An Introduction to the Age of Revolution
A Chorus of Friends

A song/poem activity by Dr. Chris Deason for Earthschooling

To understand the Age of Revolution it is vital to reflect on the spirit of the Age. The Romantic Philosophers Fichte, Schelling and Scheleiermacher represent the Age of Revolution. After reading the lectures from Lecture 1 and Lecture 2 (found in the portal) you will compose a song or poem entitled a *Chorus of Friends*. This poem or song should see to illustrate and interrogate the ethical life in a life in society—a society of unique individuals who respect humanity in its uniqueness, in themselves and in others. These can then be read out loud. Schleiermacher noted, "The more every one approximates the universe, the more he communicates himself to others, the more perfect unity will they all form; no one has a consciousness for himself alone, everyone has, at the same time, that of the other; they are no longer only men, but mankind; rising above themselves and triumphing over themselves, they are on the road to true immortality and eternity." Your poem or song should capture these concepts from Schleiermacher.

The construct of "Geist" (see page 3) is the key to understanding the Age of Revolution. You should begin this block using the reading contained herein. In addition, you should be able to note and illustrate the thoughts of Fichte, Schelling, and Schleiermacher in the other activities of this period. You need firm grounding in German romantic philosophy including both Goethe and Steiner.

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had implicit faith in the powers of human reason to reach the truth. With its logical-mathematical method it endeavored to illuminate every nook and corner of knowledge, to remove all obscurity, mystery, bigotry, and superstition, to find a reason for everything under the sun. Nature, religion, the State, law, morality, language, and art were brought under the searchlight of reason and reduced to simple and self-evident principles. Human institutions were measured according to their reasonableness; whatever was not rational had no *raison d'être*; to demolish the natural and historical in order to make room for the rational became the practical ideal of the day.

Enlightenment emphasized the worth and dignity of the human individual, it sought to deliver him from the slavery of authority and tradition, to make him self-reliant in thought and action, to obtain for him his natural rights, to secure his happiness and perfection in a world expressly made for him, and to guarantee the continuance of his personal existence in the life to come.

In Germany this great movement found expression in a popular commonsense philosophy which proved the existence of God, freedom, and immortality, and conceived the universe as a rational order designed by an all-wise and all-good Creator for the benefit of man, his highest product; while other thinkers regarded Spinozism as the only rational system, indeed as the last word of all speculative metaphysics; for them logical thought necessarily led to pantheism and determinism.

In France, after reaching its climax in Voltaire, it ended in materialism, atheism, and fatalism; and in England, where it had developed the empiricism of Locke, it came to grief in the skepticism of Hume. If we can know only our impressions, then rational theology, cosmology, and psychology are impossible, and it is futile to philosophize about God, the world, and the human soul. Consistently carried out, the logical-mathematical method seemed to land the intellect in Spinozism or in materialism—in either case to catch man in the causal machinery of nature. In this dilemma many were tempted to throw reason overboard as an instrument of ultimate truth, and to seek for certainty through other functions of the human soul—in feeling, faith, or mystical vision of some sort; the claims of the heart and will were urged against the proud pretensions of the intellect (Hamann, Herder, Jacobi).

Another way of escape was found by substituting the organic conception of reality for the logical-mathematical view of the *Aufklärung*; nature and life, poetry, art, language, political, social, and religious institutions are not creations of reason, not things made to order, but organic—products of evolution (Lessing, Herder, Winckelmann, Goethe). Man, himself, moreover, is not mere intellect, but a being in whom feelings, impulses, yearnings, will, are elements to be reckoned with. And reality is not as transparent as the Enlightenment assumed it to be; existence divided by reason leaves a remainder, as Goethe had put it.

It was Immanuel Kant who tried to arbitrate between the conflicting tendencies of his age. He was an *Aufklärer* in so far as he brought reason itself to the bar of reason and sat in judgment upon its claims, and, likewise, in so far as he insisted on the objective validity of physics and mathematics. But he was as much opposed to the pretentiousness of dogmatic metaphysics as to the pusillanimity of skepticism and the *Schwärmerei* of mysticism. He repudiated the shallow proofs of the existence of God, freedom, and immortality no less emphatically than he rejected materialism with its atheism, fatalism, and hedonism. He tried to save everything worth saving—rational knowledge, modern science, the basal truths of the old metaphysics, and the most precious human values.

For the scientific intelligence, so he held, nature and the self are absolutely determined; every physical occurrence and every human act are necessary links in a causal chain. But such knowledge is possible only in the field of phenomena (*Erscheinungen*); through sense-perception and the discursive understanding we cannot reach the inner core of reality; nor can we pierce the veil of appearances by means of intellectual intuitions, mystical visions, feeling, or faith, i.e., through the emotional and instinctive parts of our nature. It is the presence of the moral law or categorical imperative within us that points to a spiritual world beyond the phenomenal causal order and assures us of our freedom, immortality, and God. It is because we possess this deeper source of truth in practical reason that freedom and an ideal kingdom in which purpose reigns are vouchsafed to us, and that we can free ourselves from the mechanism of the natural order.

It is moral truth that both sets us free and demonstrates our freedom, and that makes harmony possible between the mechanical theory of science and the teleological conception of philosophy. The scientific understanding would plunge us into determinism and agnosticism; from these, faith in the moral law alone can deliver us. In this sense Kant destroyed knowledge to make room for a rational faith in a supersensible world, to save the independence and dignity of the human self and the spiritual values of his people. In claiming a place for the autonomous personality in what *appeared to* be a mechanical universe, Kant gave voice to some of the deeper yearnings of the age. The German Enlightenment, the new humanism, mysticism, pietism, and the faith-philosophy were all interested in the human soul, and unwilling to sacrifice it to the demands of a rationalistic science or metaphysics. In seeking to rescue it, the great criticism, piloted by the moral law, steered his course between the rocks of rationalism, sentimentalism, and skepticism.

It was his solution of the controversy between the head and the heart that influenced Fichte, Schelling, and Schleiermacher. They differed from Kant and among themselves in many respects, but they all glorified the spirit, *Geist*, as the living, active element of reality, and they all rejected the intellect as the source of ultimate truth. They followed him in his anti-intellectualism, but they did not avoid, as he did, the attractive doctrine of an inner intuition; according to them we can somehow grasp the supersensible in an inner experience, which **Fichte** called *intellectual*, **Schelling** *artistic*, **Schleiermacher** *religious*. The bankruptcy of the intelligence was overcome in their systems by the discovery of a faculty that revealed to them the living, dynamic nature of the universe. They were all more or less influenced by the romantic currents of the times, seeking with Herder and Jacobi an approach to the heart of things other than through the categories of logic. Like Lessing and Goethe, they were also attracted to the pantheistic teaching of Spinoza, though rejecting its rigid determinism so far as it might affect the human will. They likewise accepted the idea of development which the leaders of German literature, Lessing, Herder, and Goethe, had already opposed to the unhistorical *Aufklärung*, and which came to play such a prominent part in the great system of Hegel.