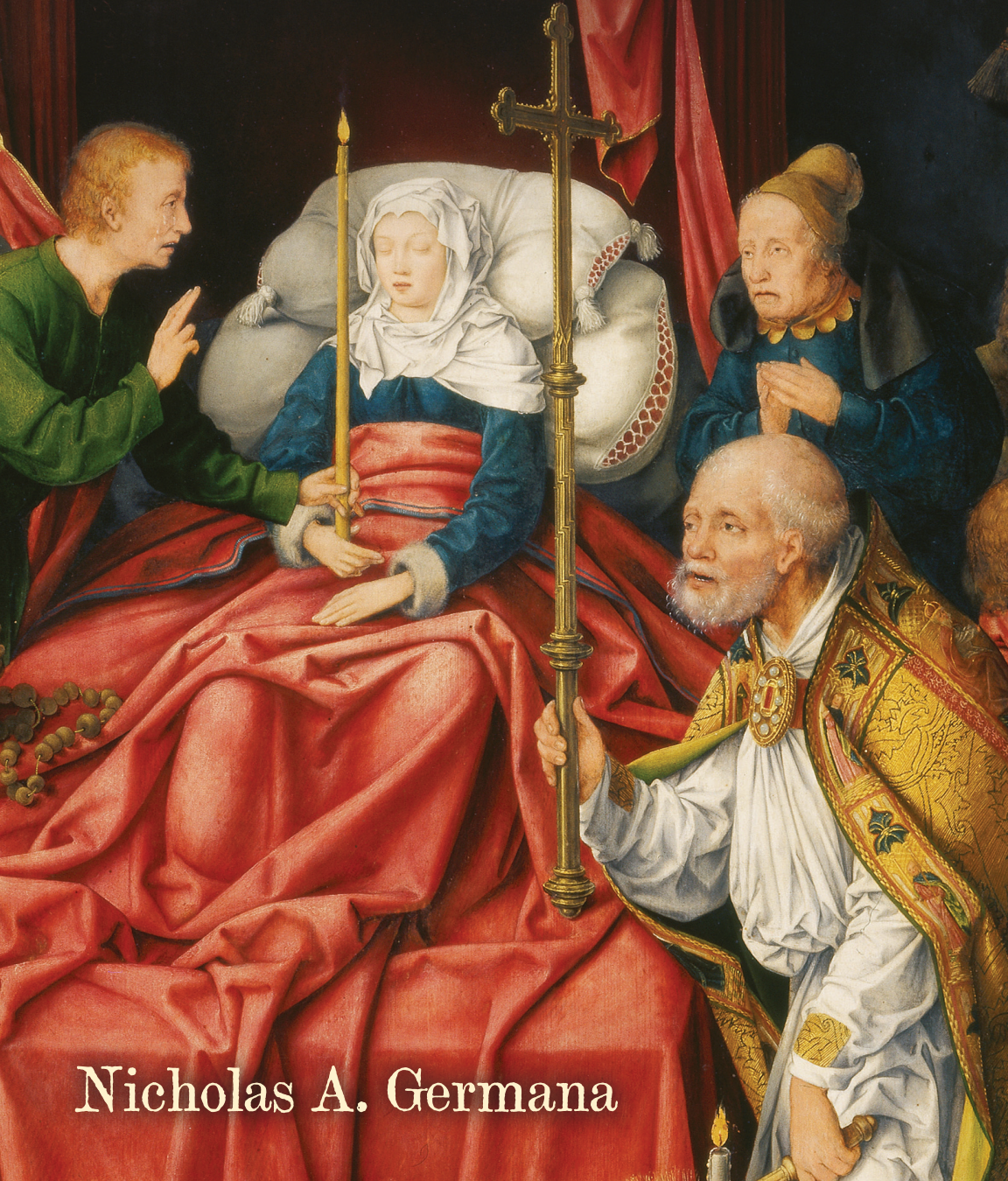


The Anxiety of Autonomy and the Aesthetics of German Orientalism



Nicholas A. Germana

*The Anxiety of Autonomy and the
Aesthetics of German Orientalism*

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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For my parents—Richard and Kathleen Germana

Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! Have courage to make use of your own understanding! is the motto of enlightenment. . . . That by far the greatest part of mankind (including the entire fair sex) should hold the step toward majority to be not only troublesome but also highly dangerous will soon be seen to by those guardians who have kindly taken it upon themselves to supervise them; after they have made their domesticated animals dumb and carefully prevented these placid creatures from daring to take a single step without the walking cart in which they have confined them, they then show them the danger that threatens them if they try to walk alone.

—Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?”

There is a beauty of a peculiar kind in women, in which their countenance presents a transparency of skin, a light and lovely roseate hue, which is unlike the complexion of mere health and vital vigor—a more refined bloom, breathed, as it were, by the soul within—and in which the features, the light of the eye, the position of the mouth, appear soft, yielding and relaxed. This almost unearthly beauty is perceived in women in those days which immediately succeed childbirth; when freedom from the burden of pregnancy and the pains of travail is added to the joy of soul that welcomes the gift of a beloved infant. A similar tone of beauty is seen also in women during the magical somnambule sleep, connecting them with a world of superterrestrial beauty. . . . Such a beauty we find also in its loveliest form in the Indian world; a beauty of enervation in which all that is rough, rigid, and contradictory is dissolved, and we have only the soul in a state of emotion—a soul, however, in which the death of free self-reliant Spirit is perceptible. For should we approach the charm of this Flower-life—a charm rich in imagination and genius—in which its whole environment and all its relations are permeated with the rose-breath of the Soul, and the world is transformed into a Garden of Love—should we look at it more closely, and examine it in the light of Human Dignity and Freedom—the more attractive the first sight of it had been, so much the more unworthy shall we ultimately find it in every respect.

—Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*

Furthermore, women soon come into opposition to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence—those very women who, in the beginning, laid the foundations of civilization by the claims of their love. Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable. Since a man does not have unlimited quantities of psychical energy at his disposal, he has to accomplish his tasks by making an expedient distribution of his libido. What he employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with them, even estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it.

—Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

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Introduction

IN MY FIRST BOOK I was primarily interested in what A. Leslie Willson called the “mythical image” of India in German Romantic thought.¹ In the absence of material German interests in the region, how can we account for Romantic orientalist enthusiasm in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?² In that study, I came to the conclusion that their construction of the “mythical image” was part of the process of the Romantics’ construction of a mythical image of Germany. As India had once been the fountainhead of religious, philosophical, and literary traditions that flowered throughout the ancient world, so too would Germany become “the Orient of Europe”³—the birthplace of a spiritual revolution that would usher in a new Golden Age.

The most persistent adversary of the Romantic mythical images of both India and Germany was G. W. F. Hegel, and one chapter in that study focuses on the place of India in Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of history, history of philosophy, and philosophy of religion. I was especially struck, as one cannot fail to be, by Hegel’s description of the mysterious kind of beauty that “one” finds in the Orient. It is strange and otherworldly, and its seductive allure possesses the power to “dissolve” (auflösen) oppositional subjectivity into the flaccidity of a mere “state of emotion.” This beauty is a trap, and only a critical analytical consciousness can see beneath the lovely appearance of this “beauty of enervation” to recognize it for what it is—“the death of free self-reliant Spirit.”

What I could not quite account for at that time was the *anxiety* that is evident in this passage, as elsewhere in Hegel’s writings on India. One possible source of Hegel’s discomfort with Indian thought, which Bradley Herling has incisively shown, is its similarity to his own philosophical project.⁴ Hegel’s narrative of the “Self” that comes to know itself in and through the absolute has striking similarities to Upanishadic Vedantism and Krishna’s teaching regarding the relationship between Śāṅkhya and Yoga and the nature of duty in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Hegel’s antipathy toward these schools of Indian thought might very well have been due to the uncomfortable affinities he found between them—and the post-Kantian philosophical and literary projects of the Romantics—and his own efforts at systematic philosophy.⁵ In Hegel’s teleological narrative of reason, ancient Indian philosophy simply could not have attained a comprehension of the absolute, an achievement that could only be realized in

the dusk of world history when Spirit arrives at complete self-realization or Absolute Knowing.

In his analysis, Herling says that he does not wish to “subject the passage [above] to psychoanalysis but merely to suggest that unless Hegel was attempting a parody of his Romantic cohorts, there is some earnestness in this depiction.”⁶ There is unquestionably a great deal of earnestness in this description of the enervating beauty of India, and something of a psychoanalytic approach might prove very useful in helping us to uncover the source of Hegel’s “earnestness,” or—to put a more diagnostic label on it—anxiety.⁷ There may be, in fact, some very compelling reasons for adopting a psychoanalytic approach toward an effort to locate and understand the anxiety that is manifest in Hegelian orientalism. There are, after all, important similarities between Hegel’s spiritual anthropology and Freud’s psychoanalytic project. Both thinkers pioneered methodologies that begin with an examination of the structures of the human mind in an effort to map out its logic, to trace its development toward self-understanding (and therefore self-mastery), and to identify pathologies in that development. For both men, it should also be added, *Wissenschaft* was much more than an occupation or even a calling—it was a cultural project of world-historical importance. Philosophy and psychoanalysis, respectively, are held to be agents of the very historical change that builds up to them and marks them as monumental achievements of human thought.⁸

If these narratives are so triumphal, if there is a larger historical logic at play that seemingly necessitates the triumph of reason over the irrational (in all of its myriad forms), how can we account for the obvious unease with which they diminish reason’s Others? Judith Butler has pointed in a fruitful direction in her examination of the force of desire that animates Hegel’s philosophy, the imposing structure of which aims at mastering the “immediate, arbitrary, purposeless, and animal” in human nature that “threatens to undermine the postures of indifference and dispassion which have in various different modalities conditioned philosophical thinking.”⁹ We are beings of desire, as Hegel famously formulates it in the dialectic of the Lord and Bondsman. But this desire entangles us in complex relations with others as we strive to overcome otherness itself—either by belonging with and to the Other or by mastering and nullifying it. The task of philosophy is to subvert the “animal” desire that threatens to consume us by turning it into another kind of desire, the “rational” desire for freedom through mastery.¹⁰

The complexities of these relations between Self and Other, so burdened by desire, are by no means unique to Hegel. They are, in fact, central to the philosophical concerns of Kantian and post-Kantian German thought. Susan Shell has argued persuasively that the mind-body problem stands as a central thread in Kant’s philosophy from the

1750s on, unifying the pre-Critical works with the Critical philosophy that Kant developed in the two decades after 1781. Kant's hypochondria left him in dread of "the wavering, and ultimately deflating, attractions of sensuous desire, whose objects disgust once we are sated." The life of the mind, by contrast, promises "the unwavering draw of ideas, whose 'unfathomable depth' is the source of their infinite capacity to uplift us."¹¹ The flesh is indeed weak—male flesh in particular. Like the Greeks, Kant held female sexual capacity to be virtually limitless, while men's limits in this regard were painfully obvious. In the absence of some form of defense against the seductive allure of feminine charm, men are all too willing to enslave themselves to the "fair sex" and allow themselves to be consumed and annihilated.

In response, Kant formulated a philosophy of radical freedom that is intended to inure the rational subject to the seductive force of "pathological" influences—autonomy. A rational being who has realized his nature *as* a rational being becomes self-legislating. (The fact that he must *become* autonomous is critical to the anxiety at the core of Kant's philosophy of freedom and the direction it takes in the succeeding generation.) Robin May Schott places Kant's moral and theoretical philosophy within the context of a tradition of Western thinkers who sought to "distance [themselves] from a multitude of sensuous, erotic, and emotional concerns" by objectifying the Other in the form of the feminine, nature, and the emotions.¹² "Objects of nature," she argues, "become merely a substratum to be dominated by scientific knowledge."¹³ As is the nature of fetishism, however, the result of this objectification is that the proscribed Other becomes sexually charged for the thinking subject through the very process by which it seeks to manifest its mastery over the Other (the central problem of the dynamic of desire that Butler describes in Hegel's dialectic). Hartmut and Gernot Böhme, in their Freudian analysis of Kant's construction of the rational Self, also point to the price to be paid for the repression/domination of reason's Others—the empowering of the irrational in the unconscious.¹⁴

The gendered language that objectifies the Orient as the feminine Other in European thought also empowers it as an object of desire. Said identified this objectification as an essential aspect of the "Western" orientalist imagination, as in paintings by Delacroix or Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (he might have included Montesquieu's seraglio from *Persian Letters*).¹⁵ A number of other scholars have provided critical insights into the inextricable skeins of gender and colonial discourse from the early modern period into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Suzanne Zantop provocatively extended this analysis to Germany (a lacuna curiously left by Said) and the German imagination in the century prior to unification.¹⁶ Even when the relationship between Europe and its Other was couched in matrimonial, familial terms the Other was

also unavoidably sexually charged as an object of earthly, material desire. Hegel could not have stated it more clearly: "And as in this silent way, Northern India has been a centre of emigration, productive of merely physical diffusion, India as a Land of Desire forms an essential element in General History. From the most ancient times downwards, all nations have directed their wishes and longings to gaining access to the treasures of this land of marvels . . ." ¹⁷

The real threat posed by the seductive power of the non-European Other has been most clearly underscored by Kamakshi Murti.¹⁸ Murti extends Said's model to include a German variant of orientalism that, while differing in practice from the French and English (i.e., no direct state interest), differs little, if at all, in its essence. While I cannot agree with Murti's claims regarding the "complicity" of German orientalism in the Anglo-French colonialist project, her emphasis on seduction, and the anxiety produced by its possibility, provides a key insight into the intersection of the German orientalist and moral-political discourses. Murti points directly to the "seductive ambivalence" toward the Orient, and incisively identifies the anxiety that it produces, as well as the strategy employed by the male orientalist imagination in coping with it: "The fear of losing one's subject status by empowering the object of one's desires permeates the Orientalist's texts. . . . What better way of warding off such anxieties than by transforming a transitive into an intransitive state of being?" ¹⁹

While Murti writes about the fear of seduction, she fails to ground it, to trace it to its origins in German thought. She points in the right direction, but she never follows this line of thought back to its origins—in German moral and political philosophy. It has gone remarkably unremarked upon that the very terms we use to describe these relationships (*Self* and *Other*), and the power dynamics that underlie them, are taken from the tradition of German moral and political thought in the period from Kant onward to the Romantics and Hegel. The idea of the Self that is simply presumed, and subsequently reaffirmed, in Cartesian thought is inherently problematized by Kant. The Self, as we experience it in the empirical world, is a construct—a prerequisite condition for the possibility of experience itself. The generation of thinkers who succeeded Kant was forced to grapple with the complexities and inconsistencies in his account of this Self, how it comes to be, and how we come to know it. The problem to which they must return time and again is the relationship of the Self to the Other and how this relationship defines the Self at the same time that the Self struggles to negate the influence (if not the reality) of the Other.

This problem at the heart of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophies of freedom is the question of what it means to be a *subject*. The word itself is fraught with ambivalence and (at least potentially) contradiction.

To be a subject in the Kantian sense is to exercise power over the world of external objects through cognition, but it also implies the threat of being subject to the influence of those same objects. The difference between these two states—autonomy and heteronomy—is the vital difference between freedom and slavery for Kant. As Reiner Schürmann argues, as a result of this bifurcated Kantian “Self,” “the terror of freedom has its source only in itself.”²⁰ Autonomy is made possible by the separation of a Self that commands from a Self that obeys. The problem is that the Self that obeys, the phenomenal Self, is always susceptible to influence, and, in the end, the most powerful influence will win out.

Autonomy is the defining quality of the subject in German philosophy from Kant to Hegel; it is the defining quality, its essence, *and* that toward which it strives. Autonomy is a problem and a source of tremendous anxiety because it is never guaranteed—it must be *achieved*. The achievement of autonomy is precisely what Kant describes as “maturity” (Mündigkeit) in “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” We are enlightened when we have gained the capacity to think for ourselves, when we, as individuals and collectively, have come of age. The problem is laid out clearly enough: “It is because of laziness and cowardice that so great a part of humankind, after nature has long since emancipated them from other people’s direction . . . nevertheless gladly remains minors for life. . . . It is so comfortable to be a minor!”²¹

Jessica Benjamin has identified the dynamic process of ego formation as a core concern of both (Hegelian) German Idealism and Freudian psychoanalysis. The historical development (i.e., one that occurs progressively over time) of the individual ego is a turbulent process in which consciousness becomes self-consciousness (or subjectivity) in relation to objects outside of itself, which it comes to determine as “other” than itself. The conflict that Benjamin (following both Hegel and Freud) describes strains the ego—the barrier between the “Self” and the “Other” is malleable, and tremendous psychical energy must be applied to maintaining it in a healthy way. Failure to do so results in the collapse of subjectivity and surrender to the mastery of the Other or the effective annihilation of the Other as an independent existing thing.²²

The balance of this psychical energy—or what he called sexual economy—was a problem that Freud had to grapple with in his efforts to describe the dynamics of ego development. In his efforts to articulate a theory of instincts, one of the fundamental issues with which Freud struggled was the distinction between those which were presumed to be non-sexual and focused on self-preservation, and those sexual instincts that were directed toward the propagation of the species. This distinction, he concluded, simply could not provide a satisfactory explanation for many of the neuroses that he encountered in his patients.²³ Equally unsatisfactory for Freud was the theory advanced by Jung that the “primal libido”

was a single, unitary force that pervades all of mental life and could be either sexualized (if directed toward an object) or desexualized (if directed toward the Self).²⁴

The direction of the libido is, for Freud, an “economic” problem. Libidinal energy is finite and must be shared between the ego and its objects. While libido which is drawn back into the ego results in narcissism, if taken to its pathological extreme (“sexual overestimation”) the result is fetishism.²⁵ Ego-libido can be directed toward any number of objects (often resulting in “sexual aberrations”), and it can be sublimated into activities that do not appear to be sexual by nature, such as intellectual activity. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud describes the process of sublimation whereby the sexual instincts are detached from family life and human sexual objects and channeled toward the creation of culture, but at a cost: “The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable.” Libido is finite, however, and “since a man does not have unlimited quantities of psychical energy at his disposal, he has to accomplish his tasks by making an expedient distribution of his libido.” Women, who are incapable of such distribution (the range of objects toward which they can direct their object-libido is more limited), are left behind, in the home, and become “hostile” toward the civilization that draws men out of the family.²⁶ (Hegel gives expression to the same sentiment in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, when he writes of women as the “internal enemy” of the state.)

In suggesting Freud’s libido theory as a useful analytical lens or framework, it is not my intention to simplistically reduce the sources and motivations for Kant’s and Hegel’s complex philosophical systems to sexual desires and anxieties. Freud’s theory is useful for understanding the development of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy for two reasons. First, as explained above, Freud understood the dynamics and difficulties of ego/object relations as fundamentally economic. Energy is required to maintain a proper balance, and failure to do so can be psychically damaging. Second, and this is the point that is too often missed by the postcolonial critics of this tradition of German thought, the Self is understood as a construct—cognitively and historically but also culturally and psychologically. The Self is formed in and through its relationship to non-selves. The Orient as the Anti-Europe²⁷ is the Other in and through which European thinkers struggled to understand their own culture in the period covered in this book.

For the historian these theoretical frameworks are all well and good, but they do not provide a sufficient basis for explaining the relationship between these ideas and the larger social, cultural, and political context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany. To what can we

attribute these particular anxieties about the power dynamics between the sexes, the place of women in modern European public life, and the place of Asian philosophies and religions in world history? Why are these issues of such momentous concern at precisely this moment? The tendency among postcolonial literary scholars, like Murti, is to answer these questions by attempting to link German popular and academic orientalism in some way to the more overt connections between orientalism and the exercise of political and economic power in British and French colonialism. (Other examples of this approach to German texts will be explored in chapter 4.) In their desire to place German philosophy and literature in a colonial framework, however, these accounts too often fail to provide an adequate grounding of German orientalist discourses within the specific cultural and political context of Germany in this period.²⁸

As I have developed this argument, my work has been influenced by a number of feminist scholars who have written compelling studies of the insecurity and anxiety at the core of French revolutionary and republican discourse at the end of the eighteenth century. These studies are of particular value because they analyze the construction of a highly politicized notion of modern, “enlightened,” masculinity in opposition to the culture of despotism of the Old Regime. Dena Goodman’s *Republic of Letters* emphasizes what she calls the “phantasy of masculine self-governance” in the last years of the Old Regime.²⁹ Resentment toward the feminine, republican, salon “governance” resulted, Goodman argues, in a revolt against both the Old Regime and salon culture, both of which were experienced by the *lumières* as sources of emasculation. Joan Landes’s *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* is even more explicit about the emasculating effects of absolutist power, and the connection made in the minds of French men of letters and revolutionaries between absolutist power and the prominent cultural role of women in Old Regime France.³⁰ Landes sees the public sphere, which emerged in France and came fully into being throughout Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as a potent construction of a privileged male space, wherein citizenship was defined in gendered terms. Women were systematically excluded from this sphere (limited to the role of “Republican Mother”), and it is precisely this exclusion that makes possible the ideal of the autonomous (i.e., self-legislating) republican male citizen.

Of particular interest for this study is Lynn Hunt’s reading of “the family romance” of the French Revolution.³¹ Hunt adapts Freud’s notion of the family romance as a framework for understanding the social relations that defined the French body politic in the eighteenth century and argues that the dynamics of those relations help explain the course of events as they transpired in the 1790s. There are only so many correlations that can be made from Hunt’s argument to the situation in Germany in

roughly this same period, but her emphasis on the revolutionaries' anxieties regarding the gendered (and gendering) notion of the public sphere does strike a chord with the discourse in German philosophy on the nature and possibility of freedom. Hunt effectively employs Freud's concept to underscore the importance of the bonds of the "band of brothers" and their claims to social and even (indirectly) political authority, and the multiple bodies of the queen as a representation of "the menace that the feminine and the feminizing presented to republican notions of manhood and virility."³²

One might well ask whether the very different political and cultural realities in France and Germany will allow for such a comparison as I am suggesting here. Historians and other scholars have emphasized, at least since the end of the Second World War, the political impotence of the German Bildungsbürgertum and the consequences of the tension between its members' relatively high social status and their almost complete lack of real political influence.³³ Such readings easily find support, for example, in Kant's seemingly obsequious praise, in "What Is Enlightenment?" of Frederick II's declaration to his subjects: "*Argue* as much as you will, and about whatever you will, *but obey!*"³⁴ And even more ominously in Kant's conclusion that "a greater degree of civil freedom seems advantageous to a people's freedom of *spirit* and nevertheless puts up insurmountable barriers to it; a lesser degree of the former, on the other hand, provides a space for the latter to expand to its full capacity."³⁵

While some important efforts have been made to rethink, recontextualize, and criticize this emphasis on a proclivity toward authoritarianism in German thought,³⁶ it remains true that with a very few noteworthy exceptions, even the most ardent young German enthusiasts for liberty did not take up the revolutionary cause in central Europe. The revolution in Germany would be different; it would take place in and through art, literature, and philosophy. Friedrich Schlegel, who proclaimed the French Revolution one of the three great "tendencies of the age" (along with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*) gave voice to a typical criticism of the French when he wrote that "whoever cannot take any revolution seriously that is not noisy and materialistic, has not yet achieved a lofty, broad perspective on the history of mankind."³⁷

While it may be (and clearly has been) tempting to dismiss pronouncements such as these as a form of escapism from German political realities, or at best an accommodationism to absolutist power, historians have shown that political revolution along French lines did not occur in the German states (with some exceptions) because of a history of "enlightened" political reform that had successfully ameliorated the worst conditions that existed in France. In an effort to centralize authority and modernize political, economic, and military institutions, numerous German states followed the Prussian lead in creating a form

of “bureaucratic state absolutism,”³⁸ exemplified by the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (1794). This new modern bureaucratic state came to rely more than ever on the educated middle-class civil servants who regulated the economy, collected taxes, and standardized legal codes and systems of weights, measures, and currency. This was the world into which the early Romantic generation was born. Hegel, for example, was the son of just such an administrative official in the Duchy of Württemberg, so it should come as no surprise that in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821) he would identify the civil service as the impartial guarantors of “the state’s universal interest.”³⁹

In other words, even though the development of the Bildungsbürger differed in important ways from the revolutionary classes in France, it was nonetheless coming into a consciousness of itself as an economic *and* political class in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴⁰ However accommodationist Kant may have seemed in the “What Is Enlightenment?” essay, he took very seriously the right of freedom of what he called “public” speech (i.e., the right to speak publicly as a private individual) on political and religious matters. “Our age is the genuine age of criticism,” he announces in the first *Critique*, “to which everything must submit.” He continues:

Religion through its holiness and law-legislation through its majesty commonly seek to exempt themselves from it. But in this way they excite a just suspicion against themselves, and cannot lay claim to that unfeigned respect that reason grants only to that which has been able to withstand its free and public examination.⁴¹

Kant was taken to task for precisely this kind of critical activity, as King Frederick William II took exception to his critical examination of traditional religious dogma in his 1794 *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone* and forbade Kant from offending His Majesty (“Failing this, you must expect unpleasant measures for your continued obstinacy”).⁴² Kant abstained for a time, until the king was dead and a more tolerant monarch had ascended the throne in 1797. He then rushed to publish an essay, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, which he had written as a response to Frederick William II (including the full text of the king’s reprimand). Scholars, he reasserted, had the right to express themselves on civil and religious matters without interference from the state.

Both Kant and Hegel argued for the privileged status of philosophy and philosophers in a modern, enlightened state. The *Gelehrten* that Kant describes in “What Is Enlightenment?” might be compared to Hunt’s “band of brothers,” not in their revolutionary intent but in the extent to which their collective identity was tied to a narrative of masculinity. Kant and Hegel saw the status of the scholar as one of the defining qualities

of modern society, proof of its world-historical maturity. (The Romantics made similar claims, albeit with strikingly different ends in mind, about the importance of art and the artist.) Not unlike their brethren in the Republic of Letters in France, the Bildungsbürger were becoming increasingly aware of their tenuous status in absolutist German society, and they were, as we shall see, prone to many of the same insecurities.

How the Orient came to be connected with these anxieties and insecurities is the primary interest of this study. Of the thinkers whose work will be considered here, only Hegel can be said to have had an “Orientalist” agenda, in the Saidian sense, in any meaningful way. (I will elaborate upon the distinctions among the varying definitions of *orientalist* below.) He drew extensively on British sources, frequently remarked with approval on British officials’ degrading judgments of Indian religion and morality, and argued that Indian culture could only be of world-historical importance as it was transmitted by and through later civilizations. While Kant unquestionably contributed to the nineteenth-century discourse on race through his work in the nascent field of anthropology, his works on moral philosophy contain sharp rebukes of the self-serving logic of European colonial projects.⁴³ None of these thinkers projected or proposed any form of German participation in the colonial enterprise. To argue, as Elena Pnevmonidou does, that Novalis’s mythical ideal of the German nation “stages the ideology of empire” is entirely without historical foundation.⁴⁴

In recent years a number of historians have provided some much-needed contextualization that has shaped the study of German orientalism in important ways. Suzanne Marchand has done a great service in her thorough examination of the strands of post-Reformation religious concerns that shaped the German reception of and attitude toward “Oriental” thought.⁴⁵ Through careful contextualization she has exposed the most compelling weaknesses in the work of those scholars who would apply Said’s model, more or less uncritically, to Germany. Tuska Benes’s erudite account of the formal institutionalization of philology in the nineteenth century makes critical connections between academic orientalist discourses and evolving notions of German national identity.⁴⁶ Douglas McGetchin has been one of the most active scholars in the field, and his work has shed important light on the relationship between academic discourses and institutions and more-popular attitudes about the Orient in German culture.⁴⁷ Most recently, Peter K. J. Park has provided an important account of the place of Africa and Asia in the development of philosophy and the history of philosophy as academic disciplines in German universities.⁴⁸

Each of these scholars has made significant contributions to a richer and more comprehensive view of the complexities of German orientalism, in both theory and practice. The focus of much of this scholarship

has been on institutionalized forms of orientalism. The pre-Romantics (such as Herder), the Romantics, and Kant have largely been treated as constituting a sort of prehistory of German orientalism, which, properly speaking, perhaps comes into being with Hegel in philosophy and Franz Bopp in philology. As Marchand, Benes, McGetchin, Aluri and Bagchee, and Park have all shown (and as I attempted to show in chapter 5 of *The Orient of Europe*), the institutional and discursive establishment of Indological studies as *Wissenschaften* was central to a sense of “German” identity in the nineteenth century. Dorothy Figueira has shown how this relationship between German scholarship on the Orient and German cultural identity played out in the praxis of translation and literary production in this same period.⁴⁹

In this book, I have gone down a different path, one that has not yet been explored. My contention is that German orientalism in the philosophical tradition from Kant to Hegel has to be understood, first and foremost, within the context of the central concerns of moral and political philosophy (with a further interest, as I will describe below, in demonstrating how these concerns converge in aesthetics). To be a “subject” also has important political as well as epistemological and psychological meaning. The political status of the subject (*Untertan*) is, in fact, inseparable from the epistemological, psychological, and moral concerns of Kantian and post-Kantian thought. It is in terms of these concerns and anxieties that we must begin our understanding of the place of the Orient in this tradition of German thought.

Whatever sympathy Kant and Hegel may have had for the “civilizing mission” of European colonialism, their interest in Oriental cultures stemmed from concerns much closer to home. Their primary concern was with defining an ideal of freedom that took as its foundation the historical maturation of the human race toward rational, moral perfection in the modern state.⁵⁰ Modern philosophy is the result of this maturation, and the study of earlier stages of human development provides evidence of the immensity of this achievement.⁵¹ Just as the childlike immaturity and dependence of women must be held in contrast to the dignified self-sufficiency of men, ancient (pre-Greek) cultures must be held up as examples of the immaturity of the human race, of the failure to rise above the immediacy of nature to full (i.e., rational) humanity.

This triumphalist narrative, however, encountered obstacles. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was coming under increasing attack from popular religious and literary movements that placed new emphasis on intuition and the emotions. The artists and intellectuals associated with the *Sturm und Drang* and Early Romanticism were skeptical of the claims of the *Aufklärung* regarding the sovereignty of reason and its place as the defining quality of humanity. They advocated for an alternate epistemology, a more immediate form of “knowing” that placed

greater value on the importance of art as a foundation for genuine freedom and a cure for the ills of modern society. At the same time, and for the same reasons, that these thinkers revalued traditionally feminine qualities such as imagination and sensibility they began to think anew about the vitality of Oriental art, religion, and philosophy as expressions of a presumably childlike innocence and spiritual wholeness. The popularity of these movements was a source of considerable frustration for both Kant and Hegel, who saw in the projects of the Schwärmer a persistent threat to the progress of reason that was central to their philosophical projects and, consequently, to their definitions of masculinity.

* * *

It is important to say a word about what, exactly, I mean by the “Orient.” For the most part, the Orient that I am concerned with here is limited to ancient India and China. I have made this choice because the Islamic Orient (as well as Persia) is in many ways a much more complex subject that deserves its own treatment. Nina Berman has explored German literature on the Middle East in broad strokes from the Middle Ages to the late twentieth century, and Ian Almond has written an analysis of Islam in German thought from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century.⁵² Islamic monotheism makes a difference in how these cultures were perceived by Kant and Hegel. For example, in his historical/geographical classification of world cultures Hegel locates Islam in the “German World” and goes so far as to claim:

The European who goes from Persia to India, observes . . . a prodigious contrast. Whereas in the former country he finds himself still somewhat at home, and meets with European dispositions, human virtues and human passions—as soon as he crosses the Indus . . . he encounters the most repellent characteristics, pervading every single feature of society.⁵³

While Hegel is repulsed by the eroticism of Indian mythology and literature, he expresses great admiration for Persian poetry, especially Rūmī. In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Kant compares the aesthetic sensibilities of various cultures. European nations are said to have Oriental analogues: Arabs are the “Spaniards of the Orient,” while Persians are the Frenchmen, and the Japanese are analogous to the English.⁵⁴ Among the Asian cultures Kant discusses, the Indians and the Chinese alone apparently offer no grounds for comparison.

There is no question that the Islamic Orient shares many of the same “exotic” features that German thinkers found in South Asia and China, but it is also regarded in some ways as being more familiar to the West

because of more prolonged contact between Europe and Islamic cultures, and because of a shared Abrahamic religious tradition. By contrast, the “bizarre” and “grotesque” semianthropomorphic imagery of Indian mythology and the apparent atheism of Chinese thought made those cultures much more distinctively “Other” to Kant and Hegel. A detailed study of the similarities and differences between German ideas about these different “Orients” would be valuable, but it is beyond the scope of this project. The one exception to this rule will be my examination of the encounter between the young Heinrich and the Arab maiden Zulima. I include this passage because Novalis’s Orient was an especially vague and hybrid poetic construction, and because although she is Arab, Zulima is certainly stereotypically “Oriental” and can be compared with the Hindu maiden Śakuntalā, whose presence is very much felt in Novalis’s imagery in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1799–1801). While this distinction is less than ideal, I have found it to be necessary.

Likewise, it is important that I should attempt to clarify what I mean by the term *orientalism*. In its Saidian usage, it refers to a collection of academic, literary, and political practices by means of which European countries exercised hegemony over various cultures from the Near to the Far East. Suzanne Marchand, Tuska Benes, and Douglas McGetchin (among others) have carefully distinguished between Orientalism in this sense and the history of Orientalistik as an academic discipline within the newly reorganized German universities in the early to mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁵ With reference to Kant and Hegel (as well as the Early Romantics), my use of the term “orientalism” is both more general and more specific. As I argued in my first book, I take German Idealist and Romantic interest in Asian cultures to be first and foremost an expression about concerns *within* late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German culture. While I recognize how this interest fed into and, in unique ways, helped shape European cultural, political, and economic imperialism, it did not originate in this discourse and cannot be reduced to it. Likewise, while Kantian and post-Kantian “orientalism” contributed significantly to the development of Orientalistik, it also has a life of its own in the very specific concerns that animated philosophical debates about the nature of freedom, debates that are distinct from the central concerns of Sprachwissenschaften. To put it simply—the term “orientalism” as I employ it in this study refers to efforts in Kantian and post-Kantian thought to construct an image of modern German identity through the construction of an idealized “Oriental” *Anti-Europa*.

The battleground between these opposing camps was, as often as not, aesthetics. From Kant’s *Observations* and Herder’s *Fragments on Recent German Literature* in the 1760s to Schelling’s philosophy of art, Schlegel’s theory of irony, and Hegel’s lectures in the 1820s, Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetic theories reflected a whole host of epistemological,

moral, and political concerns. It makes perfect sense that this would be the case; aesthetic concerns necessarily involve a consideration of the problem of influence—how do the beautiful and sublime *affect* us? How *can* they affect us without that affecting being, by definition, a fundamental threat to autonomy? Aesthetics returns us again to the question of what it means to be a subject—to subject the world to the mastery of reason, or to surrender to the mastery of nature.

Remarkably, given its prominence as a central philosophical concern—and, even more so, its central importance to the anthropological concerns of both Kant and Hegel—the scholarship on German orientalism has virtually nothing to say about aesthetics. The modern, mature (i.e., Western, male) subject must be a self-legislating being who can exercise reason as a restraint on the senses and the imagination. Reason must master or transform the content of aesthetic experiences; such mastery is requisite for, and evidence of, the realization of freedom. Likewise, Oriental cultures (like women) are defined by their excessive sensibility and sensuality. Their art, which is scrutinized as an expression of their religious beliefs, is evidence of their world-historical immaturity. These early underdeveloped stages in human history provide the backdrop for the achievement of Occidental philosophy. They provide, as Murti argues, the “intransitive” against and in opposition to which the “transitive” becomes what it is meant to be, or as Beauvoir puts it, the “anchorage in immanence” out of which the Occidental male must develop.⁵⁶

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Before proceeding to a brief overview of the chapters that follow, it is important to state clearly what I hope to achieve with this book. This is as much a history of Kantian and post-Kantian thought as it is of German orientalism. Even more so, in fact, because the tradition of thought discussed in this book comprises just one period (albeit a foundational one) in that larger history.⁵⁷ What I hope to disclose is an anxiety that is at the core of Kantian and post-Kantian thought, and to demonstrate that this anxiety sheds light on these thinkers’ derogation of Oriental cultures. Just as scholars of German orientalism—many of whom come from backgrounds in literary and cultural studies—can deepen their understanding of this phenomenon through a closer examination of its philosophical foundations, I believe that scholars of German philosophy can engage in a fruitful reexamination of these sources in light of the deeper concerns that are revealed through a closer look at the place of the Orient in the tradition of thought from Kant to Hegel.

In the chapters that follow I will trace the anxiety of autonomy from Kant’s moral, political, and aesthetic philosophy of the 1760s through the revolutionary decade of the 1790s and the work of the post-Kantian Idealists and Romantics to Hegel. In each chapter my aim is to balance an

appropriately detailed exploration of the central philosophical issues with an examination of the larger cultural and political context in which these ideas were articulated. While such an approach runs the risk of pleasing neither the philosopher nor the historian entirely, my hope is that it will open a space for a meeting of scholarly discourses that will allow for a fuller understanding of this tradition in German thought. Historians are too seldom attentive to the ways in which philosophers engage with ideas as things-in-themselves (to borrow a Kantian phrase), as expressions of fundamental human concerns that transcend time and place. Likewise, philosophers are often not sensitive enough to the “groundedness” of philosophical discourse, the extent to which it reveals and expresses historically unique sets of problems even as it employs the language of a tradition that extends back more than two millennia.

The first chapter focuses on Kant’s philosophy of history, as he articulated it in two short but important essays from 1784—“Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim” and “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” In these essays Kant argues that reason is what allows man to distinguish himself from nature, and that it is the source of his dignity. I trace this teleological narrative through Kant’s works on moral philosophy and anthropology from the 1760s through the 1780s. Women and the Orient emerge as examples of people and cultures who are never able to learn how to reason for themselves and are therefore doomed to historical and cultural stagnation. Kant’s references to Asian cultures reveal at times a frustration with contemporary enthusiasm for Oriental art, religion, and philosophy that runs contrary to his own narrative of teleological progress. I conclude this chapter with an examination of the conflict between Kant and his former student Johann Gottfried Herder, who had become a vocal proponent of Oriental religion and literature.

Chapter 2 focuses on the development of Kant’s aesthetic theories, and their relationship to his epistemology and moral philosophy, from 1764 to 1790. The central problem with which Kant is forced to contend in his moral philosophy is the problem of *influence*. How does one achieve self-mastery when we are always being influenced by the stimuli of our senses? Just as problematic for Kant, he contends in his works on moral philosophy that true virtue is sublime, but if the sublime is an affect how can it be moral? I argue that the *Critique of Judgment* pulls together the various threads of Kant’s epistemology and moral philosophy from the previous twenty years in an attempt to redefine the nature of influence in order to justify his idea of “moral feeling.” In his efforts to distinguish between “moral beauty” and immoral, grotesque sensuality the Orient serves time and again as an example of the latter. As with the first chapter, I conclude with an examination of the larger cultural context of Kant’s work in this period, including his struggles against religious enthusiasm, revitalized Spinozism, and state censorship.