

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Schlegel's Philosophy of the Middle

Or Physics and the Transition between Forms

*Gabrielle Reid**

ABSTRACT

This article considers the role the concept of polarity, derived from physics, plays in Friedrich Schlegel's theory of poetry. It specifically addresses polarity's intervention in the construction of the new mythology, which would unify the disparate poetry of his age. Polarity instantiates the tension between two conceptions of theory more broadly found in Schlegel's thought: theory as immanent in the work or field it theorizes (e.g., the new mythology as poetry about poetry) and theory as cross-disciplinary (e.g., the romantic encyclopedia project). Although polarity enters the discourse on poetry from without, it underlies Schlegel's notion of immanent theory. I argue that polarity functions as a pivot between these two frameworks. While scholarship has considered polarity within the context of the encyclopedia project, this article shows how polarity must be negated if the cross-disciplinary organization of knowledge is to take shape.

Keywords: Friedrich Schlegel, polarity, new mythology, poetry, physics

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit der Rolle, die Polarität, abgeleitet von der Physik, in Friedrich Schlegels Theorie der Poesie spielt. Er verfolgt dabei die Beantwortung der Frage, inwiefern Polarität an der Herausbildung Schlegels neuer Mythologie mitwirkt, mit welcher der letztere wiederum die disparate Poesie seiner Zeit vereinigen will. Polarität dient als Beispiel für den Konflikt zwischen den zwei Auffassungen von Theorie, die sich im Werk Schlegels finden: 1) Theorie, die dem Werk oder dem Fach immanent ist (z.B. die neue Mythologie als Poesie der Poesie) und 2) Theorie, die fachübergreifend ist (z.B. das romantische Enzyklopädieprojekt). Obwohl die Polarität von außen in den Diskurs über die Poesie eintritt, liegt sie Schlegels Begriff der immanenten Theorie zugrunde. Ich argumentiere, dass Polarität als Drehpunkt zwischen den zwei Theorieverständnissen funktioniert. Obwohl Polarität oft im Rahmen des Enzyklopädieprojekts betrachtet wird, zeigt dieser Artikel auf, wie Polarität verneint werden muss, um Wissensorganisation interdisziplinär werden zu lassen.

Stichwörter: Friedrich Schlegel, Polarität, neue Mythologie, Poesie, Physik

* PhD Candidate, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Yale University, New Haven, CT 06520, USA – gabrielle.reid@yale.edu

1. Introduction

In his *Dialogue on Poetry*, Schlegel calls on physics to revive poetry by restoring unity to the divided works of his age.¹ Physics, Schlegel explains, can shed light on poetry's nature and reveal inner connections that otherwise evade our grasp. Why would the author so well known for his immanent notion of theory, which claims that a theory must be derived from within the work or field to which it pertains, turn to physics to further our understanding of poetry? While the passages in the *Dialogue* that mention physics raise more questions than they answer, this paper shows how Schlegel's other works from around the same time, his *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy* and thematically corresponding fragments, more thoroughly address this issue and make a case for why physics is essential to the practice and study of poetry. Constructing the unifying function of all poetry (what Schlegel calls the new mythology) is an infinite task for poetry alone. He does, however, speak of such unification in another context when he introduces the encyclopedia project—the combination of all knowledge from all fields within a single work, which would forge interrelations across disciplines through a series of thematically mixed fragments. This project culminates in the unification of poetry, but only to the extent that it also unites poetry with all disciplines while preserving the distinctions between the fields.

While the new mythology and the romantic encyclopedia share the unification of poetry as a common goal, the latter is described as imminently possible. To the extent that the text frames itself as a poetic meditation on the nature of poetry, the *Dialogue* is primarily based on an immanent conception of theory, here in the form of poetry about poetry. The trajectory of the *Lectures*, by contrast, is enabled by a cross-discursive conception of theory, both in terms of its goal and the way it gets there; the *Lectures* show how philosophy will culminate in the romantic encyclopedia, an organization of knowledge in which philosophy is only one branch. Despite this general difference, the *Dialogue* includes details that depend on the cross-discursive notion of theory (for example, by relying on physics for the construction of the new mythology), and the *Lectures* still leave room for the immanent notion of theory, both before and after we reach the stage in which the encyclopedia becomes possible. Here, Schlegel begins by developing a philosophy of philosophy from within philosophy before showing the limitations of this method,

¹ I would like to thank Rüdiger Campe, Leif Weatherby, and the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions during the revision process. I would also like to thank Jelscha Schmid for helping me with the abstract.

and his notion of the encyclopedia still leaves room for the immanent conception of theory without letting it dominate. This paper draws attention to passages that point to the moment of transition between these two forms of theory. As I will show, physics provides the key to understanding the relationship between immanent and cross-discursive theory and the relationship between the *Dialogue* and the *Lectures*. In particular, the figure of polarity acts as a pivot point between these two frameworks.

Most prominently, polarity serves as an example of and foundation for theory that is immanent to the field it theorizes. The concept of polarity is taken from the vocabulary of physics, more specifically from magnetism. For Schlegel, it refers to a way of dealing with simultaneous yet opposed terms. It brings together the positive, the negative, and their midpoint or synthesis (otherwise called the point of indifference) within a single figure. The polarity of the magnet not only belongs to the content of physics but also functions as a sort of diagram of physics' experimental method, which progresses dialectically through diametrically opposed terms. Polarity thus presents us with a theory of physics but also belongs to the content of the field it theorizes.

Schlegel's various iterations of immanent theory all fall into this polar form, but it has its limitations. As in the case of the new mythology, all thought that progresses through polarities is always caught up in an infinite striving for a theory that can account for the totality of which the specific case is a part. In order to arrive at the infinite whole, the figure of polarity must be neutralized and negated. While Schlegel leaves hints of this idea in the *Dialogue*, it can only be thoroughly explained outside of poetry's domain. Poetry as a totality, as it emerges in the romantic encyclopedia, cannot be reached from within poetry. The negation of the figure of the magnet, which opens up new, non-polar ways of organizing knowledge, can only be reached through an indirect route—through physics' intervention in the development of philosophy.

Physics is essential to poetry both because it already underlies poetic notions through polarity and because it allows poetry to achieve its goal: the unification of all poetry. Physics enables this unification by negating the polarities it produces and thereby opens up the possibility of the interrelation of all arts and sciences in the encyclopedia project. Poetry's goal is thus reached not through poetry alone but through physics and philosophy. Since Schlegel's oeuvre contains fragments of the sort one expects to find in the encyclopedia that is to come, and since Schlegel continually stresses the ubiquity of polar forms, there is a tendency to read polarity into a theory of

the romantic fragment primarily based on Schlegel's texts.² This paper argues that the organization of knowledge in a series of fragments is only possible after the negation of polarity. This point of transition entails moving from a linear model to a circular model of philosophy, and ultimately to a conception of philosophy as conic, enabling the transition between these two and many other forms while also opening up the possibility of cross-discursive theorization. In this organization of knowledge, the once polar, immanent conception of theory still remains; when neutralized, however, it no longer dominates.

2. Physics and the New Mythology

In his *Dialogue on Poetry*, Schlegel puts forward the idea that the theory of poetry must itself be poetry, and his own text puts this idea into practice. *Dialogue on Poetry* is a theoretical work of fiction, and as we shall see, the text takes on a poetic practice through which the goals of constructing a new poetry (or new mythology) and constructing a theory of such poetry become one; the new mythology is both an all-encompassing poem and the general theory of poetry. Since the new mythology is presented as the solution to the crisis of poetry in Schlegel's age, and since Schlegel's own text takes steps towards constructing this new poetry through its theoretical reflections on poetry, the assumption that the theory of poetry is itself poetry seems to mark the path towards the missing unity. Nevertheless, Schlegel claims that physics and philosophy must intervene in order to establish the new mythology as an all-encompassing poem.³

Schlegel's *Dialogue* consists of four presentations on various aspects of poetry by four different characters. The section titled "Speech on Mythology" most directly addresses the topics raised in the introduction by the narrator of the text: the relationship between contemporary romantic poetry and ancient poetry, and the relationship between individual poems and poetry in general within each period. The narrator sees in ancient poetry what the poetry of his own age lacks—a unifying midpoint not only at which all individual poems and poets converge, but also at which other forms of poetry (e.g., nature) join the poetry of words. Identifying that midpoint as mytho-

² See Antje Pfannkuchen and Leif Weatherby, "Writing Polarities: Romanticism and the Dynamic Unity of Poetry and Science," *The Germanic Review* 92, no. 4 (2017): 335-339.

³ With this turn to physics, Schlegel implicitly joins a broader conversation taking place between some of his contemporaries on the potential use of physics for philosophical and poetic aims. Like Schlegel, other authors such as Goethe, Schelling, and Ritter consider how physics can intervene in philosophy and poetry in order to bypass these disciplines' limitations. This article is part of a larger project that situates Schlegel within this context.

logy, the speech calls for a “new mythology,” which would fill the role of the intersection missing from the otherwise disparate and disorderly poetry of the current age.

Mythology, as the unifying function of all poetry, is itself poetry.⁴ For the ancients, this unity is realized in “a single, indivisible, and perfect [vollendetes] poem” which includes the various specific instances of poetry.⁵ For modern poetry, however, the integration of the individuals into a unified whole is an ideal. Not starting from, but rather working towards this unity, romantic poetry is caught in an infinite striving for and construction of its center. On this distinction Schlegel writes:

The new mythology, in contrast, must be forged from the deepest depths of the spirit; it must be the most artful of all works of art, for it must encompass all the others; a new bed and vessel for the ancient, eternal fountainhead of poetry, and even the infinite poem concealing the seeds of all other poems.⁶

The individual poets must construct the new mythology like a work of art, starting from their own perspectives and reaching towards the infinite whole. One might think that the paths from individual poems to one, infinite poem would lead us through poetry. Parts of Schlegel's text give evidence for this interpretation, both on the level of poetry and the level of the theory of poetry. Schlegel explains how the poet “must strive continually to expand his poetry and his view of poetry, and to approximate the loftiest possibility of it on earth by endeavoring in the most specific way to integrate his part with the entire body of poetry.”⁷ Here, he describes poetry and views or theories of poetry as all contributing to the construction of the totality of poetry (the new mythology). Schlegel further weaves the two concepts together by asserting that all theory of poetry must itself be poetry. In addition to the eternal extension of their poetry in the direction of the all-encompassing poem, the poet must similarly orient their theoretical understanding of poetry towards the whole. The parallel movements of poetry and its theory here described

⁴ “...mythology and poetry are one and inseparable.” Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (hereafter: KFSa), ed. Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett, and Hans Eichner (Munich: Schöningh, 1958-), vol. II, 313. English translation in: Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park & London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), 82. All translations of passages from the *Dialogue* are from Behler and Struc. All other translations are my own.

⁵ Ibid. It is in light of this ideal that Lukács describes the Romantics as seeking an all-encompassing order, looking to poetry to provide a “synthesis of unity and universality.” Georg Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971), 73.

⁶ KFSa II, 312; Behler and Struc, 82.

⁷ KFSa II, 286; Behler and Struc, 55.

give way to the view that "...one cannot really speak of poetry except in the language of poetry [*als nur in Poesie*]." ⁸ Furthermore, Schlegel's text puts forward the idea that to understand poetry, one must engage in poetic production—one must be a poet. ⁹

The integration of poetry and its theory supports the idea that the solution to the problem of poetry is to be found in the construction of an infinite poem, which can be approached by extending the reach of poets towards the unifying function of the whole. Schlegel's *Dialogue* participates in this endeavor. Setting the stage for the conversation to follow, the narrator explains the format of the work:

It is intended to set against one another quite divergent opinions, each of them capable of shedding new light upon the infinite spirit of poetry from an individual standpoint, each of them striving to penetrate from a different angle into the real heart of the matter. ¹⁰

Rather than writing a treatise on poetry, Schlegel cultivates a theory through a poetic and fictive work in which individual characters share their thoughts on poetry. While these viewpoints are themselves limited to one perspective each, common themes and ideas emerge that connect them. Schlegel thus demonstrates his commitment to the view that conversations about poetry should take on the form of collective poetic practice, which aims to construct a point at which all poems and all views on poetry converge. His own text puts this idea into action.

At this point, the reader expects to find poetic meditations on the nature of poetry, and this is mostly what follows. In the second speech, however, we find the following passage:

If a new mythology can emerge only from the innermost depths of the spirit and develop only from itself, then we find a very significant hint and a noteworthy confirmation of what we are searching for in that great phenomenon of our age, in idealism. Idealism originated in just this way, from nothing as it were, and now it has constituted itself in the spiritual sphere as a firm point from which the creative energy of man can safely expand, developing in all directions, without losing itself or the possibility of return. All disciplines and all arts will be seized by the great revolution. You can see it already at work in physics where idealism erupted of its own before it was touched by the magic wand of philosophy. And

⁸ He continues: "Everyone's view of poetry is true and good as far as that view itself is poetry." (KFSa II, 285; Behler and Struc, 54)

⁹ "We are able to perceive the music of the universe and to understand the beauty of the poem because a part of the poet, a spark of his creative spirit, lives in us..." (Ibid.)

¹⁰ KFSa II, 286; Behler and Struc, 55.

this wonderful, great fact can at the same time be a hint for you of the secret correspondence and inner unity of the age.¹¹

Despite the text's organization, which is described as participating in the construction of a new mythology through its poetic character, we find here a different path marked. Instead of in poetry, evidence of the new mythology emerges in idealism as it appears in philosophy and in physics. At this point, physics is merely the field in which idealism is first visible. By the end of the *Dialogue*, Schlegel suggests that physics might play a more essential role in realizing the new mythology:

Only when the mysteries and mythology are rejuvenated by the spirit of physics, will it be possible to write tragedies in which everything is ancient, and which yet would be certain to capture the sense of the age through the meaning. Greater compass and greater variety of external form would be allowed, indeed advisable...¹²

Mythology, or poetry, must be rejuvenated, and it is in physics that this key process takes place. In light of Schlegel's methodological commitment to the idea that we can only speak about poetry in poetry, and that the theory of poetry should take the form of and be thoroughly integrated with poetry, how are we to understand the role of physics in constructing the new mythology? Perhaps counterintuitively, the key to understanding the role of physics in poetry lies in another work, one not of poetry but of philosophy: Schlegel's *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy*. If we are to seek a solution to the problem of poetry in physics, and the solution to the problem of poetry and physics in philosophy, we must justify this intertextual and interdisciplinary approach. We must account for the possibility of two seemingly contradictory forms of knowledge. In one, poetry must expand to include physics and in the other, the two disciplines must remain separate.

3. Polarities

Before we can account for the way Schlegel's work incorporates two contradictory organizations of knowledge (the immanent and the interdisciplinary conceptions of theory), we must observe the point at which these two frameworks come to a head: the moment when polarity reaches its limits. As we shall see, Schlegel conceives of the immanent conception of theory as thoroughly polar. Modelled on the magnet, the form of immanent theory is

¹¹ KFSA II, 313-314; Behler and Struc, 82-83.

¹² KFSA II, 350; Behler and Struc, 117.

actually responsible for the crisis of poetry with which Schlegel is concerned. From this perspective, the poet is always striving to reach the midpoint but can at best only indefinitely approach it; there is no outside perspective from which to observe the movements of polarity without taking on these movements. Despite the infinite task of constructing the new mythology from within poetry, Schlegel maintains that achieving this goal is possible. Furthermore, while polarity goes hand in hand with the immanent conception of theory, physics—and not poetry—provides the basis for this form. Since polarity comes from physics, physics is already involved in poetry. Polarity, however, masks the role of the outside field (physics) and appears as the inherent form of the field it theorizes (here, poetry). These observations point to another conception of theory at work beyond polarity's limits in which cross-disciplinary theories become possible. For Schlegel, these limits coincide with the pivotal moment in which we reach philosophy of philosophy.

In his *Dialogue*, Schlegel explains the importance of physics for poetry and its project of finding the new mythology, the midpoint that unites the totality of poetry. As we have seen, physics makes signs of poetry's unity visible. While it is not the only discipline that can shed light on this center, it is the one that can do so most clearly.¹³ Physics connects the particular to the whole, and thereby shows the possibility of the individual experiment or poem moving beyond itself to say something about the whole: "Physics cannot conduct an experiment without a hypothesis, and every hypothesis, even the most limited, if systematically thought through, leads to hypotheses of the whole."¹⁴ Physics thus demonstrates an ability to move from the individual to the whole, whereas poetry can only infinitely strive for and approach the whole as its limit. As we have seen, the individual's view of poetry is always restricted. The poet, however, does not accept this limitation. Schlegel writes:

The mind cannot bear this; no doubt because, without knowing it, it nevertheless does know that no man is merely man, but that at the same time he can and should be genuinely and truly all mankind. Therefore, man, in reaching out time and time again beyond himself to seek and find the complement of his innermost being in the depths of another, is certain to return ever to himself. The play of communicating and

¹³ "I preferred physics also for the reason that the connection here is most visible." (KFSA II, 324; Behler and Struc, 90)

¹⁴ Ibid.

approaching is the business and the force of life; absolute perfection [Vollendung] exists only in death.¹⁵

In this passage, which discusses the attempt at overcoming of the individual's limits through a form of communal striving, various oppositional pairs emerge such as unknowing/knowing, individual/totally, self/other, and life/death.¹⁶ The task of constructing an infinite poem, the seed of all poems, is never complete; however, contrary to the claim that this infinite poem can only be progressively approached and never reached, the *Dialogue* also includes passages that state that the poet *can* find the midpoint. Poets can expand their poetry and views of poetry when they have “found the center point through communication with those who have found theirs from a different side, in a different way. Love needs a responding love [Gegenliebe].”¹⁷ The midpoint can be found through the oppositional pair of love and counter-love, through a poet's search for the midpoint that occurs in conjunction with another's. The form of this seemingly paradoxical demand, that the midpoint exists only as a limit yet can be reached as the meeting-point of oppositional terms, is recognizable as the form of the magnet—Schlegel's essential model of experimental physics.¹⁸

Experimentation generates polarities, and in doing so constructs the common midpoint of two diametrically opposed terms. Physics contributes to poetry's aim by providing the cooperative notions of experimentation and polarity. As we shall see, these ideas from physics correspond to the immanent conception of theory. In his *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy*, Schlegel calls his method the experimental method, which consists of three parts: the positive element, the negative element, and the combination of the positive and negative (their shared midpoint).¹⁹ The fact that this dialectical

¹⁵ KFSa II, 286; Behler and Struc, 54.

¹⁶ Bianca Theisen places emphasis on the complex unities that emerge from Schlegel's use of such oppositional pairs. See Bianca Theisen, “χα Absolute Chaos: The Early Romantic Poetics of Complex Form,” *Studies in Romanticism* 42, no. 3 (2003): 301-321. John Smith contextualizes Schlegel's notion of the infinite within infinitesimal calculus and shows how it informs his approach to these polarities. Schlegel's “concept of the infinite, which both embraces philosophical dualisms even as he empowers consciousness with the ability to approach their overcoming, owes much of its formulation to debates concerning infinitesimal calculus.” John H. Smith, “Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic Calculus,” in *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 240.

¹⁷ KFSa II, 286; Behler and Struc, 55.

¹⁸ I use “model” here in a sense similar to Jocelyn Holland, when she writes about the lever in Schlegel: “If we think of the lever as a ‘model,’ then it is one that arrives with a strong sense of its own functionality already embedded within the larger conceptual apparatus.” Jocelyn Holland, *The Lever as Instrument of Reason* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 85.

¹⁹ KFSa XII, 33.

method, which he borrows from physics, is figuratively embodied by the magnet becomes clear when he calls the midpoint the point of indifference—the point at which the polarized forces cancel each other out. Abstracting from the actual magnet, Schlegel’s thought positions the positive and negative poles as limit-concepts between which the middle oscillates.²⁰ In the *Lectures*, the poles are also described as the minimum and maximum of this middle term.²¹ Belonging to physics while also functioning as a diagram of physics’ method, the magnet is the epitome of immanent theory. The magnet belongs to physics, but it also shows how physics operates; it *is* part of physics, but it also is *about* physics.²² When terms are brought into this constellation, they take on the same self-theorizing structure.

We can see this occur, for example, with idealism. For Schlegel, idealist philosophy has to do with the poles of consciousness and the infinite, and it seeks to unite them in consciousness of the infinite.²³ Idealism, oscillating between the two poles, is a “firm point,” which “will not only by analogy of its genesis be an example of the new mythology, but it will indirectly be its very source.”²⁴ Having emerged as if out of nothing, freely out of the depths of the spirit, idealism thematizes the struggle to find the common midpoint while providing that midpoint. Idealism expresses “that mankind struggles with all its power to find its own center.”²⁵ It is the recognition that the essence of spirit consists in the process of infinite oscillation, “to determine

²⁰ See, for example, *Athenaeum* Fragment 116, which portrays poetry as hovering in the middle between a series of oppositional pairs: object and subject, real and ideal, outwards and inwards. Caught in the structure of polarity, romantic poetry can never be complete. See KFSa II, 182; Behler and Struc, 140-141. On a similar abstraction from the perspective of the lever in Schlegel’s thought, see Holland’s *The Lever as Instrument of Reason*: “...the logic of the lever allows for abstract concepts to be treated as discrete quantities, and positioned into relationships—without, however, losing their dynamic potential or status as constructions-in-progress.” (Holland, 85)

²¹ See, for example, the polarity of consciousness and the infinite, between which reality (as their midpoint/point of indifference) oscillates: “Consciousness is thus to be seen as the negative or minimum of reality; the infinite, by contrast, is the positive or maximum of reality.” (KFSa XII, 17)

²² It is here that we see the emergence of the structure that Leif Weatherby attributes to poetry with respect to the organism. “Poetry is not an imitation of the structure of the organism. Rather, it *is* and is about that structure.” Leif Weatherby, “Romantic Conceptions of Life,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Elizabeth Millán Brusslan (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 450. According to Weatherby, this structure is related to the Romantic “attention to the blurry boundary between the depicted and the means of depiction,” which we can also see at work in Schlegel’s use of the figure of the magnet and the experimental method. (ibid)

²³ KFSa XII, 17.

²⁴ KFSa II, 314-315; Behler and Struc, 82-84.

²⁵ KFSa II, 314; Behler and Struc, 83.

itself and in perennial alternation to expand and return to itself.”²⁶ The “fixed point” is the search for the fixed point. Idealism therefore participates in the construction of humanity and poetry’s common midpoint, but it does so only insofar as it provides a theoretical expression of the struggle to construct such a center. Idealism thus provides an example of immanent theory; it strives to construct the midpoint or synthesis between two poles, and in doing so it thematizes this movement. Idealism furthers the proliferation of the figure of polarity and serves as a theory that explains the oscillation between two poles.

Poetry, as we have seen, is similarly caught up in an eternal striving for the infinite, both as infinite totality and infinite origin. Each poet seeks the common midpoint, both through their poetic creation and their theoretical conception of poetry. It is through this common oscillation between unreachable limit-poles that we arrive at the conclusion that the theory of poetry can only be found in poetry.²⁷ Schlegel’s philosophy similarly hovers between polarities insofar as it progresses through a series of oppositional pairs.²⁸ This movement also occurs on a larger scale, insofar as Schlegel’s philosophy oscillates between systematicity and lack of system.²⁹ We have noted how the generation of polarities goes hand in hand with the immanent conception of

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The claim at the beginning of the *Dialogue*, “...one cannot really speak of poetry except in the language of poetry [als nur in Poesie],” is situated in a passage that highlights the common striving for a limit-pole that poetry and representations of poetry take on. Leading up to the claim about poetry and its theory, Schlegel describes how our poetry is related to an original, wordless poetry of nature: “Just as the core of the earth adorned itself with formulations and growths, just as life sprang forth of itself from the deep and everything was filled with beings merrily multiplying; even so, poetry bursts forth spontaneously from the invisible primordial power of mankind when the warming ray of the divine sun shines on it and fertilizes it. Only through form and color can man recreate his own creation, and thus one cannot really speak of poetry except in the language of poetry.” (KFSa II, 285; Behler and Struc, 54) Even the “origin” of life, if such a thing can exist, is always already cloaked in poetry the moment it manifests itself. Any representation of the origin of poetry, wordless or of words, is already part of poetry. There is no outside of this poetry from which we could actually reach the origin.

²⁸ Jocelyn Holland, situating this character of Schlegel’s thought within the broader discourse on the lever, writes: “Schlegel’s approach can best be described as the exploratory creation of levers themselves.” (Holland, 81) For the most part, the figure of the lever and the figure of the magnet offer Schlegel the same general form: “The fulcrum is a locus of alternation, the point that embodies the interplay of forces on either side. Much like the points of indifference between magnetic poles—which are also privileged in romantic thinking—it serves as a model for negotiating a relationship between opposing concepts, as a figure of dynamic opposition.” (Holland, 83-84)

²⁹ KFSa XVIII, 80. As Weatherby points out, “Although Schlegel insists here that a system cannot help, his repeated use of Spinoza as example suggests that the poetry he intends as philosophical organ will have a good measure of systemic unity.” Leif Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 260.

theory, which positions the midpoint as an unreachable limit of the two poles despite also positing its existence.

The polarity characteristic of Schlegel's thought reappears within scholarship. Schlegel's demand for the simultaneity of contradictory terms has resulted in a split—some have tended to emphasize the aspects of his thought that involve the striving for unity and systematicity, while others have emphasized the prevalence of disorganizing forces in his works.³⁰ Despite their different conclusions, both strains of interpretation emerge as ways of dealing with the proliferation of polarities, and readers on both sides emphasize the connection between these oppositional structures and the notion of immanent critique. By looking at two exemplary cases, we shall see how both readings bring us to the conception of theory being what it is about, but they nevertheless also tend towards an interdisciplinary understanding of Schlegel's thought, stressing the interrelation of fields. In order to get out of the framework in which, for example, the theory of poetry is found in poetry, we must transition out of the model of polar oppositions—we must move beyond the figure of the magnet and the theoretical framework it offers.

Frederick C. Beiser, exemplary of the reading focusing on the yearning for unity, sees Schlegel's Romanticism as primarily antifoundationalist.³¹ According to Beiser, infinite striving for the whole enters Schlegel's thought as a way of dealing with the lack of foundations and complete totalities: "If we both must and cannot have a system, all that remains is the persistent *striving* for one."³² On this view, the poles are limits that take the place of first principles and complete systems, two ideals that can only be infinitely approached.³³ Beiser takes Schlegel's notion of *characteristic*, or immanent critique, as a specific case of his antifoundationalism. Immanent critique compares each work not to some universal standards of beauty but instead to the work's own ideal, which for romantic poetry is always the ideal of

³⁰ See, for example, Beiser, Frank, and Lukács for the emphasis on striving for unity, and Trop, Weatherby, and Chaouli for arguments that emphasize the undoing of such organizing tendencies (but not without drawing attention to the reorganization, the emergence of new forms, that follows).

³¹ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Beiser identifies Schlegel's antifoundationalist turn with his break from Fichte. On this, he writes, "The only dimension of Fichte's philosophy that Schlegel wants to maintain are the doctrines that the ego consists in activity, and more specifically the activity of infinite striving. It is with striving, he insists, that philosophy should begin and end... Schlegel reads Fichte's first principle 'The ego posits itself absolutely' as an imperative: 'The ego *ought* to be absolute.'" (Beiser, 123)

³² Beiser, 126.

³³ "The infinite longing and striving of the romantic aesthetic seemed entirely appropriate to an antifoundationalist epistemological doctrine that stressed the purely regulative state of first principles and complete systems." (Beiser, 108)

attaining the infinite whole. In Beiser's words, "This would mean trying to understand how all the features of romantic poetry—its mixture of genres, its lack of constraint, its use of irony, its longing and striving—derived from its central aspiration: the desire for the infinite."³⁴ Beiser points to the common orientation of poetry and the theory of poetry, here "immanent critique," that we observed in Schlegel's *Dialogue*. As we have seen, poetry and its theory both participate in the task of finding a common midpoint. This parallel striving for an infinite ideal is foregrounded in Beiser's account. On this reading, Schlegel's characteristic positions the work in relation to its own ideal, but romantic poetry positions *itself* in relation to its infinite ideal. Immanent critique is immanent to Romanticism's own central movement; it is, in a sense, romantic poetry.

We have seen in the cases of idealist philosophy and poetry two examples of self-theorization. In both instances, we end up with different iterations of the striving for poles and oscillation between them. The movement of oscillation and striving serves as a theory of poetry and idealism, but this movement is also produced by (and is even identical with) idealism and poetry. While Beiser considers these movements as fundamentally oriented towards and striving for unity in the infinite ideal, Gabriel Tropic considers the ways in which these stabilizing gestures are always accompanied with ones of destabilization. Building on the type of reading put forward by Beiser, Tropic focuses on a higher-order movement from which the oscillation between poles that pervades romantic conceptions of every discipline stems.³⁵ All the particular polarities that arise are symptoms of the polarizing movement of the absolute. On this reading, "the *form* of Schlegel's discourse thus has a revelatory function that organizes itself along the pulsations of a higher-order Absolute of force, a movement modeled on the structure of the magnet."³⁶ This absolute is the process of structuring polarities; it is the enactment of the experimental method as it occurs within scientific (in the broad sense of *Wissenschaft*) and artistic practices.

For Tropic, the absolute is not the ideal of unity to be infinitely approached. Instead, the act of striving for the absolute or infinite, which for Beiser was the stabilizing way of dealing with the unsettling nature of the polar demand for the simultaneity of opposites, is accompanied by its

³⁴ Beiser, 128.

³⁵ "The most fundamental romantic patterns of representation operate within a cosmos of forces and polarities that cut across discursive fields, moving not only through magnetism, chemistry, medicine, and so forth, but also through poetry and philosophy, indeed interpenetrating *every field*." Gabriel Tropic, "Arts of Unconditioning: On Romantic Science and Poetry," in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*, 426.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

destabilizing counter-pole. In light of this realization, “The unconditioned or Absolute is not the holistic dream of totalizing mythology aiming to unite all of humankind and usher in a new golden age, but becomes a drive toward the production of difference, catapulting individuals out of their most entrenched investments and positions.”³⁷ As the absolute moves in accordance with the structure of the magnet, producing polarities across discursive fields, it operates along an overarching polarity: that of the opposed processes of conditioning (or stabilizing) and unconditioning (or destabilizing). Attempting to theorize the absolute thereby participates in the ongoing proliferation of the structure of the magnet, generating further polarities through which the absolute continues to move. According to Trop, however, the magnet does not lend its form to the absolute’s movement; instead, the absolute has priority, and the magnet of physics is a medium for this movement from which it derives its structure. Since the magnet’s polar form comes from the immanent movements of the absolute, the force of the absolute that underlies that figure is the same as the one that structures other discourses into this “magnetic” form.

The magnet is a clear representation of the absolute’s movement, but for Trop, the physics to which it belongs does not have some privileged status over the other disciplines. From this point of view, there is a limit to the sense in which philosophy, science, and criticism can be “about” their subject matters. Poetry, for example, “is an operation rather than a genre,” and romantic literature such as the fragments “attempt to continually generate new relations that themselves *are* the movements of the Absolute.”³⁸ The theory of poetry is found in the structure of the magnet, but the magnetic form is itself generated by poetry. The theory of poetry is immanent to poetry. It is the form which the operation *poetry* takes. Similarly, philosophy is first and foremost a medium in which the absolute as dynamic oscillation thematizes itself: “Philosophy itself, then, is less a meta-discourse that governs all the others than itself a medium of the Absolute of force: a thematization of the unconditioned as the production of a dynamic oscillation.”³⁹ Philosophy and criticism are not just “about” the absolute; they facilitate the movements of the absolute and further its polarity-generating operations.

The figure of the magnet pulls everything into itself. For Beiser and for Trop, there is no outside perspective beyond its limits. Therefore, while philosophy can theorize the absolute, it cannot be a general meta-discourse

³⁷ Trop, 425-426.

³⁸ Trop, 425 and 427.

³⁹ Trop, 426.

of various fields because it is limited in its capacity to be “about” things external to its domain. Not only philosophy but “no discourse can claim a privileged status.”⁴⁰ Philosophy cannot obtain some perspective outside the world it seeks to describe, and therefore “cannot function as a framework that explains *why* the sciences, the arts, and the whole world must be romanticized, but rather, is itself also part of the world that must be romanticized.”⁴¹ When romantic critics work to further a discipline that traditionally seeks to understand the world, they are not merely producing knowledge about the world, but knowledge that is part of the world. It acts in the world through its role in the movements of the absolute of force.⁴² Given these restrictions on theory, there is a limited way in which we can understand the romantic formulations about the theory of the novel that is itself a novel, the theory of poetry that is itself poetry, and the theory of philosophy that is itself philosophy (“philosophy of philosophy”). Because theory can only operate on the same plane as that which it theorizes—the theory becomes part of the domain it seeks to explain—any theory of poetry will become poetry, and any theory of philosophy will become philosophy.⁴³ While Beiser explains these formulations as the result of the common act of infinite striving shared by, for example, poetry and criticism, Trop explains them in terms of the disciplines’ and genres’ common role as media of the movements of the absolute. For Trop, any type of science or theory is ultimately engaged in the same unconditioning and reconditioning as poetry, the arts, or anything that is part of the world.

In this context, “philosophy of philosophy” gets pulled into the magnet’s structure as well. For Beiser, “philosophy of philosophy” would be

⁴⁰ Trop, 429.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “The romantic critic would see his or her own act as something that would facilitate the unconditioning and reconditioning of the real.” (Ibid.)

⁴³ Maurice Blanchot points to this aspect of romantic literature when he writes, “literature (understood as the totality of forms of expression, including forces of dissolution as well) suddenly becomes conscious of itself, manifests itself and in this manifestation has no other task nor trait than to declare itself... The poet becomes the future of man at the moment when, being nothing but one who knows himself to be a poet, he designates (in this knowledge for which he is intimately responsible) the place where poetry will no longer be content to produce beautiful, well-defined works, but will produce itself in a movement without termination or determination. In other words, literature encounters its most dangerous meaning—which is to interrogate itself in a declarative mode: at times triumphantly in the discovery that everything thereby belongs to it, at others in the distress at discovering that it lacks everything, for it only affirms itself by default.” Here we see literature oscillating between triumph and distress, between including everything and yet only itself. Maurice Blanchot, Deborah Esch and Ian Balfour, “The Athenaeum,” *Studies in Romanticism* 22, no. 2 (1983): 166-167.

a metacritical philosophy. Since “criticism must be integrated with the process of enquiry and cannot stand apart from it,” philosophy must engage with questions about what it means to be philosophy; it must be philosophy about philosophy, or critique of critique.⁴⁴ Trop diverges from Beiser on this point as well when he writes, “Schlegel’s ultimate formulation of a ‘philosophy of philosophy’ is not a simple ironic infinite self-reflection or *mise-en-abîme*, but the folding of philosophical discourse into a self-perpetuating oscillation between opposing forces.”⁴⁵ Any attempts to explain philosophy themselves participate in the furthering of the dynamic oscillation that structures polarities, and therefore also become philosophy. On this reading, “philosophy of philosophy” signals the common forces of the absolute that permeate every field and sensuous reality, in which they structure polarities into the figure of the magnet and perpetuate the processes of stabilization and destabilization.

Beiser and Trop in their own ways thus read “philosophy of philosophy” along the lines of theory that is what it is about, but for Schlegel, the moment in which we move from “philosophy” to “philosophy of philosophy” involves discontinuity and reconfiguration. In the following section, we shall see how this move is spelled out in the *Lectures*, but it is hinted at in the *Dialogue* as well. As we will learn from the *Lectures*, the move from philosophy to philosophy of philosophy involves a shift from idealism oriented towards the infinite to an infinite realism. We have already seen how, in the search for the new mythology, idealism becomes its origin. It does so, however, indirectly. It too must be rejuvenated once it realizes that it only has a fragmentary view of the whole; it is “only a part, a branch, a mode of expression” of the striving to find the midpoint.⁴⁶ Idealism becomes an indirect origin of the new mythology only when it becomes infinite realism.⁴⁷ According to the *Dialogue*, this realism cannot be expressed in philosophy but only in poetry.⁴⁸ We are thus led to a further polarity, that of the ideal and the real, since poetry will retain the idealistic origin of this infinite realism and will be based on the harmony of the two. Despite this replication of the magnetic figure, this moment breaks from the theoretical framework furthered by this structure. The philosophy of philosophy is not philosophy, but poetry.

⁴⁴ Beiser, 124.

⁴⁵ Trop, 427.

⁴⁶ KFSa II, 314; Behler and Struc, 83.

⁴⁷ “Therefore, there must and will arise from the matrix of idealism a new and equally infinite realism.” (KFSa II, 315; Behler and Struc, 83)

⁴⁸ KFSa II, 314.

What ends up being philosophy of philosophy is what Schlegel excludes from the range of philosophy's representational capacities. Poetry, as the philosophy of philosophy, is not a broadened conception of poetry that includes everything but is rather one in which poetry can achieve what another discipline (namely philosophy) cannot.⁴⁹ Philosophy of philosophy thereby hinges on the two models: that in which the theory is what it is about and that in which disciplines can theorize each other. Without considering philosophy of philosophy as the limit of polarity, we leave unexplained the fact that physics provides the basis for the figure that confines its own field and others to self-theorization. Foregrounding polarity without recognizing its limits also reduces the cross-disciplinarity of the encyclopedia to the absorption of all fields into poetry, without allowing true distinction between them.

4. The Line, the Circle, and the Transition between Forms

We have thus far observed the experimental method of philosophy modelled on the magnet and the implications it has for theory, which in this framework must be what it is about. The magnet pulls everything into it, and therefore forecloses any perspective outside its discursive field from which to theorize what belongs to that field. Despite the prevalence of this figure and the experimental method for which it functions as a model, Schlegel's work also contains many puzzling passages that seem to contradict polarity's theoretical implications. To understand how we can move from the claim that theory should be what it is about to the possibility of cross-disciplinary theorization, we must look closer at the moment in which the latter becomes possible: the moment when philosophy becomes philosophy of philosophy, which coincides with the moment when we move from idealism to an infinite realism. Attention to the pivot point between the two forms of knowledge-organization reveals that this transition is made possible through the negation of the figure of the magnet. With the cross-disciplinarity that enables the encyclopedia project, Schlegel moves beyond the polarities associated with his work. The negation of the figure of the magnet ultimately occurs at the culmination of its own form. Before we turn to the emergence of philosophy of philosophy at this point, we must observe how there is already tension within Schlegel's

⁴⁹ Weatherby comments on the distinction maintained between the disciplines: "The *Dialogue* does not analogize poetry to science but instead seeks to unite them by a precise analysis of their differing forms of semiotic production." Leif Weatherby, "A Reconsideration of the Romantic Fragment," *The Germanic Review* 92, no. 4 (2017): 411. On my reading, this is made possible primarily through the movement into an encyclopedic organization of knowledge.

polar model of theory. This tension is thematized and worked out in the figures of the line and the circle. The language surrounding Schlegel's polarities point to the figure of the linear bar magnet, whose point of indifference is the two opposite poles' shared midpoint and therefore lies between them. The use of the word "diametrical" in reference to the positive and negative poles further supports this reading.⁵⁰ When Schlegel first introduces philosophy as dealing with the poles of the infinite and consciousness, the infinite is the positive, consciousness the negative, and together they are "the two poles around which all philosophy turns."⁵¹ This description invokes the linear figure of the axis of rotation. Even when Schlegel gives up the more concrete aspects of this figure of thought and considers, for example, the poles as unreachable limits from the perspective of some middle domain that only loosely maps onto the notion of the point or zone of indifference, he still maintains the associated vocabulary and its general structure.

Philosophy, as a knowing of knowing, repeats the form, associated with the magnet, of a theory that is what it is about. Nevertheless, Schlegel describes philosophy using the figure of the circle: "The idea of philosophy can only be reached through an infinite progression of systems. Its form is a cycle [*Kreislauf*]."⁵² The circle that arises, however, is not one whose center is the point of indifference, and whose diameter reaches through both poles to their limits on the circumference. While Schlegel for the most part depicts the circle as an ideal, when he does describe its completed form, he does so in a way that does away with the original linear configuration entirely. The linear figure of the magnet is negated, even though the language associated with the magnet remains. The magnetic terms of positive/negative poles and point of indifference are reconfigured in the circle whose periphery is philosophy. Schlegel writes:

If someone wants to know how a circle can be described by two opposed elements, they could think of it like this: the center of the circle is the positive

⁵⁰ KFSa XVIII, 419.

⁵¹ KFSa XII, 5.

⁵² KFSa XII, 10. In his notes, Schlegel further contrasts the linear, self-explanatory model and the circular, cross-discursive model: "Philosophy must therefore begin in the middle, like the epic poem, and it is impossible to recite it in such a way and to add to it piece by piece, as if the first piece were fully established and explained. It is a whole, and the path to recognizing this is therefore no straight line but a circle. The whole of basic science must be derived from two ideas, propositions, concepts, intuition without all other material." (KFSa XVIII, 518) Starting from the middle, one must begin with two elements (which together form a line), but we must traverse the circular path in order to reach philosophy as a whole. Manfred Frank reads this moment as the realization of a higher unity, which "turns the infinite into an allness" ["die Unendlichkeit in Allheit umwendet"]. See Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 290.

factor, the radius the negative and the point on the periphery the point of indifference. Now the positive factor in the point of indifference strives to unite itself with the positive factor in the center; but the force of the negative factor cannot approach the center, and instead gets pulled around the center.⁵³

In the circle described, the two poles still create a straight line. We learn, however, that this line is the negative factor (the radius), which stretches from the positive factor (the center of the circle) to the periphery (the point of indifference). The forces at work in the magnet, the attraction of unlike and repulsion of like forces, do not direct the circular movement of philosophy. Instead, it is the attraction of like and repulsion of opposite forces that drives the rotation that generates philosophy's circle. In light of this reconfiguration, Schlegel writes that the method of idealism and of philosophy is experimentation, but experimentation whose direction is centripetal or centrifugal, directed towards or away from the center.⁵⁴ While Schlegel first claims idealism deals with the poles (consciousness and the infinite), once the circle is complete, it instead deals with the midpoint (the point of indifference), which here is the periphery. Despite this passage and the tension between the line and the circle that it implies, Schlegel goes on to rely on both the circular form of philosophy and the more linear structure of the magnet.⁵⁵

The magnetic and circular forms of philosophy are not merely two different parts of the same configuration, but rather stand in tension with one another. As we have seen, the magnetic model foregrounds the aspect of theory that is what it is about. Schlegel speaks of the circular model of philosophy as still to come; however, while he acknowledges that the circle is of yet not closed, he describes in detail what the completion of this form would entail. The moment in which the circle is closed is also when idealism (or philosophy) ends and infinite realism (or philosophy of philosophy) begins. With philosophy of philosophy we arrive at a cross-disciplinary organization of knowledge, and we can then observe how the circle is associated with interdisciplinarity in its highest form—with the encyclopedia project.⁵⁶ Just

⁵³ KFSX XII, 10.

⁵⁴ KFSX XII, 21.

⁵⁵ Beiser points to the circular form of Schlegel's philosophy when he writes: "The proper form of a system is not *linear*... but *circular*, where we begin from any proposition and return to it because all propositions are interconnected." (Beiser, 125) For Beiser, however, the circular system is only an ideal, which Schlegel's work would not claim to achieve but merely approximate (Beiser, 126). As we shall see, Schlegel does close this circle, but in doing so transitions beyond it.

⁵⁶ Early on in the lectures, he calls this period in which the circle is completed the epoch of the understanding. It is here where we can finally see the whole world. He writes, "Only with the epoch of understanding is the circle closed; this is thus the highest epoch." (KFSX XII, 13)

as idealism realizes that it is only a part of the whole in its transformation into infinite realism, the return of philosophy to itself (as the closing of the circle and the shift into philosophy of philosophy) involves the same step. Philosophy of philosophy concerns “the interconnection of all arts and sciences” and thus has the task of constructing the organism of their unification.⁵⁷ In this moment, when the circle is closed and philosophy achieves its unity, philosophy as the knowing of knowing becomes a part of knowing, a part of the infinite whole.⁵⁸ Once the encyclopedic organization of knowledge is made possible, what was thought to be the whole, or the complete theory of a field, is revealed as itself part of a larger whole. A field can no longer account for itself without considering its relation to other disciplines.

The magnetic and circular models are not merely two different figures that point to and describe the encyclopedic collection of fragments.⁵⁹ Although they can ultimately both be found within the romantic encyclopedia, they are two figures in tension. The engagement with this tension and the emergence of a model that can account for the transition between the two is an essential component of Schlegel’s thought. In order to make sense of the two models together, we require a point of transition from the understanding of romantic poetry as progressive to an understanding of the fragments that resists the “redemptive” reading.⁶⁰

The circle seems to promise what the figure of the line could not—philosophy could ultimately be taken as a whole instead of merely approa-

⁵⁷ KFSÄ XII, 91 and 94.

⁵⁸ “Here philosophy will be only a part of the whole.” (KFSÄ XII, 94)

⁵⁹ Chaouli picks up on this tension, framing it in terms of the “synthesis of all branches of science and art,” which counterintuitively “expresses these ideas in the stubbornly non-synthetic form of fragments.” Michel Chaouli, *The Laboratory of Poetry* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 4. He argues for a new understanding of synthesis that is informed by chemistry that would describe “the process of experimentation in which some forms emerge and others decay, in which some outcomes are predictable and others are not” (ibid). On his reading, this notion of synthesis and experimentation gives us the reciprocal necessity of opposite terms (such as synthesis which is always accompanied by analysis and vice versa). While I agree with Chaouli’s view as it applies to the encyclopedia project, I argue that the type of reading he is working against (which views poetry as “the activity of enlivening all facets of a productive life with the same (organic) meaning,” or as drawing everything into its poetic grasp) is not necessarily misguided, but rather picks up on the role of poetry in the pre-encyclopedic organization of knowledge (ibid). Chaouli himself makes room for aspects of this reading (which foregrounds the organic or dialectical) within his own, while emphasizing the simultaneity of narrative sense and senseless interruption. Both of these views exist in the encyclopedia, and we must account for the simultaneous possibility of the two and the transition between their forms.

⁶⁰ Chaouli argues that we must make space for “a process of reading that tolerates, indeed encourages, the emergence of transient configurations of thought among the fragments and essays that cannot be folded into a redemptive narrative, toward which the fragments have so often been understood to strive.” (Chaouli, 5)

ching the whole by striving towards the limit poles of consciousness and the infinite. Approached directly, however, attempts to close the circle are also caught in an infinite process; it requires an “infinite progression of systems.”⁶¹ The circle, and with it the encyclopedic organization of knowledge, is merely an ideal from the perspective internal to idealism. How, then, does Schlegel maintain that the circle can ultimately be closed? Schlegel first shows the limitations of the direct approach before proposing an alternate method. Idealism theoretically culminates in the identity of its poles, which would destroy the figure of the magnet by eliminating its grounding polar force. Doing so, however, would entail an infinite task. Instead, we must take an indirect approach; we must linger in the finite in order to move beyond it, shifting our attention away from infinite aims and instead focusing on reality and its science: physics.

The details of this indirect path, and the solution to the tension between the magnetic and circular models, are worked out in Schlegel's particular use of physics. While philosophy generally deals with the poles of the infinite and consciousness, physics is the science of the middle domain: reality. Schlegel claims that his own philosophy is more akin to physics insofar as it is the philosophy of the middle and primarily deals with reality. Schlegel's philosophy is, like physics, concerned with the finite, but in a way that allows us to move through the finite, negating it and reaching a sort of apotheosis in the infinite. When philosophy and poetry try to present the infinite directly, they fall short and are caught in an infinite process of striving. This type of theorization of a medium from within that medium can only ever indirectly (symbolically, allegorically, or otherwise) present its limits—both its self-generating origin and its relation to the infinite totality of poetry. With the new mythology, however, “What usually escapes our consciousness can here be perceived.”⁶² To construct the new mythology and reach a conception of philosophy as an infinite whole, we must take an indirect route: “*The appearance of the finite should be destroyed*; and in order to do that, *all knowledge must be put in a revolutionary state*.”⁶³ Instead of constructing the infinite, we must negate the finite and thereby allow the infinite to arise.

Despite lending philosophy its experimental form of the magnet (through which we get the structure of polarities that can only be approached from the domain between them), physics paradoxically also has a tendency to step beyond itself. Schlegel, noting this, writes that physics, “without knowing it gets into cosmogony, astrology, theosophy, or whatever you wish

⁶¹ KFSA XII, 10.

⁶² KFSA II, 318; Behler and Struc, 85.

⁶³ KFSA XII, 11.

to call it, in short, into a mystic discipline of the whole.”⁶⁴ Physics thus not only connects the particular to the general through the relationship between the individual experiment and the hypothesis about the whole, but also connects itself to other sciences that are concerned with a more general whole beyond its scope. Physics mediates between the domain of self-theorization and the domain of cross-discursive theorization, and as we shall see, it does so through its ability to negate itself as representation of the finite. It is this negation of the figure of the magnet that coincides with the closing of philosophy’s circle and with the resulting turn to philosophy of philosophy, or to an infinite realism. Once the circle of philosophy is closed and the figure of the magnet is negated, separate disciplines gain the capacity to join together in a collective, encyclopedic form of knowledge.

Schlegel positions this collapse of the structure of the magnet at the point at which philosophy reaches its ideal and becomes a circle. As we have seen, philosophy strives to become circular, an infinite progression of systems with varying circumferences. The unattainability of this form seems to foreclose any standpoint beyond the limits of philosophy. We can only theorize philosophy from within its field. According to Schlegel, if we could reach the limits of philosophy directly, we would do so by arriving at what he calls the last and highest truth of idealism—the identity of opposite poles through which “the positive and negative are one.”⁶⁵ This identity would entail the collapse of the figure of the magnet, since there is no polarity without opposing forces. Instead of the linear magnet, philosophy would reach its circular form. Schlegel’s way out of these limits is thus through a process of reconfiguration. The ideal limit case has the capacity to undo, or “uncondition,” the form of the systems that strive for it.⁶⁶ Once philosophy becomes a circle and reaches its ideal, we reach the necessary turning point in which the magnet is neutralized.

⁶⁴ KFSa II, 324-325; Behler and Struc, 90.

⁶⁵ KFSa XII, 27.

⁶⁶ Trop similarly highlights the dissolution of the magnet model in Novalis’ thought. He cites the fragment, “Science does not begin with an antinomy—binomy—but with an infinitinomy.” Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das allgemeine Brouillon*, trans. David W. Wood (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 153. On this fragment, Trop writes, “The ‘infinite’ in this instance *unconditions* the very structure of a polarity and opens a thinking of the proliferation of laws as the infinite multiplication of sheer difference rather than oppositionality” (Trop, 433). It is of note, however, that the fragment that turns away from the model of polar opposition is part of the encyclopedia project. While Trop might see this move from the binomy to the infinitinomy as reaffirming the underlying polar movement of the absolute that accompanies any stabilizing process with that of destabilization, the encyclopedia project to which this fragment belongs is only possible after the negation of the magnetic form.

Despite being apparently out of reach, the upshot of philosophy achieving its ideal is that the goal of the new mythology is realized: philosophy's final stage ushers in the unifying function otherwise missing from Schlegel's age. With the identity of the positive and negative poles and the neutralization that it entails comes the realization that "all separation is relative, is illusion; *they must coalesce, they must complete their interconnection.*"⁶⁷ The missing connection is revealed once philosophy is complete and all dichotomies become identities. On this, Schlegel says, "True philosophy is the last philosophy, in which diametric opposition can no longer be philosophy."⁶⁸ Once we reach the final stage of philosophy, polarity is no longer part of this field. If all separation is illusion, the magnet structure of philosophy falls away in its final stage. The circle, however, is dependent on the magnetic line and also collapses in the process of neutralization. Schlegel does provide an alternate means of neutralizing the magnet that takes advantage of physics' natural ability to both mediate between the parts and the whole within its own field and pursue connections to disciplines beyond its own domain. This other, indirect path leads us to the negation of the magnet without having to reach the identity of poles. Closer attention to the immanent conception of theory shows how its own movements cause the collapse of its grounding figure. The negation of the magnet occurs because of its own magnetic structure.

The final stage of philosophy in which all propositions are identical is only an ideal, but we can instead reach the same result through the middle.⁶⁹ In order to see how all separation is relative without asserting the identity of each and every proposition, we need only turn our attention to the form of polarity. In the case of idealism, aimed at the identity of consciousness and the infinite, the middle domain—reality—is determined in relation to the two poles between which it oscillates. This middle domain, the domain with which physics and Schlegel's philosophy are concerned, is not only the domain of reality, but also of truth and knowledge.⁷⁰ Truth, like reality, is the product of conflicting poles and is relative. If truth is the point of indifference between two error-poles, then it is not absolute. It is not something outside of reality that reality can only approach, but rather arises within reality as we fight against error at reality's limits.⁷¹ Viewed in this way, truth is something we produce, but not directly. Schlegel writes: "Truth emerges when opposing

⁶⁷ KFSa XII, 27.

⁶⁸ KFSa XVIII, 419.

⁶⁹ KFSa XII, 28.

⁷⁰ KFSa XII, 9.

⁷¹ This lack of absolute truth gives freedom to thought and spirit. See KFSa XII, 92.

errors neutralize each other... If we negate error, truth emerges from itself.”⁷² This process of neutralization through which the poles are negated occurs during the same process that propagates the magnet form—through experimentation.⁷³ In order to bring about the collapse of the magnetic form, we merely need to acknowledge the role the poles play in determining the middle term. The very operation that produces polarities also draws our attention to the magnetic structure of the resulting dichotomies. Upon noticing this structure, we reveal the relative nature of the middle term. Experimentation thus leads to the negation of the figure of experimentation, Schlegel’s primary figure of thought. In the case of truth, the polar structure that determines it reveals that truth is not absolute. Without a notion of absolute truth, we must give up our conception of error, for what was once considered error can no longer be meaningfully separated from the truth.⁷⁴

The absence of error does not mean that what occupies the position of a pole is disregarded on the way to truth, but rather that this element is swept up in the reconfiguration.⁷⁵ Of the infinite, he says: “Yes, it is fiction... but the error disappears by itself when we proceed from ourselves as the midpoint and come back to ourselves again. How can one err? It can’t be an illusion.”⁷⁶ If there is no absolute truth, there are no errors and no poles. What was a pole and possibly an error, such as the infinite, is no longer opposed to truth. Schlegel’s revolution rests on the realization that truth is itself infinite, and so is philosophy and knowledge. The negation of the finite comes from going through the finite, from beginning and ending with ourselves as the midpoint. The neutralization of the poles is a collapse of the magnet figure, the collapse of the framework through which we can only ever approach the origin and the totality as the limit points. No direct path can lead to consciousness of the infinite. Instead, we must go through the middle, we must turn our attention away from the absolute in order to discover it elsewhere. It is in this sense that the new mythology is an *indirect* mythology.⁷⁷ Beyond the magnet structure, Schlegel gives up the goal of identity of the positive and negative,

⁷² KFSA XII, 93.

⁷³ “Each series of experiments based on something real leads to the truth.” (Ibid.)

⁷⁴ KFSA XII, 95.

⁷⁵ Trop writes that “contrary forces... cancel one another but nevertheless remain present as structuring polarities. Truth becomes a higher-order movement *through errors*, and the relativity of truth involves the way in which these ‘relations’ both exist as differences and cancel one another out when one moves from one polar opposition to the next” (Trop, 427). Truth does not merely emerge as a movement within the magnet-structure but requires a reconfiguration that undoes this structure entirely.

⁷⁶ KFSA XII, 9.

⁷⁷ KFSA II, 319.

and instead goes about approaching philosophy through its interconnections.

Philosophy of philosophy is thus a turning point, and one that allows us to go through the magnet structure and through the circle, to a new configuration in which philosophy can account for both. Once we see the dissolution of the magnet, we reach a conception of philosophy that is not merely linear nor merely circular. The forces of physics retreat, and new figures emerge with the possibility of interdisciplinarity. Once physics can theorize poetry and philosophy from the outside, it gives up its priority as a dominant discourse. Philosophy of philosophy must account for the transition between forms, and it does so through mathematics. In this spirit, Schlegel writes: "The path of modern poetry and philosophy is not by any means cyclical, but instead more conic."⁷⁸ Philosophy is conic insofar as it concerns the middle, beginning not with basic elements but with complex objects. When we start with the cone, the Euclidean building blocks, the point and the line, are themselves derived as conic sections, emerging from the intersection of the cone with the plane. Using this method, we can also obtain the circle, ellipse, hyperbola, and parabola. Through their construction, we observe the transition and interconnection between these forms. For Schlegel, the cone is associated with apotheosis, which entails reaching the absolute and the infinite.⁷⁹ To be conic means to stretch from the point to the infinite, but from the perspective of the middle realm in which Schlegel's philosophy begins. The cone thus represents, for Schlegel, the possibility of finding the infinite in the finite.⁸⁰ We therefore achieve consciousness of the infinite, but not by a merely linear nor merely circular path.

In light of these considerations, the polarities invoked in the opening of the *Dialogue* obtain a new meaning. We recall, "The play of communicating and approaching is the business and the force of life; absolute perfection [*Vollendung*] exists only in death." The absolute completion mentioned there is not that of some infinite convergence; instead, the completion of life takes place in the negation of life, which entails a "leap into the opposite," a leap into death.⁸¹ What first appeared as another oppositional pair—as furthering the structuring of polarities—is revealed as participating in the negation of the oppositional form. A different formulation of this thought appears in the

⁷⁸ KFSa XVIII, 233.

⁷⁹ See, for example, KFSa XVIII, 234, fragment 492.

⁸⁰ Smith considers this point with reference to calculus: Schlegel as "the romantic thinker of the infinite," for whom "the infinite has entered into, or is always already within, the finite just as calculus employs differentials, infinitesimals, and their infinite integration in order to explore the world of constant change." (Smith, 247)

⁸¹ KFSa XII, 417.

lectures: “*True life is only in death*. Namely death is what emerges when life neutralizes itself, when it negates the opposition. Vulgar life (in the opposition) is thus not true life; the former must be negated if the latter is to emerge.”⁸² The configuration described here, that the “neutralization” of life involves the negation of the opposition intrinsic to the magnet structure, is revealed as a specific case in the general disintegration of this form.

When Schlegel’s figure of experimentation is negated through experimentation, the dissolution of the magnet marks the extreme culmination of a theory that is what it is about. At the limits of this notion of theory, a reconfiguration takes place through which the old model is absorbed and included in a broader model—the encyclopedia project. Since the figure of the magnet disintegrates in the moment in which the encyclopedia project comes to fruition, the fragment is not so much engaged in producing polarities as in producing other forms of relation.⁸³ Just as the cone includes the line and the circle, the encyclopedia project includes the insights generated from the magnet-driven inquiry into the nature of knowledge and poetry.⁸⁴ When neutralized, the magnet no longer draws all discourses into its form. Instead, the configuration at work in structuring polarities still appears in the reconfigured project, but it no longer dominates. The post-magnetic realm of the fragments can therefore include the theory of the poem that is a poem, but it also opens up the possibility of the theory of the poem being found in physics, in math, and beyond.

⁸² KFSX XII, 40.

⁸³ The fragment can still relate the “foundational binaries of representing the world—science and aesthetics—to one another through contradiction,” but the fragments of the encyclopedia project would also offer other forms of relation not dependent on polarities. (Weatherby, “A Reconsideration of the Romantic Fragment,” 408)

⁸⁴ This point is similar to the one Holland makes: “Once constructed, the lever effects continue to operate beneath the surface of the encyclopedia project, even when the lever or its component parts are not directly mentioned.” (Holland, 86)