

Half a century is always a considerable time in the history of the universe, for the matter which forms it is always shifting; something is always taking place. But the same length of time in literature often goes for nothing, because nothing has happened; unskilful attempts don't count; so that we are exactly where we were fifty years previously.

To illustrate this: imagine the progress of knowledge among mankind in the form of a planet's course. The false paths the human race soon follows after any important progress has been made represent the epicycles in the Ptolemaic system; after passing through any one of them the planet is just where it was before it entered it. The great minds, however, which really bring the race further on its course, do not accompany it on the epicycles which it makes every time. This explains why posthumous fame is got at the expense of contemporary fame, and _vice versa_. We have an instance of such an epicycle in the philosophy of Fichte and Schelling, crowned by Hegel's caricature of it. This epicycle issued from the limit to which philosophy had been finally brought by Kant, where I myself took it up again later to carry it further. In the interim the false philosophers I have mentioned, and some others, passed through their epicycle, which has just been terminated; hence the people who accompanied them are conscious of being exactly at the point from which they started.