

This condition of things shows why the scientific, literary, and artistic spirit of the age is declared bankrupt about every thirty years. During that period the errors have increased to such an extent that they fall under the weight of their absurdity; while at the same time the opposition to them has become stronger. At this point there is a crash, which is followed by an error in the opposite direction. To show the course that is taken in its periodical return would be the true practical subject of the history of literature; little notice is taken of it, however. Moreover, through the comparative shortness of such periods, the data of remote times are with difficulty collected; hence the matter can be most conveniently observed in one's own age. An example of this taken from physical science is found in Werter's Neptunian geology. But let me keep to the example already quoted above, for it is nearest to us. In German philosophy Kant's brilliant period was immediately followed by another period, which aimed at being imposing rather than convincing. Instead of being solid and clear, it aimed at being brilliant and hyperbolic, and, in particular, unintelligible; instead of seeking truth, it intrigued. Under these circumstances philosophy could make no progress. Ultimately the whole school and its method became bankrupt. For the audacious, sophisticated nonsense on the one hand, and the unconscionable praise on the other of Hegel and his fellows, as well as the apparent object of the whole affair, rose to such a pitch that in the end the charlatanism of the thing was obvious to everybody; and when, in consequence of certain revelations, the protection that had been given it by the upper classes was withdrawn, it was talked about by everybody. This most miserable of

all the philosophies that have ever existed dragged down with it into the abyss of discredit the systems of Fichte and Schelling, which had preceded it. So that the absolute philosophical futility of the first half of the century following upon Kant in Germany is obvious; and yet the Germans boast of their gift for philosophy compared with foreigners, especially since an English writer, with malicious irony, called them _a nation of thinkers_.