Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Spinoza

Volume 7 (2025)

Grave of Spinoza in The Hague
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Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Editorial

In memoriam Karl Ameriks (1947-2025)

In 2022 *Symphilosophie* devoted issue 4 to the unfairly neglected Dutch thinker François Hemsterhuis. At the centre of our seventh issue is another Dutch philosopher. This time, however, a well-known figure that has left a considerable mark on the history of philosophy – Baruch Spinoza. The early German romantics were among those who avidly discussed Spinoza's work, often through the lens of the reception in Germany of his compatriot Hemsterhuis.

The main thematic dossier of the present issue was guest-edited by María Jimena Solé, Professor of History of Modern Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires, where she leads the Research Group on Spinoza and Spinozism, as well as the Research Group on Idealism. For her dossier María Jimena Solé chose to broaden the exploration of Spinoza's philosophical reception, allowing *Symphilosophie* in turn to further open up the study of romantic philosophy beyond the limits of Europe to include Argentine romanticism. We warmly thank her for all her wonderful work.

We are also extremely thankful to all the contributors to this issue and to our editorial team. In addition, we would like to express our gratitude to Michael Steinberg for permitting us to publish in advance a chapter of his latest book *The Philosopher's Ring—Wagner as Thinker and Dramatist* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2026).

Issue 8 (2026) of *Symphilosophie* will be a special volume of conference proceedings on the idea, relations, and methods of symphilosophizing. The conference was held at the University of Bonn in March 2025.

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague Karl Ameriks, who passed away in April 2025. Karl was not only one of the world's leading scholars of Immanuel Kant's thought, but was passionately interested in German romantic philosophy. We were thankful to be able to get to know Karl more personally at a number of philosophy events and conferences over the years. These include Dublin in the year 2001, where he was enthusiastic to learn that a first English translation of Novalis's *Romantic Encyclopaedia* was being prepared, and kindly gave feedback on the project; and the wonderful 2007 Bremen conference, *Das neue Licht der Frühromantik*, hosted by Bärbel Frischmann and Elizabeth Millán; or going on a memorable excursion together to the Andechs monastic brewery in 2012, near Munich, Karl's place of birth. In 2018 Karl was one of the first scholars to get behind our journal *Symphilosophie*, readily lending his support both in word by agreeing to be on the editorial board and in deed by submitting a research article for publication already for our second volume in 2020. We were always grateful to receive Karl's warm and supportive emails after the publication of a new issue, the last being in February 2025, a couple of months before he died. He additionally communicated some events concerning his last book – *Kantian Dignity and its Difficulties* – that again intersects critical and romantic philosophy; indeed, which concludes with the chapter: "Back to the Early Romantics and Kantian Dignity." (A review of this book by Cody Staton can be found below).

With his research and editorship on Kant and German idealist and romantic philosophies, Karl was one of the people who most inspired us to create this philosophy journal. His kindness, humour, and generous scholarly spirit of *symphilosophizing* will be sorely missed.

Bonn, January 2026

Laure Cahen-Maurel
David W. Wood

Symphilosophie

Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik

Editorial

In memoriam Karl Ameriks (1947-2025)

Im Jahr 2022 widmete *Symphilosophie* die Ausgabe 4 dem zu Unrecht vernachlässigten niederländischen Denker François Hemsterhuis. Im Mittelpunkt unserer siebten Ausgabe steht ein weiterer niederländischer Philosoph. Diesmal jedoch eine bekannte Persönlichkeit, die die Geschichte der Philosophie maßgeblich geprägt hat – Baruch Spinoza. Die Jenaer Frühromantiker gehörten zu denen, die Spinozas Werk eifrig diskutierten, oft durch die Brille der Rezeption seines Landsmanns Hemsterhuis in Deutschland.

Das thematische Hauptdossier der vorliegenden Ausgabe wurde von María Jimena Solé als Gastredakteurin zusammengestellt. Sie ist Professorin für Geschichte der Philosophie der Neuzeit an der Universität von Buenos Aires, wo sie die Forschungsgruppe zu Spinoza und Spinozismus sowie die Forschungsgruppe zum Idealismus leitet. Für ihr Dossier weitete María Jimena Solé die Untersuchung der philosophischen Rezeption Spinozas aus und ermöglichte es *Symphilosophie* wiederum damit, die Erforschung der romantischen Philosophie über die Grenzen Europas hinaus auf die argentinische Romantik auszudehnen. Wir danken ihr herzlich für ihre großartige Arbeit.

Wir sind auch allen Autoren dieser Ausgabe und unserem Redaktionsteam sehr dankbar. Darüber hinaus möchten wir Michael Steinberg unseren Dank dafür aussprechen, dass er uns erlaubt hat, ein Kapitel seines neuesten Buches *The Philosopher's Ring – Wagner as Thinker and Dramatist* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2026) vorab zu veröffentlichen.

Die Ausgabe 8 (2026) von *Symphilosophie* wird ein Tagungsband sein mit Beiträgen zum Thema ‚symphilosophieren', dessen Ideen, Beziehungen und Methoden. Die Tagung fand im März 2025 an der Universität Bonn statt.

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Die vorliegende Ausgabe ist dem Andenken an unseren Freund und Kollegen Karl Ameriks gewidmet, der im April 2025 verstorben ist. Karl war nicht nur einer der weltweit führenden Wissenschaftler auf dem Gebiet des Denkens von Immanuel Kant, sondern interessierte sich auch leidenschaftlich für die deutsche romantische Philosophie. Wir sind dankbar, dass wir Karl im Laufe der Jahre bei einer Reihe von Philosophieveranstaltungen und Konferenzen näher kennenlernen durften. Dazu gehören Dublin im Jahr 2001, wo er davon begeistert war, zu erfahren, dass eine erste englische Übersetzung von Novalis' *Allgemeines Brouillon* in Vorbereitung war, und freundlicherweise Feedback zu dem Projekt gab; die wunderbare Bremer Tagung 2007, *Das neue Licht der Frühromantik*, die von Bärbel Frischmann und Elizabeth Millán veranstaltet wurde; oder der unvergessliche gemeinsame Ausflug zur Klosterbrauerei Andechs in der Nähe von München, Karls Geburtsort, im Jahr 2012. Im Jahr 2018 war Karl einer der ersten Wissenschaftler, der unsere Zeitschrift *Symphilosophie* unterstützte, indem er sich bereit erklärte, Mitglied des wissenschaftlichen Beirats zu werden, und bereits für unseren zweiten Band im Jahr 2020 einen Forschungsartikel zur Veröffentlichung einreichte.

Wir waren immer dankbar für Karls herzliche und unterstützende E-Mails nach der Veröffentlichung einer neuen Ausgabe, zuletzt im Februar 2025, einige Monate vor seinem Tod. Er berichtete außerdem über einige Ereignisse im Zusammenhang mit seinem letzten Buch – *Kantian Dignity and its Difficulties* –, das erneut die Schnittstelle zwischen kritischer und romantischer Philosophie thematisiert und mit dem Kapitel „Back to the Early Romantics and Kantian Dignity" endet. (Eine Rezension dieses Buches von Cody Staton finden Sie weiter unten).

Mit seinen Forschungen und Herausgeberschaften zu Kant und den deutschen idealistischen und romantischen Philosophien war Karl einer der Menschen, die uns am meisten dazu inspiriert haben, diese Philosophiezeitschrift zu gründen. Seine Freundlichkeit, sein Humor und sein großzügiger wissenschaftlicher Geist des *Symhilosophierens* werden uns sehr fehlen.

Bonn, Januar 2026

Laure Cahen-Maurel
David W. Wood

Symphilosophie

Revue internationale de philosophie romantique

Éditorial

In memoriam Karl Ameriks (1947-2025)

En 2022, *Symphilosophie* consacrait son quatrième numéro au Néerlandais François Hemsterhuis, dont la pensée a été injustement négligée. Notre septième numéro est consacré lui aussi à un philosophe néerlandais, mais il s'agit cette fois d'une figure bien connue, dont l'empreinte sur l'histoire de la philosophie est profonde : Baruch Spinoza. Les premiers romantiques allemands furent de ceux qui discutèrent avidement de l'œuvre de Spinoza, souvent à travers le prisme de la réception en Allemagne de son compatriote Hemsterhuis.

Le dossier thématique du présent numéro a été coordonné par María Jimena Solé, Professeure d'histoire de la philosophie moderne à l'Université de Buenos Aires, où elle dirige le Groupe de recherche sur Spinoza et le spinozisme, ainsi que le Groupe de recherche sur l'idéalisme. Pour ce dossier, María Jimena Solé a choisi d'élargir l'exploration de la réception philosophique de Spinoza, permettant ainsi à *Symphilosophie* d'ouvrir à son tour l'étude de la philosophie romantique au-delà des frontières de l'Europe pour y inclure le romantisme argentin. Nous la remercions chaleureusement de sa collaboration.

Nous sommes reconnaissants également à tous les contributeurs de ce numéro, ainsi qu'à notre équipe éditoriale. Enfin, nous tenons à exprimer notre gratitude à Michael Steinberg pour nous avoir autorisés à publier en avant-première un chapitre de son dernier ouvrage, *The Philosopher's Ring—Wagner as Thinker and Dramatist* (Rochester, NY : Camden House, 2026).

Le numéro 8 de *Symphilosophie* (2026) sera un numéro spécial : les Actes d'un colloque de mars 2025 organisé à l'Université de Bonn sous le titre : *Symphilosophizing in German Romanticism: Relationships, Methods, and Ideas* (« Symphilosopher dans le romantisme allemand : relations, méthodes, idées »).

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Nous dédions la présente livraison à la mémoire d'un ami et collègue, Karl Ameriks, disparu en avril 2025. Karl fut non seulement un des grands spécialistes de la pensée d'Emmanuel Kant dans le monde ; il s'intéressait aussi vivement à la philosophie romantique allemande. Nous avons eu la chance d'apprendre à mieux connaître Karl au fil des ans, à la faveur d'événements et de colloques philosophiques. Notamment à Dublin, en 2001, où il se montra enthousiaste d'apprendre qu'une toute première traduction anglaise du *Brouillon général* de Novalis était en préparation, faisant généreusement part de ses remarques sur le projet ; à Brême, en 2007, à l'occasion du merveilleux colloque *Das neue Licht der Frühromantik*, organisé par Bärbel Frischmann et Elizabeth Millán ; ou encore en 2012, lors d'une excursion mémorable à la brasserie de l'abbaye d'Andechs, près de Munich, lieu de naissance de Karl. En 2018, Karl fut un des premiers chercheurs à soutenir *Symphilosophie*, tant en paroles – il avait immédiatement accepté de faire partie du comité scientifique de notre revue – qu'en actes : il nous avait soumis un article dès 2020, pour notre deuxième numéro. Nous lui avons toujours su gré des courriels chaleureux et pleins d'encouragements qu'il nous adressait après la parution d'un nouveau numéro, le dernier datant de février 2025, quelques mois avant sa mort. Il nous avait, d'autre part, tenu informés d'événements autour de son dernier livre – *Kantian Dignity and its Difficulties* –, qui croise une fois de plus philosophie critique et philosophie romantique : l'ouvrage s'achève par un chapitre intitulé « Back to the Early Romantics and Kantian Dignity » (Retour aux premiers romantiques et à la dignité kantienne). (Cody Staton donne de ce livre une recension en anglais dans les pages qui suivent).

Par ses travaux de recherche et d'édition scientifique sur Kant et sur les philosophies idéalistes et romantiques allemandes, Karl fut une des personnalités nous ayant le plus inspirés pour créer cette revue de philosophie. Sa gentillesse, son humour et sa généreuse pratique du *symphilosopher* vont beaucoup nous manquer.

Bonn, janvier 2026

Laure Cahen-Maurel
David W. Wood

Symphilosophie

Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica

Editoriale

In memoriam Karl Ameriks (1947-2025)

Nel 2022 *Symphilosophie* ha dedicato il numero 4 al pensatore olandese François Hemsterhuis, ingiustamente trascurato. Al centro del nostro settimo numero c'è un altro filosofo olandese. Questa volta, però, si tratta di una figura ben nota che ha lasciato un segno considerevole nella storia della filosofia: Baruch Spinoza. I primi romantici tedeschi furono tra coloro che discussero avidamente l'opera di Spinoza, spesso anche attraverso la lente della ricezione in Germania del suo compatriota Hemsterhuis.

Il dossier tematico principale del presente numero è stato curato da María Jimena Solé, Professoressa di Storia della filosofia moderna all'Università di Buenos Aires, dove dirige il Gruppo di ricerca su Spinoza e lo spinozismo, nonché il Gruppo di ricerca sull'idealismo. Per il suo dossier, María Jimena Solé ha scelto di ampliare l'esplorazione della ricezione filosofica di Spinoza, consentendo a sua volta a *Symphilosophie* di ampliare ulteriormente lo studio della filosofia romantica oltre i confini europei, includendo anche il romanticismo argentino. La ringraziamo sentitamente per il suo meraviglioso lavoro.

Siamo inoltre estremamente grati a tutti i collaboratori di questo numero e al nostro team editoriale. Vorremmo infine esprimere la nostra gratitudine a Michael Steinberg per averci permesso di pubblicare in anteprima un capitolo del suo ultimo libro *The Philosopher's Ring—Wagner as Thinker and Dramatist* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2026).

Il numero 8 (2026) di *Symphilosophie* sarà un volume speciale dedicato agli atti del convegno *Symphilosophizing in German Romanticism: Relationships, Methods, and Ideas* che si è svolto presso l'Università di Bonn nel marzo 2025.

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Questo numero è dedicato alla memoria del nostro amico e collega Karl Ameriks, scomparso nell'aprile 2025. Karl non era solo uno dei massimi studiosi mondiali del pensiero di Immanuel Kant, ma era anche appassionato di filosofia romantica tedesca. Siamo grati di aver potuto conoscere Karl personalmente in occasione di numerosi eventi e conferenze di filosofia nel corso degli anni. Tra questi ricordiamo Dublino nel 2001, dove fu felice di scoprire che era in preparazione una prima traduzione inglese dell' *Allgemeines Brouillon* di Novalis e ci fornì gentilmente il suo feedback sul progetto; o la meravigliosa conferenza di Brema del 2007, *Das neue Licht der Frühromantik*, ospitata da Bärbel Frischmann ed Elizabeth Millán; o la memorabile escursione al birrificio monastico di Andechs nel 2012, vicino a Monaco, luogo di nascita di Karl. Nel 2018 Karl è stato uno dei primi studiosi a sostenere la nostra rivista *Symphilosophie*, offrendo prontamente il suo sostegno sia a parole, accettando di far parte del comitato editoriale, sia con i fatti, inviando un articolo di ricerca da pubblicare già nel nostro secondo volume nel 2020.

Siamo sempre stati grati di ricevere le e-mail calorose e incoraggianti di Karl dopo la pubblicazione di un nuovo numero, l'ultimo delle quali risale al febbraio 2025, un paio di mesi prima della sua morte. Ci ha inoltre comunicato alcuni eventi riguardanti il suo ultimo libro – *Kantian Dignity and its Difficulties* – che tocca nuovamente l'intersezione tra filosofie critiche e romantiche, e che si conclude con il capitolo: "Back to the Early Romantics and Kantian Dignity" (Ritorno ai primi romantici e alla dignità kantiana). (Una recensione di questo libro, a cura di Cody Staton, è disponibile qui sotto).

Con le sue ricerche e la sua attività editoriale su Kant e sulle filosofie idealiste e romantiche tedesche, Karl è stato una delle persone che più ci ha ispirato a creare questa rivista di filosofia. La sua gentilezza, il suo umorismo e il suo generoso spirito accademico di *simfilosofare* ci mancheranno moltissimo.

Bonn, gennaio 2026

Laure Cahen-Maurel
David W. Wood

Spinoza

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Spinoza's Reception and the Reception of Ideas

María Jimena Solé[*]

This dossier addresses some under-explored aspects of Spinoza's reception in Romanticism—an episode in the history of philosophy that, although it has received increasing attention from specialists in recent years, still holds much to be discovered. The aim is, therefore, to contribute to the understanding of how certain ideas and problems linked to the figure of Spinoza had an impact on the literary productions and theoretical developments of some of the leading exponents of the Romantic movement. Three of the articles in the Dossier focus on the reception of Spinoza in German Romanticism, particularly in Schelling, Caroline Michaelis, Novalis, and the young Hegel. The fourth article proposes to discover an affinity of ideas between Spinoza and two of the leading figures of the Romantic movement in Argentina, Juan Bautista Alberdi and Esteban Echeverría. In order to do so, it reconstructs the plot of an indirect reception of Spinozism in these lands, mediated by how Spinoza had been read and interpreted in France and Germany. The fifth contribution is a vignette on Spinoza and Weimar classicism.

The history of the reception of Spinozism is as complex as it is fascinating. As is well known, Spinoza was a philosopher who was censored and persecuted both during his lifetime and after his death. Ever since his expulsion from the Jewish community in 1656, he had been regarded with suspicion. The publication of his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in 1670 confirmed many of his contemporaries' concerns. In it, Spinoza defended democracy as the best system of government and presented freedom of expression as an inalienable right. He also proposed separating church and state and considered the Holy Scriptures as a text written by human beings for human

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beings. The book was denounced as heretical and blasphemous by religious authorities and was confiscated and banned by political authorities. A few years later, when Spinoza intended to deliver the manuscript of his *Ethica, ordine geometrico demonstrata* to his publisher, he was forced to abandon its publication because rumors had spread that the book he was about to send to press contained a demonstration of the non-existence of God.

The posthumous publication of the *Ethica* in 1677 prompted the appearance of numerous controversial writings that sought to denounce his thought as unacceptable, dangerous, and absurd. At the same time, he aroused intense curiosity, which explains the appearance, at the turn of the century, of a series of biographies of Spinoza, which were widely circulated throughout the 18th century and established some of the commonplaces of the discussion surrounding his figure, such as the image of Spinoza as a virtuous atheist presented by Johannes Colerus or Pierre Bayle's assertion that Spinoza was a systematic atheist.

Despite the strong reaction against him, or perhaps precisely because orthodox thinkers never stopped fighting and refuting him, Spinoza did not fall into oblivion. Spinoza was the Cursed philosopher, the Prince of atheists, and the messenger from hell sent to subvert order on Earth. The term Spinozist became an insult, and being accused of Spinozism had serious consequences. This is confirmed by the case of Christian Wolff, who in 1723 was forced to leave his position at the University of Halle and the territory of Prussia after being publicly denounced as a follower of Spinoza. However, there were also some who vindicated him, certain clandestine Spinozists who saw in the arguments of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* an inspiration for their own battle against religious orthodoxy and monarchical despotism. Proof of this underground interest in Spinoza's ideas is the appearance in 1744 of the first German translation of the *Ethica*, whose author, Johann Lorenz Schmidt, was convicted and persecuted.

The situation changed radically after 1785, when F.H. Jacobi published his *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*. This small book contains the correspondence that Jacobi had maintained with M. Mendelssohn for more than two years, thanks to the mediation of Elise Reimarus. The trigger had been the famous conversation Jacobi had had with Lessing in 1780 in Wolfenbüttel, shortly before his death. According to Jacobi, Lessing confessed his complete agreement with Spinoza, vindicated the motto *Hen kai pan* (one and all)—long associated with Spinozian pantheism—and lamented that the vilified philosopher was still treated like a dead dog.

Drawing on Lessing's authority, Jacobi challenged the widespread opinion about the limited philosophical value of Spinoza's doctrine and, on the contrary, argued that Spinozism was, in fact, the only philosophy, the most coherent result of human reason, a complete and irrefutable system. The spirit of Spinozism, according to Jacobi, was the principle *a nihilo nihil fit* (nothing comes from nothing), and this radicalization of causal explanation had led him to postulate an immanent cause of the universe, without understanding or will, from which everything followed with the utmost necessity. Thus, Spinozism—and all rationalist philosophy, including Mendelssohn's enlightened philosophy—led, according to Jacobi, to fatalism and atheism. Faced with this unacceptable result, his proposal was to take a leap of faith, abandon philosophy, and embrace belief in a transcendent, creator, personal, free, and good God.

Mendelssohn was compelled to defend both the memory of his friend Lessing and, above all, the Enlightenment itself against the accusation of Spinozism. He deployed his efforts in his last work, *Morgenstunden* (Morning Hours), but they were ineffective. All he achieved was to highlight the weakness of his rationalist position, deepening the crisis of the traditional way of doing philosophy. On the contrary, it was Kant who successfully found a way out of the dilemma posed by Jacobi. He did so by showing that the alternative between a fatalistic and atheistic philosophy or a non-philosophy based on faith did not exhaust all options. In his 1786 article, entitled "Was heißt: sich im Denken Orientieren?" (What does it mean: to orient oneself in thinking?), he presented his rational faith as a triumphant way out of the dilemma and, in an extensive footnote, responded to those who had found support for Spinozism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For him, Spinozism was dogmatism: Spinoza, like Mendelssohn, had not carried out the necessary critical examination of reason, did not recognize the limits of reason in its theoretical use, and had produced a completely false system.

Meanwhile, in Weimar, Goethe and Herder had also begun reading the *Ethica* together and, unlike Jacobi, Mendelssohn, and Kant, they were strongly attracted to Spinoza's philosophy. Both rejected Jacobi's interpretation, which identified Spinozism with atheism. Goethe expressed his interpretation in a short text, *Studie nach Spinoza*, and in a letter to Jacobi in June 1795, he stated that Spinoza does not prove the existence of God, because existence is God. Herder, for his part, published *Gott. Einige Gespräche*, in which he argued that for Spinoza the idea of divinity is the first and last of all ideas, and proposed that Spinoza be considered a fanatic of divine existence. In this work, which had an immense impact on the exponents of early Romanticism, Herder reinterpreted Spinoza's God as the

supreme principle of life, the original force (*Urkraft*) that acts through each of the particular forces of nature. This vitalistic and immanent notion of divinity allowed him to develop a conception of religion and morality that challenged the paradigm of Enlightenment philosophy.

This controversy, which, as I have just outlined, involved the leading figures of the German intellectual scene—now known as the *Pantheismusstreit*—put Spinoza at the center of the debate for the first time. More than a hundred years after his death, Spinoza's doctrine experienced a true renaissance. His texts were considered worthy of study and his ideas were discussed publicly without resorting to the strategies of defamation and misrepresentation that had been dominant until then.

However, this brief summary of the different positions that arose in the heat of the controversy is enough to understand that the Spinoza who was resurrected in Germany at the end of the 18th century did not present a clear figure with well-defined contours. On the contrary, he was a Spinoza with many very different, even contradictory faces, who stirred up very different reactions, winning both supporters and enemies alike. But in addition, and perhaps more importantly, "Spinoza" represented a problem, namely, the problem of how to practice philosophy without falling into the abyss of atheism and fatalism. Indeed, towards the end of the 18th century, anyone who wanted to venture down the path of philosophy had to take a stance on Spinozism and either refute it and show that it was possible to philosophize in a different way, or vindicate its radical rationalism and accept its consequences. This was the context in which both Reinhold and Fichte began to construct their own philosophical systems. Spinoza, transformed into the battlefield where the fate of all philosophy was being decided, was for them a privileged interlocutor whose ideas they fought against and also, to a certain extent, adopted.

This complex history of Spinoza's reception in late 18th-century Germany runs through the connection that the exponents of the *Frühromantik*, but also later Romantics and those from other latitudes, established with Spinozism. Spinoza was not for them a closed and well-defined set of ideas, but, as I have shown in this brief overview, an open problem, an invitation to think about the scope and limits of human reason, the conception of nature and its relationship with the divine, the possibility of being free and building a different political order, and above all the role of philosophy in an emancipatory cultural project.

Now, beyond the obvious significance of understanding how the Romantics read, interpreted, discussed, and adopted certain ideas from Spinoza, studying this specific episode in the history of philosophy allows us

to reflect once again on the complex phenomenon of the reception of ideas. Indeed, it allows us to critically reflect on the process by which a set of ideas produced in a given context finds, in a different context, people who read them, disseminate them, translate them, and adapt them to their own interests; people who recreate them and, in a way, appropriate them. I believe that understanding this process in all its complexity, as a process that presupposes both the power of that set of ideas to challenge their recipients and certain theoretical and practical interests in those recipients that drive and guide the reception, helps us to develop a critical and non-naïve view of how philosophy is practiced and how its history unfolds.

Indeed, the process of receiving ideas is usually thought of as a kind of desecration of the treasures of the past. Many believe that when an idea or doctrine is received in a cultural context different from that in which it arose, it inevitably undergoes deformation, misrepresentation, and distortion. To the extent that ideas and texts travel without their contexts, Pierre Bourdieu famously asserts, misunderstandings are inevitable. While there are those who celebrate the virtues of these "misreadings" and praise the productive power of misunderstandings, this way of viewing reception reinforces another notion ingrained in our common sense: the notion that, in philosophy, there are certain places and certain epochs that are "producers" of ideas, while the rest of the world and the rest of history must settle for repeating them and, in doing so, inevitably distorting them.

This notion of reception as misunderstanding and distortion operates surreptitiously in numerous studies, is embedded in a certain common sense among philosophy students and professors, and has significant implications for the way the academic world functions and the various instances of the legitimization of knowledge. It is not surprising, therefore, that this problem, which aims to think about the connection with the foreign, which questions the possibility and the way in which certain foreign ideas can become our own, is of particular concern to us, who do philosophy from Latin America, from a place historically considered peripheral to the great centers of the production of ideas. I am convinced that this concern motivates and is present in the articles that compose this Dossier, many written by researchers born and educated in Argentina who, despite pursuing their academic careers in European universities or in contact with international academic circles, have maintained intact their connection with our way of doing and living philosophy.

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Schelling and Caroline Michaelis

Two Complementary Views in the Reception of Spinoza's Philosophy in Early Romanticism

Virginia López Domínguez *

ABSTRACT

Spinoza's thought constitutes a decisive key for understanding Schelling's philosophical development. Since his youth, he explains Fichte using Spinozian vocabulary, characterizes the I as substance, and the Absolute as *Hen kai pan*, which anticipate his Philosophy of Identity. As a result, intellectual intuition is assimilated to *amor dei intellectualis* and presented as a direct access to the suprasensible world. This annihilates individuality and sinks into nihilism, but produces bliss; dogmatism is revalued, putting it on a theoretical equal level with idealism. Finally, an aesthetic vision takes place, which generates a positive evaluation of Nature based on the idea of *deus sive natura*, a parallelism of *ordo idearum* and *ordo rerum*, a distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, while mechanism is assumed within teleology. Prior to Schelling, Caroline Michaelis adopts this holistic and teleological version of nature, referring it to art in her analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*. The aim of this article is to highlight, through a brief analysis of these concepts, the fundamental impact that the Spinozist vision of Nature had on Schelling and early Romanticism.

Keywords: Absolute I, intellectual intuition, deus sive natura, natura naturans, Shakespeare

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Spinozas Denken ist ein entscheidender Schlüssel zum Verständnis von Schellings philosophischer Entwicklung. Seit seiner Jugend erklärt er Fichte mit Hilfe von Spinozas Vokabular, charakterisiert das Ich als Substanz und das Absolute als *Hen kai pan*, was seine Philosophie der Identität vorwegnimmt. Infolgedessen wird die intellektuelle Anschauung mit *amor dei intellectualis* gleichgesetzt und als direkter Zugang zur übersinnlichen Welt dargestellt. Dies vernichtet die Individualität und versinkt im Nihilismus, erzeugt aber Glückseligkeit; der Dogmatismus wird ebenso aufgewertet und theoretisch auf die gleiche Ebene wie der Idealismus gestellt. Schließlich entsteht eine ästhetische Perspektive, die eine positive Bewertung der Natur hervorbringt, basierend auf der Idee von *deus sive natura*, einer Parallelität von *ordo idearum* und *ordo rerum*, einer Unterscheidung zwischen *natura naturans* und *natura naturata*, während Mechanismus innerhalb der Teleologie angenommen wird. Vor Schelling übernimmt Caroline Michaelis diese ganzheitliche und teleologische Version der Natur und bezieht sie in ihrer Analyse von *Romeo und Julia* auf die Kunst. Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, durch eine kurze Analyse dieser Begriffe den grundlegenden Einfluss hervorzuheben, den die spinozistische Naturauffassung auf Schelling und die Frühromantik hatte.

Stichwörter: Absolutes Ich, intellektuelle Anschauung, *deus sive natura*, *natura naturans*, Shakespeare

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As is well known, Spinoza's works were not well received in his time. In Germany the philosopher was considered a dangerous author since the publication of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in 1670, because his defence of freedom of thought, religious tolerance and democracy, in addition to his criticism of superstition and despotism, clashed with the governmental and religious principles in force at the time.[1] The publication of the *Ethica* in 1677 worsened the situation. By giving a metaphysical foundation to his political position, Spinoza came to be considered a cursed philosopher, defender of atheism, and a true enemy of both Christian orthodoxy and the political order. But this generalized attitude of aversion changed the moment Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi published in 1785 *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, his correspondence with Moses Mendelssohn on Spinoza. In these letters, he revealed the conversations he had with Lessing shortly before his death, in which the latter confessed that he adhered to Spinoza's pantheism. The revelation generated a great controversy, indirectly favouring Kantian philosophy as an alternative to fideism and rationalism, and awakening the interest of directly reading the works that had aroused so much discomfort. Jacobi argued in his writing that Spinoza's thought is a pantheism that, by identifying God with nature, becomes an atheistic materialism and a fatalism that denies human freedom. With these objections he intended to gather adherents for his *Unphilosophie*, abandoning rationalist thought and embracing faith, based on feeling, immediate certainty, etc. But they produced the opposite phenomenon: the conviction that the Spinozist system was irrefutable mainly due to the use of the geometric method, which demonstrated from axioms and gave unity to philosophy allowing all reality to be derived from substance. Such systematic form was adopted by all German idealists, with specific variations. After the refutation of Karl Leonhard Reinhold's attempt to systematize the Kantian Critiques,[2] Fichte created the *Wissenschaftslehre*, defined as "the first system of freedom."[3] And very soon his philosophy was accused by Jacobi as an "inverted

[1] Among the bibliography in Spanish on this subject, see *El ocaso de la Ilustración. La polémica del spinozismo* (selection, translation and preliminary study by María Jimena Solé (Bernal: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de Quilmes / Prometeo, 2013), 11; M. J. Solé, *Spinoza en Alemania (1670-1789). Historia de la santificación de un filósofo maldito* (Córdoba: Brujas, 2011); José Luis Villacañas, *Nihilismo, especulación y cristianismo en F. H. Jacobi. Un ensayo sobre los orígenes del irracionalismo contemporáneo* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1989). See also, Virginia Moratiel, *Cuando lo infinito asoma desde el abismo. Estudios sobre romanticismo en lengua alemana e inglesa* (Madrid: Taugenit, 2021) and Virginia López Domínguez, *Schelling (1775-1854)* (Madrid: Ediciones del Orto, 1995) and *La flor azul* (Buenos Aires: RAGIF Ediciones, 2025).

[2] The refutation was made by Fichte in his "*Aenesidemus Review*" (1794).

[3] Letter from Fichte to Baggesen in 1795. GA III/3, p. 300.

Spinozism",[4] because – as Hegel would later say, in the prologue to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* – it transforms substance into subject. Thus, the *Ethica* became the perfect model that guaranteed the formal truth of philosophy. In addition, among his first readers were Herder and Goethe, who undertook together the crusade to rehabilitate Spinoza or even to "sanctify" him, if we stick to the inscription that the former put on the copy of the *Ethica* that he gave to Charlotte von Stein and that the three of them later discussed together.[5] The impulse to achieve this paradoxical "sanctification of Spinoza", that is, to establish an agreement between pantheism and Christianity, guided from the beginning Herder's interpretation, who, as is well known, was a Protestant pastor. Despite his distorting interpretation of certain ideas of the Jewish philosopher,[6] the association of the two religious positions allowed him to impose his exegesis at the time, for example, modulating the reading of the romantic motto of the "One and All", the "*Hen kai pan*".[7] Thus, the romantic theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher stated in 1799 in his work *Über die Religion*:

> Offer with me reverently a tribute to the manes of the holy, rejected Spinoza. The high World Spirit pervaded him; the Infinite was his beginning and his end; the Universe was his only and his everlasting love. In holy innocence and in deep humility he beheld himself mirrored in the eternal world, and perceived how he also was its most worthy mirror. He was full of religion, full of the Holy Spirit. Wherefore, he stands there alone and unequalled; master in his art, yet without disciples and without citizenship, sublime above the profane tribe.[8]

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4 See, for example, Jacobi's letter to Fichte, March 3-21, 1799 in *Fichtes Briefwechsel*, ed. Hans Schulz (Leipzig: Haessel, 1925), II, p. 27.

5 In 1784 Herder gave a copy of the *Ethics* to Charlotte von Stein, and wrote her a dedication, in which he emphasized the need to rehabilitate the philosopher and the meaning that such a rescue had for him: "*May Spinoza always be for you the Christian saint.*" J.G. Herder, *Sämtliche Werke* (ed. Bernhard Suphan. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1877-1913), XXIX, p. 697.

6 Jimena Solé analyses the German reception of Spinoza's thought with great accuracy and detail in her book *Spinoza en Alemania*, where she states: "Strictly, Herder betrays Spinoza's letter as far as the notion of substance is concerned, his doctrine of attributes, to his rejection of the existence of an intellect in God, to his refusal to attribute moral qualities to the divinity." M. J. Solé, *Spinoza en Alemania*, p. 358.

7 For example, *Vom ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* (1795) in SW I, p. 117. See also SW I, pp. 90 n., 103, 119 and 116 n. On the meaning of Schelling's reading of the Spinozist substance, see my article "Subject and modernity in Schelling's *Philosophy of Art,*" *Ideas* 1 (2015), pp. 80-108.

8 Fr. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1893), p. 40. "Opfer mit mir ehrerbietig eine Loke den Manen des heiligen erstossenen Spinoza! Ihn durchdrang der hohe

In turn, Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*, stripped of materialism and adapted to the idea of finality characteristic of providentialism, had served Herder as an initial hypothesis for his studies on nature, making him, along with Goethe, the precursor of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and later one of the points of support for the theory of evolution. In this way, mechanism had given rise to a vision of the universe as a divine and living totality, as an organism.

Because of his peculiar position within idealism, Schelling combines these two tendencies in his reception of Spinoza's philosophy. On the one hand, his concern for systematicity led him, while still at the Seminary of Tübingen, to write a dissertation entitled *Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt*, which he published in 1794. There he established the formal characteristics that a philosophical system should fulfil. It is noteworthy that this text is contemporary to Fichte's *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*, and with similar content. On the other hand, when Schelling arrived at the University of Jena as a professor in 1797, he began the construction of a Philosophy of Nature, which extends over several texts even reaching the period of the Philosophy of Identity.

1. The Absolute I and Spinoza's Substance

Through Schelling's correspondence with his Seminary classmates – Hegel and the poet Hölderlin, both five years older than him –, we know that he read with admiration and passion Jacobi's *Letters on Spinoza's Doctrine* and the *Ethica*, and that he anticipated a true cultural revolution as a result of the alliance between Spinoza and Kant, who "had given the results, but not the premises."[9] Schelling's great hope was placed in Fichte, who "would take philosophy to a height that is going to give vertigo." That is why, in his letter to Hegel on Twelfth Night in 1795, he tells him that at that time he was "working on an Ethics *à la Spinoza*."[10] Hölderlin, who was in Jena working out the materials for his novel *Hyperion* and reading Fichte, suspected that the teacher's intention was to go beyond consciousness. And that is why he wrote to Hegel:

Weltgeist, das Unendliche war sei Anfang und Ende, das Universum seine einzige und ewige Liebe, ein heiliger Unschuld und tiefer Demuth spiegelte er sich in der ewigen Welt, und sah zu wie auch Er ihr liebenswürdigster Spiegel war; voller Religion war Er und voll heiligen Geistes; und darum steht Er auch da, allein und unerreicht, Meister in seiner Kunst, aber erhaben über die profane Zunft, ohne Jünger und ohne Bürgerrecht." Fr. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion, Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Berlin: J. Unger, 1799), p. 54.

9 *Aus Schellings Leben in Briefen* I (1775-1803), ed. Gustav Leopold Plitt (Leipzig: Hirsel, 1869-1870), p. 71 n.

10 *Ibidem.*

> His absolute I (= Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; it is all, and outside of it there is nothing; therefore, there is no object for this absolute I, for otherwise it would not contain all reality; a consciousness without an object is inconceivable; and if I myself am this object, then I am as such necessarily limited, even if this is only in time, and therefore not absolute; thus, no consciousness is conceivable in the absolute I; I have no consciousness as the absolute I, and insofar as I have no consciousness, insofar as I am (for myself) nothing, therefore the absolute I is (for me) nothing.
>
> This is what I wrote while still in Waltershausen, when I read his first pages, immediately after reading Spinoza.[11]

Let us keep in mind this first reading that Hölderlin makes of Fichte, because the same arguments soon curdle in Schelling, since there was a close intellectual relationship between the two at this time. In fact, a few days later Schelling wrote again to Hegel, defining his position on the Pantheism Controversy raised by Jacobi's letters and already announcing the interpretation of Fichte's system that he would make in his next book *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie, oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen*. The letter is dated February 4, 1795:

> Just an answer to your question: whether I believe that moral proof is insufficient to extend to a personal being? I confess the question surprised me; I wouldn't have expected it from someone familiar with Lessing—but you probably only did this to see whether I had fully settled the matter; for you, it certainly has long been settled. For us, too, the orthodox concepts of God are no longer valid. My answer is: we go even further than a personal being. In the meantime I've become a Spinozist! Don't be surprised. You will soon hear how. For Spinoza, the world (the object *par excellence*, as opposed to the subject)—was *everything*; for me, it is the *I*. The real difference between critical and dogmatic philosophy seems to me to lie in the fact that the former proceeds from the Absolute I (not yet conditioned by any object), the

[11] "Sein absolutes Ich (= Spinozas Substanz) enthält alle Realität; es ist alles, und ausser ihm ist nichts; es gibt also für dieses absolute Ich kein Object, denn sonst wäre nicht alle Realität in ihm; ein Bewusstseyn ohne Object ist aber nicht denkbar; und wenn ich selbst dieses Object bin, so bin ich als solches notwendig beschränkt, sollte es auch nur in der Zeit seyn, also nicht absolut; also ist in dem absoluten Ich kein Bewusstseyn denkbar, als absolute Ich habe ich kein Bewusstseyn, und insofern ich kein Bewusstseyn habe, insofern bin ich (für mich) nichts, also das absolute Ich ist (für mich) Nichts. […] So schrieb ich noch in Waltershausen, als ich seine ersten Blätter las, unmittelbar nach der Lektüre des Spinoza." Letter from Hölderlin to Hegel on Januar 26, 1795 in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* IV. Kritische-historische Ausgabe, ed. Franz Zinkernagel (Leipzig: Insel, 1921), p. 206.

> latter from the absolute object or Not-I. The former, in its highest consequence, leads to Spinoza's system, the latter to the Kantian. Philosophy must begin with the *unconditioned*. Now the only question is, where does this unconditioned lie, in the I or in the Not-I? Once this question is decided, *everything* is decided. For me, the highest principle of all philosophy is the pure, absolute I, that is, the I insofar as it is mere I, not yet conditioned by objects, but rather posited by *freedom*. The alpha and omega of all philosophy is freedom. […] – God is nothing but the absolute I, the I insofar as it has annihilated everything theoretical: thus, in *theoretical* philosophy, it = 0.[12]

A few months later *Vom Ich* appeared, where Schelling explains Fichte's thought trying to make it understandable or accessible to that educated majority, who perceived the philosopher's terminology as sectarian jargon, full of neologisms. The text did not surprise the philosophical public, who saw in the young man a disseminator of Fichtean idealism, to the point of being ironically described as a "public crier of the I" by the poet Baggesen.[13] But it did catch Fichte's attention that Schelling expressed his *Wissenschaftslehre* using Spinoza's vocabulary, although – as he himself states in a letter sent to Reinhold on July 2, 1795 – he found it witty and liked it.[14] But the reality is that, if Schelling was sincerely convinced that he was a Fichtean and

[12] "Noch eine Antwort auf Deine Frage: ob ich glaube, wir reichen mit dem moralischen Beweis nicht zu einem persönlichen Wesen? Ich gestehe, die Frage hat mich überrascht, ich hätte sie von einem Vertrauten Lessings nicht erwartet – doch Du hast sie wohl nur gethan, um zu erfahren, ob sie bei mir ganz entschieden sei; für Dich ist sie gewiss schon längst entschieden. Auch für uns sind die orthodoxen Begriffe von Gott nicht mehr. – Meine Antwort ist: wir reichen weiter noch als zum persönlichen Wesen. Ich bin indessen Spinozist geworden! – Staune nicht. Du wirst bald hören, wie? Spinoza war die Welt (das Objekt schlechthin im Gegensatz gegen das Subjekt) – *Alles*, mir ist es das *Ich*. Der eigentliche Unterschied der kritischen und dogmatischen Philosophie scheint mir darin zu liegen, dass jene vom Absoluten (noch durch kein Objekt bedingten) Ich, diese vom absoluten Objekt oder Nicht-Ich ausgeht. Die erstere in ihrer höchsten Konsequenz führt auf Spinoza' s System, die letztere aufs Kantische. Vom *Unbedingten* muss die Philosophie ausgehen. Nun fragt sich´s nur, worin dies Unbedingte liegt, im Ich oder im Nicht-Ich. Ist diese Fragen entschieden, so ist *Alles* entschieden. Mir ist das höchste Princip aller Philosophie das reine, absolute Ich, d. h. das Ich, inwiefern es blosses Ich, noch gar nicht durch Objekte bedingt, sondern durch *Freiheit* gesetz ist. Das A und O aller Philosophie ist Freiheit. […] – Gott ist nichts als das absolute Ich, das Ich, insofern es Alles theoretisch zernichtet hat: in der *theoretischen* Philosophie also = 0 ist." Letter from Schelling to Hegel on February 4, 1795. *Aus Schellings Leben in Briefen* I, p. 71 n.

[13] The expression "public crier of the I" appears in a letter from Baggesen to Eberhard of 1797. In his maturity, in *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie. Münchner Vorlesungen (1827),* Schelling also recognized that his goal at that time was to popularize Fichte's philosophy: "So wenig habe ich mich beeilet, ein eignes Systems aufzustellen, dass ich mich benügt, wie es auch meiner damaligen Jugend geziemte, vorerst nur das Fichtesche System begreiflich zu machen", SW V, p. 165.

[14] Sch. I, p. 481.

even the readers thought the same, his own interpretation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* was in accordance with his own interests and back-ground, which were already very different from those of Fichte. As a consequence, he felt a need to overcome the ethical idealism that led him in 1802 to a break with his former teacher, until at last he openly admitted that from his point of view Fichte's I was limited, not universal or transcendental, but simply a human I, "such as each one finds in his consciousness."[15]

The work was based on the originally Fichtean idea that the first principle of the system is pure activity of self-constitution that cannot be attributed to anything external, but the absolute I gradually adopted in Schelling's hands all the characteristics of the Spinozist substance. Transformed in *causa sui*, since it was the only truly self-sufficient thing, presented as an immanent cause or as *essentia* of reality, since everything that exists can only be explained from the I and, in that sense, is an accident of it, the I stood as the only eternal being that can never become a thing (hence it is unconditioned = *unbedingt* in German, referring to the fact that it cannot be objectified). It was defined as a unity containing all of reality and even as absolute power (*Selbstmacht*).[16] What Fichte failed to see at the time was that the translation of his thought into Spinozist terms was not the naïve wordplay of an adolescent but the expression of a religious experience of the Absolute that transcended the I, the affirmation of a mysticism of the entire universe, of the doctrine of *Hen kai pan*. And so he expressed it in an explicit way:

> In order to find truth, you must have a principle of all truth. Place it as high as you wish, it still must lie in the land of truth, in the land that you are as yet seeking. But if you produce all truth by yourself, if the last point on which reality hinges is the I, and if this is only through itself and for itself, then all truth and all reality are immediately present to you. By positing yourself as the I, you simultaneously circumscribe the whole sphere of truth, of the truth which is truth only through you and for you. Everything is only in the I and for the I. In the I philosophy has found its one-and-all (*Ev kai pav*), for which it has contended as the highest price of victory until now.[17]

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[15] *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, SW V, p. 160; *Cf*. Schelling, *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, SW V, p. 550 n.

[16] *Vom Ich*, SW I, p. 90 n., pp. 103, 116, 119,

[17] Schelling, *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, or On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge* in IDEM, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge. Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. F. Marti, (London: Associated Universtiy Press, 1980) pp. 93-94. "Um Wahrheit zu finden, musst du ein Princip aller Wahrheit haben: setze es so hoch als du willst, es muss doch im Lande der Wahrheit liegen, im Lande, das du erst suchen willst. Wenn du aber alle Wahrheit durch dich selbst hervorbringt, wenn der letzte Punkt, an dem alle Realität

In short, Schelling was not talking about the pure subject, he was only using it to present the absolute, while in it he already sensed that undifferentiated unity of subject and object which presides over his later Philosophy of Identity and that, as the form of all forms, is the same as chaos.[18] By using the word "I" he was trying to give expression in the best possible way to something ineffable that, being absolute, can never be objectified, is beyond all thinking and all representation, is not a phenomenon or a thing-in-itself and, of course, cannot be demonstrated.[19] Thus, Schelling had not placed the absolute I as the principle of philosophy, but "the Absolute itself in the form of the I."[20] He had used the I as a metaphor with which he intended to show the most unrestricted, full, total freedom, an overwhelming freedom, without limits or rules.[21] This explains the phrase from *Vom Ich* that we have already seen appear in the correspondence with Hegel: "the beginning and the end of all philosophy is: *Freedom*!"[22] It is also clear why this last word is underlined by writing it with an exclamation mark: this is how the enthusiasm – we could say "romantic" – is manifested.

2. Intellectual Intuition

The result of this fervent and almost mystical apprehension of freedom is evident in Schelling's next work, the *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus* (1795), in at least three aspects that are directly related to the vindication of Spinozism: 1) intellectual intuition is presented as a direct access to the suprasensible world, which annihilates individuality and sinks into nihilism; 2) dogmatism is revalued, putting it on a theoretical equal footing with idealism; 3) alongside the moral perspective an aesthetic vision takes place, which ends up leading Schelling to a positive evaluation of nature.

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hängt, das Ich ist, und dieses nur *durch* sich selbst und *für* sich selbst ist, so ist alle Wahrheit und alle Realität dir unmittelbar gegenwärtig. Du beschreibst, indem du dich selbst als Ich seztst, zugleich die ganze Sphäre der Wahrheit, der Wahrheit, die nur *durch* dich und *für* dich Wahrheit ist. Alles ist nur im Ich und für das Ich. Im Ich hat die Philosophie ihr *Εν και Παν* gefunden, nach dem sie bisher Fals dem höchsten Preise des Siegs gerungen hat." SW I, p. 117.

18 *Philosophie der Kunst*, SW III, p. 485.

19 Prologue to *Vom Ich* (note 1), SW I, p. 83. See also p. 90 n., 101 and 116 n.

20 This is how Xavier Tilliette characterizes him in his article "Schelling's beginnings: The absolute and intellectual intuition" in Falgueras, I. (ed.), *Los comienzos filosóficos de Schelling* (Málaga: Servicio de Publicaciones de UM, 1988), pp. 145-158.

21 On the conception of subjectivity as absolute freedom, see V. López Domínguez, *Schelling (1775-1854)*, p. 17-21; and "Del Yo a la naturaleza por el camino del arte," in Market, O. and Rivera de Rosales, J. (eds.), *Los orígenes del idealismo alemán* (Madrid: UCM, 1996).

22 *Vom Ich*, SW I, p. 101.

In fact, Schelling recuperates in the *Briefe* the notion of intellectual intuition, which Fichte had briefly mentioned as irrefutable proof of the presence of the Absolute in us, defining it only in opposition to sensible intuition. Unlike the dogmatic intuition rejected by Kant at the end of his "Transcendental Aesthetics", Fichte's intuition was not directed to a thing but to an action, it was the immediate awareness of the categorical imperative that accompanies the performance of the moral act and, therefore, a faculty – so to speak – democratic, present in all individuals, which even supports all our acts as a feeling of life and inner strength.[23] Schelling's intuition, on the other hand, is presented with the characteristics of religious ecstasy and picks up the mystical moment in Spinoza of *amor dei intellectualis*. It is a selective and elitist path, the development of which requires a degree of spirituality reserved for a few, since it can only occur in those individuals who have been able to exercise their freedom by escaping the fascination produced by the world of objects, that is, those who have overcome crass materialism. Moreover, intuition brings us into immediate contact with being, which is the condition of all phenomenal revelation, but cannot be considered itself as a phenomenon. It is the suprasensible which, as such, is outside space and time. As Schelling says, it is the same pure and absolute eternity in us, an experience by which the I withdraws from the world by concentrating on itself and entering into a state of passivity until it achieves full fusion with the absolute, a skill that is at odds with Fichte's activism and does not consist in the capture of an immanent absolute in the finite but of an omnipotent power that in its affirmation annihilates and devastates everything that comes before it.[24]

Such an intuition is carried to its ultimate consequences, for in it one discovers the total and complete freedom which, when affirmed, places itself above all norms and laws.[25] Reason then turns into unreason and, as a result, all opposites end up identifying themselves. In conclusion, it does not simply point to the unity of subject and object, but opens the way to irrationalism and, even more, to radical nihilism, since the absolute activity shot into infinity, without resistance to force it to materialize, is transformed into complete stillness, being is converted into nothingness and the transition from the finite to the infinite becomes immolation. Through intellectual

[23] Later, in the *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* in 1797, Fichte affirms that "diese intellectuelle Anschauung in jedem Momente seines Bewusstseyn vorkomme. Ich kann keinen Schritt thun, weder noch Fuss bewegen, ohne die intellectuelle Anschauung meines Selbstbewusstseyns in diesen Handlungen." GA I/4, p. 217.

[24] *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus*, Letter 8, SW I, p. 242 n.

[25] SW I, p. 248.

intuition, the individual surrenders himself completely to being, renouncing his individuality, dies to his particular I in order to enter, in short, into nothingness. Schelling says in Letter 8:

> The supreme moment of being is, for us, transition to not-being, the moment of annihilation. Here, in this moment of absolute being, supreme passivity is at one with the most unlimited activity. Unlimited activity is absolute repose — perfect Epicureanism.
>
> We awaken from intellectual intuition as from a state of death. We awaken through reflection, that is, through a forced return to ourselves.[26]

As we can see, the experience of intellectual intuition is similar to that of Nirvana, since it is defined as annulment of the Self and maximum happiness. However, it is important to clarify that this practice also appears in Hölderlin, who – according to Tilliette – was the one who inspired Schelling, and specifically in *Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland*,[27] but also in *Der Tod des Empedokles*, since the idea of the philosopher throwing himself into the bowels of nature is a parable of it. Nor should we forget that such an interpretation of intuition was already used by Novalis when he studied Fichte's system. He maintained that, since philosophy begins with the death of the finite I, the intellectual intuition represents a form of suicide.[28] Finally, let us remember that it also appears in the English romantic John Keats, who stated that the poet is the least poetic of the creatures of God, since he does not have any attribute that defines him; on the contrary, he acts like a chameleon that loses its identity to mimic what he wants to sing.[29] And these affinities with different poets have an explanation. Intellectual intuition no longer responds

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[26] Schelling, *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* in Idem, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, p. 185. "Der höchste Moment des Seyn ist für uns Uebergang zum Nichtseyn, Moment der Vernichtung. Hier, im Momente des absoluten Seyns, vereignit sich die höchste Passivität mit der unbeschränktesten Aktivität. Unbeschränkte Thätigkeit ist absolute Ruhe, vollenter Epikuräismus. / Wir erwachen aus der intellektualen Anschauung wie aus dem Zustande der Todes. Wir erwachen durch Reflexion, d. h. durch abgenöthigte Rückkehr zu uns selbst." SW I, pp. 248 n.

[27] Note the similarity between the content of this text and Hölderlin's short essay entitled *Urteil und Sein*. X. Tilliette has rightly noted that the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, especially in its second part, bear the imprint of Hölderlin's influence. *Cf*. X. Tilliette, *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir* (Paris: Vrin, 1992), vol. I, p. 91 n.

[28] *Cf*. *Fragmentblatt* 54 in Novalis, *Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*. Bd. II (ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl). Munich: Carl Hanser, 1978, p. 223.

[29] Letter from John Keats to Benjamin Bailey of November 22 1817 and letter to Richard Woodhouse of October 27 1818, in *The Letters of John Keats (1814-1821)*, ed. H. E. Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958) I, p.186 and p. 38.

to an ethic of duty, which confronts the world of passions as if it were an antagonist to be eradicated, but appeals to empathy, seeking to merge with its object in order to express it better. In fact, a few years later, in the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, Schelling will show that aesthetic intuition is intellectual intuition concretized and made an object through a work of art.[30]

3. Dogmatism as True Philosophy

The second consequence of Schelling's fervent apprehension of freedom through intellectual intuition will be the vindication of dogmatism after its refutation by Kant. Clearly, the philosophical movement is represented by Spinoza's system, which is put on an equal level with idealist philosophy. In his *Briefe*, Schelling argues that the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* serves to ground both dogmatism and criticism. When they are exposed in a systematic way, they are presented respectively as realism and idealism, two apparently opposing ways of thinking; as far as one explains the world from the thing-in-itself or the substance, and the other does so from a transcendental subject. But the procedure of both is the same. Their first moment consists of looking for the foundation of experience outside of it through an intuition and, from there, the whole of reality is derived. At the starting point the two systems agree, because, although it is true that one opts for the subject and the other for the object, they admit them as absolute, where there is no longer any difference.[31] Thus, from the theoretical point of view, dogmatism and criticism have the same validity, because neither can explain how the world arises from the absolute principle, since "there is no transition from the infinite to the finite."[32] The real difference is at the practical level in the contrast of attitudes when establishing the passage from the finite to the infinite. The dogmatist accepts self-annihilation for the sake of the infinite, annuls his sensible individuality by thinking of it only as an accident of a superior substance which, in the end, would be nothing more than his own alienated I. As a result of his decision, he is unable to transform the world, sunk in quietism, paralyzed by the ethics of acceptance of the established order and renunciation. The idealist, on the other hand, aware of the fact that freedom is in himself, can come to exercise it by changing his environment, but knowing that on each occasion his actions only partially liberate him, since there is none that is definitive, so that his freedom is thrown into infinity, converted into an ideal. The absolute, therefore, would

[30] *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, Chapter VI, SW II, pp. 612-634.
[31] *Philosophische Briefe*, SW I, p. 217 n.
[32] SW I, p. 237.

be placed in the future as a goal, non-existent or unattainable. In this way, the choice between the two philosophies is not simply a theoretical decision, it involves a practical problem whose resolution depends on the degree of freedom that each one has achieved within himself.[33] In conclusion, the foundation of a system always implies the anticipation of this practical decision which, placed at the beginning, becomes a proleptic affirmation.[34]

It is evident, however, that, once the choice has been made, the ethics of duty seems to be at odds with the happiness attained in intellectual intuition, because in his struggle against passions and inclinations the individual is always frustrated and sad. Hence, in the last of his letters, Schelling proposes an aesthetic vision to achieve true reconciliation between these two philosophies. To do this, he turned to classical tragedy, where the protagonist faces fate through his free actions, as in the example of the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*.[35] In this way, a struggle is waged between two equally powerful forces, that of the blind necessity of nature and that of the free human will, which reaches its climax when the tragic hero achieves victory, but at the same time discovers that he has been defeated. At that moment, ethical action is synthesized with fatality, because the protagonist under-stands that he has been responsible for his destiny, which is why Oedipus punishes himself by taking his eyes out. True liberation and happiness are achieved when one freely embraces destiny, realizing what Nietzsche would later call *amor fati* and which is expressed in the final transfiguration of the protagonist in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

4. *Naturphilosophie* and Aesthetic Vision

Such an aesthetic, poetic and amorous vision will allow Schelling to create a Philosophy of Nature, where the latter is not presented as something opposed to transforming or subduing. In fact, the philosopher's task is to undertake a relationship of respect with nature, just as if it were an I, so that everything that is said about it results by analogy with the subject.[36] Unlike Kant, who used analogy only in regulative affirmations, Schelling uses it to create knowledge and construct an "unconditioned empiricism",[37] a superior realism, built after having passed through the purifying filter of transcendental philo-

[33] SW I, p. 231 n.
[34] SW I, p. 236 n.
[35] SW I, p. 260 n. See also *Die Philosophie der Kunst*, SW III, pp. 344-362.
[36] "Der Naturphilosoph behandelt die Natur als der Transzendentalphilosoph das Ich behandelt." *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie,* SW II, p.12, n.
[37] SW II, p 27. See also *Ueber den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie und die richtige Art, ihre Probleme aufzulösen*, SW II, p. 716.

sophy, that is, after the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and the subsequent denial of the thing-in-itself made by Fichte. Thus, for him, nature is unconditioned, pure activity, affirmation, being or life that flows spontaneously. Through these characteristics he picks up Spinoza's idea of *Deus sive natura*, because Schelling's nature is brimming with divine life and forms a unity, that is, a single substance, although emptied of mechanism, since this is only the superficial aspect of things seen in space. There is a significant difference compared to Spinoza, because here the natural totality incorporates a peculiarity of consciousness within itself: time. And thanks to this temporalization, it becomes organic and teleological, constituting a new representation of the *Hen kai pan*.

Other Romantics assume a perspective like Schelling's, guided by Fichte's theory of intersubjectivity, thereby rejecting the possibility of a single, universal discourse. This is the case of Novalis, who believes that a personal dialogue is established with Nature that offers as many interpretations as individuals approach it. This implies that the natural world, more than an I, is a Thou, which awakens from the lethargy to which it had been relegated by the objectifying attitude of science through the poetic word. Two endings are offered for this encounter that is experienced by the whole of our being, at the same time physically, emotionally, and mentally. *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* tells the story of Hyacinth and Roseblossom, where the young man manages to lift the veil of the Goddess of truth, that is, of Mother Nature, and, in doing so, discovers the image of his beloved. In another version, collected in a few verses, he finds his own image.[38]

The equivalence of Nature with the absolute subject will have important consequences. In the first place, the convergence between subjective and objective processes or, in Spinozist terms, the parallelism between *ordo idearum* and *ordo rerum*, will be perfectly founded. In fact, in the *System des Transzendentalen Idealismus* of 1800 Schelling shows that all processes of the I, for example, self-consciousness, sensation or imagination, have their respective correlate not only in categories of inorganic physics, such as in magnetism, electricity and chemism, but also in organic physics and, specifically, in the categories of sensitivity, irritability and drive to form (*Bildungstrieb*).[39] In this way, the experience of knowing oneself supposes the

[38] *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*, in *Novalis Schriften*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960) I, pp. 91-95. "Einem gelang es – er hob der Schleyer der Göttin zu Saïs - / Aber was sah er? – Wunder des Wunders – Sich selbst" (*Novalis Schriften*, II, p. 584).

[39] *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, SW II, p. 444-450 and pp. 492-495. See also *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*, SW II, pp. 155-220.

capture of the world, and vice versa. In short, man is conceived as the Greeks did, as a microcosm, the universe is thought of as a *macroanthropos* – according to Novalis' expression –, that is, consciousness and world reflect each other. Moreover, such an original identity appears in magical conceptions of the universe and is the basis for any attempt at mental manipulation of Nature. Let us not forget that Novalis' idealism has rightly been called "magical idealism."

Secondly, by thinking of the universe as an activity (as this is what defines the subject), its perception cannot occur in experience, since it only offers facts, the results of an action that has been concluded and frozen in time. The empirical understanding of the world, which proceeds by induction, is not truly scientific for Schelling, because it presents – according to Spinozist vocabulary – the *natura naturata*, it shows only products, isolated from each other and externally linked through the causal mechanism. True science must be able to penetrate the very interior of facts in order to unveil their genesis, to enter into the dead mechanism to infuse it again with the energy that has made it possible. And so speculative physics must be dynamic because it must bring out the movement by which the world is generated, equating itself by its method to transcendental philosophy. To approach a phenomenon dynamically means "to explain it from the original conditions of the construction of matter in general",[40] that is, to understand it from the game of forces derived from the absolute that intervene in it and that are nothing more than expansion and inhibition. For this reason, Schelling's consideration can only be *a priori*, thanks to which it can access to *natura naturans*, that is, creative Nature, as productivity and freedom. The philosopher says in the *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*:

> we must think the natural product itself under the predicate of being. However, viewed from a higher standpoint, this being itself is nothing other than a *continually operative natural activity* that is extinguished in its product.—Originally, no *individual being* at all (as an accomplished fact) is present for us in Nature, for otherwise our project is not philosophy, but empirical investigation.—We must observe what an *object* is in its *first origin*. First of all, everything that is in Nature, and Nature considered as sum total of *existence*, is not even present for us. To philosophize about Nature means *to create* Nature. Every activity perishes in its product, because it reaches only to this product. Thus we do not know *nature as product*. We know Nature only as *active*—for it is impossible to philosophize about any subject which cannot be engaged in activity. To philosophize about nature means to heave it out of the

[40] *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Prozesses oder der Kategorien der Physik,* SW II, p. 710.

> dead mechanism to which it seems predisposed, to quicken it with freedom and to set it into its own free development—to philosophize about nature means, in other words, to tear *yourself* away from the common view which discerns in nature only what "happens"—and which, at most, views the act as a *factum*, *not the action itself* in its acting.*
>
> * In the usual view, the original productivity of nature disappears behind the product. For us the product must disappear behind the productivity.[41]

The presence of the absolute in Nature will finally be transposed to art, since – as Kant had already shown in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* – organicity and teleology converge in the two spheres. The aesthetic work will then become the sensible embodiment of the infinite in the finite, and Schelling will account for this not only in the final part of the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* but in his lectures and discourses of the period of Identity, for example, in *Die Philosophie der Kunst*. It must be recognized, however, that his ideas on specific fields of art are a consequence not so much of his reading of Spinoza but of the repeated application of the principles of his own system, where Nature is already understood as "unconscious poetry of the spirit." However, it may be interesting to show that there are appropriations of Spinoza's philosophy among the Romantics that lead directly to the analysis of works of art and precede Schelling's writings on this subject. I am referring,

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[41] Schelling, W. F. J., *Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, or, On the Concept of Speculative Physics and the Internal Organization of a System of this Science* in: Idem., *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. K. R. Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press) pp.14-15. "Das Naturprodukt selbst müssen wir uns allerdings unter dem Prädicat des Seyns denken. Aber dieses Seyn selbst ist von einem höheren Standpunkt angesehen nichts anderes als eine *continuirlich-wirksame Naturthätigkeit*, die in ihrem Produkte erloschen ist.- Ursprünglich aber ist für uns in der Natur überhaupt kein *einzelnes Seyn* (als ein zu Stande gekommenes) vorhanden, denn sonst ist unser Thun nicht Philosophie, sondern Empirie. - Wir müssen, was *Object* ist, in seinem *ersten Ursprung* erblicken. Vorerst also ist alles, was in der Natur ist, und die Natur als Inbegriff des *Seyns*, selbst für uns gar nicht vorhanden. Ueber die Natur philosophiren heisst die Natur *schaffen*. Jede Thätigkeit aber erblickt in ihrem Produkte, den sie ging nur auf dieses Produkt. Die *Natur als Produkt* kennen wir also nicht. Wir kennen die Natur nur als *thätig*, - den philosophiren lässt sich über keinen Gegenstand, der nicht in Thätigkeit zu versetzen ist. Philosophiren über die Natur heisst, sie aus dem todten Mechanismus, worin sie besangen erscheint, herausheben, sie mit Freiheit gleichsam beleben und in eigne freie Entwicklung versetzen – heisst, mit andern Worten, *sich selbst* von der gemeinen Ansichte losreissen, welche in der Natur nur, was geschiet – höchstens das Handeln als *Faktum*, *nicht das Handeln selbst* im Handeln- erblickt. [Anmerkung:] Die ursprüngliche Produktivität der Natur verschwindet in der gewöhnlichen Ansicht über dem Produkt. Für uns muss das Produkt über der Produktivität verschwinden." SW II, p. 13.

in particular, to the review of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which appeared in 1797 in *Die Horen*, the monthly journal edited by Schiller.[42]

5. The Review

The review is signed by August Wilhelm Schlegel, but through testimonies, drafts and the correspondence of several friends, we know that it was written by his then wife, Caroline Michaelis, who some years later married Schelling.[43] Its edition was due to the recent publication of the first volume of the poetic translation of Shakespeare's dramatic works into German, a long-term task, which both carried out side by side, at least while they were married until 1803.[44] Today, their translation is considered canonical, a true work of art, which has not been surpassed and had a notable influence on the development of German theatre. Despite that, Caroline was not recognized as a co-translator, as she unfortunately suffered from *ghostwriting* by Wilhelm. This was a common phenomenon at the time and, in a sense, Romanticism fostered it by spreading that, in the act of aesthetic creation, the work transcends the individuality of the artist and is the expression of a divine gift that is granted together with the obligation to consummate it at any price. From the philosophical point of view, the usurpation of authorship was

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[42] "Ueber Shakespeare's Romeo und Julia," *Die Horen*, 10 vol. 6 (1797), pp. 18-48. It was reprinted first in August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Charakteristiken und Kritiken* (Königsberg, 1801), I, pp. 282–317; then in *Kritische Schriften* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1956) I, p. 387-416; and finally in *Sämmtliche Werke* (Leipzig: Weidmann'sche Buchhandlung, 1846) VII, pp. 71–99. The latter, being slightly edited, still incorporates entire passages verbatim from Caroline's letters Nr. 186 and 187. Cf. *Caroline, Briefe aus der Romantik*, ed. G. Waits and E. Schmidt (Leipzig: Insel, 1913).

[43] In the preface to volume II of his *Kritische Schriften* (Berlin, 1828), A. W. Schlegel confesses that those texts marked by an asterisk in the table of contents are not entirely of his own, coming instead in part from the hand of "an intelligent woman who possessed all the talents to shine as an author but whose ambition was not pointed in that direction" (p. 18). In addition, there are two letters from Caroline to A. W. Schlegel dated 1797 where she makes an analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* that Wilhelm used for the review (*Caroline, Briefe aus der Romantik*, Nr. 186, p. 426 and Nr. 187, p. 428). Pages of the first letter are missing at the beginning and end, but there are descriptions of the character of the monk or of Romeo and Juliet as recorded in the review of *Die Horen*. In the second, the end of which has also been lost, there are entire passages that appear in the text of Wilhelm. Regarding ghostwriting in the couple, see, for example, Wulf, Andrea, *Magníficos rebeldes. Los primeros románticos y la invención del Yo* (Madrid: Taurus, 2022), p. 119 n., 112 n. and 152 n.

[44] Apart from Caroline's intervention, in the Schlegel-Tieck edition of Shakespeare's plays in German only 17 were translated by A. W. Schlegel from 1797 to 1810. The rest were added between 1825 and 1833 by Graf Wolf Baudissin and Dorothea Tieck, Ludwig's sister. The poet intervened only as reviser and annotator. Certain editions of *Romeo and Juliet* list Caroline as the primary translator, e.g., the edition of H. H. Furness in 1899.

justified by the idea that culture is always a collective activity since reason develops in reciprocity between subjects.

The importance of this review lies not only in the fact that it made the Shakespearean drama *Romeo and Juliet* known to the German public, but also in that it completely changed the interpretation that had been given to it until then and turned the work into a literary model to follow, on which the romantic theory of the discursive arts would be based. The study was highly rated in England. And more than twenty years after its publication, Julius Charles Hare[45] recalled that it had marked a milestone in the history of literature in that country by drawing attention to the dramatic successes and virtues of a text that, despite its popularity, had been misinterpreted on many occasions. On the other hand, this brief text vindicates a way of writing critical essays on literature, which was little experienced at the time, a new aesthetic sensibility that culminates into a different, non-normative artistic criticism. It could be said that it is a hermeneutical-deconstructive discourse, where what disappears is the notion of critical metalanguage, that is, of a transparent language capable of understanding literature and art in general better than they could understand themselves. It consists of developing the ambiguous and self-reflexive characteristics present in the message of the work, simply by listening to it, avoiding moral, philosophical or psychological criticism, which reduces what is communicated to opposite concepts. By reducing the difference between literature and literary criticism, this discourse points to an equivalence with philosophy, which implies admitting the truth value of the work of art with the consequent discrediting of scientific rhetoric and the increase of the creative merit of criticism. As Schelling would say a few years later at the end of the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, the philosopher, like the poet, opens the sanctuary where the divine burns in a single flame, which, separated in Nature and in History, seeks itself through a long odyssey of the spirit.[46] This convergence between the poet and the philosopher bears the mark of Spinozism because the order of things, that is, the work of art that criticism turns into an object, coincides with the order of ideas.

The review proceeds from a meticulous critique, taking into account the previous developments of the story that Shakespeare turned into a theatrical piece and the conclusion is that the deviations from the traditional story are few. The careful consideration of all this background is decisive

[45] Julius Charles Hare, "A. W. Schlegel on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet; with Remarks upon the Character of German Criticism", *Ollier's Literary Miscellany in Prose and Verse by several hands. To be continued occasionally*, I (1820), pp. 1-39.

[46] *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, SW II, p. 628.

because it is the basis of the point of view that is going to be adopted in the review. If Shakespeare follows the previous stories and does not invent contents that alter the fable, that means that the important thing about his dramas is in the form they assume. His great merit consists, therefore, in his ability to "turn the letter into spirit." And this is possible because of the holistic belief in the unity of Nature, which presides over the Schlegels' interpretation of this drama. The first Romantics used such an idea, which had already taken hold in one of their favourite genres, that of the *Bildungsroman*. Thus, they understood the plot exposed in a literary text as a process arising from a living totality that contains within itself its future developments, a kind of germ that generates its own parts, transformed into necessary moments of growth, and its characters, turned into essential organs of the whole. In a work created from an organic conception there is nothing accidental, everything is related to each other and has a meaning. This need likens aesthetic production to divine creation and gives it a brilliant character. For this reason, the reviewers state:

> The relation of his art to nature does not require that strict separation between the accidental and the necessary, which constitutes a distinctive characteristic of the tragic poetry of the Greeks. […]
>
> Yea one may call this poem a harmonious miracle, whose component parts that heavenly power alone could so melt together. It is at the same time enchantingly sweet and sorrowful, pure and glowing, gentle and impetuous, full of elegiac softness and tragically overpowering.[47]

In his essay "Shakespearean Characters Study to 1800", John Bligh refers to the theory of organicism and argues that A. W. Schlegel realized early on its relevance to Shakespearean criticism. For this reason, he applied the new method in his review on *Romeo and Juliet*, considering the work as an organic whole and trying to show how each scene and each character fits within the organism or harmonizes with its general tone. This relativized the lack of

[47] "A. W. Schlegel on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet; with Remarks upon the Character of German Criticism." [trans. J. C. Hare] *Ollier's Literary Miscellany in Prose and Verse by several hands. To be continued occasionally*, no. I (London 1820), p. 31 and 39. "Das Verhältniß seiner Kunst zur Natur erfodert nicht jene strenge Sonderung des Zufälligen vom Nothwendigen, welche ein unterscheidendes Merkmahl der tragischen Poesie der Griechen ausmacht. […] Ja man darf dieß Gedicht ein harmonisches Wunder nennen, dessen Bestandtheile nur jene himmlische Gewalt so verschmelzen konnte. Es ist zugleich bezaubernd süß und schmerzlich, rein und glühend, zart und ungestüm, voll elegischer Weichheit und tragisch erschütternd." "Ueber Shakespeare's Romeo und Julia", p. 47.

coherence on some points and generated a new evaluation of the work in England.[48]

This methodology is also used to analyse the central theme of the drama, namely, love. We know that the revival of Shakespeare made by the reviewers does not come from Herder[49] but from Lessing, who declared that "Romeo and Juliet was the only tragedy he knew, and which love itself had helped to compose." For them, the interest of reading it consisted in the treatment of the theme of love, not only between the protagonists but in the very construction of the work, due to the capacity of that affection to avoid dispersion and reconcile opposites. As stated in the essay, "love is not here deduced from moral relations, nor is it represented as at war with duties, but in its original purity as the first dominion of Nature." As a force of Nature, love is not only beyond social conventions and the confrontation between rival families, but also an infinite impulse that overcomes any obstacle, the "poetry of life" that seeks union in difference, therefore, "in its essence there are contradictions that cannot be understood." The review says:

> Contradictions that cannot be understood lie in the essence of love; even with the most beautiful return it can never dissolve itself into perfect harmony; and is therefore, in itself, already naturally inclined to express itself antithetically. Indeed, such comes even more naturally to it as soon as external circumstances compel it. Playing upon words is a contrasting or comparison between the meaning of words and their sound; and just as in love in general the intellectual and sensual strive to unite in the most intimate fashion, just as love perceives and luxuriates in even the most delicate allusions of the one to the other, so also can it play presciently with similarities of tones. One usually rejects all playing upon words as something childish and unnatural. If the first charge is founded, the second cannot be so; and experience does in fact show that children enjoy occupying themselves with the sensuous constituent parts of words, and referring them to other meanings. Love, however, in the condition of its most unaffected devotion, transports the soul in more developed organs and amid the florescent fullness of life in a certain sense back into the state of childhood.[50]

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[48] "It is no less regrettable than amazing that this epoch-making essay, which inaugurated a new era in Shakespearian criticism, should have passed into oblivion." John Bligh, "Shakespearian character study to 1800", *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 37 (2002), p. 152.

[49] Herder had written an essay on Shakespeare in 1774, considering him a revolutionary genius and pointing to his dramatic pieces as a model to follow.

[50] "A. W. Schlegel on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet; with Remarks upon the Character of German Criticism", pp. 36-37. "Unbegriffene Widersprüche liegen im Wesen der Liebe; sie kann sich auch bey der schönsten Erwiederung nicht in vollkommne Harmonie auflösen, und ist daher schon an sich geneigt, sich antithetisch zu äussern. Noch

As we see, the love shown in *Romeo and Juliet* corresponds to the infantile state of innocence where sensuality and intellect are not presented as opposite faculties but forming a spiritual bond, so its impetus can elevate the soul to higher levels, as it happens in the Platonic vision, ascending from beautiful bodies to beautiful souls until reaching communion with ideas. Precisely at this point, the authors compare the meaning that love acquires in Shakespeare's work and in Petrarch's poetry. It is impossible not to think that their unrestricted admiration for the Englishman's drama is based on the conviction that it is a representation of love as a search for lost unity, of that *Hen kai pan* incarnated in Nature in the manner of Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*. In fact, the review notes that the two moments of maximum intimacy between the lovers take place under the shelter of Nature and in communion with it, pointing to the scenes of the meeting in the garden of Juliet's house and the end of their wedding night, when the lovers listen to the songs of the nightingale and the lark, acting as prophetic signs that determine the fate of their love relationship.

Moreover, all these ideas would be taken up by Schelling, who saw in the English poet the summit and paradigm of drama in Modernity with its return to the intimate, the subjective and the individual. In *Die Philosophie der Kunst,* he argues that, in this way, Shakespeare managed to internalize destiny, which dominated ancient tragedy as a power of Nature, and turned it into a multitude of unbridled passions, whose struggle leads to gruesome outcomes.[51] Let us conclude that Schelling's new interpretation is based on Caroline Michaelis and Schlegel's commentary on *Romeo and Juliet*, because the protagonists represent the natural forces ignited in the depths of the soul as emotions snatched away in search of unity through a fight to the death.

natürlicher ist ihr dieß, sobald äusserliche Verhältnisse sie drängen. Ein Wortspiel ist ein Gegensatz oder eine Vergleichung zwischen dem Sinne der Wörter und ihrem Klange; und wie in der Liebe überhaupt das Geistige und das Sinnliche sich innigst zu verschmelzen strebt, sie zartesten Anspielungen des einen auf das andre wahrnimmt und sich daran weidet, so kann sie auch mit Ähnlichkeiten der Töne ahnungsvoll spielen. Man verwirft gewöhnlich alle Wortspiele als etwas kindisches und unnatürliches. Ist das erste gegründet, so kann das zweyte nicht seyn; und die Erfahrung zeigt allerdings, daß Kinder sich gern mit den sinnlichen Bestandtheilen der Wörter zu schaffen machen, und sie auf andre Bedeutungen wenden. Die Liebe aber in ihrer unbefangensten Hingegebenheit versetzt die Seele bey entwickelten Organen und blühender Lebensfülle auf gewisse Weise in den Stand der Kindheit zurück." "Ueber Shakespeare's Romeo und Julia", p. 44.

[51] "Von der modernen dramatischen Poesie" in *Die Philosophie der Kunst*, SW III, p 369 n.

6. Conclusion

The interpretation of Fichte's thought in the light of Spinoza's philosophy allowed Schelling to construct his own system of freedom taking the *Ethica* as a model, by identifying the substance with the I and deriving from it all reality. Throughout different works he expanded on the consequences of this initial discovery and, always following Spinoza, he made intellectual intuition the starting point for an aesthetic vision of the world that founded a superior realism, capable of facing Nature as an I. The Romantics, such as Hölderlin, Novalis or the Schlegels shared these ideas. They influenced each other and each deepened these ideas in their own way, so that it is difficult to determine who was the first to embrace them. We know, however, that Caroline Schlegel-Schelling was the first to apply this vision to the analysis of a literary text in the review on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, giving concrete life to the organic conception of the work of art, founded on the unity of man and nature from the perspective of the *Hen kai Pan*. Shortly afterwards, her suggestions were taken up by Schelling in his *Philosophie der Kunst*.

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Novalis Between Spinoza and Fichte

On the Possibility of a Realist-Idealist Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to elucidate the philosophical relationship of Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) (1772-1801) with two authors who, through different ideas and concepts, influenced his emergent philosophical studies and the formation of his own thought: Benedictus Spinoza (1632-1677) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). Novalis turned to philosophy after his personal encounter with Fichte and reading of several of his works. The result of this engagement is the set of notes later published posthumously under the title *Fichte-Studien* (1795 / 96). A few years later, Hardenberg more particularly dedicated himself to analyzing Spinoza's thought, which led to a modification of how he understood idealist philosophy. Indeed, in the fragments that make up the draft of the Encyclopaedia Project that Novalis wrote in 1798 / 99 – *Das allgemeine Brouillon* – he alludes to the possibility of syncretizing Fichtean idealism and Spinozist realism-dogmatism into a new philosophy – his own. In this context, the article aims to show why and how Novalis conceived this philosophical plan while pointing out the inconsistencies – and even contradictions – of such an intellectual undertaking.

Keywords: Novalis, Spinoza, Fichte, realism, idealism, I, God

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der vorliegende Beitrag zielt darauf ab, das philosophische Verhältnis von Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) (1772–1801) zu zwei Autoren zu erhellen, die seine frühen philosophischen Studien und die Ausgestaltung seines eigenen Denkens durch unterschiedliche Ideen und Begriffe beeinflussten: Benedictus Spinoza (1632-1677) und Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). Novalis wandte sich der Philosophie zu, nachdem er Fichte persönlich kennengelernt und einige seiner Werke gelesen hatte. Das Ergebnis dieser Auseinander-setzung ist die posthum veröffentlichte Notizsammlung *Fichte-Studien* (1795 / 96). Wenige Jahre später widmete sich Hardenberg intensiver der Analyse des spinozistischen Denkens, was eine Modifikation seines Verständnisses des idealistischen Denkens nach sich zog. Tatsächlich spricht Hardenberg in den Bruchstücken philosophischer Enzyklopädistik, den er 1798 / 99 unter dem Titel *Das allgemeine Brouillon* verfasste, die Möglichkeit an, den Fichte'schen Idealismus und den spinozistischen Realismus-Dogmatismus in einer neuen – seiner eigenen – Philosophie zu synkretisieren. In diesem Kontext verfolgt der Artikel das Ziel, aufzuzeigen, warum und wie Novalis diesen philosophischen Plan konzipierte, und zugleich die Inkonsistenzen – und sogar Widersprüche – eines solchen intellektuellen Unterfangens herauszuarbeiten.

Stichwörter: Novalis, Spinoza, Fichte, Realismus, Idealismus, Ich, Gott

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Per realitatem et perfectionem idem intelligo

Spinoza
(EII Def. VI)

Aus dem Gesagten ergiebt sich zugleich die
absolute Unverträglichkeit beider Systeme
[Idealismus und Dogamtismus–Realismus],
indem das, was aus dem einen folgt,
die Folgerungen aus dem zweiten aufhebt;
sonach die nothwendige Inconsequenz
ihrer Vermischung zu Einem.

Fichte
(GA I/4, 193)

Der Idealismus sollte nicht dem Realism
entgegengesetzt werden.

Novalis
(NW 2, 601, Nr. 565)

1. Introduction

The influence of Baruch de Spinoza on the philosophical school of German Idealism —led by Fichte, Hölderlin,[1] Hegel, and Schelling—is a subject that has generated extensive historiographical interest. By contrast, Spinoza's role in shaping the thought of the figures of Early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*)—the brothers August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), and Ludwig Tieck—has received comparatively less attention. Specifically, with regard to the philosophical connection between Spinoza and Novalis, which constitutes the central concern of this paper, scholarly treatments have often been reduced to a passing reference to a fragment in which the German poet and philosopher writes: "Spinoza is a person drunk on God" (NW 2, 812/304, Fg. 346/562).[2]

[1] It is invariably problematic to situate Hölderlin within the confines of either Idealism or Romanticism. He appears here, yet not as one to be assimilated to Hegel and Schelling in their vocation as architects of idealist systems.

[2] Quotations and references to the German texts under consideration are taken from Fichte's and Novalis' critical editions; separated by a slash (/), the page number of an English edition is also provided. In the case of Novalis' works, the same proceeding is established regarding the number of his fragments in those cases when fragments' numbers do not coincide. In the case of citations from Spinoza's works, reference is made directly to their most widely circulated English edition. Full bibliographical details of the

It is true that Novalis seldom cites or explicitly names Spinoza throughout his writings.[3] Nevertheless, by recovering those references that do exist, the present study aims to provide an exegesis that elucidates the role Spinozist philosophy played—both positively and negatively—in Novalis's thought. Positively, insofar as Novalis adopted certain ideas and concepts from Spinoza to articulate his own philosophy; negatively, inasmuch as his engagement with Spinoza contributed to his distancing from Fichte's philosophy of the I, as formulated in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (*GWL*) (1794–1795). This work initially sparked Novalis's philosophical interest[4] and, as I will prove here, it was appropriated by Novalis, who utilized it to construct his initial philosophical ideas—a process not entirely free of contradictions.[5] Building on this foundation, I will examine whether and in what sense it is possible to argue that Novalis sought to synthesize the thought of Spinoza and Fichte within his own system. The article thus pursues both a formal or systematic-methodological dimension, and a material one, concerning the conceptual content and significance of the philosophical ideas under discussion.

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editions and their translations are provided in the references section at the end of the paper.

[3] According to the research I conducted for this article, there are nineteen explicit references, distributed across fragments and letters. Two allusions in *Fichte Studien* (*FS*) (1795–1796) (Nos. 151 and 159); one allusion in *Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen* (1798) (*VF*) (No. 23); nine allusions in *Das allgemeine Brouillon (Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik)* (*AB*) (1798–1799) (Nos. 70, 459, 633, 914, 958, 1067, 1073, 1096, 1098); four allusions in *Fragmente und Studien* (1799–1800) (*FSt*) (Nos. 336, 346, 393, 395); and three allusions in letters from the years 1791, 1796, and 1799—two to F. Schlegel and one to Caroline Schlegel (HKA IV: 95; IV: 188; IV: 276).

[4] Novalis met Fichte in person at a gathering in Niethammer's house in May 1795—in which Hölderlin also took part—and, following the event, devoted himself to the study of Fichte's work. According to the official records, it may be said that Novalis read the following writings by Fichte: *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie, als Einladungsschrift zu seinen Vorlesungen über diese Wissenschaft* (*BWL*) (1794); *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (*BG*) (1794); *Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre, in Rücksicht auf das theoretische Vermögen* (*EWL*) (1795); *Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache* (*US*) (1795); and the first part of *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach den Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (*GNR*) (1796). After the encounter, Novalis proceeded to take notes on his readings, which were posthumously published under the title *Fichte Studien*. It should be emphasized that these consist of 667 fragments encompassing a variety of concepts and themes, though they are particularly grounded in the analysis of the *GWL*.

[5] Well known are the letters from F. Schlegel to Novalis dated May 5, 1797, and June 8 of the same year, in which he writes: "How nice it would be if we could sit together alone for a few days and philosophize, or as we always called it—'fichtisiren'?" (HKA IV: 482) (My own translation). And: "Oh, if only we could once again 'fichtisiren' as heartily [...] as we did a few times this winter." (HKA IV: 487) (My own translation).

In addition, Spinoza's influence on Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin also resonated in their critiques of the *GWL* from the perspective of their own idealist systems. These critiques must also be taken into account in order to construct the appropriate philosophical-historical constellation for a proper understanding of Novalis's thought. Although this is not the central focus of the paper, it is worth noting that Hegel, in his *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie* (1801) and *Glauben und Wissen* (*GuW*) (1802), criticizes Fichte's I as the principle of philosophy on the grounds that it cannot serve as a truly absolute principle, since it contains division within itself. In continuity with this argument, Hegel rejects the moral character of the I as both idea and an ought (cf. TWA 2, 44/111; 48/115; and TWA 2, 393–394/153–154). Similarly, already in his early writings—*Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie oder Über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (1795) and *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus* (1795)—Schelling values Spinozist philosophy (cf. SW I/1, 194–196/94–96; 309–310/173–174; and 321–322/182–183), thereby marking a philosophical distance from Fichte's idealism, even though in these works Schelling still to some extent regarded himself as Fichte's disciple. In fact, Fichte wrote two introductions to the *GWL*—the *Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (*EE*) (1797) and the *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (*ZE*) (1797–1798)—in part to clarify the differences between his own philosophical system and Schelling's interpretation of it.[6]

Schelling sought to articulate a foundational unity of subject and object, and when describing the subject's access to the absolute, he did not speak of self-knowledge or the subject's experience of itself as such, but rather of knowledge of an absolute that inhabits in the subject without being identical to it or, at any rate, that is more than the subject alone. This absolute both transcends and permeates the subject. For Schelling, the absolute is simultaneously immanent and transcendent in relation to the finite—both subjective and objective. His departure from Fichte's I-centered idealism becomes even more pronounced in the development of his philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*) (1796–1799) and his system of identity (*Identitäts-system*) (1800–1804). In these works Schelling also seeks to account for a foundation in which the conceptual pair subject–object, I and world, ceases to function as a duality and is conceived instead as unity. Here, the

[6] Beiser, *German Idealism. The struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*, 472; Lauth, *Schelling ante la doctrina de la ciencia de Fichte*, 10-12; Serrano Martin, *Absoluto y conciencia. Una introducción a Schelling*, 156 and 159-160; and Solé, "Spinoza en el origen del Idealismo alemán: Repercusiones de la «Polémica del spinozismo» en Fichte y Schelling," 40, they also highlight the confrontation between Schelling and Fichte.

movement of absolute self-knowledge unfolds through the subject, which serves merely as an instrument of a higher reason. At the same time, this transcendent reason must be conceived as a constitutive—not merely regulative—principle of both subjectivity and world. By reappropriating Spinoza's notion of *amor intellectualis Dei*, Schelling maintains that through knowledge of the unity of God, nature, and subject, the latter attains happiness. As he writes in *Bruno, oder über das göttliche und natürliche Prinzip der Dinge* (1802): "Now within our own lives, we experience this indivisible identity of God and nature as destiny, but to behold it in direct, supersensible intuition is to be initiated into the supreme bliss (*Seligkeit*), which is to be found only in the contem-plation of the most perfect" (SW I/4, 307/203). Spinoza's concepts of love and blessedness (*beatitudo*) are thus appropriated by Schelling—an appropria-tion that Novalis too will later undertake, moving further away from Fichtean idealism.

Finally, Hölderlin composed a short two-page essay, *Urtheil und Seyn* (*UuS*) (1795), in which he critically reflects on the foundation of Fichtean idealism. Here he distances himself from Fichte's conception of the finite–infinite unity, and more precisely, from his manner of referring to the absolute. To this end, Hölderlin contrasts the terms judgment (*Urtheil*) and being (*Seyn*). He highlights the impossibility of comprehending the absolute as a finished synthesis of subject and object through the act of judgment. Drawing on the etymology of *Urteil*—with *ur-* denoting origin and *-teil* denoting division—he characterizes judgment as an "original separation". Every act of judgment necessarily divides what it posits, even in the case of a judgment of identity. Hence, in his view, the foundational judgment of the Fichtean system—"I=I"—cannot establish the absolute as unity. The absolute I, as system principle, is not a unitary principle but a divided one: it is at once identical and non-identical to itself.[7]

In opposition to the concept of the I, Hölderlin invokes the concept of *Seyn*, which he regards as the proper term for the absolute, conceived as inseparable unity. This absolute is grasped through intellectual intuition. Thus, Hölderlin distances himself from Fichte not only with respect to terminology but also in his conviction that the absolute can indeed be apprehended by the subject. Correspondingly, Hölderlin counters Fichte's moral interpretation of the I's development by proposing a conception in which art and aesthetics assume a central role—as *medium* through which the

[7] Hölderlin writes: "When I say: I am I, then the subject (I) and the object (I) are not combined in such a way that no separation can take place without injuring the nature of what is to be separated; on the contrary, the I is only possible through the separation of the I from the I" (StA 4,1: 216–217/191–192).

subject unites absolutely with *Seyn*.[8] In this brief but significant fragment, Hölderlin accuses Fichte of dogmatism,[9] while simultaneously recuperating Spinozist philosophy—a claim that may appear paradoxical, given that Fichte elaborated his idealism in deliberate opposition to Spinozism as the paradigm of dogmatic thought. This issue will prove crucial when analyzing Novalis's attempt to propose a conjunction of idealism and dogmatism.

From this exegetical perspective, the paper advances a twofold hypothesis. First, contrary to a widespread interpretation of Novalis's *Fichte-Studien* (*FS*), I claim that it should not be concluded that he criticized and rejected Fichte's idealism *tout court*. On the contrary, Novalis echoed the practical-moral sense of Fichtean idealism, shaping his views—at least in the period 1795–1796—in line with the idea of the I as the foundation of philosophical thought in terms of the projection of subjective existence into the world. Second, I propose that Novalis's engagement with Spinoza—alongside his studies in the natural sciences and readings of Plotinus[10]—precipitated a shift in his philosophical outlook. If this did not amount to an outright rejection of Fichtean idealism, it at least encouraged the idea that it required reconfiguration through concepts drawn from Spinozist philosophy—such as God, substance, nature, hypostasis, love, and unity. On this basis, Novalis elaborated his own philosophical position, which he himself characterized as "realist idealism" (*realistischer Idealismus*) or plainly "Spinozism" (*Spinotzismus*).

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[8] In this regard, one can echo the explanation of Villacañas, who writes: "in front of Fichte, Hölderlin became aware that the centrality of morality overlooks the unfolding of aesthetics and that morality is incapable of reconstructing the problem of the *Hen Kai Pan* except through a victory [...] that is internally impossible." Villacañas, "Hölderlin y Fichte o el sujeto descarriado en un mundo sin amor," 359. (My own translation). In addition, the concept of *hen kai pan*—in its association with the philosophy of Spinoza—is also a term that Novalis will address (See note 38).

[9] For his part, in an enigmatic fragment where Novalis did not develop his thought with breadth and depth, he writes: "Isn't Fichte's presentation of the Doctrine of Science rather 'dogmatic'? Fichte's 'prejudices'—or his scientific 'character'" (NW 2, 481/9, Nr. 57). For Novalis's further criticisms on the presentation and style of Fichte's *WL*, cf. NW 2, 571/77, Nr. 463; and cf. NW 2, 574/80, Nr. 468.

[10] In December 1797, Novalis moved to Freiberg to study natural sciences, physics, and mathematics at the local *Bergakademie*. In 1798, he read Dietrich Tiedemann's (1748–1803) *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie* (1791–1797)—a widely circulated manual at the time—and, in particular, focused on the presentation of Plotinus's philosophy within it. In a letter dated December 10, 1798, to the younger Schlegel, he writes: "I don't know if I've already told you about my dear 'Plotinus'. I got to know this philosopher, who was born for me, through Tiedemann [...]" (HKA IV: 269). (My own translation). For his part, Mähl conducted a specific study on Tiedemann's mediation of Hardenberg's reading of Plotinus. In this context, it is worth referencing the lines he dedicates to specifying how the concept of ecstasy (*Ekstase*) and the Plotinian emanationist doctrine reached Novalis (cf. Mähl, "Novalis und Plotin," 394-400).

This article does not aim to provide a definitive or exhaustive answer regarding Novalis's intellectual relationship to Spinoza and Fichte, nor to determine once and for all the exact character of his philosophical thought. Indeed, the fragmentary form of his writing, the dialogical confrontation of divergent ideas within his own notes, and his early death at the age of 28 preclude any unified picture of a fully consistent, systematic philosophy. The aim here, rather, is to demonstrate how Novalis's philosophy took shape in dialogue with Spinoza and Fichte, and to highlight its particularities within the intellectual context of German Idealism and Romanticism.

The paper is structured into two sections. First **(2)**, an analysis of Novalis's philosophical relationship to Spinoza and Fichte in the years 1795–1796, drawing on the *FS*. At this point, we seek to highlight a certain continuity between Novalis's conception of philosophy and Fichte's—which must account for the meaning of the subject's theoretical representation of the world[11] and of itself, as well as its practical existence. During this period, Fichte was Novalis's principal philosophical reference, while Spinoza did not yet figure prominently in his thought. Second **(3)**, an analysis of Novalis's philosophical relationship to Spinoza and Fichte from 1796 onward, when his orientation shifts toward an attempt to unite idealism and realism, privileging an aesthetic-religious-mystical approach to subjective existence over the moral framework of Fichtean practical idealism. From this point onward, Spinoza's presence in Novalis's reflections becomes increasingly explicit and substantial. Finally, the **Conclusion** will synthesize the arguments advanced in order to assess both the scope and the challenges of Novalis's philosophical thought in the context of early German Idealism and Romanticism, particularly in light of his engagement with Fichte and Spinoza.

2. Novalis between Fichte and Spinoza in 1795-1796

The philosophical activity of Novalis during the period 1795-1796 includes the writing of the *FS*, in which he explicitly alludes to Spinoza only twice. Before referring to such passages, it is worth contextualizing his thought at this moment, in order to point out a certain contrast with respect to some of his ideas displayed in 1798 in *AB*, once he had already undertaken the study

[11] Fichte writes in the first line of *GWL*: "We have to seek out the absolutely first, purely and simply unconditioned foundational principle of all human knowledge" (GA I/2, 255/200).

of Spinoza.[12] Indeed, one of the objectives of this article is to show that this study entailed a change in his perspective regarding Fichtean idealism and regarding his conception of philosophy, which he had understood as a practical-moral idealism[13] in his early speculations during 1795-1796.

Now, in order to make this evident, it is appropriate to discuss the idea presented by part of the bibliography that analyzes the intellectual relationship of Novalis with Fichte, according to which already in *FS* his aim was to criticize him and not to continue his philosophical line. The rejection would focus on the way in which Fichte presents the first principle of philosophy through the judgment of identity: "I=I". In particular, Frank points out that this critique is framed in the context of the thought of Reinhold's students who rejected both their teacher's *Grundsatzphilosophie*[14] and Fichte's *WL*—insofar as the latter also sought to account for an ultimate constitutive foundation of reality and of subjectivity.[15] Now, besides the fact that this reading carries within it the idea that Fichte conceived the I as a constitutive principle—from which, in part, the Novalisian critique would derive[16]—as Nassar points out, it is difficult to determine in the *FS* when

[12] It should be noted that, insofar as the available evidence indicates, there is no basis for claiming that Novalis read Spinoza first-hand. Nevertheless, his engagement with Spinoza's thought is evident, situated within the philosophical climate of the period. In particular, it is important to highlight that Hardenberg had read Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785).

[13] It may also be characterized as transcendental idealism, in the wake of Fichtean idealism's reappropriation of Kantian critical philosophy—as Fichte maintains in *EE* and *ZE*. In these works Fichte asserts that his thought is none other than Kantian thought properly understood (cf. GA I/4, 184/4 and 221/52). Moreover, as early as *GWL* Fichte had referred to his thought as transcendental idealism (cf. GA I/2, 267/210).

[14] Novalis attended Reinhold's lectures in Jena during the winter semester of 1790–1791.

[15] Cf. Frank, "Philosophische Grundlagen der Frühromantik", 49 and Frank, "Zur Kapitulation vor des Novalis «philosophischem Werk»", 94-95; cf. Navarro, *La nostalgia del pensar. Novalis y los orígenes del romanticismo alemán*, 172; cf. Wallwitz, "Über den Begriff des Absoluten bei Novalis," 425 and 428). For his part, Haering also maintains that Novalis distanced himself from Fichte in philosophical terms, particularly with regard to his conception of the dialectic between the concepts of I and not-I. Unlike Fichte, Novalis's thought at this point takes on the features of the dialectical mode of thinking that Hegel would later develop. That is to say, according to this commentator's reading, Novalis, like Hegel, conceives of a finite–infinite dialectic in which it attains an ultimate unity (cf. Haering, *Novalis als Philosoph*, 115)—in contrast to the never fully closed character of the reciprocal determination (*Wechselbestimmung*) between I and not-I as described by Fichte in *GWL*.

[16] According to the interpretation of Fichte presented in this article, the *WL* does not introduce the concept of the I as a constitutive principle but rather as a duty of a practical–moral and regulative order (cf. GA I/2, 263; 277–278; 281–282/207; 220; 223). In *Ueber den Unterschied des Geistes, u. des Buchstabens in der Philosophie* (1794), Fichte writes: "A science of this type can furnish no rule except the following: One should continue to abstract from everything possible, until something remains from which it is totally

Novalis is offering a description of what Fichte affirms and when he is speaking for himself. This makes it difficult to indicate when he refers negatively to him.[17]

On the other hand, as Hardenberg progresses with the writing of his fragments, his presentation of the fundamental concept of Fichtean idealism—namely, the I—gradually adopts the tone of the *GWL*. That is to say, Fichte's I and Novalis' I appear not as a constitutive foundation but as an idea of reason in a practical-moral idealist sense.[18] With regard to the I as a transcendental and fundamental instance of subjectivity, Novalis maintains that the subject feels nothing but its need (cf. NW 2, 41/34, Nr. 46), and it is not something possessed in an immediate and complete way. This need appears in other fragments of the *FS* as a duty to be realized. In Hardenberg's words: "I 'ought' always to be I" (NW 2, 49/42, Nr. 74). This I that the I ought to be is an idea—and from the point of view of the subject's action directed toward it, an ideal: "For the simple I to be related to the object is a must – [to be related] to the object, mediated by the subject – an ought. The simple I is an idea" (NW 2, 49-50/42, Nr. 74 and 75). As an idea, the I cannot be interpreted as something given prior to the projection that the

impossible to abstract. What remains is the pure I, which, precisely because one cannot abstract from it, is at the same time completely determined as regulative for the capacity for thinking" (GA II/3, 329/204).

17 Cf. Nassar, "Reality through illusion: presenting the absolute in Novalis," 43.

18 Frank even raises the question of whether Fichte's I is nothing more than an idea in the Kantian sense (cf. Frank, "Von der Grundsatz-Kritik zur freien Erfindung. Die ästhetische Wende in den *Fichte-Studien* und ihr konstellatorisches Umfeld," 91—which contradicts the conception of the I as a principle with constitutive power within the framework of the *WL*. Novalis writes: "A striving to be one [...] but precisely for this reason an endless striving, so long as the subject does not become a pure I – which will not likely happen as long as the I is an I" (NW 2, 39/32, Nr. 44). And he also asks and answers: "To what extent will the subject [...] be able to relate to itself? Basically, never" (NW 2, 76/67, Nr. 219). For his part, Navarro emphasizes the importance for Novalis of the fact that the I, as a striving directed toward the absolute, cannot fully accomplish its task. In his words: "The Ideal is never attained by the I, as the I consists in its striving toward it. I consist in wanting to be I, and thus, in wanting to reach the Ideal of reason" (Navarro, *La nostalgia del pensar. Novalis y los orígenes del romanticismo alemán*, 100). (Translation my own). Von Molnár, on the other hand, while acknowledging that Novalis appropriates the Fichtean concept of the I understood in regulative terms, stresses that he would go further than Fichte regarding the moral sense of his philosophy—precisely based on the I as a practical–moral principle—by also attributing an absolute character to the counterpart of the I—the not-I or nature—and thereby naming the principle not only as I but also as God—as Absolute encompassing both the I and the not-I—(cf. von Molnár, *Novalis' "Fichte Studies": The Foundations of his Aesthetics*). In this way, Hardenberg creates the space for aesthetics and art—poetry in particular—as well as religion to acquire a prominent role in his philosophy with respect to its moral sense (cf. von Molnár, "Die Umwertung des moralischen Freiheitsbegriffs im kunsttheoretischen Denken des Novalis," 115 and 117).

subject makes of it.[19] In this sense, Novalis writes: "/The highest principle must be absolutely nothing given, but rather must be freely made, something

[19] Now, against this conception of the I as the foundation of philosophy, one must refer to the Novalisian treatment of the notion of *Seyn*—which also appears in *FS*—and which has been reappropriated by commentators—paradigmatically by Frank—in his attempt to show a critical relation of Novalis to Fichtean idealism and his effort to overcome the *Reflexionsmodell des Bewußtsein* (cf. Frank, "Ordo inversus. Zu einer Reflexionsfigur bei Novalis, Hölderlin, Kleist und Kafka," 75). In some fragments of *FS*, Hardenberg refers to this concept as something that exists and is already there prior to the unfolding of the subjective reflexive activity in its quest for the absolute encounter with itself as idea—of I (cf. NW 2, 17/12, Nr. 14). The issue becomes even more problematic insofar as in other fragments Hardenberg affirms that this *Seyn* can be considered through the concept of God—and that the subject would be nothing more than, according to Novalis's citation of the biblical passage, a creation in the image and likeness of divinity (cf. NW 2, 46/38, Nr. 54). Another biblical passage he cites, framed within his reflection on a Principle conceived as God, is Acts 17:28. In the same fragment in which he refers to this passage, he writes: "we are, we live, we believe [*denken*] in God" (NW 2, 159/147, Nr. 462). These ideas are situated within the context of his thought concerning the renowned concept of *ordo inversus* (cf. NW 2, 31–32/25-26, Nr. 32) and the philosophical perspective according to which: "Consciousness is a being outside of being that is within being" [...]. What is outside being must not be a proper being. An improper being outside being is an image – So what is outside being must be an image of being within being. Consciousness is consequently an image of being within being" (NW 2, 10/5, Nr. 2). Thus, self-consciousness as the foundation of subjectivity would yield its place to the concept of *Seyn*-God, and subjective life would have no other foundation and no other theoretical and practical sphere of unfolding than being-in-God. Hardenberg also asks with respect to the Fichtean idealism that takes the concept of I as its foundation—and not the concept of God—: "Has not Fichte too arbitrarily packed everything into the I?" (NW 2, 12/7, Nr. 5). Finally, in fragment 292 he asks: "How is philosophy capable of presentation?", in a context of reference to the substance as the *self-active* and to the accidents as the *alien active* —making implicit, yet clearly evident, use of Spinozistic conceptuality (cf. NW 2, 116/105, Nr. 292). Thus, if one takes these ideas into account, and at the same time recalls that, when asked what I was before becoming conscious of myself (cf. GA I/2, 260/204), Fichte answers that the I was nothing—and therefore the question has no meaning (cf. GA I/2, 260/204)—and that whenever the existence of something prior to the I is posited one falls into dogmatism, then it becomes difficult to characterize Novalis's philosophy as an idealist position—particularly in the line of Fichte. In fact, Novalisian thought would have to be characterized as a Spinozist form of dogmatic thought—for whom human life can only be conceived as life in God. On the other hand, one can also point to other passages in *FS*—and even in *AB*—in which Novalis himself contradicts the consideration of the philosophical foundation in terms of a *Seyn* and reinforces the idea that it is the I that is such a foundation and that nothing precedes it. He writes: "That we are we – no philosophy can ascend higher. Why we are we – that is self-explanatory and as a question, contradictory" (NW 2, 48/40, Nr. 63). And in a sentence that denotes the moral sense of his philosophical thought, he writes: "'The beginning of the ego (*ich*)' is merely 'ideal'.—If it had to begin, then it had to begin in this manner [...]. The beginning originates later than the ego, thus the ego cannot have begun [...]. The ego should (*soll*) be constructed" (NW 2, 485/12, Nr. 76). In a radical way, he also affirms: "God is I" (NW 2, 46/38, Nr. 54). Finally, it is worth quoting an excerpt of Frank's exegesis on this issue, in which—contradicting his position as noted at the beginning of this footnote—he maintains, concerning Novalis's conception of the

composed, devised, in order to ground a universal metaphysical system that begins with and proceeds toward freedom. / All philosophizing aims at emancipation. /" (NW 2, 184/171, Nr. 568).[20] Along these lines, Novalis's idealism coincides with the moral-practical spirit of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*—in particular as a system of freedom.[21] Only an ideal and regulative principle can serve as the foundation for the subject's freedom. If the subject could access itself as something already given as absolute, it could not truly develop its freedom. Freedom is both from and for the subject, liberation. Liberation from the determinations of reality and liberation from itself insofar as it is a determined I (cf. NW 2, 199/186, Nr. 647).[22]

Now, in addition to those fragments in which Hardenberg addresses the concept of *Seyn*, there are others that also make that interpretation complex. In one of these, we read: "We must not pursue the idea, otherwise we will end in the spaces of nonsense. Every regulative idea applies to the eternal – but it contains no independent relation to an actual thing [...]. It is entirely beyond the sphere of the actual (*Wircklichen*)" (NW 2, 162/150, Nr. 466). Thus, what does it imply, for Novalis, that one should not pursue the idea? At the same time, he voices his reservations regarding philosophical activity as such, writing: "philosophy can never be 'primal history' (*Urgeschichte*) [...]. It may not pursue its ideas, but only represent them" (NW 2, 164/152, Nr. 472). In a certain sense, these reflections would seem to rule out the possibility of situating Novalis's conception of philosophy in continuity with

concept of God, that: "The thought (*Gedanken*) of God corresponds at best to an idea in the Kantian sense" (my translation) (Frank, "Die Philosophie des sogenannten «magisches Idealismus»," 42). Jones also refers to this aspect of Frank's interpretation (cf. Jones, *Revitalizing Romanticism: Novalis' Fichte Studien and the Philosophy of Organic Nonclosure*, 77).

[20] And in similar terms: "/It seems to me that a kind of principle of reciprocal determination, a pure law of association, must have to be the highest fundamental principle – a hypothetical principle./" (NW 2, 85/75, Nr. 234). At this point it is worth anticipating the relevance of morality as a determining aspect in the construction of a philosophical system of freedom. Thus, Novalis maintains, in parallel with the centrality of the concept of the I as idea, that his morality requires his system just as his system must impose itself as a necessity through his morality. He writes: "My ethics (*Moral*) must further my system. Through my ethics, I must make my system necessary to every empirical subject" (NW 2, 59/50, Nr. 108).

[21] In a letter to Baggesen of April-May 1795, Fichte writes: "My system is the first system of freedom" (my translation) (GA III/2, 298). A few years later he makes the same point explicit in a letter to Reinhold: "From beginning to end, my system is nothing more than an analysis of the concept of freedom, and this cannot be contradicted within it by introducing any other ingredient" (my translation) (GA III/4, 182).

[22] In turn, regarding the connection between the concept of Ought in moral terms and the concept of freedom as the axis of Novalis's—and also Fichte's—idealist thought, Novalis notes: "I should (*soll*) be free, says practical freedom" (NW 2, 55/48, Nr. 96).

Fichtean idealism. However, it should be noted that when he asserts that the idea should not be pursued, he does so in the context of indicating its lack of effective reality. That is, Novalis does not annul the possibility of seeking the ideal. Rather, he clarifies that such a task must not be carried out as if it were an end that could be effectively and completely attained. In fact, the subject can do no more than seek this ideal, since its existence resides in nothing other than the constant overcoming of itself. The search is already the overcoming, and the overcoming is always a search. From here arises the reflection on the practical-moral meaning of his idealism—in continuity with the Fichtean one. According to Hardenberg, the idea of the unconditioned is an idea and a demand proper to the I as practical I (cf. NW 2, 54/46, Nr. 89).

But what is the practical I for Novalis? He affirms that the practical I is what it is because it acts. That is, it is an activity. More precisely, its activity is a longing (*Sehnen*) (cf. NW 2, 54/46, Nr. 91 and 57/49, Nr. 99).[23] In this sense, it is not surprising that in another fragment he equates the practical I with the absolute I. With this, the question of what the practical I is receives an answer: "The practical I is 'the absolute I' – or becomes it after the completion of theory" (NW 2, 59/50, Nr. 111). Yet this equivalence does not imply a completed identification. If the practical I were to fully realize its activity, it would cease to be an I that acts. It would attain a state of inactivity (*Zustand der Unthätigkeit*). At this point, Novalis continues his analysis in the same terms employed by Fichte in *GWL*. Both affirm that the dialectic between the I and the not-I never comes to a halt. Although the I constantly advances over the not-I, the latter does not cease to impose itself as limit (cf. NW 2, 180/167, Nr. 564 and 565). This dynamic is what gives rise to the moral character of this idealism. That is, according to Novalis's thought—in its Fichtean heritage—subjective existence in the world entails a moral unfolding, morality understood as the subject's continuous overcoming-idealization of the obstacles posed by reality and, in this same movement, self-overcoming.

In fragment 556 of the *FS*, Novalis expounds the centrality of morality within his idealist philosophy. There he writes: "Morality must be the core of our existence, if it is to be for us what it wants to be. Its end, its origin, must be the 'ideal of being'. An unending 'realization of being' would be the vocation of the I. Its striving would be toward ever more being [...]. The

[23] For his part, the concept of *Sehnen* is pivotal in the context of Fichte's explanation of his system in idealist terms in the section on the Foundation of the Science of the Practical in *GWL* (cf. GA I/2, 431 ff./358 ff.).

highest philosophy is ethics" (NW 2, 177/165, Nr. 556).[24] In this passage the imprint of Fichte's conception of the I is evident—an I characterized by inexhaustible activity. Now, what name should be given to this kind of action as conceived by Hardenberg? It is none other than practical-moral action as explained by Fichte in *GWL*. The coincidence between the philosophers becomes patent when Novalis describes the importance of *praxis* as the sole path through which the subject can exist as such, and by which something can exist for it: "Something can occur for me only through action – because something comes into my sphere – something occurs between me and my self. Only through my activity is a Being possible for me. I push my boundaries forward as it were – I gain something" (NW 2, 206/192, Nr. 654). Thus, morality is the freedom to always be more, but it is also the freedom to always be less. In order for the subject to surpass itself through action—and to become with each action more than what it was—it must always be less than what it could become if conceived as a total unity. In this sense, being more and being less coincide. Gaining oneself and losing oneself are the same. And if this stems from the metaphysical constitution of subjectivity, then philosophical reflection—particularly idealist reflection—must be limited to accounting for it. At this point, Hardenberg returns to the question of the limits of philosophical thought, writing: "Philosophy is limited strictly to the determinate modification – 'of consciousness'. [Philosophy] is modest – it remains within its borders [...]. Freedom of reflection leads to a freedom of the acting I" (NW 2, 179/166, Nr. 559). Yet this modesty is not impotence. On the contrary, it is precisely for this reason that Novalis characterizes morality as philosophy in a superior—or, more rigorously, supreme—sense. It is in the very lack of philosophical thought that the subject can give an account of the absolute. It is through reflecting and becoming aware of the limits of all its actions that its absolute being and moral superiority—over both itself and the not-I—are expressed. The negativity of philosophy—as moral idealism—is its positivity.

Now, in one of the fragments of *FS*, Hardenberg notes: "Spinoza ascended as far as nature – Fichte to the I, or the person. I [ascend] to the

[24] Novalis, attesting to the persistence of the influence of Fichte's morally oriented thought, writes in a note from FSt: "Fichte's morality contains the most correct views on morality" (my translation) (NW 2, 840, Nr. 433). Also with a view to accounting for this persistence, it is possible to allude to certain fragments of *AB*. In his words: "Life is a 'moral' principle" (NW 2, 519/38, Nr. 255). And regarding the relation of morality to the construction of a philosophical system, he states: "The system of morality has great potential to be the only possible system of philosophy. Philosophy can be represented only in practical terms" (my translation) (NW 2, 828, Nr. 389).

thesis God" (NW 2, 63/55, Nr. 151).[25] According to this fragment, Novalis would propose a conceptual scale that would entail, in turn, a philosophical progression between Spinozist, Fichtean, and his own intellectual developments. In fact, authors such as Beiser maintain that what Hardenberg sought was to synthesize the thought of Spinoza and that of Fichte.[26] In other words, to synthesize realism-materialism—dogmatism, according to Fichte's characterization of Spinozist thought—with idealism.[27] This issue appears explicitly in various fragments subsequent to *FS*—in particular, in those corresponding to Novalis's Encyclopedic project.

3. Novalis Between Fichte and Spinoza in 1798-1800

In the previous section of the article I showed Novalis's continuity with Fichtean idealist thought. In this section I will examine those fragments in which a critique of Fichte is exhibited—together with a recuperation of Spinoza's metaphysical realism[28] and, in particular, of the concepts of God, substance, nature, love, unity, and hypostasis. This presentation gives rise to the question as to whether this turn in Novalis's thought can be sustained. In other words, is it possible to formulate a philosophy that combines—within Hardenberg's original and critical appropriation—the ideas of Spinoza and

[25] The other fragment of *FS* in which Novalis mentions Spinoza is Nr. 159, where he refers to the Spinozist concept of God (cf. NW 2, 66/57, Nr. 159).

[26] Beiser, *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*, 411, 416 and 420.

[27] Indeed, the fragment cited is interwoven with some that precede it and others that follow it, in which Novalis presents the concept of God as the synthetic concept of the concepts of nature and of the I-person (cf. NW 2, 61–64/53-56, Nr. 142–157). That is, the conjunction of the fundamental concept of the Fichtean system—the I—and nature as the fundamental concept of the Spinozist system—although, in the conceptuality of the latter, the concept of nature is homologized with the concept of God and also of substance. To confirm this, one can refer to the famous *motto* of the *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata* (*Ethica*) (1661–1675. Published 1677): "*Deus sive natura*" (EIV Pref./ vol. I, p. 544). Kneller (2012: 67), for her part, highlights Novalis's appropriation of Spinozist naturalism through the latter's conception of God as a substance identified with nature. Fichte, on the other hand, opposes idealism and realism-dogmatism—Spinozism. This can be seen both in *GWL* (cf. GA I/2, 279-280/222) and throughout the whole of *EE* and *ZE*. For a study of Hardenberg's Spinozist naturalism in opposition to Fichte's subjective idealism, see: Valpione, "Novalis' Metaphysics of Having: A Step Towards an Environmental Conception of the Human–Nature Relationship".

[28] Although the nomenclature of "realism" is foreign to Spinoza's technical vocabulary, we follow the traditional attribution of the term to his thought, emphasizing, in general terms, the Spinozist idea that nothing exceeds nature as reality—in particular, that there is no place in his philosophy for the subjective projection of an ideal, perfect world beyond this very reality. This is alluded to at the beginning of the second Part of the *Ethics*, according to the epigraph at the outset of the treatise (cf. EII Def. 6).

Fichte? Is a conjunction between idealism and realism-dogmatism possible?[29] Can Novalis stand between Spinoza and Fichte?

The conceptual pair in which a shift in Novalis's philosophical *apparatus* becomes most evident is that which refers to the terms "I" and "God". It is not the case that, systematically and in every instance, wherever Novalis once wrote "I" he now writes "God". Nevertheless, it is true that the fundamental role once played by the concept of the I of Fichtean heritage—particularly as treated in the final part of the fragments of *FS*—is, to a considerable extent, set aside in the notes that make up the *AB*, while the concept of God gains prominence as the philosophical principle—standing above the I, which is in turn encompassed within it.[30] At the same time, however—as one of the fragments of the *AB* states—Novalis does not draw a sharp dividing line between the concepts in question. Indeed, he writes: "Fichte's ego is reason—His God and 'Spinoza's' God are strikingly similar" (NW 2, 712/183, Nr. 1098). Yet is it the same to consider the foundational principle of philosophy through the concept of the I as it is to consider it through the concept of God?[31] In other words, is an immanent philosophical system the

[29] It is also worth asking whether philosophy can be conceived as *mysticism* (*Mystizismus–Mystizism*)—as another concept that Novalis links to Spinoza and of which he avails himself in order to formulate his own ideas (cf. NW 2, 693/169, Nr. 958). The term *Mystizismus* and the adjective "mystical" (*mystisch*) appear multiple times in *AB*. In fact, Novalis asks about its relation to reason and the possibility of grounding a dogmatic philosophical perspective: "Does mysticism kill reason?—Kant believed it was dogmatism" (NW 2, 660/144, Nr. 782). To Kant's name one must add that of Fichte in the same vein. In this fragment as well, that term appears associated with the concept of love—as another of Hardenberg's central notions that make up the fragments of *AB*. For his part, Loheide emphasizes that some readings of Novalis as a mystic rely on his connection with Spinozist philosophy (cf. Loheide, *Fichte und Novalis Transzendental-philosophisches Denken im romantisierenden Diskurs*, 159).

[30] With regard to a possible antecedent of this in *FS*, in addition to fragment 151—in which he refers explicitly to Spinoza—in fragment 218 one reads: "We 'are' God – we think as individuals. If transcendence becomes immanence, it is the idea of divinity" (NW 2, 75/66, Nr. 218). Indeed, the possibility of uniting idealism and realism entails the possibility of uniting immanence and transcendence. That is, the possibility of thinking analogously that the foundation of subjective existence lies within itself (immanence) or outside the subject (transcendence). Precisely this transcendent sense of Spinozist thought, based on the concept of substance—of which the subject is only a mode—is what Fichte criticizes in *GWL*—while at the same time underscoring the immanent sense of the system of the *WL*.

[31] Fichte himself, following the Atheism Dispute (*Atheismusstreit*) (1798–1800)—an academic, political, and judicial process in which he was accused of atheism and which concluded with his departure from the University of Jena—ventured down this path and, in subsequent expositions of the *WL*, made use of the concept of God rather than the concept of I to account for the systematic foundation. Although this is not the aim of the paper, it is particularly relevant to consider the contrast between the 1794-1795 versions of his system and the 1804 version. This issue gave rise to problems of consistency within

same as a transcendent philosophical system? Can Fichteanism be described as a thought oversaturated with divinity, and Fichte himself as a man intoxicated with God—as Novalis says of Spinoza and his thought: "Spinozism is an oversaturation with divinity" (my translation) (NW 2, 810, Nr. 336) and "Spinoza is a person drunk on God" (NW 2, 812/304, Fg. 346/562)?

On the other hand—and even though, at times, he does not draw such an absolute division and even in some fragments associates Fichte with realist or, if one prefers, empiricist thought[32]—Novalis affirms a certain deficiency in Fichte's philosophy and, on this basis, the need for a combination of idealism and realism. This deficiency would be made manifest, concretely, in Fichte's lack of understanding of the concept of hypostasis—a concept that was indeed an object of Spinozist thought. Hardenberg writes: "Fichte fails to comprehend hypostasis—and because of this lacks the other. Philosophy as a whole isn't going to get very far without 'ecstasy' (*Ekstase*)—without a consciousness that supplants and anchors everything. (Spinoza's goal)". (NW 2, 707/180, Nr. 1067).[33] Moreover, Novalis even goes so far as to state: "True philosophy is definitely (*durchaus*) realistic idealism—or 'Spinozism'" (my translation) (NW 2, 832, Nr. 395), and also:

> The complete concurrence of idealism and realism—with the most complete independence, furnishes the complete proof of the correct methodology for everything. Transformation of the one into the other. [...]. Idealization of realism—and realization of idealism. One *works* for the *other*—and hence indirectly for itself [...]. The *proof of realism* is idealism—and vice versa (NW 2, 621-622/114-115, Nr. 634).

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his own system. Regarding the *Atheismusstreit*, see Scarfia, "Fichte on Trial. The Atheist, the Nihilist, the Democrat."

[32] Novalis writes in *AB*: "What did Spinoza seek? Even Fichte's philosophy isn't entirely lacking in inspired 'empiricism'—in fortunate flashes of inspiration" (NW 2, 708/180, Nr. 1073).

[33] On the other hand, although not by contrasting Fichte with Spinoza but with Plotinus, Novalis writes: "With respect to the majority of results, Plotinus was already—a critical idealist and realist./ The method of Fichte and Kant is not yet complete or presented precisely enough" (NW 2, 687/164, Nr. 924). Hardenberg's reading of Plotinus from 1798 onward reinforces his appreciation of Spinozist philosophy. That is, both the Plotinian and Spinozist influences on him facilitate the transformation of his understanding of Fichtean idealism. In a passage of *AB*—concerning the concept of God—Novalis aligns Spinozism with the emanationist system (NW 2, 685/163, Nr. 914). For an analysis that argues that the Novalisian synthesis of Spinoza and Fichte was made possible by Novalis's recovery of Plotinus, see: Hampton, "The Role of Plotinus in the Romantic Philosophy of Novalis." For reference to a passage in which Novalis thinks of Plotinus and Fichte in a filial manner, see NW 2, 684/162, Nr. 908.

With a view to weighing the possibility of this synthesis—or, more rigorously, *syncretism* or *syncriticism* (*Synkretism oder Synkriticism*)[34]— between the terms, it is necessary at this point to briefly recall—albeit in a limited way, since the focus of this paper is not the thought of Fichte or of Spinoza but rather its reappropriation by Novalis—their ideas concerning the formal and material framework of their philosophical systems with respect to the conceptual pairs idealism / realism and immanence / transcendence.

We should begin by turning to Fichte's critique of the realism–materialism–dogmatism of Spinoza's transcendent system—an approach that clarifies his own philosophical perspective while also opening the way to analyze Spinoza's thought and to assess the extent to which Novalis's aim of synthesizing both philosophers is possible. In fact, Fichte introduces the development of his idealism precisely by distinguishing it from the scope of the modern philosophical thought that preceded him, namely Maimon, Kant, Descartes, Reinhold, and, in particular, Spinoza (cf. GA I/2, 262/205–206). Combining what is stated toward the end of the first paragraph of *GWL*—in which Fichte deduces the I as the principle of the philosophical system—with what is expressed toward the end of the third paragraph of the text, we read:

> According to Spinoza, the I does indeed exist for the I; but he [also] asks what the I would be for something outside the I. Such a being "outside the I" would similarly have to be an I, of which the posited I (e.g., my I), along with all the I's that could possibly be posited, would be modifications. He separates pure from empirical consciousness. He posits the former in God, who is never conscious of himself, since pure consciousness never attains to consciousness; and he posits the latter in the particular modifications of Deity (*Gottheit*) [...]. One further remark: if one oversteps the I am then one must necessarily arrive at Spinozism [...]. [T]here are only two fully consistent systems: the Critical system, which recognizes this limit, and the system of Spinoza, which oversteps it. [...]. In the Critical philosophy, a thing is what is posited by the I; in dogmatic philosophy a thing is that within which the I itself is posited. Criticism is for this reason *immanent*, because it posits everything in the I, whereas dogmatism is *transcendent*, because it proceeds beyond the I. Insofar as dogmatism can be consistent, Spinozism is its most consistent product (GA I/2, 263/206-207 y 279-280/222).

[34] Novalis homologizes these concepts (cf. NW 2, 568/75, Nr. 457). In turn, in this entry he highlights the unifying power of *Synkriticism* with respect to what constitutes a real criticism and an ideal criticism.

As Fichte explains, the overstep (*überspringt*) is an overstep into transcendence. But this is an empty transcendence—as all transcendence is—or, in other words, a transcendence that is nothing but an invention: "The thing in itself (*Ding an sich*) is a pure invention (*Erdichtung*) which possesses no reality (*Realität*) whatsoever" (GA I/4, 190/13). Fichte's intellectual effort in the opening sections of *GWL* is to deduce the I as an immanent foundation. That is, to show that subjectivity is not theoretically or practically determined by anything external to itself. In other words, Fichte maintains that subjective life in the world depends, in a fundamental sense, on nothing other than itself. The subject is free—to produce the world and to produce itself. Using the logical principle of identity as the medium of metaphysical deduction, Fichte arrives at "I=I" as the systematic foundation that accounts for both representation and practical subjective existence (cf. GA I/2, 256–261/201–205).[35]

It is crucial to emphasize here his concern to separate—and, more strongly still, to oppose—idealism and Spinozist dogmatism. The former consistently conceives an immanent principle—the I—from which it is possible to give an account in philosophical-deductive terms within the system, and which entails conceiving human existence as free. The latter, grounded in the invention of a transcendent foundation—the thing-in-itself, substance-God—which cannot be accounted for deductively—but only through its exposition as an axiomatic definition—entails conceiving human life not as free but as fatally determined.[36] For this reason, idealism and Spinozism are antithetical and irreconcilable. To overstep beyond the I entails an irrational procedure, and any system constructed on this basis will itself be—though irrefutable—an irrational system. Indeed, Fichte writes of Spinoza's system—not without a certain sarcastic tone: "Set up in this manner, his system is completely consistent and irrefutable, because he is on

[35] This is also the aim of the opening pages of *EE*, in which Fichte shows why and how the I is a self-founded principle, in opposition to the thing in itself (*Ding an sich*)—that is, Spinoza's Substance—as the principle of the latter's dogmatic system. With a view to tracing the immanent philosophical path characteristic of the *WL*, he writes: "Attend to yourself; turn your gaze from everything surrounding you and look within yourself: this is the first demand philosophy makes upon anyone who studies it" (GA I/4, 186/7). On the other hand, it should be clarified that the role of the logical principle of identity in *GWL* is not fundamental with respect to the metaphysical principle "I=I". Fichte employs the former as a means to facilitate the course of metaphysical thought (cf. GA I/2, 261/205).

[36] In *EE*, Fichte writes thinking of Spinoza: "Every consistent dogmatist must necessarily be a fatalist" (GA I/4, 192/16). Also: "A consistent dogmatist is also necessarily a materialist" (GA I/4, 192/16). Finally, cf. GA I/4, 197/23).

his own turf, where reason cannot pursue him any further" (GA I/2, 263/207).

On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the idealist sense of Fichte's philosophy does not lead to a wholesale denial of reality in its material existence. Indeed, Fichte does not fall into a naïve idealism *à la Berkeley*—what he calls "dogmatic idealism" (*dogmatischer Idealismus*) (cf. GA I/2, 412/343)—in which reality would be nothing more than an abstract projection—that is, empty of content—of consciousness or of the mind. Fichte even maintains: "the Wissenschaftslehre is *realistic*. Despite its realism, however, this science is not transcendent, but remains in its innermost depths *transcendental* [...]. The *Wissenschaftslehre* [...] is a Critical idealism, though one could also call it a real-idealism or an ideal-realism" (GA I/2, 411-412/342-343).

While bearing in mind that the focus of this paper is not to unpack Fichte's deduction of the I, the Not-I, and their reciprocal determination as the principles of his idealist system, it is nevertheless worth noting that, on this matter, Fichte explains that—in a practical sense—the I collides (*Anstoß*) with the Not-I as a limit in its tendency to expand over all reality, and that from this encounter it returns to itself in a conscious manner while at the same time modifying, in concrete terms, the reality-world (cf. GA I/2, 355 ff./292 ff.). That is, the Not-I is there, outside the I in material terms.[37] However, reality is only real for the I insofar as it is idealized by it. In this sense, Fichte explains: "With respect to its ideality, everything is dependent upon the I; with respect to its reality, however, the I is itself dependent. But nothing is real for the I without also being ideal" (GA I/2, 411/342). Consequently, he states in concise terms: "no ideality, no reality, and vice versa" (GA I/2, 413/343).

Thus, for Fichte—in contrast to Spinoza—, all reality is determined on the basis of the subject's ideal dynamic. Subject—the I—and nature–world–reality—the not-I—are opposing poles, and the realism of the former's philosophy does not entail, as in the latter's case, conceiving that human beings form part of a whole of nature as the sole reality–materiality—in its infinite modes with respect to the unity of substance.

Taking this last point into account, it is now necessary to turn to the metaphysical structure of Spinoza's system, with the objective of clarifying the extent to which Novalis can bring it into synthesis with Fichtean idealism.

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[37] Beiser, *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*, 218, 220, and 254-255 and Breazeale, "Fichte's Abstract Realism," 113, likewise emphasize the ever-irreducible presence of a field of otherness, in the specified sense, within the Fichtean *WL* as a system that accounts for the relation of the I to that which is not itself.

Spinoza's system seeks to establish itself in an immanentist–monist sense. In particular, this becomes evident in his rejection of the theism and religious cosmogony of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which posits the existence of an anthropomorphic entity that would have created the world and human beings and endowed their existence with meaning (cf. EI P15, Schol./ vol. I, p. 421). Spinoza discards such a conceptualization of divinity, which, in his system, is identified with the world–nature—as a concept that encompasses everything that is, including man.[38] It is in this sense that Spinoza rejects a transcendent system; that is, insofar as transcendence is conceived in theistic religious terms.

Now, despite the emphasis on distancing himself from this conception of natural–human existence, in the system of the *Ethica* the logic of religiosity and transcendence is nevertheless retained. Although it is not religiosity understood as a bond (*religatio*) with an anthropomorphized God arising from a supposed fall and, therefore, from a supposed rupture between divinity and the world,[39] Spinoza's metaphysics is an ontology in which the foundation is

[38] This idea underlies the characterization of Spinozism, according to multiple readings, as pantheism. In particular, it is worth noting its interpretation in these terms already by Lessing, which gave rise to the (*Pantheismusstreit–Spinozismusstreit*), in which Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn were also involved. This dispute influenced the philosophical thought of German idealists and romantics. For example, Hölderlin took up the concept of *hen kai pan* as Lessing had done before, in order to account for the Spinozist understanding of the identification between divinity and nature. For his part, Serrano Martín sustains: "if the 'one and all', as a formula capable of condensing Spinozism, was [...] the position from which Hölderlin could accuse Fichte of dogmatism, this one and all must now appear as a principle opposed to Fichte's 'I'. And, indeed, in the aforementioned essay [*Urtheil und Seyn*], Hölderlin defines his principle [...] in terms of unity […]. Hence, the key to the essay lies in the opposition between the principle considered as unity—being—and the principle considered as division (*Trennung*) […]. An opposition […] between Fichte's absolute 'I' [...] and Spinoza's substance" (Serrano Martín, "Sobre Hölderlin y los comienzos del Idealismo alemán," 183) (my translation). This is important in the context of our paper, insofar as Novalis likewise transforms his conception of the philosophical principle from Fichte's I to Spinoza's Substance, in order to conceive an absolute unity between the subject and nature–God. In fact, Wood places Hölderlin and Novalis in continuity with respect to their conception of the Spinozist *hen kai pan* (cf. Wood, "From 'Fichticizing' to 'Romanticizing': Fichte and Novalis on the Activities of Philosophy and Art," 264).

[39] In fact, the causal–mechanical sense of the Spinozist system precludes the possibility of sustaining this idea. Such a mechanistic character of his metaphysics is eminently expressed in the maxim associated with his thought according to which nature does not make jumps (*natura non facit saltus*). Likewise, it is not the case that Spinoza conceives of a creation in the style of the theistic religion, in which God creates the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*). The Spinozist rejection of theism is the rejection of creationism and *vice versa*. This goes hand in hand with the rejection of the idea of a final cause—finalism. According to Spinoza, what exists is not a voluntary and free creation by a particular being aimed at a purpose, but a necessary effect of a cause in a chain that ultimately traces back to the substance as cause of itself, acting by necessity of its own nature and not freely. These

a being–thing whose precisely ontological status is not the same as that of what derives from it. Indeed, Spinoza begins the *Ethica* with a series of definitions intended to mark the distinction between substance–God as cause of itself (*causa sui*) and modes as affections of substance—that which is in it, that is, that which is not in itself, which is not cause of itself but is rather the effect of something by virtue of which it exists (cf. EI Def. I; III; V; VI).

Thus, there is no theistic religious transcendence in Spinozist thought, but neither is there immanence when it comes to the fundamental point concerning the determination of subjective existence. This determination is external: it is a hypostasis that rises above and transcends the subject, which, in this way—that is, insofar as it is not self-grounded but exists in something else—cannot be regarded as free, since its existence is necessarily determined, just as every thing in nature is determined. Here becomes evident—now from an analysis of Spinoza's own thought—its fatalistic sense from the Fichtean perspective. Regarding the thing-like and determined status of the human being, Spinoza writes: "men, like other things, act from the necessity of nature" (EV P10, Schol./ vol. I, p. 602).[40] Likewise, insofar as it is nothing more than a mode of substance, Spinoza conceives that the human being exists only insofar as it is in God. In fact, we read in the *Ethica*: "[w]hatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (cf. EI P15/ vol. I, p. 420).[41]

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ontological issues are summarized at the beginning of the Appendix to the First Part of the *Ethica*. Spinoza writes: "[w]ith these demonstrations I have explained God's nature and properties: that he exists necessarily; that he is unique; that he is and acts from the necessity alone of his nature; that [...] all things are in God and so depend on him that without him they can neither be nor be conceived; and finally, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from freedom of the will [...] but from God's absolute nature" (cf. EI Ap./vol. I, p. 439). On the other hand—although not from a creationist perspective—Fichte criticizes the mechanistic orientation of Spinoza's metaphysical thought, particularly insofar as it entails constraining subjective freedom as the principle of human existence (cf. GA I/4, 197 ff./22 ff.; 221/51; 258-259/90-92; and 261/94-95).

[40] In turn, it is worth referring to another of the most frequently cited Spinozist passages, in which he criticizes those who: "seem to conceive man in nature as a dominion within a dominion (*imperio*). For they believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself" (EIII, Pref./vol. I, p. 491). This idea also appears in the *Tractatus-Politicus* (*TP*) (1675-1677) (cf. TP II #6, p. 509).

[41] The question of the ontological status of man is a theme developed, implicitly, throughout the first part of the *Ethica*—under Spinoza's analysis of the substance–mode relation. In general terms, the logical–ontological development of the presentation begins with the definitions of *causa sui* (EI Def. 1, p. 408) and of substance (EI Def. 3, p. 408), and with the axiom according to which "[w]hatever is, is either in itself or in another" (EI Ax. 1, p. 410). Spinoza indicates that there can be only a single substance–God as cause of itself, as that which is and is conceived through itself. God is, therefore, unique (cf. EI P14, cor., p. 420). Thus, as noted in the proposition cited in the body of the text,

On the other hand, the texts cited in the previous paragraph find a certain echo in Novalis when he writes: "Theory of the Future of Mankind. (Theology). *The theory of the future of humanity* contains everything that God has predicted. Every machine that currently lives by virtue of the grand *perpetuum mobile*, will itself become a *perpetuum mobile*—every person, who currently lives from God and through God, will himself become God" (NW 2, 531/47, Nr. 320). At this point, it is not only a matter of highlighting Novalis's conception of the human being—just as in Spinoza's case—as a thing-machine that lives from and through God, but also the fact that Novalis considers that the human being ought to become God.[42] In the same vein, in one of the entries of *VF*, he states: "'God wants gods'" (NW 2, 373/172, Nr. 248). As for Spinoza, the Fifth and final part of the *Ethica* is devoted to the concept of blessedness (*beatitudo*) as the human experience of its unity with divinity, described as the greatest perfection and greatest Joy (cf. EV P27, dem./ vol. I, p. 609), attainable only through the knowledge of God—love of God—that is, through what he designates as the third kind of knowledge (cf. EV P20, Schol./ vol. I, p. 606).[43] In turn, in the Fourth part he had affirmed:

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everything that exists—including man—exists in God. Moreover, it is not only that the substance determines man's being—his existence—but that it also determines his actions (cf. EI P26, p. 431 and P29, p. 433).

[42] Although Novalis uses the verb *sollen* rather than *müssen*—without losing sight of the meaning of the former within Fichtean conceptuality, which entails thinking of the idea of ought as an infinite approximation to an ideal that can never be fully attained, as also appears in some of the Novalis fragments in *FS*—the following reading line traces, from certain Hardenberg fragments written from 1798 onward—taking into account his study of Spinoza at that time—that he conceived the subject as capable of transcending its finite status and achieving—effectively, and not merely regulatively—a unity with the absolute understood under the concept of God. Indeed, in a fragment of *FS*, we read: "Our nature is immanent – our reflection is transcendent. We 'are' god – we think as individuals. If transcendence becomes immanence, it is the idea of divinity" (NW 2, 75/66, Nr. 218). For his part, the finite sense of Fichtean idealism—opposed to dogmatism—is perceptible throughout the whole of *GWL*. Even Hegel, in his reading of *GWL* in *GuW*, emphasizes this character of Fichtean thought (cf. TWA 2, 298). On this topic, see López Domínguez, *Fichte: Acción y libertad*, 95-96 and López Domínguez, "El cuerpo como símbolo: la teoría de la corporalidad en el sistema de Jena," 125. Breazeale, for his part, highlights the inderivability of the finite within the *GWL* system. In other words, he underscores that, for Fichte, the finite cannot be thought of as a moment derived from the infinite that would encompass it in a higher synthesis (cf. Breazeale, "Fichte's Abstract Realism," 101). In turn, Rockmore asserts that the starting point of Fichtean philosophy is the finite human being (cf. Rockmore, "Filosofía trascendental e idealismo en Fichte," 176).

[43] Although it is not the focus of the paper, it is worth mentioning that Spinoza describes three kinds of knowledge in the *Ethica*: opinion or imagination—knowledge of the first kind—; reason—knowledge of the second kind—; intuitive knowledge—knowledge of the third kind—which we take into account for analysis in the paper (cf. EII P40, Schol. II/vol. I, pp. 477–478). On the other hand, contrary to some commentators who seek to

"blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction (*animi acquiescentia*) of mind that stems from the intuitive knowledge of God" (EIV, Ap. Ch. IV/ vol. I, p. 588). In continuity with this idea, he writes: "we clearly understand wherein our salvation, 'or' blessedness, 'or' Freedom, consists, viz. in a constant and eternal Love of God, or in God's Love for men" (EV P36, Schol./ vol. I, p. 612).[44] A love which, ultimately, refers to God's love for itself (cf. EV P36/ vol. I, p. 612).[45]

With this, we see that the becoming of man's existence—in Spinoza's conception—has an ontological–constitutive and theoretical foundation and end, in contrast to the metaphysical–regulative and practical orientation of the foundation as understood from Fichtean idealism. That is, the

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emphasize that this theoretical issue implies a practical attitude, here we align with Vidal Peña's reading, which underscores that it is a cognitive issue (cf. Peña, "Introducción y notas," 285, note). This is not surprising if we take into account that, at an ontological level, Spinoza conceives that the power and essence of the human mind are defined by knowledge (cf. EV P20, Schol./vol. I, pp. 605–606; cf. EV P36, Schol./vol. I, p. 612). Moreover, it should be noted that in the twentieth proposition of the last part of the *Ethica*, Spinoza links the love of God with the highest good (*summum bonum*) (cf. EV P20, dem./vol. I, p. 605).

[44] Although Spinoza associates *beatitudo* and freedom, taking up the analysis from the Fichtean perspective, it should be emphasized that here human freedom is reduced to the assumed knowledge of the necessity of one's own existence and its development. Thus, in a contradictory manner, Spinoza asserts that freedom is knowing oneself to be not free. In this sense, Fichte states in *ZE*: "Spinoza could not have been convinced of his own philosophy. He could only have thought of it; he could not have believed it. For this is a philosophy that directly contradicts those convictions that Spinoza must necessarily have adopted in his everyday life, by virtue of which he had to consider himself to be free and self-sufficient" (GA I/4, 264/98). Likewise, in *GWL*, Fichte affirms that Spinoza, by displacing the infinite outside the subject—in the substance–God as a transcendent hypostasis—could not answer the question concerning the origin of the idea of the infinite. He writes at this point: "it would remain forever unknown how even the idea of the infinite could ever arise within us. (On account of his dogmatism, Spinoza himself could not even pose this question)" (GA I/2, 392/326).

[45] With regard to the close relationship that Spinoza establishes between the concepts of third kind of knowledge and intellectual Love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*), cf. EV P32, cor./vol. I, p. 611; cf. EV P33/vol. I, p. 611. In the final proposition of the text, this connection is made explicit along with the concept of *beatitudo* in a chain that moves from knowledge, through love, to the resulting blessedness. In his words: "[b]lessedness consists in Love of God (by P36 and P36S), a love which arises from the third kind of knowledge (by P32C)" (EV P42, dem./vol. I, p. 616). This logic also appears in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), where Spinoza writes: "That knowledge of God is our supreme good also follows from the fact that a man is more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing which he loves before all others, and conversely. Therefore, the man who is necessarily the most perfect and who participates most in supreme blessedness is the one who loves above all else the intellectual knowledge of God, the most perfect being, and takes the greatest pleasure in that knowledge. Our supreme good, then, and our blessedness come back to this: the knowledge and love of God" (TTP #4, pp. 127–128).

foundation—God-substance—is a "thing in itself" that causes human existence, and which man can know. And precisely through such theoretical knowledge he can lovingly attain it—in the sense of uniting himself with it—and thereby unfold a blessed and free existence, insofar as he knows that his existence is necessarily determined by this cause. This has nothing to do with the idea of a moral drive (*Trieb*) in Fichtean terms that, precisely, drives human life from and toward absolute freedom.

Considering what has been said, it becomes clear that Novalis appropriates the Spinozist concept of *amor Dei intellectualis* in order to shape his own philosophical ideas—especially from 1798 onward, when he begins to take some distance from Fichtean idealism. In a letter to F. Schlegel from December of that year, he writes: "Spinoza and Zinzendorf explored it, the infinite idea of love, and discovered the method—to realize it for themselves and themselves for it on this thread of dust. It is a pity that I see nothing of this prospect in Fichte, feel nothing of this breath of creation" (my translation) (HKA IV: 188). Likewise, in *AB*, the concept of love—closely associated with the concept of God—takes on a decisive philosophical role as existential foundation and as *telos* of the world's historical unfolding. In some of his entries, he writes: "God 'is love'. Love is the highest 'reality'—the primal foundation (*Urgrund*)" (NW 2, 486/12, Nr. 79). "Love proceeds like philosophy—it is and will be—each and everything to everyone. Therefore love is the ego—the ideal of every endeavor" (NW 2, 673/153, Nr. 835). Also: "Love is the final goal of 'world history'—the One of the universe" (NW 2, 480/8, Nr. 50). And*:* "'Amor is the thing' throwing us together. All the functions mentioned above have sensuousness ('sympathy') as their basis. The actual sensuous function is above all the mystical function—the veritable absolute—or the function penetrating to the 'totality' of the union (mixture)" (NW 2, 666/148, Nr. 797).[46] Thus, this concept assumes a preeminent role

[46] In the cited fragment 79 of *AB*, Hardenberg connects the concept of love with the concept of magic (*Magismus-Magie*) and states: "'Love' is the basis for the possibility of magic. Love works magically" (NW 2, 487/13, Nr. 79; cf. NW 2, 487/13, Nr. 80). The concept of magic acquires significant relevance in this set of fragments. On various occasions, the magician (*Magus*) appears as the agent of an action that is meant to surpass all limits of reality (cf. NW 2, 531/47, Nr. 322). In this way, magical action would be distinguished from, and have greater scope than, action understood in moral terms. Indeed, for decades, Novalis's philosophical thought was reduced to the nomenclature "magical idealism" (*magischer Idealismus*)—as a term that he himself uses to account for his thought and which, in parallel with the concept of *Synkriticism*, refers to the attempt to synthesize idealism and realism. However, this characterization gave rise to exaggerations regarding Hardenberg's conception of magic and the magical scope of philosophical thought. Strictly speaking, the label "magical idealism" appears only six times throughout his work (cf. NW 2, 394–395/194, Nr. 375; NW 2, 535/51, Nr. 338; NW 2, 549–550/62, Nr. 399; NW 2, 623/116, Nr. 638; NW 2, 624/117, Nr. 642; and NW 2, 671/152, Nr. 826). As

in the constitution of a philosophy that seeks to bring together idealism and Spinozism—aiming to remedy the deficiency Hardenberg perceived in Fichte's thought.[47] By drawing on Spinoza's conceptualization of love, Novalis carries his own philosophy beyond the confines of Fichtean idealism of the finite, towards what he conceives as an absolute unity between human being, nature, and God. Love, in its mystical–religious force, would surpass moral action driven by impulse, which always tends toward an incomplete unity.

Alongside the concept of love, the concept of ecstasy (*Ekstase*) assumes a central role in Hardenberg's thought, as an experience of divine unity. Although Spinoza does not employ the term "ecstasy" in his *Ethica*, Hardenberg associates it with philosophical activity—according to the aforementioned fragment 1067 of *AB*—as a means of accounting for a consciousness that encompasses all, which he identifies as Spinoza's philosophical aim. From this perspective, he writes: "'Spinoza's extremely interesting idea' of a categorical—imperative—of beautiful or 'perfected knowledge'—of a self-satisfying knowledge—of a knowledge that 'pleasantly' eliminates the desire for knowledge, and annihilates all other kinds of knowledge—in short, of a 'sensuous' knowledge (lying at the basis of all mysticism)" (NW 2, 693/169, Nr. 958). The ideas of love and all-encompassing knowledge—whose correlate for man is ecstasy—mark this Novalisian turn toward conceiving philosophy in religious and mystical terms, in which Fichtean idealism and Spinozism are brought together as philosophy in its eminent sense.[48]

However, the question to be considered is whether such a conjunction entails that idealism—rooted in Fichte—degenerates into dogmatism and, consequently, falls into philosophical contradiction. Summarized and

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for other fragments of relative interest for our analysis in this paper, in which Hardenberg reflects on the concept of love, see NW 2, 485/12, Nr. 78; NW 2, 645/132, Nr. 717; NW 2, 647/134, Nr. 723.

47 In fact, in another fragment of *VF*, he places the concepts of philosophy, God, and love along a horizontal line. He writes: "<When one begins to reflect upon philosophy— then philosophy appears to us to be everything, like God and love" (NW 2, 313/117, Nr. 7).

48 However, it should be clarified that there are some fragments in *AB* that suggest that even at this stage, Hardenberg conceived the concept of God in a moral rather than a mystical–religious sense—one that would allow for thinking of a total unity with respect to the foundation of existence. In this way, his philosophical conception had not completely abandoned the limits of Fichtean practical idealism. For example, we read: "The world is the sphere of the imperfect unions of the spirit and Nature. Their perfect indifferentiation forms the moral being par excellence—'God'. The essence of God consists in 'incessant moralization'" (NW 2, 446/197-198, Nr. 12). See also NW 2, 482/9-10, Nr. 61. In any case, the aim of the paper is not to dismiss a particular type of exegesis of his thought but rather to show its variants.

schematically—on the basis of the themes discussed in this paper—it may be said that such a contradiction would arise insofar as Novalis, positioned between Fichte and Spinoza, or more rigorously in the passage from Fichteanism to Spinozism, conceives: (i) that the principle of the philosophical system is no longer the I but God as hypostasis—the return to a transcendent system from an immanentist one; (ii) that a total unity of the development of subjective existence can be attained—experienced by the subject as love and ecstasy; (iii) that this divine unity is achieved in a theoretical–cognitive sense, not as a practical–moral approximation.

Now, it is not the case that Novalis is unaware of this issue. On the contrary, he explicitly acknowledges it and, under a new perspective according to his own stated intention (cf. NW 2, 533/49, Nr. 331), employs the terms "realism" and "syncretism–syncriticism"—in combination with idealism—to describe his thought. Suggestively, with regard to the conception of the philosophical principle that accounts for both subjectivity and objectivity—in a gesture aimed at linking Fichtean idealism, centered on the concept of the I, with Spinozist materialism,[49] whose principle is a substance identified with the world–nature, encompassing human being—he declares: "It is 'immaterial' whether I posit the universe within myself, or myself in the universe. Spinoza posited everything outside—Fichte everything within. So too with freedom. If freedom is within the whole, then freedom is also in me. If I call freedom necessity, and necessity is in the whole, then necessity is in me, and vice versa" (NW 2, 620/114, Nr. 633).[50] Likewise, it is not surprising that Hardenberg asserts along this line of thought: "Idealism should not be opposed to realism" (NW 2, 601/100, Nr. 565).[51]

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[49] In one of the *Logologische Fragmente*, Hardenberg explicitly associates the name of Spinoza with philosophical materialism (cf. NW 2, 320, Nr. 23). For a particular study that links Novalis to Spinoza's thought as a materialist philosophy, see Biareishyk, "Rethinking Romanticism with Spinoza: Encounter and Individuation in Novalis, Ritter, and Baader". This author, in a manner similar to our own paper, argues for a break between Novalis's thought and Fichtean idealism from 1797 onwards. Yet, in contrast to the exegetical approach proposed in our paper, the author intends to show that Novalis's materialist thought—grounded in Spinoza's philosophy, specifically through Novalis's appropriation of the Spinozian concept of substance—does not lead to the consideration of his thought as transcendent and mystical–religious. Rather, it would be an ontology of immanence.

[50] This passage can be contrasted with what Fichte establishes in *EE*: "The dispute between the idealist and the dogmatist is actually a dispute over whether the self-sufficiency of the I should be sacrificed to that of the thing, or conversely, whether the self-sufficiency of the thing should be sacrificed to that of the I" (GA I/4, 193/17).

[51] See also NW 2, 611/107, Nr. 603; cf. NW 2, 640/128, Nr. 694.

However, can this turn in Novalis's thought be sustained? As indicated in the title of this paper, Novalis aims, between Spinoza and Fichte, to think idealism together with realism—that is, idealism "and" realism, even in equilibrium.[52] In this sense, it would not be accurate to speak of a complete turn. Yet, if we adhere rigorously to the Fichtean Philosophy—within the framework of practical idealism rooted in a critical Kantian heritage—even the slightest realist–materialist–dogmatic nuance would entail the disintegration of the philosophical system. Thus, the terms "idealism" and "realism" could not be joined by a simple conjunctive connector but only through a disjunctive conjunction—i.e., either idealism or realism. Indeed, what is mentioned in entry 633 of the *AB* would disrupt the structural metaphysical consistency of the *WL* in the relationship established between its principles. In other words, the meaning and coherence of Fichtean idealism depend on the system beginning with the I rather than the Not-I. The I and the Not-I are not interchangeable in their foundational position. To conceive the I as the Not-I—or as nature—entails the implosion of the I as such and the destruction of the idealist system along with its exaltation of subjective freedom as the very foundation of the subject's existence. Conversely, to conceive the Not-I—nature—as the I involves a leap beyond the critical limits of reason, which are confined to self-consciousness as the basis of subjective thought.[53]

Finally, it is also not the same for idealism to possess a prominent practical sense—grounded in activity understood in moral terms—or to acquire a theoretical sense that, based on the knowledge and love of God, facilitates the attainment of a life that is precisely divinized or ecstatic—or, even, drawing on Spinoza's conceptual framework, blessed (*beatific*)—as a seamless unity.

4. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, an effort was made to trace the development of Novalis's philosophical thought—from his early readings and written

[52] In another fragment of *AB*, through an analogy with liberal economic thought, Hardenberg maintains that the dispute between idealism and dogmatism would balance out just as the rise and fall of gold and silver occurs, according to the greater or lesser demand for one or the other, based on their accumulation or scarcity (cf. NW 2, 617/112, Nr. 624).

[53] In contradiction to this, Novalis asserts: "So-called transcendental philosophy—the referring back to the subject—'idealism', and the categories—and the connection between object and representation, now appear in a brand new light [...]. Nature is the 'ideal.' The true ideal is simultaneously possible, real and necessary [...]. ('You'.) (Instead of the non-ego—You)" (NW 2, 670/151, 820).

fragments on *GWL* to his later philosophical notes, already significantly marked by the influence of Spinoza's system. Beyond the relatively short temporal span in which this transition occurs—and, as previously noted, without implying a total abandonment of his readings of Fichte or even the appropriation of some of his ideas—I have pointed out that between 1798 and 1800, Novalis deliberately and evidently gravitates toward a philosophy that transcends certain limits of critical, idealist thought.

Recalling the two aspects of the hypothesis that guided this paper, as mentioned in the Introduction, it was shown that, contrary to a common reading of Novalis's thought, he does not present in his *FS* a wholesale critique entailing the rejection of the formal structure or conceptual content of the first version of the *WL*. Moreover, from Novalis's treatment of the main concept of Fichte's system—the I—it can be deduced that it is possible to read his thought in continuity with the moral sense of practical idealism characteristic of the *GWL*. While across his fragments Hardenberg does not present a systematic philosophy entirely free of tension or internal contradiction, it is important to note that, for him—as for Fichte—the I, as the philosophical principle explaining both theoretical representation and the development of practical subjective existence, has a regulatory character—as an idea of reason—rather than a constitutive one with respect to representation and existence. In other words, it is not an entity that, outside subjectivity—that is, in a transcendent and already given form—would constitute and thus determine the life of the subject. The I is, in this sense, for Hardenberg—in continuity with Fichte—self-production, an ideal subjective projection that motivates the constant overcoming of the subject's encounter with the object—that is, reality, the world as that which opposes him—without ever attaining a culminating point of total overcoming or grounding itself in a unification with itself through that which is other than itself. In line with this, Novalis's thought between 1795 and 1796 cannot be characterized as religious–mystical–magical–aesthetic—as it has often been reduced—but as idealist and, at least based on the fragments analyzed here, as a moral idealism *à la Fichte*.

On the other hand, according to the second aspect of the hypothesis explored in this paper, with Novalis's move to Freiberg in 1797 and the beginning of his studies in the natural sciences, as well as—decisively for the purposes of this paper—his deepening engagement with Spinoza's philosophy, and, according to his reading of Tiedemann's manual, also through his study of Plotinus, a turn becomes perceptible in his fragments from an idealist perspective toward a realist–materialist, or even dogmatic, philosophy, in which the philosophical principle is no longer the I but God—in its

Spinozist conceptual heritage. Explicitly, Novalis indicates that, philosophically, not only should the Spinozist realist approach not be disregarded—as Fichte emphasized in his critique of Spinoza as the paradigmatic dogmatic philosopher—but that idealism and realism must be aligned—figuratively, as the bases of a triangle—with the aim of forming the most proper philosophical thought, which would constitute the apex of that triangle, namely Novalis's *Synkriticism*.

The question posed in various ways throughout the paper is: what is critical—and, it could be added, moral, as a central aspect of Fichtean idealism—about *Synkriticism*? In other words, is it possible, from critical philosophy—or more precisely, from practical, moral, critical idealism rooted in Fichte—to combine it with realist thought? Is it possible to argue that the concepts of I and God are interchangeable as the philosophical principle, just as the concepts of I and Not-I or nature might be? To what extent can one synthesize the idea that an absolute unity with respect to the development of subjective life is impossible with the idea that the subject has always already been part—metaphysically—of a unity accessed through love and self-knowledge in a theoretical sense? Can one reconcile the idea of free subjective action with the idea of subjective action necessarily determined by something transcending subjectivity? Finally, is it possible to combine a subjectively immanent life with one that unfolds in transcendent *Ekstase*?

These questions, which emerge from the analysis throughout the paper, highlight the difficulties Novalis faces in attempting to position himself between Spinoza and Fichte—between realism and idealism. And this is because, ultimately: "they find themselves in two completely different worlds" (GA I/4, 261/94).

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Immediatezze che dileguano

La "certezza sensibile" e il congedo di Hegel dallo spinozismo e dal romanticismo

Sandra V. Palermo *

ABSTRACT

Well-known are Hegel's statements according to which Spinozism constitutes the "beginning" of genuine philosophy, because philosophy cannot properly commence unless the soul immerses itself in the ether of the one substance. Yet Spinoza is not merely *Anfang*. In the *Science of Logic*, substance appears both as the result of a long conceptual process – one that can at the same time be identified with the unfolding of the history of philosophy – and as a beginning which is nevertheless also said to be an end, insofar as within it all movement comes to rest. Starting from this ambiguous positioning of Spinoza within the framework of Hegel's system, the text asks whether the presence of the Dutch philosopher can be traced in the "universal" that results from the first phenomenological movement of consciousness, and goes on to show that this universal cannot in any way be identified with the universality of Spinozist substance. An analysis of Hegel's appeal to the image of the Eleusinian mysteries makes it possible to show how distant the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is from both Spinozism and Romanticism, both of which are characterized by a lack of determinacy, measure, and discursivity.

Keywords: sense certainty, immediacy, universality, *Substanz*

RIASSUNTO

Ben note sono le affermazioni di Hegel secondo cui lo spinozismo è l'"inizio" della vera filosofia, perché questa non può cominciare se l'anima non si tuffa nell'etere dell'unica sostanza. Ma Spinoza non è solo *Anfang*. Nella Scienza della logica, la sostanza compare sia come l'esito di un lungo percorso concettuale da identificare al contempo con lo sviluppo della storia della filosofia, sia come inizio del quale tuttavia si dice che è anche fine, perché in esso ogni movimento si arresta. Partendo da questa incerta collocazione di Spinoza entro la cornice del sistema di Hegel, il testo si domanda se è possibile riscontrare la presenza del filosofo olandese nell'universale che risulta dal primo movimento fenomenologico della coscienza, e giunge a mostrare come tale universale non possa affatto essere identificato con l'universalità della sostanza spinoziana. L'analisi del ricorso all'immagine dei misteri eleusini consente inoltre di mostrare quanto lontano sia lo Hegel della Fenomenologia e dallo spinozismo e dal romanticismo, entrambi identificati con la mancanza di determinazione, di misura e di discorsività.

Parole chiave: certezza sensibile, immediatezza, universalità, sostanza

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1. L'inizio essenziale del filosofare

Sull'importanza della filosofia di Spinoza per la formazione e lo sviluppo del pensiero di Hegel non ci sono dubbi né disaccordi tra gli interpreti. Non è neanche in discussione il fatto che l'appropriazione hegeliana di Spinoza vada letta alla luce della polemica scatenata dalle *Lettere sulla dottrina di Spinoza* di Jacobi. Come dice Frederick Beiser, queste lettere trasformano la mappa culturale della Germania di fine secolo[1], proprio durante gli anni della formazione secondaria e soprattutto universitaria di Hegel, che infatti a cavallo tra la fine dell'‘80 e gli inizi del ‘90, inizia a scrivere il suo itinerario concettuale in un costante confronto con la dottrina del pensatore di Amsterdam. Dottrina letta, sin da subito, come pensiero che non fa concessioni ai concetti ecclesiastici ortodossi, come modello radicale di razionalità collocatosi in tutto e per tutto dalla parte dell'immanenza, e come esercizio filosofico in grado di accedere alla vera unità. Sin dalla prima giovinezza di Hegel, il pensiero di Spinoza rappresenta dunque la filosofia della sostanza unica, *Standpunkt* in grado di elevarsi al di sopra di tutte le determinatezze e delle ostinate finitezze del senso comune e del filosofare meramente riflessivo.

L'ammirazione e la ripresa della dottrina spinoziana che con accenti diversi accompagnano l'intera formazione e dispiegamento del pensiero hegeliano si condensano, com'è noto, nel famoso adagio delle *Lezioni sulla storia della filosofia*, secondo cui "essere spinoziani è l'inizio essenziale del filosofare", perché "non si comincia a filosofare, senza che l'anima si tuffi anzitutto in quest'etere dell'unica sostanza, in cui è sommerso tutto quel che si era ritenuto vero"[2]. Filosofare dunque è porsi dal punto di vista dello spinozismo e l'identificazione di filosofia e spinozismo è così stretta che Hegel non esita a sostenere: "O spinozismo o nessuna filosofia"[3]. In questo senso, come scriveva Franco Chiereghin, uno tra i più lucidi ed eleganti studiosi italiani del pensiero di Hegel, la filosofia hegeliana rimane sempre, nelle sue strutture fondamentali, un "completamento e un'estensione dello spinozismo secondo i suoi stessi principi"[4].

Ora, se è facile vedere che la filosofia di Spinoza guida e accompagna sin da subito la riflessione di Hegel, più difficile diventa stabilire il "luogo"

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1 Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 44.

2 Georg W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* III, in *Werke in 20 Bänden* (Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 165 (d'ora in poi cit. come *VGP*, seguito dal numero di pagina); *Lezioni sulla storia della filosofia*, trad. it. di E. Codignola e G. Sanna, vol. III.2. (La Nuova Italia, 1981) p. 110 (d'ora in poi cit. come *LSF*, seguito dal numero di pagina).

3 *VGP*, 163-164; *LSF*, 110.

4 Franco Chiereghin, *L'influenza dello spinozismo nella formazione della filosofia hegeliana* (Olschki, 1961), p. 178.

del pensiero dell'olandese nel dispiegamento concettuale hegeliano. Questa difficoltà, che si lascia già scorgere nei primi abbozzi sistematici di Hegel, acquista una dimensione ancor più pregnante allorché la si pensa in relazione al disegno sistematico maturo del filosofo, chiamato ad attuare il programma di un superamento immanente della sostanza di Spinoza. Com'è noto, infatti, Hegel identifica il proprio progetto filosofico con un mostrare il farsi soggetto della sostanza, o, detto nei termini della *Scienza della logica*, con il movimento di confutazione della sostanza, equivalente al rivelarsi della sostanza come "genesi del concetto"[5].

Rispetto a questa questione, gli studiosi hanno spesso sottolineato una doppia posizione di Spinoza nel movimento concettuale del sistema di Hegel: da un lato, la sostanza è punto di arrivo o istanza conclusiva di un percorso di elevazione al di sopra del mondo delle particolarità fenomeniche –in questo senso va letto il capitolo dedicato alla sostanza a conclusione dell'itinerario della logica oggettiva nella *Scienza della logica*–; dall'altro, la posizione del pensiero spinoziano compare come inizio di ogni sviluppo filosofico, poiché se non si è disposti a "rinunciare ad ogni determinato, ad ogni particolare, per riferirsi soltanto all'Uno", non si può intraprendere la strada della filosofia –qui il riferimento è senz'altro alle *Lezioni di storia della filosofia*, dove, come si diceva poc'anzi, la sostanza è "*Anfang*" della filosofia. Eppure, nelle *Lezioni*, come nella cosiddetta *Grande logica*, l'inizio spinoziano è al contempo una fine. È vero che nella *Scienza della logica* Hegel presenta la sostanza come genesi del concetto, ma nella riedizione della *Dottrina dell'essere* scritta poco prima di morire, identificando la posizione dell'essere indeterminato della triade iniziale con lo *Standpunkt* della sostanza spinoziana, sostiene che esso è un inizio che non è inizio di alcunché. Dunque la sostanza è un cominciamento che è al contempo istanza di arresto di ogni movimento, pietra di inciampo di ogni serio movimento concettuale.

In questa incerta collocazione della sostanza –come compimento e come inizio, e come inizio che è al contempo fine perché non consente avanzamento alcuno– c'è da riconoscere probabilmente la presenza di Jacobi. Infatti, Hegel assume fino in fondo sia la tesi jacobiana secondo cui Spinoza rappresenta l'espressione più compiuta e coerente della ragione occidentale e moderna, sia la sua convinzione che la sostanza è espressione di quell'antichissimo *ex nihilo nihil fit*. È in questo senso che Spinoza deve essere pensato sia come compimento, sia come inizio. Del resto, questa collocazione è

[5] Georg W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die subjektive Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 12, hrsg. v. F. Hogemann-W. Jaeschke (Meiner, 1981), p. 15; trad. it. A. Moni, *Scienza della logica*, 2 vol. (Laterza, 2004), p. 652 (d'ora in poi cit. come *SdL*, seguito dal numero di volume e di pagina).

funzionale a una presentazione del proprio progetto filosofico come un superamento della filosofia della sostanza unica.

Si può dire, dunque, che nella posizione di Spinoza nel sistema di Hegel si stratificano diversi livelli di appropriazione. Questi livelli riflettono tra l'altro gli spostamenti che lo stesso progetto sistematico hegeliano subisce dalla sua prima formulazione ai disegni più maturi. Durante il periodo di Tubinga e di Berna, Hegel condivide con Schelling e Hölderlin l'idea che Spinoza rappresenti l'audacia di pensare al di fuori dei dogmi e di innalzarsi al di sopra di un concetto di Dio come "ente personale"[6], e che la sua sostanza sia la strada per il compimento della rivoluzione copernicana iniziata da Kant e della sua "parola d'ordine": "ragione e libertà". Durante il soggiorno francofortese, e soprattutto nei primi anni di Jena, la necessità di combattere la *Zerrissenheit* e l'*Entzweiung* proprie della Modernità –diventate più drammatica allorché la rivoluzione francese, salutata con entusiasmo e speranza da uno Hegel ancora studente universitario, aveva imboccato la strada del terrore– fanno del pensatore di Amsterdam l'alleato ideale contro i dualismi propri della riflessività moderna: la "lucida vigilia di Spinoza" (*das Wachen des Spinoza*) diviene allora la migliore arma per smontare la trappola dualista in cui rimane impelagata la *Bildung* moderna con la sua contrapposizione tra idealismo soggettivo e realismo oggettivo. Il concetto spinoziano di sostanza, scrive Hegel, accede ad un *infinitum actu*, ovvero al vero infinito che, a differenza dell'infinito delle filosofie della riflessione, è tale perché è

[6] Lettera di Hegel a Schelling della fine di gennaio 1795: "Ragione e libertà sono la nostra parola d'ordine, e il nostro punto di incontro la chiesa invisibile"; Georg W.F. Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, Bd. 1:1785-1812 (Meiner, 1969), p. 18 (d'ora in poi cit. come *Briefe*, seguito dal numero di pagina); trad. it. P. Manganaro, *Epistolario I – 1785-1808* (Guida, 1983), p. 111 (d'ora in poi cit. come *Ep*., seguito dal numero di pagina). A riprova del fatto che Hegel, Schelling e Hölderlin leggono la filosofia di Spinoza alla stregua della grande "aurora" spuntata con la filosofia kantiana che porrà fine ai concetti ortodossi di Dio, si veda la lettera di Schelling a Hegel del 4 febbraio 1795, in cui, facendo riferimento alla domanda di Hegel sui rapporti tra prova morale ed ente personale, dice: "Ammetto che la domanda mi ha sorpreso; non me la sarei aspettata da un familiare di Lessing; ma tu l'hai posta proprio per capire se per *me* essa è *del tutto* definita; per te essa già da tempo è certamente risolta. Anche per noi i concetti ortodossi di Dio non esistono più. La mia risposta è: noi arriviamo *più avanti* ancora dell'ente personale". E subito dopo aggiunge: "Nel frattempo sono diventato spino-zista!" (*Briefe*, 21; *Ep*., 115). La possibilità di un superamento dei concetti dogmatici e ortodossi della divinità –ripresa dalla critica kantiana alle prove dell'esistenza di Dio– così come l'accesso ad un incondizionato al quale la filosofia non può rinunciare, vengono riposti nella dottrina della sostanza unica di Spinoza. Questa, infatti, non solo consente una presa di distanza da ogni ortodossia teologica, ma offre al contempo la possibilità di andare oltre l'io e le sue limitazioni soggettive. Si tratta, infatti, scrive Hegel a Schelling, di seguire "la natura stessa della ragione", "che si libra in volo, oltre l'Io" (lettera del 30 agosto 1795, *Ep.*, p. 125).

"assoluta affermazione dell'esistenza di una natura […] [è] assoluto concetto, uguale a se stesso, indivisibile e vero, che comprende entro di sé il particolare o finito secondo la sua essenza ed è unico e indivisibile"[7].

Nelle lezioni e nei testi critici dei primi anni jenesi dunque Hegel vede la dottrina di Spinoza come il grimaldello che scardina le rigide opposizioni della filosofia moderna, e la sostanza, come l'istanza apicale di questo superamento. Pochi anni più tardi, invece, la riabilitazione del principio dell'individualità come principio irrinunciabile del Moderno renderà invece la sostanza il luogo di un'unità che, appunto perché priva di determinazioni, è abisso oscuro e informe, nel quale il mondo con le sue variopinte differenze viene cancellato. È allora che l'unità sostanziale di Spinoza comincia ad essere declassata ad inizio che tuttavia non è inizio di alcunché[8]. La filosofia spinoziana diventa così cominciamento che è al contempo fine; idea che si ritrova nell'*Enciclopedia*, dove la sostanza diviene fondo oscuro e impenetrabile nel quale ogni particolarità sprofonda per non più riemergere.

L'esigenza di determinazione, di ripristino della particolarità e della coscienza, spinge dunque Hegel a prendere le distanze dal pensiero spinoziano. La necessità di affrancarsi da ogni oblio dell'individualità nell'indistinguibile oscurità dell'Uno assoluto allontana il suo pensiero da quello del filosofo dell'*Etica*. L'uno spinoziano che a Jena rappresentava il superamento di ogni dualismo, dalla *Fenomenologia* in poi diviene essere senza pori né attriti. Ma laddove non vi è attrito non vi è discorso, e laddove non vi è discorso, secondo Hegel, lo spirito è sottratto a sé, al suo dispiegarsi e riconoscersi. Lapidarie, in questo senso, le parole della *Prefazione* alla *Fenomenologia*: "Chi pretende di avvolgere nella nebbia la propria varietà dell'esis-

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[7] Georg W.F. Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität, in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen, als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie,* in *Gesammelte Werke,* Bd. 4, hrsg. v. H. Buchner und O. Pöggeler (Meiner, 1968), p. 354 (d'ora in poi cit. come *GuW*); trad. it. di R. Bodei, *Fede e sapere o filosofia della riflessione della soggettività nell'integralità delle sue forme come filosofia di Kant, di Jacobi e di Fichte,* in *Primi scritti critici* (Mursia, 1971), p. 124 (d'ora in poi cit. come *FES*, seguito da numero di pagina). A questa infinitezza vera, aggiunge Hegel, si accede solo mediante intuizione intellettuale: "è l'infinitezza della sostanza e la sua conoscenza è l'intuizione intellettuale". Per una lettura del rapporto tra Hegel e Spinoza durante i primi anni di Jena, mi permetto di rinviare a Sandra V. Palermo, "Razón y modernidad. El joven Hegel entre Spinoza y Kant", *Cogency*: *Journal of Reasoning and Argumentation*, n.1 (2024): 41-56.

[8] Infatti, nella seconda edizione della *Dottrina dell'essenza* Hegel esplicitamente identifica l'essere indeterminato del cominciamento logico con la sostanza di Spinoza, con l'essere parmenideo e con l'Io di Fichte, sostenendo che nei loro principi ogni movimento al contempo si arresta e che dal loro "primo" ogni sviluppo è precluso; *cf.*, Georg W.F. Hegel, *Die Lehre vom Sein (1832),* in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 21, hrsg. v. F. Hogemann-W. Jaeschke (Meiner, 1984), p. 82; *SdL*, I, 85.

tenza terrena e del pensiero, e anela all'indeterminato piacere di questa divinità indeterminata, veda pure dove trovare tutto questo: gli sarà facile trovare il mezzo per fantasticarsi qualcosa e per esaltarsene"[9]. La filosofia, invece, conclude Hegel, deve guardarsi bene da ogni "disprezzo per la misura e la determinazione", deve tenersi alla larga da qualsivoglia "abbandonarsi all'incontenibile fermento della sostanza" che avvolgendo l'autocoscienza in un velo finirà sempre per dissolverla nell'etere indistinto di un sogno senza attriti[10].

Il pensiero hegeliano, dunque, da un'entusiasta adesione alla posizione di Spinoza procede verso una sorta di assorbimento di tale posizione in cui però questa non riesce più a trovare uno spazio preciso e chiaro. Interessante, in questo senso, la tesi di Francesca Michelini, che parla di una progressiva espulsione della sostanza di Spinoza dall'itinerario di realizzazione di sé del concetto hegeliano[11]. In un testo sulla presenza di Spinoza nella *Scienza della logica*, la studiosa italiana mostra come, a dispetto dell'esplicitato progetto hegeliano di mostrare la sostanza come genesi del concetto, Spinoza non si trovi mai tra le pagine della logica, perché quando qualcosa come un movimento o sviluppo logico comincia, la sostanza –scrive Michelini– è già stata confutata. A questo proposito, si potrebbe dire che appunto perché il programma di Hegel consiste nel mostrare il passaggio della sostanza al soggetto, nel suo sistema non vi può essere spazio per la sostanza, ché tutto ciò che sarà da trovare in esso è il movimento del farsi soggetto della sostanza, movimento nel quale essa, come tale, non è punto più.

Sulla falsariga di queste considerazioni vale la pena domandarsi qual è il luogo della sostanza nella *Fenomenologia dello spirito*. In fondo, è proprio nella *Prefazione* a questo testo che Hegel annuncia il suo programma filosofico secondo il quale: "tutto dipende da questo: cogliere ed esprimere il vero

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9 Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 9, hrsg. v. W. Bonsiepen- H. Heede (Meiner, 1980), pp. 13-14 (d'ora in poi cit. come *PdG*, seguita da numero di pagina); trad. it. di G. Garelli, *Fenomenologia dello spirito*, Einaudi, Torino 2008, p. 8 (d'ora in poi cit. come *FdS*).

10 Cf. *PdG*, 14; *FdS*, 9.

11 Francesca Michelini, *Sostanza e assoluto. La funzione di Spinoza nella "Scienza della logica" di Hegel* (EDB, 2003), p. 136. Hermann Braun, nel suo *Spinozismus in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*, sostiene che "lo sprofondare di tutte le determinatezze nell'abisso dello spinozismo, consigliato [da Hegel] come esercizio del pensare è certamente da intendere come una anticipazione del percorso della logica […]", ma soltanto nel senso che "colui che riflette deve attribuirsi la facoltà di lasciare da parte tutte le determinazioni"; "Spinozismus in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik", *Hegel-Studien*, 17 (1982): 53-74, qui, p. 70. Mi permetto di rinviare anche a Sandra V. Palermo, "La sostanza come genesi del concetto. Sulla lettura hegeliana di Spinoza nella *Wesenslogik*", in *System und Logik bei Hegel*, ed. by L. Fonnesu-L. Ziglioli (Olms, 2016), 193-212.

non come *sostanza*, ma anzi propriamente come *soggetto*"[12]. È nella *Fenomenologia* dunque che il progetto di un superamento immanente della sostanza comincia a prendere corpo. Benintesi, né nel passaggio della *Prefazione* dove parla della sostanza come tale che include immediatezza del sapere e dell'essere, né altrove nel testo del 1807 Hegel fa il nome di Spinoza[13]. Ma non poteva essere altrimenti, visto che le figure fenomenologiche non rappresentano posizioni filosofiche specifiche[14]. Vi è dunque qualche figura, all'interno del percorso fenomenologico che rifletta la posizione di Spinoza? E dove si collocherà tale figura: all'inizio o alla fine dell'itinerario della coscienza? Sono queste le domande che mi pongo nelle pagine che seguono.

Si tratta, va detto subito, di una problematica troppo vasta e sfaccettata per poter essere affrontata in modo esaustivo nel contesto di un lavoro così breve. Mi concentrerò dunque solo sulla prima figura della *Fenomenologia*, ovvero la certezza sensibile. Questa posizione esprime senz'altro una veduta opposta a quella spinoziana; ma appunto per questo, nel superamento della *sinnliche Gewissheit*, qualche interprete ha visto la sostanza di Spinoza. In effetti, se la certezza sensibile rappresenta la coscienza che pone il vero o l'essenziale nell'immediatezza di un "questo" e l'esito e il rovesciamento dialettico di questa figura approdano ad un universale in cui ogni "questo" si dissolve, quell'universale dovrebbe assumere le sembianze della sostanza così come la intende Spinoza, come "etere" in cui ogni particolare cola a picco. Eppure, mi piacerebbe mostrare che se la sostanza fa capolino in queste pagine, lo fa per subito scomparire, ché l'universale che dialetticamente risulta dal primo scuotersi della coscienza dal torpore sensibile è già per Hegel mediazione e discorsività.

Se la mia lettura è corretta il percorso della certezza sensibile non solo esplicita il superamento del "questo" dei sensi, ma rivela al contempo il congedo hegeliano da ogni forma di immediatezza e da ogni pretesa di

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12 *PdG*, 18; *FdS*, 13.

13 Il riferimento più chiaro a Spinoza che compare in queste pagine, in cui si dice che la sostanza include l'immediatezza dell'essere e immediatezza del pensare, si trova nel passaggio in cui si rammenta l'indignazione dell'epoca dinanzi alla concezione di Dio come sostanza unica; cf. *PdG*, 18; *FdS*, 14.

14 Come ha ben messo in evidenza Sergio Landucci, le figure sono modi di percepire e di agire nella realtà che hanno un carattere non individuale, ma collettivo ed epocale. Non rappresentano neanche posizioni semplicemente erronee, fallaci o illusorie; anzi, nella misura in cui esprimono una visione del mondo fondata attorno ad un principio logico organizzatore, presentano una struttura unitaria ed una coerenza interna. Da questo punto di vista, in nessuna figura sarà dato trovare un'unica dottrina filosofica, perché in esse si tratta di 'modelli' di dottrine, forme 'ideal-tipiche' che restituiscono un modo di percezione o di reazione al mondo effettivo, inteso a partire da un suo tratto dominante; Sergio Landucci, *Hegel: la coscienza e la storia. Approssimazione alla "Fenomenologia dello spirito"* (La Nuova Italia, 1976), p. 15 e ss.

afferrare la totalità dell'essere in una puntualità inestesa e irrelata da cogliere istantaneamente. In questo senso, la certezza sensibile è anche rifiuto di qualsivoglia concetto di Assoluto pensato nei termini di un *Essere* o di un *Anfang* da cogliere in un'intuizione intellettuale. Tale concetto è proprio quello che Hegel aveva attribuito a Spinoza negli scritti dei primi anni jenesi e in virtù del quale presentava la sostanza come il punto apicale della metafisica.

D'altro canto, il riferimento ai misteri e ai segreti eleusini con il quale si chiude la prima figura fenomenologica funge da cartina di tornasole che consente di misurare la distanza tra lo Hegel degli anni di Francoforte e lo Hegel che scrive la *Fenomenologia dello spirito*, ché d'ora in poi non vi è spazio per l'ineffabile o l'esoterico. Lo svolgimento della certezza sensibile, mostrando il carattere negativo e quindi mediato di ogni universale, pone una pietra tombale su qualsivoglia tentativo di porre il vero al di là della discorsività, nell'oblio senza parola né immagini di un'immensità indicibile.

Si può dire allora che nella *sinnliche Gewissheit* non solo è in gioco la confutazione dell'immediato sensibile e dell'essere sostanziale di Spinoza, letto, per l'appunto, come questa immensità informe; qui si misura anche la distanza dello Hegel fenomenologico dallo Hegel degli anni giovanili, poiché per il primo l'uno senza determinazioni né porosità diventa mera velleità romantica e vuota. Da questo punto di vista, per lo Hegel che scrive la *Fenomenologia dello spirito*, filosofia spinoziana e progetto romantico rappresentano un passato che deve essere superato: quello in cui non c'era posto per la discorsività e quindi per lo spirituale.

2. Dal "questo" all'universale

Hegel apre la certezza sensibile distinguendo tra "accogliere" (*Auffassen*), che è "sapere immediato" (*unmittelbares Wissen*), e "comprendere concettuale" (*Begreifen*)[15]. Tale distinzione, va rammentato, si iscrive entro la struttura dei primi capoversi del capitolo, che hanno sempre un carattere logico e parlano a quel «noi», il cui compito è un "puro stare a vedere" il movimento della coscienza. I capoversi introduttivi di ciascuna figura si presentano infatti come un riassunto del percorso svolto, richiamano i risultati acquisiti da esso e presentano il movimento ancora da compiere nella figura in questione. Nel caso specifico della certezza sensibile Hegel anticipa in questi primi capoversi che nonostante questa coscienza creda di essere la più "*veritiera*", perché ha il sapere più pieno o colmo, essa si scoprirà in realtà come la "*verità* più bassa

[15] *PdG*, 63; *FdS*, 69.

e più povera"[16]. Ed è la verità più infima appunto perché non può se non limitarsi ad attestare il mero essere della cosa: "Di ciò che essa sa, non enuncia che questo: 'esso *è*; e la sua verità contiene unicamente *l'essere* della cosa"[17]. Questo essere viene presentato da Hegel come "*puro essere*" (*reines Sein*), sì che l'inizio della *Fenomenologia* richiama da vicino l'apertura della *Scienza della logica* a partire da un essere che è mero e vuoto essere, senza determinazioni né qualità.

Va rammentato che allorché parla di "verità" della certezza sensibile come il "puro essere", questo genitivo va preso come genitivo soggettivo. Si tratta di ciò che la certezza sensibile prende come vero, ciò che le si presenta dapprima come "in sé" o come "essenza"; ciò della cui nullità, del resto, essa farà esperienza. La certezza è convinta che nell'apprensione immediata della cosa essa coglie l'essere come tale, è convinta che nel *questo* le è dato l'essere o, altrimenti detto, che l'essere le si rivela come *questo*. Da qui che tale coscienza pensi di essere la più ricca e veritiera, perché intende (*meint*) di afferrare, nel singolare sensibile, immediatamente anche l'universale. La certezza sensibile ha in mente (opina) che nel singolo essa fa esperienza della totalità dell'essere nella sua pienezza e unità originaria:

> Tale conoscenza appare (*erscheint*) inoltre come la *più veritiera* (*wahrhafteste*); infatti essa non ha ancora tralasciato nulla dell'oggetto, ma anzi lo ha di fronte a sé nella sua totale completezza (*hat* […] *ihn in seiner ganzen Vollständigkeit vor sich*)[18].

Ora, il ricorso al linguaggio nelle prime due esperienze della certezza sensibile consente a Hegel di mostrare come non vi sia affatto quell'immediatezza e omogeneità che la certezza sensibile pretende. Né il *questo* né il *questi* sono soltanto immediatamente, ma sempre e solo come mediati l'uno dall'altro e l'uno nell'altro: "Io ho la certezza *per mezzo di* qualcosa d'altro, cioè tramite la cosa; e questa allo stesso modo è nella certezza *per mezzo di* qualcosa d'altro, ossia tramite l'Io"[19]. In questo contesto Hegel scrive che la certezza sensibile pretende di attestare e accogliere il *puro essere* come unità immediata, ma che basta stare a vedere per capire come in quel suo esperire, che si pretende pura e diretta immediatezza, "molto altro v'è ancora in gioco"; ché l'immediato è

[16] *PdG*, 63; *FdS*, 69.
[17] *PdG*, 63; *FdS*, 69.
[18] *PdG*, 63; *FdS*, 69.
[19] *PdG*, 64; *FdS*, 70.

da sempre fuori di sé, è mediato, relato ed implica, in quanto tale, differenza[20].

A dire il vero, non basta "stare a guardare". È necessario chiedere a questa certezza: "*che cos'è il questo*?"[21]. È una domanda, dunque, quella che, socraticamente, spinge la coscienza ad abbandonare il torpore nel quale è immersa. E non appena essa cerca di rispondere, ogni immemore immediatezza è già stata spazzata via. Hegel ha infatti buon gioco nel far vedere come nessun enunciato si mantenga: "*l'adesso è la notte*", "il *qui* è […] l'*albero*" dileguano. Anzi l'*adesso* e il *qui* si conservano, ma non come l'adesso che è la notte o il qui che è l'albero, bensì come l'*adesso* che, proprio perché *non è* la notte, può essere sì la notte, ma anche il mezzogiorno e la sera; e come il *qui* che, proprio in quanto *non è* l'albero, può essere sia l'albero, che la casa, che la barca o la scrivania. L'ora (*Jetzt*) si conserva in quanto è sempre un *non ora*; così come il qui (*Hier*) si conserva in quanto è sempre un *non qui*. Questo è ciò che Hegel presenta come un "*negativo* in generale", sostenendo che appunto perché esso si mantiene sempre "*tramite il fatto* che altro […] non è" –l'ora, per esempio, si mantiene in quanto non ora, non ora, non ora– siamo di fronte ad una "semplicità" che "è per negazione" (*durch Negation*). A questa semplicità che si mantiene mediante il suo non essere, scrive Hegel, "noi diamo il nome di *universale*"; ma non nel senso di qualcosa di immediato, "bensì come qualcosa a cui sono essenziali la negazione e la mediazione"[22].

Questa dialettica dell'*adesso* e del *qui* è ancora più esplicita nella terza esperienza della certezza sensibile, ovvero l'indicare. Presentata da Hegel come tale che l'immediatezza esclude qui anche ogni confronto con un altro

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[20] Sono interessanti le espressioni usate da Hegel in questo capoverso: da un lato, si insiste sul fatto che nel "*puro essere*" come essenza e verità che la certezza sensibile enuncia (*aussagt*), "molto altro vi è ancora in gioco" (*An dem reinen Sein* […] spielt […] *noch vieles andere* beiher), ché la certezza sensibile "non è soltanto questa pura immediatezza, ma è anche un *esempio* (*Beispiel*) di ciò che è in gioco in quell'immediatezza" (*PdG*, 64; *FdS*, 70); dall'altro, gli esempi "ricadono subito fuori" (*fallen heraus*). Dunque la certezza sensibile concreta non è mai quell'immediatezza che pretende, ma è sempre e soltanto un *Beispiel* di essa, perché è sempre un *questo* o un *questi*, un *qui* o un *ora* che cadono già sempre, in quanto tali, fuori da questa immediatezza (*Bei-spiele*, per l'appunto). La certezza sensibile nel suo dire –ma anche nell'indicare– è già fuori dalla sua pretesa immediatezza e unità. Ma –e questo è ciò che intendo sostenere in questo lavoro– non nel senso che vi è un immediato che rimane oltre il linguaggio e altro da esso, irraggiungibile dalla parola, nella sua compatta e chiusa datità, bensì nel senso che se la coscienza è tale –ovvero, non mera natura, ma coscienza–, essa non rimane attaccata alla puntualità e-statica dell'evento, ma si muove sempre nello spazio plurale di una relazionalità mediata.

[21] *PdG* 64; *FdS*, 71.

[22] *PdG*, 65; *FdS*, 71-72.

adesso o un altro qui, la terza esperienza della certezza sensibile fa i conti con una coscienza completamente 'ferma' alla sua costatazione, che è tutt'uno con questa sua certezza. Ora, infatti, non c'è neanche enunciazione e la coscienza si limita ad "indicare" (*zeigen*), sicché a noi, scrive Hegel, non rimane che "insinuarci nel medesimo punto del tempo o dello spazio, e farci indicare quella verità"[23]. Ma pure in questo caso, nell'atto stesso di indicarlo l'adesso è già dissolto:

> *Adesso*: ma questo, mentre viene indicato, ha cessato di essere. L'*adesso* che *è* è diverso da quello che viene indicato, e noi vediamo che l'adesso consiste propriamente in ciò, nel non essere già più, nel momento in cui è. L'adesso, per come ci viene indicato, è qualcosa che è *stato*; e questa è la sua verità[24].

Ancora una volta, la consistenza –il mantenersi– dell'*ora* risiede nel suo essere sempre un *'non ora'*; o, come scrive Hegel, nell'essere una "pluralità di ora raccolti insieme" (*Vielheit von Itzt zusammengefaßt*)[25]. Dove per pluralità non va inteso una somma meramente esteriore; piuttosto si tratta di una totalità che contiene, nella forma del negativo, ogni ora; o, come detto prima, che è ogni ora perché non è nessun ora:

> Il 'qui', mentalmente inteso (*das gemeint wird*), sarebbe il punto (*Punkt*); esso però non *è*, anzi, nel momento in cui viene indicato come essente (*seiend*), l'indicare fa mostra di essere non già sapere immediato, bensì un movimento che va dal 'qui' mentalmente inteso (*von dem gemeinten Hier aus*), attraverso molti 'qui', al 'qui' universale (*allgemeine Hier*)– che è una pluralità semplice di 'qui' (*einfache Vielheit der Itzt*) […][26].

Il movimento dell'esperienza della certezza sensibile si presenta dunque come superamento di ogni immediatezza sensibile, intesa come un singolare assoluto e irrelato, fermo nella sua autosufficiente consistenza. Tale imme-

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[23] *PdG*, 67; *FdS*, 75.

[24] *PdG*, 67; *FdS*, 75.

[25] Anche il "qui" è una pluralità di qui raccolti insieme: "non è precisamente *questo* 'qui', ma è un avanti e un dietro, un sopra e un sotto, una destra e una sinistra". Questo essere una pluralità di ora o di qui raccolti insieme è ciò che fa dell'adesso e del qui un "complesso semplice" (*einfache Komplexion*); termine che pare ricalcare l'idea kantiana dello spazio e del tempo come "unità collettive": non una somma meramente esteriore di spazi e tempi, ma un tutto in cui ogni parte, per esempio ogni punto dello spazio, è anch'esso spazio, è anch'esso tutto. Tale carattere di complesso semplice sembra indicare in Hegel la necessità della *forma* affinché il *contenuto* sensibile possa costituirsi; così come l'unità collettiva indica un tutto unitario solo entro il quale le sue parti si possono costituire come tali.

[26] *PdG*, 68; *FdS*, 76.

diatezza è già sempre solo come mediazione, è sempre entro una rete di connessioni, che alla fine del percorso del momento della coscienza si mostrerà posta dall'intelletto e dalle sue leggi –e che alla fine dell'intero movimento fenomenologico si rivelerà attività spirituale–. A conclusione della certezza sensibile, Hegel individua il guadagno di questa figura nella confutazione dell'idea "che la realtà o l'essere di cose-oggetto esterne (*äussern Dinge*), in quanto sono *queste*, ossia sensibili, hanno verità assoluta per la coscienza". Infatti, sostiene il filosofo: "un'affermazione di questo tipo già non sa quel che asserisce: non sa cioè di dire il contrario di quanto vuol dire"[27]. Vuol dire il *questo*, dice invece *un* universale:

> Per la coscienza, la verità di *questo* sensibile dev'essere esperienza universale (*allgemeine Erfahrung*); ma a essere esperienza universale è piuttosto il contrario […] in ogni certezza sensibile non si esperimenta altro da quanto abbiamo visto, ossia il *questo* come un *universale* che è proprio il contrario di ciò che quell'affermazione garantisce essere esperienza universale[28].

Questo universale però è per l'appunto *un* universale; ovvero è negatività. Negatività grazie alla quale vi è qualcosa come un movimento fenomenologico che configura l'innalzamento della coscienza alla scienza. Negatività in virtù della quale la coscienza non rimane intrappolata nella dimensione di mera naturalità, come datità immediata e sensibile. Ecco la prima, incipiente "saggezza" che la coscienza acquisisce: il sensibile come puntualità immediata non è; l'immediatezza come tale non è. Saggezza, questa, che non sfugge neanche agli animali, secondo Hegel. Infatti, essi "non rimangono fermi alle cose-oggetto sensibili (*Ding*), in quanto essenti in sé (*als in sich seienden*), ma disperando di tale realtà, e nella piena certezza della loro nullità (*Nichtigkeit*) vi si protendono e se ne provvedono senz'altro per consumarle"[29]. Nemmeno l'animale dunque rimane irretito al dato immediato e sensibile. La vita come tale è consumo e trasformazione di qualsivoglia datità.

Ma oltre all'animale Hegel chiama in causa ciò che presenta come la "più bassa delle scuole di saggezza", ovvero quella dei rituali eleusini. Si tratta, scrive a questo punto il filosofo, di "un'anticipazione"; quasi a rammentare che di quella spinta ad uscire da sé e a non rimanere chiusi nella compatta e muta opacità del questo –spinta che fa della coscienza *naturale* pur sempre una *coscienza* e dunque "l'esserci immediato dello spirito"–, non si può render conto entro la prospettiva specifica della coscienza. Si dovrà

[27] *PdG*, 69; *FdS*, 76-77.
[28] *PdG*, 69; *FdS*, 77.
[29] *PdG*, 69; *FdS*, 77.

infatti giungere all'autocoscienza per capire che tutto l'esperire precedente, dalla certezza sensibile all'intelletto –dalla singolarità sensibile alla legge, passando per l'universale condizionato della percezione–, aveva la sua radice in un'autocoscienza come *desiderio*, dunque come attività vitale e impulso, come trascendenza di sé. Ad ogni modo, Hegel equipara la saggezza degli animali a quella degli iniziati dei misteri eleusini perché entrambi disperano della realtà degli "essenti in sé" e della "loro nullità". È per questo che, "come loro, l'intera natura celebra la rivelazione di questi misteri, che insegnano quale sia appunto la verità delle cose-oggetto sensibili"[30].

Può questa prima "verità" della certezza sensibile venir identificata con la sostanza di Spinoza? Non vi è infatti in questo primo guadagno del movimento fenomenologico un riferimento a quel tuffo nell'etere dell'unica sostanza in cui ogni individualità e particolarità sensibile si dissolve e senza il quale la filosofia non può cominciare?

3. L'universale come mediazione

In un articolo di alcuni anni orsono, *Spinozist Pantheism and the Truth of "Sense Certainty"*, Brady Bowman presenta "la verità" della certezza sensibile come la sostanza di Spinoza[31]. Secondo lo studioso, oltre a contrapporsi a qualsivoglia forma di realismo e di aconcettualismo, la *sinnliche Gewissheit* mira a mostrare che l'individualità sensibile non ha alcuna genuina esistenza o consistenza metafisica[32] e, da questo punto di vista, l'universalità astratta che risulta dal suo movimento sarebbe da identificare con il monismo sostanziale di Spinoza così com'esso viene interpretato da Hegel[33]. Secondo Bowman, dunque, nell'esito della certezza sensibile si può riconoscere lo spinozismo così come lo intende Hegel, ovvero come "intuizione del fenomeno sensibile della natura in quanto espressione non in sé di una sostanza unica che

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30 *PdG*, 69; *FdS*, 77.

31 Brady Bowman, "Spinozist Pantheism and the Truth of 'Sense Certainty': What Eleusinian Mysteries Tell us about Hegel's *Phenomenology*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 50, n.1, 2012, pp. 85-110.

32 Ciò che si dovrebbe imparare da questa figura è non solo che "le cose singolari esterne non hanno alcuna verità per la coscienza", ma che esse sono "'nullità' metafisiche e non hanno alcuna esistenza genuina", Bowman, "Spinozist Pantheism", 86. Per realismo qui s'intende una posizione secondo cui "l'immediata datità degli items individuali dell'esperienza sensibile è la forma paradigmatica ed epistemicamente fondativa della coscienza". Per aconcettualismo, invece, si intende una posizione che pensa la ricchezza fenomenica della certezza sensibile come "non mediata da concetti o da altre funzioni dell'intelletto", Bowman, "Spinozist Pantheism", 93.

33 L'articolo riprende l'interpretazione svolta in Brady Bowman, *Sinnliche Gewissheit. Zur systematischen Vorgeschichte eines Problems des deutschen Idealismus* (Akademie Verlag, 2003).

soggiace indifferente come fondamento di tale fenomeno"[34]. Infatti, l'universale al quale giunge la coscienza mediante il suo esperire sarebbe dunque da intendere nel senso di quell'indifferente "*Sein in allem Dasein*" che secondo Jacobi caratterizzava la sostanza di Spinoza[35].

Come abbiamo visto in precedenza, diversi elementi della prima figura fenomenologica rimandano al modo in cui Hegel legge la filosofia spinoziana, primo fra tutti, l'idea che l'individualità sensibile non è. Idea che lungo tutta l'opera hegeliana a partire dal 1801 viene pensata come acquisizione irrinunciabile dello *Standpunkt* di Spinoza, ovvero il riconoscimento che la "determinazione è negazione"[36]. Se la verità cui approda la certezza sensibile è che non vi è qualcosa come un mero dato da afferrare immediatamente, e se Spinoza insegna che non vi è filosofia se l'anima non si tuffa nell'etere della sostanza unica in cui ogni determinato e ogni individualità scompaiono, la presenza del filosofo di Amsterdam in queste pagine sarebbe quasi scontata. Eppure, credo che sarebbe un errore identificare il "risultato" della certezza sensibile con l'essere astratto e universale di spinoziana memoria. E mi sembra che è proprio il riferimento al "segreto" appreso dagli iniziati dei rituali eleusini ciò che consente di mettere in evidenza la distanza tra l'universale che risulta da questo primo movimento fenomenologico e quello che Hegel attribuisce a Spinoza. Infatti, benché verità della certezza sensibile sia la nullità dell'essere sensibile, l'universale di cui parla qui Hegel è già mediazione discorsiva. Ciò che conta, dunque, non è tanto il riconoscimento che il sensibile nella sua immediata datità non ha consistenza propria né privilegio da serbare, ma il fatto che non vi è datità se non mediata dalla negatività. Gli antichi misteri eleusini di Cerere e Bacco rappresentano dunque "la più bassa scuola di saggezza" e in qualche modo sono gli animali a mostrare meglio la nullità di ogni "in sé", nella loro seppur inconsapevole attività divoratrice in cui ogni datità viene trasfigurata dall'attività.

Se la mia interpretazione è corretta, il movimento della certezza sensibile va letto sì come confutazione dell'immediatezza sensibile, ma anche

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[34] Bowman, *Sinnliche Gewissheit*, 23.

[35] Bowman, *Sinnliche Gewissheit*, 23.

[36] Da *Fede e sapere* alla *Scienza della logica*, la sostanza di Spinoza compare a Hegel come istanza di nullificazione di ogni determinatezza e in questo senso come *Standpunkt* irrinunciabile per ogni vera filosofia. Per quanto riguarda *Fede e sapere*, la contrapposizione tra il "volgare empirismo" di Jacobi e l'idealismo di Spinoza per il quale il finito e il sensibile sono nulla, è il filo conduttore di tutto il capitolo dedicato a Jacobi; cf. *GuW*, 347-386; *FeS*, 165-216. Per quanto riguarda la *Scienza della logica*, si veda la nota nel capitolo dedicato sull'Assoluto, in cui Hegel pronuncia la celebre sentenza secondo cui il principio assoluto della filosofia spinoziana è che "la determinatezza è negazione"; Georg W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die objektive Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 11, hrsg. v. F. Hogemann-W. Jaeschke, Meiner, Hamburg 1878, p. 379; *SdL II*, 604.

come dismissione di qualsivoglia immediato intellettuale o metafisico. Nell'anticipazione contenuta nel riferimento ai misteri eleusini non è la dissoluzione del dato a venir sottolineata, ma il fatto che esso è sempre e solo come trasfigurato, "divorato" per l'appunto dall'attività spirituale. E da questo punto di vista, la chiusa della certezza sensibile consente di vedere la lunga strada che separa questo Hegel da quello degli anni di Berna o Francoforte. Nei riferimenti alla saggezza eleusina, infatti, c'è poco o nulla di quella brama per l'uno assoluto e senza determinazioni da cui muoveva il pensiero dello Hegel giovanile e che ora il filosofo identifica con la sostanza di Spinoza.

Nell'agosto del 1796, poco prima di trasferirsi a Francoforte e felice del fatto che di lì a poco avrebbe rivisto il vecchio amico di Tubinga[37], Hegel invia a Hölderlin un poemetto dal titolo *Eleusis*. In questo testo troviamo diversi elementi che poi ricompariranno nell'ultima paginetta della certezza sensibile; solo che nei versi giovanili essi assumono un significato opposto a quello che assumeranno nella *Fenomenologia*. *Eleusis*, infatti, è tutto nel segno di un notturno in cui sfumano i contrasti e i confini del mondo diurno e in cui s'insinuano i "segreti" che mai possono esser detti: "si perde il senso nel contemplare, / si dissolve quel che dicevo 'mio', ed io mi abbandono all'immenso: sono in lui, sono tutto, sono solo lui"[38]. Hegel parla qui non solo di un infinito che si ritrae "estraneo al pensiero", ma anche di uno stupefatto contemplare che vorrebbe intendere le rivelazioni della dea e spiegare "l'alto senso delle [s]ue immagini", ma non può, perché le porte del suo santuario sono chiuse e i suoi vestiboli muti: "tace la saggezza dei tuoi sacerdoti; / nessuna parola delle sacre iniziazioni si è serbata per noi –e invano la cerca / la curiosità dello scienziato". Del vero, del sacro, di ciò che è più alto, scrive Hegel, non vi può essere parola, e nemmeno immagine. Queste "scavano" alla ricerca del "segreto recondito", ma è invano: "solo polvere e cenere essi trovano / ove la tua vita non ritorna mai"[39].

Come in altri testi hegeliani della fine del diciannovesimo secolo, il discorso compare qui come qualcosa che tradisce il vero senso dell'essere, la

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[37] "S'avanza verso di me, o caro, il tuo viso / e la gioia di giorni fuggiti; e subito cede / alle più dolci speranze del rivederti. / Già si dipinge innanzi a me la scena del caloroso desiato abbraccio, dell'interrogare, del segreto reciproco spiare / se il portamento, l'espressione, il sentimento dell'amico / il tempo abbia mutato", Georg W.F. Hegel, *Frühe Schriften I*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. I, hrsg. v. F. Nicolin-G. Schüler (Meiner, 1989), pp. 399-402 (cit. come *FS*, seguito dal numero di pagina); trad. it. E. Mirri, *Scritti giovanili*, Ortothes, Napoli 2015, pp. 407-409 (cit. come *SG*, seguito dal numero di pagina).

[38] *FS*, 400; *SG*, 408.

[39] *FS*, 401; SG, 408.

parola è "povertà", "vuota chiacchiera" che riduce ciò che è santo a qualcosa di piccolo. Per questo, rammenta Hegel, all'iniziato ai misteri eleusini era vietato "rendere palese / quel che quella notte santa aveva *visto, udito, provato*". Gli "aridi segni" del dire sono incapaci di cogliere "la profondità dell'inesprimibile sentimento"[40]. Nel discorrere monotono e prosaico delle parole, il vero diventa "giocattolo e merce del sofista / che lo venderebbe per pochi baiocchi, / mantello dell'ipocrita eloquente, o addirittura / frusta per il gioioso fanciullo"[41]. Il "segreto" della dea è dunque affidato a pochi eletti e può essere custodito solo nella memoria. Non può esser detto, ne può essere posseduto. Non si dà alla curiosità dei mercanti, né si lascia eviscerare nell'analisi fredda del ricercatore. Dinanzi ad esso la bocca tace "tremante" e il "pensiero più non segue l'anima / che fuori del tempo e dello spazio / nel presagio dell'infinito immersa, se stessa oblia"[42].

Nulla di questo sentimento oceanico che invadeva *Eleusis* rimane a mio avviso nel percorso fenomenologico. Nel doloroso itinerario di formazione della coscienza non vi è spazio per quell'esoterismo ebbro di entusiasmo dinanzi a ciò che si sottrae a ogni discorso. Anzi, il progetto filosofico hegeliano è ora tutto intento a smontare la convinzione di un sacro –nel linguaggio più maturo, di un vero– che non si lasci dire o catturare dalla povertà prosaica delle parole. Nella certezza sensibile, come abbiamo visto, la consistenza gnoseologica e ontologica di ogni in sé sensibile si sgretola. Ma lo stesso accade a qualsivoglia in sé come tale. In questo senso dico che la prima figura fenomenologica è anche critica dell'idea di un 'essere puro e semplice', di hölderliniana memoria, confutazione di qualsivoglia immensità irrelata, senza limite né misura. Non è certo un caso se alla fine della certezza sensibile Hegel scrive che "ciò che viene chiamato l'ineffabile altro non è che il non-vero, il non-razionale, il mero contenuto mentale". Il che va inteso, a mio avviso, non nel senso di un x che eccede il dire, ma nel senso che oltre la mediazione discorsiva nulla è[43]. E appunto perché non vi è spazio per qualcosa come un "in sé" –né sensibile, né intelligibile–, non vi è spazio per l'intuizione intellettuale. Così come non vi è spazio per alcuna saggezza disponibile a pochi *eletti*, né vi è alcun mistero da serbare "nell'intimo santuario del cuore", ché lo spirito è "grande soltanto quanto lo è la sua estrinsecazione"[44], ovvero esso non vive in un mistero inafferrabile ai più, ma

[40] *FS*, 401; *SG*, 409.
[41] *FS*, 401; *SG*, 409.
[42] *FS*, 401; SG, 409.
[43] *PdG*, 70; *FdS*, 78. Ciò che non si può dire non è e ogni separazione tra essere e parola viene meno. Da questo punto di vista, in Hegel non c'è spazio per quel wittgensteiniano "di ciò di cui non si può parlare si deve tacere".
[44] *PdG*, 14; *FdS*, 8.

in ciò che è "compiutamente determinato" e "nel contempo essoterico". Lo spirito è ciò che "può essere compreso concettualmente ed è suscettibile d'essere imparato e di essere proprietà di tutti"[45], è ciò che coglie e sa sé proprio in quanto si espande ponendosi fuori di sé.

Ecco dunque il "segreto recondito nel mangiare il pane e nel bere il vino" di cui parla Hegel nell'ultima pagina della certezza sensibile e che diversi interpreti hanno collegato al quasi omonimo poema hölderliniano. Tale segreto consiste nel mostrare che l'immediato non è se non nella sua trasfigurazione, ovvero non è se non nella e come mediazione. A livello del momento della "Religione" tale mediazione verrà presentata come condensata dapprima nel sacrificio naturale dei rituali dionisiaci e, poi, nel rituale cristiano dell'ultima cena, come rappresentazione della morte e resurrezione di Gesù. E qui si renderà evidente che pane e vino come immediate datità singole e sensibili non sono. Sono soltanto nel movimento costitutivo della comunità che nell'attività di mangiarli e renderli il suo nutrimento si riconosce come tale[46].

Da questo punto di vista, il movimento della certezza sensibile sottolinea il definitivo congedo di Hegel da ogni forma di sostanzialismo statico, in cui l'individualità o viene affermata come ciò che unicamente è vero o viene sacrificata nell'altare dell'unità del tutto. Se il punto di partenza della certezza sensibile risiedeva nella convinzione dell'afferrabilità immediata del *questo* come vero, ciò di cui tale coscienza farà esperienza è del fatto che ogniqualvolta presume di aver appreso tale immediato, questo le si è "già" trasfigurato, sì che quel *questo* che si pretendeva "esperienza universale" (*allgemeine Erfahrung*) si rivela invece "*un universale*" (*ein Allgemeines*), inteso ora come "negativo in generale" o come "complesso semplice" (*einfache Komplexion*), ovvero come la cosa-oggetto della percezione. In quanto "negativo in generale", l'universale cui giunge il movimento della certezza sensibile non può tuttavia venir identificato con la sostanza di Spinoza, la quale, dal punto di vista di Hegel, è pura positività, pura affermazione, carente di negatività[47].

Il riferimento ai rituali bacchici non ha più il significato francofortese di dissoluzione del singolare nel tutto, del sé nell'uno indifferenziato; piuttosto indica che la spiritualità comporta l'annientamento di ogni immediatezza, l'annientamento di ogni 'naturalità' o datità. Detto altrimenti, nell'annichili-

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45 *PdG*, 15; *FdS*, 10.

46 "La natura, nell'utilità per cui essa può essere mangiata e bevuta, raggiunge la sua suprema perfezione: in tutto ciò infatti essa è la possibilità di un'esistenza superiore, e viene a contatto con l'essere spirituale", *PdG*, 386; *FdS*, 472-473.

47 *GuW*, 354; *FeS*, 175.

mento di ogni «questo» come «in sé» è all'opera il prodursi del sé[48]. Come detto prima, per cogliere il significato del riferimento hegeliano ai misteri di Cerere e Bacco nel contesto della certezza sensibile occorre leggerlo alla luce del richiamo agli animali: nonostante il loro mutismo, essi si mostrano «iniziati nella maniera più profonda», perché «non rimangono fermi innanzi alle cose-oggetto sensibili, in quanto essenti in sé»[49], ma provvedono a consumarle. Anzi, il riferimento alla vita come divorazione di ogni immediatezza costituisce la chiave per cogliere che non si tratta più, per Hegel, di un superamento dell'immediatezza e della datità sensibile mediante lo sprofondare nel notturno infinito di un essere che tutto contiene. Ciò che al filosofo preme ora è sottolineare che non vi è alcun *primum* come dato in sé; il *primum* è piuttosto la negatività che in quanto attività comincia a emergere come *vis* nel vivente come tale; impulso ad andar *oltre* sé, desiderio che troverà compimento solo "nella perfetta libertà e autonomia della propria antitesi, cioè di diverse autocoscienze che sono per sé"[50]. Non l'unità sostanziale spinoziana in cui il finito dilegua è qui in gioco, ma quella negatività che alimenta il movimento fenomenologico e che sconquassa *ab initio* ogni dato, ogni mero "in sé", ogni essere.

Dunque, già a livello dell'acquisizione dialettica della coscienza sensibile, Hegel lascia in chiaro che il *primum* non è la cosa o l'in sé, anzi non vi è in sé se non come attività di un porsi come tale. E quest'attività –ma la coscienza lo scoprirà più avanti– è lo spirito. Lo spirito, come dirà Hegel, è un «*Io* che è *Noi*, e *Noi* che è *Io*», e che in quanto tale, si costituisce nel desiderante incontro / scontro e non nella fusione dissolutrice delle differenze; nella parola e non nel silenzio; nell'agire individuale e collettivo e non nell'attesa muta dinanzi alle porte del santuario.

L'adesione all'immediatezza piatta che proprio in quanto tale per Hegel è negazione dello spirituale è ciò che rende la certezza sensibile la figura più bassa e più povera del percorso fenomenologico; una figura caratterizzata da un torpore che soltanto una domanda riesce a scuotere. Non appena cerca di rispondere al quesito che le viene posto, la certezza innesca un movimento che spazza via la sua muta convinzione, mostrandole che la pretesa di qualsivoglia "in sé", chiuso nella sua ermetica e compatta realtà, appartiene all'ordine dell'"opinare" o del *bloss Gemeinten*, di ciò che non può essere né

[48] "La placida essenza della natura priva del Sé guadagna nel proprio frutto lo stadio in cui quella natura, nella sua lenta preparazione e digestione si offre all'egoismo della vita. La natura, nell'utilità per cui può essere mangiata e bevuta, raggiunge la sua suprema perfezione: in tutto ciò infatti essa è la possibilità di un'esistenza superiore, e viene posto a contatto con l'essere spirituale", *PdG*, 471; *FdS*, 472-473.

[49] *PdG*, 69; *FdS*, 77.

[50] *PdG*, 115; *FdS*, 127.

enunciato, né indicato. E che, proprio in quanto tale, semplice-mente non è. Il singolo o l'unico –sia esso sensibile o intelligibile– nella sua astratta e irrelata consistenza, non ha per Hegel verità alcuna, non può venir né afferrato né detto ed è semplicemente "il non-vero, il non-razionale". In quell'ostinata e solipsistica medesimezza con l'oggetto non vi è alcuna verità; e non vi è mondo possibile. In questo senso dicevo all'inizio che l'universalità spinoziana, se proprio compare in queste pagine –e certamente nel riferimento all'esigenza di "dubitare dell'essere delle cose sensibili" compiendo "il loro stesso annichilimento" si può scorgere l'eco dello spinozismo–, lo fa per sparire immediatamente, ché non si tratta di consegnarsi inermi all'uno-tutto, ma di "consumare" e trasformare ogni datità. Anzi, è proprio qui che comincia a farsi strada la consapevolezza che ogni datità è tale in quanto già da sempre trasfigurata dall'attività spirituale.

Quando nella *Prefazione* alla *Fenomenologia*, Hegel critica la vacuità di conoscenza di chi spaccia il proprio assoluto come la notte in cui tutte le vacche sono nere è chiaro che il suo bersaglio è, se non Schelling, i sostenitori della filosofia schellinghiana; ma è anche chiaro che tale formalismo è da lui già stato accostato alla sostanza della dottrina di Spinoza. Del resto, Hegel conosceva bene le *Lettere filosofiche* di Schelling in cui questi aveva insistito più volte sull'esigenza spinoziana di annientarsi nell'infinito, di annichilire ogni soggetto nell'"intuizione di un oggetto assoluto", perdendosi nella sua infinità[51]. È questo "oggetto assoluto" –ribadisco: sia sensibile, che intelligibile– che lo Hegel della *Fenomenologia* non può più accettare. Come non può più accettare alcun vero che non si declini nella mediazione discorsiva.

Nel riferimento ai misteri eleusini accostato agli animali divoratori del dato, Hegel dunque non intende riprendere nulla di quell'annullarsi o dissolversi nel tutto universale e omogeneo che ispirava il poema del '96. Né abbandono all'immenso, né sprofondo nell'oscura interiorità del sentimento di un'individualità inesprimibile. In entrambi i casi si ha, per Hegel, una rinuncia al mondo, quella che per esempio verrà attribuita all'anima bella romantica, erede del soggettivismo fichtiano, "che si consuma e spegne entro di sé". Liquefarsi nel tutto in cui non ci sono contorni o aspirarsi in una puntualità irrelata sono i volti contrapposti di uno stesso "acosmismo", che nella luce accecante della pura affermazione di Spinoza o nell'incomunicabile interiorità del sentimento romantico "calpesta con i piedi la radice" dello spirituale.

[51] *Cf.* Friedrich W.J. Schelling, *Lettere filosofiche su dommatismo e criticismo* (Sansoni, Firenze 1958), p. 65.

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Immanence, Determinism, and Freedom

Spinoza's Presence in Argentine Romanticism

Natalia Sabater[*]

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discover an affinity between important Spinozist theses and the ideas of two prominent figures of Argentine Romanticism: Juan Bautista Alberdi and Esteban Echverría. This affinity can be traced back to the concepts of immanence, determinism, and freedom. We will show that it is possible to outline an indirect contact between these authors and Spinoza's philosophy, mediated by other sources in which Spinoza has a significant influence, and which were explicitly addressed by Argentine philosophers. Thus, tracing the footprint of Spinozism in the Romantic Argentine movement involves taking into account the reception of other European authors who actively participated in the process of reception of Spinozism that took place in Germany and France, and act as mediations for our local thinkers.

Keywords: reception of ideas, Spinozism, Argentina, immanence, determinism, freedom

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article vise à mettre en évidence une affinité entre d'importantes thèses spinozistes et les idées de deux figures éminentes du romantisme argentin : Juan Bautista Alberdi et Esteban Echverría. Cette affinité peut être rapportée aux concepts d'immanence, de déterminisme et de liberté. Nous montrerons qu'il est possible d'esquisser un lien indirect entre ces auteurs et la philosophie de Spinoza par l'intermédiaire d'autres sources dans lesquelles Spinoza exerce une influence significative, sources abordées explicitement par les philosophes argentins. Retracer l'empreinte du spinozisme dans le mouvement romantique argentin implique ainsi de prendre en compte la réception d'autres auteurs européens ayant activement participé au processus de réception du spinozisme en Allemagne et en France, et servi de médiateurs pour nos penseurs locaux.

Mots-clés : réception des idées, spinozisme, Argentine, immanence, déterminisme, liberté

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1. Introduction

Spinoza's name is mentioned by Juan Bautista Alberdi, a central figure in Argentine Romanticism, in a note of his *Fragmento preliminar al estudio del derecho* (*Preliminary Fragment to the Study of Law*). This appearance is surprising in a period in which there are almost no other references to Spinozism in Argentina and leads us to ask about the possible link between Spinoza's philosophy and the Romantic movement in our country. In this paper, we will seek to establish that there is a relation of affinity between important Spinozist theses and the ideas of two prominent figures of Argentine Romanticism: the aforementioned Juan Bautista Alberdi and Esteban Echeverría. We will argue that this affinity can be traced back to the concepts of immanence, determinism, and freedom. We will show that it is possible to outline an indirect contact between these authors and Spinoza's philosophy, mediated by other sources in which Spinoza has a significant influence, and which were explicitly addressed by Argentine philosophers.

Tracing the footprint of Spinozism in the Romantic movement of a country like Argentina – which can be considered peripheral because it is not part of the hegemonic centers of knowledge on the global stage – requires thinking about the reception of other European authors, who function as mediators of Spinozist theses. The process of the reception of Spinozism that took place in both Germany and France is a central component to this reconstruction. Indeed, many of the authors that these Argentine thinkers read and discussed actively participated in this reception. This is because Spinoza is a philosophical interlocutor of sources that were highly relevant to the Argentine Romantic movement. This makes it possible to think of a mediated contact, a collateral dialogue with core elements of Spinozism. Thus, it is possible to identify certain traces, similarities, and common points between Spinoza and the above-mentioned Romantics of Argentina. Understanding the reception of Spinozism in France and Germany by the many thinkers who were key references for these Romantic intellectuals enables us to make these transitions through them, seeking in the mediation of these sources a link of philosophical affinity. This leads us to think of a network of different receptions of the same thought that intersect, intertwine, and leave philosophical traces. Therefore, questioning the presence of Spinozian philosophy in Argentina means questioning, at the same time, the various receptions of Spinoza that unfolded at other latitudes, to which the intellectuals of that country are, in a sense, indebted, and with which they necessarily engage in dialogue.

It should be noted that the figure of Spinoza and important elements of his doctrine have been present in the territory of the Río de la Plata[1] since colonial times.[2] Through the works of the Benedictine priest Benito Feijoo and periodical publications such as the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, which contain explicit references to Spinoza,[3] his philosophy entered Argentine territory and was received by professors and students of local universities.[4] This allows us to establish a circulation of Spinozism prior to the May 1810 Revolution, which marked the beginning of Argentina's path to independence, and also suggests that this presence continued in the decades that followed, when the Romantic movement was born. Furthermore, the openness to readings of European authors encouraged and cultivated by post-revolutionary intellectuals deepened contact with multiple philosophical traditions and problems.[5] This enabled new mediations between Argentine thinkers and the sources that nourished European authors themselves, including Spinoza. We are talking, then, about an encounter with the sources of our sources, about a philosophical process in which the readings of others impacted the local heritage, enabling a mediated reception.

Thus, although in the philosophical context of the first decades of the 19th century in Argentina Spinoza does not appear as a central interlocutor of the romantic authors, we believe that the underground presence of certain Spinozian theses can be established. We will show this connection, as we said, in terms of the notions of immanence, determinism, and freedom, considering the mediations of the German and French reception of Spinoza, in

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1 The geographical region broadly referred to as *"Río de la Plata"* refers to the configuration that a vast territory of South America took on between the 16th and 19th centuries, centered around the basin of the river of the same name. During the colonial period, the name referred to the set of territories that depended on the Virreynato del Río de la Plata (1776-1810), a jurisdiction established by the Spanish monarchy that included areas that today belong to Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, part of Bolivia, and southern Brazil.

2 *Cf.* Natalia Sabater, "La figura de Spinoza en el Teatro Crítico Universal de Benito Feijoo", *Contrastes. Revista internacional de filosofía* 26, no. 1 (2021): 7-25; Sabater, Natalia, "Recepción del pensamiento moderno europeo y enseñanza de la filosofía en el siglo XVIII en el Río de la Plata. El caso de Baruch Spinoza", *Cuadernos de Filosofía Latinoamericana* 43, no. 126 (2022): 1-31, https://doi.org/10.15332/25005375.7602.

3 *Cf.* Ezequiel de Olaso, "Spinoza y nosotros" in *Homenaje a Baruch Spinoza* (Museo Judío de Buenos Aires, 1976), 179-198.

4 *Cf.* Diego Tatián, "El rastro de aire. Informe sobre algunas lecturas de Spinoza en la Argentina" in *Spinoza y el amor del mundo* (Altamira, 2004): 125-130.

5 *Cf.* Miguel Alberti, "Huellas de la filosofía kantiana en el pensamiento posrevolucionario argentino: la administración del tiempo", *CUYO* 30 (2013): 11-33; Jorge Dotti, *La letra gótica. Recepción de Kant en Argentina, desde el romanticismo hasta el treinta* (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1992), 21-49; Oscar Terán, *Historia de las ideas en Argentina* (Siglo XXI, 2008), 61-108; Castex, Adelina, "Alberdi y el historicismo" in *Actas del Primer Congreso Nacional de Filosofía* (Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 1950), 2092-2098.

which many European authors who are sources for the Argentines were involved.

2. Argentine Romanticism, its Sources, and Other European Receptions of Spinoza

The beginning of what we might properly call *Argentine thought* is linked to the outbreak of the May Revolution of 1810, linked to the independence movement, and the project of forming a new nation. The configuration of Argentina as an independent country was regarded by its protagonists in connection with the need to develop a distinctive thought, a set of shared ideas that could be conceived on the basis of a common experience and worldview. Thus, this historical scenario entails profound political, social, and cultural transformations and raises a series of new challenges that the intellectuals of this territory must address.

The process that led to the May Revolution and the subsequent declaration of independence is complex, shaped by factors of a diverse nature, and can be analyzed from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, Spanish weakening due to European wars resulted in the erosion of the Río de la Plata's defensive organization.[6] From 1796 onwards, the imperial ties with the colonies had been largely loosened and the dispatch of men and resources from Spain became scarce and difficult. In response to this situation, the British invasion of Argentine territory in 1806 provoked the emergence of local forces during the resistance and expulsion of the invader.[7] This emergence of militias with a stronger local presence created a relatively organized armed wing as a force parallel to the regular troops and contributed to the spread of a feeling of local pride, elements that carried weight at the time of independence.

The economic difficulties Spain was experiencing, associated with the wars and the crisis of the monarchy, also led to changes in the colonies' trade agreements, allowing a risky opening in the colonial pact, which at the same time generated conflicts of interest among the local elites.[8] The effervescence that existed in this political scenario was further fuelled by the news of Napoleon's occupation of Spanish territory and the imprisonment of King Ferdinand VII. Faced with the vacancy of the Spanish throne, a provisional

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6 *Cf.* Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Reforma y disolución de los imperios ibéricos*, 1750-1850 (Alianza, 1985), 75-93.

7 *Cf.* José Carlos Chiaramonte, "Autonomía e independencia en el Río de la Plata, 1808-1810", *Historia Mexicana*, LVIII, 1 (2008), 332.

8 Cf. *ibid.*, 336; Halperin Donghi, *Reforma y disolución de los imperios ibéricos*, 81-82.

government was finally established in Buenos Aires on May 25, 1810. As a first step toward independence, this government proclaimed the autonomy of the territory from the Spanish crown.

Following this course, the questions and issues addressed by Argentine authors of the period are clearly intertwined with political concerns, with the factual demand to establish the foundations of a new society, of a national identity, and a national way of thinking. The emergence of a reflection on politics is radical and plays a leading role in the first Argentine philosophical works. In this revolutionary juncture – of opening, of breaking with colonial structures, and with the hegemonic philosophical heritage associated with them – European philosophies began to gain greater acceptance,[9] especially those of the French tradition, which were thought to be fruitful in guiding the construction of the new independent nation, as they themselves had originated in the heat of the French Revolution.

As the 19th century progressed, the wars of independence were followed by civil wars between two opposing factions: the Unitarian Party based in Buenos Aires, which advocated for a centralized organization, and the Federalist Party that defended the autonomy of the provinces. In the heat of this conflict, with the victory of the federal forces in 1829, the leader Juan Manuel de Rosas was appointed governor and consolidated his position as a figure around whom the political power of the nascent country gravitated. In the context of these civil wars and conflicts, various intellectual groups emerged that set new directions for Argentine political, social, and philosophical ideas. One of the most prominent was the so-called "Salón literario" ("Literary Salon") led by Esteban Echeverría and based in Marcos Sastre's bookstore, which included local intellectuals, thinkers and writers, such as: Juan Bautista Alberdi, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Juan María Gutiérrez, Vicente Fidel López, among others.[10]

This political-literary society formed the core of the Argentine Romantic movement, the first intellectual society with the goal of total cultural transformation, guided by the need to build a national identity.[11] Mostly young and belonging to the educated class, these thinkers considered themselves as the New Generation, the one that succeeded and replaced the revolutionary generation, which after achieving that milestone, had been

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9 *Cf.* Juan Carlos Torchia Estrada, *La filosofía en la Argentina* (Estela, 1961), 57.

10 On the Literary Salon, see: Félix Weinberg, *El Salón Literario de 1837* (Solar-Hachette, 1977).

11 *Cf.* Jorge Myers, "La revolución en las ideas: la generación romántica de1837 en la cultura y en la política argentinas" in ed. Noemí Goldman *Revolución, república y confederación (1806 -1852)* (Sudamericana - Nueva Historia Argentina, 1998), 383.

unable to assume spiritual and political leadership in shaping the country.[12] They were later named "the romantic generation" or "the generation of '37" in reference to the year the Literary Salon was created, and many of them became the most important writers of the 19th century in Argentina. The cultural and philosophical field in which the group emerged lacked major figures of reference, which is why these young romantics were able to occupy positions of visibility at an early age, thinking of themselves as autonomous intellectuals who did not respond to the powers that permeated society and forming part of an open program that harbored diverse and multiple positions within it.

The progressive confrontation with Rosas's regime led the members of the movement down the path of proscription and exile, a diaspora from which each one continued their work and political intervention. Their fundamental mission, expressed in the writings of their main leaders, was to define a new national identity based on the values established by the May Revolution. In other words, to unfold a second phase or a second moment of that revolution in the dimension of thought, based on a renewal of ideas, philosophically weaving together and shaping the spirit of the new country. The reading of European sources by this Argentine group was fundamental, mainly of the French intellectual and literary tradition.[13]

Although the work of the romantic writers of '37 covered many different genres – philosophy, history, economics, novels, drama, poetry, political journalism – they all shared a common theme: the concept of "nation", a typically romantic question that was intensified in a new country like Argentina by the need to define the identity of a recently emancipated territory.[14] The developments of these authors, in any genre and on any subject, were thought to be linked to the needs imposed by a new country, whose primary task was to achieve an adequate understanding of its own reality in order to define its national identity. This idea of *nationhood* was not, however, thought of as something that could be "discovered", because it was given in advance or endowed with a timeless existence, but rather as a creation, as an encounter with something of one's own, the result of the revolutionary process.[15] In the unfolding of the romantic project of the Generation of '37, motifs and imprints characteristic of other currents of thought are evident, such as histo-

[12] *Cf.* Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Una nación para el desierto argentino* (Centro Editor de América Latina, 1992), 10-13.

[13] *Cf.* Oscar Terán, *Historia de las ideas en la Argentina* (Siglo XXI, 2008), 64. The author points out that French translations were often used to access the works of European philosophers.

[14] Myers, "La revolución en las ideas", 384.

[15] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 425.

ricism but also the Enlightenment, despite criticism of their local exponents. This composes a multiple universe of references, an eclectic combination that is expressed in different ways in the productions of the various members of the movement.[16] Regarding the sources they read and consulted, the aim was to take from them whatever was useful, productive, and fruitful for a local and situated reflection. Echeverría, for example, called for a "cross-eyed gaze,"[17] always directing the vision simultaneously toward Europe and America. Alberdi also emphasized that it was necessary to study philosophy, but not in isolation, not to satisfy a metaphysical curiosity, but "linked to everything that is most positive, most real, most indispensable in life."[18] Thus, he insisted on the need for a practical philosophy, on the need to link philosophy with political practice, rejecting a philosophy that is exclusively speculative.[19]

With the end of the colonial period, in the early years after the revolution, the influence of so-called French ideology and Condillac's sensualism was predominant.[20] From the 1830s onwards, eclecticism began to gain prominence, particularly Victor Cousin and Eugène Lerminier, the Saint-Simonians, mainly Gaston Leroux, and the Romantic movement, through figures such as Goethe and Herder.[21] Contact with these European authors also enabled a mediated approach to other philosophers who were sources for the French and Germans and to the theoretical discussions in which they participated, among them Spinoza and his thought. In this sense, it is possible to trace an indirect connection between the Argentine Romantics and Spinozian theses through the reading of those European philosophers who had been part of the process of reception of Spinozism in different European countries. If we focus especially on France and Germany, we find that during the 18th and 19th centuries, references to Spinoza are constant[22] and that his image is refracted in multiple ways in different intellectual currents and in

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16 *Cf.* Jorge Dotti, *La letra gótica. Recepción de Kant en Argentina, desde el romanticismo hasta el treinta* (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1992), 34-37; *cf.* Coriolano Alberini, "La metafísica de Alberdi" in *Precisiones sobre la evolución del pensamiento argentino* (Docencia, 1981), 103.

17 Terán, *Historia de las ideas en la Argentina*, 92.

18 Excerpt quoted in Torchia Estrada, *La filosofía en la Argentina,* 131.

19 *Cf.* María Carla Galfione, "Contextos argentinos-contextos franceses: el *juego* de la filosofía y la política", *Revista de filosofía y teoría política*, 41 (2010): 209.

20 *Cf.* Torchia Estrada, *La filosofía en Argentina,* 57.

21 *Cf.* Castex, "Alberdi y el historicismo," 2092-2098.

22 *Cf.* Yannis Prélorentzos, "Difusión y recepción del spinozismo en Francia desde 1665 hasta nuestros días" in *Spinoza y España. Actas del congreso internacional sobre «Relaciones entre Spinoza y España»*, ed. Atilano Domínguez (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1994), 87-106.

the thought of various authors.[23] His reception is divided between the abjuration of his philosophy – considered devastating to the foundations of religion and morality, an expression of abstract and empty metaphysics – and its recovery, especially of its ethical-political dimension, through heteroclite, counter-hegemonic, or clandestine philosophical movements. Although Spinoza's ideas were often discussed for the sake of controversy, with the intention of refutation, his philosophy did not cease to be discussed in both France and Germany; it was circulated and addressed by important thinkers, considered as references.

Condillac, who was a central source for Argentine intellectuals of the revolutionary generation, addresses Spinoza's philosophy in chapter X of his 1749 work *Traité des systèmes*. His analysis focuses specifically on the geometric method and Spinoza's theory of ideas, based on the question of human epistemology and gnoseology. For this author, the application of geometry – the mathematical paradigm of scientific knowledge according to modern rationalism – was a legacy of Cartesianism that needed to be questioned based on the empiricist program present in Locke or embodied by Newton. According to Condillac, Spinoza's geometric method was the prime example of a vain and outdated "spirit of systems" that should be replaced by an empirically oriented "systematic spirit", as it contained nothing in its demonstrations that could lead to knowledge of things.[24] The main focus of the refutation is therefore of Spinoza's theory of ideas, which, for this author, is based on the paradox of a spontaneous production or generation of ideas in the divine attribute of thought.[25] There is thus an autonomous, spontaneous dynamism of the true idea linked to the concept of *causa sui,* of a cause that remains in itself to produce everything that derives from its own nature. Condillac explains that Spinoza's metaphysical monism presupposes the adequacy between being and thought, between the order of ideas and the order of things, from which results the paradox of an idea-cause considered capable of generating itself in all its effects.[26] This thesis – which implies

[23] *Cf.* Diego Donna, *Contre Spinoza. Critique, système et métamorphose au siècle des Lumières* (Georg Editeur, 2021), 7. For a fundamental general bibliography on the subject, see: Pierre Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution* (PUF, 1954); Yves Citton, *L'Envers de la liberté. L'invention d'un imaginaire spinoziste dans la France des Lumières* (Éditions Amsterdam, 2006); María Jimena Solé, *Spinoza en Alemania (1679-1789)* (Brujas, 2011); León Dujovne, *Spinoza*, vol. IV (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1945).

[24] *Cf.* Mogens Laerke, "Spinoza in France, c. 1670–1970." In: A *Companion to Spinoza* (2021), 5.

[25] *Cf.* Donna, *Contre Spinoza,* 159 - 203; *Cf.* Diego Donna, "Comment sortir du labyrinthe. Condillac critique de Spinoza, entre *mos geometricus* et langue des calculs", *Noctua. La tradizione filosofica dall'antico al moderno,* IV, 1-2 (2017), 153- 155.

[26] Cf. *ibid.,* 154, 157, 172.

conceiving the notion of truth as an intrinsic property of the idea – leads Spinoza to construct rigorous chains of reasoning where, according to Condillac, all objective truth is lacking.[27] The concepts become empty and their origin unexplained, revealing the nothingness of their foundation. This refutation is interesting because it focuses on Spinoza's theory of ideas and epistemology, positioning his philosophy as an exponent of classical metaphysics, continuing Cartesian rationalism, against which it was necessary to establish a counterpoint in order to construct a new system.

In the 19th century, the main intellectual movement that spread Spinozism in France was the eclectic spiritualism of Victor Cousin and his disciples, a school of great importance for Argentine Romantics. Closely linked to the university and the academic world, the exponents of this French movement set out to edit and translate texts as a way of exercising philosophical activity, as a way of providing authoritative interpretations of other thinkers and of intervening in the speculative debates of their time. Cousin, for example, who presented himself as the continuator of Cartesian developments, produced a complete edition of Descartes's works in his intention to establish him as the founder of a new French spiritualism centered on the *cogito*.[28] It is in this context that Saisset, a disciple of Cousin, published the first French translation of Spinoza's works in 1841. The publication includes, in successive volumes, an introduction by the translator in which he expresses his reading of the Spinozian system, the translation of Spinoza's biographies by Lucas and Colerus, the *Theological-Political Treatise,* the *Political Treatise,* the *Ethics,* the *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding,* and some of his letters.[29] Although there were previously other translations of passages, chapters, or even some of Spinoza's works in France, these were anonymous or remained in manuscript form and isolated. Saisset's, on the other hand, is a complete and official edition, which had greater circulation and significance and was carried out in comparison with the edition of the *Opera posthuma* and with German translations.[30] The intention of this translation, however, was not only to make the Dutch philosopher's works known, but also to provide an interpretation that strategically refuted him by showing his radical distance from Cartesian philosophy. This allowed, in a single movement, to distance eclecticism from Spinoza and, with it, from the accusation, made by the

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27 *Cf. ibid*., 155

28 *Cf.* Laerke, "Spinoza in France," 6.

29 On this work and on Saisset's reading of Spinoza, see: Pierre-François Moreau, "Traduire Spinoza: l'exemple d'Émile Saisset" in *Spinoza au XIXe siècle,* ed. André Tosel, Pierre-François Moreau, Jean Salem (Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007), 221-230.

30 *Cf. ibid*., p. 226.

clerical right, of pantheists and pro-Spinozists. Thus, Cousin and his disciples address the question of Spinozism to defend themselves against such critics and to demonstrate that rationalism does not necessarily lead to pantheism, separating Spinozian developments from the philosophy of Descartes.[31] They consider Spinoza to be a philosopher linked to the Jewish and Eastern tradition of thought, in whose system human beings are reduced to nothingness, subsumed by substance, annihilated in the bosom of infinity. They sharply distinguish Spinoza's thought from Descartes even arguing that the philosophy of *the cogito* could be the most effective antidote to Spinozist pantheism.

On the other hand, there were also movements and authors in France at this time who showed sympathy for Spinoza's philosophy or even closeness to his political-religious position. An example of the latter case can be seen in the atheistic literature that circulated clandestinely at the beginning of the 18th century, which sets out Spinoza's central theses, such as his criticism of anthropomorphism, the idea of final causality, and his biblical exegesis.[32] Many of these anonymous texts contain significant references to the Dutch philosopher. One of the most important of these writings is *L'Esprit de Spinoza,* also known as *Traité des trois imposteurs,* which revisits the medieval argument that the three main figures of the three great monotheistic religions – Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad – were in fact mere impostors who posed as prophets to gain or consolidate political power.[33] Within this anti-ecclesiastical and anti-absolutist perspective, which sought to expose the political origins of religion, Spinozist theses were revived and vindicated, including the identification of God with Nature.[34] The libertines who printed and circulated these texts clandestinely recognized themselves as continuators of important ideas and developments present in Spinoza's works.[35] There was also a more favorable reception of Spinozism from a materialist perspective.

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31 On Cousin's reading of Spinoza's system, see: Jean-Pierre Cotten, "Spinoza et Victor Cousin" in *Spinoza au XIXe siècle,* ed. André Tosel, Pierre-François Moreau, Jean Salem (Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007), 231-242.

32 *Cf. ibid.; Cf.* Laerke, "Spinoza in France," 4.

33 For more information on this anonymous manuscript, which was widely circulated in Europe in the 18th century, see: Françoise Charles-Daubert, *Le "Traité des trois imposteurs" et "L'Esprit de Spinoza". Philosophie clandestine entre 1678 et 1768* (Voltaire Foundation, 1999); Gianni Paganini, "Politique et religion dans *L'Esprit de Spinoza*," *Littératures classiques,* 55 (2004/3), 105-117. For other clandestine texts mentioning Spinoza, see: Fernando Bahr, "Spinoza, Bayle y la filosofía clandestina" in *Spinoza en debate,* ed. María Jimena Solé (Miño y Dávila, 2015), 77-90.

34 *Cf. ibid*., 106.

35 *Cf.* Prélorentzos, "Difusión y recepción del spinozismo en Francia desde 1665 hasta nuestros días", 90.

In the proposal of Diderot, another philosopher known and read in this period in Argentina, elements of similarity can be found, although in the entry on the Dutch philosopher in volume XV of the *Encyclopédie*, Spinoza is once again presented as a systematic atheist, as first proposed by Pierre Bayle. Diderot's conception of matter as sensible and of the material world as a single body has affinities with Spinozian metaphysics, an affinity that can be seen in his conversations with d'Alembert, in which he argues that the universe is a single individual, a single totality.[36]

This brief overview allows us to appreciate that Spinozism was present in France in the 18th and 19th centuries, traversing important debates and currents within French philosophy of the period. It was explained, interpreted, refuted, and translated, both for the purposes of controversy and with the intention of continuity, becoming an unavoidable interlocutor. The readings, appropriations, and reinterpretations of Spinoza's philosophy compose a complex, dense, and multifaceted reception, in which central thinkers of the French philosophical tradition took part; thinkers who were, in turn, read by the Argentine intellectuals.

Spinoza's philosophy also had considerable influence within the German Romantic movement. Goethe and Herder were avid readers of the Dutch philosopher, openly acknowledged themselves as followers of his thinking, and defended its ethical and political dimensions.[37] Instead of seeing Spinozism as atheism, fatalism, or dogmatism, they considered it the only doctrine capable of offering a coherent concept of God and freedom. Their interpretation of the *Ethics* understands it as a system that projects the liberation of human beings from the servitude of a supposed transcendent order and aspires to self-determination within infinite Nature.

Goethe recognizes Spinoza as an important source of his ideas, finding in Spinozism not only a model for ethical life, but also a theoretical confirmation of his secular conception of the world and his fundamental conviction about the unity between God and Nature.[38] In 1773, Goethe encountered Spinoza's writings for the first time and was immediately overwhelmed with enthusiasm for these ideas.[39] From his early works one already discovers the pantheistic feeling of unity with the whole, the rejection of final causes, the affirmation of necessity in nature, and the identification of reality with

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[36] *Cf.* Laerke, "Spinoza in France," 5.

[37] *Cf.* Solé, *Spinoza en Alemania*, 329.

[38] *Cf. ibid.*, 330. On the link between the conceptions of both authors, see: Carlos Astrada, "Goethe y el panteísmo spinoziano" in *Carlos Astrada. Obras escogidas,* ed. Martín Prestía (Caterva/UNC/UniRío/Meridión, [1933] 2021), 496-506.

[39] *Cf.* Dujovne, *Spinoza,* vol. IV, 124-126; Albert Bielschowsky, "La filosofía de Goethe", *Revista de Filosofía,* 1, 2 (1949): 217.

perfection.[40] During the years 1784 and 1785, together with Herder and Charlotte von Stein, he devoted himself to reading the *Ethics* in its original Latin. From this study of the source emerged a rejection of the interpretations of Spinozism offered by other German thinkers such as Jacobi, who saw in this philosophy a radical form of atheism and fatalism, or Mendelssohn, who only accepted it after subjecting it to a purification or comprehensive revision.[41] The poet, by contrast, shared with Spinoza the belief in the unity, divinity, and necessity of all that exists, conceiving God in Nature and Nature in God. From this conception he rejected the idea of an anthropomorphic, creative, transcendent divinity.[42] The universal divinity understood through the identification of God and world is, for him, impersonal and opposed to the notion of a paternal God made in the image and likeness of human beings. The necessity and perfection of reality is deduced, for Spinoza and Goethe, from the eternal laws of Nature, thus excluding the possibility of teleology and the absolutization of human value scales.[43] Beatitude and freedom are identified, for both, with the feeling and knowledge of one's own existence as an expression of the infinite, with the preservation of one's own being according to the laws of nature. These affinities with Spinozian thought run through Goethe's poetic and philosophical work and are explicitly acknowledged by him as an inspiration for his romantic stance, his conception of Nature, and the place of human beings within it.

Herder, for his part, also expressed admiration for Spinoza's ideas and intervened in the Pantheism controversy by arguing against Jacobi's position. In a letter addressed to the latter in 1784, Herder stated that the problem with the Jacobian interpretation, as well as with those of other anti-Spinozists, lay in their reduction of Spinoza's God to a negative principle according to which "nothing comes from nothing," thereby transforming him into an abstract concept.[44] By contrast, for Herder, Spinoza's God is the One who is supremely real and maximally active, the immanent principle, the living force that produces and traverses the universe. This conception of the divine, which Herder claimed to find in Spinoza – according to which God is the animate power that acts within Nature and within human history[45] – is opposed to Jacobi's theistic position and to the idea of a creator, personal, transcendent God. In 1787 Herder published the first edition of *God: Some*

40 *Cf.* Solé, *Spinoza en Alemania*, 333.
41 Cf. *ibid.*, 330.
42 *Cf.* Bielschowsky, "La filosofía de Goethe", 218.
43 *Cf. ibid.*, 220-221.
44 *Cf.* Solé, *Spinoza en Alemania*, 336.
45 *Cf.* Dujovne, *Spinoza,* vol. IV, 140.

Conversations, in which, in the form of five dialogues, he made explicit his reading of the Spinozist system and takes a public stance in the controversy that had arisen around it. Although he does not simply accept Spinoza's theses outright, but rather subjects them to a reinterpretation that expresses what he considers to be the true spirit of Spinozism,[46] Herder sets out to defend Spinoza against the widely disseminated tendentious and injurious readings, rescuing him from the accusation of atheism, and reaffirming the notions of immanence and of God as a natural and infinite power.[47] He also upheld the idea of a necessary unity of Nature, liberated from any supposed arbitrary will of God,[48] understanding the unfolding of reality as a synthesis of necessity and rationality.[49] Thus, God is the productive and conserving principle of life – the universal life itself – not a demiurge but a vital force.[50] This reading of Spinoza conveys Herder's own conception of the world, the divine, and Nature, revealing continuities and reciprocities with Spinoza's proposal. The importance of the Dutch philosopher for these two great figures of German Romanticism is, therefore, radical. Both adopt a vindicatory position and a willingness to continue his thinking.

Spinoza is seen as an interlocutor with whom various philosophical movements in Germany and France argue and engage in dialogue, as a source of inspiration or a subject of refutation, but one to whom no one remains indifferent. Spinoza's presence in authors who were essential references for Argentine intellectuals offers a mediation through which one may project a possible trace of the Spinozist spirit in their ideas, theoretical proposals, and conception of reality. Although there is no specific corpus devoted to Spinoza that allows us to study an explicit reception of his philosophy in Argentina during this period, we believe it is possible to trace fruitful philosophical intersections from which to establish a presence or resonance of Spinoza's theses in the romantic movement of this country. This leads us to believe that absences in the philosophical field are never total or definitive, insofar as it is always possible to find lines of continuity, underground presences, and diverse connections that allow us to follow the trajectory of a thought across the centuries.

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46 Cf. *ibid.*, 141; *cf.* Solé, *Spinoza en Alemania*, 345.
47 *Cf.* Dujovne, *Spinoza,* vol. IV, 142–143.
48 *Cf.* Marion Heinz, "La posición de Herder en el conflicto del panteísmo", *Ideas y valores*, 116 (2001): 71.
49 Cf. *ibid.*, 72.
50 Cf. *idem.*

3. Juan Bautista Alberdi, Esteban Echeverría, and Spinoza

We aspire to discover an affinity, a bond of closeness between Spinozian thought and that of two fundamental authors of Argentine Romanticism, present in some of their central philosophical works. Juan Bautista Alberdi refers explicitly to Spinoza in one of the extensive notes included as an appendix to his above-mentioned text *Fragmento preliminar al estudio del Derecho (Preliminary Fragment to the Study of Law)*. In this note, he analyzes different philosophical currents of the time and offers a critical reading of each one. With regard to Victor Cousin – an important philosophical reference for the young Alberdi – he reconstructs Cousin's intellectual journey, noting that he "begins by commenting on the Scottish school",[51] then "embraces Kant's moral philosophy"[52] and finally "yields to the spirit of the age"[53] and becomes eclectic. In conclusion, Alberdi states:

> Fortunately for Cousin, the systematic idealism of Kant and Fichte had been succeeded by the eclectic realism of Schelling and Hegel, also born of democratic society. Hegel had professed the idealistic identity of abstract reason that constitutes God, the world, and history. He had concluded from this that reason is everywhere, like divine necessity for Spinoza; he had legitimized all facts: he had elevated history to the sacred character of a pure manifestation of the absolute and established this axiom: "Everything that is rational is real, and everything that is real is rational."[54]

This reference is significant because it represents a testimony that attests to Spinoza's presence in the philosophical heritage of an author as important to the Argentine tradition as Alberdi. The mention shows that he knew the name of the Dutch philosopher and even knew a central axis of his thought,

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51 Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Fragmento preliminar al estudio del Derecho*, 1837, Apéndice de notas, nota 2, in *Obras completas*, vol. I (Imprenta de La Tribuna Nacional, 1886), 243.

52 *Idem.*

53 *Idem.*

54 *Idem.* This is our own translation of the original Spanish text: "Por fortuna de Cousin, al idealismo sistemático de Kant y Fichte había sucedido el realismo ecléctico de Schelling y Hegel, parto también de la sociedad democrática. Hegel había profesado la identidad idealista de la razón abstracta que constituye a Dios, el mundo, y la historia. Había concluido de ella que por todas partes está la razón, como la necesidad divina para Espinosa; había legitimado todos los hechos: había elevado la historia al sagrado carácter de una pura manifestación de lo absoluto, y establecido este axioma: "Todo lo que es racional es real, y todo lo que es real es racional." Regarding this same note and the presence of Fichte in it, see: María Jimena Solé, "Filosofía y emancipación. El espíritu de Fichte en la letra de Alberdi" in *Fichte en las Américas*, ed. Mariano Gaudio, Sandra Palermo, María Jimena Solé (RAGIF, 2021), 125-143. The English version of this paper appeared in: M. J. Solé and E. Millán, *Fichte in the Americas* (Brill, 2023).

such as the immanent determination of divine necessity in the unfolding of reality. Spinoza's appearance as an intellectual interlocutor is mediated by references to other philosophers, in this case to great figures of German idealism, which confirms that contact occurs through mediations, intervened by other sources. In Alberdi's case, his contact with Spinozism may have come both from the French sources he frequented and which are considered transversal influences on his thought,[55] and through his knowledge of German idealism and romanticism, especially the figure of Herder, whom he had read in the French translation by Edgard Quinet and from whom he took elements of his historicist imprint and his conception of law.[56]

The allusion to Spinoza in this work and the specific reference to Spinozian necessity, to the determination that necessarily permeates being, invite us to reflect on the philosophical proximities with Alberdi's thought and also with the ideas of Esteban Echeverría, who – although he does not explicitly refer to Spinoza – was noted as an attentive reader of many European sources we have mentioned, especially of Herder.[57] We believe that these intersections and affinities can be outlined or delineated from three perspectives: determinism, immanence or the articulation between the infinite and the singular and the notion of freedom.

In all three authors we find a deterministic conviction regarding the unfolding of everything that exists, a lawfulness of reality according to which everything unfolds. The denial of chance or contingency and the affirmation of the necessity of all things in terms of the necessary unfolding of Nature is a central element that structures Spinoza's system, which is expressed in multiple ways throughout his work. "Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence",[58] Spinoza maintains in his *Ethics*. From this he concludes: "In nature there is

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55 Regarding the French sources of Alberdi's thinking, in addition to the aforementioned article by Galfione, see: Raúl Orgaz, *Alberdi y el historicismo* (Imprenta Argentina, 1937); Jorge Mayer, *Alberdi y su tiempo,* (Eudeba, 1963); Dotti, *La letra gótica,* 21-58.

56 *Cf.* Diego Pró, "Pensamiento filosófico de Alberdi", *CUYO,* 1 (1984): 175-182.

57 See: Alfredo Roggiano, "Esteban Echeverría y el romanticismo europeo" in *Actas del Sexto Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas* (University of Toronto, 1980), 629-631; Raúl Orgaz, *Las ideas sociales de Echeverría* (Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 1912); Coriolano Alberini, *Problemas de la historia de las ideas argentinas*, (Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 1966). There, Alberini characterizes Echeverría as an "Argentine Herder."

58 E I, prop. 28. I follow the translation of Edwin Curley: *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I (Princeton University Press, 1985), 432.

nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."[59]

In Alberdi's case, we also find the idea of legality of reality, the affirmation of a law of the progressive development of the human spirit which, from its universality, instantiates and particularizes itself in various ways. In his speech delivered on the opening day of the Literary Salon, he states:

> Thus, gentlemen, our revolution is the daughter of the development of the human spirit, and its goal is this same development: it is a fact born of other facts, and which must produce new ones: the child of ideas, and born to engender other ideas: engendered to engender in turn, and to contribute in its own way to the support of the progressive chain of the days of humanitarian life.[60]

And later, he reinforces this point:

> Development, gentlemen, is the goal, the law of all humanity: but this law also has its laws. All nations necessarily develop, but each develops in its own way: because development operates according to certain constant laws, in intimate subordination to the conditions of time and space.[61]

Likewise, in his *Fragmento Preliminar al estudio del derecho* (*Preliminary Fragment to the Study of Law)*, he argues that "by conceiving of law as a constitutive element in the life of society, which develops with society in a manner that is individual and proper to it, we must understand that the same law presided over the development of the other elements that constitute it."[62] The evolution of humanity and all its manifestations are permeated by this general law, of which each element is a singular instance. Thus, what occurs cannot

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59 E I, prop. 29. Trad.: 433.

60 Juan Bautista Alberdi, "Doble armonía entre el objeto de esta institución, con una exigencia de nuestro desarrollo social; y de esta exigencia, con otra general del espíritu humano" in Alberdi, *Obras completas*, 262. "Así, Señores, nuestra revolución es hija del desarrollo del espíritu humano, y tiene por fin este mismo desarrollo: es un hecho nacido de otros hechos, y que debe producir otros nuevos: hijo de las ideas, y nacido para engendrar otras ideas: engendrado para engendrar a su vez, y concurrir por su lado al sostén de la cadena progresiva de los días de la vida humanitaria."

61 *Ibid.*, 262-263. "El desarrollo, Señores, es el fin, la ley de toda la humanidad: pero esta ley tiene también sus leyes. Todos los pueblos se desarrollan necesariamente, pero cada uno se desarrolla a su modo: porque el desenvolvimiento se opera según ciertas leyes constantes, en una íntima subordinación a las condiciones del tiempo y del espacio."

62 Alberdi, *Fragmento Preliminar*..., 110. "[A]l concebir el derecho como un elemento constitutivo de la vida de la sociedad, que se desarrolla con esta, de una manera individual y propia, hemos debido comprender que la misma ley presidía al desarrollo de los otros elementos que la constituyen."

be attributed to mere historical accidents, to the purely fortuitous conjunction of circumstances. Necessity is a constitutive component of reality and, as such, manifests itself in history, in the succession of its stages.[63]

With regard to Echeverría, his ideas are akin in this respect to Alberdi's and can also be related to Spinoza's. For Echeverría, likewise, the historical process unfolds according to general laws, a determinism that structures the future, taking a particular form in each nation. In his work *Dogma Socialista*, he states: "Heaven, earth, animality, humanity, the entire universe, has a life that develops and manifests itself over time through a series of continuous generations: this law of development is called the *law of progress*."[64] This universal law, according to which all things are expressed and develop, necessarily takes different forms according to each society, according to its local modalities and historical particularities. Echeverría argues: "Just like man, organic beings, and nature, peoples also possess a life of their own, whose continuous development constitutes their progress."[65] This shows that, for the author, there exist general laws according to which beings – and likewise peoples – develop, laws that shape their unfolding and structure the very being of reality. In fact, within the framework of this conception, the course of history is understood as the realization of these laws, traversed by the singularity of each being and each people and by their own journey.[66] The three authors, then, share the idea of an intrinsic determinism, of a necessity that permeates all things.

It is true that there is a radical difference in the form that this determinism takes in each proposal, insofar as Alberdi and Echeverría affirm that there is a teleology that guides the evolution of reality, an end toward which that evolution tends, which is the principle of human progress, the development of humanity in terms of progress; while for Spinoza the causes are efficient, primary, and the unfolding of causal chains is mechanical. In Echeverría's case, the figure of providence and a creator God also intervenes, around which the concept of progress is articulated. However, the postulation of this determinism stipulates in all three cases a connection between the

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63 María Carla Galfione, *Profetas de la Revolución José Esteban Echeverría, Juan Bautista Alberdi y la izquierda humanitarista francesa* (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2016), 164.

64 Esteban Echeverría, Dogma Socialista in *Dogma Socialista y otras páginas políticas* (Estrada, 1948), 115. "Cielo, tierra, animalidad, humanidad, el universo entero, tiene una vida que se desarrolla y se manifiesta en el tiempo por una serie de generaciones continuas: esta ley de desarrollo se llama la ley del Así como el hombre, los seres orgánicos y la naturaleza, los pueblos también están en posesión de una vida propia, cuyo desenvolvimiento continuo constituye su progreso."

65 *Idem.*

66 *Cf.* Galfione, *Profetas de la Revolución*…, 100.

infinite and the finite, between the universal and the particular, which can be considered akin, and which reveals itself as immanent, as a link that occurs on the horizon of immanence. Mainly because for the Argentine authors, this teleological unfolding implies the actualization of a dimension that has to do with the very being of a people or an individual. It has to do with the encounter of that which is not extrinsic but, ultimately, an expression of something constitutive or essential. It would thus be affirming that being itself, from both a universal and a singular perspective, it contains within itself the principles of its own formation and the inherent force to realize them. In this sense, the unfolding of reality seems to respond to a principle that is constitutive, inherent to those general laws that determine the finite, but also in each expression of the laws. We can therefore think that this teleology unfolds according to an immanent mode, according to a union between the finite and the infinite in which there is no gap, no separation nor transcendent disposition. The finite, the singular, is not thought of as disconnected from that which governs it, that determines it, but rather as a drift constitutive of the infinite. But, moreover, from this horizon of immanence, in all three approaches, the particular is considered an expression of the necessary and absolute law, a form or instantiation of it, whose singularity is affirmed and distinguished as such – unique, unrepeatable and irreplaceable.

Within the framework of Spinoza's system, monism and panentheism as the ontological foundation of reality presuppose immanence as the dimension in which everything exists. Nature, identified with God, with substance, determines itself – in a movement of absolute affirmation – in the form of a modal system, within which finite beings are found, in which they exist.[67] They are a part of the same and only being, but they express their essence and power in a determined way. Essences are not thought of as universal categories that would abstractly subsume the distinctive characteristics of a group of beings,[68] but as singular essences, proper to each being, which make it precisely what it is and nothing else, which affirm its existence.[69] Therefore, the current essence of all finite things is *conatus*,[70] the power or effort to persevere in being, an essence that in its formal aspect is singular, unique and distinguishes each being from others and from Nature, understood as absolute totality.

In Echeverría's case, the law of human progress that governs historical development takes on a different, unique, local form in each society, depen-

67 *Cf.* E I, prop. 15.
68 *Cf.* E II, prop. 40, esc. I.
69 *Cf.* E II, def. 2.
70 *Cf.* E III, props. 6 and 7.

ding on its customs, which is called "*the law of its being*."[71] In his work *Ojeada retrospectiva sobre el movimiento intelectual en el Plata desde el año 37* (*Retrospective Overview of the Intellectual Movement in the Plata Region since 1837*) Echeverría argues:

> But each people, each society has *its own laws or peculiar conditions of existence*, which result from its customs, its history, its social status, its physical, intellectual, and moral needs, and the very nature of the soil where providence wanted it to dwell and live perpetually.[72]

These unique laws express in various ways, in line with Herder's ideas, "*the voices of the people*."[73] In his text *Dogma Socialista* he points out: "Each people has its own life and intelligence. [...] A people that enslaves its intelligence to the intelligence of another people is stupid and sacrilegious."[74] And this reveals the mutual dependence between the particular and the general, between the individual and the collective, between peoples and humanity.[75] The unfolding of history presupposes the permanent articulation between both poles, an articulation that allows each people to be recognized as a moment in its development, while understanding its inalienable uniqueness. In fact, in line with this idea, Echeverría affirms that "the efforts of man and society are directed toward achieving the well-being they desire. The well-being of a people is related to and arises from its progress. A people that does not work to improve its condition does not obey the law of its being."[76] Then, within a development that can be thought of as immanent, the singular implies an intrinsic affirmation: it is not alienated or subsumed into the absolute but manifests its particularity. Just as we could think in Spinoza's system, this drift of the finite, of the singular, in search of its own good is precisely the realm of ethics and politics. It is the domain where the human

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71 Echeverría, *Dogma Socialista,* 116.

72 Esteban Echeverría, *Ojeada retrospectiva sobre el movimiento intelectual en el Plata desde el año 37* en *Dogma Socialista y otras páginas políticas*, 18-19. "Pero, cada pueblo, cada sociedad tiene *sus leyes o condiciones peculiares de existencia*, que resultan de sus costumbres, de su historia, de su estado social, de sus necesidades físicas, intelectuales y morales, de la naturaleza misma del suelo donde la providencia quiso que habitase y viviese perpetuamente."

73 Rogiano, "Echeverría y el romanticismo europeo", 630.

74 Echeverría, *Dogma Socialista,* 116. "Cada pueblo tiene su vida y su inteligencia propia. […] Un pueblo que esclaviza su inteligencia a la inteligencia de otro pueblo, es estúpido y sacrílego."

75 *Cf.* Galfione, *Profetas de la Revolución*..., 86.

76 Echeverría, *Dogma Socialista,* 115. "[L]os conatos del hombre y de la sociedad se encaminan a procurarse el bienestar que apetecen. El bienestar de un pueblo está en relación y nace de su progreso. Un pueblo que no trabaja por mejorar de condición, no obedece a la ley de su ser."

manifests itself and can be thought of from its particular and enduring existence.

In connection with these theses, for Alberdi, universal reason, the law of human progress, also develops or manifests itself in a specific way with respect to each people, a particularity that constitutes their *civilization*. He states in his aforementioned speech:

> This individual mode of progress constitutes the civilization of each people: each people, then, has and must have its own civilization, which it must take in combination with the universal law of human development and its individual conditions of time and space.[77]

Reason as a universal principle governing the evolution of humans and peoples always occurs in a singular, specific way; it is enlivened, expressed, and takes shape in the configuration of each peculiarity, without ceasing to be the law that sustains and determines it. Alberdi says in his *Preliminary Fragment*:

> Reason: the law of laws, the supreme, divine law, is translated by all the codes of the world. One and eternal like the sun, it is mobile like the sun: always luminous to our eyes, but its light is always diversely colored. These diverse colors, these different phases of the same torch, are the codifications of the different peoples of the earth: codes fall, laws pass, to give way to the new rays of the eternal torch.[78]

The identity of a nation, its particularity expressed in the form of general will,[79] constitutes that inalienable being which, framed by the general law, each society must affirm and pursue. That singularity dialogues with universal reason, is determined by it without being annulled, distinguishing that individual or people from all others. Alberdi continues:

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77 Alberdi, "Doble armonía entre el objeto de esta institución…", 263."Este modo individual de progreso constituye la civilización de cada pueblo: cada pueblo, pues, tiene y debe tener su civilización propia, que ha de tomarla en la combinación de la ley universal del desenvolvimiento humano, con sus condiciones individuales de tiempo y espacio."

78 Alberdi, *Fragmento Preliminar*…106. "La razón: ley de las leyes, ley suprema, divina, es traducida por todos los códigos del mundo. Una y eterna como el sol, es móvil como él: siempre luminosa a nuestros ojos, pero su luz, siempre diversamente colorida. Estos colores diversos, estas fases distintas de una misma antorcha, son las codificaciones de los diferentes pueblos de la tierra: caen los códigos, pasan las leyes, para dar paso a los rayos nuevos de la eterna antorcha."

79 *Cf.* Elías Palti, *El momento romántico: nación, política y lenguajes políticos en la Argentina del siglo XX* (Eudeba, 2009), 41-42.

> But its manifestations [of universal reason], its forms, its modes of development, are not identical: they, like man, and man like nature, are infinitely fertile. Nature never plagiarizes itself, and there are no two identical things under the sun. It is universal and eternal in its principles, individual and ephemeral in its forms and manifestations. Everywhere, always the same and always different; always variable and always constant.[80]

In the awareness and exercise of this specificity, of civilization, the Argentine thinker sees the destiny and freedom of peoples. Thus, it is possible to think that in the three authors, the eternal and necessary is articulated with the finite, at the same time constituting it, structuring it, and allowing it to express its singularity.

On the horizon of determinism and based on the peculiar immanent articulation between the absolute and the singular, the three authors project a notion of freedom that presents similarities. From Spinoza's immanent and monistic panentheism, freedom is defined as self-determination, as acting in accordance with the laws of one's own nature. In his *Ethics*, he defines: "That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner."[81] The challenge posed by Spinoza's ethical project is, therefore, to adequately understand our own essence and that of our surroundings in order to become free, to escape mere extrinsic determination and act based on the necessity of our being. For humans, for finite beings, this freedom can never be absolute, a condition that only Nature or the infinite substance possesses. But from the recognition of this limit, from the critique of the fiction of free will understood as causeless or indeterminate spontaneity, Spinoza seeks to demonstrate that real freedom is only possible within the framework of necessity, understood as self-determination.[82]

For Echeverría, the affirmation of a people and their abandonment of exogenous forms rests, as noted, in their progress, but this is conceived as the

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[80] Alberdi, *Fragmento Preliminar…*, 106. "Pero sus manifestaciones [de la razón universal], sus formas, sus modos de desarrollo, no son idénticos: ellos como el hombre, y el hombre como la naturaleza, son fecundos al infinito. La naturaleza no se plagia jamás, y no hay dos cosas idénticas bajo el Sol. Es universal y eterna en sus principios, individual y efímera en sus formas y manifestaciones. Por todas partes, siempre la misma y siempre diferente; siempre variable y siempre constante."

[81] E I, def. 7. Trad.: 409.

[82] On this subject, see, for example: E I, prop. 17; E I, prop. 32; E I, appendix; E III, defs. 1 and 2, E V, pref.

unfolding of their own law, the law of its being. He says: "To progress is to become civilized, or to direct the action of all one's forces to the achievement of one's well-being, or in other words, toward the realization of the law of one's being."[83] The freedom of a people, then, has to do with actualizing itself, with determining its development in function of it. It is not freedom understood as the power to do whatever one wants, but as the search for that proper law in accordance with the general law of progress. Echeverría argues that America "must appropriate everything that can contribute to the satisfaction of its needs; it must, in order to know itself and illuminate its path, walk with the torch of the human spirit."[84] We must cultivate and seek what reflects our own law, freeing ourselves in turn from whatever is extrinsic that diverges from our particularity, from the voice of our people. On the other hand, for this author, reflection on freedom is inseparable from thinking about politics and political freedom in relation to the life of a society. Like Spinoza, Echeverría maintains that freedom should be the end and foundation of all political order and that it cannot exist where citizens do not enjoy the "right to publish their opinions in word or writing", or where "a religion and a cult other than that which their conscience judges to be true is imposed on them. Where they can be arbitrarily disturbed in their homes, torn from their families, and exiled from their homeland",[85] where "their safety, their lives, and their property are at the mercy of the whim of a ruler. Where they are forced to take up arms without absolute necessity and without the general interest requiring it."[86]

In Alberdi's case, since civilization is conceived as the specific mode in which each people progresses, freedom is the awareness and exercise of that civilization. It is emancipation from all that is extrinsic, it is the unfolding of each people's own law or way of being. If this specific law of its development is not known, a people can never be independent, free. The Argentinean says

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83 Echeverría, *Dogma Socialista,* 116. "Progresar es civilizarse, o encaminar la acción de todas sus fuerzas al logro de su bienestar, o en otros términos, a la realización de la ley de su ser."

84 *Idem.* "[D]ebe apropiarse de todo lo que pueda contribuir a la satisfacción de sus necesidades; debe, para conocerse y alumbrarse en su carrera, caminar con la antorcha del espíritu humano."

85 Echeverría, *Dogma Socialista,* 123.

86 *Idem.* Echeverría sostiene que la libertad debería ser el fin y fundamento de todo orden político y que ella no puede existir allí donde los ciudadanos no gocen del "derecho de publicar de palabra o por escrito sus opiniones", o en donde "se le impone una religión y un culto distinto del que su conciencia juzga verdadero. Donde se le puede arbitrariamente turbar en sus hogares, arrancarle del seno de su familia y desterrarle fuera de su patria", donde "su seguridad, su vida y sus bienes, están a merced del capricho de un mandatario. Donde se le obliga a tomar las armas sin necesidad absoluta y sin que el interés general lo exija."

in his *Preliminary Fragment:* "A people is civilized when it is self-sufficient, when it possesses the theory and formula of its own life, the law of its development. Therefore, it is not independent unless it is civilized."[87] And he goes on to argue:

> for there is no true emancipation while one is under the dominion of a foreign model, under the authority of exotic forms. And since philosophy is the denial of all authority except that of reason, philosophy is the mother of all emancipation, of all freedom, of all social progress.[88]

Philosophy is a fundamental exercise, an essential tool for freedom and autonomy, because it is what leads us to know and understand our specificity as a nation, the very law according to which our progress must be guided and unfolded. That is why Alberdi insists on the need to link philosophy with political practice, with the conviction that the articulation of both is essential for real and effective freedom. He states:

> To have political freedom and not have artistic, philosophical, or industrial freedom is to have free arms and a chained head. To be free is not merely to act according to reason, but also to think according to reason, to believe according to reason, to write according to reason, to see according to reason.[89]

Along the same lines, he concludes that "intelligence is the source of freedom: intelligence emancipates peoples and men. Intelligence and freedom are correlative; or rather, freedom is intelligence itself."[90] Understood in this way, freedom for Alberdi is not absolute either. On the contrary, it is an "end that will never be achieved except relatively, because when we speak of freedom,

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87 Alberdi, *Fragmento Preliminar…*, 111. "Un pueblo es civilizado cuando se basta a sí mismo, cuando posee la teoría y la fórmula de su vida, la ley de su desarrollo. Luego no es independiente, sino cuando es civilizado."

88 *Idem.* "[P]orque no hay verdadera emancipación mientras se está bajo el dominio del ejemplo extraño, bajo la autoridad de las formas exóticas. Y como la filosofía, es la negación de toda autoridad más que la de la razón, la filosofía es madre de toda emancipación, de toda libertad, de todo progreso social."

89 Alberdi, *Fragmento Preliminar…*, 113. "Tener libertad política y no tener libertad artística, filosófica, industrial, es tener libres los brazos, y la cabeza encadenada. Ser libre no es meramente obrar según la razón, sino también, pensar según la razón, creer según la razón, escribir según la razón, ver según la razón."

90 *Ibid*, 114. "La inteligencia es la fuente de la libertad: la inteligencia emancipa los pueblos y los hombres. Inteligencia y libertad son cosas correlativas; o más bien, la libertad es la inteligencia misma."

as with any human element, we speak of more or less."[91] But, for that very reason, it will never be totally absent either. Because the possibility of its exercise is immanent, it is rooted in the law itself, in the being of each people, and is therefore inalienable. The three authors, then, distance themselves from a conception of freedom as an arbitrary or extrinsic goal to conceive it as the immanent unfolding and affirmation of the law of one's own being, which becomes possible within the framework of determination, in the becoming of our finite existence.

This horizon of affinity that can be delineated between certain elements of Spinozism and the thinking of Echeverría and Alberdi invites us to think about a latent presence of Spinozian philosophy, a possible trace of his ideas in the Argentine Romantic movement, through its critical reception in the European sources that were read and discussed by local intellectuals. The explicit reference to Spinoza in the *Preliminary Fragment* shows that he is not an unknown figure and that, although marginally, he carried weight as an interlocutor in the philosophical heritage of the Argentine thinkers. The philosophical proximity between these authors thus becomes a new prism from which to study and think about Spinozism, and we believe that it can also be fruitful for revisiting the ideas of the founders of Argentine philosophy.

4. Conclusion

In this article, we have explored a possible speculative closeness between fundamental ideas of Spinozism and the proposals of two central exponents of Argentine Romanticism. This exercise involves proposing the existence of an underground, mediated reception of Spinoza's philosophy in Argentina in the early decades of the 19th century, influenced by the reception of European philosophers who were, in turn, readers and interpreters of Spinozian thought. The journey through the reception of Spinoza in France and Germany by authors who were important references for Argentine intellectuals is central insofar as it establishes the mediation, the indirect contact that allows Spinoza's theses to enter through other sources. We are talking, then, about "philosophical traces", latent presences that may have taken on a specific form in Argentina, that may have been transformed and traversed by diverse conceptual matrices, making it possible to identify common points and resonances with the ideas of local intellectuals. Although the lack of

[91] *Ibid.*, 116. For Alberdi, freedom is "un fin que jamás se obtendrá sino relativamente, porque cuando se habla de libertad, como de todo elemento humano, se habla de más o menos."

explicit references to Spinoza in these early decades of the 19th century in Argentina could have been a factor leading to the abandonment of the search for his traces, we believe that the effort to outline these affinities, even if only in a conjectural way, invites us to think the study of the reception, transformation, and appropriation of a philosophy as an open field in which it is possible to investigate these latent affiliations. Undoubtedly, Spinoza was not a central source or a leading figure of reference at this philosophical juncture of Argentine history. However, as Alberdi's allusion shows, it is not possible to decree his definitive absence either. We have shown that it is possible to think that there is, at least, a latent presence of his ideas in these lands. It is in that *in-between*, in that space, where we have sought to slide our inquiry. To think about this mediated presence in the 19th century is also a way to study the reception of Spinoza in Argentina, that became manifest and takes on a prominent role from the 20th century onward, in a movement that could be understood as an explicit realization of those latent matrices of affinity that we have explored in this article. In turn, focusing on reconstructing the reception of Spinozism in territories such as Argentina, far from the hegemonic centers of philosophical production, constitutes an invitation to write another history of the course of his ideas, one that projects a new present for Spinoza's philosophy and allows us to explain the centrality of these ideas in other latitudes today. This undoubtedly contributes to enriching contemporary studies on Spinoza and to seeking new philosophical paths in which his ideas germinate into new convictions and joyful affections.

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Spinoza und die Weimarer Klassik

Daniel Elon[*]

Spinozas zentrale Bedeutung für die deutsche Philosophie um 1800 ist lange anerkannt und unumstritten. Dies gilt in besonderem Maß für das ›Dreigestirn‹ Fichte, Schelling und Hegel, die sich, jeder auf höchst eigenständige Weise, in der Herausbildung ihrer eigenen Philosophien von Spinoza haben prägen lassen.[1] In der vorliegenden Kurzbetrachtung soll es nun um eine andere, historisch vorgelagerte Phase der Spinoza-Rezeption in Deutschland gehen, nämlich um diejenige durch Goethe und Herder. Indem diese beiden, neben Schiller und Wieland, wiederum zum ›Viergestirn‹ der Epoche der Weimarer Klassik gehören, soll dies der Leitgedanke dieses Kurzbeitrags werden. Die beschriebene Konstellation ist bemerkenswert, immerhin werden unter den Schlagwörtern der ›Weimarer Klassik‹ und der ›klassischen deutschen Philosophie‹ zwei unbestritten entscheidende Episoden der deutschen Philosophie- und Literaturgeschichte verhandelt, für die Spinoza also jeweils eine Schlüsselposition einnimmt.

Zur genaueren Ein- und Abgrenzung dieser Thematik lässt sich zunächst festhalten, dass sich in der frühen Phase der Spinoza-Rezeption in Deutschland, also im Wesentlichen vor 1795, gewissermaßen zwei Achsen rekonstruieren lassen. Diese weisen zwar enge Bezüge zueinander auf, können aus systematischen Gründen jedoch als gesondert voneinander betrachtet werden: Zum einen Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi und Salomon Maimon – Achse I –,[2] deren Auseinandersetzung mit der Philosophie Spinozas im

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[1] Vgl. Eckart Förster u. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Hrsgg.), *Spinoza and German Idealism*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2012, »Introduction«, 1–6.

[2] Vgl. insb. Friedrich H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* [1785], auf Grundlage d. Ausg. v. Klaus Hammacher u. Irmgard M. Piske bearbeitet v. Marion Lauschke, Hamburg: Meiner 2004 (= PhB, 517); Salomon Maimon, *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie* [1789/90], in: ders., *Gesamtausgabe*,

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weiteren Umfeld Moses Mendelssohns stattfindet und sich dabei deutlich von diesem abgrenzt. Diese Grundzüge sind hier lediglich in aller Kürze zu skizzieren: Jacobi fasst Spinozas Philosophie, wie er in seinen Briefen an Mendelssohn darlegt, als in sich geschlossene und gerade darin vollends konsequente, rationale sowie deterministische Systemphilosophie auf, die jedoch das Faktum des Individuums als frei und zweckgerichtet handelnde Person eben wegen des Systemgedankens aufgeben müsse.[3] Maimon bekennt sich anfangs zur Philosophie Spinozas[4] und positioniert sich damit offen gegen Mendelssohn. Später problematisiert Maimon dies selbst und bezeichnet Spinozas System als »akosmisch«,[5] da es in der Annahme der göttlichen Substanz die Existenz einer davon unabhängigen Welt negiere. Dies kann als früher Nihilismusvorwurf verstanden werden.[6] Sowohl Jacobi als auch Maimon begegnen dem Denken Spinozas mit Hochachtung und Bewunderung, sehen ausgehend vom Diskursfeld um System, Substanz, Welt und Freiheit allerdings auch kritische Abgrenzungspunkte.

Dem steht mit Achse II – der genannten Spinoza-Rezeption durch Goethe und Herder – nun ein deutlich andersartiges Spinoza-Verständnis gegenüber, das im Folgenden eingehender, dabei dennoch schlaglichtartig, betrachtet werden soll.

Michael N. Forster legt valide dar, dass Herder als die zentrale Figur der beginnenden Spinoza-Rezeption in Deutschland aufgefasst werden kann, und zwar bereits ab 1768 / 69.[7] Als verschiedene inhaltliche Themen dieser Rezeption bei Herder werden, in historischer Abfolge, Bibelhermeneutik, politische Philosophie,[8] eine nicht-dualistische Theorie des Geistes und schließlich ein »metaphysisch-religiöser Monismus und globaler Determinismus« benannt.[9] Auch wenn der letztgenannte Punkt, so Forster, bereits in

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Bd. I,1, hrsg. v. Maria C. Marinelli u. Ives Radrizzani, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 2023; Salomon Maimon, *Lebensgeschichte* [1792/93], in: ders.: *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 1, hrsg. v. Valerio Verra, Hildesheim: Olms 1965.

3 Vgl. v. a. Birgit Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache. Die Vernunftkritik Jacobis*, München: Fink 2000.

4 Vgl. v. a. Yitzhak Y. Melamed, »Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German Idealism«, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42,1 (2004), 67–96.

5 Maimon, Lebensgeschichte, a. a. O., 154.

6 Vgl. u. a Daniel Elon, *Die Philosophie Salomon Maimons zwischen Spinoza und Kant. Akosmismus und Intellektkonzeption*, Hamburg: Meiner 2021 (= Paradeigmata, 42).

7 Michael N. Forster, »Herder and Spinoza«, in: Förster u. Melamed, Spinoza and German Idealism, a. a. O., 2012, 59–85, hier 60 f.

8 Dass dies auch bei Goethe ein Thema ist, weist Martin Bollacher nach, vgl. ders., »Goethe and Spinoza on Faith, the State, and the Old Testament«, in: Jason M. Yonover u. Kristin Gjesdal (Hrsgg.), *Spinoza in Germany. Political and Religious Thought Across the Long Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: Oxford UP 2024, 137–155.

9 Forster, Herder and Spinoza, a. a. O., 62; 77–80.

den späten 1760ern und frühen 1770ern Herders Interesse weckt, findet dies seinen deutlichsten Niederschlag in der Schrift *Gott. Einige Gespräche* von 1787. Herder bezieht sich hier klar positiv auf Spinoza, legt den Schwerpunkt des Substanz- und damit Gottesverständnisses jedoch auf die Aspekte von Kraft, Aktivität, Lebendigkeit und Handlung. Dass dies kein nennenswertes Abweichen von der Grundposition Spinozas bedeutet, zeigt sich u. a. im Lehrsatz 34 von Teil I der *Ethik*, in dem es heißt: »Gottes Macht ist genau seine Essenz.« Substanz / Gott erscheint bei Herder nun dezidierter als Geist im Sinne einer ursprünglichen, intellektuellen Kraft, die in den spezifischen, insbesondere den organischen Kräften der Natur ihren Ausdruck findet. Progressive Selbstentwicklung kann sich demzufolge in Natur und Geschichte zeigen, die für Herder beide von besonderem Interesse sind.

Für Goethe ist es nun vor allem die dritte Erkenntnisgattung in Spinozas *Ethik*, die zum Ausgangspunkt einer enthusiastischen Befürwortung des Spinozismus wird, wie Eckart Förster ausführlich darlegt.[10] Die *scientia intuitiva* ist, nach *imaginatio* und *ratio*, dadurch bestimmt, dass sie »von der adäquaten Idee dessen, was die Essenz gewisser Attribute Gottes ausmacht, weiter[schreitet] zu der adäquaten Erkenntnis der Essenz von Dingen.« (*Ethik*, Teil II, Lehrsatz 40, Anm. 2) Intuitive Erkenntnis zeichnet den menschlichen Geist, der sich nicht in Vorstellung und Denken erschöpft, somit entscheidend aus – *tertium datur*. In Kontemplation der natürlichen Dinge, insbesondere der von Goethe so intensiv erforschten und morphologisch ergründeten Pflanzenwelt, soll deren inneres Wesen intuitiv erfasst werden. Auch wenn Konzepte und Ideen innerhalb des Subjekts statthaben, so drücken sie doch das innere Wesen ihrer Gegenstände aus und sind daher in der externen Welt realisiert.[11] Eine für diesen Erkenntnisweg zentrale Episode war sicherlich Goethes Aufenthalt im botanisch reichhaltigen öffentlichen Garten Palermos während seiner Italienreise 1787. Zurück in Weimar, veröffentlicht er 1790 den *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* – einer der entscheidenden Entwicklungsschritte der Weimarer Klassik in naturwissenschaftlicher und naturphilosophischer Hinsicht.

Aus den beschriebenen Konstellationen erhellt also, dass Herder und Goethe insbesondere im Kontext ihres Natur- und Wissenschaftsverständnisses bedeutend durch Spinozas Philosophie geprägt wurden. Dies geht,

[10] Eckart Förster, »Goethe's Spinozism«, in: ders. / Melamed, Spinoza and German Idealism, a. a. O., 2012, 85–99; vgl. auch Eckart Förster, *Grenzen der Erkenntnis? Untersuchungen zu Kant und dem Deutschen Idealismus*, hrsg. v. Bodo Beyer u. Johannes Haag, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 2022 (= Spekulation und Erfahrung II,62).

[11] Förster, Goethe's Spinozism, a. a. O., 99.

ganz im Sinne dieser Philosophie, unmittelbar mit der Entwicklung des jeweiligen Gottesverständnisses und daher auch mit ontologischen sowie theologischen Grundannahmen einher. Die zentralen Autoren der Weimarer Klassik agieren dabei primär systemimmanent innerhalb des Denkens Spinozas – anders als Jacobi und Maimon, die, wie beschrieben, tendenziell eher das System als solches in den Blick nehmen und in verschiedenen Hinsichten problematisieren. Ohne Zweifel, so das Fazit der hier entwickelten kurzen Reflexion, kann die Philosophie Spinozas als bedeutsame, lebendige Strömung innerhalb der uns heute als Weimarer Klassik bekannten Epoche gelten, wobei ebendiese Lebendigkeit und Dynamik auch den inhaltlichen Kernpunkt besagter Rezeption und Einbindung ausmacht.

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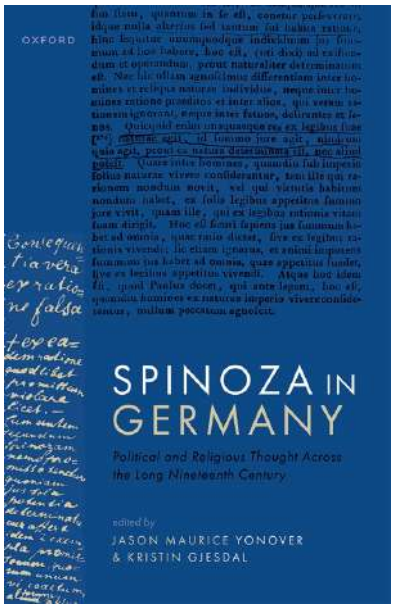
Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

María Jimena Solé[*]

Jason Maurice YONOVER & Kristin GJESDAL (eds.), *Spinoza in Germany. Political and Religious Thought Across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 331 pp. ISBN 9780192862884



"Spinoza was never in Germany," the book's editors Jason M. Yonover and Kristin Gjesdal state in the first line of the Introduction. Indeed, there is no record that the philosopher born in Amsterdam in 1632 ever set foot on German soil, despite having had a concrete opportunity to do so: in February 1673, Karl Ludwig, Prince Elector of the Palatinate sent Spinoza, through Professor Johan L. Fabritius, a formal invitation to take up a professorship at the University of Heidelberg. In his letter, Fabritius assures Spinoza that in Heidelberg he will have the broadest freedom to philosophize although, he

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adds, the Prince trusts that he will not abuse it to disturb the publicly established religion. The invitation, as is clear, came with its own conditions and the warning was, to some extent, justified. The suspicion of atheism that surrounded Spinoza for having been expelled from the Jewish community and not having adopted any other religion, had been reinforced after the publication in 1670 of his *Theological-Political Treatise*, just three years before he received the invitation to Heidelberg. The book, as is well known, defends the freedom to philosophize, argues in favor of the separation between religion and philosophy, denounces the existence of a secret pact between despots and superstitious religion in order to keep the people under control, and presents democracy as the best system of government. Immediately condemned by the Calvinist church authorities and then banned by the political authorities, the book confirmed the bad reputation of its author, widely considered a danger to order and an enemy of religion. Of course, Spinoza politely declined the invitation to Germany. He preferred to remain on the margins of educational institutions and to safeguard his intellectual independence, even if this meant continuing to live austerely thanks to the favor of his friends.

But even though Spinoza was never in Germany, Yonover and Gjesdal immediately point out, "modern German philosophy would have had a very different development without the influence of Spinoza's writings, whose importance for this tradition is significantly pronounced" (p. 1). This is most certainly true, and I believe it would be possible to further extend the scope of this counterfactual judgment and claim that modern philosophy as a whole would have looked very different if Spinoza's writings had not been read, translated, discussed, refuted and vindicated by German thinkers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the Spinoza renaissance that took place in Germany as the main consequence of the so-called Pantheism Controversy, triggered by F.H. Jacobi with the publication of his correspondence with M. Mendelssohn in 1785, completely transformed the course of philosophy.

It is not surprising, then, that the history of Spinoza's reception in Germany and the influence of his ideas on German thinkers has long been a topic of interest to scholars. However, there is still much to be discovered and explored about this fascinating aspect of the history of philosophy. And while in German the bibliography is abundant, in the English-speaking world the interest in this subject seems to have awakened more recently, to the point that there is only one noteworthy antecedent to this book: the collection of essays by E. Förster and Y. Melamed, published in 2012 under the title *Spinoza and German Idealism* by Cambridge University Press.

It is, therefore, undeniable that Yonover and Gjesdal's book represents a highly significant addition to studies of Spinoza's influence and reception in Germany in English. However, this is far from being its only merit. Throughout its fifteen chapters, specially written for the volume, the book undertakes an exploration of entirely novel aspects of this history of Spinozism. This is because the book proposes a completely original approach to the subject. Instead of concentrating on the importance of Spinozism for German philosophy in its metaphysical, epistemological and ethical dimensions—as scholars have mostly done so far—the editors propose to attend to the impact of Spinoza's political philosophy and philosophy of religion on German thinkers of the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, concentrating mainly on the reception of the theses contained in the *Theological-Political Treatise.*

The chosen approach is sufficiently justified. In fact, as Yonover and Gjesdal point out, the *Theological-Political Treatise* was read and discussed in German territory since its appearance, before the publication of the *Ethics* and the rest of Spinoza's works. However, the reception of the former work is nonetheless produced through neglected, or not so well known, figures of the German intellectual sphere of the time. Thus, the viewpoint adopted by the book is innovative in another respect, which makes the work a significant contribution. I refer to the fact that it deals with the importance of Spinozism in thinkers considered minor or marginal, including certain women thinkers such as Madame de Staël and Lou Andreas-Salomé.

The book is composed of fifteen chapters and an Introduction, which provides an overview of the proposed itinerary. The first seven chapters reconstruct the reception of a series of ideas and values of Spinozian origin in a group of German thinkers of the late eighteenth century. The book begins with Michael N. Forster's contribution, "Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* and the German Romantic Tradition," primarily concerned with tracing Herder's Spinozism. It shows, through the analysis of a set of documents, that he is first concerned with the *Theological-Political Treatise* (and not with the *Ethics*) and argues that this proves decisive for the shaping of his own view of politics, hermeneutics, and philosophy of mind. These developments, in turn, are of vital importance for understanding some aspects of the thought of two great representatives of Romanticism, F. Schlegel and Schleiermacher. Michael A. Rosenthal also deals with the Romantic reception of Spinoza, studying the way in which F. Schlegel reinterprets the figure of the prophet, with and against Spinoza, to place him between the philosopher and the poet. Kristin Gjesdal investigates which dimensions of Spinozian hermeneutics are used productively in the field of

politics by Herder, Schleiermacher, and de Staël. She shows that, creatively utilized by these thinkers, Spinoza's hermeneutic principles go hand in hand with his emancipatory potency. Yoav Schaefer, in his article "Kant's Anti-Judaism and Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*" proposes to trace Spinoza's influence on the critique of Judaism present in *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* to show that, while there is reason to claim that Kant knew the text, it does not merely repeat Spinozian assertions but radicalizes many of its theses and goes beyond the Dutch thinker. Michah Gottlieb also deals with the Spinozist heritage to critically rethink religion and shows how, through the enlightened Jewish thinker Friedländer and other thinkers of the same orientation, it contributed to the birth of the new Reform Judaism. Yitzhak Melamed uncovers and analyzes the concept of "political theology" as used by Salomon Maimon and, for this purpose, traces the possible influence of Spinoza in some of his most provocative statements about the philosophical and political character of Judaism. Finally, Martin Bollacher is concerned with illuminating Goethe's relationship with Spinoza, showing that in addition to the *Ethics*, the German was also acquainted with the *Theological-Political Treatise.* By analyzing a passage in which Goethe refers to this latter text, the author aims to highlight the importance of Spinoza in Goethe's vision of freedom of thought and the Old Testament.

The remaining eight articles deal with the German reception of Spinoza during the Nineteenth Century. This second section of the book begins with a chapter by Jonathan Israel, who addresses the link of Börne, Heine and Hess with Spinoza on the one hand, and with socialism on the other, taking as a broad horizon of analysis the category of radical enlightenment, developed by the author in his renowned books. In his text "David Friedrich Strauß and Spinoza," Frederick Beiser examines how the German writer—who has gone down in history as one of the most notable freethinkers of the 19th century—opposes some of Spinoza's theological theses by making use, paradoxically, of Spinozian hermeneutic principles. Sandra Shapshay and Dennis Vanden Auweele also deal with Spinoza's philosophy of religion by reconstructing the dialogue between Spinoza and Schopenhauer on the link between faith and philosophy in order to examine the ethical character of their metaphysical theories. In her chapter, entitled "Marx, Spinoza, and 'True Democracy,'" Sandra L. Field traces the possible impact of Spinoza on Marx's position on democracy in his writings on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* to highlight the differences between them, and the importance of Rousseau as an alternative source for understanding that concept. Tracie Matysik also examines the link between Marxism and Spinoza, focusing on some thinkers who reject certain Spinozist positions, such as his critique of

teleology and the possibility of historical progress, but who recover the value of others, such as his conception of the human being as part of nature. In his article entitled "Spinoza, Mendelssohn, and Hess on Zion," Warren Zev Harvey retraces the different positions adopted by Mendelssohn and Hess on the possibility of the existence of a Jewish state and how Spinoza's statements were understood differently by his successors. Continuing with topics that have strong current resonances, Shira Billet deals with Hermann Cohen's position in relation to Spinoza in order to emphasize certain methodological affinities between them, which emerge when investigating the link that each one admits between philosophy and history. The last article included in the volume, by Katharina Kraus, deals with Lou Salomé's reading of Spinoza's philosophy and how Spinoza's ideas play a role in the intellectual development of the thinker.

The route proposed by the book through the different chapters, which I have briefly commented on, is in itself a fundamental contribution to a better understanding of the process of reception of Spinozism in Germany and the impact that his thought had on the development of philosophy in that territory. As I said, this contribution lies not only in the fact that it traces the influence of Spinoza's political philosophy and philosophy of religion on German thinkers, but also in the fact that, in order to achieve this, it deals with figures who are usually neglected in the histories of the philosophy of the period.

But the book also presents another virtue for those interested in the phenomenon of the reception of ideas. Indeed, the collective character of the book and the fact that each chapter deals with a specific episode of Spinoza's reception throughout the long nineteenth century, which poses different theoretical challenges and requires different approaches, allows each author to adopt his or her own original perspective. As a small sample of this rich and enriching coexistence of multiple scholarly approaches, I would like to draw attention to some concepts with which the authors make their point of view explicit and which constitute, as I have just said, at least in my opinion, the other great achievement of this book.

At the beginning of her article Sandra Field mentions three possible methodological approaches to the study of the reception of one thinker by another: historical influence, theoretical affinity, and theoretical transformation (212). The *first* approach, which aims to reconstruct the link that actually existed between the two figures to be studied on the basis of documents—books, letters, notes, etc.—in order to establish whether there was indeed an influence of the ideas of one on the other, is adopted by most of the authors of the chapters of the book. The chapter by Martin Bollacher is an excellent

example of this approach, carried out rigorously and exhaus-tively. However, the notion of historical influence also has its nuances. Michael Forster, for example, distinguishes between direct and indirect influence. Thus, he establishes that while Spinoza exerted a direct impact on Herder that can be verified from the textual record, it was above all through Herder that Spinoza influenced F. Schlegel and Schleiermacher. This distinction renders the historical mode of studying influences more complex, since it allows us to think of the function of the direct receivers of a doctrine as capable of prolonging that reception in other thinkers, becoming an intermediate but fundamental piece of the puzzle when deciphering the sources of the thought of the author under study.

To approach reception from the *second* perspective of theoretical affinity, on the other hand, no longer aims at following the traces of the readings that one thinker made of another in his texts. Explicit mentions become secondary in order to allow ideas to take center stage. The aim is precisely to find agreements, coincidences and similarities between the thinkers. In her chapter, Sandra Field combines the two aforementioned methodological paths to reexamine Spinoza's impact on Marx's concept of true democracy. Katharina Kraus adopts this same double approach in her study of Lou Salomé and Spinoza. First, she shows that it is possible to establish from her texts a sustained influence of Spinozism on her thought. Secondly, she examines three themes in Salomé's thought to show their affinity with Spinoza's positions: his conception of the original foundation of life as *All-Einheit*, his psychosomatic parallelism and his explanation of the ethical dimension of human life. Frederick Beiser also provides a good example of the combination of these first two ways of studying reception, by setting out to trace the reception of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* in a work by Strauβ that does not mention it at all, the scandalous *Das Leben Jesu*. After establishing from other documents—his correspondence, his doctoral dissertation, and an early work on Christianity—that Strauβ read and studied Spinoza, and that he explicitly acknowledges him as the father of biblical criticism, Beiser reconstructs a number of affinities between the methodology adopted in *Das Leben Jesu* and that of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Also Sandra Shapshay and Dennis Vanden Auweele find an "implicit dialogue" that Schopenhauer conducts with Spinoza in a section of the second volume of his *World as Will and Representation*. Moreover, as many specialists admit, this approach is essential in the case of the history of the reception of Spinozism, a doctrine that had been, since its first appearance, combated and denounced from the most traditional sectors. Many German thinkers who read and studied Spinoza were not willing to admit it publicly,

knowing the cost that this could bring them. Thus, finding conceptual affinities is a way to reconstruct a subterranean influence, a silenced presence of this source in their texts.

The *third* methodological approach, which Field calls "theoretical transformation" and which, according to her brief note, can be seen in the attempt of French thinkers of the late 1920s who try to refound Marxism on a Spinozian metaphysical basis, is also brought into play in this book. This is what, we may think, Michael Rosenthal does in connecting the phenomenon of reception with creative philosophical thought. In studying F. Schlegel's understanding of the figure of the prophet in connection with Spinoza's ideas, Rosenthal argues that the German is using Spinozistic ideas to produce an entirely new philosophical model (35). Thus, he points out that if Schlegel is interested in certain Spinozian ideas, this interest is in the service of a new Romantic project. Spinoza is thus transformed into an "inspiration" (37) that allows him to explain his positions, but not completely. In the same vein, Kristen Gjesdal warns that "Philosophical positions sometimes take on a life of their own—one that could not have been anticipated by their authors or immediate followers" (50), and proposes to leave aside the question of whether Spinoza exerted an influence on German Romanticism to discuss, instead, how Herder, Schleiermacher and Staël "made creative use of the systematic space disclosed by Spinoza's hermeneutics" (50-51). Tracie Matysik, too, in studying the way in which Dietzgen, Engels and Plekhanov transformed Spinoza into a dialectical materialist, points out that all three appealed to Spinoza's thought mainly as an instrument of critique; that is, that they tried to find in Spinoza an anti-foundationalist metaphysics that would serve them to attack bourgeois philosophy.

However, whatever the methodological approach chosen to study the reception of Spinoza in the different German thinkers, each of the chapters of the book shows to what extent this type of research not only allows a better understanding of the thought of these recipients by making explicit their sources and theoretical background, but also opens up the possibility of seeing the received texts in a new light, of identifying new problematic aspects of their proposals. To put it briefly, reconstructing the history of the reception of Spinozism allows us to discover a new Spinoza, a Spinoza with more faces, more nuances, and more philosophical depth.

If it is true that Spinoza, during his lifetime, never set foot on German soil, his presence in Germany is indisputable. The effects of the highly complex process of reception of his ideas by German thinkers, poets and writers was extremely powerful and its echoes continue to resonate today. Knowing this history is, indeed, fundamental to understanding not only the

shaping of German enlightenment and romanticism, but also, as this book shows, the unfolding of so much contemporary philosophy. The emphasis placed on the reception and discussion of political philosophy and philosophy of religion additionally transforms this book into a highly topical collection that interrogates issues such as freedom of expression, democracy, and the link between philosophy and religion—issues that have not lost their relevance and that continue to challenge us.

Miscellaneous

Varia

Varia

Miscellanea

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Friedrich Schiller's Ethical State

A Republic Based on Humanity

Semyon Reshenin[*]

ABSTRACT

This paper defends a republican interpretation of Friedrich Schiller's political philosophy, challenging the common view that equates his aesthetic state with the republic and regards virtue to be a prerequisite for establishing the republic. Instead, I argue that Schiller identifies the republic with the ethical state, founded not on virtue but on the capacity for humanity, which I interpret as a capacity for individual self-determination. For Schiller, forming the general will and entering the social contract are duties of a free person. Those lacking individual self-determination cannot be responsive to duty and thus cannot participate in pursuing the common good required by a republic. By emphasizing individual self-determination over virtue, Schiller's vision of republicanism proves to be distinctly modern and accommodates genuine diversity.

Keywords: Schiller, Kant, republicanism, self-determination, humanity

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Aufsatz verteidigt eine republikanische Interpretation von Friedrich Schillers politischer Philosophie und stellt die verbreitete Auffassung in Frage, die seinen ästhetischen Staat mit der Republik gleichsetzt und Tugend als Voraussetzung für deren Errichtung betrachtet. Stattdessen vertrete ich die These, dass Schiller die Republik mit dem ethischen Staat identifiziert, der nicht auf Tugend, sondern auf der Fähigkeit zur Menschlichkeit gründet – eine Fähigkeit, die ich als die Fähigkeit zur individuellen Selbstbestimmung interpretiere. Für Schiller sind die Bildung des Gemeinwillens und der Eintritt in den Gesellschaftsvertrag Pflichten freier Menschen. Wer keine individuelle Selbstbestimmung besitzt, kann der Pflicht nicht entsprechen und somit nicht an der Verwirklichung des Gemeinwohls mitwirken, das eine Republik erfordert. Indem Schiller die individuelle Selbstbestimmung über die Tugend stellt, erweist sich seine republikanische Vision als dezidiert modern und offen für echte Vielfalt.

Stichwörter: Schiller, Kant, Republikanismus, Selbstbestimmung, Menschlichkeit

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1. Introduction[1]

Kant's political thought has profoundly influenced modern republicanism, particularly in its emphasis on freedom as non-domination and self-legislation.[2] Post-Kantian republicanism, broadly understood, extends and revises these ideas in diverse ways, reflecting both enthusiasm for and critiques of Kant's rationalist approach to politics. Thinkers such as Fichte and Hegel transformed Kant's abstract principles into more institutional and social models, while later republican theorists have debated the balance between individual autonomy, democratic participation, and the determining structures of the state.[3] Within this broader post-Kantian discourse, Friedrich Schiller occupies a unique intermediary position. Deeply influenced by Kant's philosophy, especially by the third *Critique*,[4] Schiller was critical of Kant's dualisms and sought to bridge the gap between reason and feeling, law and freedom – all while staying within the Kantian framework and emphasizing self-determination.

This paper aims to show that Schiller's republicanism is not merely a historical curiosity but offers a novel way to conceptualize the republic in conditions of diversity and individual liberty. I argue that Schiller's republicanism is distinctly modern, compatible with commercial society, and does not demand that citizens be fully virtuous, but rather that they possess an uncompromised capacity for individual self-determination or, in Schiller's terms, the *capacity for humanity* (*Vermögen zur Menschheit*) (Schiller 20: 378, AL 78).[5]

While there is a growing consensus among scholars that Schiller's political views, as well as the political implications of his artistic and philosophical writings, should be interpreted as republican,[6] the debate remains

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[2] On Kant's republicanism, see e.g. Riley 1983; Ripstein 2009; Kleingeld 2012.

[3] On Fichte's republicanism, see James 2015; on Hegel's republicanism, see Westphal 2019.

[4] On Kant's influence on Schiller, see Kuno Fischer (1868), Eva Schaper (1964), Leslie Scharpe (1991), Rüdiger Safranski (2004), Frederick C. Beiser (2005).

[5] Following Immanuel Kant, Schiller associates humanity with the capacity to set one's own ends, that is, the capacity to choose freely and rationally. The term *capacity for humanity* underscores that in such choices, individuals have access to a fulfilled infinity (*erfüllte Unendlichkeit*) of possibilities for realizing their humanity (Schiller 20: 377, AL 76).

[6] Different versions of the republican reading of Schiller's political philosophy are proposed by Safranski (2004), Beiser (2005, 2008), Douglas Moggach (2007, 2008),

active regarding how we should characterize Schiller's republicanism. To better understand the positions of different authors, I focus on three crucial points. First, proponents of the republican interpretation generally agree that a defining feature of republicanism is the active participation of citizens in public life and the pursuit of the common good; I will refer to this as *engagement.* Second, they agree that engagement cannot be taken for granted – there must be something that ensures it; I will call this the *engagement condition.* Third, they consider whether the engagement condition is compatible with modern commercial society; I will call this the *compatibility problem.*[7]

The engagement condition of a republic can be understood purely in institutional terms, as political liberty secured by the constitution. More commonly, however, it involves certain requirements for citizens, particularly virtue, sometimes also described in terms of patriotism or love for one's country (Beiser 2005: 163–164, Schmidt 2009: 291–292). This raises the question: how compatible is such patriotic virtue with a society that not only tolerates but is based on the pursuit of private interest? The response to this question roughly divides republicanism into classical and modern. Classical republicanism condemns luxury, excessive wealth, and inequality as causes of moral decay, leading citizens to prioritize private interests over the common good. Modern republican thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, especially Adam Ferguson, offer a more optimistic view: the engagement condition can and should coexist with a commercial society (Ferguson 1995: 235–241).

Two central questions emerge in the debate on Schiller's republicanism. The first concerns his awareness of the compatibility problem. Schiller was familiar with the Scottish discussion on the compatibility of virtue with

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Alexander Schmidt (2009), Jeffrey Church (2014), and Samantha Matherne and Nick Riggle (2020, 2021). I also fully agree with the anonymous reviewer that, despite the recent growth of a republican consensus, there are other important approaches to Schiller's political philosophy. Thus, for example, Schiller has been identified as an explicit liberal by Friedrich Hayek (1966), David Kaiser (1999), Terence Holmes (1980), and Beiser in his early work (1992). Other authors, such as Herbert Marcuse (1955), Jacques Rancière (2004), and María del Rosario Acosta López (2018), have demonstrated how Schiller can be read as a proto-leftist thinker. All these approaches are fully justified, as Schiller wrote extensively on the importance of personal freedom and autonomy and was both an early theorist of alienation and a critic of modern commercial society.

7 Discussions of the compatibility problem are part of a broader debate, also connected with republicanism, concerning the critique of commercial society. An important predecessor of Schiller here is Rousseau, with whom Schiller enters into a dialogue. For more on Rousseau's critique of commercial society, and Adam Smith's response to it, see Dennis Rasmussen (2008) and, especially, Istvan Hont (2015).

commercial society,[8] yet Fania Oz-Salzberger (1995, 2005) argues that he overlooked the nuances of this debate and was not fully aware of the compatibility problem. Oz-Salzberger's position is convincingly challenged by Schmidt (2009) and Moggach (2007, 2008), who point out that although Schiller does not explicitly discuss commerce, his analysis addresses the growing division of labor and over-specialization in commercial society – a subject also explored by Ferguson. Schiller seeks a way to engage citizens in political life without forcibly eliminating their differences. As he writes, "the constitution of a state will be very imperfect if it can bring about unity only through the abolition of diversity" (Schiller 20: 317, AL 11).[9] The very idea of preserving diversity in the republic, as Moggach (2007, 2008) and Schmidt (2009) argue, demonstrates that Schiller was acutely aware of the challenges modernity poses to republicanism.

The second question is whether Schiller addresses the compatibility problem as a classical or modern Republican. His concern with preserving diversity in unity strongly suggests the latter: Schiller believes that the engagement condition can be compatible with commercial society. But how exactly does he conceptualize the engagement condition? Schiller's solution to the compatibility problem aligns with Republican ideals, as he argues that proper education for citizens is essential. What is novel in his thesis is that this education should be *aesthetic*, focused on the cultivation of the *capacity of humanity*, rather than virtue or patriotism. This point is somewhat overlooked in recent literature on Schiller's republicanism.[10] For instance, Beiser (2005, 2008) and Schmidt (2009) insist that the engagement condition in Schiller's republicanism is virtue.

In *On Grace and Dignity*, Schiller defines virtue as the ideal of perfected humanity (*das Ideal vollkommener Menschheit*) (Schiller 20: 298, GD 161), that is, virtue is not merely patriotism, courage, or adherence to principles, but rather the highest possible degree of harmony between reason and sensibility. If we understand virtue, following Schiller, as the culmination of human spiritual development – a quality peculiar only to the most morally and aesthetically developed *beautiful souls* – then I disagree with Beiser and Schmidt's positions. That said, I concur that virtue is a condition of what

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8 On Schiller's study of Ferguson at the Karlschule, see, e.g., Beiser (2005: 19, 92, 125), David Pugh (1997: 173-80), Scharpe (1991: 58-9).

9 Almost all citations from Schiller are given in my translation; however, I consulted the English translations listed in the bibliography.

10 As an anonymous reviewer rightly noted, the importance of humanity for political participation in Schiller had already been discussed earlier, for example by Marcuse (1955: 164-179). One of the aims of the present article is to reintroduce this focus on humanity specifically into contemporary debates on Schiller's republicanism.

Schiller calls the *aesthetic state.* However, the aesthetic state is not, as I will show, Schiller's term for a republic but for an exceptionally demanding ideal polity.

This brings me to an important point: the debates outlined earlier can be clarified by paying closer attention to Schiller's ternary division of the dynamic, ethical, and aesthetic states from his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (henceforth *Aesthetic Letters*). Schiller bases this classification not on differences in the content of laws or the essence of institutions and society, but on the distinct procedures by which society, laws, and institutions are formed. This classification structures the paper in the following manner: in the next three sections, I will examine each of the three types of state distinguished by Schiller and explicate the necessary conditions for each.

2. The Dynamic State of Rights

In this section, I analyze the first element of Schiller's ternary division – the dynamic state of rights or, as Schiller also calls it, the natural state (*Naturstaat*).[11] The dynamic state is the first and the most primitive form of statehood. Schiller defines it "as any political body which originally **derives its institution from forces**, not from laws [*von Kräften, nicht von Gesetzen*]" (Schiller 20: 314, AL 8, my emphasis). Despite the contrast between the dynamic state and lawfulness, we should not conclude that Schiller equates the dynamic state with a state of nature characterized by anarchy or a Hobbesian war of all against all. Schiller makes it clear that the role of the dynamic state is precisely to restrain the destructive impulses of the natural man and prevent a lapse into anarchy. Furthermore, he describes the very idea of the state of nature as an artificial fiction, unsupported by experience and created to temporarily justify the present dynamic statehood as a product of free will. That is, the idea of the state of nature serves as a necessary premise for the idea of the social contract, which, in turn, is less a description of past events and more a moral justification for the future transformation of the state (Schiller 20: 313–4, AL 7–8).

When Schiller denies the dynamic state's lawfulness, this should be understood only as referring to objectively valid laws. Any positive law, unless it (i) is adopted through a proper procedure, embodying the ideal of self-legislation, and (ii) has objective validity, would not, in Schiller's terminology, be considered a law. Instead, Schiller uses the term right (*Recht*) to refer to arbitrary positive laws that are neither derived from self-legislation nor

[11] Schiller also uses the term the *state of necessity* (*Nothstaat*) in the *Aesthetic Letters* (Schiller 20: 313, AL 7).

necessarily objectively valid. Still, Schiller emphasizes that even in a dynamic state, some form of legislation exists, though its *Recht* does not merit being called laws.

It is crucial to emphasize that Schiller's classification of a state as dynamic does not depend on the specific content of its laws or institutions but solely on the fact that they are formed dynamically through the interaction of various forces.[12] This means there can be countless variations of dynamic states, differing based on the outcomes of these interactions. The only necessary condition for the emergence and existence of a dynamic state is the "taming of nature through nature" (Schiller 20: 410, AL 110) or the "balance of evil" (Schiller 20: 321, AL 16; 26: 264, LtP 125).

Dynamic states may fulfill the requirements of a natural human being, protecting it and providing conditions for satisfying its needs. However, under favorable circumstances, a moral person emerges within the natural human being, yearning for something that the dynamic state cannot provide. The moral person is capable of thinking for herself and following self-prescribed laws. The dynamic state lacks the authority that her reason can recognize, and the rationale for this lies in the dynamic mechanism of rights formation itself: "The work of blind forces has no authority to which freedom had to bow" (Schiller 20: 314 AL 8).

Let us assume for the sake of argument that the dynamic interaction of forces has given rise to laws that, in their content, a moral person could call just. Even that would not be sufficient. In this case, only condition (ii) for genuine lawfulness is fulfilled: the right has objective validity. Condition (i), however, remains unmet: the right has not been adopted through a proper procedure. For the moral person, rights that *accidentally* happen to be just still fail to meet her rational requirements. This applies not only to the arbitrary content of rights in a dynamic state but also to the state's very existence, which is itself arbitrary. Dynamic states arise from the interaction of blind forces, not from the intentional establishment by individuals:

> even the sparse fragmentary connection [*Antheil*], which still ties the individual members to the whole, does not depend on forms, which they give themselves, (for how could one trust their freedom in such an artificial and light-shy clockwork?) (Schiller 20: 323-4, AL 19).

In summary, the theory of the dynamic state is Schiller's attempt to provide a conceptual explanation of how a stable state initially comes into being and

[12] Schiller's reference to the right of the strong (*das Recht des Stärkern*) in his letter to Prince Frederick Christian II von Augustenburg (July 13, 1793) (Schiller 26: 260, LtP 123) is quite telling.

why it takes different forms. Schiller rejects social contract theory[13] and shows how the state could have emerged simply as a result of the interaction of various forces. However, two fundamental problems make dynamic states unsatisfactory for a moral person. First, they are established without her participation, and second, she has no meaningful input into their legislation. Because dynamic states do not involve their citizens in their establishment or perpetuation, they fail to embody political self-determination and are thus unworthy of the moral person. What kind of state is worthy of her? Could it be an aesthetic state?

3. The Aesthetic State of Semblances

The aesthetic state is commonly invoked in literature as Schiller's republican response to the mechanistic nature of the dynamic state.[14] In this section, I demonstrate that Schiller explicitly distinguishes the aesthetic state from a republic. Furthermore, I argue that the demands of the aesthetic state far exceed those typically expected of a republic. In doing so, I will, on the one hand, support the thesis that virtue is a condition for the aesthetic state, while on the other hand, I will challenge the thesis that the aesthetic state is Schiller's term for a republic.

Unlike the concept of the ethical state, Schiller's aesthetic state has been widely discussed in the literature.[15] Nearly every scholar engaging with Schiller's philosophy addresses it to some extent. However, its distinction from the ethical state remains underexplored. Although authors rarely write about the latter, they often ascribe its features to the former. I intend to focus only on those features of the aesthetic state that belong to it and make it unique. The distinction hinges on this criterion: the ethical state is grounded solely in the requirements of reason – that is, moral and legal obligations – whereas the aesthetic state integrates the demands of an ennobled nature, that is, aesthetic obligations in addition to the merely moral and legal ones.[16]

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[13] It should be noted that Schiller rejects social contract theory specifically as a correct descriptive account of the origin of the state. At the same time, in the fourth section of the article I show that Schiller regards social contract theory as a necessary illusion which justifies the existing state and provides a general direction of how the state ought to be reformed.

[14] Schiller's political position is defined specifically as aesthetic republicanism e.g. by Moggach (2007, 2008), Schmidt (2009), and Church (2014).

[15] For an overview of the history of the concept of the aesthetic state, see Josef Chytry (1989).

[16] Although this is not the focus of the article, I would like to note that I regard Schiller's aesthetic state as something that complements rather than replaces the ethical state. For

It should be noted, however, that Schiller regards aesthetic obligations as rational as well, since they are endorsed by reason, even though their ultimate source is nature – albeit an ennobled one. A key difference lies in external enforceability: aesthetic obligations cannot be imposed externally.[17] While the ethical state governs external actions through laws, the aesthetic state relies on beauty and sociable character (*geselliger Charakter*) (Schiller 20: 410, AL 110). Aesthetic obligations also differ from moral obligations, as they do not involve moral self-necessitation but are free expressions of the play drive (*Spieltrieb*).

Schiller develops the concept of the play drive by drawing on Kant's theory of the free play of the faculties. According to Kant, our aesthetic judgments involve the interaction of the same cognitive faculties as theoretical judgments: understanding and imagination. The crucial difference lies in the mode of their interaction. In aesthetic judgments this interaction is not mediated by determinate concepts but occurs as a free play evoked by the representation of the aesthetic object (Kant 5:217, CPJ 102). When reflecting on the representation of a beautiful object, we discover in this representation a form of purposiveness, and this discovery is pleasurable for us. The purposiveness in this case is not objective, that is, it is not directed toward a specific purpose, but subjective, meaning that the representation of the object is purposive for the free interaction of our mental faculties. Independence from any specific purpose, whether the satisfaction of an inclination or the acquisition of knowledge, renders aesthetic pleasure genuinely free.

The freedom realized in Schiller's aesthetic state likewise presupposes the free play of our capacities, but Schiller presents it in anthropological terms as the reciprocal interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) of two basic drives: the formal drive (*Formtrieb*) and the material drive (*Stofftrieb*), which can be roughly correlated with what Kantian philosophy calls reason and sensibility,

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a similar position, see, for example, Stadter (2023: 364); for an alternative reading, see Mehigan (2023: 243).

[17] According to Kant, not all moral obligations are coercively enforceable either. In particular, the duties of virtue are unenforceable by others and necessitated through the respect for the moral law. Moreover, as Onora O'Neill shows, some Kantian duties of right, such as "the duty to enter a civil condition and duties of equity, are not in principle enforceable" (O'Neill 2016: 111) as well. Of course, at the time of writing the *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller could not have known about Kant's distinction between duties of virtue and duties of right. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in emphasizing the aesthetic character of virtue, Schiller anticipates Kant's distinction. However, it should also be pointed out that aesthetic obligations do not imply any form of necessitation, neither through external legal coercion nor through internal respect for the law. They arise from the very nature of the virtuous person, and, strictly speaking, we can refer to them as obligations only in a metaphorical sense.

respectively. As Beiser aptly summarizes, the task of the former "is to formalize matter, or to internalize what is external," and the task of the latter "is to externalize what is internal" (Beiser 2005: 139). The formal drive is associated with activity, rationality, principles, concepts, reasons, normativity, morality, timelessness, absoluteness, and personality. The material drive is associated with passivity, inclinations, instincts, sensual desires, feelings, self-preservation, happiness, and the particular conditions of personality. When the two basic drives are equally strong and reciprocally strained, their respective claims suppress each other's compulsion (Schiller 20:367–8, AL 64–5). As a result of the active and reciprocal interaction between these two drives, a complex third drive, the play drive, emerges, and the person finds herself in a condition of active determinability, which allows her, through reflective distance, to examine the claims of both drives, choose in favor of one of them, and act accordingly.

It is crucial to note that Schiller distinguishes between the possibility of the reciprocal interaction of the two basic drives and the ideal realization of such interaction. In speaking of the former, he uses the term the *capacity for humanity* (Schiller 20:378, AL 78). In speaking of the latter, he uses the term the *ideal of perfected humanity* (Schiller 20:298, GD 161). Although Schiller primarily discusses the ideal of perfected humanity within the framework of his theory of virtue presented in *On Grace and Dignity*, I maintain that the aesthetic state is the political manifestation of the same ideal. As Matherne and Riggle (2021: 3–4) observe, the claims of humanity within and without are inextricably linked. Society, institutions, and laws in the aesthetic state are formed through free play, as if it were a dance in which each dancer anticipates the other's step:

> Everything has been arranged such that the first has already made room for the second before he arrives, everything comes together so skilfully and yet so artlessly that both seem merely to be following their own mind and still never get in the way of the other. This is the most fitting picture of maintained personal freedom and the spared freedom of the other (Schiller 26: 216, K 174).[18]

The aesthetic state does not need to enforce aesthetic obligations because it presupposes ennobled citizens for whom such obligations are already fully internalized and are expressions of their genuine sociability. In Schiller's terms, the aesthetic state presupposes beautiful souls, that is, individuals who

[18] Stephen Houlgate (2008) provides a thorough account of Schiller's political metaphor of dance.

have realized the ideal of perfected humanity and thereby become fully virtuous (Schiller 20: 298, GD 161).

A moral person, however, is not necessarily a beautiful soul. She possesses the capacity for humanity and is therefore capable of self-legislation and of following it, but she will not necessarily do so. She is merely capable of moral action, whereas for beautiful souls moral and aesthetic behavior is habitual. They are naturally attuned to the claims of humanity. Hence, while the aesthetic state can be said to be worthy of a moral person, the moral person is not good enough for the aesthetic state. Only beautiful souls can coexist with each other in the aesthetic state, where, instead of law, relationships are regulated through sociable character. Thus, for Schiller, perfect virtue – being a defining characteristic of a beautiful soul – is indeed the condition of the aesthetic state, while the aesthetic state itself is the condition for perfecting virtue.

That said, I argue that the aesthetic state is not the concept in which we should search for Schiller's understanding of the republic. To begin with, Schiller says of the aesthetic state that "as a matter of fact it could be found, like the pure church and the pure **republic**, only in a few select circles" (Schiller 20: 412, AL 112fn, my emphasis). Schiller implies that only particularly refined individuals can form an aesthetic state and – what is more important for this section – he explicitly distinguishes the aesthetic state from the church and the republic. The aesthetic state and the pure republic are not the same thing, even if both are to be found only in a few select circles.

Another reason I believe it is incorrect to view the aesthetic state as Schiller's concept of a republic is that its demands go far beyond those of the republic. Specifically, the aesthetic state entails radical inclusivity: "In the aesthetic state, everything – even the serving tool [*dienende Werkzeug*] – is a free citizen who has equal rights with the noblest" (Schiller 20: 412, AL 112). Kant's formula of humanity extends there to all natural objects: "Beauty, or rather taste, regards all things as ends in themselves and absolutely does not tolerate that one serves the other as a means or bears the yoke" (Schiller 26: 212, K 170). Citizens of the aesthetic state are tasked with "making everything else around them, including the inanimate, free" (Schiller 20: 386fn, AL 87fn). This radical inclusivity is still understudied and holds significant potential for the development of broadly Kantian animal and environmental ethics on aesthetic principles. Nevertheless, it would be too demanding to expect such inclusivity from a republic. What is even more important, Schiller himself denies the full attainability of the aesthetic state: "the ideal of equality, which a fanatic [*Schwärmer*] would so gladly like to see

realized in its essence, is fulfilled [only] in the realm of aesthetic semblances" (Schiller 20:412, AL 112).

Beneath the semblance of the aesthetic state there always lies the ethical state as its foundation. The unattainability of the aesthetic state in essence, however, does not mean that it is, as e.g. Pugh (1997: 155) claims, merely a fiction that distracts us from the non-ideality of the world. The space limits do not allow me to devote more attention to this question, but I agree with Beiser (2005: 111) that the aesthetic state and the beautiful soul should be regarded as regulative ideals that we both can and aesthetically ought to approximate, thereby bringing about ever greater harmony among all natural beings. If even an approximation were impossible, Schiller would not have said that the aesthetic state "as a matter of fact <…> could be found <…> in a few select circles" (Schiller 20: 412, AL 112fn). We become fanatics only if we forget that this ideal is never fully attainable, especially in a revolutionary, here-and-now format.

To summarize this section: the aesthetic state is a regulative ideal that blurs the distinctions between animate and inanimate, rational and non-rational, and Schiller explicitly distinguishes this ideal from a republic. The aesthetic state's laws, and institutions are formed through free play, and it requires its citizens to be beautiful souls, that is, to embody the ideal of perfected humanity. In the next section, I show that Schiller's ethical state aligns more closely with traditional conceptions of the republic.

4. The Ethical State of Duty

Schiller's ethical state has surprisingly received little attention in the literature. Beiser, in his otherwise excellent book on Schiller, for instance, mentions the term in only two pages. He argues that we should understand Schiller's ethical state as Kant's *kingdom of ends* (Beiser 2005: 162), i.e., "a systematic union of different rational beings under common laws" (Kant 4: 433, GMM 83). Schmidt, on the contrary, considers the ethical state, which he views as synonymous with the state of reason (*Vernunftstaat*), to be the enlightened, egalitarian moral state envisioned by revolutionaries (Schmidt 2009: 307-9).[19] To my knowledge, none of the Anglophone authors attempted a detailed analysis of this concept, and addressing this gap is the goal of this section. First, I show that the ethical state is a republic. Then I

[19] Pugh's position seems somewhat similar to Schmidt's, but he makes the further point that ultimately the rational state remains a product of the imagination, in lieu of which Schiller ends up offering "an acceptance of an authoritarian state with a compensating aesthetic dimension" (Pugh 1997: 406).

discuss the engagement condition of the ethical state and argue that it is not virtue but an uncompromised capacity for individual self-determination. Finally, I show that Schiller's republicanism is modern rather than classical and briefly discuss the role of diversity within it.

a) The Ethical State is a Republic

As I have already mentioned, Schiller's classification is based on the principle through which a state is organized and its institutions are shaped. In the dynamic state, this principle is the dynamic interaction of different forces, whereas in the aesthetic state, it is free play. As for the ethical state, it "can make it [society] (morally) necessary only by subjecting the individual will to the general will [*allgemeiner Wille*]" (Schiller 20: 410, AL 110). Schiller appeals to Rousseau's concept of the general will. Very roughly, according to Rousseau, a state can be legitimate only if it is guided by the general will of its members. The general will acts as the source of all laws, which are willed by all citizens. Thus, by obeying these laws, a citizen "obeys only himself and remains as free as before" (Rousseau 1994: 138).

From Schiller's brief discussions, we learn that the ethical state is characterized by the rule of law, that genuine freedom is the foundation of political association within it, that political legislation is governed by reason, and that every person (though not every natural being, as in the aesthetic state) is treated as an end in itself (see Schiller 20: 319, AL 14; and 26: 262, AL 123). In other words, Schiller associates the general will not with simple majority rule but with Kantian autonomous self-legislation as the source of universal practical principles. Unfortunately, Schiller does not delve into the details of the procedure through which such self-legislation should be carried out at the state level. The implication, however, is that the procedure can take different forms, which aligns well with Schiller's conviction that "if reason brings its moral unity into physical society, it must not violate the diversity of nature" (Schiller 20: 318, AL 13).

In addition to the general will, Schiller references another concept extensively used by Rousseau: the social contract. Schiller observes that the present dynamic state is justified in our imagination by the fiction that we have, by our *willful decision*, exchanged the state of independence (*Stand der Unabhängigkeit*) for the state of contracts (*Stand der Verträge*) (Schiller 20: 313, AL 8).[20] Why does he think this is fiction? Such a decision presupposes that people conceive of the state of contracts as a purpose and possess the capacity to make a free choice in its favor. Schiller argues that in this imagined past,

[20] The word *state* in this case has no political meaning; it is *Stand*, not *Staat*.

humans had neither a proper understanding of the purpose nor a functioning capacity for choice. In other words, the idea of the social contract implies the existence of a rational free agent, which humans of that time were not. Furthermore, while Schiller acknowledges that humans, through a rich theoretical culture, have developed a sense of proper purpose, they still lack an uncompromised capacity for individual self-determination – or, in Schiller's terms, a capacity for humanity.

This is the central problem that Schiller seeks to address in his *Aesthetic Letters*. It seems that all the conditions for the establishment of the ethical state are ripe, yet the most important condition is missing: "The moral possibility (*moralische Möglichkeit*) is lacking, and the generous moment finds an unreceptive generation" (Schiller 20: 319, AL 14). I want to draw attention to his choice of terminology. Schiller does not speak of moral perfection, that is, virtue, nor does he mention moral actuality; for the ethical state, only moral possibility is required. This is further confirmed by Schiller's brief discussion that seeking support (*Stütze*) for the ethical state is equally pointless in both the natural character driven only by selfish impulses and the moral character, which is yet to be cultivated within the process of becoming a beautiful soul. What is needed is "to create a **third character**, which, while related to the other two, paves the way for a transition from the rule of mere forces to the rule of laws" (Schiller 20: 378, AL 78, my emphasis).

Schiller's reliance on Rousseau's republican concepts, along with his discussion of why the transition to the state of contracts is not feasible, allows us to situate him within the republican tradition. To briefly recap, in the introduction, I identified three aspects central to the debate on Schiller's republicanism: (1) the active participation of people in the political life of their country (engagement), (2) the conditions that make such participation possible (the engagement condition), and (3) whether the engagement condition is compatible with modern commercial society (the compatibility problem). The first two aspects determine whether the doctrine in question is republican, while the third clarifies whether it is classical or modern republicanism. For now, I will focus on the first two.

For a moral person, the problem with the dynamic state is its lack of engagement: she does not participate either in the establishment of the dynamic state or in its legislation. The dynamic state arose through the interaction of forces, and its rights were shaped in the same manner. Finding no confirmation in the experience of the past, the notion of the state of contracts becomes reinterpreted as an ethical and aesthetic obligation to reestablish the state so that there be genuine engagement among its citizens.

The ethical state for which the moral person strives implies participation in its establishment through the social contract and in legislation through the formation of the general will. Engagement is, therefore, central to the ethical state. By pointing out humanity's current unreadiness for such engagement, Schiller highlights the engagement condition, which has yet to be met. Thus, Schiller's concept of the ethical state explicitly addresses the problem of engagement and does so by appealing to the republican concepts of Rousseau. From this, I conclude that Schiller's ethical state is a republic. In the next section, I compare Schiller's views on establishing a republic with those of his great influence, Kant, to further clarify Schiller's position on the engagement condition.

b) The Difference Between the Positions of Schiller and Kant

Kant's influence on Schiller is well recognized. Although not dogmatic, Schiller was a meticulous Kantian. This makes it worth considering the differences in their positions. Schiller believes that the natural man cannot establish a republic because doing so requires a free choice, while the natural man "behaves in a purely passive manner <…> as a natural force [*Naturkraft*] (that is, a force which acts only in accordance with what it undergoes)" (Schiller 20: 386, AL 86). This does not mean that the natural man is devoid of instrumental rationality or unable to choose suitable means to achieve existing ends. The natural man is capable of this; in Kantian terms, we might say the natural man can follow hypothetical imperatives. However, what is not yet fully available to him is the ability to set his own ends. According to Schiller, the establishment of an ethical state or a republic is precisely such an end, one that must be freely set.

This implies, in particular, that the ethical state cannot be established for any instrumental purpose. For example, it cannot be created merely to better protect property or to pursue interests more efficiently. The ethical state must be established not through a hypothetical imperative but through a categorical imperative – that is, it must be established because it is an ethical state. The same principle applies to the formation of the general will: it is not formed to solve personal, social, or political problems more effectively. For Schiller, the establishment of an ethical state and the formation of the general will are duties. They are to be done for their own sake, out of respect for the moral law. Thus, they cannot be motivated by instrumental considerations but only by an awareness of, and respect for, the moral law. The determination to act solely out of respect for the moral law is possible only for those who possess the capacity for individual self-determination, or in Schiller's terminology, the capacity for humanity.

Kant, on the other hand, argues that the problem of organizing a republican state depends not on freedom or choice but solely on the proper arrangement of nature's mechanisms.[21] This means that the problem can be solved even by a nation of devils, provided they have understanding (*Verstand*) (Kant 8: 366, *PP* 335). All that is required is an organization in which the selfish inclinations of these devils collide in such a way as to neutralize their destructive effects – essentially, a system of checks and balances. As Reidar Maliks notes, Kant's argument about devils implicitly refers to his concept of unsocial sociability and illustrates how a republic can arise in the first place (Maliks 2014: 64–65). Nature, in a sense, "wants" a republic to exist, and it achieves this not through duty (which arises only from freedom) but through the direct collision of opposing forces: "[N]ature itself does it, whether we will it or not" (Kant 8: 366, *PP* 335).

In Schiller's terms, we might say that Kant believes the dynamic state can become a republic on its own if it is provided with a proper constitution. Schiller disagrees, asserting that even a properly organized state will not become a republic if its citizens possess only instrumental rationality. That is, Schiller insists that an engagement condition of a republic is more than a proper constitution.

c) An Engagement Condition of the Ethical State

What exactly is required, beyond a proper constitution, for the establishment and maintenance of an ethical state – Schiller's version of a republic? In addressing this question, I disagree with almost all the scholars writing on Schiller's republicanism (Beiser 2005, 2008; Moggach 2007, 2008; Schmidt 2009). The consensus position – henceforth referred to as the *virtue reading* – holds that the engagement condition for Schiller's republic is virtue, sometimes described in terms of patriotism.

The virtue reading can be divided into two versions: a strong and a weak one.[22] According to the *strong virtue reading*, citizens must, through aesthetic education, cultivate their virtue and become *beautiful souls*,[23] such that the

[21] Kant's political views have changed and refined considerably over time. For a detailed discussion on this topic, see Kleingeld 2012. I reconstruct Kant's views as of 1795 based on two works: *On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice* (1793) and *Toward perpetual peace* (1795).

[22] The distinction is mine; other authors do not make it. While I am unsure how best to characterize their positions, I assume, following the principle of charity, that their interpretations align more closely with the *weak virtue reading*, as I find it more convincing.

[23] For a detailed discussion of Schiller's usage of the concept of the beautiful soul and Schiller's theory of virtue, see Reshenin (2022).

moral law is almost entirely internalized by them and incorporated into their nature. Virtue thus understood fulfills the engagement condition in the following way: only beautiful souls can consistently concern themselves with the common good. Consequently, until most citizens have become beautiful souls, the establishment of a republic remains premature. Let us now consider a passage from the fourth *Aesthetic Letter* that seems to support the strong virtue reading:

> If then we are to count on man's moral conduct with as much certainty as we count upon *natural* events, then this conduct must *be* his nature, <...> [and] this can only be accomplished by ensuring that the effects of these two incentives [duty and inclination] in the realm of phenomena **are completely the same**, and that, despite all differences in form, the matter of man's volition remains the same (Schiller 20: 315-6, AL 10, my emphasis (bold)).

The idea that the phenomenal effects of duty and inclination must coincide plays a key role in Schiller's theory of virtue. The *beautiful soul* is characterized by its sensibility being ennobled to such an extent that, whenever the limits of humanity permit, duty and inclination act in harmony, moving the individual in the same direction.

In other passages, Schiller no longer asserts that duty and inclination must coincide in their phenomenal effects. Instead, he suggests that for moral behavior to be possible, duty must influence humans as sensual beings. This requirement is far less demanding: a person may have inclinations that conflict with duty, but her sense of duty must still be capable of manifesting as a force in the phenomenal world that overcomes opposing forces:

> Reason has done what it can by discovering the law and establishing it; it is **the courageous will** and the living feeling that must carry it out. If truth is to gain victory in the conflict with forces [*crafte*], it must first become a force itself, and set up a drive as its proxy [*Sachführer*] in the realm of phenomena; for drives are the only moving forces in the sensual world (Schiller 20: 330-1, AL 26, my emphasis).

This quote is essential to what I term the *weak virtue* reading. In this interpretation, virtue is no longer seen as the ethical and aesthetic perfection inherent in a beautiful soul but rather as a crucial element that enables duty to become

a motivating force. Like Kant,[24] clearly mentioned in the following quote, Schiller often describes this element in terms of courage:

> there must be something in the people's feelings [*Gemüter*] that stands in the way of receiving the truth, no matter how brightly it shines, and of accepting it, no matter how vividly it convinces. A wise old man has sensed this, and it lies hidden in the pregnant statement: *sapere aude*.
>
> *Dare to be wise*. It takes the energy of **courage** [*Muth*] to fight the obstacles that both the indolence of nature [*die Trägheit der Natur*] and the cowardice of the heart [*die Feigheit des Herzens*] put in the way of learning (Schiller 20: 331, AL 27, my emphasis (bold), see also Schiller 26: 298, LtP 132).

Courage is understood here as a commitment to one's principles in the face of external influences. According to the *weak virtue reading*, only by being courageous, i.e. by daring to use their own understanding and overcoming the indolence of nature and the cowardice of the heart, can citizens truly take an interest in the common good. Thus, until they acquire courage through aesthetic education, the establishment of an ethical state, that is, a republic, remains premature. In Aristotelian terms, we can say that the weak virtue reading is not about virtue, but about *enkrateia*, self-control, which enables one to remain true to their principles.

The main reason I reject the *strong virtue reading* is that it implies an anti-Kantian view of the state as an end and of humanity as a means to that end. For Schiller, a beautiful soul represents the ideal of perfected humanity. However, if the establishment of the ethical state requires that its citizens be beautiful souls, it would follow that the unconditional good (a human being in its perfection) becomes merely a means to a conditional good (the state). One might argue that Schiller is abandoning the Kantian position here, treating the state as more significant and fundamental than humanity. Yet there is ample evidence to suggest otherwise – that Schiller is in complete agreement with Kant on this point. For instance, he writes in a letter to Caroline von Beulwitz (November 27, 1788):

> The state is a creature of chance, but man is a necessary being, and by what else is a state great and venerable than by the powers of its individuals? The state is only an effect of human power, only a work of

[24] On the association between courage and virtue in Kant, see Robert B. Louden (2011). See also Anne Margaret Baxley (2010) for a recent systematic discussion of Kant's theory of virtue.

> thought, but man is the source of power himself, and the creator of thought (Schiller 27: 310).

The same point is reiterated in Schiller's historical essay *The Legislation of Lycurgus and Solon*:

> **The state itself is never an end**, it is only important as a condition under which the end of mankind can be fulfilled, and this end of mankind is no other than the development of all the powers of man, progress (Schiller 17: 423, my emphasis).

Schiller criticizes constitutions that permit human progress to be sacrificed for the sake of the state. The last quotation also reveals another problem with the *strong virtue reading*. As we see, Schiller, like Kant, regards the state as a means to promote progress and human development. However, if the state's establishment depends on the existence of fully developed, perfect individuals, it becomes unclear why the state is needed at all, as its supposed purpose would already be fulfilled.

As mentioned, Schiller states that political change requires a "capacity for humanity" (Schiller 20: 378, AL 78), a "moral possibility [*moralische Möglichkeit*]" (Schiller 20: 319, AL 14), or some "third character" that is neither natural nor moral, since moral character "must first be cultivated" (Schiller 20: 378, AL 78). Moral possibility does not represent perfect virtue but merely the potential for moral action. Similarly, the capacity for humanity is far less demanding than the ideal of perfected humanity embodied in the beautiful soul (Schiller 20: 298, GD 161). The third character Schiller associates with moral possibility is neither natural nor moral, meaning that Schiller is not referring here to virtue understood as moral and aesthetic perfection.

This criticism does not undermine the *weak virtue reading*, as it does not claim that humans must achieve moral and aesthetic perfection to establish an ethical state. However, the *weak virtue reading has another problem*: it does not fit well with what Schiller writes about the challenge of modernity in the *Aesthetic Letters*. Namely, Schiller addresses the question of why the French Revolution, despite proper constitutions, numerous writings extolling reason, and stirring speeches about liberty from the tribunes, culminated in *la Terreur*. He argues – making one of his most intriguing departures from Kantian orthodoxy – that people's capacity for humanity was compromised at the phenomenal level:

> That freedom cannot be acted upon is already evident from its mere concept; but that *freedom itself* is an effect of *nature* (this word taken in

> its broadest sense), not a work of man, and from this, it follows immediately that freedom can therefore also be promoted and inhibited by natural means (Schiller 20: 373, AL 73).

The gist of Schiller's argument is that the capacity for humanity depends on the proper connection between sensibility and reason, which he analyzes in terms of the reciprocal interaction between two basic drives: the material and the formal (Schiller 20: 348fn*, AL 45fn*). The lack of this reciprocal interaction arises because people have lived, been educated, and worked under modern conditions characterized by over-specialization and division of labor. By constantly focusing on a very limited set of capacities, modern individuals have greatly contributed to societal development. However, this progress has come at the cost of personal fragmentation.

Schiller identifies two forms of fragmentation: "Man can be at odds with himself in two ways: either as a savage [*Wilder*], his feelings ruling his principles; or as a barbarian [*Barbar*], if his principles destroy his feelings" (Schiller 20: 318, AL 12). Schiller argues that some individuals possess sufficient intellectual capacity to discern the right principles but, due to their disharmonious development, remain unresponsive to them. These modern barbarians lack the courage needed to overcome cowardice and indolence. The *weak virtue reading* accommodates the issue of modern barbarians well: they recognize just and true principles but cannot act on them because of the indolence of nature and the cowardice of the heart. Consequently, they are unable to establish or sustain an ethical state.

However, Schiller also addresses the problem of modern savages.[25] The modern savage is passively ruled by need and natural necessity, to the extent that they are entirely under "the power of the moment [*das Machtwort des Augenblicks*]." For them, the world is not an object for reflection but "mere fate" (Schiller 20: 388, AL 89). This condition stems from two causes. First, there are socio-economic factors: modern savages cannot escape the oppression of need and must devote all their time and energy to survival and the provision of basic needs. Second, like modern barbarians, modern savages are victims of the division of labor and over-specialization. Their capacities are insufficiently developed to enable them to push the world away through reflection or contemplation, which allows the will to distance itself from immediate desires, preventing them from directly determining action: "If desire seizes its object directly, contemplation shifts its object into the

[25] Schiller uses the term in a technical sense: a "modern savage" can be French, German, or a member of any other people. The important condition is that they are moved solely by the material drive, that is, moved solely by feelings, disregarding any principles.

distance" (Schiller 20: 394, AL 95). Modern savages, unable to achieve this reflective distance, remain under the power of the moment and thus cannot establish or maintain an ethical state.

Therefore, according to Schiller, the problem of establishing and maintaining an ethical state cannot be reduced solely to a lack of courage, as the *weak virtue reading* suggests. The problem is that people in the context of modernity, for various reasons, are deprived of their capacity for humanity, finding themselves incapable of individual self-determination. Schiller believes that aesthetic education can restore this capacity: "Beauty is <…> **our second creator** <…> For it gave us nothing more than the capacity for humanity, but leaves the use of this to our own determination of will" (Schiller 20: 378, AL 78, my emphasis). Notably, he does not claim that beauty predisposes individuals to any particular behavior, such as virtue, but only that it enables self-determination. He reiterates this idea elsewhere:

> The transition from the passive condition of sensation to the active one of thought and volition thus occurs no other way than through the middle condition of aesthetic freedom, and although this condition in itself decides nothing either for our insights or for our attitudes, and thus leaves our intellectual and moral value entirely **problematic** [*problematisch*], it is nevertheless the necessary condition under which alone we can attain insight and an attitude (Schiller 20: 383, AL 84, my emphasis).

In this context, 'problematic' means that the value is not yet determined and that its determination is up to a person. Schiller does not suggest that people will become more virtuous under the influence of beauty, nor that their inclinations will necessarily align with duty in their phenomenal effects. His thesis is that beauty enables people to choose and, through choice, exercise self-determination. Only such individuals can establish an ethical state, i.e., a republic. Since only unhindered capacity for humanity makes individual self-determination possible, it becomes a condition for citizens to participate in the life of the republic; in other words, it serves as an engagement condition for the ethical state. I call this interpretation of the engagement condition the *humanity reading*.

The understanding of beauty as our second creator motivates Schiller's program of aesthetic education. In the context of modernity, each individual's humanity becomes fragmented as he devotes all his time to the exercise and cultivation of a narrow set of capacities. The purpose of aesthetic education is not to bring about a temporary change in a person's condition under the influence of aesthetic experience, but to produce a lasting effect,

which is possible only through the formation of capacities or dispositions.[26] This formation can be achieved only through frequent and systematic exposure to aesthetic experiences.

In order to choose, our reactions to passive determinations must not merely be accompanied by reflection, but must be reflection-guided. In other words, our reflection should directly contribute to our favoring one course of action over another. Systematic encounters with art and naturally beautiful objects are intended to restore person's capacity for humanity, first, "by awakening, exercising, and training a power in him to move the sensual world – which otherwise <…> presses upon us as a blind power – into an objective distance" (Schiller 1803); and second, by revealing to him his spiritual vocation and cultivating his resolve (*Entschluß*), which is "needed to overcome the obstacles that the natural indolence of the mind [*Trägheit des Geistes*] and the cowardice of the heart" (Schiller 26: 298, AL 132) present. Art, on the one hand, being fiction and illusion, accustoms us to the reflective distance, thereby freeing us from unnecessary pressure; on the other hand, despite this distance, art touches us, it remains emotionally meaningful to us.[27] The true works of art that approximate the ideal of beauty successfully fulfill both functions. Thus, the *Juno Ludovisi*, as "the feminine divinity demands our reverence <…> [and] enkindles our love; yet just as we surrender ourselves, dissolved, to heavenly charm, [her] heavenly self-sufficiency drives us back" (Schiller 20: 359–60, AL 57).

Finally, I want to show how my interpretation fits with terms such as "moral possibility" and "third character," which Schiller uses in the *Aesthetic Letters* to describe what is lacking for political change. The capacity for humanity enables a person to set her own ends, making moral ends possible for her. By achieving reflective distance from her desires and the power of the moment and being courageous enough to follow her own understanding, a person becomes capable of behavior based on conscious principles, though not necessarily moral ones. I suggest that this transformation is what Schiller refers to as the formation of the third character. This character is no longer purely natural but provides the foundation for striving toward true moral

[26] I thank the anonymous reviewer for prompting me to emphasize more fully the role of aesthetic education specifically, rather than merely beauty, in the restoration of the capacity for humanity. And yet, in view of space limitations, I will postpone a full exposition of all the functions of beauty within aesthetic education to another paper which I am already working on.

[27] The first function is performed by liquefying beauty (*schmelzende Schönheit*), and the second by energetic beauty (*energische Schönheit*), which – following many authors such as Petrus (1993), Pugh (1997), and, with some qualification, Sharpe (1991) and Schmidt (2016) – I take to be Schiller's term for the sublime.

character, i.e., perfect virtue. I speculate that Schiller's concept of the third character is similar to what Kant would later call *character as a way of thinking* in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*:

> to have a character signifies that property of the will by which the subject binds himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed to himself irrevocably by his own reason. **Although these principles may sometimes indeed be false and incorrect**, nevertheless the formal element of the will in general, to act according to firm principles (**not to fly off hither and yon, like a swarm of gnats**), has something precious and admirable in it; for it is also something rare (Kant 7: 292, Ant 389-90, my emphasis).

Note that a character as a way of thinking, for Kant, is not necessarily moral or even good, but it is nonetheless admirable because it is based on conscious principles rather than unconscious impulses. These are precisely the qualities a potential citizen of an ethical state should demonstrate: the ability to take a reflective distance from their desires, to recognize relevant practical principles, and to have the courage to act in accordance with them. This enables them to freely set the end of establishing and maintaining a republic.

d) Schiller as a Modern Republican

In the final subsection, I will address the compatibility problem and show that Schiller's republicanism is modern and that it not only allows but even encourages diversity. Schiller acknowledges that progress is both desirable and unattainable without over-specialization: "the human species could not have progressed in any other way" (Schiller 20: 326, AL 21). He does "not deny the merits which the present race, considered as a whole, and on the scales of reason, may claim before the best in the previous world" (Schiller 20: 322, AL 18). At the same time, Schiller emphasizes the price individuals pay for the progress of humanity as a whole:

> Eternally bound only to a single small fragment of the whole, man forms himself only as a fragment, <...> he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of expressing humanity in his nature, he becomes merely an imprint of his profession, of his science (Schiller 20: 323, AL 19).

While Schiller often invokes ancient Greece as a model of human wholeness, he believes that ancient solutions cannot achieve the same wholeness under modern conditions. He stresses that if the Greeks had wanted to achieve greater progress, "they too – just as we have had to – were required to

relinquish the totality of their being and pursue truth along separate paths" (Schiller 20: 327, AL 21). Schiller is particularly opposed to any solution that would hinder progress. His main criticism of Lycurgus' legislation, for instance, is that it rendered progress impossible (Schiller 17: 426–7). Thus, Schiller is simultaneously a critic and a defender of modern society. Modern commercial society is the source of antagonism, both between individuals and within each person, which brings humanity into a fragmented condition; but such antagonism – and here Schiller is clearly following Kant (cf. Kant 8:21, IUH 111) – is the only way "[t]o develop the manifold capacities in the human being" (Schiller 20:326, AL 22).

Schiller's commitment to mitigating the negative effects of progress without abolishing it clearly shows his awareness of the compatibility problem. My interpretation of the engagement condition of the ethical state as the capacity for humanity reinforces the view that Schiller's republicanism is modern. By shifting the focus from virtue to freedom of choice, Schiller envisions a different kind of republic – one that respects the freedom of citizens and their right to exercise in diverse ways. Schiller states that "the constitution of a state will be very imperfect if it can bring about unity only through the abolition of diversity" (Schiller 20: 317, AL 11).

To further illustrate this point, I would like to highlight some forms of diversity that Schiller considers unacceptable and acceptable, or even desirable. Predictably, he does not view modern savagery or barbarism as acceptable forms of diversity. Such conditions hinder individual self-determination and must be overcome through socio-political reforms and aesthetic education, which should not replace but rather complement the division of labor, thereby mitigating its negative aspects. That said, Schiller acknowledges that people may differ not only in their economic functions and private interests but also more fundamentally in their anthropological types. In *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, Schiller identifies two broad groups: realists and idealists, neither of which he deems superior to the other (see Schiller 20: 491-503). Schiller uses these terms not in a narrow philosophical or metaphysical sense but to describe two distinct worldviews with differing theoretical and practical implications. In short, it is a distinction between a pragmatic, down-to-earth stance directed toward realistic expectations and prosperity (*Wohlstand*) in general and a more exalted stance grounded in principles and ideals. Schiller highlights the flaws of both groups and, though he identifies as an idealist, warns that corrupt idealism is far more dangerous than corrupt realism. While the latter may lead to stagnation, the former, Schiller argues, results in fantasizing (*Phantasterey*), leading to "an infinite fall

into a bottomless depth, and can only end in complete destruction" (Schiller 20: 503).

A detailed analysis of the differences between realists and idealists lies beyond the scope of this discussion. For now, it suffices to say that Schiller believes both groups should be represented in the ethical state, as only together can they embody the ideal of humanity:

> I remark, in order to prevent any misinterpretation, that in this division it is not at all intended to cause a choice between the two, consequently favoring one to the exclusion of the other. It is precisely this exclusion, which is found in experience, that I fight against; and the result of the present considerations will be the proof that only through the completely equal inclusion of both can the rational concept of humanity be satisfied (Schiller 20: 492-3f*)

What may appear to be a simple desire for conceptual completeness, as Schiller's discussion reveals, also has pragmatic justifications. Idealists strive for freedom and progress, while realists aim for prosperity and happiness. Realists can save the republic when idealists succumb to fantasizing and risk dragging it into the abyss; conversely, idealists will oppose the realists' tendency to settle for pros-perity without progress or freedom (Schiller 20: 497, 502–3).[28] Thus, diversity stands at the very heart of the republic, not merely as an ornament but as a vital source of checks and balances.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I reconstructed Schiller's political philosophy and his ternary typology of states, showing the necessary conditions of each. I challenged the view that Schiller equates a republic with an aesthetic state, arguing instead that the ethical state represents his vision of a republic. Schiller contends that a republic must be established and maintained for its own sake, making it a moral duty. For this reason, he regards the capacity for individual self-determination to be a necessary condition for a republic.

I critiqued the virtue reading of Schiller's republicanism. The strong virtue reading presupposes that individuals are merely a means for the state,

[28] Schiller recognizes that these two anthropological types are oversimplifications and that every individual possesses a combination of idealistic and realistic traits. As Sharpe aptly observes, even a fervent idealist like the Marquis de Posa from Schiller's *Don Carlos* exhibits a degree of realism. Posa distinguishes between "a realizable political goal, namely the protection of the Netherlands from brutal suppression" (Sharpe 1991: 90), and his idealistic vision of a future world founded on the lofty principles of freedom and dignity.

while the weak virtue reading neglects the importance of reflection alongside courage for individual self-determination.

I have proposed the humanity reading, according to which the main obstacle to building a republic is the fragmentation of humanity caused by modern society, with its division of labor and hyper-specialization, which renders people incapable of self-determination and therefore incapable of political participation in the pursuit of the common good. This incapacity manifests itself in two forms: savagery, in which citizens are too weakened and too subordinated to the power of the moment to take reflective distance from the world; and barbarism, in which the indolence of nature and the cowardice of the heart render citizens unable to act in accordance with principles. Beauty, through the program of aesthetic education, helps to resolve both problems by forming in us the paradoxical combination of detachment through reflection with motivational commitment through the awareness of our spiritual vocation and resolve, thereby restoring our capacity for humanity.

Lastly, I defended the view that Schiller's republicanism is distinctly modern, as it recognizes freedom of choice and diversity. Schiller demonstrates that, in a modern republic, diversity not only sustains but actively strengthens the common good, preventing the extremes of complacent stagnation and fanatical, destructive pursuits of progress and freedom. The role of diversity in the ethical and aesthetic states merits further exploration, which I leave for a future study.

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Schiller's works are cited initially by the volume and page number, given by Arabic numerals separated by a colon, in the *National edition of Schiller's writings*, then followed by the abbreviated title and page number in the English translations listed in the biography. The two exceptions are Schiller's *History of the Revolt of the Netherlands,* which I quote directly from the English translation published by the Harvard Publishing Company, and *Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie*, which I quote from the Friedrich Schiller Archive internet site.

Kant and Schiller's works are identified in quotes by the following abbreviations:

Ant Kant, I. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*
AL Schiller, F. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*
GD Schiller, F. *On Grace and Dignity*
GMM Kant, I. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
IUH Kant, I. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*
K Schiller, F. *Kallias or Concerning Beauty. Letters to Gottfried Korner*
LtP Schiller, F. *Letters to Prince Frederick Christian von Augustenburg*
PP Kant, I. *Toward Perpetual Peace*

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Symphilosophie

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Moral Sense and 'Decorum'

F.H. Jacobi's Ethics Between Cicero and the British Enlightenment

Juliana F. Martone[*]

ABSTRACT

This article discusses Jacobi's views on ethics and moral law, based on an analysis of two key excerpts: *Concerning Man's Freedom*, published in the second edition of *Spinoza Letters*, and the dialogue between two characters, Woldemar and Sidney, in the 1796 edition of the romance *Woldemar*. It seeks to demonstrate the influence of British philosophy, of the notion of moral feeling, as well as of Stoicism and Cicero (through the concept of honour or *decorum*) on Jacobi's thinking. Jacobi's conception of moral feeling enables him to redefine the notion of moral law as superior to the instrumental law of understanding, thereby rejecting Kantian practical philosophy. Like the authors discussed here (Cicero, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, Ferguson and Hemsterhuis), Jacobi believed that philosophy is the harmony between actions (*erga*) and words (*logoi*) and a guide for conduct in life.

Keywords: moral feeling, ethics, F.H. Jacobi, Cicero, *decorum*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Artikel werden Jacobis Ansichten zu Ethik und Moralgesetz diskutiert. Die Analyse stützt sich auf zwei bedeutende Auszüge: *Über die Freiheit des Menschen*, veröffentlicht in der zweiten Ausgabe der *Spinozabriefe*, sowie auf dem Dialog zwischen Woldemar und Sidney in der 1796-Ausgabe des Romans *Woldemar*. Der Fokus der vorliegenden Untersuchung liegt darauf, den Einfluss der britischen Philosophie, des *moral feeling* sowie des Stoizismus und Ciceros (durch das Konzept der Ehre oder *decorum*) auf Jacobis Denken zu beleuchten. Mithilfe des *moral feeling* kann Jacobi den Begriff des moralischen Gesetzes als dem instrumentellen Gesetz des Verstandes übergeordnet neu konfigurieren und die praktische Philosophie Kants ablehnen. Er teilt mit den in dieser Diskussion erörterten Autoren (Cicero, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, Ferguson und Hemsterhuis) die Auffassung, dass Philosophie die Harmonie zwischen Handlungen (*erga*) und Worten (*logoi*) sowie ein leitendes Prinzip für das Verhalten im Leben sein soll.

Stichworte: Moralisches Gefühl, Ethik, F. H. Jacobi, Cicero, *decorum*

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1. Introduction

Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's ethics is hardly one of the main topics of research when it comes to his philosophical thinking, although it was his main concern in everything he wrote and thought. The reader acquainted with Jacobi's works knows that his writing is rhapsodic and intentionally lacks a systematic outline. He must, therefore, be even more attentive and able to connect ideas and interpret concepts in a manner not at all obvious.

According to Jacobi, moral acts are not ruled by reason but by the heart. He directly rejects any type of morality according to laws, which he describes as mechanical or scientific. To understand this position, I will consider the influence of both Cicero and the British Enlightenment on Jacobi's ethics in two of his works, although they are present throughout his entire production. In fact, much has been said about Aristotle's role in Jacobi's thoughts, especially in his novel *Woldemar*, but in this article, I would like to investigate other references equally or maybe even more important to the development of Jacobi's moral thinking.

To reach such a goal, I would like to focus on two different texts, on the extract entitled *On Men's Liberty* (published in the second edition of *Spinoza Letters*), in which he discusses the Stoic notion of a "sense of honour" (*Gefühl der Ehre*) and on the dialogue added to the 1796 edition of Jacobi's *Woldemar*, in which the main character, Woldemar, and his British friend Carl Sidney discuss the fundamentals of morals. The "moral sense" of the British philosophy (developed foremost by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson) and the notion of *decorum* (*sensus recti et honesti*) in Cicero's *On Duties* indicate a compelling interpretation of what Jacobi calls "moral unconditional judgments". In other words, a moral sentiment that judges without reasons. Regarding epistemology, it is well known that Jacobi conceives of the criterion of truth as a self-evident immediate belief (*Glauben*) prior to reasoning or reflection. In a similar manner, he considers moral judgments to be based on a self-evident moral feeling or moral faculty that is common to all human beings and does not involve the activity of speculative reason. Jacobi's emphasis on a self-evident and immediate criterion to establish the foundations of both epistemology and morality is essential for understanding the kind of philosophy he advocates. This philosophy is perhaps more closely aligned with that of the British Enlightenment than one might initially think, given that both have their roots in ancient thought.

2. *Decorum* and *honestum*

In the second edition of the *Spinoza Letters* (1789) Jacobi includes many appendices and develops some ideas that were absent or just suggested in the first edition of 1785. An interesting part of the new preface is called *Concerning Man's Freedom*, afterwards (1819) renamed as *Preliminary Propositions about Man's Constraint and Freedom.* This text essentially compares two coexisting, albeit opposing, characteristics of man: freedom and mechanical necessity. In the 35th and 36th propositions of the first part, Jacobi explains that the Stoics always distinguished between the principle of desire and the principle of honour. In the first case, men are only slaves, living in accordance with the law of things (pleasure). In the second case, there is true freedom and its object is the perfection of human nature, autonomous activity.[1] That is why the Stoics "would quite rightly only allow a man to be called free who lived just the life of his soul and determined himself according to the laws of his nature, hence *only* obeyed *himself and* always acted *on his* own."[2]

The feeling of honour is therefore the manifestation of moral "unconditioned judgments", of the moral feeling that judges without reasons and nevertheless exists in an apodictic manner. An important etymological note is needed here. The formulation "feeling of honour or nobility" (*Gefühl der Ehre*), depending on the translation of *Ehre*, attributed to the Stoics (to Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius) seems somewhat out of place, since the expression does not appear in either of the two Roman Stoics. However, a more plausible possibility is that it was actually borrowed from Cicero, especially from an extract of the book *On Laws*, which Jacobi quotes in his letter to Fichte.[3] In Book I, 54, Marcus speaks as "arbitrator between the Old Academy and Zeno", that is, between Peripatetics and Stoics: "The Old Academy decided that everything in accordance with nature was good if it helped us in life, while Zeno thought nothing good that was not also honourable."[4]

The Latin word for "honourable" is *honestum*. In fact, the German word *Ehre* (honour) comes from the Latin words *honos* and *decus*. *Honos* or honour

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1 "The objects of desire, they said, can be measured against the sensation of the pleasing, and the concepts of what is beneficial can be measured against one another, and one desire can be sacrificed to another. The principle of desire, however, falls outside any relation to the principle of honour which has {xxxix} one object alone, viz. the perfection of human nature per se, autonomous activity, freedom." F. H. Jacobi, *MPW* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 345.

2 Jacobi, *MPW* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 346.

3 Jacobi, JWA 2,1, 223.

4 Cicero, *On Laws*, I, 54: *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 124.

is the common etymon that forms *honestus* and *honoratus* (honest and honoured).[5] *Decus*, on the other hand, is related to the impersonal verb *decet*, which means to conform, to be convenient, and is also akin to the noun *decorum* (seemliness, propriety) and the adjective *decorus*. But what should this discussion accomplish? It should explain the sense of decorum and honesty, which is central to Cicero's ethics, and establish how these concepts undergo a transformation in British moral philosophy until they become what we call the *moral sense*. In his book *On Duties* (Book I, XXVII), Cicero explains the meaning of decorum as such: what is decorous (proper) is morally good or honest, and what is morally good or honest is decorous. "This propriety (*decorum*), therefore, of which I am speaking belongs to each division of moral rectitude; and its relation to the cardinal virtues is so close that it is perfectly self-evident and does not require any abstruse process of reasoning to see it."[6]

In the second extract mentioned in the beginning, i.e. in the dialogue between Woldemar and Sidney in the novel *Woldemar*, the influence of the British moral school on Jacobi is most evident. Woldemar is the protagonist, and Sidney is introduced as a disciple of Adam Ferguson. The two men immediately form a strong bond, and Woldemar declares that Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* played an important role in his life and made him resume his study of the ancients.[7] Sidney also names Thomas Reid as one of his teachers and praises his ideas on human understanding and ethics. Both authors provide a hint to connect the sense of honour attributed to the Stoics to the moral feeling, and they also reveal how these concepts are articulated in Jacobi's own ethical discussion. Furthermore, it is well known how important Reid's ideas were to Jacobi.

In Reid's works we find the assimilation of the *sensus recti et honesti* to the moral sense, the moral faculty or conscience. He explains that the word *sense* was probably chosen by analogy with the external senses, which are "the immediate testimonies of nature."[8] Only through this moral faculty do we have the original conception of right and wrong in human behaviour. Hence, such as the external senses are the immediate first principles of the material world, the moral sense constitutes the immediate first principles of the moral world. This means that the principles of the moral sense and the external senses are perceived immediately and without reasoning. As such, not only

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5 *Dictionnaire Gaffiot*, Latin-français, 1934, https://www.lexilogos.com/latin/gaffiot.php?p=753

6 Cicero, *On Duties* I, 94-95 (Harvard University Press, 1913), 97.

7 Jacobi, JWA 7,1, 244.

8 Thomas Reid, *Essays on the active powers of man*, III, part. III, VI (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 176.

morals, but the sciences as well must be built on such self-evident indemonstrable certainty. "The faculties which nature hath given us are the only engines we can use to find out the truth. We cannot indeed prove that those faculties are not fallacious, unless God should give us new faculties to sit in judgment upon the old. But we are born under a necessity of trusting them."[9]

As well as for Reid, for Jacobi the immediate certainty of belief is the foundation of nature (natural world) and morality (supernatural world). It is in this spirit that Jacobi plays with the words: to lose sense (*Sinn*) is to fall into folly (*Wahn-Sinn*).[10] But Jacobi very rarely uses the word "sense". In the context of the text on man's freedom, he replaces it with instinct. Virtue is the specifically human instinct and, like all instincts, acts "blindly", that is, before experience and without the intermediation of reasoning. According to him, actions of benevolence and justice are motivated with no other intention than the satisfaction of the impulse itself and do not function as some means to an end. Therefore, as a fundamental impulse (*Grundtrieb*), the realization of virtue is man's true destiny.

To understand how this moral sense can be an immediate truth and the foundation of all moral actions I need to rewind the thread of history a bit further and address the work of the philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746). Hutcheson was a key figure and outstanding reference for the entire Scottish school of moral philosophy, as well as for Reid himself. He was one of the British philosophers who most clearly conceived the moral sense as a reinterpretation of the Ciceronian *sensus decori et honesti*. It was from this principle that he developed an anti-legalistic ethics, fighting the selfish morality of authors like Thomas Hobbes. In absolute opposition to this line of thinking, he argues that the sense of advantage, associated with self-interest, could never engender the feeling of public good deeply engraved in man's constitution, but only the feeling of a "good for us" (of personal benefit), which would never make us approve of actions that promote the happiness of others. And this "sense of right and wrong" is called moral sense or conscience.

The moral sense is described by Hutcheson as an "universal benevolent instinct", rather than an innate idea. It is a kind of indemonstrable "hidden quality", "some secret Sense which determines our Approbation without regard to Self-Interest."[11] Its principle is benevolence, in which that Cicero-

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9 Thomas Reid, *Essays on the active powers of man*, III, part. III, VI (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 179-180.

10 Jacobi, JWA 2,1, 209.

11 Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the original of our Ideas of beauty and virtue* (Liberty Fund, 2008), 92.

nian sense of decorum and honesty manifests itself and enables judgment of moral good or evil without reasoning or syllogism. Indeed, Hutcheson uses the same formulation as Cicero in his Latin work *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*: "sensus, decorum, pulchrum, et honestum". *Sense* indicates, therefore, any faculty or power that precedes all opinion and reasoning. As such, it is enough to look within ourselves to find benevolence.

As for virtue, it must be desired for itself and does not depend on the deity's promise of punishment or reward, nor on education, instruction or customs. These play an important role in man's development, but they are not the *cause* of virtue. Moral sense and benevolence are universal to all human beings, and the common configuration of human nature is responsible for the agreement in moral judgments, for a "language of feeling" understood by all. This proves that "man was destined to action by nature." Hence, the moral *law* serves only to counterbalance a moral sense already weakened by self-interest, because the law is not the *foundation* of virtue, and benevolence does not depend on it. This anti-legalistic aspect of moral sense is also very important to Jacobi.

However, I have found no direct reference to the fact that Jacobi read Hutcheson's work himself. His *Denkbücher* (personal notebooks in which Jacobi made notes of ideas, citations and comments) contain no mention of Hutcheson, although his indirect influence is certainly present through several important authors in Jacobi's education, such as the Bishop Joseph Butler, Adam Ferguson, Thomas Reid, David Hume and Adam Smith. For instance, Jacobi read and reviewed Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* in his notebooks, in which the Scottish author explains and summarises Hutcheson's theory of moral sense. Furthermore, Hutcheson was widely read by the German authors in the early 18th century, and his *System of Moral Philosophy* was translated into German and attributed to Lessing.[12] Hutcheson was also an important source of Kant's precritical writings, especially concerning the development of the notion of moral sentiment.[13]

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[12] The translation was published anonymously in 1756 under the title *Sittenlehre der Vernunft*. Such an attribution is contradictory, and the main reasons are explained in the article "Übersetzung und Adaption. Lessings Verhältnis zu Francis Hutcheson" by Thomas Martinec (*"Ihrem Originale nachzudenken": Zu Lessings Übersetzungen*. Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung, Bd. 31, 2009). Lessing certainly had fundamental disagreements with Hutcheson, but he studied his 'System' thoroughly, as evidenced by his letters.

[13] "These principles, however, cannot be dispensed with, principles which form, as postulates, the basis of other practical propositions. Under the name of moral feeling Hutcheson and others have provided the beginning of beautiful remarks on this subject."

According to Hutcheson, benevolence is at the core of virtue; it makes us approve of virtue, and it is disinterested because it is not produced by an act of the will nor is it a means to an end. To recognize it, Hutcheson recommends looking at our own hearts, for this is the most efficient way to convince ourselves that we desire the good of others, regardless of our own interests. That's why attempts to engage in metaphysics to prove what everyone can see without any kind of reasoning are useless. Reasoning takes no part in moral judgement. "Unhappy would it be for Mankind, if a Sense of Virtue was of as narrow an Extent, as a Capacity for such Metaphysicks."[14] Reason is a slow faculty, full of doubts, it hesitates too much "to serve us in every Exigency, either for our own Preservation, without the external Senses, or to direct our Actions for the Good of the Whole, without this moral Sense."[15]

He argues and exemplifies as follows: suppose someone acts out of self-love but without causing any harm to others, this does not mean that their action can be considered *morally* good. The relationship between good and utility is of a very peculiar kind. The actions that we approve of with our moral sense are useful for *humanity*, but not always for the person who approves them. In other words, the concept of utility follows Ciceronian ethics, since utility is always in service of *humanity* and not of the *individual*. This also explains why reason can recommend actions that originate from self-interest, but coincide with what our moral sense leads us to admire, regardless of interest. Thus, reason can confirm what the moral sense determines without it and before it, and utility and the good can agree with it. But it is important to emphasise that the moral sense is at work even when there is no personal advantage for the one who performs a good action.

In fact, we can approve of the justice of a judgement against ourselves. Moreover, very often a morally good action is not accompanied by pleasure or usefulness at all, but by the opposite feelings, for example, when we try to alleviate the suffering of another person to defend someone from injury or repair a damage we have caused. The only possible pleasure here is the one which results from a subsequent calm reflection, when the circumstances and passions involved in the action have already ceased, and the disposition from

Kant, AA 2 ("Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral", *Vorkritische Schriften* II: 1757-1777), 300.

14 Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the original of our Ideas of beauty and virtue* (Liberty Fund, 2008), 94.

15 Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the original of our Ideas of beauty and virtue* (Liberty Fund, 2008), 180.

before seems good to our moral sense. In any case, pleasure never occurs in the heat of the moment and is not the motive that drives us to act.

3. Mechanical ethics and the concept of law

On the opposite side of the moral feeling, there is the morality of pure interest or self-love, which can also be called a mechanical or causal morality, that does not produce disinterested virtue, since everything is explained in terms of avoiding evil (aversion) or preserving good (appetite). This is the position of many philosophers, such as Hobbes and Descartes himself, but also of Spinoza. The author of the *Ethics* rejects the concept of final causes, meaning he must explain human action through a purely mechanical ethics. In this system, a disinterested action is impossible because the very concept presupposes the absence of a causal series determining the action. As it is well known, in Spinozism every action is determined by an efficient cause, therefore passions (love or hate, joy or sadness, satisfaction or regret etc.) are only modes of aversion and appetite.

Thus, Spinoza claims to be able to deal with passions according to geometric method, by considering "human actions and appetites exactly as if they were a matter of lines, planes or bodies."[16] And he adds that all our ideas of bodies indicate the current state of our own body rather than the nature of an external body. In this *self-referential* ethics, the object of love or hate actually refers to the individual because there is no good or evil in things themselves. Good and evil are just ways of thinking, notions that arise from comparing things, so one and the same thing can be good and bad at the same time and still be indifferent.

If good and evil only relate to the individual and the preservation of their own existence, then we call 'good' that which contributes to the conservation of our being and 'evil' that which hinders it. In moral terms, good is something that affects us with joy and evil something that affects us with sadness (see Prop. 8 of Part 4). It is easy to demonstrate that this ethics is based on utility: "The more each person endeavours to pursue what is useful for himself, i.e. to preserve his own being, and is able to do so, the more he is endowed with virtue."[17] And it is clear that the lack of capacity to exist by itself (only God is a true substance) and the lack of final causes forces Spinoza to consider the greatest virtue to be the preservation of our own existence, the *conatus*. "The endeavour to preserve itself is the first and only

[16] Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 94.
[17] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV, prop. 20, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 173.

foundation of virtue. For nothing else can be conceived as prior to this principle (by 4p22), and (by 4p2I) no virtue can be conceived without it."[18]

The relationship between self-preservation and utility is even clearer in Jacobi's explanation of Spinozism: "Since the soul is nothing but the immediate concept of the body and is one and the same thing as the body, the excellence of the soul also cannot be anything but the excellence of its body."[19] In short, the ancient moral good is reduced to a natural good produced by the mechanism of efficient causes. This is what Jacobi has in view in the first part of the text *Concerning Man's Freedom* ("man has no freedom"). He admits and recognizes an instinctive aspect of self-preservation, but this mechanism is not enough, it is not the domain of freedom nor of morality.

So, if we take the feeling of love as an example, the theory of utility would explain this notion as loving qualities in another person, just because they are similar to our own. In other words, in this case love would be the projection of our own love onto another person, as exemplified by the relationship between parents and children. According to Hutcheson's critique of this theory, following this logic, paternal love would only exist because children resemble their parents and are rational beings just like them. Like Jacobi, Hutcheson does not reject self-love *per se*, but rather its abuses and excesses, which hinder benevolence. He argues that benevolence influences all of humanity in the absence of interest and the true source of vice lies not in human nature, but in violent self-love, which can supplant natural benevolence. Those who describe interest as a condition of human nature are so consumed by self-love that they cannot recognise benevolence as a fundamental aspect of human nature.

Another example of someone who defends the mechanical point of view of morality is Hornich, an important character in Jacobi's *Woldemar*. He mocks Woldemar and Sidney, replying that the discussion on virtue and religion has nothing to do with feeling. For him, concepts must demonstrate the same consistency and teach to disdain the doubtful help of the heart. Men must determine themselves solely by reason.[20] In defence of the moral sense against pure law, Sidney draws a comparison between Woldemar and the English bishop Joseph Butler.[21] He claims that Butler was the first among the "new moralists" to expose the human faculty to approve or reject our own

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18 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, Prop. 22, corollary (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 175.
19 Jacobi, *MPW* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 225; JWA 1.1, 107-108.
20 Jacobi, JWA 7,1, 255.
21 Author of *The Analogy of Religion: Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736).

actions and the actions of others internally, i.e. without any reference to external good or bad effects of actions. He was the first to state the existence of a moral faculty capable of judging right and wrong, the propriety or impropriety of actions without reference to an end (external effect). When he wrote this, Jacobi was probably unaware that the original authors of these ideas are Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, who were extensively read by Butler himself.

Nevertheless, if only the heart can say what is good, then speculation can only say what is useful. In other words, the heart is where man's destination and true fulfilment of the highest good lie. Speculative and instrumental reason (understanding or instrumental reason in Jacobi's vocabulary) can only find the means to worldly happiness. "The only true reason is the basis of everything, it is honour, it is freedom itself, but it resides much more in the heart than in the spirit. – That who says: I have honour, says: I'm free."[22]

The same idea is also found in Shaftesbury's critique of Locke's assertion that we learn everything about morals through education and custom – an argument also refuted by Hutcheson. Without a moral sense imprinted in our hearts, no law would suffice to distinguish right from wrong, or vice from virtue.

> Thus virtue, according to Mr. Locke, has no other measure, law, or rule, than fashion and custom; morality, justice, equity, depend only on law and will, and God indeed is a perfect free agent in his sense; that is, free to anything, that is however ill: for if He wills it, it will be made good; virtue may be vice, and vice virtue in its turn, if he pleases. And thus neither right nor wrong, virtue nor vice, are anything in themselves; nor is there any trace or idea of them naturally imprinted on human minds. Experience and our catechism teach us all![23]

The relationship between the utility of speculative reason and the morality of feeling is equivalent to the relationship between understanding and true reason. For Jacobi, true reason is only moral and practical not speculative, it is the moral organ itself. As such, it is the sense of good and evil in all moral actions and, as a result, this conception implies giving a new meaning to the word *reason* (*Vernunft*) and a new *sense* to the understanding (*Verstand*). Understanding is the faculty of finding the means to an end, not the faculty that provides the ends. Hence, it "performs the best or the worst [ends] with

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22 Jacobi, *Kladde* 2, JWA I, 1.1, 86, (original in French).

23 Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen* (Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Lim., The Macmillan Co., 1900), 404.

the same diligence."[24] It compares and calculates with absolutely no regard to moral good or evil. "Only reason reveals the highest good; it is the ability to presuppose the highest"[25], what the ancients called wisdom. Understanding is the intelligence that shows us what is *useful*.

But both must necessarily be united, after all "It is impossible that pure and clear understanding is incompatible with sublime reason. On the contrary, used correctly, both should foster each other."[26] The problem lies in the imbalance. When the progress of understanding or science takes itself to be the only right path and imposes a mechanical or intellectual morality, suppressing the moral sense or true reason (the heart).[27] Furthermore, Jacobi wants to emphasise that the value of an age and of a man (person) lies in his concrete actions, in his living example and not in his abstract systems.

The loss of confidence in one's own conscience (*Gewissen*) leads to an obsession with deriving everything from the letter of the law, whether that be the law of the state, civil society, reason or religion. "No man has ever obeyed a law only by virtue of the law itself, but only by virtue of the coercion resulting from or accompanying it; always by virtue of the intensity of impulse, inclination and habit. Only the *heart* immediately tells a person what is good; only the *heart*, the *impulse* (*Trieb*) can immediately tell him: 'Your life is to love.' *Speculative reason* teaches him to recognise and employ what is useful for the good."[28] This is why the heart is identified with conscience (*Gewissen*) and not with speculative self-positing (*Selbstsetzen*), opposition or composition. The choice of the word *Gewissen* is important, since *Bewusstsein* has a long-standing conceptual association with the idea of reflection, which does not take place here.

To better understand the mechanical morality of the law, ascribed to Kant and his followers, an enlightening passage in *Woldemar* helps us to see the distinction made by Adam Ferguson between the doctrine of nature or physics (*Naturlehre*) and the doctrine of morals or ethics (*Sittenlehre*). From this doctrine of nature emerges a scientific morality:

> The former [scientific doctrine of nature] determines the laws of motion *mathematically*; the latter [scientific morality] determines the laws of respect *philosophically*. Both, however, are essentially different in this respect: what *must* be determined according to physical-mathematical

[24] Jacobi, JWA 5,1, 358.
[25] Jacobi, JWA 5,1, 358.
[26] Jacobi, JWA 5,1, 362.
[27] These ideas were uttered in Jacobi's opening discourse in 1807 (*On learned societies, their spirit and their end*) as president of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences.
[28] Jacobi, JWA 7,1, 267.

> laws, always does take place; whereas what *should* necessarily take place according to philosophical-moral laws does not always take place: for the former refers to forces which are always determined; the latter to a force whose essence is self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) and, from an ethical point of view, concerns nothing but matters of choice (*Dinge der Wahl*).[29]

To this, Woldemar cries: "Excellent! replied Woldemar. (…) Through genius, nature gives art its rules; both the art of goodness and the art of beauty. Both are free arts and are not subject to guild laws."[30] This is why Jacobi claims that "scientific" morality is mechanical and does not arise from true freedom, but from an "illusion of freedom" derived from the mechanical laws of nature, rather than from the moral sense we are discussing. The scientific moral system is therefore modelled on physics. In this system, our will acts according to rational maxims rather than a moral sense that determines good and evil. The will follows the same causal logic as physical laws. The only difference is that what must happen in physics (necessity) does not always happen in the moral world (contingency). In other words, it's just a matter of a modal verb: *müssen* versus *sollen*.

This similarity guarantees an appearance of "absolute certainty" in practical reason, which is simply the necessity of the *law in the contingency of its application*. This is precisely what aphorism XX of Jacobi's text on freedom states: inner law is formed mechanically because of the identity of conscience and law. "The external law, which people freely agree upon and freely establish among themselves when they enter into civil association, is only a reflection of the inner law that has come into being among the individual members."[31]

Jacobi's main argument is that we do not need to accept a mechanical system of moral philosophy to achieve absolute certainty. Just as with the Law of Attraction, the moral sense is universally valid for everyone and its common configuration in human nature allows us to conclude that there is a consensus of moral judgement and – like previously mentioned – a *language of feeling* that everyone is capable of understanding.

In Birgit Sandkaulen's analysis of this excerpt on human freedom, she arrives at a similar conclusion, yet focuses exclusively on the distinction between the morality proposed by Jacobi and the notion of mechanical morality, as exemplified by Spinoza and Kantian moral law. Her analysis shows how Jacobi diverges from Kantian moral law, despite their shared

[29] Jacobi, JWA 7,1, 248-249.
[30] Jacobi, JWA 7,1, 249.
[31] Jacobi, JWA 2,1, 245.

notion of ethics as an end in itself. The article's conclusion that "Jacobi refers explicitly to a 'law' in this context, but a law which, in contrast to Kant's universal ethical law, is active within us as an always individual 'expression' of a divine will"[32] is precisely the point here. Sandkaulen's position is founded on a "metaphysics of action", which would lead Jacobi to adopt a distinct approach within the ethical domain.

Certainly, the concept of *person*, which is the foundation of this so-called metaphysics of action, with its metaphysical background and markedly Leibnizian inspiration, is of great importance to understanding the moral agent as a concrete agent, a real unit in multiplicity and not as an abstract epistemological ground. But what seems to have gone unnoticed until now is the great contribution of the authors of the British Enlightenment in Jacobi's philosophy. This explains the sense of honour, but above all the reconfiguration of the very idea of law. As has been established thus far, moral law remains universally valid, even if it cannot be known *instrumentally*. As with certainty of belief, immediate certainty takes precedence over certainty that requires demonstration.

According to Hutcheson, the notion of *law* is itself artificial because it is formed by reason through observation and comparison. Natural law is the observation of the nature of things, whereas civil or positive law is merely a convention. Furthermore, a law can only be considered natural because it originates from the universal moral sense that distinguishes between right and wrong, just and unjust. Without this moral sense, we would never achieve any law.[33] The governing moral principle, on the other hand, is engraved on our hearts. It is the source of our moral sentiments and the art of regulating our lives. It establishes our right to act when our actions contribute directly to the general good or the good of a few, provided they do not harm others.

Hutcheson, with whom Jacobi would agree on this point, emphasises the qualities of the "man of action" (the Ciceronian ideal of the "good man", who acts in politics and society), replacing the Stoic ideal of the Sage. This concept has never been realised in history and is the Logos itself. This is a fascinating development in Cicero's thinking that sets him apart from the Stoics and has been enthusiastically adopted in British interpretations of his moral philosophy.

> The Stoics responded that the ideal was not dependent on its historical realisation. For them, the absolute model was the sage – the Logos made

[32] Birgit Sandkaulen, *Between Spinoza and Kant* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 72.
[33] Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria* (Liberty Fund, 2007), 103-ff.

> flesh. He did not possess the traits of a fixed individuality, but precisely because of this, he transcended all human weaknesses. The myth of the Stoic sage was a powerful one, and Cicero himself was drawn to it.[34]

As Cicero scholar Milton Valente explains, the abstract concept of the Stoic sage did not align with the Roman ideal of a practical individual seeking to define the principles of a virtuous and useful way of living. For a Roman who wants to build his life on such practical foundations, an abstract ideal is insufficient and must be adapted. This is precisely what Cicero does with the concept of the "good man", that is, "a man, no doubt, who does not fulfil the theoretical and negative ideal of the sage, a man who at least does… something, something both useful and supremely virtuous, since he is useful to the public cause."[35]

Another key concept that is dear to Jacobi and synonymous with moral sense is "sympathy" or "fellow feeling." Hutcheson described this as a kind of "primordial sociability" because we are affected by the fortunes of others without any intellectual operation; that is to say, without any particular purpose in mind. We rejoice in their prosperity and are saddened by their misfortune.

But the most significant characteristic of Hutcheson's moral sense is that it acts as a guide to life – according to the Stoic "ruling principle" (*hegemonikon*) – which, as Jacobi says, is the true destination of human life, and, as Hutcheson says, its true dignity, supreme happiness and purpose. It is immediately perceived from its very nature when we immediately feel that it naturally assumes the right to judge, approve or condemn all the movements of the soul. This is the highest good, which is not a means to an end but is desired for its own sake. As stated by Hutcheson (who is surprisingly in line with Jacobi), the highest good is found in God and the moral sense is the "organ" through which humans are intimately connected to Him. This connection gives rise to disinterested love, or "pure love" in Jacobi's terminology. It is the moral sense that reveals the existence of a Creator, and without it, we would be detached from everything concerning the inner world.

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[34] Milton Valente, *A ética estoica em Cícero* (*L'Éthique Stoïcienne chez Cicéron*), (EDUCS, 1984), 290.

[35] Milton Valente, *A ética estoica em Cícero* (*L'Éthique Stoïcienne chez Cicéron*), (EDUCS, 1984), 290.

4. The internal sense

Only our internal organ, or moral sense, allows us to perceive God in the universe. It is the ultimate moral concept, as it combines the aesthetic and the moral in the fundamental idea of harmony. The Hutcheson scholar Peter Kivy comments on the paradoxical fact that it was John Locke who, in a certain sense, paved the way for the philosophy of moral sense and the new aesthetics that emerged from it. Kivy refers to Shaftesbury, who, in criticising Locke's dry empiricism, reformulated and gave a new direction to 18th century philosophy.

This notion is particularly evident in the famous letter Shaftesbury wrote to his protégé, Michael Ainsworth, on June 3rd, 1709. According to him, Locke was even more harmful than Hobbes when it came to moral matters, because he dealt a fatal blow to philosophy in general by removing all its foundations, thus eliminating order and virtue from the world.

> It was Mr. Locke that struck the home blow: for Mr. Hobbes's character and base slavish principles in government took off the poison of his philosophy. 'T'was Mr. Locke that struck at all fundamentals, threw all order and virtue out of the world, and made the very ideas of these (which are the same as those of God) unnatural, and without foundation in our minds.'[36]

In the same letter, Shaftesbury highlights Locke's qualities as an author and a person – after all, Locke was his tutor – describing him as "a most zealous Christian and a believer",[37] but he lost himself in a philosophy that asserts virtue has no measure than the simple law, custom or experience. In other words, that morality depends only on teaching and learning, and not on some internal sense or organ.

However, the most important argument here is the core of Shaftesbury's criticism, which Hutcheson both shares and develops: Locke's *way of ideas* impoverishes the world by assuming that human knowledge can be reduced to impressions from the external senses (the five senses) or ideas of these impressions (reflex ideas). Márcio Suzuki has shown in his book *The Form and Sentiment of the World* that, despite employing various Lockean notions, Hutcheson rejects the main presuppositions of Lockean philosophy. Following Shaftesbury, he develops his own philosophy based on the same

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[36] Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen* (Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Lim., The Macmillan Co., 1900), 403.

[37] Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen* (Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Lim., The Macmillan Co., 1900), 403.

idea that reducing everything to the five senses would diminish the human spirit to a significant degree. Indeed,

> some strange Love of Simplicity in the Structure of human Nature, or Attachment to some favourite Hypothesis, has engag'd many Writers to pass over a great many Simple Perceptions, which we may find in our selves. We have got the Number Five fixed for our external Senses, tho Seven or Ten might as easily be defended.[38]

According to Suzuki, unlike Locke's sensualism, for Hutcheson philosophy ought to include the multitude of perceptions that are characteristic of life rather than reduce everything to the five senses. "The argument in favour of multiplying and diversifying the ways in which we feel performs thus an essential function: it constitutes the most effective antidote to epistemological reductionism, which has serious moral consequences."[39] For our purposes in this article, the key point are these words: "moral consequences." It is through the moral or internal organ that Hutcheson can escape mere sensualism and, as Suzuki explains, reunite morals and aesthetics, because the aesthetic sense is more refined, subtle and, above all, free of interest, allowing us to experience a wider variety of objects of pleasure, like art, language and morality.[40]

The consequences of separating man from his inner sense are much more serious than they might initially appear. As we have seen, it leads to a purely mechanistic philosophy and an equally mechanistic morality and ethics. The criticism of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson is essential to show that we cannot be like Janus, the two-faced Roman god, who could only open the eyes of one head at a time and see either the natural or the supernatural world, but never both simultaneously.[41]

As has been previously stated, Shaftesbury exerted a great influence in 18th-century Germany, and Hutcheson himself also had a considerable degree of influence in more exclusive circles (Hamann and Herder,[42] for

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38 Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* [*ECP*] (Liberty Fund, 2003), 5.

39 Márcio Suzuki, *A forma e o sentimento do mundo. Jogo, humor e arte de viver na filosofia do século XVIII* (Editora 34, 2014), 178.

40 *Ivi*, p. 175-176.

41 This is a quotation from Jean Paul: "(...) in the Janus head of man, which looks towards opposite worlds, sometimes one pair of eyes is closed or covered, sometimes the other." Jean Paul. *Vorschule der Ästhetik*. JPSW I,5. (Carl Hanser, 1996), 66.

42 In Herder's text entitled *Gott. Einige Gespräche über Spinoza's System nebst Shaftesbury's Naturhymnus* (1787) it is explicitly stated on the very first page that he has had in mind for many years a work in which the names of Leibniz, Shaftesbury and Spinoza appear.

example, were two of his most devoted readers). The role of both authors in Germany was pivotal, and would transform the development of moral philosophy there.

But another influential author who must be mentioned, and who shared the idea that different sense organs enrich human perception and can make it infinitely perfectible was the Dutch philosopher Franz Hemsterhuis. He was a close friend of Jacobi and was even indirectly involved in the *Spinoza-streit*. Initially, he participated indirectly through a letter addressed to him, where Jacobi explains the main premises of Spinoza's philosophy while arguing against a fictional Spinoza, as if he had just read Hemsterhuis's dialogue *Aristaeus, or on the Divinity*. This letter was later translated into German and attached to what became known as *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn* (1785). Jacobi was also responsible for translating *Alexis, or on the Golden Age* into German.

It is indeed striking how Hemsterhuis parallels the ideas of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson on the topic of the variety of organs or senses, particularly when he is criticising empirical philosophy and the reduction of knowledge to the five external senses. Just like the British philosophers, he defends the idea of a diverse and multifaceted world that reflects different perspectives. In the dialogue *Sophylus, or on Philosophy* we can follow a very similar discussion between Sophylus and Euthyphro:

> Sophylus. Your unknown lands, my friend, are imaginary spaces, believe me. Philosophy is beautiful and good only because it destroys these fables. Its unshakable foundation is experience, and there is no truth beyond this.
>
> Euthyphro. We agree. A philosophy based on experience is certainly the only good one, but how many kinds of experiences there are!
>
> Sophylus. I know just one sole kind; it is experience through our five senses. Do you know of others?
>
> Euthyphro. To tell you the honest truth, there was a time when I had precisely the same opinion, but I have changed since. I am so changed that when I think of my small-mindedness then, I feel ashamed. [43]

Although Hemsterhuis is still an understudied author, there are many works on his concept of "organology", which posits that human beings are virtually

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This text is set in the context of the Spinoza controversy (also known as the Pantheism controversy) with Jacobi and the debate surrounding a pantheistic God.

[43] Hemsterhuis, *EE* 2, 45.

endowed with infinite sense organs. The dialogue in question deals with the criticism of an empiricist philosophy which advocates reducing our perception of the world to the five senses, as set out by Locke or materialist authors. Euthyphro develops a theory about how we can have a sense of things outside ourselves or, in other words, how we can form a representation of things outside ourselves, since – as he himself acknowledges – we can never represent things as they are in themselves. Curiously enough, Hemsterhuis accepts the notion that ideas initially arise from a sensation, i.e. from an external action, in the face of which the soul is passive. But he introduces the novel idea that, when the soul feels, it is not only passive, but also active.

> However, one essence can act on another essence only by immediate contact, or by organs or by media. The immaterial soul acts on the material body, and vice versa. The body acts on the body, the immaterial on the immaterial; and since what concerns us now are essences which have the ability to feel, then there must be organs and media between them to serve as vehicles, and to propagate their reciprocal actions, so as to produce these sensations.[44]

Therefore, to overcome materialism, as in Hutcheson's case, it must be stated that we have much more than five senses or organs to perceive things and the world. To put it another way, the premise here must be entirely different from that of empiricism: we must assume an infinite number of organs (or media) through which our sensitivity is affected. As a result, the notion of matter (or what Hemsterhuis calls "essences") could be defined by an infinite number of attributes. Euthyphro explains: "Thus you see, my dear Sophylus, the poverty of the idea we attach to the word matter"[45], to which Sophylus replies: "It is true, Euthyphro, and I perfectly sense that the word 'matter' is merely a sign to express essences insofar as they have some analogy to our current organs. I have nearly been convinced of the possibility that essence has an infinity of faces,[46] different from those by which we call it matter."[47] Given that essences (both material and immaterial) are infinite, and yet we can only perceive them if there is an analogy with our organs, Hemsterhuis

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44 Hemsterhuis, *EE* 2, 57.

45 Hemsterhuis, *EE* 2, 53.

46 About the concept of "face" it is interesting to mention an explanation from Whistler: "Every essence can express itself in an infinite number of 'manners of being' or 'attributes'. In line with Scholastic and early modern uses of *facies*, Hemsterhuis dubs these manners of being the various 'faces of the universe', which each correspond to a particular sense organ". Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 117.

47 Hemsterhuis, *EE* 2, 54.

proposes the idea that our human organs can improve without limit. Daniel Whistler refers to this as an "indirect realism", since the subject does not have direct access to the world.

In his criticism of the reduction of modern philosophy to the mechanism of sensory perception, Hemsterhuis turns to ancient philosophy, particularly to the Socratic. While Shaftesbury and Hutcheson were mainly inspired by Stoicism, the Dutch author saw Socrates as the best example of someone who cultivated his various faculties, making him the best model for a manifold, pluralistic philosophy. In *Sophylus*, Socratic philosophy emerges as the only possible philosophy alongside Newton's system. However, since Newton's system is merely a small branch of philosophy, rather than a philosophy *per se*, Socrates is presented as the philosophical ideal that transcends the personal point of view and encompasses all perspectives. In other words, Socratic philosophy could achieve true harmony of all human organs. Because "in the case of the Socratic [system], everything is within its reach. Socrates, and Socrates alone, who gave us the belief that man resembles God, preached philosophy itself, while others merely preached their limited philosophical systems."[48]

As a matter of fact, we should bear in mind an important lesson taught by Pierre Hadot in his studies of the ancient schools and the concept of philosophy as a "way of life." All of the ancient schools shared the Socratic spirit and adopted his model for themselves. For the Stoics, being like Socrates was as important as it was for other contrasting and sometimes opposite schools. In his commentary on Epictetus's *Enchiridion*, Hadot mentions that Epictetus would say that young people sought out Socrates, asking him to introduce them to a philosopher, unaware that he himself was one. This was because Socrates did not recite beautiful phrases or principles.[49] Indeed, he did not intend to teach anything; he wanted to demonstrate the actions of a philosopher instead, and his only concern was improving himself. Socrates is presented as the ultimate model of a philosopher in both the *Enchiridion* and the *Discourses*. But above all he is a model of humanity. The novice philosopher knows that he is not Socrates, but he must seek to live "as if he wanted to become Socrates."[50]

As previously mentioned, Stoicism plays an important role in this discussion. The Stoics' fundamental principle is that good and evil refer only to virtue and vice, that moral actions depend on our freedom of choice, while everything else is indifferent. Consequently, attributing good or evil to an

48 Hemsterhuis, *EE*2, 47.
49 See for example Epictetus, *Discourses* III, 5, 17.
50 Pierre Hadot, *Manuale di Epitteto* (Einaudi, 2006), 122.

external cause beyond our control is a misunderstanding of our perceptions. Ferguson, quoted by Jacobi in *Woldemar* on this very subject, points out that, due to this conception of good and evil being contrary to that of the Peripatetics, Stoicism was able to affirm that "virtue could be practised in all circumstances, whether favourable or adverse."[51] In other words, the idea that good can be found in adversity and evil in prosperity undermines utilitarian or hedonistic ethics. But according to the Stoic doctrine, some of the indifferent things are *preferable*. On this subject, Hutcheson adds a clarifying note in his translation of Marcus Aurelius: "the Stoics called all external advantages or disadvantages, respecting the body or fortune, things indifferent, neither good, nor evil; but they allowed this difference among them, that some were according to nature, and preferable; others contrary to nature, and to be rejected."[52]

5. Conclusion

However, I think it is clear so far that this is not really about Stoicism itself, but rather its incorporation into British moral philosophy, primarily through Cicero. This article explores how Stoicism was adapted to modern demands and tempered by the acceptance of natural goodness. An important fact in the history of these ideas is that Hutcheson himself translated the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, who was held up as the greatest example of virtue, of someone who led his life according to Stoic principles and in accordance with himself. In his notes on the text, Hutcheson makes no secret of his affinity with the Roman emperor, but we can also glimpse certain transformations in the key concepts that foreshadow the moral sense. In Marcus Aurelius, we can already see a defence of the common good and benevolence, a call to action in public affairs and an emphasis on leading a life in accordance with one's own nature (*hegemonikon*). There, Hutcheson argues that

> the most important practical truths are found out by attending to the inward calm sentiments or feelings of the heart: And this constitution of heart or soul is certainly the work of God, who created and still pervades all things; it is just and natural to conceive all divine and social dispositions as the work of God: all the great moral maxims deeply affecting the soul, and influencing the conduct, are the illumination of

[51] Jacobi, JWA 7,1, 320.

[52] Francis Hutcheson, *The meditations of the emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, V, 36 (Liberty Fund, 2008), 69. This interpretation of Stoicism mitigates the most commonly rejected aspect of this philosophy, namely its perceived neglect of natural goods such as physical health and life itself.

> God, and a divine attraction toward himself, and that way of life he requires.[53]

It is important to remember that Socrates also had a great influence on Jacobi. His *wissendes Nichtwissen* or *Unphilosophie* is a reinterpretation of the Socratic concept of philosophy. In the *Spinozabriefe*, Jacobi states that the way of thinking of an era or a people derives from their way of acting, that philosophy is incapable of creating its own matter (a clear criticism of transcendental philosophy) and its matter is always present or past history. "It follows therefore that one ought not to derive the actions of men from their philosophy, but rather their philosophy from their actions; that their history does not originate from their way of thinking, but rather, their way of thinking from their history."[54]

According to him, these are the conditions for philosophy to be true, living philosophy, or wise ignorance (*wissendes Nichtwissen*). However, what might seem like a peculiar position at the time – and perhaps even today – is nothing more than the maxim attributed to Socrates: philosophy is the art of knowing how to live. In other words, it is about the harmony between actions (*erga*) and words (*logoi*), [55] whereby knowledge must always be subordinated to life.

What matters is not one particular philosophy, but the life of the *philosopher*. In other words, his actions and conduct must be consistent with his principles, since any doctrine has value only when put into practice. Jacobi's defence of the idea of a "personal philosophy", namely that of "the man F. H. Jacobi", is therefore no coincidence, given that the moral agent must be a concrete individual. And if living philosophy is history and each era has its own truth situated in a unique historical moment, then the type of philosophy one adopts will also be particular and a matter of personal choice. This perfect conjunction of conduct and philosophy is what makes Socratic knowledge a *wise* ignorance: his moral choices and guiding principles are in perfect harmony with his life. He is living according to his nature.

Having retraced this scenario, it becomes clearer the role such thoughts played in Jacobi's intellectual development. Indeed, the philosophical novel *Woldemar* is a defence of the moral sense in its different features and a total rejection of selfishness, legalist morals and unconditional law. I hope that I have illustrated how Jacobi's ethical philosophy is far more intricate than it

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53 Francis Hutcheson, *The meditations of the emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, V, 36 (Liberty Fund, 2008), 137.

54 Jacobi, *MPW* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 239.

55 See John Sellars, *The art of living. The stoics on the nature and function of philosophy* (Bloomsbury, 2003), 32.

may seem and was influenced not only by the philosophy of his own time, such as Kantian morality, but also by British philosophy, Cicero and, through it, Stoicism. While the birth of the so-called "practical philosophy" is essential to Jacobi's moral reflection, it offers only a one-sided perspective of his manifold thinking. It is essential to acknowledge that he was a distinguished scholar and a profound student of the history of European philosophy.

Furthermore, ethics based on a moral sense is closely associated with the idea of a philosophy that unifies the diverse authors previously referenced through the central figure of Socrates: philosophy as a way of life. For Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Ferguson, Hemsterhuis and Jacobi, the conduct of the individual is at the heart of philosophy; their concrete actions are paramount, and theory and practice (or "head and heart", in Jacobi's words) should never be separated.

The term *hegemonikon*, employed by the Stoics and translated by Cicero as "living according to one's own nature" means exactly that words and actions should always be in harmony with each other. To quote one of Jacobi's maxims, one should be what one appears to be and appear to be what one really is. Moral sentiment is therefore the measure of the success or failure of the adequacy of our conduct and of our consistency as individuals in society.

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Wagner as Philosopher

Michael Steinberg[1]

ABSTRACT

Wagner was never averse to self-promotion, but he downplayed his abilities as a philosopher, and he never attempted anything like a philosophical text. In the essays he wrote in exile and some of his letters, though, one can see him engaged with the issues raised by the early German idealists and the more philosophically inclined Romantics, and in that context his apparent fragments assemble themselves into a surprisingly coherent philosophy, one which moves from fundamental questions about self-consciousness and its relationship with supra-personal processes towards the social function of art and the critique of bourgeois culture. Wagner's "materialist idealism" both illuminates the action and text of the *Ring* and remains interesting and thought-provoking in its own right.

Keywords: Wagner, idealism, aesthetics, sociology of art, revolution

RÉSUMÉ

Wagner n'a jamais été contre l'autopromotion, mais il minimisait ses aptitudes comme philosophe et n'a jamais tenté d'écrire un texte philosophique. Dans les essais écrits en exil et dans certaines de ses lettres, on le voit toutefois s'intéresser aux questions soulevées par les philosophies des premiers idéalistes et romantiques allemands. Dans ce contexte, ses considérations d'apparence fragmentaire s'assemblent pour former une philosophie étonnamment cohérente, qui va des questions fondamentales sur la conscience de soi et sa relation avec les processus supra-personnels à la fonction sociale de l'art et à la critique de la culture bourgeoise. L'« idéalisme matérialiste » de Wagner éclaire à la fois l'action et le texte du *Ring* tout en demeurant intéressant et stimulant en soi.

Mots-clés : Wagner, idéalisme, esthétique, sociologie de l'art, revolution

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Wagner seems to have had, at best, an ambivalent attitude towards philosophy.[1] His autobiography is not always a reliable source, and there are reasons to doubt his memory of his first encounter with Feuerbach, but it still provides an illuminating account of his early interest in the subject:

> I had always had an inclination to fathom the depths of philosophy, just as I had been led by the mystic influence of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to search the deepest recesses of music. My first efforts at satisfying this longing had failed. … I had procured Schelling's work, *Transcendental Idealism*, … but it was in vain that I racked my brains to try and make something out of the first pages, and I always returned to my Ninth Symphony.
>
> During the latter part of my stay in Dresden I … chose Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. A good deal of this impressed me deeply, and it now seemed as if I should ultimately penetrate into the Holy of Holies along this path. The more incomprehensible many of his speculative conclusions appeared, the more I felt myself desirous of probing the question of the "Absolute" and everything connected therewith to the core. For I so admired Hegel's powerful mind that it seemed to me he was the very keystone of all philosophical thought.
>
> The revolution intervened; the practical tendencies of a social reconstruction distracted my attention, [until] a German Catholic priest and political agitator … drew my attention to "the only real philosopher of modern times," Ludwig Feuerbach. My new Zürich friend, the piano teacher, Wilhelm Baumgartner, made me a present of Feuerbach's book on *Tod und Unsterblichkeit* ("Death and Immortality"). The well-known and stirring lyrical style of the author greatly fascinated me as a layman. … The frankness with which Feuerbach explains his views on these interesting questions, in the more mature parts of his book, pleased me as much by their tragic as by their social-radical tendencies. … It was more difficult to sustain any interest in *Das Wesen des Christenthums* ("The Essence of Christianity") by the same author, for it was impossible whilst reading this work not to become conscious, however involuntarily, of the prolix and unskillful manner in which he dilates on the simple and fundamental idea, namely, religion explained from a purely subjective and psychological point of view. Nevertheless, from that day onward I always regarded Feuerbach as the ideal exponent of

[1] This article is an excerpt from Michael Steinberg's forthcoming book *The Philosopher's Ring—Wagner as Thinker and Dramatist* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2026).
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> the radical release of the individual from the thralldom of accepted notions, founded on the belief in authority.[2]

In the end, however, he concluded that "what had really induced [him] to attach so much importance to Feuerbach was the conclusion … that the best philosophy was to have no philosophy … and secondly, that only that was real which could be ascertained by the senses."[3]

Wagner was never as modest as he claimed to be. He did start off a long and important letter to Röckel, dated January 25, 1854, by restricting the Real, or true Being, to that "which is appreciable to the senses," but this common-sense realism soon disappears. Later in the same letter he redefines it in terms that echo—consciously or not—Fichte's "one life":

> [T]he essence of reality consists of infinite multiplicity … [an] inexhaustible multiplicity, incessantly renewed and renewing. … [which] can only be apprehended by feeling, as the one ever-present though ever-varying element. This variability is the essence of the *real.*[4]

In no way is this a random agglomeration of disconnected events. There is only one reality, an "ever self-renewing and self-creating, … ever self-fulfilling, self-satisfying principle," characterized by "endless cohesion."[5] All things arise within that single but ungraspably complex process.

This is a genuinely philosophical starting point, positing a kind of transcendental ground for the realm of experience, and Wagner frequently restated it or implied it even after he discovered Schopenhauer. It owes much to the biological theories of Wagner's day, and he often works it out in biological terms, but it evokes the same kind of activity that the idealists had seen in the self-manifestation of the divine or the self-realization of the Absolute. Since those thinkers had generally rejected a personal deity and all notions of providence, Wagner's focus on activity alone kept him surprisingly close to their standpoint. What counted for both was the continuous process of creation, transformation, and destruction, the endless fertility that we associate with the natural world but which underlies and forms our own lives and thoughts as well. In Wagner's words, "Nature creates and shapes unintentionally and involuntarily as the need arises—out of necessity therefore—and

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2 Richard Wagner, *My Life,* "authorized translation." (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1911), 520–22.

3 *My Life*, 522.

4 Ricard Wagner, *Letters to August Roeckel*, tr. Eleanor C. Sellar. (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1897), 78, 81, 82 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 102.

5 Richard Wagner, *The Artwork of the Future*, tr. Emma Warner (London: The Wagner Journal, 2013), 18, *PW* I, 79.

it is this same necessity which is the creative, shaping force behind human life."[6]

Things are not so simple for conscious beings like ourselves, however. On this subject, too, Wagner revised and naturalized elements of idealism while preserving its underlying structure. To become self-conscious we had to remove ourselves from the underlying activity of all things: "The moment we humans became aware of our difference from nature, … when we set ourselves apart from nature and … thought began to develop within us—this was the moment we went astray, error as the first expression of consciousness." We separated ourselves from reality, and from that moment on we have tried to bridge that gap, through our personal lives, our art, our politics, and most of all through our science, philosophy, and religion; "the history of the birth of knowledge out of error is the history of the human species from primitive myth to the present day."[7]

Wagner was confident that through that struggle "enlightened nature will herself become self-aware."[8] But this would bring us to a very different kind of knowledge from the facts and theories that we usually rely on. Discovering it is difficult, and searching for it is all too likely to lead us into deeper errors than the ones we are trying to undo, bedazzling us with "fanciful image[s] based not on nature but on arbitrary willfulness."[9] We want to know, and to know that we know, but all thought is marked by the separation on which self-consciousness depends. What is real is prior to and beyond that split, so it cannot be an object of knowledge. By thinking about it we just push ourselves farther and farther away from what we think we are understanding. We mistake image for reality:

> [Humanity] has recourse to endless expedients in order to grasp the Universe as a *whole*: these expedients in all their endless complexity are simply a group of concepts; and in our pride at having thus attained to a concept of the world in its entirety, we lose sight of our true position, forgetting that after all we have grasped nothing but the concept, and that consequently we are simply taking pleasure in the instrument of our own making, while all the time we remain further removed than ever from the *reality* of the world.[10]

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6 *The Artwork of the Future*, 13, *PW* I, 69–70.

7 All quoted text *The Artwork of the Future*, 13, *PW* I, 69–70.

8 *The Artwork of the Future*, 13, *PW* I, 69–70.

9 *The Artwork of the Future*, 14, *PW* I, 71.

10 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 80–81 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 302. The inaccessibility of the real ground of existence is something of a Romantic commonplace; as Tieck wrote late in life: "Is it not more devout, more noble and upstanding, to simply acknowledge that

One can read this as an anticipation of some modern philosophies of science, but Wagner first thought of it as a critique of religion: "we suppressed [nature's] physical forms in favor of a cause that is inaccessible to the senses … conceiving the infinite cohesion of her unconscious, unintentional processes as the deliberate expression of some inchoate, finite will."[11]

It is worth pausing here. In *The Essence of Christianity* Feuerbach had more or less taken it for granted that people projected human qualities onto the divine. He had assumed this to be the result of a primitive animism; in the distant past we didn't know enough about why the sun rose and set, why there was death, why there were storms and earthquakes and so on, so we made up gods to explain these facts. Wagner had a much more sophisticated starting point; he could explain why there was a place for the gods to begin with. They (or He) occupied a throne that we had set up ourselves.

Consciousness begins with a fall. Once we had separated ourselves from reality we could no longer simply live in it. It had become a puzzle that we had to solve. Everything, both good and bad, seemed to have its own life and follow its own rules, and once we started thinking of ourselves as outside observers we had figure out those rules and "grasp the Universe as a *whole*." We wanted to explain things and events that seemed to stand in front of us, and that led us to imagine that these were put together and managed by something that stood behind them, a figure we could imagine only on the model of our own isolated, active, and thinking selves: a god, in other words. As Wagner wrote in *Opera and Drama*, "*the concordant action* of human and natural forces in general … appears super-human and supernatural by the very fact that it is ascribed to *one* imagined individual, represented in the shape of Man."[12]

Wagner came to see, too, that these intellectual and emotional needs are at work in more than just religious life. This was a step beyond Feuerbach. We can get rid of the gods, Wagner understood, but it is much harder to stop asking the kinds of questions that those gods were designed to answer, and this is why science was as limited as religion. He insisted that "at the begin-

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we cannot perceive this [connection], that our knowledge can only relate to the individual, and that we must resign [to any further claim]?" (Quoted in Manfred Frank, trans. Millán, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 212.

11 *The Artwork of the Future*, 13, *PW* I, 70. Cooke sees superstition as the "original" error. Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 254. Wagner's text, however, identifies the separation of humanity from nature as the primordial error of consciousness; the positing of a cause behind nature is a consequence of that error, and is not identical with it.

12 Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. Ellis, *PW* II, 154. He cites Feuerbach in this connection.

ning of science we stand in the same relation to life as we did when we began to set our own human life apart from nature";[13] there may be no gods involved, but we are still trying to find an external principle that explains away the world of the senses. This is a doomed enterprise, however. Science generates just another set of limited ideas that can never capture a limitless reality. "The essence of science is therefore as finite as that of life is infinite, just as error is finite while truth is infinite."[14]

We cannot think our way out of those constraints. Understanding that impasse leads some of us to reject the "barren illusion" of theory, "to turn to *reality* and to approach it by means of feeling." But "how is this to be done, seeing that *reality* as an imagined *whole* can only be made intelligible to the intellect, and cannot be brought into relation with feeling?"[15]

Wagner's uncle Adolf had suggested to Tieck that idealism was a "hunger cure" that removed us from the purely human so we could recuperate in a world of both nature and humanity.[16] Wagner himself had a different "hunger cure." It was giving up the fiction of a world that could be grasped by the mind. We do not need right views or better theories; "we must entirely renounce the pursuit of the Universal."[17] What we need is the most radical kind of trust. Much as Fichte did, Wagner insisted that we could embrace reality only by surrendering the Ego of self-consciousness and the detached thinking that self-consciousness makes possible.

Wagner asked Röckel: "To be real—to live—what is it but to be born, to grow, to bloom, to wither and to die?"[18] He went on:

> Therefore to be at one with truth is to give oneself up as a sentient human being wholly and entirely to reality—to encounter birth, growth, bloom, blight and decay frankly, with joy and with sorrow, and to live to the full this life made up of happiness and suffering—so to live and so to die.[19]

It is probably not coincidence that Wagner was, at least briefly, very taken with the Sufi poet Hafiz, whom he praised to Röckel as "the greatest of all

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13 *The Artwork of the Future*, 14, *PW* I, 72.
14 *The Artwork of the Future*, 14, *PW* I, 72.
15 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 81 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 302, translation altered.
16 *Letters to and from Ludwig Tieck and His Circle: Unpublished Letters from the Period of German Romanticism Including the Unpublished Correspondence of Sophie and Ludwig Tieck*, ed. Percy Matenko, Edwin H. Zeydel, and Bertha M. Masche (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 164, translation mine.
17 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 82 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 303.
18 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 81–82 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 302–3.
19 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 82 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 302–3.

poets."[20] It is also tempting to see this as an anticipation of Nietzsche's *amor fati*, the deep sense "that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it … but *love* it."[21]

For it was love, and sexual love in particular, that Wagner saw as the path towards selfless oneness with the Real. He told Röckel that "we can only fully grasp a phenomenon if we can at one and the same time completely absorb it, and be absorbed by it," and to achieve that absorption, he added, "We must look to love, and to love only":[22]

> [O]nly that which is real can be eternal, and it is through love that we attain to the most perfect manifestation of reality; therefore Love only is eternal. The fact is, egoism ceases at the moment when the "I" passes into the ''Thou."[23]

We believe that we are separate beings who must armor ourselves against an indifferent or hostile world, and our finitude "has power to strike terror into our souls; but it can do so only if we have lost our hold on *reality.* If, on the contrary, we are possessed by a sense of the reality of love, that terror vanishes, for love annihilates the notion of limitation."[24] At that point we let go of the ego and of all the hedges and defenses with which we struggle to protect it. There is only the real, and in love we sense and embrace our identity with its movement. That is why falling in love seems like a deeper wisdom than anything we can think or speak, and why every step that lovers take can feel effortlessly choreographed.

Wagner wrote endlessly about love in all of its forms, at least those that he could accept within his at-least-publicly heteronormative outlook.[25] But it is essential to recognize that he did not give it such importance because it made people nice or kind. It was not worthy because it inspired us to do good deeds or to treat others as they deserved to be treated. Love was important because "it is through love that we attain to the most perfect manifestation of reality."[26] We therefore misunderstand much of the *Ring* if we think of this

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20 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 59 (September 12, 1852), *SL* 270.

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Ecce Homo," tr. W. Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1968), 714.

22 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 82–83 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 303.

23 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 86, *SL* 304.

24 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 86, *SL* 304.

25 He praised Spartan homosexual love but this was premised on a belief that "it excluded the motive of physical, selfish pleasure." *The Artwork of the Future*, 63–64, *PW* I, 168.

26 *Letters to August Roeckel*, 86 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 304 (Note that Wagner's text does not refer to the "sentiment" of love, as the *SL* translation has it).

as a desirable or socially beneficial emotional state or as "a natural instinctive need for mutual love and fellowship," in Deryck Cooke's words.[27] Love is central to human life because of its transformative and even destructive power. It returns us to reality, and so long as we live in love we are freed from the misleading separation on which we had premised our conscious lives.

Love has both power and inestimable value because it aligns us with the all-encompassing activity of what is real, the ever-flowing river in which we gladly immerse ourselves. It is a liberating force, freeing us from the selfish compulsion to look after our own private needs and impulses, and through it we live as willing participants in the life we share with all others. Like Fichte's ethical person, we become pure presentations of reality, and this—not self-indulgence or untrammeled power—is genuine freedom. Wagner never developed a theory of ethics, but ethical concerns are rarely absent when he talks about love, and one can easily trace a line that goes from Kant's moral law through Fichte's egoless morality to Wagner's praise of love.

Erotic union, for Wagner, was both immersion in reality and a passage into shared agency. "Now, a human being is both *man* and *woman*, and it is only when these two are united that the real human being exists, and thus it is only by love that man and woman attain to the full measure of humanity. But when nowadays we talk of a human being, such heartless blockheads are we that quite involuntarily we only think of man."[28] This is a model for all truly human connections. "Every other manifestation of love can be traced back to that one absorbingly real feeling,"[29] and this experience grounds the community of the entire human race. People "only find understanding, redemption and satisfaction in a higher element; and this higher element is the human species. … And the individual human can only satisfy his or her need for love by giving, indeed by giving him or herself to others and at the highest level to humankind."[30] Just as in sexual love, this is not self-denial but self-realization: "only by wholly merging with the other, with the community therefore, that you can be fully what you are, what you can be and what you reasonably want to be. Only in communism is egoism fully satisfied."[31]

This underpins Wagner's utopian politics, but for him it also led to art. In the early 1850s he had little use for religion, which he saw as just another "external, imaginary power" whose votaries concocted images which they

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[27] Cooke repeats this formula almost verbatim in many passages starting around p. 253 of *I Saw the World End.*

[28] *Letters to August Roeckel*, 84 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 303. The *Symposium* was a favorite of Wagner's, and he may well be echoing the fable that Plato ascribes to Aristophanes.

[29] *Letters to August Roeckel*, 83 (January 25–26, 1854), *SL* 303.

[30] *The Artwork of the Future*, 27, *PW* I, 96–97.

[31] *The Artwork of the Future*, 28, *PW* I, 99.

sold to us as pictures of the real. They were nothing like that, of course, so it was left to art to accomplish what religion only claimed to do. Art would show humanity that it reflects and embodies "the inner necessity of nature." It would bring reality to light. That gives it a quasi-religious, even sacramental function.[32]

For Wagner art is a form of revelation; it is nature itself that gives it birth. In the very first sentence of *The Artwork of the Future* he hints at this in a statement too compressed to be taken in quickly: "Humans are to nature as art is to humans." He goes on to expand this thought:

> Once nature had developed the right conditions for humans to exist then humans came spontaneously into being: as soon as human life develops the conditions for art to emerge, so art springs spontaneously to life.[33]

These are separate moments in the same activity. One and the same movement fashions both human consciousness and art, and in both thinking and artistic creativity an invisible reality is made visible. Just as nature becomes aware of itself through humanity, humanity becomes aware of itself through art.

If Wagner had read through Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, or if he had flipped to the end after "racking his brains to make sense of its first pages," he would have seen that, for Schelling, all philosophy culminated in the work of art, which "reflects to us the identity of the conscious and unconscious activities."[34] "To put it more briefly," Schelling had written, "nature begins as unconscious and ends as conscious," and through art "the unconscious activity operates as it were through the conscious, to the point of attaining complete identity therewith."[35]

This would be quite easy to translate into Wagner's terms, but doing that would miss the point. Schelling saw this entire process as a private one, carried out by individuals and ultimately by the solitary Romantic genius, who alone could unite the infinite productivity of nature with an infinite freedom of thought.[36] Nothing could be less Wagnerian. Wagner did generally feel himself to be solitary, but he saw that as the fault of his times, not as the precondition for art; the "artist of the future" would be "necessarily the

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32 *The Artwork of the Future*, 14–15, *PW* I, 71.
33 *The Artwork of the Future*, 13, *PW* I, 69.
34 Friedrich Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 225. As was typical of Schelling, he soon gave up on this idea.
35 Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 219.
36 Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 228.

community of all artists."[37] As a man of the theater, especially, he insisted that artistic work was always collaborative, and the camaraderie of the artists and artisans at Bayreuth was a delight to him; "Very often the relations between Wagner and his artists were extremely jolly and free-and-easy. At the last rehearsal in the salon of the Hotel Sommer he actually, out of sheer high spirits, stood on his head."[38] He dismissed talk of artistic genius as a gift or an "absolute windfall" (think of the play and movie *Amadeus*) as "uncommonly vapid and superficial."[39]

Real genius was different. It was nothing but "receptive force" applied to something that had already fashioned itself within the life of the community:

> That which operates so mightily upon this [receptive] force that it must finally come forth to full productiveness, we have in truth to regard as the real fashioner and former, as the only furthering condition for that force's efficacy, and this is the Art already evolved outside that separate force, the Art which from the artworks of the ancient and the modern world has shaped itself into a universal Substance, and hand in hand with actual Life, reacts upon the individual with the character of the force that I have elsewhere named the *communistic*.[40]

"Thus the poet cannot create, but only the folk; or the poet only in so far as he comprehends and utters, represents, the creation of the folk."[41] Art is thus profoundly social. Wagner saw this ideal at work in ancient Greece, and especially in Athenian tragedy, which he read closely and creatively, if sometimes oddly. His term for the unconscious artwork of the community was "Mythos," and in Mythos "all the shaping impulse of the Folk" collaborated in showing to "its senses a broadest grouping of the most manifold phenomena, and in the most succinct of shapes."[42] What the tragedian did was make the Mythos visible; "the shapes that had been in Mythos [as] merely shapes of Thought, were now presented in actual bodily portrayal by living men: so the actually represented Action now compressed itself, in thorough keeping with the mythic essence, into a compact, plastic whole."[43]

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37 *The Artwork of the Future*, 78, *PW* I, 196.
38 Quoted in Mann, "Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," in Mann, Essays of Three Decades. (New York: Knopf, 1948), 329.
39 Richard Wagner, *A Communication to My Friends*, trans. Ellis, *PW* I, 288.
40 *A Communication to My Friends*, *PW* I, 288.
41 Richard Wagner, "Sketches (1849–1851)," trans. Ellis, *PW* VIII, 349.
42 *Opera and Drama*, *PW* II, 154.
43 *Opera and Drama*, *PW* II, 154.

Putting it briefly, "Tragedy is nothing other than the artistic completion of the Myth itself; while the Myth is the poem of a life-view in common."[44] This social grounding is what makes it possible for art to be "the faithful, conscious image of the authentic human being and of a human life lived according to natural necessity."[45] The calling of art is to make that necessity, that activity, into something sensible and therefore knowable, thus completing a kind of circle: in self-consciousness the unity of nature splinters into sensible events, which are woven together by the community in its stories and images, and through art these elements are focused and fused into sensible representations that show us our original identity with reality itself. Art is the mirror that shows us that we ourselves are the mirror of nature.

This is not a primal unity, as Nattiez thinks.[46] It is something achieved, and we can see the *Ring* cycle as an attempt to achieve just that. But this is also why Wagner's tetralogy is such a monster. It has something alien about it. Looking around him Wagner saw nothing like the idealized collective life he thought he could see in ancient Athens. It was exactly the opposite, an "anti-art way of life."[47] Thinking had cut itself off from "the totality of all reality," seeing itself "not as the last and most contingent, but rather as the first and least contingent agency, and therefore as the foundation and cause of nature," and once that happened "the bond of necessity snap[ped] and arbitrary wilfulness rage[d] unchecked … through the workings of thought, unleashing a tide of madness into the real world."[48]

Genuine art begins with "the real, physical human presence, from his life need, whose pre-condition in turn is nature's actual, tangible presence." In a community shaped by the give-and-take of free people art was conservative. It made manifest what the people themselves had felt and done, as they lived close to the roots of experience and thus to the necessity of the real. (This is more emotional openness than some back-to-nature primitivism.) In a world of "nature-sundered" individuals, though, the circle through which reality comes to self-awareness is broken, and concepts and ideas about things replace the things themselves. Wagner calls the source of those ideas *Geist,* an untranslatable word meaning mind or spirit, and its triumph, unmoored from natural necessity and the real lives of a human

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44 *Opera and Drama*, *PW* II, 156.
45 *The Artwork of the Future,* 14, *PW* I, 71.
46 Jean-Jacques Nattiez, tr. S. Spencer, *Wagner Androgyne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 18.
47 *The Artwork of the Future*, 20, *PW* I, 82.
48 *The Artwork of the Future*, 20, *PW* I, 32.

community, is the exact opposite of the human freedom it might seem to exalt. It makes real human beings interchangeable and expendable:

> If the spirit created nature, if thought made reality, if the philosopher precedes the human then nature, reality and human beings are no longer necessary, their existence is superfluous, harmful even … Then nature, reality and human beings only gain meaning, their existence is only justified when the spirit—that unconditional spirit, which is cause, effect and law unto itself—uses them according to its own absolute, sovereign pleasure. If the spirit in itself is necessity then it is life that is arbitrary, a fantastic masquerade, an idle distraction, a frivolous whim, [and] every purely human need is a luxury, [while] luxury on the other hand is a need.[49]

Real life vanishes from view. Since we are never apart from reality, though, the belief that we can stand above it and dictate our terms to it can only be a delusion, and any cultural product that proceeds from a delusion can only be sterile. We produce dead imitations of real art, following fashion rather than necessity:

> Fashion … requires nature's absolute obedience; it demands the complete self-denial of true need in favor of an imaginary one; it forces humans' natural sense of beauty into the worship of ugliness; it kills our health to teach us to love sickness; it destroys our strength and power to make us find contentment in our weakness. Where the most laughable fashion reigns, there nature is seen to be most ridiculous; where the most criminally unnatural reigns, there the expression of nature appears the highest crime; where insanity takes the place of truth, there truth must be locked in the insane asylum.[50]

And Wagner could see no way out: "the needs of art can never exist where fashion dictates the rules by which we live."[51]

Under these conditions art could not be conservative. "With us," he wrote in *Art and Revolution*, "true Art is *revolutionary,* because its very existence is opposed to the ruling spirit of the community."[52] In that same essay, though, he admitted that the social conditions for true art were missing. "The perfect Art-work, the great united utterance of a free and

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[49] *The Artwork of the Future*, 20, *PW* I, 83. (Includes quotations in previous paragraph.) Wagner's *Geist* should not be confused with Hegel's *Geist,* which is closer to Wagner's unknowable real.

[50] *The Artwork of the Future*, 20–21, *PW* I, 84.

[51] *The Artwork of the Future*, 21, *PW* I, 85.

[52] Richard Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, trans. Ellis, *PW* I, 51–52.

lovely public life, the *Drama*, *Tragedy* … is not yet born again: … Only the great Revolution of Mankind … can win for us this Art-work."[53]

He was sure that this "great Revolution" would come soon. Though the culture of the present day had set itself against nature, its "heavy load … will one day grow so ponderous" that "down-trod, never-dying Nature" will "hurl the whole cramping burden from her, with one sole thrust."[54] "Nature and her fulness" would then be the wealth of the whole human community, equally, and the needs which had blighted the lives of the poor would be cast away (onto machines, apparently); "then will man's whole enfranchised energy proclaim itself as naught but pure *artistic* impulse."[55] Art would be reborn.

But Wagner did not want to wait, and he was more inconsistent than usual on this point: "The true artist who has already grasped the proper standpoint," he maintained, "may labour even now—for this standpoint is present with us—upon the Art-work of the Future!"[56] He would turn back to a Mythos from the distant past, reconstructed through his own prodigious if undisciplined reading. He claimed the right to do this because, he said, "The incomparable thing about the Mythos is, that it is true for all time."[57] Yet the *Ring* had no place in the life of its own day. In the early 1850s, with the idea of Bayreuth some years in the future, Wagner was convinced that it could be performed only after a revolution, not those that had failed or been put down in 1848 and 1849 but the grander one he expected, because only "the men of the Revolution" would understand that it made clear "the *meaning* of that Revolution, in its noblest sense."[58] And after that would come the truly revolutionary art, one that would bring about "the ascension of the *egoistic* essence of the individual into the *communistic* essence of the human race; the concretion of the abstract idea of Man into the actual, true and blissful common-being of *Mankind.*"[59]

These are dangerous ideas, and not always in a good way. As is all too well known, Wagner's ideas were quickly turned into ideological cover for a nascent European far right. He himself was the first to move in that direction, attacking Jews as archetypes of nature-sundered humanity, people incapable of true creativity because they were cut off from their roots. This was

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53 *Art and Revolution*, *PW* I, 53.
54 *Art and Revolution*, *PW* I, 55.
55 *Art and Revolution*, *PW* I, 57. Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" is a witty elaboration of this idea.
56 *Art and Revolution*, *PW* I, 60–61.
57 *Opera and Drama*, *PW* II, 191.
58 To Theodor Uhlig, November 12, 1851, *SL* 234.
59 Richard Wagner, "Art and Climate," trans. Ellis, *PW* I, 261.

unjustifiable and not at all theoretically necessary, but it served to rationalize Wagner's irrational hatred of Jews as a whole, and after his death, thanks to the deplorable politics of the Bayreuth circle, the antisemitic views of his widow, their daughter Eva's marriage to the English racist Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and their daughter-in-law Winifred's devotion to Hitler, Wagner and his festival came to be identified first with proto-fascism and ultimately with Nazism.

Hitler may have been the sole fanatical Wagnerian among the Nazi elite, but some of Wagner's texts and imagery and selected extracts from his scores seemed to anticipate the blood-and-soil ideology of National Socialism. Yet Nazi "culture" and governance were hardly in keeping with Wagner's theories. His ideal art was a mirror, not a model, arising from the shared creativity of ordinary people, and the reality of Fascism was exactly the opposite of this. As the sterile classicism of Arno Breker, the "official state sculptor" of Nazi Germany,[60] might suggest, it was never the organic cultivation of a grounded form of communal life. It was the imposition from above of a fraudulent image of community, enforced by a regime of propagandists and policemen far more intrusive and destructive of anything worthwhile in life than individualist capitalism has ever needed. So far from realizing a Wagnerian ideal, it actively suppressed any creative spontaneity. Instead of fostering a community that could shape itself and give birth to genuine art, it tried to force an entire nation into the mold of a pseudo-artistic idea, and it channeled a murderous rage toward anyone who seemed to threaten that idea. It killed art in the name of the people and killed people in the name of art.

Actually existing fascism was deeply anti-Wagnerian. It is not always easy, though, to separate Wagner's philosophy from its distorted echoes, and his own character and prejudices make that even harder. It is worth doing all the same. Wagner's imaginative development of a kind of materialist idealism deserves to be rescued from right-wing Wagnerians. It may need to be rescued from Wagner himself.[61]

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[60] Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933–1939* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 167.

[61] *PW* refers to *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, translated by William Ashton Ellis. The University of Nebraska reprints are photo reproductions of the first editions, which were published at the end of the nineteenth century, and the volume numbers and pagination are the same in both. Titles without an author are all Wagner's work.
I have used and quoted the only modern translation of any of these texts, *The Artwork of the Future*, translated by Emma Warner (London: The Wagner Journal, 2013), and have supplied parallel citations to the Ellis translation.
SL refers to Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, eds. & trans., *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*. (London: J.M. Dent, 1987).

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Novalis and the Mystery Traditions

Knowledge as Music, Loss, and Restoration

Cecilia Rose Inkol[*]

ABSTRACT

This exposition explores Novalis's understanding of knowledge as music, loss, and restoration, how this understanding is rooted in the ancient mystery traditions, and its relevance for today. For Novalis, all knowledge was once unified, not conceived as separate disciplines; this unified knowledge was also musical in nature. Music is the universal language that underpins the unity of the sciences, a conception connected with esoteric pansophic endeavors and the notion of the original hieroglyphic language. The fragmentation of the sciences coincides with a threefold loss: the primordial meaning of the hieroglyph, the capacities of the human, and the musicality of language. Novalis conceives of knowledge as restoration of what has been lost, but a restoration that is a creative reimagining. I examine and situate this Novalisian conception, drawing connections to the philosophies of Giordano Bruno and Walter Benjamin, and I unearth the esoteric genealogy of Novalis's conception of knowledge. I propose that Novalis's conception of knowledge has implications for contemporary knowledge culture. Finally, as Novalis espouses the philosopher as Orpheus, I explore what makes Novalis an Orphic philosopher, and what is new about Novalis's Orphism.

Keywords: Novalis, music, ancient mystery traditions, esotericism, Bruno, Benjamin, Orphism

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore la compréhension que Novalis se fait de la connaissance comme musique, perte et restauration ; comment cette conception prend ses racines dans les traditions anciennes des cultes à mystères ; sa pertinence et son actualité. Pour Novalis, les savoirs étaient autrefois unifiés, et non des disciplines distinctes ; ce savoir unifié était, en outre, de nature musicale. La musique est le langage universel sous-tendant l'unité des sciences ; cette conception a partie liée avec les entreprises pansophiques ésotériques et la notion d'un langage hiéroglyphique originaire. La fragmentation des sciences va de pair avec une triple perte : la perte du sens originel du hiéroglyphe, celle des capacités de l'être humain à le déchiffrer et celle, enfin, de la musicalité du langage. Novalis conçoit le savoir comme la restauration de ce qui a été perdu, tout en étant sa réinvention créatrice. J'examine cette conception et je la situe en établissant des liens avec les philosophies de Giordano Bruno et de Walter Benjamin. D'autre part, je retrace la généalogie ésotérique de l'épistémologie novalisienne. J'en tire également des implications pour la culture épistémologique contemporaine. Enfin, puisque Novalis voit dans le philosophe un Orphée, j'explore ce qui fait de Novalis un philosophe orphique, mais aussi ce qu'il y a de nouveau dans l'orphisme novalisien.

Mots-clés : Novalis, musique, cultes à mystères, ésotérisme, Bruno, Benjamin, orphisme

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1. Introduction

This exposition explores the Novalisian conception of knowledge as music, loss, and restoration, and evinces how this understanding is rooted in the ancient mystery traditions. It delves into the nature of knowledge and the mystery of loss and restoration at the heart of Novalis and the ancient mysteries, loss as requisite for wisdom and true knowledge; also examined are the esoteric dimensions of music, how music can be understood as expression of the divine mystery, and as magical praxis to attain it.

Novalis expounds a theory of the unification of all sciences; I begin by situating this concept philosophically and historically. Beyond the philosophy of Novalis, this concept is extant in a pre-Romantic context in the work of Hemsterhuis and Oetinger; in the German Romantic milieu this concept is also operative in the philosophy of Schelling. Novalis's interpretation of the unification of all sciences hinges upon his understanding of music as underpinning all life and knowledge. Music for Novalis is ontological and epistemological, the universal language; it is the hieroglyphic key that reunites the sciences and regains the lost primordial meaning; the divine mystery itself is musical in nature, and music is an expression of unity. To restore the unity of the sciences and the primordial meaning makes veritable knowledge and wisdom possible. Yet one's capacity to perceive the true unity of things is a function of not only one's musical sense, but also of one's moral sense, morality as entwined with knowledge and musicality. As the human, too, has become fragmented alongside the fragmentation of knowledge, divorced from her true powers, and as Novalis understands all knowledge as ultimately self-knowledge, self-restoration becomes possible when true knowledge is regained. With true knowledge, the human's lost capacities can be restored, and one's harmonization with the divine "grand rhythm" is the recovery of one's own unity with the divine. For Novalis, music is intrinsic to knowledge and life; and veritable knowledge is fundamentally a process of loss and restoration, but as will be seen, a restoration that is creative. I evince that Novalis's conception of the primordial hieroglyphic language strongly resonates with Giordano Bruno's conception of the language of the gods and the ideas of Walter Benjamin.

The German Romantic movement takes profound inspiration from the ancient mystery traditions, and Novalis's understanding of knowledge as music, loss, and restoration is rooted in the metaphysics and praxes of the ancient world. Music in the ancient world was not merely a source of entertainment; it was the vehicle for the transmission of knowledge for ancient oral cultures. In the ancient mystery traditions, there exist

conceptions of music as philosophical, as divine, as part of the fabric of reality, as anagogic, and as a form of magic; such conceptions are at work in the ancient Orphic, Pythagorean, Egyptian, Hermetic, Gnostic, Kabbalistic, and Chaldean mystery traditions. The notion of a lost original unity or divinity that can be restored forms the crux of the ancient mystery traditions, a crux entwined with music. Orpheus's music was reputed to enchant all nature, his music as divine and magical power; loss, death, and transformation are the central threads of the Orphic mysteries, the spiritual task of its initiate as recollection, restoration, and the overcoming of death. Orphism is also defined by its myth of the cosmic homecoming as restitution. Like Orpheus, Pythagoras was reputed to be able to enchant nature through his music, and able to effect transformation through music. In the Pythagorean understanding, music is part of the architecture of the cosmos, and Pythagoras, a figure who embodies divine recollection, was reputed to be able to hear the cosmic symphonies through his intellect. In late Pythagoreanism, intonement of the 7 vowels was practiced, music as anagogic rite of the soul's ascension; the practice of vowel intonement goes back to ancient Egyptian priests and is also extant in Hermetic and Gnostic milieus. Overcoming death and spiritual restoration are central themes at work in Pythagoreanism and the ancient Egyptian mysteries. The Hermetic treatise NHVI evinces a vowel intonation practice that enables one to achieve apotheosis, and music is understood as emanating from the highest spiritual realms; Hermeticism is essentially concerned with restoration of the soul's divinity, an endeavor to redeem its obscuration and forlornness in one's earthly incarnation. In the Gnostic milieu, there exist conceptions of music as capable of enduing the practitioner with divine creative power; there also exist conceptions of music as praxis to engender transformations of soul and body, and to elicit altered states of consciousness. Themes of spiritual restoration and salvatory self-knowledge are extant in the Gnostic milieu. In the Kabbalistic milieu, there exist conceptions of music as embedded in the tree of life, of spiritual music, and of music as related to the Kabbalist's letter combinations. There exist practical applications of music in this milieu to engender altered states of consciousness and to aid the soul's ascension. Lurianic Kabbalism espouses the conception of an original divine unity which fractured, and which must be reconstituted, a messianic endeavor particularly relevant for Novalis and Benjamin. In the Chaldean context, music was employed to facilitate the soul's spiritual ascent, a notion which would inspire the later Neoplatonic theurgists; the *Chaldean Oracles* also conceived of music as extant in highest tier of reality.

In the mystery traditions, there exist conceptions of music as part of the divine fabric of reality, and the modality that leads to that ultimate reality, life and the cosmos understood as endued with a musical aspect. The mystery traditions are also fundamentally concerned with loss or fragmentation and divine restoration. Understanding music, loss, and restoration as fundamental aspects of reality, thus knowledge, too, must incorporate this understanding, knowledge as intrinsically entwined with music, loss, and restoration. This understanding ties the philosophy of Novalis to the ancient esoteric world, with implications for the present context.

Finally, as Novalis espouses a vision of the philosopher as Orpheus, I explore what makes Novalis an Orphic philosopher, evincing how Novalis's profound interconnectedness with Orphism enables a deeper understanding of his work.

2. Novalis on the Hieroglyphic Language and Music

The movement of German Romanticism draws upon the ancient mystery traditions and esotericism, reinterpreting these sources in new philosophical elucidations. The notion of the unification of all sciences is a German Romantic notion that can be found in the works of Schelling[1] and Novalis; in a pre-Romantic context, it is also extant in the work of Oetinger,[2] Hemsterhuis,[3] and there are resonances with the project of the Renaissance magi and esoteric encyclopedic pansophic endeavors.

Taking inspiration from the likes of encyclopedic and pansophic endeavors to encompasses all knowledge,[4] and Hemsterhuis,[5] Novalis's own pan-sophic effort hinges upon the notion of the original unity of the sciences and a conception of the original hieroglyphic language. Novalis writes: "It is entirely due to a lack of genius that the sciences are separated... We owe the most sublime truths of our day to such interactions between the long-separated elements of this total science."[6] Genius, for Novalis, is the

1 Glenn Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 247.

2 *Ibid*., 246.

3 John Neubauer, *Bifocal Vision: Novalis's Philosophy of Nature and Disease* (University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 88.

4 Martin Dyck, *Novalis and Mathematics: A Study of Friedrich Hardenberg's Fragments on Mathematics and Its Relation to Magic, Music, Religion, Philosophy, Language, and Literature.* (Vol 27. University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 22.

5 Neubauer, *Bifocal Vision*, 88.

6 Quoted in Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, ed. and trans. David W. Wood (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 239.

"synthesizing principle."[7] And as August Coelestin Just, friend and supervisor, described Novalis's project: "His keenest wish was to bring back all art and science to first principles, and raise them to the dignity of true science, uniting them all in one complete whole. According to his conviction, there was a perfect harmony and union between them. With this object, he excluded no subject from his study."[8]

Though the sciences are generally conceived as separate, Novalis relays that all sciences are inextricably intertwined. All knowledge contains comparisons and resemblances with other forms.[9] All sciences and ideas are intertwined through the magic of analogy: "All ideas are related: analogy means *air de famille*."[10] And all "analogy is symbolical."[11] All separate arts and sciences are predicated upon only partial harmonies.[12] Philosophy occupies a privileged place in the sciences, as the "substance of science" and Novalis writes: "Every science is perhaps only a variation of philosophy."[13] Given that "all sciences are mutually interwoven, philosophy can never be limited or completed. Only when all other sciences are brought to perfection will philosophy be rightly understood."[14]

Novalis relays that the sciences were not always conceived as separate; prior to disciplinary separation and compartmentalization, there existed an all-encompassing hieroglyphic art. "The first art is the study of hieroglyphs," Novalis writes. "Then the art of communication and reflection, or language, and the art of representation and shaping, or poetry, are still one. Not until later does this raw mass divide—then the art of naming arises, language in the true sense—philosophy—and fine art, creative art, poetry itself."[15]

The first art was hieroglyphic; it was a single art which fragmented into disparate disciplines. It was a poetic art; the primordial poets were not only priests,[16] but soothsayers, legislators, and physicians.[17] For Novalis, the fragmentation of the sciences coincides with a threefold loss: the primordial

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7 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia,* 215.
8 August Just, "Life of Novalis" in *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, ed. and trans. M. J. Hope (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1891), 29.
9 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I" in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Margaret Stoljar (Albany: University of New York Press, 1997), 60.
10 Quoted in O'Brien, Wm. Arctander. *Novalis: Signs of Revolution* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 139.
11 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," in *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, 226.
12 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I," 61.
13 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia,* 52.
14 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 221.
15 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II" in *Philosophical Writings*, 70.
16 Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations" in *Philosophical Writings*, 36.
17 Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, 45.

hieroglyphic meaning, the capacities of the human, and the original musicality of language. The primordial human perceived all as spirit: "The first human being is the first spirit-seer. Everything appears to him as spirit."[18] Novalis writes that the human once could apprehend the spirit of God, but the world has lost its meaning: "Everything we experience is a communication. Thus the world is indeed a communication—a revelation of the spirit. The age has passed when the spirit of God could be understood. The meaning of the world is lost. We have stopped at the letter. As a result of the appearance we have lost that which is appearing."[19]

No longer do we apprehend spirit appearances or the hieroglyphic meaning, only dead repetition: "Formerly all things were spirit appearances. Now we can see nothing but dead repetition, which we do not understand. The meaning of the hieroglyph is missing. We are still living on the fruit of better times."[20]

Novalis writes that all "true arts" express "one idea—one spirit"; this is the "world of spirits" which are "only different expressions of different tools of the one spirit and its world."[21] Whilst the human no longer perceives all things as spirit, the poet retains some of this capacity, for she is in communication with "spirits of light, who permeate nature."[22] And the poet who is sensitive to the "musical spirit" of language, "will be a prophet."[23] "Our alphabet is an art of musical writing."[24] Music frees the spirit; referring to the "universal nth language of music," which is to say, music as the highest and utmost universal language beyond enumeration, Novalis says that the "spirit becomes free" through it. "All love—and goodness, future and past are aroused in it—hope and longing… Our language—was much more musical to begin with, and has gradually become so prosaic—so *unmusical*. It has now become more like noise—sound, if one thus wishes to degrade this beautiful word. It must become *song* once again."[25]

Novalis interprets the development of history as musical. He defines philosophy as "musical history"; he also defines philosophy as the "theory of poetry,"[26] and equates poetry with music[27] and magic.[28] He conceives of

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18 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," 67.
19 *Ibid*., 81.
20 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I," 60.
21 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," 73.
22 Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen" in *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, 106.
23 Novalis, "Monologue" in *Philosophical Writings*, 83.
24 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia,* 36.
25 *Ibid*., 37.
26 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," 79.
27 Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, 46.
28 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," 79.

musical relations as the basic relations of nature.[29] All arts, crafts, and bodies are endued with meter, rhythm, and melody. Life and destiny are "entirely rhythmical."[30] "All method is rhythm," and "rhythmical sense is genius."[31] Novalis writes that there exists a "grand rhythm" that one can tune into to access the "most sublime thoughts" which are "united with these strange oscillations," where their deeper meaning appears. Tuning into this rhythm also reveals the "Orphic legend of the miracle of sound, as the mysterious doctrine of music, as the sculptor and solacer of the universe. Here we are granted a profound and instructive view into the acoustic nature of the soul, and discover at that point where the two oscillations are joined—a fresh affinity between light and thought."[32] This is to say that the mystery of the universe is musical in nature; the mystery can be conceived as music itself. Thus, only when "the philosopher appears as Orpheus, will the Whole arrange itself…into true sciences."[33] In other words, the hieroglyphic unity of the sciences will be regained once language regains its true musicality.

For Novalis, music is synthesizing; it is an expression of spirit in the way it unites all things. Music is the hieroglyphic key that reunites the primordial unity; it is the universal language and the means for its restoration. The restoration of the universal musical language is the restoration of veritable knowledge and wisdom, for: "Wisdom is harmony."[34] To perceive true reality is not just a musical endeavor, but also a moral one; Novalis understands one's capacity to perceive the unity of things and to know the thing-in-itself as a function of one's musical attunement and one's moral sense.[35] As doing philosophy is the "revelation of the self,"[36] the "science of self-analysis,"[37] and the "arousal of the real self through the ideal self" that challenges one to "awaken and to be spirit,"[38] Novalis understands all knowledge as fundamentally self-knowledge; we ourselves are music after all, the soul as acoustic.[39] As such, there is an aspect of self-restoration that becomes possible when veritable knowledge is achieved. Regaining the universal language also offers the possible restoration of the human's lost perceptual capacities and primordial powers. Novalis expounds music as a

[29] Novalis, "Last Fragments" in *Philosophical Writings*, 154.
[30] Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments" in *Philosophical Writings*, 109.
[31] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 57.
[32] *Ibid*., 57.
[33] *Ibid*., 77.
[34] *Ibid*., 30.
[35] *Ibid*., 10.
[36] Novalis, "Logological Fragments I,"53.
[37] Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 218.
[38] Novalis, "Logological Fragments I,"53.
[39] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 57.

form of magic in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where he recounts the tales of Orpheus-like figures whose magic song incites his rescue when a band of thieves endeavor to steal his treasures,[40] a bard whose song impels the king's eagle to transfer the king's diadem,[41] and ancient poets whose "bewitching song" could transform all nature and impel spirits to disclose the secrets of all things. Novalis tells us that whilst it may seem "incredible and fabulous" to hear of such poets' powers, "traces for the recollection of these men remain," though their art has been lost.[42] Novalis affirms one's capacity to "perform wonders," even if one did not desire to, if one were to become "perfectly moral"[43]; as afore elaborated, morality is entwined with one's musical sense and ability to perceive truth. To unite with the "grand rhythm" is to recover one's unity with the divine mystery; musicality is the magical and moral means to re-attain that mystery, a mystery that is itself musical. But to know the meaning of its mystery requires poetic reinterpretation and a re-imagining.

Novalis understands the primordial unity of all disciplines as coinciding with a lost original meaning; this primordial meaning is still extant, can be recovered. The original meaning can be restored by rendering it new through poetization. "The world must be made Romantic" to "find the original meaning again. To make Romantic is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power. […] By endowing the commonplace with higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it Romantic."[44]

"All truth is ancient. The stimulus of novelty lies only in variety of expression. The more contrast in its forms, the greater the pleasure of recognition."[45] Thus, for Novalis, there is an original, primordial truth and meaning which is unchanging, but the Romantic agent is tasked to express this ancient truth and meaning in a novel way. By rendering a new poetic articulation, the primordial meaning is restored. Its novel iteration is not the same as its original form, but its poetization is idealizing, harmonizing, and speaks to its primordial truth. This is a form of creativity that requires a certain level of discipline, a creativity that preserves the essence of what it seeks to reinterpret. To summarize, Novalis understands veritable knowledge

[40] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 67-68.
[41] *Ibid*., 81-83.
[42] Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, 45-46.
[43] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 142.
[44] Novalis, "Logological Fragments I," 60.
[45] Novalis, "Monologue," 85.

as musical, synthesizing, moral, and creative. True knowledge is the restoration of the primordial lost meaning and hieroglyphic unity. It is also the restoration of one's self-knowing, of one's powers, and one's unity with the "grand rhythm."

3. Resonances with Benjamin and Bruno

For Novalis, we recreate the lost hieroglyphic primordial unity through a creative reinterpretation or re-coagulation, the original primordial meaning regained by the creation of new meaning. These conceptions of Novalis find strong congruences with the ideas of Walter Benjamin and Giordano Bruno. Benjamin understands translation as the creative reinterpretation of the original language,[46] and Benjamin is drawing on Novalis and Kabbalism in his conception of translation.[47] The Kabbalistic notion of a divine original unity which shattered, and which must be reconstituted[48] is at work in both Benjamin's and Novalis's conceptions.

In *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man* (1916), Benjamin revises the Genesis account of the Fall of the human. This account conceives of language beyond the human realm, language as the mental content of things, encrypted in materiality but veiled with flesh and other materials. Material objects are mute, thus they employ nameless, non-acoustic language, manifested in material forms. Things communicate themselves to the human. The human has the possibility to offer the mute a voice through her act of naming; such is the task God assigned to the human to complete the work of creation. Language speaks in the form of names to the human alone, elevating the human to lord of nature. The name comprises the essence of language, naming the means whereby language communicates itself in an absolute sense. This naming aspect of language, *Sprachmagie* or language magic, was conceived by Benjamin as what unites humanity with the material realm. All nature communicates itself through language to the human.[49] Naming is an act of translation. Converting the language of things into name gives the nameless name, and a voice to the mute.[50]

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[46] Walter Benjamin, "Task of the Translator" in *Selected Writings: Volume I*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Stanley Corngold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 259.

[47] Angelika Rauch, "Culture's Hieroglyph in Benjamin and Novalis: A Matter of Feeling." *The Germanic Review* 71, no. 4 (1996): 254.

[48] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Penguin Group, 1978), 138.

[49] Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Nature of Man" in *Selected Writings: Volume I*, 62-70.

[50] *Ibid*., 70.

In the paradisiacal state, there was a single language of perfect knowledge. But the human falls from grace with the snake's seduction of the nameless knowledge of good and evil. After the Fall, the human faculty of naming is blunted, the language of naming is relinquished, and the human world is created. The language of perfect knowledge is vitiated when it is used to communicate something other than itself, when it is used as per the dictates of instrumentality and semiotics. This debased form of language is dispersed, causing confusion, amnesia, and untruth.[51]

Fallen, the world needs redeeming, the Adamic naming language, restitution. With the Fall, language and world were no longer bound together. Benjamin conceives of a possibility for their reparation, developing multiple strategies to this end. Translation is one such strategy. Translation extends the life of the work of art. Translation takes the work of art to its afterlife, a more definitive domain of language. The life of the work of art is renewed and completed through translation. Through translation, the work is brought more closely to the realm of pure language wherein all meaning is reconciled.[52]

Akin to Novalis's endeavor to render the world Romantic again, Benjamin's translator is tasked to integrate "many languages into one true language," to ripen the seed of pure language through translation.[53] Translation existed in paradise in the articulation of language or as expressed by the material community. Through translation, the primordial language gene-rates new languages and meanings, the primordial language is fractalized in new forms.

Benajmin also developed the concepts of criticism and allegory for redeeming the Adamic language; both of these strategies are forms of translation.[54] The allegorist is tasked to find the particular ciphers which render the world legible. Developing a cryptoanalytic theory to achieve this end over 15 years, Benjamin's first attempt made recourse to Proustian remembrance or involuntary memory.[55] Benjamin conceived of Proust's notion of 'involuntary memory' as a framework through which the world could be read. As all creation exists as manifestation of divine language, all creation is involved with God's remembrance. Redemption of amnesia is

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[51] *Ibid*., 71.
[52] Benjamin, "Task of the Translator" 254-8.
[53] *Ibid*., 259.
[54] Walter Benjamin, "Letter to Florens Christian Rang," *Selected Writings: Volume I*, 389.
[55] James McBride, "Marooned in the Realm of the Profane: Walter Benjamin's Synthesis of Kabbalah and Communism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57 no.2 (1989): 248.

achieved through remembrance, remembrance as the point of intersection between the human and divine language.[56]

Benjamin also developed a mimetic theory that assumed two forms: *Doctrine of the Similar* (1933) and *On the Mimetic Faculty* (1933). In *On the Mimetic Faculty*, the human could once recognize and produce similarities, but this faculty has undergone degradation, and language is all that remains of it.[57] Benjamin's notion that the human once had greater powers of perception in her capacity to perceive similarities is very Novalisian. Benjamin would reconcile his philosophy of mimesis with his early language magic in his 1933 *Antitheses* through a theory of recollection.[58] For Benjamin, the similarity that was lost in the Fall can be restored through the recollective power of naming. In this way, the primordial divine language is restored alongside the human faculty for perceiving similarities.

Like Novalis, Benjamin renders an account of an original primordial magic language, and of the human as once possessing magical or spiritual powers of perception and action. With his doctrine of translation, Benjamin is also in agreement with Novalis that knowledge is fundamentally creative, understanding loss as requisite for renewal. For Benjamin, the loss of the original sacred language is redeemed through a novel translation, which is reinterpretation, likewise how Novalis iterates that the primordial meaning is regained by rendering it Romantic. Akin to Novalis, Benjamin presents an account of the Adamic language as connected with the human's original capacity to perceive similarities, or as Novalis understands it, analogy and unity. For Novalis and Benjamin, redemption of the original meaning and restoration of the human's faculties is a process of recollection or self-restoration. One primary difference is that Novalis emphasizes the musicality of the original language whereas Benjamin does not.

There are also strong resonances between Novalis's conception of the original hieroglyphic language and Giordano Bruno's notion of the language of the gods. Bruno distinguishes between the language of the gods, which is unchanging eternally, and human languages which change from moment to moment. The Egyptians, having devised a hieroglyphic language that spoke the essential nature of the things it designated, employed it to converse with Gods "with extraordinary results," Bruno relays. With the dawn of

[56] *Ibid*., 249.
[57] Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty" in *Selected Writings: Volume I*, 721.
[58] Walter Benjamin, "Anti-Theses," *Selected Writings: Volume I*, 718.

conventional language, this connection and memory of it evanesced.[59] Bruno conceived of his Ars Memoriae as the universal key which can decipher the language of the world,[60] its goal pansophy. We know for a fact that Novalis read Bruno.[61] For Novalis, the universal key to decipher the language of the world is music.

4. Bridge to Mystery Traditions

There are significant precents in the ancient mystery traditions for Novalis's conception of knowledge as musical, loss, and restoration. Similar conceptions of music as intrinsic to knowledge and reality, as a form of magic, as an expression of the ultimate mystery, and as the means of attaining that mystery exist in ancient mystery traditions, entwined with an understanding of a lost original unity and its restoration. These are central threads at the heart of the ancient mystery traditions, an understanding which is especially prominent in the Orphic, Pythagorean, ancient Egyptian, Hermetic, Gnostic, Kabbalistic, and Chaldean contexts. In his writings, Novalis explicitly cites Orpheus, Pythagoras, and the Kabbalah. I have afore evinced what Novalis explicitly writes concerning Orpheus. Pythagoras explicitly appears in his philosophical notes as well: "Mathematics. The inner living character of mathematics. Magic of numbers. Mystical doctrine of Pythagoras—Personification of 3—of 4 etc."[62] Beyond featuring in his philosophy, Orphic and Pythagorean musical conceptions are folded into Novalis's poetry-and-prose unfinished masterwork *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.[63] We know he studied Kabbalistic ideas,[64] and Kabbalism, too, explicitly appears in his philosophical notes: "Sympathy of the sign with the signified (One of the fundamental ideas of the Cabbala).[65] He would have also encountered hermetic ideas through the work of Bruno. It is also important to note that many of these ancient traditions are genealogically interwoven with one another in a historical sense, and these ideas do not exist in isolation; this will

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59 Giordano Bruno, "On Magic" in *Giordano Bruno: Cause, Principle and Unity: And Essays on Magic*, ed. Richard Blackwell and Robert de Lucca (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 115-16.

60 Antoinette Paterson, *The Infinite Worlds of Giordano Bruno* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1970), 83.

61 Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 81-83.

62 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 52.

63 Cecilia Rose Inkol, "The Philosopher as Magus: Novalis and the Esoteric Tradition." *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 6 (2024): 340.

64 Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme*, 81-83.

65 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 23.

be further explored in the conclusion. To begin tracing this lineage of ideas, I first turn to Orphism, as Novalis invokes the philosopher as Orpheus.

5. Orphism

Combining prophecy, recollection as esoteric initiation, and music as magic, the mystery cult of Orphism presents Orpheus as a divine prophet-musician. Famed for his incantatory charms, Orpheus appears in stories as a lyre-playing prophet and oracle-giver with an association to Apollo, the God of music, as a votary, son, or "companion" of Apollo.[66] Orpheus was reputed to be able to charm all nature, tame wild beasts with his music and singing, inciting birds and animals to listen to his music, and trees were calmed by it.[67] He was also reputed to be able to heal, see into the future, understand the past, and shape divine traditions of myths, spells, and song.[68]

In some renditions of his death, Orpheus was struck by Zeus's thunder. His lyre and decapitated head were flung into a river, floating to the island of Lesbos. The temple of Bakchus (the Dionysus of Orphism) was constructed where Orpheus's head, singing and prophesizing, was buried. His singing head would become renowned as an oracle-giver and prophesizer.[69]

Death, dismemberment, and the afterlife are prominent Orphic themes. Funerary texts interpreting Orphic poetry in reference to the afterlife, even providing instructions for successful descension into the underworld have been unearthed by archeologists (the Derveni papyrus and 'Orphic' Golden Tablets). Inscribed upon gold tablets is the Orphic ritual formula for greeting the guardians of the afterlife: "I am a son of Earth and starry sky. I am parched with thirst and am dying; but quickly grant me cold water from the Lake of Memory to drink."[70]

Orphism may be understood as partially deriving from Egyptian and Anatolian influence, sharply deviating from the Homeric and pre-Homeric spirituality of early Hellenism.[71] Possibly deriving from Egyptian sources, Orphism espouses the soul as immortal, unfolding a narrative of the soul's cosmic journey after death as pathway to immortality. Orphism adheres the pattern set out by the Egyptian *Pyramid Texts* that the royal soul endeavors to

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66 Algis Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism* (London: The Matheson Trust, 2011), 38.
67 *Ibid*., 44.
68 *Ibid*., 45.
69 *Ibid*., 39.
70 Fritz Graf and Sarah Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.
71 Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, 7.

ascend and recollect its unity. This anagogic scenario also seeped into Platonism with modifications. In Egyptian mystagogy, the pharaoh's winged ba, the ideal merrekh as "lover of wisdom" transforms into the winged akh, the "archetypal noetic star."[72]

The Orphic notion of the gods as numerical in essence would influence the Pythagoreans and Plato.[73] Other Orphic notions which would be adopted by the Pythagoreans, and Plato, with analogues in mystery traditions (Hermeticism and Gnosticism) include: the soul as immortal, the transmigration of the soul, the soul as an exiled god,[74] philosophy as purificatory path to immortality, the soul's heavenly journey after death,[75] the notion of a primordial androgyne,[76] and recollection as the spiritual task delegated to its adherents.[77]

In summary, the music of Orpheus can thus be understood as a form of magic and prophecy, in addition to being divine, an indication of his divine powers. Number is viewed in this milieu as divine and as an aspect of its mystery. Orphism also privileges recollection and restoration as powers that the initiate attains after death, a mystery cult that centrally concerns death, the afterlife, and the soul's celestial homecoming. The mystery of Orphism concerns loss, but restoration through disintegration, death, and transformation.

6. Pythagoreanism

Hellenic tradition states that Pythagoras wrote under Orpheus's name, and they have much in common; their myths both contain a journey to the underworld,[78] a connection with Apollo[79] alongside the power to employ music as a form of magic.

Iamblichus relates that akin to Orpheus, Pythagoras exercised dominion over animals, enchanting an ox and a bear with his voice.[80] Iamblichus also relates that Pythagoras was able to cure through music,

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72 *Ibid*., 97.
73 David Fideler, "Introduction" in *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, ed. David Fideler (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1987), 45.
74 Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, 55.
75 *Ibid*., 8.
76 M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), 155.
77 Fideler, "Introduction," 31, 45.
78 Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, 41.
79 *Ibid*., 43.
80 Iamblichus, "On the Pythagorean Life" in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavinys (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 20.

employing melodies to cure ailments and remedy passions, thereby restoring the harmony of the soul faculties. Iamblichus refers to Pythagoras's musical medicine as "preparations," and "touchings," defined as the divinely contrived ming-ling of particular, "diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic melodies" which he employed to circulate the soul's passions in a contrary direction when assuaged by sorrow, rage, pity, fear, over-desirousness, anger, appetites, and pride. "Each of these he corrected by the rule of virtue, attempering them through appropriate melodies, as through some salutary medicine."[81]

In the evening, Pythagoras would help his disciples relax, liberating them from the perturbations of the day, purifying their intellects from the distorting influence of the body, and rendering their sleep quiet, their dreams pleasing and prophetic. In the morning, he would liberate them from the heaviness of night with "certain peculiar chords"[82] and their modulations. Though he employed his voice or struck the lyre to articulate their sounds, Pythagoras achieved these effects not through the instrument or the physical voice-organ; rather, it was achieved by:

> the employment of a certain indescribable divinity, difficult of apprehension, through which he extended his powers of hearing, fixing his intellect on the sublime symphonies of the world, he alone apparently hearing and grasping the universal harmony and consonance of the spheres, and the stars that are moved through them, producing a melody fuller and more intense than anything effected by mortal sounds. This melody was also the result of dissimilar and varying sounds, speeds, magnitudes and intervals arranged with reference to each other in a certain musical ration, producing a convoluted motion most musical and gentle. Irrigated therefore with this melody, his intellect ordered and exercised thereby, he would, to the best of his ability exhibit certain symbols of these to his disciplines, especially though imitations thereof through instruments or the physical organs of voice. For he conceived that, of all the inhabitants of earth, by him alone were these celestial sounds understood and heard, as if coming from the central spring and root of nature.[83]

[81] *Ibid*., 21.
[82] *Idem*.
[83] *Idem*.

Pythagoras thus employed music as "soul-adjustment,"[84] music as a form of medicine and as magic. For Iamblichus, Pythagoras is the first composer of theurgic, anagogic music.[85]

Pythagoras is also notable as a figure who is reputed to have embodied wholeness. Diogenes Laertius recounts that whilst alive, Pythagoras recalled everything and retained the memory even upon death. His soul was "constantly transmigrating" and passing into the plants and animals it desired, and he also had knowledge and recollection of his soul's sufferings in Hades.[86] An anonymous account of the life of Pythagoras taken from Byzantine patriarch Photius recounts that Pythagoras's predictions always came true.[87] Porphyry recounts that Pythagoras was unmoved by pleasure or grief, also that he taught the deifying power of speaking truth, God's soul the body of truth.[88]

On a metaphysical level, the Pythagoreans conceived of the universe as fundamentally musical, the sensible world underpinned by the eternal order of number, harmony, and geometry. They conceived a geometrical emblem with 10 nodes, the Tetraktys, as depicting how the universe was formed and how it is sustained. Iamblichus relates that the acousmatics, "hearers," a school of Pythagoreans, encapsulated their philosophy in didactic riddles they called akousmata, such as: "What is the Delphic Oracle?" The answer to this riddle is: "The tetraktys, which is the harmony in which the Sirens sing."[89] The Pythagorean notions of singing sirens and the harmony of the spheres are also extant in Plato.[90] Though he is writing much later, Iamblichus would oft quote verbatim ancient sources that are no longer extant, and contemporary scholars conceive that Iamblichus's account of Pythagoras adheres to guidelines of ancient rhetoricians, but some of his

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[84] *Ibid*., 22.

[85] Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (Kettering: Angelico Press, 2014), 198.

[86] Diogenes Laertius, "The Life of Pythagoras" in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, 6-7.

[87] Anonymous, "The Life of Pythagoras" in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, 5.

[88] Porphyry, "The Life of Pythagoras" in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, 10-11.

[89] Robin Waterfield, ed., "Pythagoras of Croton and Fifth Century Pythagoreanism" in *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 101.

[90] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004) 616a-617c.

account is symbolical to emphasize Pythagoras's soteriological mission and his unique kinship with the divine.[91]

In late Pythagoreanism, the 7 strings on Orpheus's lyre are related to the 7 heavenly circles. Rites of ascension employed cithara music and the intonement of the 7 vowels.[92] We find an example of Neopythagorean musical theory in Nichomachus of the later first/early 2nd century CE, who espouses a system wherein every planet continually produces a particular tonal pitch; Nichomachus evinces how one can understand the vowels as corresponding to tonal pitches,[93] though Nichomachus's elucidation is only one possibility among many.[94] The concept of the cosmic lyre with 7 strings and the intonation of the 7 vowels may derive from Babylonian origin;[95] it also has connection to the ancient Egyptian religion, Hermeticism, and Rosicrucianism. Later Rosicrucians would cite the Pythagoreans as forerunners of their sacred vowel intoning practices;[96] as will be evinced, vowel intoning practices were also extant in the Gnostic, Hermetic, and ancient Egyptian milieus.

The Pythagoreans understood philosophy as a mode of living, a mystery to be initiated into, as medicine and therapeutics. Pythagorean philosophy refers to eros and wisdom, intellectual and moral purification to achieve divine likeness, a likeness attained through knowledge, gnosis, alongside the practice of truth and virtue, the highest metaphysical truth attainable by imitating the divine. Through divine association, the seeker is rendered orderly, divinized. Pythagorean first principles were gleaned through philosophical education, recollection (anamnesis), and anagogic ascent, predicated on sacramental rites, leading to one's transformation into an immortal divine human. Philosophy for the Pythagoreans sought the transformation of one's soul and dying to the body to achieve a higher form of existence. This is the Pythagorean bios or way of life (bios Puthagorikos).[97]

The Pythagoreans were preoccupied with death, practicing incubation, a ritual to die prior to one's earthly death. Involving isolation in a dark locale where one lay down motionless for hours or days, incubation practices sought

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[91] Algis Uzdavinys, "Traditional Accounts of the Life and Teachings of Pythagoras," *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, 14.
[92] Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, 46.
[93] Wouter Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination: Altered States of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 292.
[94] *Ibid*., 293.
[95] Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, 46.
[96] Karl Weinfurter, *Man's Highest Purpose: The Lost Word Regained* (London: The Mayflower Press, 1930), 14.
[97] Uzdavinys, "Traditional Accounts," 1.

to still the mind, at times described as akin to a dream state or an altered state of consciousness. The immediate focus of Pythagorean aspiration was to make contact with the underworld divinities, the gods in the depths rather than above, and the best way in antiquity to make contact with these underworldly gods was conceived to be through a dream or vision, through incubation. For early Pythagoreans, oracular dreams provided teaching, knowledge, and guidance.[98] The Pythagoreans also took inspiration from Orphism and Homer, melding it with Babylonian ideas. From the Orphic tradition, the Pythagoreans derived the notions of the deities as numerical in constitution,[99] the immortal soul, philosophy as path to immortality, and recollection as the task of the spiritual seeker.[100]

To summarize this section: in the Pythagorean milieu, music is embedded within or comprises the fabric of reality, is entwined with knowledge, is a form of divine magic, and a means for the soul's ascension. Number is understood as an aspect of the magic of music. The Pythagorean mystery tradition is also concerned with spiritual restoration, recollection, philosophy as means to immortality, and the mystery of life as entwined with death.

7. The Egyptian Mysteries

Egyptian priests for centuries intoned the 7 vowels to ensure heaven's harmony. Demetrius, a Greek Alexandrian writing in the centuries prior to Christ, writes in *On Style*: "When the priests in Egypt are singing their hymns in praise of their gods, they utter the 7 vowels in due succession." This passage is often quoted and of uncertain date.[101] He also adds that persons listen to these intoned vowels with greater pleasure than the music produced from a flute or lyre, such is its euphony. This remark imparts that the music of Old Egyptian hymns was predicated upon continuations and variations of the 7 tones.[102]

This was a popular practice in antiquity, extant in many Egyptian and Greek magical spells. Ancient persons conceived that vowels intonation

[98] Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 283-284.
[99] Fideler, "Introduction," 45.
[100] *Ibid*., 31.
[101] Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality,* 292.
[102] Gilles Quispel, "Reincarnation and Magic in the Asclepius" in *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, edited by R. van den Broek and C. van Heertum (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2000), 208.

helped to maintain universal order, had the capacity to heal bodies, and to compel powerful deities to perform their bidding.[103]

In the section on Orphism, I have also elaborated the trajectory of the royal soul in the ancient Egyptian religion after death, its stellar ascension as path to immortality and recollected unity. To summarize: in the ancient Egyptian milieu, music is a powerful form of magic, and its narrative of the restoration of the soul's stellar divinity after death would influence later mystery and philosophical traditions.

8. Hermeticism

Connected with Neopythagorean musical theory and ancient Egyptian ritual, the hermetic treatise referred to as NHVI, also known as *The Ogdoad and the Ennead*, describes the direct experience of superseding cosmic realities only available for one who had become the Aion, which is the incorporeal imagination of God. This treatise recounts the journey of Hermes and his pupil (referred to as Tat) as they enter the Ogdoad and perceive the Ennead flowing from source.[104] Hermes guides Tat to a new frontier of visionary experience.[105] They pray to the Father to bestow Hermes with his pneuma which will enable Hermes to speak "sounds full of power"[106] to transmit noetic energy to Tat through his voice, Hermes expressing the Logos of Source and Tat is tasked to "noeticize." They then pray "with all their nous and all their heart and all their soul."[107] The supreme hermetic triad is invoked, Source, Logos, and aion,[108] sacred vowels are intoned, nomina barbara uttered.[109] Silent hymns are heard in the Ogdoad sung by souls and angels, and nous understands them.[110] The noetic singing is not heard by the ears of the body, but spiritually. Tat's soul sings a noetic hymn directed to the Ennead,[111] and Tat directly perceives his own immortal essence, the noetic Light. Tat sings a hymn of vowels, the "mystery name" of divinity which is not the silent hymn sung by angels and souls within the Ogdoad and

[103] April DeConick, *The Gnostic New Age: How a Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion from Antiquity to Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 190.
[104] Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality,* 284.
[105] *Ibid*., 285.
[106] *Ibid*., 287.
[107] *Ibid*., 288.
[108] *Ibid*., 289.
[109] *Ibid*., 290.
[110] *Ibid*., 301.
[111] *Ibid*., 302.

Ennead. Thus, Tat's soul has achieved irreversible salvation, his consciousness no longer needing to traverse the realms of life and death.[112]

The Anthopos of the *Poimandres* is bequeathed an aspect of the passions dispensed by the 7 planets, whence the human returns after death.[113] The *Corpus Hermeticum* recounts a narrative of the human's veritable noetic divinity that is obscured and forgotten in her earthly incarnation. To reclaim her divinity, perceive true reality, attain true knowledge, and her freedom, the human must overcome the stellar daimons that beset her upon birth. She must also overcome her fears, desires,[114] bodily pleasures, pains,[115] and appetites that lead the soul wayward. Presenting spiritual techniques for liberation,[116] Hermeticism is a mystery tradition concerned with one's divine self-recollection and restoration.

In summary: in the Hermetic context, the vowel intonation can be understood as a divine name and formula. In this milieu, music is a magical techne to transform consciousness, to achieve salvation and apotheosis, but the greatest music derives from the Eighth sphere and beyond.[117] Music is thus understood as fundamentally divine and spiritual, even a facet of the highest tiers of reality. Music is also a mode of communication between the human soul and the divine realm. Forgetfulness of one's true divinity and one's spiritual restoration is the crux of the hermetic mysteries.

9. Gnosticism

There is evidence of vowel intonation as a spiritual and magical praxis in the Gnostic milieu to produce altered states of consciousness. Gnostic chants extolled the transcendent beings and were conceived as capable of accessing the creative power of the primal Father. The Gnostic adherents conceived of these chants as endued with the capacity to transform one's soul and heal one's body.

In the Sethian milieu, much vowel chanting was practiced, conceived to mimic the sound of God emerging from the primal silence.[118] Vowel chants in the Sethian milieu were conceived to endue the initiate with the creating

[112] *Ibid*., 306.
[113] Quispel, "Hermes Trismegistus," 8.
[114] Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, 151.
[115] *Ibid*., 148.
[116] *Ibid*., 91.
[117] Joscelyn Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth: Mysticism in Music from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1987), 76.
[118] Marvin Meyer, ed. "The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit" in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (New York, HarperCollins, 2007), 255; DeConick, *The Gnostic New Age*, 187.

power of the Aeon Jesus,[119] to engender a vision of Jesus as the God within; the chanter comes to know the God from within as Absolute Permanence, transmuted into light.[120]

The Sethian text *Marsanes* elucidates the spherical sound of various divinities, including souls,[121] with differing vowel patterns and forms connected with different beings. Vowel and consonant sounds were conceived to exist at the origin of all creation, their vocalization bringing all life into manifestation. Chants were conceived to enable the Sethian initiate to enter the transcendent realms.[122]

Themes of restoration are also extant in the Gnostic milieu. Whilst Gnosticism is not a monolithic entity,[123] the themes of a primordial fall (the fall of Sophia as engendering the material world),[124] a divine spark indwelling the human,[125] self-knowledge as salvatory,[126] and the spiritual restoration of the human,[127] are extant in the Gnostic milieu.

In summary: in the Gnostic milieu, there is an understanding of music as extant at the fount of all creation; thus, the Gnostic initiate imitates it, and by doing so, is conceived to access divine creative power, and effect transmutation in soul and body. There also exists an understanding of the divinity of the human and recollection or restoration of this divinity in this milieu.

10. Kabbalism

We also see music as embedded in Kabbalistic theory and spiritual praxis. The Kabbalistic Magical Literature of Hekhalot and the Ma'aseh Bereshit contains descriptions of the world of the Chariot, the seeker's ecstasy as she ascends unto that world, and the magical techniques conceived to accomplish this ascent. The spiritual aspirant would employ techniques to facilitate an

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[119] DeConick, *The Gnostic New Age*, 188.
[120] *Ibid*., 189.
[121] Marvin Meyer, ed. "Marsanes" in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (New York, HarperCollins, 2007), 644.
[122] DeConick, *The Gnostic New Age*, 190.
[123] Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5; Karen King, *What is Gnosticism*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 226.
[124] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, 8.
[125] Alastair Logan, "Gnosticism" in *The Early Christian World Volume 1-2*, ed. Philip Esler (New York: Routledge, 2000), 917.
[126] Dylan Burns, "Ancient Esoteric Traditions: Mystery, Revelation, Gnosis" in *Occult World*, ed. Christopher Patridge (New York: Routledge, 2015), 25.
[127] Marvin Meyer, ed. "The Secret Book of John" in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*, 131.

altered state of consciousness and recite ecstatic hymns.[128] In Kabbalistic literature, there also exists an understanding of a harmonious universe wherein angels, stars, spheres, the Chariot-Throne of the Merkavah, even the trees in the Garden of Eden and the entire universe sings before God. Whilst early writings say that this music could be heard only by Moses and Joshua, later Kabbalistic thought, especially Hasidism, conceives that living spiritual masters are also capable of hearing it.[129] Hasidism particularly privileges music as a form of devotion and as spiritual praxis. In 18th century Poland, the Hassidic movement expounded that the spiritual facet of prayer could be amplified with intensive prolonged singing accompanied by dancing. The Hassidic adherents developed the "niggun," in Hebrew meaning "melody," wherein a short simple tune is repeated numerous times until the performer enters an altered state of consciousness. In this state, the soul is conceived to attain transcendence as it "clings" to God.[130]

There also exist conceptions of the Kabbalistic letters and the tree of life as musical. The 13th century Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia relays the Kabbalist's letter-combinations as akin to musical composition, conceiving of letter-combination and music as affecting the soul in similar ways.[131] The metaphysical diagram of the Kabbalistic tree of life has also been conceived as endued with a musical component. Envisaged to evince the archetypal pattern underlying all things,[132] the arrangement of the tree can be conceived as a musical octave, Yesod, meaning Foundation, as the octave's last interval. The tree of life is even referred to by some sources as the Great Monochord.[133]

Cosmic and divine restoration are prominent Kabbalistic motifs. In Lurianic Kabbalism, there existed an original divine unity. Whilst the vessels designated to contain the highest tiers of divine power were able to contain the light flowing into them, the subsequent vessels were not and shattered, except for the final sephirah, Malkuth, which cracked without entirely shattering; this event is referred to as the "breaking of the vessels" and the "death of the kings." Some of the light from the shattered vessels found its way back to its source, but the remaining light was scattered alongside the broken shards of the vessels. From the shards, the dark forces of the kelippot, and gross matter were engendered.[134] The broken vessels would be subject to

[128] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 15.
[129] Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth,* 55.
[130] W. Timothy Sharp, "Hallelujah!" *The Choral Journal* 38, no.2 (1997): 43.
[131] Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth*, 57.
[132] Scholem, *Kabbalah,* 105.
[133] Zev ben Shimon Halevi, *The Way of Kabbalah* (London: Rider and Company, 1976), 32.
[134] Scholem, *Kabbalah,* 138.

the cosmic restoration project of tikkun, initiated immediately upon this cosmic catastrophe.[135] All subsequent creation processes unfolded in the endeavor to restore this primordial fall.[136] Though tikkun almost achieves resolution from the processes of the supernal lights, the human is part of the restoration process, the human's actions as the ultimate goal of creation. Universal redemption depends upon human activity;[137] the human activity required for cosmic restoration is religious, contemplative,[138] and ethical.[139]

In summary: in the Kabbalistic imagination, there exists a concept of a divine music that can only be heard by initiates; there also exist conceptions of music as encoded into the very fabric of existence, as a means for the soul's transcendence, and perhaps even related to the Kabbalist's messianic endeavor of restoration. In the Lurianic Kabbalistic understanding, divine unity has been shattered, humanity and material creation as broken shards that require reconstitution and restoration.

11. The Chaldean Oracles

In the *Chaldean Oracles*, the ascension of the soul is achieved through a combination of purification, elevation upon the sun's rays, the ritual burial of the body, the chanted voces mysticae, uttered prayers, and hymns sung to aid the soul's journey through the spheres and elements.[140] There are also vowel intonations in the Chaldean practice of "Conjunction" wherein the theurgist solicits communication or contact with a deity or spirit.[141] For the *Oracles*, music is a mode of ascent and characteristic of the world the initiate ascends unto. The *Oracles* relate the Intelligible Empyrean world where the rational soul ascends to as a tier with spiritual music, a realm inhering with hymn-singing angels.[142] Salvation is achieved through the soul's purification and magic ritual, of which music is an aspect.[143]

The Chaldean understanding of theurgy would be later imported to the Neoplatonic milieu by Iamblichus; Iamblichus refers to particular melodies and rhythms that enable the soul to directly participate with the gods.[144]

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[135] *Ibid*., 139.
[136] *Ibid*., 140.
[137] *Ibid*., 142.
[138] *Ibid*., 143.
[139] Joseph Dan, "Jewish Gnosticism?" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2, no.4 (1995): 327.
[140] Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles* (New York: Brill, 1989), 37-8.
[141] *Ibid*., 26.
[142] *Ibid*., 19.
[143] *Ibid*., 23-4.
[144] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Betram Dobell, 1895), 68; Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul,* 55.

Proclus, another Neoplatonic theurgist, viewed prayerful hymns as "theurgical instruments," human philosophy an imitation of the hymns of Apollo.[145]

In summary: the Chaldean mystery tradition is concerned with the magical salvation of the soul; there is a conception of spiritual or divine music, of music as enabling communication or contact with spiritual entities, and as a means of the soul's ascent, conceptions which would influence Neoplatonic theurgy.

12. Magic and Music

As has been evinced, in the milieu of ancient mystery traditions, music is fundamentally entwined with magic and knowledge. Music has also been cited as a way of understanding magic, as providing a metaphysics of magic for the ancient world. Daniel P. Walker showed why ancients believed in magic, arguing that the study of music could provide the theoretical groundwork for understanding magic.[146] He likened air as the medium of music as akin to the ancient Greek and Roman notions of pneuma or spiritus, saying that it offered a physical explanation for magic, in the way it joined embodied and disembodied phenomena.[147] One also notes that magic is conceived in musical metaphors, sympathetic magic conceived in terms of harmony and resonance. The notion of music as the physics of magic, music as expression of spirit, is very Novalisian.

13. Implications for Contemporary Knowledge Culture

Novalis imparts a conception of knowledge as essentially musical, synthetic, creative, and restorative of a lost unity. This exposition has explored how similar conceptions of knowledge exist in the mystery traditions: an understanding of music as ontological and epistemological, capable of effectuating transformation, entwined with loss and restoration of unity. These conceptions, I argue, have implications for contemporary knowledge culture. In the contemporary milieu, the intimate connection between music and knowledge is not duly appreciated. Music is deployed in the modern sphere mostly as a form of entertainment; as mere entertainment, it is disconnected from its esoteric origins as entwined with reality, knowledge, ritual, and the sacred.

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[145] Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, 45.

[146] Brian Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 23.

[147] *Ibid*., 24.

Rather than unity, contemporary knowledge culture, including the academic milieu, can be characterized by disconnection, fragmentation, and the compartmentalization or specialization of knowledge rather than holism, synthesis, or unity. And there is a chasm between the relationship between the imagination and knowledge, whereas the ancient mystery traditions understood the imagination as an epistemological and ontological faculty. "Imagination alone reveals to me what this present world is," Novalis writes, and he defines conscience as the "spirit of poetry in life, bringing about strange conjunctions in the varied romance of existence."[148] Novalis understands knowledge as a function of not only music and unity but morality, morality as wholeness. A knowledge culture defined by unity, synthesis, conscience, and creativity or imagination would render possible a very different kind of understanding, and a different kind of world.

I argue that such an understanding legitimizes and makes requisite the generation of experimental, musical, synthesizing, and transdisciplinary forms of knowledge culture that entwine the imagination and knowledge, theory and praxis, creativity and scholarship, also conscience alongside rigor. The understanding of creative practice as knowledge-generation is gaining traction in the academic milieu through the movement of arts-based research, gaining momentum but still largely not viewed as endued with the same credibility of traditional academic forms.

It is notable that Novalis and Benjamin's doctrine of mimesis both espouse knowledge as fundamentally constituted by similarity and analogy. In stark contrast to contemporary epistemologies that understand knowledge as compartmentalisation and specialization, Novalis and Benjamin understand knowledge as essentially holistic and interconnected. Their conceptions impart that the true fruit of knowledge lies in between realms of meaning, that a deeper form of knowledge is gleaned by perceiving the interconnections and resonances between ostensibly disparate domains. This insight is deeply at odds with how academic research largely functions. As Novalis and Benjamin impart, we live in a fragmented culture, much of the "knowledge" it produces disconnected from the whole.

14. What Makes Novalis an Orphic Philosopher and What is New about Novalis's Orphism?

One of the strongest Orphic resonances in Novalis's thought is tragedy, sadness, death, and loss as requisite for knowledge. Novalis's personal

[148] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 167.

mythology, the early death of Novalis's beloved and poetic muse Sophie von Kühn, strongly parallels Orpheus's mythic loss of Eurydice. Orpheus reputedly descended unto the underworld in an attempt to retrieve Eurydice, although his retrieval is not successful. When Eurydice evanesced a second time, what remained for Orpheus was "the power of his song, the vision with which he knew himself linked to the world of the dead, whose herald he became."[149] Hiebel writes that Orpheus's "descent into Hades gave him the wisdom of accepting death. The descent to the nether world became the orphic archetype of the poet's way."[150] The mystery of death is a guiding star for Novalis's poetry and philosophizing, a central preoccupation that his works explore in variegated ways. Novalis presents death as mystical, as "revelation of life,"[151] as the "Romanticizing principle,"[152] and as the ultimate mystery. "Life is for the sake of death. Death is at once the end and the beginning—at once separation and closer union of the self."[153] Tragedy and sadness as seeds for growth, wisdom, and renewal are prominent Novalisian themes: "The new world rises from pain, and eternity is revealed to tears."[154] This is also the principle of Novalis's famous emblem of the blue flower, the flowering of beauty and wisdom from saturnine sadness. Orphism privileges spiritual recollection and divine restoration; Novalis similarly seeks restoration of: one's unity with the divine, true knowledge, the primordial meaning, one's original powers and condition. Akin to Orpheus's magic, Novalis's recollection and restoration is transformative in its renewal. For Novalis, to restore the primordial meaning and unity is to render a novel poetic synthesis. What was lost may never be fully regained; but it can be sanctified and poetized, rendered into a higher meaning.

Orphism also seeks the restoration of the primordial androgyne, a theme we see articulated in Novalis's "Astralis" poem in the culmination of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Astralis is what I would define as the alchemical homunculus that is engendered from the kiss of Heinrich and Matilde, described by Hiebel as the divine astral child[155] that embodies the resolution of polarities; the spiritual progeny Astralis also embodies the rebirth of the

[149] Frederick Hiebel, *Novalis: German Poet—European Thinker—Christian Mystic* (University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 22.
[150] *Idem*.
[151] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 160.
[152] Novalis, "Last Fragments," 154.
[153] Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations," 25.
[154] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 154.
[155] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 112.

world on the spiritual plane, the dream made world, a new world sanctified by unity, harmony, and love.[156]

As Orphism entwines prophecy with spiritual memory, Novalis likewise unites memory and prophecy, but in his own unique way. Using the terminology of Jean D'Alembert (1717-1783), Novalis propounds the concept of memory sciences as the "elementary sciences of nature," and propounds "combinatory" sciences as the "science of compounds."[157] He defines philosophy[158] and poetry[159] as combinatory arts, that through their combinatory operations, create a higher unity. He develops his own conception of memory as what is presently extant: "All memory is the present."[160] And he relays that: "Nothing is more poetic than memory and premonition, or the conception of the future. The everyday present joins both of these together through limitation… But there is a spiritual present—which fuses them together through dissolving them—and this mixture is the element, the atmosphere of the poet."[161] The alchemical homunculus Astralis is an embodiment of the fusion of reminiscence and futurity.[162]

Novalis's poetry follows the Orphic trajectory of cosmic and celestial soul restoration. Akin to Orphic conceptions, Novalis understands the human as "intimately related to the stars."[163]As Sophia relays to Fable in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, entwining stellar themes with a restorative tincture: "Dearest child, your zeal and faith have won you a place amid the eternal stars. You have chosen the undying potion, the Phoenix is yours."[164] In the Orphic imaginary, the soul returns to its cosmic origin; Orphism propounds a myth of cosmic homecoming and restitution. One of Novalis's most famous philosophical maxims is: "Philosophy is home-sickness, a longing everywhere to be at home."[165] What is this primordial home that Novalis speaks of?

"He sang the creation of the world, the beginning of the stars, plants, animals, and men, of the long-forgotten days when love and poetry were lords of all. Then he described the advent of hate and cruelty, their ceaseless strife

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[156] Edith Borchardt, "The 'Astralis'-poem by Novalis as Creation Myth," in *Modes of the Fantastic*, ed. Robert A. Latham and Robert A. Collins (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 132-134.
[157] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 30.
[158] Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 218.
[159] Novalis, "Logological Fragments I," 54.
[160] Novalis, "Logological Fragments I," 65.
[161] Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations," 45.
[162] Borchardt, "The 'Astralis'-poem by Novalis as Creation Myth," 134.
[163] Novalis, "Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies (1798/99)" in *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 208.
[164] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 153.
[165] Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 219.

with love; ending in the triumph of love over all, the end of sorrow, the return of the Golden Age, and the restoration of nature to the never-ending youth and beauty."[166]

The "home" that philosophy longs for is the paradisical unity which sundered, as the minstrel relays in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, due to the human's moral failing, whence emerged cruelty and hate, and the minstrel prophesizes that this paradise will be regained. Novalis tells us that the "familiar world of home" is the domain of fairy tales; he tells us this home is "everywhere and nowhere."[167] Novalis also defines paradise as "the ideal of earthly life" which has been "scattered all over the world," now unrecognizable. But to recollect the scattered shards is its regeneration.[168] The regeneration of paradise is the ideal realm that the Romantic poet accesses through her sanctifying poetization; it is also the moralization of nature. This is to say that the restoration of unity is also the rectification of nature and spirit, with music as exemplification of the unity of spirit.

To say a few more words about Novalis's philosophical Orphism, Novalis's notions of mathematics as the "life of the gods"[169] and philosophy as path to immortality[170] find precedents in Orphism. Orpheus is also reputed to be a healer; in the Pythagorean milieu, which borrows heavily from Orphism, Pythagoras's musical influence over bodies is made more explicit as medicinal. One notes Novalis's concern with medicine as aligning with the Orphic and Pythagorean understanding of music as medicine. Novalis conceives of health and illness as rhythmical and says: "Every illness is a musical problem—the cure is a musical solution."[171]

15. Which of Novalis's Texts are Particularly Orphic?

Death, music, and restoration are central themes of Novalis's work; Novalis's corpus can be conceived as primarily Orphic in essence. In the sense that Novalis's *Romantic Encyclopaedia* seeks to unite all disciplines, with music as the bedrock of this endeavor, entwined with theories of memory, magic, divine mathematics, and prophecy, the *Encyclopaedia* can be conceived as an Orphic work. *Hymns to the Night* is Novalis's ode to death as the spiritual redemption of life. The work recounts the "I" who descends or submerges from "appearances" into death, death personified as the Night. His childish

[166] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 79.
[167] Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," 67.
[168] Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 223.
[169] *Ibid*., 229.
[170] Novalis, "General Draft" in *Philosophical Writings*, 128.
[171] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 58.

fears are assuaged by the Night as he "sees" the "locks of the mother." He sees in the Night with "the infinite eyes that the Night opens within us."[172] He perceives a vision of his own death,[173] and the fifth hymn concerns the universal mythic history of Western religion in terms of the progressive revelation of the mystery of death; it has been musically adapted by more than 20 noteworthy composers including Franz Schubert.[174] *Spiritual Songs*, also rife with themes of sorrow, death and resurrection, wormed their way into the music of church congregations.[175] *Hyacinth and Rosebud* is defined by Orphic themes: a conception of spiritual or supernatural music[176] and the lifting of the veil as revealing the beloved. *Hyacinth* is also relayed as having Orpheus-like powers, conversing with birds and trees, and nature is described in musical terms, a brook that sings.[177] I would cite *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a particularly Orphic work. Hiebel describes it as the "most musical" of Novalis's works.[178] The characters are often in song, and there are multiple Orpheus-like figures who can transform nature through music. It incorporates an Orphic understanding of music as magical and divine mathematics.[179] As the narrative begins to culminate, the merging of spirit and materiality occurs through a musical medium: "Heaven and earth flowed together in sweet music."[180] Combining the Orphic themes of the stellar mysteries, magical music, and mystical water, Novalis waxes poetically about the spirits of the stars which surround a mythic throne, and about magical music that transforms with the combinations of inscribed mystical symbols of the stars in water.[181]

Heinrich von Ofterdingen also incorporates numerous subterranean motifs redolent of Orphic underworlds, viz., the hermit indwelling a cave in possession of a strange book encrypted with the secrets of Heinrich's own deepest mysteries,[182] the princess and her beloved who live underground for 1 year, their consummation subterranean.[183] There is also an implicit subterranean reference in the character of Sylvester, who appears as a stand-in for Empedocles; Empedocles was a magician-philosopher-poet-healer,

[172] O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 261.
[173] *Ibid*., 264.
[174] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 81.
[175] O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 252.
[176] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 53.
[177] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 239.
[178] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 101.
[179] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 67.
[180] Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, 167.
[181] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 136-137.
[182] *Ibid*., 110.
[183] *Ibid*., 77.

who like Orpheus, was reputed to be able to enter unto the underworld.[184] Hiebel draws connections between Novalis's occupation as a miner, descending into the bowels of the earth, and the Orphic endeavor in the underworld.[185]

Recovery and restoration is the backbone of its narrative. "What dost thou seek?" the Sphinx asks Fable. "My possession,"[186] Fable replies. Its narrative concerns the nefarious Scribe's endeavor to usurp the rightful rulers; Fable's mission is "revenge"[187] or rectification. "What is most transient?" the Sphinx riddles. "Wrongful possession," Fable replies. The fundamental moral of the tale is that truth, justice, and restoration always win in the end, at least in the poetic, idealized realm, despite the powers of connivance and instrumentality that seek to overthrow what is true. Immorality may reign for a time, but it will fall. Eternal life is restored to the true initiate, tears its draught to reveal the eternal realm ruled by love and conscience. "What is the eternal secret?" the Sphinx asks Fable. "Love," Fable answers. "With whom does it rest?" "With Sophia," is Fable's knowing reply.[188]

The titular character Heinrich dreams of a blue flower, Mathilde's countenance within its petals. Then he remembers having seen her face in a mysterious book. He describes her as the "visible spirit of song" and says: "She will dissolve me into music. She will become my inmost soul, the guardian spirit of my holy fire."[189] These lines, especially the notion of her dissolving Heinrich into music, imparts how Novalis understands music as spirit itself. "She will dissolve me into music" can be translated as: she will dissolve me into spirit. Entwined with its exemplification of spirit, music is a way for Novalis to understand the unity and ideality of all things, music as unity, wholeness, and love.

The novel is a poetic idealization of Novalis's life; the plot enfolds tragedy that mimics Novalis's own. Heinrich has a dream that he loses Mathilde, and in the dream, she promises that he will be reunited with her in spirit forever.[190] It was a foreshadowing. After her death, Heinrich meets Cyane, her name reminiscent of the blue flower. Hiebel writes: "This is the concept of metempsychosis."[191] A Pythagorean conception, one notes.

[184] Inkol, "The Philosopher as Magus," 356.
[185] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 29.
[186] Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, 169.
[187] *Ibid*., 178.
[188] *Idem*.
[189] *Ibid*., 133.
[190] *Ibid*., 136.
[191] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 114.

Heinrich asks her: "Where are we going?" "Ever homeward," Cyane replies.[192] In this way, translation has occurred. As Novalis writes elsewhere: "One finds what one loves everywhere, and sees similarities everywhere." He goes on: "To the lover of learning, all its branches offer garlands and remembrances for his beloved."[193] This is the principle of Novalis's poetic transfiguration, the renewal of the primordial meaning. This is not to say that Cyane replaces Mathilde; Hiebel notes how Cyane is reminiscent of Julie Charpentier, whom Novalis became engaged to after Sophie's death.[194] In a private letter to Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis confessed that despite his new relationship with Julie, his true wish was death, to be reunited with his true beloved. Cyane is a reminder of what was lost but leads to his ultimate transfiguration. Not much later, an early death would come for Novalis too.[195] In some of the final pages that Novalis penned whilst alive, the primordial androgyne as Astralis is restored, an Orphic epiphany that unites Novalis with his true beloved for poetic eternity.[196]

16. Conclusion

This article has explored Novalis's conception of the original unity of disciplines and the hieroglyphic language, and how these conceptions are tied to the understanding of knowledge as music, as loss, and restoration, with music as means to reattain the lost unity; it has also explored how Novalis's understanding of knowledge and musical praxis is rooted in the ancient mystery traditions, and how it is applicable to contemporary knowledge culture. It has evinced philosophical connections between Novalis's conception of knowledge and the ideas of Bruno and Benjamin. Finally, it has explored what makes Novalis an Orphic philosopher and what is new about his Orphism.

This exposition has situated Novalis's conception of the unity of the disciplines in German Romanticism and preceding thinkers. Music for Novalis is the hieroglyphic key that reunites the sciences; as an expression of spirit, it is the glue that entwines all things, music as exemplifying wholeness, morality, magic, synthesis, and love. The way that true knowledge redeems and restores the lost wholeness and original meaning is through conscience, creativity and imagination, a musical endeavor. True knowledge is unity and

[192] Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, 203.
[193] Novalis, "Faith and Love or the King and Queen," 85.
[194] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 113.
[195] Robert Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 35.
[196] Novalis, *Henry of Ofterdingen*, 193-195.

unifies what has been fragmented in oneself and in the world. True unity for Novalis is divine, a universal endeavor not restricted to the sciences; it is also an endeavor to reunite with the primordial androgyne, if only in the ideal realm.

If music is interwoven with the fabric of reality, then music is also central to knowledge, and applicable practically, as seen in the anagogic rites of ascension of the mystery traditions. In the ancient mystery traditions, there exist conceptions of music as capable of offering an experiential epopteia, a beholding of the vision of the mystery, a direct apprehension of the thing-in-itself. In these conceptions, music is entwined with the deepest mysteries, and in some conceptions, music is the esoteric mystery or an expression of it. For Novalis, the thing-in-itself is musical, and one's musical sensibility is one's capacity to perceive it; music is an expression of spirit, and idealizing. Music in these conceptions is something supra-rational, in line with or akin to Nietzsche's conception in *The Birth of Tragedy* that music is the thing-in-itself;[197] Nietzsche drew upon mystery cults[198] and was versed in Romanticism.[199]

Central to Novalis and these esoteric conceptions is also an understanding of loss as requisite for knowledge, wisdom, and transcendence or unity. Loss is part of the divine mystery in this understanding. What is lost may not be fully restorable; Orpheus's retrieval of Eurydice is unsuccessful. But though not everything can be restored exactly as it was, Novalis imparts that restoration can exist as transformation. In this way, nothing is ever fully lost. In a mysterious way, one's forlornness from the divine makes the reunion more meaningful, one's reunion a function of one's freedom, a conscious decision rather than a predetermined fate. As Novalis writes, freedom is "the essence of conscience,"[200] identifying freedom with love.[201] Unity and unification are the fruits of love, and love is God in the world, but love requires conscience for it to be true. Novalis's loss of his true beloved Sophie can be understood as contributing to his depth as a visionary, and his own impending death impelling his poetic urgency. Loss is a central aspect of life; in a sense, life is fundamentally about loss; but the inevitability of loss enables the possibility for wisdom, beauty, redemption, and even restoration, at least in some capacity. Novalis envisioned his poetry to sanctify, poetize,

[197] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 86.
[198] *Ibid*., 23; George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 242.
[199] Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany,* 274-5.
[200] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 167.
[201] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 132.

and idealize his own tragedy, his own life marked by tragedy and an early death; his poetry renders novel and higher meaning out of tragedy. If loss is inevitable, a central aspect of life, then it too, must be reflected in knowledge for it to accurately represent life, alongside the possibility for redemption and restoration.

I have evinced how Novalis's understanding of knowledge and conception of music finds its origins in the ancient mystery traditions, evincing this shared terrain of thought and practice amongst the mystery traditions. The ideas of the ancient mystery traditions do not exist in isolation; there is a significant historical genealogy that unites them. Orphism may be understood as partially deriving from Egyptian influence.[202] The Pythagoreans may have inherited Egyptian magical traditions[203] and Pythagoras was reputed to have travelled to Egypt to learn its philosophy. The Pythagorean (and Platonic) schools were founded upon a chain of transmission that was partially predicated on ancient Egyptian wisdom.[204] The Pythagoreans[205] and Plato and took inspiration from Orphism; as Olympiodorus writes: "Plato paraphrases Orpheus everywhere."[206] In addition to Orphism, Plato took inspiration from Pythagoreanism.[207] Plato's Orphic paraphrasing is a possible explanation for why the primordial androgyne appears in Plato's *Symposium*;[208] also notable is that Plato was one of Novalis's favorite writers.[209] However, in addition to featuring in Orphism, the notion of the primordial androgyne also appears in the Egyptian mysteries,[210] Hermeticism,[211] Kabbalism,[212] and Gnosticism;[213] it is a major symbol of the doctrine of the cosmic journey from Oneness and the Good to plurality and evil, then back to cosmic wholeness.[214]

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[202] Uzdavinys, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism*, 7.
[203] Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 287.
[204] Algis Uzdavinys, "Introduction" in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, xvi-xix.
[205] Fideler, "Introduction," 39.
[206] Kinglsey, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 129-30.
[207] *Ibid*., 94.
[208] Plato, "Symposium" in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 189-190d.
[209] O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 276.
[210] Roelof van den Broek, "Hermeticism and Gnosticism" in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. Glenn Alexander Magee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 52.
[211] Quispel, "Gnosticism," 159.
[212] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 155-156.
[213] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 50.
[214] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 155.

Platonism, especially Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, are interwoven with these mystery traditions, influencing Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and Chaldean thinking; this is the crux of the scholarly notions of the "Platonic underworld" or "Platonic Orientalism."[215] In addition to Platonic influence, the *Chaldean Oracles* share a common milieu with Hermeticism, Gnosticism and the Neo-Pythagorean Numenius;[216] the *Oracles* also employ Pythagorean terminology.[217] Gnosticism may have exerted an influence upon the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah.[218] Certain Gnostic teachers took inspiration from Plato and Pythagoreanism.[219] And thus concludes this esoteric genealogy of knowledge as music, loss, and restoration, understanding music as praxis to reattain to unity.

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[215] Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 2; Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13-14.
[216] Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, 2-3.
[217] *Ibid*., 3-5.
[218] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 10; Dan, "Jewish Gnosticism?" 321.
[219] Burns, "Ancient Esoteric Traditions," 25.

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Moving Mountains

Resituating the Sublime in Fichte's Early Aesthetics

James Ternent[*]

ABSTRACT

Fichte's "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" concludes by claiming that the *Wissenschaftslehre* makes possible an account of "the pleasant, the beautiful, and the sublime." Attempts have subsequently been made to reconstruct an aesthetics on Fichte's behalf, yet these omit consideration of the 'sublime'. Fichte's aesthetics concerns almost exclusively 'the artist', and refers to Nature as merely the subject of scientific analysis, so what does he mean by 'the sublime'? This paper attempts to present a way in which a Fichtean can talk meaningfully about 'the sublime', simultaneously reaffirming the sublime's importance in Fichtean aesthetic experience, and subordinating it to the creative acts of the I. I argue the sublime is itself an artwork, a creation of the I, and something that directs the I back upon itself. It is, in other words, a prompt for the subject's move from the practical to the transcendental standpoint.

Keywords: Fichte, aesthetics, theoretical, practical, sublime, striving

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Fichtes, „Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre", schließt mit der Behauptung, die Wissenschaftslehre ermögliche eine Theorie des „Angenehmen, des Schönen, und Erhabenen". Später wurden Versuche unternommen, in seinem Namen eine Ästhetik zu rekonstruieren, doch wurde dabei die Berücksichtigung des „Erhabenen" vernachlässigt. Fichtes Ästhetik befasst sich fast ausschließlich mit dem „Künstler" und betrachtet die Natur lediglich als Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Analyse. Was meint er also mit „dem Erhabenen"? Dieser Aufsatz versucht, einen Weg aufzuzeigen, wie ein Fichteaner sinnvoll über „das Erhabene" sprechen kann, indem er gleichzeitig dessen Bedeutung in der fichteschen ästhetischen Erfahrung bekräftigt und es den schöpferischen Akten des Ichs unterordnet. Ich argumentiere, dass das Erhabene selbst ein Kunstwerk ist, eine Schöpfung des Ichs und etwas, das das Ich auf sich selbst zurückführt. Mit anderen Worten, es ist ein Anstoß für den Wechsel des Subjekts vom praktischen zum transzendentalen Standpunkt.

Stichwörter: Fichte, Ästhetik, theoretisch, praktisch, Erhabene, Streben

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1. Introduction[1]

Keeping the title of this paper in mind, I want to list a couple of things, and see if you can identify what they've got in common: the formidable cliff edges of the Dolomite Mountains in Italy; the raging sea during a storm, *à la* paintings by J. M. W. Turner, for example; and purple and orange shards of light carving their way through an otherwise unblemished night sky, peppered with stars. Any guesses? That's right, they are all products of the productive power of the absolute I in Fichte's philosophy.

A more common response might be to say that these things are generally considered to produce in us a feeling of the *sublime*. There are relatively few passages in Fichte's early work (broadly, that produced while Fichte was at Jena University, covering the years 1794-99) which concern the 'sublime' [*erhaben*], or Fichte's doctrine thereof. Worse still, the passages that *do* make such a move are philosophically vexing, in part due to Fichte's later inability to follow through on his promises concerning them, or because of his failure to present a systematic account of both what he means by 'sublime', and what it means to undergo a feeling of the sublime.

This paper aims to fill these gaps in scholarship on Fichte and early Romanticism, by supplementing Fichte's aesthetic theory with a robust conception of sublimity, that is in keeping both with Fichte's invocations of the sublime, and with the kind of contemporaneous examples of artworks and philosophical accounts of aesthetics with which he was engaged. I want to first address the passages on the sublime in Fichte's early writings, before acknowledging the work of previous scholars to construct, on Fichte's behalf, a theory of aesthetics more broadly. However, I suggest that such work has, thus far, largely ignored the possibility of a sublime-specific aesthetic theory, and conclude by, at the very least, *initiating* an attempt to construct one on Fichte's behalf. This comes, I argue, as an impetus-to-another-impetus. That is to say, if, with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, we hold that 'aesthetic sense'[2] is an impetus to move us from the 'real' to the 'transcendental standpoint', then the sublime can initially prompt us to engage with this impetus. The sublime is, then, as such, a first jumping-off point, or *Anstoß*, for any movement from the practical to the transcendental standpoints.

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[1] I am indebted to audiences at the Sixteenth Biennial Meeting of the North American Fichte Society and the XII Congress of the Internationale Fichte-Gesellschaft for advice on early drafts of this paper, and to Laure Cahen-Maurel, Eli I. Lichtenstein, and David W. Wood for their invaluable comments. Thanks as well to María del Mar Copes for arguing about what harm sublimity actually does to notions of time and representation.

[2] As with Breazeale, I shall use terms like the 'aesthetic sense', 'aesthetic standpoint', 'aesthetic point of view', etc. more or less interchangeably. See Breazeale 2013*b*, 384.

2. "Concerning the Concept" and Fichte's *Grundlage*

Fichte's reference to aesthetics in any sense during his Zurich period and early Jena period is relatively sparse. One of the most conspicuous references made thereto is in his short text "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*". This was published in May 1794, just as Fichte was moving to Jena, having been written whilst he was still in Zurich as an apparent prolegomenon to the forthcoming lecture series he intended to give on his arrival in Jena. The third and final section, entitled 'Hypothetical Division of the *Wissenschaftslehre*' concerns the notion of 'striving' [*streben*] that was to receive fuller attention in the *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (I will henceforth refer to this as both the *Foundation* and the *Grundlage*) of 1794-5, and contains within it the assertion that the practical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* lays the groundwork

> for new and fully elaborated doctrines of the pleasant, the beautiful, and the sublime, of the lawfulness of nature in its freedom, of theology [*Gottslehre*], of so-called common sense or the natural sense of truth – and finally, for new doctrines of natural law and morality […].[3]

Such further doctrines, Fichte believes, all stem from the establishment of an absolute I, a Not-I posited in opposition to it, and a relational I brought about by the I's power to freely determine itself in response to the Not-I. Fichte later went on to elaborate on *most* of these during the remainder of his Jena years, notably in his *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796-7) and the *System of Ethics* (1798), and to a lesser degree in *The Vocation of Man* (1799). However, of all of these promised 'doctrines', the one concerning "the pleasant, the beautiful, and the sublime" is the most conspicuous absence from Fichte's later corpus. Indeed, the entirety of this third section of "Concerning the Concept" was later omitted from the bowdlerised reedition that Fichte commissioned in 1798, since the 1794-5 *Foundation,* according to Daniel Breazeale, had "made [it] redundant."[4]

In other works of a similar period, mention of aesthetics or beauty is equally lacking: Fichte mentions in "Concerning Human Dignity" (a speech given at the conclusion of his 1794 Zurich lecture series) that because of the human being, that which "lacks form […] will resolve itself into the most beautiful order."[5]

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3 GWL 190 [GA I/2: 151].
4 Breazeale 2022, 20-1.
5 GWL 459 [GA I/2: 87].

Meanwhile, in the *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* itself, he briefly mentions 'the judgement of taste'. On the account given here, the claim 'A is beautiful' means 'A' contains something definitive that is *also* contained in the ideal of the beautiful, and claims like this command the individual to set about "discovering such an ideal." This is a 'task' set for the individual, which consists in exhausting the predicate 'the beautiful', a task that Fichte believes, with Kant, is an "infinite judgement."[6] There are hints here of a pedagogic role that I shall discuss in greater detail in the next section, but for now, it will suffice to say that the notion of the beautiful gives us an imperative to seek the absolute due to its situation as a created product, and recipient of some characteristic qualities of the same.

To my mind, however, the most important claim Fichte makes during this period comes in a bracketed section in Part Two of the *Foundation*. Here, Fichte is primarily concerned with the notion of time, which he describes as an "oscillating of the power of imagination between components that cannot be united", that is, the relational and the absolute. The subject comes about from within this, as a manifestation of the relational endowed with a conception of the absolute. Within the practical sphere, the productive power of the I extends outwards, until it reaches a notion of absolute unity. Given this is practically impossible, except through the power of the imagination, the self-reverting activity of I is constantly futilely striving for it.[7]

So far so obvious – indeed, this is the very notion of striving that enables all the further doctrines mentioned in "Concerning the Concept" to come about (*Sittenlehre*, *Gottslehre*, *Rechtslehre*, etc.). However, on this occasion Fichte goes further, declaring that, though the oscillation is not sustained by the imagination for any longer than a 'moment', the exception to this is in a "feeling of the sublime". The result is a feeling of "*astonishment* […] in which the reciprocal-acting-and-being-passively-affected in time comes to a stand-still."[8]

There are a couple of things to note in this passage. Firstly, it sounds very similar to Kant's notion (following Burke) that the sublime causes "*astonishment* amounting almost to terror, […] horror and sacred awe," but that "all this, when we are assured of our own safety, is not actual fear." Instead, for Kant, what we feel in the presence of the sublime is "an attempt to gain access to it through imagination."[9] The sublime, by its nature, goes

6 GWL 22 [GA I/2: 278].
7 GWL 298-9 [GA I/2: 360-1].
8 GWL 298 [GA I/2: 360-1], italics original.
9 KU §29, 269.

beyond the sensible,[10] so the imagination attempts to give itself an idea of the might that it cannot, by itself, understand. What occurs instead, is a stunned 'horror', by which the imagination attempts to give sensory form to the sublime. It judges the scale of the sublime by trying to transcend its own limits, by manufacturing a feeling of fear, such that the subject can understand the degree to which the sublime confounds its cognitive faculty.

This comparison hints at a second noteworthy point: how does our response to sublimity square with Fichte's wider theory of striving? When the 'reciprocal-acting-and-being-passively-affected' reaches a 'standstill' when we feel the sublime, what actually happens? The three options, it seems to me, are that the subject becomes *only* active, *only* passive, or else *everything* is paused. The notion of being merely 'active' seems to run counter to the feelings we feel when affected by the 'sublime', whilst being merely 'passively affected' negates the absolute positing-power of the I. Hence, I would be inclined to suggest that the latter is the most likely option, that is, that *everything* comes to a standstill. But given this passage is written in the context of Fichte's account of time, this seems to suggest that, in the presence of sublime feeling, time simply *stops* for the subject.

Kant encounters a similar problem. He claims that "the comprehension of the successively apprehended parts at one glance, is a retrogression that removes the time-condition […]. Therefore, since the time-series is a condition of inner sense and of an intuition, it is a subjective movement of the imagination by which it does violence to inner sense."[11] If read as a 'mode of intuition of time', Rudolf Makkreel suggests, "then this would mean a violation of the critical framework." He argues instead that Kant isn't contravening time as a whole, but merely the 'linear form of time'.[12] But since Fichte emphasises self-positing and the fundamentality of the absolute I, his construal of time seems far more vulnerable to problems caused by moments of 'sublime feeling'.[13] Time, for Fichte, isn't an intuition external of the subjective experience of it, nor indeed a category of the understanding. It is,

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10 Schaper 1992, 384. For ease's sake, and in line with the way Fichte talks about the sublime, I will here collapse the Kantian distinction between the mathematically and the dynamically sublime. For the Burkean origins of Kant's notion of 'astonishment' that Fichte appears to inherit, see Burke 2015, 47.

11 KU §27, 258-9.

12 Makkreel 1984, 307-8.

13 Makkreel interestingly has done work to highlight this problem, in particular in relation to Kant and Fichte's respective modes of relating the imagination to the feeling of the sublime. Makkreel's solution is to insist that, for Fichte, "the sublime allows us to experience time as not merely a hovering flux but as a duration" because, in an experience of the sublime, the imagination is related to 'reason' rather than to the 'understanding'. See Makkreel 1994, 10-1.

instead, bound up with our very being. He suggests that "time exists only for the power of imagination", whereas "for pure reason alone, everything is simultaneous."[14] While the pure, conceptual notion of reason, the law-prescribing end of the rational being,[15] is timeless and absolute, the imagination wavers "between determination and non-determination […] [which] characterizes the power of imagination by means of its product," the I's determinate limit.[16] Both of these faculties are important for Fichte's conception of subjectivity: the imagination's oscillating power moves constantly between the opposed concepts of I and Not-I and makes them intuitable, before reason fixes its products by reflecting upon them, thereby bringing these components under the I's laws of cognition.

Responding to the question 'Has time really passed?' in "Outline of What is Distinctive of the *Wissenschaftslehre* with Respect to the Theoretical Power", Fichte answers "Of course time has passed, if you posit it as having passed."[17] Positing here encapsulates the entire process outlined above, of the imagination's hovering between components, which is then stabilised by the reflecting power of reason. This is bound up with positing a past time which, Fichte claims, necessarily exists. Space and time (seemingly *linear* time, if we accept the foregoing), for Fichte, are intimately bound up with one another: we measure space in terms of the time required to traverse it.[18] What, then, of moments in which we cannot measure space by time, when the scale of space is immeasurable in these terms? When we have these moments of repose, and our being efficacious / affected comes to a standstill, time itself appears to have no place and essentially ceases to exist.

3. Constructing Fichte's Aesthetics

It is these dilemmas to which we will return in the final section. But for now, I want to discuss Fichte's account of aesthetics more broadly. As established, Fichte never completed the *Ästhetik* promised in "Concerning the Concept", and attempts have been made to construct one on his behalf. I shall give a brief overview of these, before returning to the sublime, and see if we can find a place for it.

Fichte's theory of aesthetics, as pieced together from later works, is fundamentally inward-looking. Just as his wider *Wissenschaftslehre* concerns

14 GWL 298 [GA I/2: 360].
15 See Hoeltzel 2018 for a discussion of Fichte's notion of reason, its operations and end.
16 GWL 298 [GA I/2: 360].
17 GWL 435 [GA I/3: 207].
18 GWL 435 [GA I/3: 207].

the positing and coming to self-efficacy of the I, so his aesthetics is geared towards this project too. The project of the 'philosopher', he claims in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, is to raise herself to the 'transcendental' or 'ideal' standpoint; that is, to

> [look] down upon the ordinary point of view. This constitutes the very essence of transcendental philosophy: that it has no desire to become a way of thinking [*Denkart*] that could be employed within life, but observes an I that embodies this system of thinking within life. Transcendental philosophy itself creates nothing. The I it is investigating occupies the ordinary viewpoint.[19]

Ordinarily, we occupy the 'standpoint of life', we view things as they appear to us – when I see a chair, for example, I may think merely 'chair!', experiencing it as an object of common consciousness, and without bothering to interrogate the underlying structure of these appearances. Transcendental philosophy, contrastingly, aims to explain life as it appears to us directly, or to explain the basis of "representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity."[20] Why does the world seem to be the way it is to us? Why do we have the experiences we do? To answer these questions, the philosopher must raise herself above 'the standpoint of life', so that she can, in Breazeale's words, "reflect upon what is involved *a priori* in and thus presupposed by our ordinary consciousness of a world of apparently mind-independent objects and other self-cognizing agents."[21]

The difficulty with this, Fichte rightly notes, is that the philosopher too initially occupies the 'real' standpoint to begin with. After all, she is only human. To elevate herself to the transcendental, then, she requires a middle term to reconcile these viewpoints, the ideal and the real. The existence of a middle term – the 'aesthetic standpoint' – unites these two. "From the aesthetic point of view," Fichte claims, "the world appears to be given to us just as if we had produced it."[22]

On this view, Fichte's notion of aesthetics is directed inwards. If the task of philosophy is to explain external representations, and the grounding for these representations transpires to be the I, then aesthetics must serve the purpose of turning the philosopher's attention inwards, on the aesthetic quality of the I itself. Diego Fusaro puts this explicitly by suggesting that for

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19 WLnm GA IV/3:265; FTP, 472.
20 IWL 8 [GA I/4:186].
21 Breazeale 2013*b*, 362. See also Kim 2022, 342.
22 WLnm GA IV/3:265-6; FTP 472-3.

Fichte, representations can't merely *be*, *qua* representation.[23] Instead, they must be endowed with an aesthetic quality, such that we can see exactly *how* we ought to change them – a claim that is endorsed by Fichte himself in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*.[24] Note that this carries with it an instructive tendency: I shouldn't just take the world at face value. My coming into contact with the world should be productive, I should transform the world according to the concepts I form of it. At this stage, however, I don't desire to change it according to my moral sense, but instead according to my aesthetic sense.

As with philosophy more generally, aesthetics is subsumed under the moral law – "no 'art for art's sake,' for Fichte", says Breazeale – but Fichte would argue that this does not impede aesthetic judgement's value in providing an imperative for the subject.[25] When I see, to take some contemporaneous examples, a work by Caspar David Friedrich,[26] or read Novalis' *Hymns to the Night* (1797-1800),[27] I am not necessarily coming to understand that I ought not murder, but I am learning about what is beautiful, and as such am coming to form beliefs, such as that the world ought to be beautiful. Nothing in Friedrich's *Seashore by Moonlight*, a depiction of anchored boats in repose on a luminously moonlit sea, nothing in this scene depicts any kind of moral imperative. That murder is morally impermissible is not directly the object of my aesthetic beliefs, but they set me on my way to such judgements. Indeed, Fichte himself claims in the *System of Ethics* that aesthetic sense is "a preparation for virtue."[28] By liberating the subject 'from the bonds of sensibility', it is a means for achieving moral oneness, rather than an end itself.

Hence, aesthetics serves as a go-between between the real viewpoint, the world as it immediately appears to us, and the transcendental standpoint, the basis of these appearances. Aesthetics directs the individual's attention *inwards*; it makes one see one's own ability to create beautiful things, and thereby makes us consider the individual, initially from a purely aesthetic standpoint, but eventually from the standpoint of the philosopher, as the

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23 Fusaro 2016, 36.

24 "The world is a theoretical concept. The concept of the way in which the world *ought* to be lies within us and is practical. Aesthetics is therefore practical as well. However, it does not coincide with ethics; for we are obliged to be conscious of our duties, whereas the aesthetic way of looking at things is natural and instinctive and does not depend upon freedom" (WLnm IV/3:266; FTP 473-4).

25 Breazeale 2013*a*, 37.

26 Cf. Cahen-Maurel 2014, 74-5.

27 For a more direct relation between Fichte and contemporaneous examples of romantic art and the aesthetics of nature, see Hoffman 2019.

28 SE 335 [GA I/5: 308].

source of "representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity". Fichte, remember, says that "from the aesthetic point of view, the world appears to be given to us just as if we had produced it"; that is, the world is simultaneously given and a creation of the I. Therefore, a work of art is 'beautiful' if it succeeds in making us consider ourselves in-and-for-ourselves. The artist, through her work, should aim at changing the mind of the audience, not at changing the world, and though the physical manifestation of an inner image *may be* necessary to be comprehended by the aesthetic drive, the inner image itself is what matters.[29] That is, the object of artistic expression is subordinate to the effect upon the audience, and it is only endowed with the quality of beauty if it coincides with the inner impression it evokes within the consumer. I may find a painting 'nice' etc., but I can only call it 'beautiful' if, as a result of its influence, I come to consider myself differently, as a subject with moral efficacy. This gives further credence to Fichte's claim that ethical obligation requires more than "the aesthetic way of looking at things", which is "natural and instinctive", as opposed to our being directly aware of it.[30] We have a more immediate awareness of the aesthetic standpoint, and as such it acts essentially as a springboard (or *Anstoß*) to the more inaccessible ideal, or moral, standpoint.

The foregoing has contained reference to something as yet merely granted that it is important to dwell on for a moment. This is the fact that Fichte's aesthetics, as sketched out so far, is almost entirely concerned with the expression of the artist. I've talked about the beauty of a work of art and the duties of the artist. This is because art most fully reflects or spotlights the creative power of the individual. Fundamentally, the 'true' object of the aesthetic sense is the inner image produced by the I, and *not* the physical object. Resultantly, the more closely aligned with the productive power of the imagination the artwork is, the more 'beautiful' it is. This has the adverse effect of rendering anything (seemingly) other to the I – anything that is part purely of nature – beyond the scope of the aesthetic sense. I can't find something that is *absolutely other* to my aesthetic sense beautiful, because it

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[29] Breazeale 2013*a*, 33-4. Discussion of the notion of 'drives' [*trieb*] is not the topic of this paper, but is a term Fichte coined in his "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy", which he drafted in 1795, and published in Berlin in 1800. Friedrich Schiller held the moral drive to be fundamentally tied to the aesthetic or 'play' drive. See Letter 14 of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Schiller 2016, 51), published in his journal *Die Horen* just as Fichte was writing "On the Spirit and the Letter" for the same journal. Indeed, it was in part the similarity (and possibly hostile tone) of Fichte's piece which prompted Schiller to reject its publication. See also Piché 2002, 299-300 and La Vopa 2001, 269-97.

[30] WLnm GA IV/3: 366; FTP 473-4.

inspires in me no sense of my creative powers, and doesn't turn my attention inwards. In Fichte's terms, it doesn't begin to raise me beyond the real to the ideal point of view.

Hartmut Traub goes as far as to claim that it is the artist's moral *duty*, therefore, to depict the ideal, however this manifests itself, so that *all* rational beings can share in it and realise their individual creative power. This, he claims, involves rejecting so-called 'mimetic-empirical' accounts of art.[31] What kind of product does this yield, then? Breazeale notes that, by "sever[ing] the bond between art and nature", Fichte clears space for non-representational artistic expression, works that don't have as their object any latent thing in the world, and are instead directed at some apparent object of thought.[32] As a rough guide, I include within non-representational artworks here such works as, for example, Wassily Kandinsky's *Composition 8* (1923), Jackson Pollock's *Circumcision* (1946), Mark Rothko's *Orange and Yellow* (1956), or the cover of Jennifer Nagel's *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (2014).[33]

But the overall result is an appeal to alignment between philosophy and expressive art. Fichte draws parallels between the philosopher and the artist; in "Concerning the Concept", he states that the philosopher needs an 'obscure feeling' for what is right, that is, a sense of 'truth'. In a similar vein, the artist needs an obscure feeling for 'genius', in this case, a sense of 'beauty'. Indeed, in the second edition, Fichte emphasised the words 'beauty' and 'truth',[34] and added a rebuttal against Salomon Maimon, who argued that 'genius' is an 'empty word', best left to chefs, tightrope walkers, and artists.[35] He stipulates in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, however, that this doesn't mean the philosopher *needs* to be a "poet or a fine writer".[36] The philosopher's task is to reach the ideal standpoint and attain the truth of the empirical world, and though the aesthetic sense *can* help them achieve this, it isn't the only means by which to do so. Aesthetic sense seems to be a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for philosophising.[37]

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31 Traub 2006, 99-100.

32 Breazeale 2013*a*, 36.

33 Some of the examples I've mentioned here (i.e. the Pollock and the Rothko) may raise questions related to immoral artists, questions to which Fichte's insistence that artists should depict the moral law seems somewhat vulnerable.

34 A move which, to my mind, conjures similarities with John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. See Keats 1977, 346, lines 49-50.

35 GWL 183n. [GA I/2: 143].

36 WLnm GA IV/3: 266; FTP 474.

37 My thanks to an anonymous peer reviewer for seeking clarity on this claim.

It is worth clarifying this latter claim, insofar as Fichte distinguishes in his lectures "Concerning the Difference between the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" (delivered 1794, first published 1924) between the productive imagination, and the reproductive one. The productive, or creative imagination is the basis of spirit, which one needs to possess in some degree at least to be a rational being. The latter, conversely, simply repeats and reforms what is given by the former which, as Fichte says is, "at least from the point of view of empirical consciousness, completely creative."[38] There are admittedly ambiguities between the ways in which Fichte understands imagination as it is depicted in "Concerning the Difference between the Spirit and the Letter" and the *Grundlage*, but I take it that the creative imagination resembles more the oscillating power of the imagination that intuits the opposition between I and Not-I and makes these absolute opposites intelligible to the empirical subject. In this respect, the artist deploys the reproductive imagination, reforming elements of the world in creating the artwork, in ways that strive towards depicting the ideal, the activity of the creative imagination. It is the former, the reproductive imagination, that can invoke philosophising, that can prompt the inner construction of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. But to philosophise, one does not *need* this re-productive form of imagination; the aesthetic sense, which grasps the productive by means of the reproductive, is not the only means of grasping the "ideal that hovers before [one's] soul," as Fichte makes clear in his instruction that one ought "not make [oneself] into an artist against the will of nature."[39]

Fichte believes the artist has the privileged position of already occupying the ideal standpoint. I mentioned earlier that the philosopher merely occupies the real standpoint in the first place and must thereby be emancipated from it. From the start, the artist occupies the philosophical standpoint, and as such doesn't *realise* that she does so. The artist views the world as a product of the I *solely*, it never occurs to her that there is a different standpoint, that there is a real-world to be explained, "[occupying] this viewpoint without thinking of it in any determinate manner."[40] Only true 'philosophers' can philosophise properly on the real *and* ideal standpoints – if you like, they should be able to 'oscillate' [*schweben*] between them. The artist, who occupies merely one, should be able, through her work, to prompt people to look inwards and discover within themselves the ideal standpoint.

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38 EPW 193 [GA I/3: 316].
39 SE 335-6 [GA I/5: 309].
40 See SE 334 [GA I/5: 307].

In this, the aesthetic sense is both pedagogic and architectonic.[41] It is a means, though not the only one, of being taught how to transcend the real standpoint and reach the ideal, and a bridge by which the individual may do so. The end of this process is a reflection of the individual on themselves,[42] and an 'oscillating' between both the ideal and the real.

4. A Place for Sublimity?

On Fichte's view, as it has been construed so far, aesthetic judgement concerns the inner-produced artwork, the created work, and its abilities to excite in the individual an affinity with her *own* creative power, her own I-hood. An artwork can, then, be judged 'beautiful' or not, on its ability to fulfil this criterion. A problem arises when we think about the apparently 'not created' work, that is, the beauty of nature, and in this case, the sublime. Think again about my examples from the beginning: the Dolomite Mountains, the stars emerging in the evening sky before night has completely fallen, and the sea during a storm, much like a Turner painting. How can Fichte explain these? They seem merely given, and don't occupy the privileged position between the ideal and real standpoints that the artist does, since they are not endowed with 'aesthetic sense' – they are just inanimate objects.

I should note that I am treating 'the sublime' here *mostly* as caused by natural objects, e.g. mountains and so forth. I do this as it is, for the most part, consistent with Fichte's intertwining of the notions of nature and the sublime – Piché goes as far as to assert, without citation, that Fichte's understanding of nature is 'primarily associated' with the sublime'.[43] However, I admit that a feeling of the sublime, as described by Fichte in the *Grundlage*, can be caused by individuals – Laure Cahen-Maurel points out an excellent example in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (1791), and more specifically

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41 Piché 2002, 300; Renaut 1986, 99.

42 Kant offers a theory which is similar in its emphasis on aesthetic judgements being subjectively grounded *reflective* judgements. When the understanding and the imagination 'harmonize' when we perceive an object, the object becomes 'purposive' in judgement's perception. This purposiveness is subjective because the concept isn't necessary, and the judgement obtained is not cognitive. It is, instead, an *aesthetic judgement of reflection*. (KU First Introduction VII, 20:221). The purposiveness of the object presented to aesthetic judgement, Kant stipulates, is "for our cognitive faculties", for without it the understanding could not situate itself in its environment. Only in judgement do we apply the concept of ends to nature. Of these, the aesthetic judgement alone has the task of deciding when an object conforms to our cognitive faculties, and when it doesn't. This it does via the faculty of 'taste' (KU Introduction, VIII:193-4).

43 Piché 2002, 314n.22.

the character of the Queen of the Night.[44] A Soprano reaching notes that can make glass break may well evoke the same feeling of astonishment that one gets from looking at the Matterhorn.

With this caveat out of the way, we return to our question: how, for Fichte, can we explain the sublime? Fichte, as we have seen, admits that we *can* undergo feelings of the sublime. Is there, then, any way of reaffirming the importance of these feelings in Fichte's aesthetic triumvirate? The first thing to do is to dismiss the notion that nature is merely an *explanandum* for the *Wissenschaftslehre* and to thereby restate that nature can evoke feelings of beauty, or even of sublimity, within us. Ostensibly this runs counter to Fichte's own claim in the late-Jena work *The Vocation of Man*, that science makes nature 'transparent'. Nature is understood as an object of investigation for the 'human power' to "control without effort".[45] The natural world, on this view, is explained away by Fichte's doctrine of self-determination, it loses its quality of being *terra incognita*, and the 'romantic' appeal to 'mystery' in nature no longer has any recourse. Indeed, it is a common trope among scholars to see nature, for Fichte, as "a punching bag for our moral energies."[46] On this view, nature must be stripped bare, rendered *terra cognita*, and overcome by humans, a view which, admittedly, has ample textual support within Fichte's own works.[47]

The view that the *Wissenschaftslehre* makes the world purely *terra cognita* seems to be challenged by a claim that Fichte makes in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*. He claims that the individual can only understand things that her body allows her to understand – through the senses, say – and only through the forms her body allows (Fichte's example is that gustatory 'sweetness' can't be heard). One cannot, therefore, feel 'in general', but only in part. This sentence lends itself to a phenomenological reading, insofar as the subject can only grasp part of a sensation. At no point does the sensation avail itself *entirely* to the imagination. From the standpoint of the real, then, the individual is thereby architectonically prohibited from achieving absolute knowledge: my consciousness is something accumulated, I can never truly

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44 Cahen-Maurel 2020, 235-6 and 241. Cahen-Maurel evokes this case to buttress her argument that, for Fichte, the 'songstress of the night' depicted in "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" (1795/1800) serves all three components of the triadic structure of aesthetics outlined in "Concerning the Concept": 'the pleasant, the beautiful, and the sublime'.

45 VM 83 [GA I/6: 269].

46 Mayer 1961, 336. Breazeale has done work to suggest that this view, though in many ways justified, is not the final word on Fichte's conception of nature, and that nature's ultimate truth for Fichte is "an affirmation of the ultimate harmony between […] the 'realms of nature and grace'." See Breazeale 2014, 37.

47 See, e.g., WLnm GA IV/3: 240-1; FTP 468.

grasp the whole, but only what is 'already present' to the imagination. Resultantly, when we *cannot* grasp something, "this provokes astonishment, which is the basis of the sublime."[48] I take this to mean that the feeling of the sublime is ostensibly other to us, we cannot comprehend it in any way, but it nonetheless evokes in us the astonishment requisite to direct our thoughts onto the inner sense.

This relates to the earlier claim that the sublime in some way contains within it an 'otherness' that doesn't initially seem explicable to Fichte. Returning to his description of the feeling of 'astonishment' when under the impression of the sublime that Fichte discusses in the *Grundlage*, I suggested that the 'standstill' of the subject's 'reciprocal-acting-and-being-passively-affected' essentially made the I *external* to itself for these moments, that it 'ceased to exist'. Since the 'oscillation' between un-unifiable components is what gives them their 'reality', or makes them 'intuitable',[49] when the sublime produces an astonished standstill, these representations must themselves cease. That is to say, the intuiting subject's attention is held merely by this representation, and the oscillating pauses such that the intuited product is allowed to last in the imagination.

That the attention is *held* by the sublime feeling produces a warped moment in time for the subject, wherein she is 'astonished'. The I is thereby *othered* from the power of imagination which makes things intuitable, and loses some kind of grip on her power to endow the non-unifiable relational and absolute with their reality. In other words, the sublime *blurs* the gap between the two, if only for a moment. This also brings Fichte into a closer relationship with Kant. Kant's notion of the sublime 'contravene[s]' our judgement, as it makes us feel 'ill-adapted' to our modes of cognition: we appreciate the sublime because the greatest faculty of sense we have is inadequate to comprehend this incomprehensible other.[50] For Fichte, it seems, the sublime can't *fit*. It looks as though it can't be comprehended merely by the relational subject, who needs to bring in a conception of the absolute to be able to cognise it in its fullness.

This brings me to the crux of my argument. From at least one way of looking at it, the sublime, as evoked by products of nature *are* creations of the I.[51] Without the absolute positing of the I, they would not exist. I joked at the

48 WLnm GA IV/3: 135-6; FTP 278.
49 GWL 305 [GA I/2: 368].
50 KU §§23 & 27, 245 & 257.
51 To clarify, Kant thinks that objects can be beautiful, but *not* sublime. The sublime, for Kant, is only a sensation related to the absolute moral order, and I see no indication that Fichte thinks any differently. My investigation focuses on how, for Fichte, the objects of

beginning that all of my examples, the Dolomites, the sea, and the night sky were all products of the I's absolute positing power, and this is exactly why. They are not, however, created products of the relational I: unlike the Kandinsky, Pollock, Rothko, *et cetera*, they are not things that the subject (that is the relational I) sketches out for herself. They seem, at the very least, *given*. But we nonetheless have an aesthetic reaction to them, one of 'astonishment'. Again, this can be a result of the work of the artist – for example, Cahen-Maurel's opera singer. But when such a sensation is caused by something contained in nature (in this case taken to be whatever isn't the product of some relational act), then my argument runs that this prompts an aesthetic reaction because it *is*, fundamentally, a result of the I's productive power. In my view, the sublime provokes a reaction of astonishment because of the incomprehensibility of something produced, that the sublimity of nature comes about *as a result* of the I's absolute self-positing.[52] It gives us our first glimpse of the connection between our real, mundane, or 'humble' world, and eternity which, Fichte asserts in the *System of Ethics*, is "the most sublime thought attainable by a human being."[53]

To be clear, I am not claiming that the nature-induced sublime is some *partes extra partes*, something external to the aesthetic sense that Fichte talks of elsewhere – a sense which occupies a midpoint between the practical and transcendental standpoints. Instead, I hold the sublime to be a guide *into* that midpoint. The honour of being the midpoint itself is reserved for aesthetic sense; in terms of aesthetic reasoning, there is no other. However, the sublime is an important aspect of this aesthetic sense, one which doesn't wholly exist within it, but brings the imagination into contact with it through 'astonishment'. By directing our minds from the simple, mechanistic elements of nature towards the beauty thereof by an overwhelming feeling, in which the oscillating of time ceases, the philosopher is brought suddenly to the realisation that beauty is reproducible within herself. As such, she is brought into contact with the aesthetic sense, which further guides her towards the transcendental, absolutely creating I. When I see, for example, Monet's series of paintings *Storm Off the Belle Ile Coast* (1886), I think it beautiful precisely

nature can *produce* this sensation of sublimity within the cognising, creating subject, even if these objects are not sublime in and of themselves.

52 This is what I take Makkreel to mean when he claims that, for Fichte, an experience of the sublime is the result of relating the imagination to reason, rather than the understanding. In such cases, "a limiting point B is incorporated into [the imagination's] own core." In other words, the thing outside the imagination that limits it is experienced as a result of the imagination's own activity. See Makkreel 1994, 11.

53 SE 331 [GA I/5: 305]. In this section, Fichte is discussing the role of the external church in relating these actions: eternity is held, here, to be synonymous with 'God'.

because I have been prompted to see its mimetic quality, its reflection of the sublime world that it depicts. This is not to say that *all* art does such things – the case could be made that the aim of such works as Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), or Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), is not to overwhelm us with their sublimity, and that their aesthetic merits lie elsewhere, perhaps in Velázquez's confounding deployment of perspective, or in Duchamp's depiction of fluid motion, rather than a static, definable scene. Rather, the merit of the sublime is that it directs us towards our own aesthetic sense, our ability, first mimetic, then creative, to bring the givenness of the world and the creating power of the I into their first initial contact.

We should note that not everything 'beautiful' in nature evokes feelings of sublimity. However, the sublime, and *only* the sublime, simply through its scale, constitutes a feeling of astonishment, which initiates the search for 'beauty' in art and the products of our own creative power as individuals. We can again draw parallels with Kant, here, and with his assertion that "for the sublime [we must seek a ground] merely in ourselves and the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature."[54] Nature's sublimity arises precisely from the subject's finding itself unable to adequately situate itself in relation to the absolute. The sublime makes the subject feel othered or astonished by something that is nonetheless a part of the absolute I and is in some sense, thereby, a creation of the I. As a result of this seeming contradiction, the subject is prompted to look to art as a source of beauty, be it mimetic *or* non-representational.[55]

This preceding claim is a bit of a jump, which requires further clarification. Fundamentally, the I itself, and its realisation of the moral law is the highest source of sublimity. In "Concerning the Difference between the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy", Fichte holds that the achievement of the 'primal sublime' is a feeling of 'eternal truth' and 'ethical perfection'.[56]

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[54] KU §23, 246. The other part of this claim is that "For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves." Insofar as the imagination 'oscillates' between its relational and its absolute capacities, thereby constituting both, Fichte would disagree with this.

[55] Breazeale 2013*a*, 36.

[56] EPW 195-6 [GA II/3: 319]. Echoing Fichte's discussion of temporality in the *Grundlage*, this passage further claims that, in coming to "stare in wonder at the 'primal sublime'," spirit "lifts itself above spatial and temporal limitations of sensation and sweeps beyond time and space". Further, "everything that occurs for us happens within the physical world, and that includes a sensuous being's spiritual ideas. The free spirit is clothed in a body" (EPW 195-6 [GA II/3: 319]). I take this to mean that Fichte himself endorses my notion of the sublime causing a 'warped moment in time', wherein the subject ceases to

This echoes his later claim in the Second *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), that when we exhibit the ethical law within us, "the I is represented as something sublime."[57] Elsewhere, Fichte seems to imply that cultivating the aesthetic sense is a moral imperative, and that the artist who fails to depict beauty actually 'deforms' the human being.[58] When one gains access to a feeling of 'ethical perfection' through acquaintance with the 'primal sublime', one also becomes acquainted with beauty, because the sublime and beauty are united by their fundamental 'truth'. Hence, the overwhelming 'astonishment' heralded by the sublime is fundamentally a first contact with created beauty, insofar as the external sublime in nature is simultaneously the created product of the absolute I.

The sublime ostensibly seems to 'overwhelm' us with its beauty, but this is in fact a product of our inner creative faculty, by our relation to the absolute.[59] This astonishment (the 'basis of the sublime') divides the I into two. It seems to reaffirm the boundary between the real and the ideal standpoints, by showing us something that seems fundamentally other to us. Yet it simultaneously gives us a glimpse into the 'eternal truth' of the I. The sublime essentially entices us, it gives us a flavour of absolute beauty, absolute *truth*, which is to say, of the "unspeakably sublime character of duty."[60]

It is important to draw the reader's attention here to the parallels between this account of the sublime and Fichte's notorious doctrine of the *Anstoß*, which he introduces in the *Grundlage*. The *Anstoß* is understood, from the theoretical standpoint, as the 'check' upon the pure, unmediated activity of the I. This 'original limitation' serves as the first experience of limitation within the I, but must itself originate within, and resultantly be posited by the I, in order that the I, which Fichte characterises initially as pure activity, isn't problematically constituted by passivity simultaneously.[61] Fichte acknowledges, however, that this generates a 'contradiction', since subjectivity, in containing the check within itself, seems thereby to already contain

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properly interact with the phenomenal categories of space and time, whilst nonetheless remaining a phenomenal, relational subject. See above.

57 IWL 49 [GA I/4: 219].

58 SE 335 [GA I/5: 309]. Further in the *Sittenlehre*, Fichte seems to imply we are in some way predisposed towards our own sublimity, through our aversion to whatever is *not* beautiful. He describes something that resembles Friedrich Nietzsche's 'master' archetype, who "tramples […] everything around him", and claims that we generally perceive this as "*ugly* and *repugnant*", whereas in the case of animals we find it "natural and in order". The fact that we do so, he believes, "is proof of humanity's nobility and sublimity" (SE 193 [GA I/5: 185], my italics). See also GM 1 I §11.

59 See Piché 2002, 305.

60 SE 147 [GA I/5: 145].

61 GWL 292 [GA I/2: 354-5].

its own limitation. Frederick Neuhouser puts this nicely when he says that the *Anstoß*, and more specifically its effect of making the I dependent upon a Not-I, makes representation 'impossible' without the theoretical subject being "irremediably dependent upon something other than itself", a claim that "conflicts with the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*", which Neuhouser understands to be encapsulated in the notion of absolute self-positing.[62]

Fichte's solution is to claim that the "*dependence* of the I, qua intellect, is supposed to be annulled, and this is conceivable only under the following condition: namely, *that the I determines through itself this Not-I,* […] to which there is ascribed that check or impetus […]. In this way, the Not-I that is to be represented would be *immediately* determined by the absolute I, whereas the representing I would – thanks to that determination [by the check] – be *mediately* or *indirectly* determined by the absolute I."[63] In this way, the I retains its quality of being entirely self-determined, whilst simultaneously bringing about representation for the relational subject, a determination that the relational subject experiences as a 'felt' compulsion.

Similarities between this and the subject's interaction with the sublime should now be clear. I believe the overwhelming response we have to the sublime is in fact the response to this seeming contradiction, the clash between the absolute positing-power of the I and the otherness of the Not-I. In coming to awareness of the beauty of the sublime, the subject is becoming familiarised with Fichte's solution to this contradiction: that it is as intelligence that we are othered from these objects, whereas it is within the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the absolute positing-power of the I, that we are united. On the one hand, we are distinct and separable from products that evoke feelings of the sublime, insofar as we are relational subjects. Whereas, on the other hand, these products and the perceiving subject as intelligence are in fact one and the same, insofar as they are all results of the same 'absolute activity' of the absolute I. The feeling of the sublime itself is the response we have to this apparent contradiction which is, with the reflection of the intelligent subject, thereby resolved.

Though Neuhouser is clear that the principle of self-positing found in the 1794-5 *Wissenschaftslehre* cannot be said to convey any information about the subject's "practical freedom or moral autonomy,"[64] I think it is important to look at its implications for a doctrine of the same. If, with later works, we understand the moral law to be identifiable with universal truth, then the

62 Neuhouser 1990, 49.
63 GWL 322 [GA I/2: 388].
64 Neuhouser 1990, 46.

sublime can serve as the *Anstoß* to help us strive to attain it. An encounter with a feeling of the sublime brings either a new or *re*newed impetus to seek the transcendental standpoint, to become acquainted with the moral law and the absolute activity of the I, and thereby achieve 'eternal truth'. At this point, the aesthetic standpoint kicks in and acts as a go-between between the real and the ideal standpoints, directing the philosopher to look inwards, to seek beauty in the work of the artist and the created products of her inner soul. In this, if the aesthetic sense is the impetus to seek the ideal standpoint, then the sublime is an 'impetus-to-another-impetus', it gives us prompt or reason to see beauty in the world. In essence, it encourages us to take note of the fact that there is more to the I's existence than the real standpoint alone can account for. The brief section in which Fichte introduces the concept of the sublime suggests as much, claiming that the imagination is determined to subsume the object into the finite I's activity, something which seems a somewhat larger task in the case of such overwhelming, for all intents and purposes "infinite" objects. Hence, this can only be achieved by means of a post-hoc 'reflection', in accordance with reason, rather than an immediately perceivable representation, as would be the case were the encounter intuited by the understanding. In this sense, Fichte says, "the power of imagination extends into the infinite, until it arrives at the utterly undeterminable Idea of supreme unity."[65] The sublime, by bringing about the feeling of 'astonishment' and a 'standstill' in the imagination, sets the finite I on its way towards an (albeit unattainable) idea of an absolute infinity.

We should remember, of course, that Fichte's aesthetic doctrine, as outlined in "Concerning the Concept", is tripartite: "the pleasant, the beautiful, and the sublime".[66] I would argue, however, that the sublime has a privileged position in relation to the aesthetic sense insofar as it overwhelms us. Astonishment is an enthralling reaction, we fall under its power to a greater degree than to, say, the pleasant, and as such are made far more susceptible to the sway of the aesthetic sense than we would be to that which is merely pleasant. Indeed, as noted, it is only in the context of the sublime that Fichte believes the oscillating of the imagination falters. The 'astonishment' that the sublime incites has the power to overwhelm us with the absolute incomprehensibility of something that should, somehow, be

[65] GWL 298-9 [GA I/2: 361].

[66] It would, perhaps, be interesting to consider the degree to which these three elements interact. It seems intuitively to be the case that the notion of the 'beautiful' encapsulates far more than the other two, and indeed is discussed more frequently and in greater depth by Fichte throughout his work. However, this is not what we are concerned with here.

comprehensible to the mind if we are to be able to transcend the boundary between the real and the ideal. Its incomprehensibility reaffirms that any understanding of the aesthetic sense can only come about thanks to a "necessary striving" of the I, "the applicability of which is conditioned by the effect upon feeling of the counter-striving Not-I."[67]

The I is *always* destined to fail in its striving to absolutely annul the Not-I, its striving to unite the real and the ideal. The relational subject can never assimilate the external world into her very being, except insofar as she is given it as a representation. But the possibility of doing so remains; the products of nature are in some sense products of the I, so there must be hope that these antinomies can be reconciled, and that the subject can unite her un-unifiable elements, the relational and the absolute.[68] The sublime, then, by representing the most supersensible of things in the world – the things that seem most 'other' to us – makes this union seem possible but incomprehensible, thereby giving the subject the task of striving, to attempt to make itself one with even the furthest reaches of its productive faculty.

In terms of aesthetic striving, too, the sublime can also allow the world to maintain at least some of its quality of being *terra incognita*. The aim of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is, as established earlier, to justify 'representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity', which runs the risk of explaining away nature as merely the object of scientific reasoning. However, while I don't deny that this is the end goal of transcendental philosophy, insofar as it is understood by the relational subject, it can only be explained, and never *grasped*. That is to say, as Fichte explained in the *nova methodo*, we will always be prohibited from feeling 'in general', yet we nonetheless strive for the basis of feeling that underlies it. In essence, the hovering of the aesthetic sense between the real and the ideal standpoints mirrors the hovering of the imagination between the relational and the absolute. The sublime is merely the relational side of beauty, the initial prompt to send us back into ourselves and seek the 'eternal truth' of the absolute.

I don't think this theory should be particularly shocking; indeed, my hope is merely that it has reaffirmed the importance of the natural sublime, and the reaction thereto, to Fichte's wider aesthetic project. We shouldn't be surprised that the sublime is critical to Fichte's thought. After all, Fichte himself stresses in *On the Nature of the Scholar* (1806) that people of 'noble' character are naturally predisposed to "seek the sublime […] in grand and imposing style."[69] But thus far, its actual *role* has been seldom given the

[67] GWL 190 [GA I/2: 151].
[68] GWL 331 [GA I/2: 399].
[69] GA I/8: 99, my translation.

attention it deserves. That said, we can see the germ of my argument in most discussions of Fichte's aesthetic theory. What I have described is hinted at as early as Claude Piché's seminal work on Fichte's aesthetics: that "the function of the sublime (the confrontation with the incommensurable in nature) is to return the subject to the self in order that it may realize the greatness of its moral vocation."[70]

5. Conclusion

> "O dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee,
> Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,
> Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer
> I worshipped the Invisible alone."[71]

The reader may recognise these lines from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Hymn Before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni", originally written in 1802.[72] Coleridge here evokes precisely what I take a Fichtean account of the sublime to do. Though the sublime by no means accomplishes the complete movement from the practical to the theoretical standpoints that Fichte holds art to further achieve, I hold that it nonetheless plays an important role in this transition. Just as art directs our attention inwards, towards the creative power, as opposed to givenness, as a source of beauty, so the sublime gives us a reason to seek the beautiful, it overwhelms our sense with the sudden beauty of both the created product (the song of the opera singer) and (more importantly in this case) the beauty of the natural world. The sublime 'astonishes' us, a fact that, according to Fichte, brings time to a standstill and makes a large impression upon us. Henceforth, we are compelled to seek beauty within the human spirit, as opposed to the apparently given external world.

However, insofar as the productive power of the absolute I underlies and encompasses all posited reality, the sublime aspects of nature are in fact products of the creative process of the I. They are the furthest products of the I's positing from the relational subject, inasmuch as they are incomprehensible to the imagination. As such, the influence of the sublime is the first point of impetus to seek beauty in the world. I hope to have reaffirmed that

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70 Piché 2002, 314n.22. See also Breazeale 2013*a*, 29.

71 Coleridge 1997, 323, lines 13-16.

72 It is interesting to note that Coleridge was criticised in his day for plagiarism on *Hymn Before Sunrise*, purportedly failing to acknowledge the influence of *Chamouny at Sunrise* (1791), by the Danish writer and salonist Friederike Brun (1765-1835), at whose salon Goethe, Schiller, and August Wilhelm Schlegel, all correspondents and friends of Fichte, were attendees.

the sublime is critical to Fichte's aesthetic theory, and its role in the philosopher's quest to straddle the boundary between the real and the ideal standpoints, by acting as an *Anstoß* by which we are brought to consciousness of the otherness of beauty within nature, something that can be found simultaneously within the representing subject herself, and her acquaintance with the moral law.

Nature, *prima facie* merely an object of human conquest for Fichte, is, by virtue of the subject's relational nature, always to some degree impenetrable, but is nonetheless prompt for us to strive, *irrespective* of the absolute's unattainability, to come into closer contact with it. As Coleridge seems to suggest, the entire purpose of the sublime is to eradicate itself from aesthetic thought. This, of course, is the goal of the aesthetic sense: to 'worship the Invisible alone'. In the very first instance, it can take astonishment at seeing the Dolomite Mountains, the stormy seas that so obsessed Turner in the 19th century, or the sun setting over the Grand Canyon, to see that oneness with the absolute is desirable, and that 'the world of the beautiful spirit' lies "within humanity, and nowhere else."[73]

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The Myth of Melusine and its Relation to Totalitarian Ideology

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the medieval Melusine myth and its evolution across the centuries. We explore the return of this figure in early German romanticism and the 20th century avant-garde and its significance in distorting the narrative of human dominance. In a more general sense the article explores the ambivalent notion of totality or wholeness on one side in relation to the new mythology of art, literature and philosophy, and on the other the totalitarian ideologies that likewise instrumentalized myth. As a figure of the natural, irrational, and excluded, Melusine opposes patriarchal order and carries the promise of renewal after war. Her return signals reconciliation with what society banishes. By situating this myth in the context of new mythology and 20th century myth-making and by foregrounding the tension between wholeness and totality, the article highlights neglected aspects of the Melusine revival and clarifies the myth's role in modernity.

Keywords: Melusine, myth, romanticism, surrealism, totalitarianism

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel untersucht die Entwicklung des mittelalterlichen Melusine-Mythos und seine Wiederkehr in der frühen deutschen Romantik sowie in der Avantgarde des 20. Jahrhunderts. Im Zentrum steht die Frage, wie die Figur der Melusine – als Symbol des Natürlichen, Irrationalen und Ausgegrenzten – die patriarchalische Ordnung unterwandert und das Versprechen einer Erneuerung nach Zeiten der Zerstörung in sich trägt. Diese Rückkehr wird als Ausdruck einer Versöhnung mit dem Verdrängten verstanden. Zugleich analysiert der Beitrag die ambivalente Idee der Ganzheit: einerseits als ästhetisches Ideal der „neuen Mythologie" in Kunst, Literatur und Philosophie, andererseits als gefährliche Nähe zu totalitären Ideologien, die den Mythos ideologisch instrumentalisierten. Durch die Gegenüberstellung dieser beiden Dimensionen zeigt der Artikel, wie Melusine als mythische Figur zur Reflexion über die Rolle des Mythos in der Moderne beiträgt und vergessene Zusammenhänge zwischen Romantik, Avantgarde und Mythos aufdeckt.

Stichwörter: Melusine, Mythos, Romantik, Surrealismus, Totalitarismus

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1. The Origin of the Melusine Myth

The origins of the Melusine myth can be traced to Jean d'Arras's *Romance of Melusine* from 1393, in which the myth served the dynastic ambitions of its commissioner Jean, Duke of Berry. In d'Arras's version, Melusine is not only a hybrid fairy-woman but also a supernatural ancestor who legitimizes the Duke's lineage and territorial claims, including his ties to Lusignan and Cyprus. The narrative intertwines biblical, Arthurian, and crusading themes to construct a politically charged "historical" account rather than a mere allegory. At the same time, Melusine's hybrid nature and the motif of forbidden knowledge introduce a degree of openness and ambiguity that exceeds its political purpose, allowing later reinterpretations.

a) Sources and Parallels

The history of the legendary figure Melusine can be traced to the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, when, as mentioned, Jean d'Arras composed his *Romance of Melusine* in 1393, generally regarded as the first written version of her story. If we ask what inspired him, one of the best answers is offered by Kathrynn Rimmasch who claims that d'Arras drew most heavily on the *Otia Imperialia* written by Gervase de Tilbury from the thirteenth century.[1]

Jean d'Arras's story of Melusine was commissioned by Jean, duke of Berry, one of the great patrons of art at the time.[2] Similarly *Otia Imperialia* was written on commission for the Emperor Otto IV. According to Rimmasch, it is the third part that most directly shaped d'Arras's understanding of fairies.[3] The work teaches us that if a man is to marry a fairy, he must make some sort of promise. As a rule, such a promise requires ignoring or concealing the fairy's true nature. Rimmasch then identifies this concept as analogous to the biblical story of Adam, Eve, and the forbidden apple of the Garden of Eden. Man must ignore the true nature of things in favor of personal happiness and fortune. And so Melusine brings heaven on earth to her husband, Raymondin, until he betrays her and reveals her true nature. She creates a paradise, but its existence depends on voluntary ignorance of the true nature of things. Like Adam, Raymondin was bound by a promise of not-knowing, which he broke, causing suffering.

In Jean d'Arras's story, Melusine is not only a hybrid being but also the supernatural founder of the Lusignan house. As part of this mythical foun-

[1] Kathryn Rimmasch, *Hidden Doublings: A Context for Understanding Jean d'Arras's Mélusine ou la Noble Histoire de Lousignan* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2007), 39.

[2] Daisy Delogu, "Jean d'Arras Makes History: Political Legitimacy and the Roman of Melusine," *Dalhousie French Studies* 80 (2007): 15.

[3] *Ibid.*, 34.

dation, she sends her sons on crusades – a central portion of the narrative that further legitimizes the duke's political authority. Delogu suggests that the Crusades narrative can be read as legitimizing Duke Jean of Berry's military actions after 1370, particularly his conquest of the castle of Lusignan, which became the center of his power.[4]

D'Arras's Melusine combines elements of allegory, romance, and historiography to support political claims. As Delogu argues, the depiction of Melusine's sons as Christian heroes legitimizes Jean of Berry's claim to Cyprus – despite the fact that Guy de Lusignan acquired it by purchase, not conquest. In some cases the story refers to passages from Arthurian legends.[5] However, the Arthurian legends are used here only as narrative instruments that again serve mainly to legitimize power. Notably, the brothers' adventure is in fact a crusade, a religious war. This is particularly significant because it reinforces Melusine's portrayal as a devout Christian. The relationship between Christianity and her supernatural origins is a key point in understanding the specificity of this character. Melusine is a half-fairy and she wields magical powers, but she is also a devout Christian. She sends her sons off to war with three thousand men, all the necessary armaments and supplies, but also magical rings to guarantee their invincibility on the battlefield.[6]

b) Narrative Structure

D'Arras's *Melusine* presents a distinctly hybrid narrative form, mirroring the ambiguous nature of its central figure. Melusine's own story may be read as allegory, yet its structure and intent suggest a historiographical ambition; in contrast, the episodes concerning her sons follow the conventions of chivalric romance.[7] As Delogu points out, d'Arras draws on contemporary narrative models to guide the reader's perception of extradiegetic events – most notably in the depiction of Melusine's sons as Christian warriors defeating the Saracens, which implicitly affirms Jean of Berry's claim to Cyprus. Historically, however, Guy de Lusignan acquired the island not through conquest

4 *Ibid.*, 16.

5 Two unknown knights arrive at Melusine's court to announce that the kingdom of Cyprus is under siege by the neighbouring Saracen ruler.
Delogu sees this as an allegory for a classic passage from the Arthurian legends, where strangers arrive at court announcing various dangerous adventures to ensure the knights' fame and glory. This passage then loosely goes on to introduce the two sons of Melusine, by which the author is saying that this crusade is the very task by which they will gain glory.

6 *Ibid.*, 17.

7 *Ibid.*, 20.

but by purchase, making d'Arras's account a stylized reinterpretation of a much less heroic reality.[8]

This does not mean, however, that d'Arras and his contemporaries did not understand the story of Melusine as an account of actual historical events. "Jacques Legrand, a contemporary of Jean d'Arras, affirms that history is a narration of something with clear words, as opposed to fable for example, which is a narration of something in false or covered words. Legrand's allusion to covered words seems to point out to the allegory, a common medieval rhetorical device, but one which Jean d'Arras does not employ."[9] It is worth noting that even Melusine's hybridity is not presented as an allegory to be decoded by the reader, but as an explicit fact. Delogu even believes that d'Arras is trying to construct an idealized version of 14th-century history, specifically focusing on Jean of Berry's campaign and the conquest of the castle of Lusignan.[10]

In *Melusine*, d'Arras constructs an idealized account of recent history, aligning it with the political interests of Jean of Berry – particularly his efforts to reclaim Poitou and the castle of Lusignan, long contested by the English. The fairy ancestry legitimizes the Duke's lineage, and Melusine's son Urien, marked by supernatural traits, becomes a sign of divine favor rather than monstrosity.[11] As Delogu notes, such figures offer symbolic compensation for historical defeats like the Battle of Poitiers. Raymondin, though less central, reinforces this dynastic narrative: as Rimmasch suggests, his name evokes the figure of an earthly king[12] and mirrors biblical models of unexpected rise and fall, binding his authority to his pact with Melusine.[13]

c) Political Context of the Romance

The legitimation of power and the construction of a politically meaningful historical narrative are already embedded in the figure of Melusine herself. In d'Arras's version, the myth is reconfigured to support the claims of Jean

8 *Ibid.*, 21.
9 *Idem*.
10 *Ibid.*, 23.
11 *Ibid.*, 24.
12 Rimmasch, *Hidden Doublings*, 61.
13 Rimmasch argues that his very name – possibly derived from *roi mondain* – suggests his role as an earthly king. She also draws a parallel between him and King David: both are younger sons who rise to power unexpectedly and ultimately fall from grace due to a broken vow. While Raymondin himself does not slay giants, his son does, reinforcing his archetypal role. If David's kingship depends on his relationship with God, then Raymondin's rule is similarly bound to his covenant with Melusine.

of Berry, lord of Lusignan and patron of the text. This strategy becomes particularly visible in several key elements of the story:

1) Melusine's Scottish origins – explicit in d'Arras's story, where her father is a Scottish king – are significant because the Duke of Berry sought to persuade English nobles, especially descendants of the victors at Poitiers. By linking Melusine to Scotland, the narrative subtly appealed to these English bloodlines.

2) The story provides the Duke with a legendary ancestor, reinforcing his status. It parallels the Garden of Eden: Melusine creates paradise, but only on the condition of ignorance about her true nature, much like Adam before eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

3) Raymondin, like Adam, uncovers forbidden knowledge and thereby loses paradise. His character may also echo King David, whom, as Rimmasch suggests, the Middle Ages viewed as the model of a just ruler. This association casts the Duke not only as a descendant of a mythical lineage but also as embodying ideal qualities of kingship.

4) The reference to the Third Crusade reinterprets the Duke's acquisition of Cyprus. The story claims Melusine's son, Urien, gained the kingdom through marriage, whereas in reality the Duke purchased it. The text further portrays him as a Christian savior by having him rescue Cyprus from a Saracen attack.

Thus, d'Arras's *Melusine* is not simply a literary invention but a deliberately constructed narrative serving a political purpose. By linking the Duke of Berry to a supernatural ancestor, d'Arras provided him with a legitimizing myth that reinforced his rule and positioned him within a sacred historical framework. The way in which the story incorporates biblical themes, Arthurian elements, and crusading motifs suggests a deliberate effort to shape the perception of the duke's authority. At the same time, the text does not present itself as an allegory, as an allegory requiring interpretation, but as a historical record, which further strengthens its claim to legitimacy. Melusine's hybrid nature is presented not as a symbol to be decoded but as a reality, just as her role as founder and protector is woven into the fabric of history.

d) Openness and Complexity in Jean d'Arras's *Melusine*

While Jean d'Arras's *Melusine* can be understood as participating in a broader project of dynastic legitimation, particularly in the context of Jean of Berry's political ambitions, the mythological figure at its center continues to display a notable degree of ambiguity. Melusine's hybrid nature, situated between the human and the supernatural, as well as between historiographical and mythological dimensions, complicates any unequivocal reading of the text as a purely ideological narrative. Notably, the motif of the prohibition against knowing her true form – whose violation leads to the collapse of an idealized order – suggests a model of narrative integrity that relies on accepting limits to knowledge. In this regard, the text anticipates a later Romantic sensibility, wherein myth becomes a medium for exploring the idea of ontological wholeness rather than the affirmation of political totality. The latent tension between narrative closure and symbolic openness thus marks d'Arras's version not only as a politically situated text, but also as one that leaves space for alternative, more dynamic readings of myth.

The political function of Melusine as a legitimizing myth persisted in various forms, though it was never the sole or exclusive dimension of the narrative. With the rise of Romanticism, certain layers of the myth came to be emphasized differently: less as a tool of dynastic power and more as a means of personal introspection and cultural renewal. This shift is particularly evident in Goethe's *New Melusine*, where political connotations recede, giving way to a philosophical reflection on *Bildung*.

2. Melusine of Romanticism and the Concept of New Mythology

The story of Melusine has undergone numerous transformations over the centuries, reflecting shifts in cultural, philosophical, and literary contexts. This subchapter examines Goethe's *Neue Melusine* as a *Bildungsroman* influenced by Herder's philosophy of *Bildung* – the idea that human identity is shaped through a continuous process of self-development. Unlike earlier versions, such as Jean d'Arras's medieval narrative, Goethe's *New Melusine* abandons biblical and Arthurian references in favor of mythological elements. This shift aligns with the Romantic project of New Mythology, as formulated by Herder and Schlegel. By framing Melusine as a dwarf fairy rather than a serpent-woman, Goethe reinterprets the tale not as a dynastic or theological allegory but as an exploration of human self-cultivation and the evolving relationship between humanity and nature. Through this transformation, Goethe's New Melusine emerges as a reflection on modern story-

telling – an attempt to reconcile myth, education, and individual growth within the framework of *Bildung*.

a) The Context of Goethe's *Neue Melusine*

The story of Melusine first became available in the German language through Thüring von Ringoltingen's (1473) translation, which was even printed five years before Jean d'Arras's original version.[14] Over the next two centuries, the tale spread further, translated into languages such as Dutch, Czech, Polish, Danish, Spanish, and Russian.[15] Across these versions, Melusine's hybrid nature was interpreted and reinterpreted in various ways. It is, however, in the German version that this tension between human and non-human, visible and hidden, becomes especially pronounced and Goethe likely first encountered the myth through Ringoltingen's retelling.

In Goethe's *Die Neue Melusine*, the figure departs from her traditional medieval role tied to dynastic legitimacy and is reimagined within a Romantic framework. Melusine here becomes a vehicle for exploring the boundaries between different orders of reality, the natural and the supernatural, the civilized and the instinctual. Her depiction as a dwarf rather than a part-serpent being may signal a shift in symbolic emphasis: from physical monstrosity to metaphysical strangeness, shifting the focus from outward transgression to inward otherness.

Among Goethe's inspirations, Paracelsus also deserves mention.[16] His alchemical reinterpretation of Melusine, whom he identifies with the elemental spirit of water, a so-called Undine, removed the figure from a Christian framework and placed her within a vision of nature animated by invisible forces. For Paracelsus, the visible world is only the surface; it is governed by hidden principles, laws, and entities. In this light, Goethe's Melusine can be seen as a threshold figure: not only a fantastical being, but also an embodiment of the human desire to cross from the world of appearances into the realm of the unseen, where the true structure of reality might be intuited, though never fully grasped.

Goethe's version of the Melusine myth, titled *Die Neue Melusine*, appears in the fourth book of his *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*[17] (1830). The question arises as to why this is the 'new' Melusine. Goethe himself admitted

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[14] Misty Urban, Deva Kemmis, and Melissa Ridley Elmes, *Melusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 54.

[15] *Ibid.*, 54.

[16] *Ibid.*, 102.

[17] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2016).

that it is neither a completely new story nor a simple retelling of an old one. Instead, his *Die Neue Melusine* is meant to be an attempt to synthesize the old with the new, resulting in a story with a familiar basis in d'Aras's work, but reformulated to address the concerns of modern times.[18] Compared to d'Aras's version, the New Melusine is completely removed from the framework of biblical or Arthurian references. Moreover, she is not a serpent-woman but a dwarf fairy who needs to find a husband to strengthen her bloodline.[19]

b) Goethe's Mythological Reworking of the Melusine story

Goethe's Melusine no longer transforms into a half-serpent; instead, she possesses the ability to assume human form at will, so her supernatural qualities appear natural. The story also shifts its symbolic framework: biblical references give way to mythological ones. A creation myth involving dragons, giants, and dwarves is woven into the narrative, evoking a primordial world animated by elemental beings. Interpretations of this mythological turn differ, but it can be seen as part of Goethe's broader effort to rethink myth as a medium of cultural formation rather than theological instruction. In this sense, the myth does not serve merely as a fantastical background, but participates in a project of imaginative world-building with formative, even pedagogical implications. Goethe thus gestures toward a kind of creation myth that fosters reflection and self-cultivation; he pursues a narrative attuned to the *Zeitgeist* of his age.

The idea of myth as a medium for self-cultivation is closely bound to the concept of *Bildung*, which played a central role in the intellectual horizon of Goethe's time. Far from referring to institutional education (*Erziehung*), *Bildung* designates a deeper process – the formation of the human being through experience, imagination, and engagement with otherness. This understanding of *Bildung* is crucial for interpreting Goethe's *Die Neue Melusine*, where the protagonist's failure to prove himself a worthy suitor to Melusine, a supernatural being from another order, represents a failure to confront otherness and thus a missed opportunity for growth. As Rainer Wisbert points out in his essay *Herders Weimarer Konzept der Selbstbildung*,[20] the notion of *Bildung* has roots in Leibniz's idea of "the individual skill to realize the possibilities that are given to us in time, that is, to build the

[18] Urban, Kemmis, and Elmes, *Melusine's Footprint*, 303.
[19] *Ibid.*, 310.
[20] Rainer Wisbert, "Herders Weimarer Konzept der Selbstbildung," in *Der andere Klassiker*, (2022).

world."[21] Goethe's adaptation of d'Arras's tale reflects precisely this spirit: his *Melusine* seeks to lead the reader not through moral instruction but through a narrative attuned to the *Zeitgeist*, which encourages the cultivation of the self by engaging with a symbolic world. *Bildung*, in this sense, becomes a dynamic, temporal, and creative process: the shaping of inner life in response to the conditions of one's age.

Goethe's approach did not emerge in a vacuum.[22] One important intellectual influence can be found in Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity*.[23] In this work, Herder rejects the Enlightenment notion of myth as primitive superstition and instead sees it as a genuine expression of a people's inner world as a symbolic mode of articulating their relation to nature, time, and human purpose. For Herder, human history is not a linear march of progress but a plural, organic unfolding, in which each culture follows its own path of *Bildung*. Goethe's recasting of the Melusine myth aligns with this perspective: through a new mythology, he seeks narrative forms capable of fostering imaginative self-reflection and inner growth in the modern reader.

The whole of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* is also conceived as a *Bildungsroman*, that is, its aim is not to legitimize territorial claims, as in Jean d'Arras's story, but to educate. Here we can trace a link to J.G. Herder, with whom Goethe co-founded the Sturm und Drang movement in 1770.[24] And it is *Bildung* that is the main motive of Herder's philosophical work. We can therefore assume that Goethe and Herder shared similar views on individual education.

c) *Bildung* and the New Mythology

The concept of *Bildung* gives rise to the idea of a New Mythology, articulated most explicitly by Friedrich Schlegel in his *Rede über Mythologie*.[25] We can find both the concepts of *Bildung* and the New Mythology across all of Herder's work. From *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität*[26], we know that humanity is a force of nature and that the ontological status of a man is not being (*Sein*) but becoming (*Werden*). So in Herder's philosophy a man is always becoming himself; in other words, his evolution and self-realization are ongoing. From

[21] *Ibid.*, 257.
[22] Urban, Kemmis, and Elmes, *Melusine's Footprint*, 311.
[23] Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie der Menschheit*, vol. 1 (Riga and Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1784).
[24] David Hill, *Literature of the Sturm und Drang* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2013).
[25] Friedrich Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie* (Berlin: 1964).
[26] Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (Riga: 1793).

Abhandlung der Ursprung der Sprache,[27] we also know that this evolution of an individuality is grounded in its language (*Sprache*), whereas the evolution of mankind in speech itself (*Rede*), as Michael Forster formulates it: "Thought is essentially dependent on, and bounded in its scope by, language…"[28] The third argument we must consider for our synthesis comes from Herder's *Wie die Philosophie zum Bestes Volkes allgemeiner und nützlicher werden kann*[29] which lies in the moral imperative to change the world rather than merely describe it. It can be said that precisely this value is behind Herder's and Goethe's aims to produce a *Bildungsroman*. So we can state that *Bildung* is the way an individual "builds" a world and his own personality – his own path of becoming – in language [*Sprache*], whereas New Mythology conceptualizes the extent to which this "building" operates in speech itself [*Rede*]. So *Bildung* concerns the individual, whereas New Mythology concerns all of mankind.

How, then, does this relate to Goethe's *Die Neue Melusine*? We may consider Goethe's tale as a kind of *Bildungsroman*, particularly in the Herderian sense of *Bildung* as an organic and open-ended process of becoming. At the very least, it resonates with several foundational premises outlined above. But how exactly does the story express these ideas, especially the relationship between humanity and nature? Unlike d'Arras's version, rooted in a Christian framework and centered around the question of sin and redemption, Goethe's Melusine emerges from a mythological cosmos animated by natural forces. She belongs to a race of dwarves who, like humans, were created by God, but who carry the burden of near extinction due to limited fertility. In her own words, dwarves are the oldest beings on earth, and so every few generations a princess must leave their realm in search of a human husband to renew their bloodline. The narrative thus abandons theological determinism in favor of a naturalized mythology, one where creation, limitation, and regeneration take center stage.

Melusine's plea to the protagonist is not framed as a moral test, but as a confrontation with an unfamiliar mode of existence. It is governed by necessity, time, and organic continuity. She herself embodies this alternative logic: she is supernatural, yet entirely natural in her fluid ability to shift forms and cross worlds. Nature in this context is not merely the physical environment, but the deeper set of laws – visible and invisible – that govern being and transformation. It is in this sense that Herder's idea of humanity as a

[27] Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Berlin: 1771).
[28] Michael N. Forster, *Herder's Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 18.
[29] J. G. Herder, *Wie die Philosophie zum Besten des Volkes allgemeiner und nützlicher werden kann* (Königsberg, 1765).

force of nature becomes relevant: just as nature is in constant flux, so too is the human being in a continual process of becoming (*Werden*).

So we can say that Goethe's *New Melusine* is not merely a modernized adaptation of d'Arras's tale but a philosophical reformulation attuned to the evolving understanding of *Bildung* and New Mythology. By replacing theological authority with a mythological framework grounded in natural becoming, Goethe shifts the story's focus from divine judgment to human self-formation. This shift reflects a deeper philosophical transformation: a move away from understanding identity as something static and given (*Sein*) toward a view of the human as fundamentally dynamic, defined by process, growth, and relation (*Werden*). In Goethe's vision, to become human is not to attain a fixed essence, but to remain open to transformation – through myth, through nature, and through encounters with the unknown.

d) The Romantic Transformation of Myth

In light of Schlegel's *Rede über Mythologie*, Goethe's *Die Neue Melusine* may be read as a contribution to the Romantic project of a New Mythology, which reconciles individual self-cultivation with the collective narrative of mankind. Rather than a conventional *Bildungsroman*, the tale stages a dialectic between individual formation and collective symbolic order. The protagonist's encounter with Melusine reflects a Romantic aspiration to intuit the forces that lie beyond empirical reality. In Goethe's rendering, Melusine does not simply represent the supernatural, but as noted, gives form to what Paracelsus had called the invisible, the hidden principles of nature. Her fluidity and rootedness in an elemental cosmos offer an alternative mode of knowing, one that resists rational classification and invites poetic apprehension.

Goethe's *Die Neue Melusine* is not merely a tale of a supernatural being in search of a husband; it functions as an allegory of *Bildung*, wherein both protagonist and reader are confronted with the transformative potential of myth. Melusine, as a being who traverses natural and supernatural realms, exemplifies an alternative cosmology grounded not in theological authority but in natural becoming. Her world is shaped by necessity, reproductive limitation, and cyclical temporality, which are elements that stand in contrast to the linear, rational order of Enlightenment thought and instead gesture toward a deeper, concealed logic inherent in nature. The narrative thus negotiates the porous boundary between the real and the ideal: the real, as historically and biologically determined life; the ideal, as the imaginative projection of what humanity might become through self-cultivation.

In summary: Goethe's *Neue Melusine* thus marks a fundamental shift in the function of myth: no longer serving as a tool for affirming historical or

political continuity, the myth is reimagined as an open framework for imaginative reflection on human identity as a dynamic process of becoming. This transformation resonates with the Romantic project of *New Mythology*, as formulated by thinkers such as Herder and Schlegel, which sought to reestablish symbolic narratives capable of mediating between individual formation (*Bildung*) and collective meaning, beyond the confines of Enlightenment rationalism. Melusine, in this context, ceases to function as a legitimizing ancestral figure and instead emerges as a threshold being – inviting the protagonist, and implicitly the reader, into an encounter with otherness and with the possibility of ontological transformation. Rather than enforcing a singular worldview, Goethe's reinterpretation gestures toward an organic and pluralistic notion of wholeness – one that is not imposed from above, but *emerges through openness, relation, and imaginative engagement*. The myth becomes not a static framework, but a medium of cultivation, through which a form of *open wholeness* may be intuited. In this sense, *Neue Melusine* exemplifies a Romantic rethinking of myth, whose symbolic flexibility would later stand in marked contrast to the instrumental and totalizing uses of myth in the ideological systems of the 20th century.

Yet, the Romantic vision of myth was not static. By the 20th century, with totalitarian regimes rising and war threatening the stability of European civilization, artists turned once again to mythology—not to affirm political order, but to challenge it.

3. Melusine of the 20th Century

The Melusine myth took new form and gained new relevance during the World War II period in the context of French immigration arriving in the USA. The most explicit use of the Melusine myth can be found in André Breton's book *Arcane 17* written in his American exile, in which the myth is revived and reinterpreted. However, the myth of Melusine represents a broader and more complex idea which was present in many forms across both surrealist and abstract art of that period. The increased interest in myth, and the newly appreciated feminine energy has its roots in the Romantic new mythology, alchemy, and other alternative sources. They take new shape with the contribution of psychoanalysis and during the war. For a better understanding of the revived Melusine, it is important to briefly explain the overall revival of myth in this era. This helps us understand the evolution of the Melusine myth and grasp its political meaning in this period.

a) Surrealism and the New Mythology

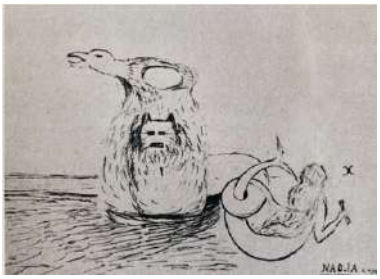
The Romantic conception of new mythology discussed above was partially revived in the 20th century by Surrealism. In the 1920s myth wasn't a central theme of this movement. With the exception of André Masson, who was expelled from the group in the early 1930s, we find few attempts to create new myths for modern society, as Romantic writers had intended. The idea of collective myth and a poetic revolution was not in line with Surrealism's cooperation with the communist regime. However, this began to change in the mid 1930s, when the group became alienated from the communist party and the leader of the group André Breton talked on various occasions about the need to create a collective myth rather than individual mythologies. We find this idea initially expressed in marginal speeches, mostly delivered abroad. In his Prague lecture in 1935 and two years later in London Breton claimed that the task of surrealism is "the elaboration of the collective myth specific to our time" in the same way that Romanticism created the Gothic novel. The new myth was meant to emerge from the depths of human experience and was thus closely related to the unconscious explored by psychoanalysis. In his talks from the 1930s Breton directly links this call to action to the political situation of the time, this new myth had to be political and revolutionary. Even though Breton was a leader and a spokesman of the French Surrealist group, the approach to myth was specific to individual artists, some of them inclined to personal mythologies like Max Ernst or Freudian themes like Salvador Dali. Others were closer to the collective new myth that Breton called for and their approach to the unconscious was aligned with Jung's interpretation.

André Masson was inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche and the Presocratic philosopher Heraclitus already in the 1920s. His paintings from that period show the importance of metamorphoses, the constant transformation of elements and the exchange between humans, nature, and inanimate objects. At first this interest was demonstrated in his automatic drawings. "Automatic drawing, which has its source in the unconscious, was born unexpectedly. The first graphic manifestations on paper are pure gesture, rhythm, incantation and, as a result, pure scribbles."[30] Masson saw the automatic

[30] André Masson, "Anatomie de mon univers," in *André Masson: une mythologie de l'être et de la nature*, ed. Nathalie Gallissot and Jean-Michel Bouhours (Milan: 5 Continents, 2019), 41.

techniques as a tool to uncover the unconscious images. This imagery appears to be in constant flux as in his drawing *Chevaux attaqués par des poissons* (1927). The horses and fish battle in the image, intertwine with each other and with the volcanic landscape that surrounds them. Masson paints a world full of life and death, which are inseparable.

In the 1930s the traditional mythological themes started to appear in art of the Surrealists and other avant-garde artists. In 1933 the magazine *Minotaure* was published for the first time with a cover image by Pablo Picasso. The mythical monster became immensely popular as a symbol of combats, hybridity and otherness, a mixture of human and animal, the irrationality and brutalness that the civilized man wanted to abolish from human society. Its hybrid character and proximity to nature and the animal realm bring the Minotaur close to Melusine. The difference between them is that the Minotaur is a brutal and masculine figure, while Melusine is traditionally a mother and is attributed with good qualities. Unlike the Minotaur, Melusine appears very rarely in the pre-war period. Her exceptional occurrence can be found in André Breton's book *Nadja* from 1928. Breton writes about the child-like woman Nadja, who seems to be a sorceress and a lunatic, she is attractive to him by her difference from the norms yet threatening at the same time. In the drawing for *Nadja* from November 18, 1926, we see a Mermaid or Siren holding a scroll, representing Nadja, and a hybrid monster, which Daniel Zamani believes represents Breton. Nadja identifies with Melusine in the story, and she appeals to Breton until her actions "cross the line between the poetic and the insane."[31]



While Melusine remained a marginal figure, Minotaur became a core character of André Masson's imagery in the 1930s. In his painting from 1938 named *Labyrinth* the creature is depicted as transparent and his own prison becomes a part of his body. In this way Minotaur takes a new meaning. He can still symbolise the animal, bestial side of human nature but also a complex inner universe that imprisons man and forces him to search for ways to escape. Apart from Minotaur, Masson also painted his mother Pasiphaë whose intercourse with a bull led to the birth of the hybrid creature. She represents the breaking of taboo, crossing the boundaries of what is permissible in human society. The moment of violating a ban, breaking a promise,

[31] Daniel Zamani, "Magical Beginnings: André Breton and the 'Occultation of Surrealism,'" in *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity*, ed. Gražina Subelytė and Daniel Zamani (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2022), 29.

and transgressing boundaries is present in the legend of Melusine as well. In her story, however, it is the man who breaks the promise and Melusine is exiled from society for it.

During this period, Masson was closely associated with Georges Bataille. The writer at times collaborated with the Surrealist group but most of the 1930s he and Breton battled against each other. Between 1936 and 1939 Bataille started publishing a magazine named *Acéphale* (literally meaning "the headless") linked to a secret society of the same name. This was the last of Bataille's attempts to constitute a society in which people would collaborate on a common goal without a leader. *Acéphale*, in his words, "turned its back on politics and pursued only a religious goal."[32] These inspirations were carried over into Masson's work, a watercolor entitled *Le Labyrinthe* depicts the figure of the Minotaur with a labyrinth growing through his chest. Here we recognize Masson's earlier fascination with the four basic elements, which are water, fire, earth and wind, and the constant transformation of the elements. The image has a traditional mythological subject, which, however, takes on new significance in response to the war in Spain and the escalation of the political situation in Europe.

Bataille viewed myth as a powerful weapon against the rising fascist movement.[33] The idea of the secret society and its religious rather than political character was therefore paradoxically also a reaction to the tense political situation. The line between politics, religion, and myth was thin in the case of totalitarian ideologies.[34] Bataille was interested in the role of the sacred in tribal societies, as described by sociologists and anthropologists (Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and other scholars), and the subversive

[32] Jean-Michel Besnier and Amy Reid, "Georges Bataille in the 1930s: A Politics of the Impossible," *Yale French Studies*, no. 78 (1990): 180.

[33] In 1933 Bataille wrote a text "La structure psychologique du fascisme" in which he sees the unifying potential of fascism, which gives power to that which is neglected by the society and gives an immense power to the leader. Georges Bataille, "La structure psychologique du fascisme", *Hermès, La Revue*, 1989 / 2, nº 5-6, p. 141. https://ecole-lacanienne.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/3-G.-Bataille-1933-pdf.pdf, consulted 6 March 2024.

[34] This point was addressed by many scholars recently (e.g. A. James Gregor, *Totalitarianism and Political Religion, An Intellectual History*, Stanford University Press, 2012; Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, Princeton University Press, 2006) and even in the 1930s there were philosophers writing about the political or mythological aspect of the totalitarian movements (Eric Voegelin, Paul Ludwig Landsberg, Christopher Dawson).

elements of myth that could disintegrate the established social order. The headless figure symbolized the society without leaders and the man guided by his body rather than mind.

b) Myths of Hybrid Creatures in Immigration

The interest in mythical creatures and the theme of hybridity and metamorphoses became very attractive to Surrealists in the late 1930s. We find these themes discussed in magazines like *Minotaure*,[35] and they were also explored in the field, in contact with original and still living myths. These field trips took place even before World War II started, when some of the Surrealists visited America because of their interest in the Native American traditions. Kurt Seligmann traveled to British Columbia in June 1938. He was supported by the Musée de l'Homme to visit the Northwest Coast tribes and bring back some objects for the museum collections. In his article Seligmann noted that one of the Tsimshian men pointed out the parallel between Greek and Native American myths. He claimed "your minotaurs, your dragons and your sea monsters must be former totems."[36] Kidnapping of women by the animals or monsters was often seen as an honor in the history of the tribe, sometimes the woman died, other times she lived with the new animal family or returned to her husband. These animals were seen as magical and became totems and often they taught the tribe magic songs or predicted the future. This led Seligmann to think about the family emblems which use the animals as their symbols. One such emblem can be found in the family of Luxembourgers with a dragon emerging from a basket, representing Melusine. At the same time these relationships between man and animal, the hybrid creatures and the monsters of the myths were already explored in Surrealism. Max Ernst and Leonora Carrington had their emblematic animals and experimented with hybrid creatures in many of their paintings.

ENTRETIEN AVEC UN TSIMSHIAN

Summer by Leonora Carrington is a painting made in collaboration with Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp and Roberto Matta after her arrival in New

[35] The theme of totemism was already discussed in the journals *Cahiers d'Art* and *Documents* edited by Georges Bataille. Carl Einstein characterized the art of André Masson as a form of totemism in *Documents* 2, 1929, in his article "André Masson, étude ethnologique".

[36] Kurt Seligmann, "Entretien avec un Tsimshian," *Minotaure*, no. 12–13 (Spring 1939): 67.

York City in 1941-1942. It shows the interest in hybridity that permeated Carrington's work since the 1930s. The bird-like figure in the background was painted by Ernst, and there are other animals or hybrid beings that have symbolic meaning. The bison represented American nature for André Masson and other immigrants, in the background we see deer impaled on a pole, perhaps as a sacrificial offering, and a strange constellation of four tiger heads placed around a star with two figures resembling mermaids in the center of the composition. The left one has a bearded male face and the breasts of a woman. His crown, his trident-shaped tail, and the hooves at the base of his tail suggest that he may be Poseidon, god of the sea and horses. The one on the right has feminine features and in her hand, placed at the base of her tail, she holds a wheel (possibly a torture instrument). The wheel was one of the trials at the *Jeu de Marseille* (a tarot card deck designed by Surrealists before their exile), where it represented a symbol of the revolution, and it also appears in a few drawings by Carrington. It may refer to her self-identification with the martyr. In New York, she wrote in one of her letters: "Every time I cry alone, I put on the martyr's crown." Carrington layers different versions of herself into the painting, combining them with elements that resonate with her experiences and interests. Around 1942, these themes coincided with those of André Breton and Kurt Seligmann, especially that of the mermaid-like hybrid creature and a feminine martyr figure – Melusine.

c) Melusine, Nature and the Unknown in the 1940s

In 1943 Kurt Seligmann finished an image called *Melusine and the Great Transparents*. He implemented a motif of so-called cyclonic landscapes which he

had been working with since 1941.[37] Similarly to Masson's metamorphosis this unstable twisting motif was linked to the four elements believed to constitute the universe according to many traditions. In an image from the book *Mirror of Magic*, that Seligmann was working on during the 1940s, we recognize similar shapes vertically dividing the space. This image was entitled *The Chaos of the Elements*.

It appears in the chapter on alchemy and the process of making the Philosopher's Stone. Seligmann writes of the four essences in the universe (fire, water, earth, and air) and claims that there is a fifth essence that permeates everything. "It is the world's soul-spirit that animates all bodies."[38] This fifth essence is invisible and resides in matter, and whoever frees it can embrace all the creative potential of God. Inspired by Paracelsus he might be linking Melusine with one of the elements in his painting.

His cyclonic shapes can be interpreted as elemental forces of nature and because of the painting's title, we can understand these shapes as the "Great Transparents", supernatural beings postulated by André Breton in 1942.[39] Breton's Great Transparents were supposed to transcend man and the objective reality, they represented the unknown, but they also represented a force of nature. Perhaps this is why Seligmann linked them with the figure of Melusine, which, since its Romantic reinterpretation, had been associated with the power of nature. Melusine, represented here perhaps by the floating shape in the upper right corner, is different from the cyclonic forms. But similarly, she is more of an abstract shape, a supernatural creature rather than a figure.

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[37] He developed these landscapes by a "quasi-automatist process" in which he was "projecting broken glass through a slide projector and tracking the outlines of the image thus obtained." (Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 181.) Seligmann said about them: "They are landscapes, but they are not static. I call them cyclonic landscapes." (Timothy Baum et al., *Kurt Seligmann. First message from the spirit world of the object*, San Francisco, 2015, p. 60.)

[38] Kurt Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), 142.

[39] André Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Not," *VVV* 1 (June 1942).

Melusine was another important mythological figure explored by André Breton during the war. In 1944 he wrote a book *Arcane 17* during his stay on Bonaventure Island in Canada.[40] This book combines facts with fiction, similar to the original 14th-century story of Melusine. It is a poetic work about the power of love in situations of deep crises, where women are assigned the role of saviors. Breton combines various elements from Egyptian mythology, alchemy, and medieval legends, quoting romantic and hermetic authors, some of whom interpreted Melusine as an alchemical symbol, but throughout the book, he also creates his own complex symbolism. The title of the book refers to the practice of tarot, which Breton engaged with in the late 1930s and discussed with Kurt Seligmann, who wrote about tarot in *Mirror of Magic*. Seligmann characterized the figures of the cards as stimuli for clairvoyant individuals, who "mysteriously influence and awaken in us images of our unconscious."[41] Although many of the symbols may be linked to Christian iconography, Seligmann argued that they are of much older (possibly Egyptian) origin.

As Anna Balakin noted, the seventeenth card of the tarot comes after the cards of war and darkness in human hearts. "But after the fall of Lucifer suddenly the skies become luminous, and love and peace triumph through the intervention of the beautiful young woman who pours the contents of two urns upon the earth: containing love and intelligence."[42] The seventeenth card is assigned to the Morning Star, a symbol of hope. Traditionally, it is depicted as a naked girl pouring water from two vessels in a landscape with two trees, a bird, and stars. Roberto Matta, who designed illustrations for the book in 1945, almost perfectly replicated the composition found in *Mirror of Magic* and other traditional

[40] Breton worked on the book from August 20 to October 20 during his stay on the Gaspé Peninsula in the Canadian province of Québec. (Tessel M. Bauduin (ed.), *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics in Search of Marvelous*, New York / London, 2018, p. 95). The book is closely connected to Breton's own personal situation and his love for the Chilean-born writer Elise Bindorff-Claro, whom he met in New York in 1943. After their wedding, the couple visited the reservations of Native American tribes (Hopi, Pueblo, and Zuni) in Nevada.

[41] Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic*, 409.

[42] Anna Balakian, "Introduction," in *Arcanum 17*, by André Breton, trans. Zack Rogow (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 10.

images of the *Arcane 17*.[43] The woman stands with one foot in the water and the other one on the land, similarly to Melusine, who is in alchemical tradition associated with water and can connect the human and natural realms.

Melusine is Breton's main heroine in this book, but she is accompanied by two more figures. First of them is the star personified by a young woman and the other one is the Egyptian Goddess Isis. Melusine and the star are closely linked, because of the association of the star card with water that was a basis for the court of Mermaid (*sirène* in French) in the *Jeu de Marseille*. For example, Lewis Carroll's Alice designed by Wifredo Lam was a Mermaid of dreams (symbolised by black star).[44] The star represents the "harbinger of hope", she is the light-bearer (Lucifer), the Morning Star. Lucifer brings light of revolt, which is supposed to lead into liberty, poetry and love. The star can be seen as the one who leads into the unknown, similarly to the Great Transparents. As Daniel Zamani noted, the symbols of star and of Melusine / Mermaid appear in Breton's *Nadja* (1928) already. However, the character of Nadja and her relationship to Breton is very different. She is not a star herself, but rather a witness of Breton's quest for the star. Nadja identifies with Melusine in the story, and her poetic nature is attractive to Breton until she "transgresses the boundaries between poetic and the mad."[45] This dimension of Melusine (the danger of the unknown) is no longer present in *Arcane 17*, where she is attributed only a positive role.

The Egyptian Goddess Isis is the last heroine of the book, she is the one who "resurrects man". She is first introduced not by her name, but as a queen adorned with symbols of stars and the moon. Later, Breton retells the legend of Isis, the queen who reconstructs the body parts of her husband, Osiris, and brings him back to life. The story of Isis and Osiris played an important role in the mythological thinking around this time, not just in Surrealism. Osiris was the counterpart of Dionysus, he was the Egyptian god of the crops, new life and rebirth. After being killed and cut into pieces, he was healed by Isis, his wife. Jung saw Osiris as a symbol of "psychological transformation" and this interpretation made him a powerful

[43] Here we used the illustration from Rider-Waite tarot deck first published in 1909, image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Star_(tarot_card).

[44] Image from VVV magazine, No. 2-3, March 1943, p. 90.

[45] Daniel Zamani, "Magical Beginnings: André Breton and the 'Occultation of Surrealism,'" in *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity*, ed. Gražina Subelytė and Daniel Zamani (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2022), 29.

symbol for the experience of modern man during World War II.[46] Breton interprets Osiris in a similar way as Jung, as he talks about the "spiritual quest" in which "one must go to the depths of human sorrow, discover its strange capacities, in order to salute the similarly limitless gift that makes life worth living."[47] In the Egyptian myth, Osiris is killed by another male god Seth, and Isis collects the pieces of his body and heals her husband. This is what Breton highlights in *Arcane 17*. Isis and Osiris are often mentioned by Kurt Seligmann as well. He tells the story of Osiris's Journey to the Underworld and dedicates a lot of attention to Isis who symbolizes "gentleness, maternal constancy, devotion to husband, and the fertility and grace of woman" and is one of the forms of the mother goddess and according to Seligmann the highest representation of her.[48] In 1944 he painted the Egyptian goddess as a depersonalized composite figure.

Seligmann's *Isis* (1944) floats in the air, she is similar to his Spectres, phantoms and witches, she looks like an aristocratic figure with a crown with feathers and a layered flowing drapery of her dress. But the empty space around her and the cyclonic forms underneath point to her godly nature. She appears confident, carried by air. In the *Mirror of Magic*, Seligmann associates Isis with the World Soul from the 17th century. She still has attributes of Isis, "half-moon on her womb, one foot in the water, the other on land." From her breast flows the seed giving new life, she is connecting God and the man. Breton describes his goddess in a similar way: "her admirable body is now covered by a veil woven from stars and fastened with a moon over the junction of her thighs. Her hair, still uncoiled, supports a sparkling tiara in the shape of snakes and grains."[49]

[46] Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 132.
[47] André Breton, *Arcanum 17*, trans. Zack Rogow, introd. Anna Balakian (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 117.
[48] Seligmann, *The Mirror of Magic*, 72.
[49] Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 110.

Some of the elements associated with Isis by Breton and Seligmann can be found in one of Carrington's major paintings of the end of the war period, *The Giantess* (The Guardian of the Egg, 1946-1947). This monumental figure seems to symbolize the fertility of earth with her hair of wheat, and the egg she takes care of and the animals surrounding her. She connects the sky and the earth and guards the new life. Carrington might be inspired by the depiction of Isis in the Mirror of Magic, but also by the overall positive approach to femininity in the end of the war period. Women were often seen as healers, mothers, goddesses, they brought new hope for the future.

Melusine in *Arcane 17* embodies both an occult and Romantic aspect for Breton, who links her to the Hebrew letter pē פ, pronounced as "phay" (fairy). Like the Romantic Undine, Melusine is a water fairy, but she is also a hybrid being, highlighting the theme of metamorphosis (similar to other figures explored by the Surrealists such as the Minotaur and Gradiva). She is deeply connected to nature and the animal world, particularly through snakes and fish. By associating her with hope (through the figure of star) and healing (through Isis) she is endowed with more complex meaning then she ever had. The story of *Arcanum 17* has a happy ending, unlike other tales of Melusine. The heroine is redeemed and comes back to the human realm and with her she brings the lost connection to nature and the feminine powers that now belong to man as well.

d) Myth and War

Similarly to Melusine of the past, the avant garde reinterpretation has important political implications. Both of the myths explored by Breton during his exile, the newly fabricated myth of Great Transparents and the Melusine myth, have a strong political and ideological basis and react to the experience of the war. The Great Transparents symbolized the unreachable, which surpasses the human realm, Breton compares these imaginary beings to a force of nature, as he talks about the "perturbations like the cyclone, in the face of which man is powerless" or like war.[50] Breton introduced this idea for the first time in a programmatic text *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism*

[50] André Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else," *VVV* 1 (June 1942) 26.

or Else in the Surrealist magazine *VVV* published in American exile. The idea of these beings also manifested in artworks created by both European and American artists around the same time, such as the *Cosmogones* by the Surrealist painter Wolfgang Paalen or various transparent beings in Roberto Matta's paintings. In the same text cited above Breton mentions the need for a new myth.[51] This is one of the reasons why the Great Transparents were seen by many interpreters as the embodiment of a new myth that Breton started to talk about from the mid 1930s. They were also sometimes seen as a reaction to the war. Angela Miller wrote about Breton's *Prolegomena*: "clearly wary of the fascist misuses of myth, his strategy was to attack fascism with its own instruments, through a collective countermyth."[52] It is unclear if the Great Transparents are countering the fascist myth or if they somehow embody the fear and helplessness associated with the war.

However, the link between war and myth was clearly one of the central themes of the period for Breton. He addressed it in his speech to the students of French at Yale University delivered on 10th December 1942, where he talked about the fight against evil. He pointed out that Nazism and Fascism are not causes of evil, but its symptoms, its products. "There is Hitler and through him, underlying the most inexplicable racial persecutions, the revival of certain myths of Germanic origin, which seem incompatible with the harmonious development of humanity."[53] He blamed rationalism which failed in the time of war and recalled the main point of the Surrealist first manifesto, the liberation of the individual. He also talked about the "immense and dark region of the self where myths swell beyond measure, at the same time as wars are fomented."[54] Breton believed that the mythological sphere already exists and

[51] Minds very different from one another, but among the boldest and most lucid of our time – Bataille, Callois, Duthuit, Masson, Leonora Carrington, Ernst, Etiemble, Péret, Calas, Seligmann, Hénein – have all been irresistibly led to searching for a prompt answer to the question: can a society exist without a social myth?" – he reacts to this need – "To what extent can we choose or adopt and impose a social myth which we judge desirable?" (André Breton, *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else*, *VVV*, June 1942, p. 22)

[52] Angela Miller, "With Eyes Wide Open: The American Reception of Surrealism," in *Caught by Politics: Hitler Exiles and American Visual Culture*, ed. Sabine Eckmann and Lutz Koepnick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 77.

[53] André Breton, "Situation of Surrealism between the Two Wars," *VVV* 2–3 (1943), 45.

[54] *Ibid.*, 51.

Fascism is able to use myths to its advantage. He believed that Surrealism can also tap into this realm and explore myth as a possible defense against fascism.

The Melusine myth has a political and ideological dimension as well and it is clearly strongly anti-fascist. *Arcane 17* centers on beings that are seen as "the other", "the irrational, feminine side of things, which counterbalances the (masculine) rationalist realism that caused the crises."[55] Femininity is mythologised through the figures of Melusine, Isis and the star and seen as a healing antidote to the masculine energies. Breton reflects on war in *Arcane 17* and it is clear that the horrors of war were one of the main impulses for writing it. Melusine is seen as a saviour, a heroine rescuing humankind. "Melusina…, she's the one I invoke, she's the only one I can see who could redeem this savage epoch."[56] The mythologisation of femininity that can be found not just in this specific book, but in many Surrealist artworks and texts was widely criticized. While some critics saw the femininity of *Arcane 17* as empowering and feminist, others rejected it for its over idealisation and stereotyping of women. Daniel Zamani, who has focused on these aspects of Breton's approach to Melusine interprets the book as "nothing short of a revolution of the traditional male-female hierarchy," and sees Breton's turn to the fairy-woman "within the broader context of his search for a new myth, and especially one that was dedicated to the project of radical social and cultural transformation."[57] The figure of Melusine has to be according to him understood in opposition to the male Aryan hero of Nazi Germany.

4. Conclusion

Throughout this article we have explored the evolution of the Melusine myth. Its symbolic role has been shaped by the societal and political contexts of each era, from its medieval roots in dynastic power to its philosophical reinterpretation during Romanticism, and later, its resurgence in the surrealist movement of the 1940s. Since Romanticism, Melusine has been linked with the conception of New Mythology, poetic creation of new myths intended to change society, creating a new political as well as poetic foundation. On the other hand, she has been linked to the concept of *Bildung* as a constant self-development. Later Melusine became one of the mythological

[55] Tessel M. Bauduin, ed., *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvelous* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 148.
[56] Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 82.
[57] *Ibid.*, 82.

figures explored by the avant garde as a symbol of alternative power in the time of the war.

The figure of Melusine can elucidate some aspects of the problematic relationship between myth and power. To understand different ways in which myths are used by totalitarian regimes and the avant-garde, it is crucial to clarify the distinction between *totality* and *wholeness* in the use of myths. *Totality* refers to the myths of totalitarian ideologies, where they are manipulated to promote an all-encompassing, unified worldview, and to impose rigid, singular narratives on society. In this context, myths are used to suppress diversity and individuality, offering a singular, overarching truth that justifies absolute control. On the other hand, *wholeness*, achieved through the reconciliation of opposites, embraces the complexity and multiplicity of human experience. Myths like the one of Melusine don't represent fixed ideologies, but rather fluid, evolving symbolic narratives. These reinterpretations suggest a more open, expansive view of existence, where the myth serves to reflect the multifaceted character of identity, nature, and humanity and to counter the dominant narratives. In this perspective the myth also possesses a power of sorts. André Breton believed that the reinterpreted Melusine myth can counter the totalitarian myth of Fascism. This approach set an example for future work with mythological material as a tool in fighting oppressive unified worldviews. Myth has a suggestive power and if used as a tool for liberation can contradict the similarly attractive narratives of oppressive regimes.

This open counter-fascist view on myth should nevertheless be approached critically as well. One of the key dangers in using the myth of Melusine, especially through the Surrealist reinterpretation, is the potential for idealization and oversimplification of femininity. Melusine has often been portrayed as an embodiment of pure feminine power, healing, and nature, but this can reduce women to one-dimensional symbols. The romanticized image of Melusine as a savior figure, as seen in Breton's *Arcane 17*, emphasizes the nurturing roles for women and associates them with the irrational forces. This can be seen as a danger inherent to myths in general: in order to be evocative and carry clear messages, they reduce reality and have a tendency to create another absolute. However, they can bring new facets of meaning to the modern world when understood as one outlook among many on the complex nature of our reality.

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Symphilosophie

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On Popularity in Philosophy

(1797)

August Ludwig Hülsen

Translated, introduced, and annotated by Marlene Oeffinger*

The following text is the first of two philosophical essays that August Ludwig Hülsen published in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teuscher Gelehrten* in the span of two years. This first essay was initially written as a philosophical letter that resulted from Hülsen's discussion with August von Briest in Nennhausen[1], in whose house Hülsen worked as tutor after his return from Switzerland in 1797.

Although Hülsen would later become a staunch advocate of traditional philosophical discourse and Socratic dialogues[2], during his time in Nennhausen, Hülsen believed that during "verbal conversations about philosophical subjects [...] mutual recollections so easily interrupt the flow of free speech that our views become scattered." He therefore thought it necessary to recount the discussion in the essay translated here, to gain "a clearer and better overview of the whole" discourse. "On Popularity in Philosophy" was Hülsen's first published essay after his only book, the *Preisschrift*, had been released a year earlier, and offers a link to the manuscript's demand for

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1 Cf. Ulrich Krämer, "… meine Philosophie ist kein Buch". August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1809) (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2001), 320.

2 Philipp Friedrich August Wilhelm von Briest in Nennhausen (1749-1822), was the father of Caroline von Fouqué and father-in-law to the Romantic German writer Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouqué, a previous student and close friend of Hülsen (see Arno Schmidt, *Fouqué und einige seiner Zeitgenossen*. Edition Arno Schmidt Stiftung, Bargfeld: Haffmans Verlag, 1993, 149, 169).

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intellectual independence and autonomy from institutional authorities. Moreover, Hülsen also formulates a number of his principal theories that he further expanded upon in his remaining essays and posthumously published fragments.

The initial premise of Hülsen's essay is the assertion that philosophy as science of philosophers cannot be popular as it would inherently also become the science of non-philosophers. This contradiction, he suggests, can be solved by eradicating the distinction between these two. Hülsen considered philosophizing a human activity based on reason and therefore assumed the ability to exist in every human being. All human beings seek harmony between themselves and the world in their consciousness. According to Hülsen, this harmony already exists in the world, as both are one and the same consciousness. It merely requires recognition, and all can recognize it, not solely philosophers, as that would be in opposition to our consciousness and a delusion of judgment. This harmony takes philosophy from a mere thought to a living and intuitive act through its connection to the living human being and validates it as 'common knowledge', an *Allgemeingut*, accessible to anyone and independent from institutional authorities. Ultimately, Hülsen presents a critique of what he deemed to be self-declared philosophers, mere collectors of encyclopedic knowledge, but also of Kantian theories, especially the thing-in-itself, which he considered a weak point of transcendental idealism.

In the second part of his essay, Hülsen's focus shifts to one of his principal interests, formation (*Bildung*), and further expands some central theories of his *Preischrift*, in particular, the freedom of human beings, their own free self-activity as the ideal and infinite action, and actual intuition as feeling of their existence, as the real. He also develops his standpoint on intuition as a function of re-production (*NachBild*) —or re-formation— insofar as it constitutes an expansion of formation's sphere of action, the infinite progress of the rational act and potentiating of real to ideal through reproduction, an idealization of the world. It is these concepts that finally establish Hülsen's connection to the Jena Romantics and their ideas: the infinite progress and the expansion or multiplication.[3]

Hülsen continued his investigations into the phenomena of formation in his follow-up essay "On the Impulse of Formation" ("*Uber den Bildungs-*

[3] See *e.g.*, Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenaeum* Fragment 116 and Novalis's Logological Fragments I, 66 and 87 and Cf. Friedrich Strack, Martina Eicheldinger (eds.), *Fragmente der Frühromantik.* Berlin: De Gruyter (2011), 32; and *Novalis: Schriften. Die Werke von Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Band 2. P. Kluckholm, R. Samuel (eds.), Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (1975), 545, 550.

Trieb") published only a year later, although not as a letter as initially announced.[4] Both essays provide a clear vision of Hülsen's pedagogical interests and intentions, which he later tried to realize in his short-lived educational institution in Lentzke.[5]

[4] It is unknown why the follow-up essay published a year later, in 1798, in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teuscher Gelehrten,* was no longer entitled as a philosophical letter to Hernn Briest in Nennhausen, as their amicable relationship had not changed. Cf. Ulrich Krämer, *"… meine Philosophie ist kein Buch". August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1809)*, 327.

[5] In the Spring of 1799, Hülsen opened an educational institution for boys in Lentzke, a small village near Berlin, in a house and grounds that Fouqué had made available to him. His curriculum was founded on ideals of harmonious formation and self-formation of pupils amongst their peers as human beings, without textbooks and through Socratic method, the Maieutik, dialogue that should stimulate critical thinking and self-knowledge. The school closed in fall 1800 after the death of Hülsen's wife, Leopoldine. Cf. Ulrich Krämer, *"… meine Philosophie ist kein Buch". August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1809)*, 235-245.

Philosophical Letters to Mr. v. Briest in Nennhausen[6].

First Letter: On Popularity[7] in Philosophy.

(1797)

August Ludwig Hülsen

Our philosophical evening conversations, my honored friend, are always such a happy and pleasant recollection for me that I have wished to preserve the memory of those hours for you as well. I did not fear that truths which were once bright and alive in our minds could ever become alien to us: for what is ours, not as a mere word but as a self-acting power, remains ours, as long as we remain ourselves. But in verbal conversations about philosophical subjects, where we do not merely relate facts, but determine their relationship to our consciousness, mutual recollections so easily interrupt the flow of free speech that our views become scattered, and we are not always able to hold fast to the investigation of a task and survey it at a glance. I noticed this shortcoming in our conversations, which is precisely why I wished to make their recollection memorable in a different manner. With this intention, I recited our conversations every evening, tracing their memories back to individual key ideas, thereby gaining a clearer and better overview of the whole. From these materials, I am attempting to write the present letters. They are reminders of those beautiful evenings, and that is why I could not dedicate them to anyone with greater pleasure than to you, my sympathetic and participative friend.

Our first conversation was about popularity in philosophy.

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[6] The original German version of this text is entitled "Philosophische Briefe an Hrn. v. Briest in Nennhausen, Erster Brief, Über Popularität in der Philosophie" and was initially published in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teuscher Gelehrten*, edited by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, Vol 7, Issue 1 (1797): 71-103.

[7] In the Eighteenth Century, the term *Popularität*, borrowed from the French *populaire*, described a subject as understandable to all classes of a State, or generally understandable (see *Adelung Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, Ausgabe letzter Hand, Leipzig 1793–1801, Band 3). In this context, Hülsen refers here to a philosophy of the people (*Volksphilosophie*).

You had long tried to familiarize yourself with the critical System.[8] But your free genius was a creator of the beautiful, and you loved truth only in the contemplation of light and pleasing forms. Therefore, every cumbersome scholastic form had to contradict your sense of truth, and you could not persuade yourself that critical philosophy, shrouded in such a daunting [*abschreckenden*] and mysterious darkness, would ever reward you for the labor you would have had to devote to it in order to fully comprehend its lofty genius.

You demand of truth that it resides in the human being[9] in general, and that therefore, despite all its possible predicates [*Prädicaten*], it is still only one thing, namely human truth. As human truth, however, it should not be a mere thought, but should be real, like the human being who is only present and acts through his living power. You therefore want truth to pass into life, and to be and mean nothing other than our real life: that it should therefore, for the sake of its practical importance, be not only the highest but also the simplest thing for all of us.

This is how you determine the character of a true philosophy. The categorical imperative, the categories, the schematism, the antinomies of pure reason and the amphiboly of the concepts of reflection, as well as any old-fashioned and monastic school form, should be removed from it. You want clarity in our thoughts, through apt but simple images of nature. Lightness in every connection between expressions, through a beautiful and spontaneous representation of the whole. A truth that is quickly apparent in the harmony of reality, for all and every human being for whom their own existence and the existence of a world is consciousness and conviction through real feeling. You call this expression of a philosophy popularity [*Popularität*], and you demand it as necessary if there is to be any philosophy for human beings at all.

I certainly honor these free and unpretentious feelings, for they reveal the beautiful nature of the human being. But let the philosopher to whom you address your words judge you, and he must find your request entirely contradictory.

Only the philosopher, he will tell you, is a philosopher according to the principle of identity, and everyone else is not, according to the same principle. Therefore, philosophy, as the science of the philosophers, can never be

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8 Hülsen's reference is to Immanuel Kant's Critical Philosophy.

9 In the original German text, Hülsen uses the terms Mensch (singular) and Menschen (plural) to describe human beings in their context as social beings. Hence, it should be kept in mind that "human being" and "human beings" in the text are to be interpreted in this sense.

the science of non-philosophers without contradiction, and consequently can never be popular. The philosophy of philosophers is therefore necessarily only philosophical, and philosophy and popularity remain completely and eternally opposed to each other. This proof is correct, and even popular, for it asserted nothing other than that everyone is only what he really is, and thus among real people, who are what they are, there can be no dispute about it.

Yet the question remains: what is every person truly? And if the opposition between philosopher and non-philosopher could be eliminated here, then your requirement could still be applied and perhaps be justified.

You are now more familiar with the fundamental principles of [Kant's transcendental] Critique. It has become obvious to you that in all possible disputes we actually always argue about nothing: namely, never about something that truly is, but that only about something that was thought to be real, and consequently only about mere thoughts.

Mere [*bloße*] thoughts are, of course, also something, namely, truly mere thoughts. We therefore cannot argue about them either, insofar as we make them objects of our thinking. But if we think something and at the same time assert an object through that thought, then the thought has only truth if the object is real, and we can therefore relate it to this object through actual intuition. Where this not the case, the thought remains empty in its relation, *i.e.,* it refers to nothing and the claim to its truth is nothing more than a mere illusion in judgement.

Such illusions have always weighed heavily on us and caused conflict within ourselves. Wanting to eliminate them would mean to eliminate all philosophizing. But all philosophy consists of searching for truth, and the end of all illusion, the cognized [*erkannte*] truth, would therefore also constitute the end of all philosophy.

The call to philosophize lies in the necessity to make judgements. But all judgement concerns the relation of an object to our consciousness. We determine this relationship, and, in general, we judge it as one and the same. When we determine this relationship, we seek nothing other than harmony between ourselves and the object in the unity of our consciousness. Yet every object is our world; therefore, we seek harmony between ourselves and our world, and this harmony should be the relationship between the two as one and the same consciousness.

When we seek harmony, we seek a connection between opposites. However, we seek only the relationship of opposites to a consciousness, therefore only a cognition of their harmony. Consequently, no cognition of opposites is possible, *i.e.,* all opposition contradicts our consciousness, and

the harmony we seek between ourselves, and our world cannot therefore arise from actual opposition but must already exist and, as such, only be cognized.

Here, then, the ground for all our illusions was revealed. Namely, we deceive ourselves by assuming opposites that necessarily contradict every consciousness. If I judged of us, me to be a Kantian and you an anti-Kantian, and you judged the same, then we would proceed from opposites in our conversations, and the series of our ideas, originally separate, would, in their continuing consequence, never meet and each of us would be misleading one another.

I recall this with utmost forethought, in order to prevent all misunderstandings wherever possible. Even if illusions were necessary, it should not always be so. It was an illusion that the seekers of truth divided the human being [*den Menschen*] into body and soul and took one of it, the best half, under their care. In doing so, they separated themselves from the actual human being, who, however, they themselves were and necessarily remained, and existed as philosophers only in mere thought. Had they ever asked where the subject of these thoughts was, then they would inevitably have found the human being who is not distinct from the philosopher. The philosopher who lets the human being be what it is and does not make distinctions within it without a subject, is himself the real human being, and insofar ceases to be a philosopher. But if by the latter he designates an action of the human being which is necessary through reason in general, then he must predicate it to everyone, and therefore, once again, not separate the philosopher from the human being. That philosophy must also become alive and intuitive through this harmony follows from its connection with the real human being, and it is precisely in this respect that its demand for popularity can be justified.

But the actual human being, who willingly allows himself to be separated into body and soul, and accepts this deception within himself, cannot demand popularity in philosophy as long as he still leaves judgement to a high council of independent thinkers [*Selbstdenker*]. He should represent himself in his entire being and thereby abolish and destroy the delusion of representatives of philosophizing reason.

So do not consider me, my friend, to be a critical philosopher, in contrast to those who are supposed to be something different. What we all truly are, in the whole extent of our existence [*Daseysn*], is what we truly are as human beings, and what we divide in human beings is therefore never anything other than a thought without a subject. We are incapable of doing anything else. For he who divides the human being is the human being himself, as one [*als Einer*] in the whole extent of his existence. He therefore

divides nothing; for he [the one] and that which is to be divided are one and the same.*[10]

The philosopher is therefore only real insofar as he is a human being and thus cannot be opposed to the non-philosopher for the human being *is* a human being and not his opposite at the same time. If both meet as what they really are, they cannot be different in anything else, because their difference would have to be considered as false and consequently as nothing. The philosopher would therefore have to contradict himself and have no truth as human being if the non-philosopher could be put in opposition to him. However, the actual reconciliation [*Ausgleichung*] between the two really consist in the following: we can only conceive of the human being as practical being as he exists in his one and self-same activity [*Thätigkeit*]. If, therefore, being a philosopher expresses an act of a human being, then this act necessarily applies to everyone, as the human being is defined solely by activity [*Thätigkeit*] in itself and through which he is truly himself in the whole extent of his existence.

But the concept [*im Begriffe*] of the practical human being comprises infinite activity; however, this activity holds degrees of difference in the actual extension of the actor to infinity. Here, then, oppositions exist within the human being itself, through his continued acts, but no opposition of the human being to human beings. Each person can only ever compare himself to oneself, and never to another. All oppositions are therefore only degrees of difference in the actual extension of our own acting and must necessarily disappear from the true representation [*richtigen Vorstellung*] of the human being as a practical being in general.*

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[10] Throughout the translation, footnotes denoted by an asterisk are Hülsen's own notes as published in the original German text (cf. footnote 6 above).

* It has always been acknowledged that human consciousness is one and that the human being is but a stream within it. But it was said, we do not divide the whole human being through the whole human being; rather, the intellect [*der Verstand*] merely observes the former and finds the differences. This could certainly be understood if you had reason. But where did you get it, if not from the one and only real human being who first found it by dividing the divisible, and how do you avoid contradiction in this finding? Reason, as a part of the human being, is just as absurd as everything you share with it and through it. I certainly do not want to deprive anyone of their mind or reason. Everyone should keep it and just realise that it is one and the same eternal force that constitutes their entire existence.

* That we think of the human being as a being of the moment is precisely the reason for our oppositions [*Entgegensetzungen*], and we shall not avoid this illusion [*Täuschung*] until we have obtained a correct conception of time. In the human being, there is only one time through the identity of the acting agent, and we can only think of them as acting; thus, the concept of them also includes in their finite being. The moment remains in eternal extension, and with it, all oppositions fall away.

But the human being exists and acts everywhere only among human beings: a connection [*Verknüpfung*] of nature in which we all truly are and must all remain forever. The active existence [*thätige Daseyn*] of everyone, therefore, necessarily has a relationship to the active existence of all others, and just as human beings exist alongside one another, this relation of theirs is just as essential as they are inevitably human beings. There is no higher or simpler truth. For whoever wants to know and cognize anything must at least be himself and know and cognize it. Everyone is only who they are as far as they are among human beings.

The human being among human beings is therefore the highest condition [*Verhältniß*] for all harmony, and wherever we demand unity, in the sciences, in the arts, it denotes the human being among human beings.[11] But the human being is a free being, *i.e.*, he is only himself through his self-activity or through that power tied to it. Everyone, therefore, has only his own self-consciousness, and the condition [*Verhältniß*] of the human being thereby becomes a law for the will [*den Willen*]. The condition is based on free self-activity. But everyone is only with everyone else, or the human being only among human beings. Accordingly, everyone is a law unto himself in this condition.

This truth contains the concept of our entire practical existence. The human being is free, but only among other human beings. That the human being is a law unto himself, therefore means nothing other than this: all are laws unto each other, and each is a law unto all. But this also follows: that the original relation between human beings, as a law for the will is at the same time a demand on this will and, consequently, from all to each, and from each to all. What is therefore a law for me is for all others a demand on me, and this demand encompasses my entire active existence.

But the original relation between human beings—the free activity of each individual in relation to all others—at the same time implies a mutual recognition of this activity and would not be possible without it.

The human being among human beings, as a law unto himself, expresses this law in his actions when his own self-cognition is directed towards the self-cognition of others. I, as a rational being with freedom and self-consciousness consequently announce myself as such through the relation of my actions to rational beings with freedom and self-consciousness, and thus we recognize each other in our relationship as human beings. If this

[11] This is one of Hülsen's core arguments he will further elaborate on his other writings, namely that human being are free, equal and existent and realized as human being only amongst human beings (see A.L. Hülsen, "On the Natural Equality of Human Beings", *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): p 403).

mutual recognition is the law for the will, because only in this way is the human being among human beings, so is it also at the same time a demand on the will. Accordingly, all necessarily demand that everyone's active existence has truth and significance for the human being, and each demands the same recognition of their act [*That*] from all others.

The law is universal, and therefore so is the demand. As little as a human being can separate himself from himself, just as little can he separate himself from other human beings, as the one would be the other. But the demand is mutual and directed at the will; therefore, it is based on acts. If I am not to separate myself from human beings, then they too should not separate themselves from me. But my existence is practical, and so is the existence of all others, and the mutual demand is therefore based on an equal extension of our activity.

The fact that all our existence is purely practical is precisely what makes our relationship equal and eternal. It will not become so, it simply is. Everything that therefore emerges from the practical human being must necessarily emerge from these relations, or it would not exist at all. As a demand on the will, therefore, the free activity of each individual in its continuing, infinite expansion should always be the expression of that eternally equal relation. But the demand is mutual, and what is law for me is law for everyone.

The human being, as a practical being, thus has only himself, *i.e.,* the human being among human beings, as the law of his endeavors. His actions are infinite, and so is their subject. Yet he acts with consciousness, or according to purposes of his own, and he is, consequently, the ideal of himself in his actions, and every human being, as a free being, necessarily has only his own ideal and seeks only to realize it.

The ideal of each individual is their own free self-activity, as infinite action; and the reality of each individual is the actual intuition as feeling of their existence. Realizing one's ideal therefore means nothing other than acting in general, *i.e.,* intuiting oneself in reality. Thus, realizing one's ideal is inherent in the ideal itself, and just as the former is certain (my action in general), so this too is certain, for one is the other.

But all reality is the relation in one consciousness, *i.e.,* the human being and his world. Consequently, realizing one's ideal is to intuit [*anschauen*] one's self-activity as one's world. The world of every person should be the action of everyone, and thus practically emerge from him to completion [*zur Vollendung*].

But my action is not the action of another; yet it is the action of the human being among human beings. My world, which I intuit [*anschauen*] as

my action, should therefore be a relationship to all rational beings, and, consequently, my intuition should be their intuition, and their intuition mine.

But my action is mine alone. Therefore, all who intuit it must intuit it as mine, and so the world of every human being. It must emerge from everyone and be intuited by all as his world.

This alone provides us the explanation of our mutual relationship. What each one does is for all others only an intuition of his deed, and no one brought it forth but [he] himself.* Therefore, everyone is the creator of their own world, and no matter what lofty ideals one may strive for, everyone has but the highest and will realize it themselves. This is precisely what constitutes the character of a rational being. No one creates and forms the human being except himself; rather, this is the act of each and every one, and whatever I may do, I do it only for myself.

But I am the human being among human beings, and so is everyone else, and this is my ideal and the ideal of everyone else. If all intuit the completed action of all, then there is only one action and only one intuition: all in one and one in all. If the human being is the creator of himself among human beings, then our mutual demand too extends only to the mutual intuition of our reason [*Vernünftigkeit*]. It should be one and the same in all, and in order for it to be so, everyone has to realize the ideal of the human being himself.

The intuition of our reason, each for all and all for each, is therefore the general law of our mutual communication. The prerequisite for this is the identity of reason. There are no different types of reason [*Vernünfte*], but rather the human being, in his practical essence, or his eternal freedom, is one and the same with all. When the human being acts, it is a rational being who acts. Therefore, there can never be irrationality [*Unvernunft*] in human action for it would necessarily exist only in reason, which contradicts itself. Reason and irrationality are therefore not to be pitted against another [*entgegenzusetzen*], but everyone who acts tacitly demands that all others intuit reason in his actions. He who truly knows how to find reason everywhere is undoubtedly the more rational [*der Vernünftigere*]. He has a deeper insight into human beings and interprets their turmoil as quiet peace and every lament and every pain as joy yet to come.

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* This applies in the strictest general sense and therefore also concerns the relationship between master and servant, between princes and subjects. No human being has ever commanded or forced another human being. But what each one did, he did himself, and his act is never the act of another. The fact that we merely deceive ourselves in that respect is a consolation for the philanthropist; for thus we can know where we will end up when our delusions, as is inevitable, are one day dissolved by truth.

Just as there is one reason, so there is one world. Both are inseparable through their relation in one consciousness, and both are therefore one in their very being.

But the world is the intuition of the rational being. Accordingly, intuition lies within reason, and both are one and the same, or in other words: reason is only reason in its intuition of itself.

If I am truly only one in the whole scope of my existence [*Daseyn*], then, for me, there is also only one intuition of myself, or only one consciousness of myself. Therefore, intuition and consciousness are not opposed to each other but are entirely one and the same.

My consciousness is myself in my intuition. However, I myself am free activity [*Thätigkeit*], and my intuition is therefore the intuition of this activity, which is only what it is precisely for that reason. Accordingly, in intuition, the intuiting [*das Anschauende*] and the intuited [*das Angeschaute*] are one and the same.

Intuition itself is theory - from the Greek θεωρειν word[12] - so theory and consciousness are therefore not opposites, but rather the same thing. But he who intuits knows something. Accordingly, intuition and knowledge are not opposites either, but one and the same. If we nevertheless distinguish the two, we are merely distinguishing knowledge from knowledge, or intuition from intuition, and, consequently, only the degrees of light and clarity in one and the same undivided consciousness. If we set them in opposition to each other, it is just as much an illusion as if we were to set illness and health, evil and good, light and darkness, *etc.* in opposition.

Our knowledge is therefore always actual intuition, and where this is not, there is no knowledge for us; there is nothing for us at all. But if the intuition is only one in general, then the inner and outer are not opposed to each other but are only relations of one and the same. If the relations do not exist, then the intuition has identity and is complete [*vollkommen*[13]] intuition. Complete intuition should be the intuition of the human being among human beings, *i.e.*, what I intuit should be the intuition of all, and what all intuit should be my intuition. Then my consciousness and the consciousness of all rational beings are one and the same.

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[12] Ancient Greek, also *θεωρειν* (*theorin)*, of the mind, to contemplate, consider (see *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, eds. English Edition Madeleine Goh & Chad Schroeder, Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University, based on 3rd Italian edition (Loescher Editore: Torino, 2013).

[13] The German word *vollkommen* describes anything consisting of multiple single pieces, once all the pieces are joined together (see *Adelung Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, Ausgabe letzter Hand, Leipzig 1793–1801, Band 4).

My consciousness is my knowledge, and my knowledge is actual intuition. But I am only one in the free activity of myself, and so my knowledge as mine is also only one. Therefore, there is no opposition in consciousness and thus no consciousness of consciousness. Whenever we assert this [the latter], we merely denote degrees of difference in the clarity [*Deutlichkeit*] of one and the same consciousness. The higher clarity [*Deutlichkeit*] and purity in my consciousness is to draw closer [*Annäherung*] to the complete intuition of myself as a human being among human beings. Completion, however, is harmony, and only takes place in freedom in general, *i.e.*, in the ideal. If now in the ideal, as my free activity, lies at the same time also the realization of this ideal, and is both only one and the same, then the higher and purer intuition does take place in the harmonious extension of my free activity. This activity is the ideal, and its subject is the world. To realize the ideal therefore means nothing other than to idealize the world, and everyone necessarily does this as long as they act. For this very reason, there have never been any other human beings at the same time than idealists and realists, for the two cannot be separated as it is one and the same.

The ideal is thus realized through the ideal treatment of a subject. The subject exists [*ist da*] as the world in general, and it as reason in the intuition of itself. In intuition, therefore, that which is intuited is the real expression of the intuiting human being and consequently his image. Consequently, in the intuition of the world, the rational being sees itself, and therein, it is both one and exists at all.

But the fact that I exist at all, as free infinite activity, does not yet do anything for the world that is to be mine. Reason in general, or free activity, only means that there is a power to act infinitely; and—the world in general, or that which is the intuition of reason, means therefore likewise only that there is a subject for infinite action. This, then, is not reason which exists in general in the living expression: *I am!* but whose being [*deren Seyn*] is self-activity [*Selbstthätigkeit*] in infinite action. One can therefore not separate action from its being, as this is precisely what it consists of, and both are one and the same. The same applies to the world as the real expression of reason: that it is the world at all, in actual intuition, is not the world, but its being consists in the fact that it is in eternal becoming through the self-activity of reason, *i.e.*, through the infinite activity of the rational being. Therefore, its being and its becoming cannot be separated, but both are one and the same within it. If being and becoming are inseparably connected, then that which truly does not exist can never come into being. But what truly is, can not only become but must necessarily become because it is one and the same.

Reason *is*,[14] therefore means: it is acting. Its action consequently does not *become*.[14] But its action is an infinite extension of its power, and for this very reason it is eternally in the process of becoming, *i.e.*, its being [*Seyn*] and its becoming [*Werden*] are one and the same. So too is the world, as an expression of reason. It *is*[14], and not a speck of dust can vanish from the spheres, nor another emerge from its void [*Nichts*]. But it is, just as a self-acting reason *is*.[14] Consequently, it only *is* [14] insofar as it is acted upon [*behandelt*] – insofar as its being is in [the process of] becoming. This leads us to the correct conception [*Vorstellung*] of becoming. Nothing comes from nothing, for it is truly nothing: and everything that can and should ever become, is already real.* The being of reason, and consequently also its expression, the being of a world, is not a coming into being in time, and therefore not a becoming of being, because for every becoming it must already be. However, acting and being acted upon is the essence of this being, and both are therefore in the processes of becoming [*im Werden*] and are one and the same.

The world, as an expression of reason, is an image of reason in its self-intuition. Reason as acting is therefore formative. Consequently, all becoming is a formation of reason in the intuition of the world, and thus the formation of itself as the world in general.

If reason is only formative, and this is precisely its being, then the world is only one of reason insofar as it is formed, and this is precisely what constitutes its being. My world is therefore the one I bring forth through my formative activity, and that which is not my intuition is hence not my world.

Reason exists, and it is formative. Within itself, therefore, lies its own fulfilment, which will emerge from it in practical terms. Accordingly, everything exists, because the infinite exists and this infinite is the human being, in the free self-acting power that eternally forms itself as the world in general.

The human being forms [*bildet* [15]] himself and forms his world and is therefore one and the same. But he is only human in so far as he forms himself

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[14] Emphasis my own to clarify Hülsen's argument.

* The orbit of suns around suns in the infinite Milky Way is something quite definite and cannot come into being at some point. That is precisely why we are able to know it, and all of astronomy is only the science of what is [exists]. One would therefore misunderstand me if one wanted to cite tomorrow as truly non-existent, contrary to the established concept of becoming.

[15] Similar to the Jena Romantics, Hülsen plays on the double meaning of the word *bilden*, which is derived from both *ab-bilden* and *bilden*. The former denotes the act of giving something its external form, including in a concrete artistic manner, while the latter describes pedagogical formation (see *Adelung Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, Ausgabe letzter Hand, Leipzig 1793–1801, Band 1). See also Novalis's "Pollen Fragments", Fragment 32: "We are on a mission: the earth's formation is our vocation". ("*Wir sind auf einer Mißion: zur Bildung der Erde sind wir berufen.*") Novalis

and only through formation does he have an intuition of himself. The more the human being forms himself, the more he intuits himself, for his formation is his intuition. The higher and purer his formation, the higher and purer his intuition. The formative power is only one power and is the self-forming power. Thus, the formative and the formed are one, and neither can be separated from the other. The formative power, however, is an ideal power, *i.e.,* power in itself or self-acting power. It forms itself, or realizes itself, and is one and the same. Consequently, its formation is at the same time its expansion, and thus its every realization is at the same time an elevation of the ideal.

The elevation of the ideal, as forming through formation, or through realized activity, is an imitation of this activity. But imitation, as merely elevated formative power, is necessarily realized again, for power is formative in general, and so on into infinity. Therefore, the more formation there is in the human being, the more elevated and greater his subject becomes. Every act thus expands the sphere of our action, for formation and imitation are intimately connected, and neither can be separated from the other.

If the formation of reason is its own true intuition, then imitation is also nothing other than a higher and purer, *i.e.,* a reproduced, intuition of reason. Thus, true intuition becomes the subject of imitation. But in true intuition, reason and its expression are one and the same through the unity of consciousness. The subject of imitation is therefore this unity, or the relation of the intuiting and the intuited in one consciousness. Evidently, prior to this imitation no such relationship exists for the intuiting. Reason forms itself, or forms a world, which was one and the same. But precisely for this reason, in intuition itself, reason and its expression are also completely separate for the intuiting. That is to say: the intuiting sees only what is intuited and not the act of intuition that occurs at the same time. Accordingly, what is separate for the intuiting in intuition, namely world and reason, is reconciled again through the imitation of intuition. Both continue into infinity; for just as necessarily as the rational being forms and intuits its world, it also strives to elevate this intuition and to view itself as forming within it.

However, formation and imitation are one and the same activity of reason, and therefore the same unity of consciousness remains in them in ever higher degrees of light and clarity. In this unity, both constitute the whole essence of the human being, and for this very reason also encompass

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also uses *Bildung* both in the context of a concrete formation through acts, but also in a pedagogical sense: to educate the world (see Novalis, *"Blüthenstaub". In Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar,* edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 163.

[*umfassen*] the whole field of the so-called sciences and arts. As reason acts, it forms and forms itself. Anything else is impossible, and it is therefore itself a necessary law of its own formation. Yet it acts freely, so its formation is also a free formation. Insofar as this is the case, its subject is the highest expression of its freedom, and it is called nature. But insofar as its being is a free formation, its action expands into an ever-increasing skill, which is called art, and its subject, nature, therefore becomes a subject of art. The two can never be separated from each other. Just as human beings are, so is nature, and just as nature is, so do the human beings form it, *i.e.*, make it dependent on their free activity. The organ of our senses, in all its modifications, is closest to us. We learn to see and to hear and to move freely, and in all these things, the human being is the first artist.

I call formation in general an art, and imitation a science. Art and science must therefore be as inseparable in the nature of reason as formation and imitation: art as practice, science as theory. There can be no objection to this division. For to regard the action of reason as an art is a perfectly correct conception [*Vorstellung*] for our reflection [*Reflexion*]. What matters is not to interrupt that action through our conception, but to think of it as infinite. Insofar as it is free action, it is not art, but the nature and essence of reason. Reason should also attain this nature in practice, *i.e.*, through art, and perfect art would therefore be nothing other than the highest freedom of human beings. In this concept nature and art coincide, and that is why we must also regard nature as perfect art. We do not proceed any differently in our observations. We have always thought of the creator of the world as an artist who, according to a conception of purpose, has arranged the whole, and thus we considered the creation of a world to be an art. In the reproduction[16] [*Nachbildung*] of our intuition of the world, we find this artist in the unity of our consciousness, since the intuiting and the intuited are one and the same. Whatever exists is complete as such, for being cannot first come into being. Such is reason in its self-activity, and the world as its expression. But that which is only acting, is also only completed in action and consequently extended into infinity. Such is reason as a formative power, and the world as its subject.

Only through action is intuition possible: thus, only through practice is theory possible. But formation and reproduction are inseparable, and by reproducing intuition, action is expanded; consequently, practice is also

[16] Hülsen considers *nachbilden* not as a mere imitation but a reproduction or re-formation which as act of the human being – artist or otherwise – constitutes an expansion of formation and of the sphere of action towards an ideal (see also Ulrich Krämer, *"… meine Philosophie ist kein Buch". August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1809)*, 324-325).

expanded through theory. But reason itself is practical, and, accordingly, so is its reproduction. Theory therefore expands into infinity in that it expands art, and art expands it in turn, and so art and science are one and the same formation of reason.

If our knowledge is only a reproduction of the actual [*wirklichen*] intuition, then there is no knowledge without this intuition, *i.e.*, all our knowledge must relate to it, just as it is one in it through the unity of consciousness.* If our knowledge relates to actual intuition, it does so through an image that must correspond to the expression of reason, namely the image in intuition. This is then called the original image [*UrBild*], the other the 'after-image' or reproduction [*NachBild*]. If the original image were not ours, and thus not an expression of our reason, then the reproduction would also remain unattainable: for the latter is nothing other than the former in its relation to reason, *i.e.*, the ideality of all that is real. Therefore, it is unreasonable to speak of a thing-in-itself and a substance of representation that would be given to us from the high heavens.[17]

In reproduction, actual intuition is our subject, and action is the same free activity. Accordingly, we must also freely produce the reproduced image (through imagination) and give it form [*Haltung*] through actual intuition. This form, as the reality in the intuition of the reproduced image, is likewise freely created, and consists in the formation of sounds and their signs, or of language in general.

Our language, in its entirety, is therefore an expression of reason through which the reproduction of actual intuition takes form within us, and itself becomes an actual intuition. I call this form the presentation [*Darstellung*] of intuition, and thus there is no reproduction of intuition anywhere without it being presented as such, *i.e.*, brought to life for the mind. The reason for this lies in the fact that reproduction in general is based on the whole intuition in its relation to consciousness, *i.e.*, on the intuiting and the intuited at the same time. It is a free production [*Hervorbringen*] of the imagination and consequently an act of reason. However, all acts of reason

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* It does not at all follow from this that experience is the source of our knowledge; for in intuition, we comprehend the intuiting and the intuited as one in consciousness. It is therefore only asserted that every act of reason is based on intuition and every intuition again based on an act of reason. The *a priori* and *a posteriori* are therefore one in consciousness, and neither can be separated from the other.

17 This is Hülsen's critique of Kant's thing-in-itself, which, in Kant's terms, we cannot know. Rather, Hülsen argues that a thought that presents a thing [*Gegenstand*] can only be true if the presented thing is present in the world as otherwise not only would the thought be empty, but it would also refer to nothing and thus be a mere delusion of judgment.

necessarily find expression in the subject and would not be an action without it. Reproduction, therefore, as free self-activity, is expressed in actual intuition, and this intuition is sound or language and its signs.

If all our reproductions are based on actual intuition, then there cannot be a single word or sign in the entire extent of language that is not derived from some action of reason and therefore has truth and meaning through an actual sensation [*Gefühl*]. In this sense of the word, no single expression can be completely empty; rather, each must find its subject in an intuition, or else it would itself be completely impossible. It would therefore only matter that we always pointed to this object and thus justified our expression in reference to it. Our whole task in reproduction would then consist solely of choosing the right image for each expression in its presentation, and thus completely assure its truth. In this respect, the representation of a golden mountain is not empty. It is based on the intuition of gold and mountain, and its truth resides in this connection. However, if we connect in reproduction what is not connected in the actual intuition, and nonetheless demand that it be so, then our demand can solely have practical significance and is only correct if the action does not contradict itself and is therefore a real action. We then want such an actual intuition and therefore form its subject; but theoretically, our demand would necessarily be an illusion as it were not yet actually theoretical, *i.e.*, not yet real intuition. This is the case, for example, with popularity in philosophy. No one can tell us where it is truly found, or that this or that is really popularity. If it does not contradict itself in itself, we can only comprehend it in practical terms and will therefore, on the one hand, have to limit our presumptions and, on the other, define our demands more precisely.

Further investigation of this matter shall constitute the subject of my second letter[18] to you, to which I have merely sought to introduce with the above remarks. Just one more comment: I could initially not determine whether the question of popularity would also first appear in the free spirit of the human being. It really does appear there for the first time, if it is at first given up. Everything comes together in one, and we embrace the whole from any given point. Let each one see to it, however, that they do not appear as a fragment in the estimation of themselves and thus try at least to justify the

[18] Although not entitled "Philosophical Letter to Mr. von Briest in Nennhausen", the second letter mentioned here is likely Hülsen's essay on "On the Impulse of Formation" ("*Über den Bildungstrieb*"), which was published a year later, in 1798, in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teuscher Gelehrten*, edited by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, Vol 9, Issue 2, pp 99-129.

idea of the whole. Those who, like Mr. Schmid[19] and Mr. Mellin[20], have brought reason into alphabetical dictionaries, choose the letter P for the place of inquiry into popularity; and this spirit of order has its basis in their categorical imperative, in the spirit of which they verily act. For me, this imperative means: do what you like! That is what I do and therefore let others do the same.

[19] Carl Christian Erhard Schmid (1761-1812) was a German theologian and philosopher and was the most prominent supporter of Immanuel Kant's writings. In the 1786, he published his written notes on his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which he delivered at the University of Jena, as: *Critik der reinen Vernunft im Grundrisse zu Vorlesungen, nebst einem Wörterbuche zum leichtern Gebrauch der kantischen Schriften.* Jena: Cröker, 1786. In the 1790s, his book became a main point of reference for studying Kant's philosophy. (See Klemme, Heiner F., Kuehn, Manfred. *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016: 146; 685f.).

[20] Georg Samuel Albert Mellin (1755-1825), a German theologian and philosopher, was best known for his encyclopedia of Kantian terms and concepts, the *Encyclopädisches Wörterbuch der Kritischen Philosophie oder Versuch einer Fasslichen und Vollständigen Erklärung der in Kants Kritischen und Dogmatischen Schriften Enthaltenen Begriffe und Sätze: Mit Nachrichten, Erläuterungen und Vergleichungen aus der Geschichte der Philosophie begleitet, und Alphabetisch Geordnet.* Züllichau und Leipzig: Frommann, 1798. (See Klemme, Heiner F., Kuehn, Manfred. *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016: 518).

Book Reviews

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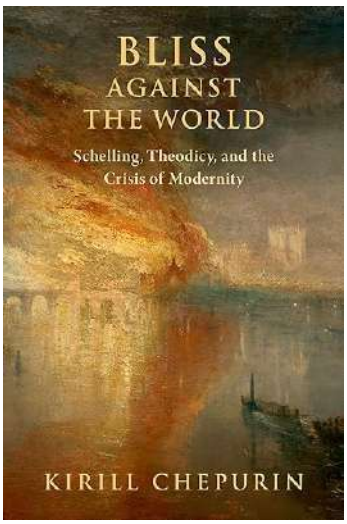
Schelling on Trial

Benjamin Norris[*]

Kirill Chepurin, *Bliss Against the World: Schelling, Theodicy, and the Crisis of Modernity*, Oxford University Press, 2025, 374pp. ISBN 9780197788899



1. Introduction: Challenging Schelling

All interpretive disagreements aside, readers agree that F. W. J. Schelling is a challenging thinker. Taken individually his works are difficult, and when taken as a whole they are even more so. Kirill Chepurin's *Bliss Against the World: Schelling, Theology, and the Crisis of Modernity* fully embraces this and is itself a challenging work in several senses. Not only does it challenge the reader to confront Schelling's writings as intentionally and unintentionally exemplifying a historical crisis lying deep at the heart of the modern world; it

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likewise challenges Schelling himself in his attempts to thematize a resolution to this crisis. Schelling's work, argues Chepurin, both arises from and stands in opposition to the historical and ultimately cosmic crisis of theodicy. Chepurin focuses on what he describes as the "antagonistic entanglement" (2) of Schelling's notion of bliss [*Seligkeit*] and his theorization of (and out of) the modern world. If Schelling is indeed a student of bliss, then he is simultaneously an engineer of the world's annihilation. Yet, as Chepurin argues, the way out of the world is not a simple matter throughout Schelling's thought. Schelling both challenges the world and its theodical structure, but his embeddedness in this very world in turn challenges him in his attempts to overcome it.

2. Bliss, Modernity, Self-Assertion

The interpretive difficulties that arise in relation to Schelling's project span from his own lifetime and persist equally in ours. Like diving in a cave, it is essential to find a guide line to which one can tether oneself. Bliss serves as Chepurin's guide line throughout *Bliss Against the World*, and rightfully so. Bliss is a particularly secure point of orientation because "the concept of bliss remains stable even as Schelling's concepts of freedom, identity, and the absolute undergo metaphysical shifts" (4). Importantly, bliss is related to these central Schellingian concepts of freedom, identity, and the absolute, yet "these other concepts are ultimately more limited than 'bliss'" (4). There is an immediacy to bliss, a kind of un-determining indeterminacy, which perpetually opposes it to the structures constitutive of the modern world: "In bliss" Chepurin explains, "all negativity and alienation, all imperatives of work and production, are dissolved into a state of absolute oneness, indifference, and non-relation" (6). Bliss, Chepurin will argue, harbors a kind of revolutionary energy situated within its utopic, spectral presence in any site of resistance to the world.

Unlike bliss, the world is characterized as a prison of negativity, relational opposition, and alienation. This form of the world, Chepurin argues, is thoroughly entangled in the "general Christian contradiction" succinctly understood as a "threefold structure of alienation between God, nature, and the human" (119). In chapter 1 Chepurin outlines how Schelling (along with Hegel) initially theorizes the crisis of modernity as an historical crisis arising from within Christianity's attempt to subdue Gnosticism, foreshadowing Hans Blumenberg's analysis of the modern age and its legiti-

macy.[1] "With Christianity" writes Chepurin, "an abyss is opened between the divine and the worldly, and so mediation – the stabilizing Christ-function – assumes the central place" (36). The structural need for mediation between the worldly and the divine entrenches division, alienation, and negativity at the core of the modern world. As Chepurin shows in Chapter 1, for Hegel and Schelling in their 1802 essay "On the Relation of the Philosophy of Nature to Philosophy in General" "modernity is *the* epoch of contradiction and *krisis*" (39). *Krisis* "is also a trial (*Gericht*) and a judgment (*Urteil*), in which the world is judged to be ungodly, alienated from God" (31). Significantly, to inhabit the *krisis* of modernity it to be constantly on trial, awaiting judgment and sentencing. The waiting here is essential, and this once again ties back to the conflict between Christianity and Gnosticism insofar as "in its opposition to apocalypticism and Gnosticism, Christianity made the move of postponing the end of the world" – the end of the trial – "making room for the world *in* its not-yetness" (33). Christianity, in its attempt to tame Gnostic apocalypticism, relies on a structure of deferral, of endless continuance, and perpetual delay.

The combination of the "not-yetness" of salvation and the inescapabilty of the world from within the world leads to a specific subjective constitution, one of demiurgic self-assertion thematized by Chepurin in Chapter 2. The demiurgic subject is always subjected to a demand from the world and this demand underlies the structure of modern freedom: "The freedom of the modern subject of self-assertion, as always subject *in* the world, is at the same time deeply unfree" writes Chepurin (79). Salvation is always temporally not-yet, and the burden of attaining the unattainable is embedded within the very structure of modern subjectivity. This pernicious combination only further entrenches the subject within the world's structure of alienation. According to the logic of self-assertion, the absence of salvation and the ultimate justification of the world is *my* fault. If only I try harder, if only I toil further in the alienation of the world, perhaps the not-yet can become the now; if it does not, then I have failed. Through the demand of self-assertion, the world immanently recreates its constitutive structure of alienation. Chepurin ties this demand of self-assertion to what he calls "the fundamental ruse of theodicy", namely "to make the subject spiritually invested in the way of the world and in working endlessly on the world, through the promise of fulfilment and bliss in the future" (16). This promise, Chepurin argues

[1] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999).

throughout *Bliss Against the World*, is always broken – not contingently due to our individual failings but necessarily due to the structure of the world.

3. Cosmic Theodicy, Blissful Methodology

Whereas Chapter 1 and 2 outline the antagonistic relationship between bliss and the world as a historical problem as well as the demand of self-assertion that perpetuates the structural alienation of the world thereby foreclosing bliss, this final chapter of Part I reads Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie* as an attempt to philosophize from bliss. The identity philosophy or philosophy of identity is one of the most complex and perplexing periods of Schelling's philosophical output. It stands between his early transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie* on the one hand and his later philosophy of freedom and philosophy of revelation on the other. Chepurin argues that the identity philosophy works to resolve two interrelated issues. First "it must present an alternative to the modern standpoint of alienated thought, religion, and science, and to the modern primacy of dirempted subjectivity" (120). Secondly, "the identity philosophy must point a way beyond the structure of alienation, a way that would not simply reject but reconcile the modern world, incorporating into the standpoint of true philosophical science the central results of modern philosophy and individual sciences" (120). The identity philosophy is faced with two competing demands: to think the primacy of bliss while simultaneously incorporating the dirempted structure of the modern world within this arche-original bliss. This is, in short, an impossible task. "In the identity philosophy" Chepurin writes, "the All is immediately one with itself and absolutely blissful, even though what we perceive as finite things are not" (123). Here we see the tension that emerges within the identity philosophy. It begins with bliss insofar as in A=A (the formal expression of identity with which Schelling begins his exposition) "there is no self-relation in the pure '='" (126). Because of the absence of self-relation, the "=" becomes the mark of bliss. Yet, and herein lies the problem, "there can thus be no science at the standpoint of bliss, and science is what Schelling wants to have" (128). So, though he begins with bliss, Schelling is once again drawn back into the world. The identity philosophy is still at pains to incorporate within this blissful unity the fractured structure of the world.

Significant in the relation between bliss and the world in the identity philosophy is the dependence of the latter on the former. Importantly, bliss is not understood as something that transcends the world. Because it begins with bliss, the non-relational "=" of A=A, the "dirempted world cannot

ground itself; it is needy, and dependent on the bliss that it forecloses and pulls apart" (129). Bliss is not "outside" of or transcendent to the world. Instead, Chepurin continues, "it is what underlies the world […] Bliss persists *below* the imposition of the world and erupts materially *against* it" (146). However, despite beginning in bliss and acknowledging the blissful foundation of the world, the identity philosophy too falls victim to the theodical structure of the world outlined in Chapter 1. Consequently,

> Schelling universalizes the constitutive tension between bliss (as world-annihilation) and theodicy (as world-justification), inscribing this tension into the heart not just of the Christian-modern trajectory, but of cosmic history as a whole (157).

Modernity is no longer simply a historical problem; its alienated structure has become the structure of the universe itself. The crisis is no longer merely historical; it has become cosmic. It is this cosmic crisis Schelling constructs and confronts in his post-1809 work.

Chapter 4 begins Chepurin's exploration into Schelling's post-1809 work with a discussion of the Fall. Schelling had long been interested in the narrative of the Fall, but following the 1804 *Philosophy and Religion* this narrative begins to take on renewed metaphysical significance. Like the identity philosophy, the story of the Fall begins as a story of bliss. "The paradisial state of the human is the primordial oneness (*Ur-Einheit*) and consciousness (*Urbewusstsein*), in which divine freedom or 'eternal freedom' rests in itself and the human rests at its center" (186). Consequently, in this condition "there is here no opposition of forces, only their perfect indistinction" (186). Like the A=A that opens the identity philosophy, this paradisial state is one of bliss and without world. Because of the Fall from the Edenic paradise "human consciousness finds itself amid multiplicity, in a scattered postlapsarian state that is alien to the oneness that consciousness used to enjoy: in the first state of alienation" (189). This, of course, is the world. Schelling further argues that the individual retains a memory of and longing for lost bliss. The world works against this memory of lost bliss, and subjectivity remains within its demiurgic form dependent upon self-assertion. Following the expulsion from paradise Adam must *work*. As we have seen, this self-assertion perpetuates the world that forecloses bliss because "bliss is the eternal *now*, but one cannot attract or seize it, master or possess it without thereby foreclosing it" (197). Once again, Schelling finds himself writing of a trial, the cosmic trial of justifying the universe. What produces difficulty is that in this trial, Schelling serves as both prosecution and defense.

In the second part of Chapter 4, Chepurin outlines Schelling's philosophical method through which the promise of bliss is maintained. This presentation of the "fundamental operations" (202) of Schelling's philosophical method begins to reconcile the tension in the identity philosophy between bliss and the world. Even in the face of subjective self-assertion, Schelling attempts to hold onto the promise of bliss. Schelling deploys these philosophical operations to salvage bliss as theorized in the identity philosophy in light of this system's failure. In short, if the identity philosophy failed because it sought to see no evil, Schelling's post-1809 thought attempts to correct this error specifically.

Briefly, Chepurin outlines five stages in Schelling's philosophical method. There is something therapeutic about Chepurin's account insofar as the subject must undertake each of these operations to achieve the proper place through which philosophical construction can take place. The first operation is purification. However, this first operation is insufficient because for Schelling philosophy is "tied to the structure of twoness, since the possibility of the world is thinkable only through twoness, not oneness" (204). Philosophy and bliss are therefore non-identical, and to philosophize one must "maintain reflection even in the face of bliss" (204). The second and third operations are associated with self-emptying and self-sacrifice modeled by the figure of Christ. Through these operations, one enacts a process of "de-subjectivication" and a "giving up of self-assertion" (204). Chepurin continues "this double operation of self-emptying and self-sacrifice enacts the Pauline-Christian logic of diminution and restages the sacrificial kenosis of Christ in his choice to submit in death to the will of the Father" (205). These operations are ones of submission. This submission is also an operation of mediation insofar as "'Christ' names for Schelling the operation of *mediating what is fallen toward the higher, or toward the universal, through which fallenness is redeemed*" (207). In this Christian-theodical structure, the promise of redemption is once again formulated as a "not-yet"; in short, the jury is still – and will forever remain – out. The fourth operation Chepurin names "polar construction". The first operation was characterized by the tension of bliss and twoness, the second and third by the submission of the lower to the higher, this fourth operation is characterized by a struggle between higher and lower. The lower has subordinated itself to the higher and this submission has generated an opposition. The fifth and final operation is anamnesis. As we have already seen, there is an anamnesis operative in the first operation of philosophy. It is through this moment of anamnesis that "the universe calls the human, and that which the philosopher enacts – again, as a prefiguration of the absolute state in which humanity will have re-

collected universal reality in bliss" (214). Through this analysis, we can see that the human begins in bliss, falls from this bliss, and subsequently works to reinstitute bliss as the universe.

This brings us to what I see as the most ambitious chapter of *Bliss Against the World* in which Chepurin reconstructs the cosmic trial that structures Schelling's attempt to theorize the system of the world. If Chapter 3 presents Schelling's first attempt at systematizing a metaphysics of bliss, Chapter 5 presents his second attempt, revised in light of the philosophical methodology outlined in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 Chepurin draws extensively upon Schelling's 1821 Erlangen lectures titled *Initia philosophiae universae*. Turning to this understudied series of lectures allows Chepurin to reconstruct Schelling's cosmic narrative from a novel perspective. These lectures develop upon the theodical trial of the *Freiheitsschrift* and the *Weltalter* project while transitioning to Schelling's later project of positive philosophy. Chepurin initially describes this "universal history" as "a process of turning and re-turning, one that is at once circular and ascending, so that the *figure* of history is an ascending spiral of spirals" (220). The theme of ascension from lower to higher is important to keep in mind, and I will return to it shortly. Chepurin continues, noting that "the *rhythm* of this universal spiral" is

> the two-part movement of Fall and redemption, in which fallenness is identified with opposing the higher or the divine, or asserting oneself *against* the higher, and redemption with kenosis as the Christ-operation of re-inversion, self-emptying, and free submission to the higher (220).

The philosophical method outlined in Chapter 4 sits firmly within this drama of Fall and redemption. Kenosis and renunciation are prerequisites for anamnesis and ascension. In Chapter 5 this dizzying spiral of ascension continues to be oriented around the promise of bliss. We again find Schelling struggling to reconcile bliss and the fallenness of the world. Further, we see how for Schelling, this spiral of spirals takes the form of a cosmic trial. Thus, even though it begins and ends in bliss, it simultaneously works against the appearance of bliss in the world. The world always posits bliss as a "then" or a "later" and never as a "now".

In the post-1809 writings, Schelling holds true to his earlier Gnostic insight. "Since its inception, the world has been at war" writes Chepurin,

> The universe that Schellingian God creates is disharmonious and unblissful, and in this continuing disharmony that the modern subject

> continues to inhabit, we hear an echo of the cosmic war that made the universe the way it is (233).

Despite attempting to resolve the conflict that emerged in the identity philosophy, the tension between identity, individuality, and evil, this post-1809 cosmic drama is again framed by the trap of theodicy. Consequently, "due world-process must be upheld: this is the law" (241). Chepurin continues "the law ensures that everything is at once differentiated or brought to light, assigned its place, and subordinated to a higher movement" (250). The law ensures that everything remains in its proper place. Further, it mobilizes what is designated as lower in the service of what is designated as higher. This structure of division, segregation, and subordination is crucial for both the cosmic drama of Chapter 5 and the analysis of bliss and race in Chapter 6.

4. World, Race, Redemption

Chapter 6 forces us to consider the elements of Schelling's philosophy that contemporary readers are likely to cast aside as an unfortunate residue of his time, namely his racism and his justification of enslavement and colonial expansion. Chepurin demonstrates how these elements are not ornamental flourishes that can be easily dismissed. Instead, they follow logically and necessarily from the core metaphysical and methodological commitments of Schelling's philosophical project. The logic of the law and the subordination of the lower to the higher discussed above carries with it normative Anthropological consequences despite being couched in metaphysical and theological language. This chapter returns to a discussion that begins in Chapter 3 regarding Schelling's comments on colonialism. "This cosmic viewpoint" writes Chepurin,

> engenders Schelling's *planetary and cosmic legitimation of the modern age*, including the colonial violence that is constitutive of global Western-centric modernity: specifically, the European conquest and extermination of the indigenous South American peoples who still worshiped the sun and were thus a scattered remnant of humanity's solar past (150).

Importantly, Schelling is not simply acting as an apologist for the violent practices of colonialism. Instead, he inscribes these practices as a necessary component of humanity's task: "For Schelling, even in its violent expansion, modernity is driven, consciously or not, by a higher mission: to unify humanity" (151). This is subsequently connected to the specifically Christian

character of Schelling's cosmic picture. Chepurin explains "humanity may be fragmented, yet these fragments must be reassembled into a oneness of consciousness and oneness of knowledge, and this is the Christian-modern mission" (152). The importance of this analysis is that it recognizes the *contingency* of Schelling's claims that Christianity provides the structure of intelligibility for world history.

Chepurin's intervention on this topic is timely and much needed. Many scholars of the late Schelling take for granted the historical process by which Christianity violently imposed itself upon the world. History was not Christian from the start; instead, Christianity – through conquest, colonial violence, and proselytizing thinly veiled as pedagogy – forced its ideology into the logic of history. Though proponents of Schelling's late philosophy emphasize its empirical, historical methodology, they often fail to consider this darker history of Christianity while simultaneously arguing for the universality of Trinitarian theology.[2] Chepurin provides a crucial correction to this naivety arguing that

> the "re-" of the modern subject's re-assertion and recentering marks the colonial dimension of modern self-assertion as co-imbricated with Christianity, for it is Christianity that teaches the European subject to take its central place for granted as the divinely-guaranteed place of

[2] Take as an example Sean J. McGrath who writes "Schelling insists, in no uncertain terms, that Christianity is the true religion, the culmination of human religious history; that the essence of Christianity consists in the succession of theism by Trinitarianism; that the history of the Trinity is narrated, not deduced (even if anticipation of the logical structure of the Trinity is native to reason); that the narration is based on certain historical facts (the events recounted in the New Testament), which can be reasonably defended in a fully secular context; that the Trinity is the proper explication of the Christ event; and finally, and most importantly, that Christianity is not yet finished. As the future religion *par excellence*, Christianity will only be complete when the world becomes Church" (Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive*, (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 17). Here we see McGrath completely sidestepping the actual history of Christianity and the methods by which it became a global religious force, referring only to the narrative of the "events recounted" in the New Testament (a document of questionable historical accuracy in the first place). Further, we find him confirming in an affirmative tone precisely what Chepurin critiques in the Christian-modern grammar of the world: first, the drive to force the whole world to become Church, and second the deferral of the salvation that would follow this reconciliation. Schelling may insist upon this point, but why should its conclusion be immediately granted to him? The virtue of Chepurin's analysis is that is refuses to accept Schelling's claims as true on their face. Perhaps, as Chepurin argues, this insistence of Schelling's "in no uncertain terms" is actually a *problem* for Schelling and should be a problem for us as well. We do neither Schelling nor ourselves any favors by letting him off the hook on such important issues.

> truth, salvation, and progress, no matter how "secularized" or "metaphorized" these categories become in modernity (303).

Chepurin connects this logic to Schelling's idea that the higher develops out of the lower by enforcing its subordination outlined above, what he calls the due process of the world. The law of the world is itself racialized thereby justifying not only colonial expansion, oppression, and missionary violence but rendering it metaphysically necessary: "European colonialism and the hierarchized and racialized distribution of humanness are, in Schelling, conditions of possibility of the absolute future" Chepurin writes (317). Because the human posited as the summit of creation is the white, European, Christian man, all other forms of humanity must be mobilized via subordination in the service of universalizing this specific formation of humanity. Again, even in Schelling's own thought the worldly operations of division, segregation, alienation, and domination overcloud the promise of bliss.

5. Gnostic Romanticism, Cosmic Pessimism

As Schelling was finishing his final lectures and the final days of his life, a new philosophical tradition was rising, namely the tradition of late 19th century German pessimism. Frederick C. Beiser, in his study of "*Weltschmerz*" or "world pain" explores the philosophical impact of "a mood of weariness or sadness about life arising from the acute awareness of evil and suffering."[3] Weariness, sadness, evil, and suffering are all central aspects of the grammar of the world described by Chepurin. Arthur Schopenhauer, the founding father of 19th century German pessimism, largely understood himself as resurrecting the "forgotten" dignity of Kant's Critical philosophy, dismissing the immediate post-Kantians as obscurantist fabulists. For Schopenhauer, Schelling stands between Fichte ("the father of *sham philosophy*") and Hegel (who appropriated Schelling's Fichtean method into "real charlatanism"[4]). Obviously, Schelling's cardinal sin according to Schopenhauer is the methodological fuel he provided for Hegel's nonsensical fire. Schopenhauer's well-documented dismissive attitude toward the post-Kantian philosophical tradition would seem to imply that there is little continuity between the idealists and romantics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries on the one hand and the pessimists of the second half of the 19th century on the other. However, if Chepurin's narrative is correct,

[3] Frederick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860-1900*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

[4] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 12-13.

Schopenhauer and the pessimists who followed in his wake can be understood as realizing (or at the very least continuing) Schelling's Gnostic vision while at the same time abandoning its countervailing worldly impulses. In other words, what differentiates Schelling from the *Weltschmerz* pessimists is his refusal to give up on bliss.

I will focus briefly on only one example, namely the largely forgotten Philipp Mainländer. Among the pessimists, Mainländer represents perhaps the most extreme spokesperson of the school's Gnostic impulses. *The Philosophy of Redemption* was his sole philosophical work and upon its publication he hanged himself at the age of 34. Therein Mainländer argues that "simple unity, God, fragmented itself into a world"; subsequently this simple unity "perished and disappeared entirely."[5] Or, as he vividly puts it earlier in the text "God has died and His death was the life of the world."[6] To translate this into Schelling's vocabulary, bliss is gone, and *this death of bliss* is why the world is as it is. Whereas Schelling seeks to keep hold of bliss in the face of the world, Mainländer jettisons divine unity and turns instead to nothingness writing "we gaze aghast or in profound satisfaction upon absolute nothingness, absolute emptiness."[7] Bliss is gone, the world must go next and we along with it. For Mainländer, we must choose satisfaction over terror in the face of the absence of any alternative fate. The advantage of Mainländer's pessimistic-Gnostic metaphysics is that, though deeply pluralistic in his understanding of the independence of finite things, it is not at all dualistic when it comes to the world and the shattered unity from which it came. That unity is gone; it is only a memory and any recovery is ultimately a fantasy. As noted above, for Chepurin "bliss persists *below* the imposition of the world and erupts materially *against* it" (146) so the relation between bliss and world is not strictly speaking dualistic in a metaphysical sense, but there is a kind of logical dualism – or as Chepurin might put it a grammatical dualism – between the identity of bliss and the dialectical multiplicity of the world. The question, then, is if bliss itself is not just a fantasy, just another promise generated by the world-torn philosopher. Chepurin has argued convincingly that Schelling needs both bliss and the world, but do we?

Chepurin demonstrates elsewhere that the romantic tradition harbors within itself a conflict similar to Schelling's; on this point Schelling is an

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5 Philipp Mainländer, *The Philosophy of Redemption*, trans. Christian Romuss (Brisbane City: Irukandji Press, 2024), 269.

6 Mainländer, *The Philosophy of Redemption*, 95 (italics removed).

7 Mainländer, *The Philosophy of Redemption*, 289.

example and not an exception.[8] Further, for authors such as Mara van der Lugt, defining pessimism as the opposite of optimism overlooks the deeper significance of the tradition.[9] She instead frames pessimism as a philosophical tradition attuned to the reality of suffering that provides a unique answer to questions of theodicy. She argues that the pessimist's orientation toward suffering does more than simply lead them to their dismissive views on existence as a whole. Centering suffering as a core aspect of human life provides an important ethical insight, and even a wellspring for ethical action as an attempt to reduce suffering. In this way, Schelling's theory of bliss fits squarely within the pessimistic tradition insofar as bliss is never a reward to be dispensed *after* one suffers the world's diremption, punishment, and evisceration. Schelling, as presented in *Bliss Against the World*, is also attuned to the problems of theodicy and the (universal) suffering *of* the world, yet it is unclear to what extent this *krisis* orients him toward the (particular) sufferings *in* the world, as shown by the discussion of race and colonialism in Chapter 6. Why does Schelling condemn the world in general as a prison of pain and alienation while at the same time mobilizing the sufferings of non-Christian, non-"Western" peoples in service of European salvation? One answer is that these positions are a result of the worldliness of Schelling's philosophy despite its attempt to thematize a cosmic vision of bliss.

As noted above, Chepurin frames Schelling as an explicitly *apocalyptic* thinker desiring the blissful annihilation of the world while simultaneously reinscribing the theory of bliss into the traps of theodicy understood as a structure of deferred judgment and delayed redemption. Schelling's idealism and romanticism harbor within them a darker thought insofar as they arise in response to, yet still remain symptomatic of a fundamental crisis embedded within the ontological structure of the Christian, modern world. This modern world is broken, and God stands over this broken world as both judge and jailer. God is not only the Lord of Being [*Herr des Seyns*], as the late Schelling argues; He is likewise Being's warden. This characterization of the world arises from within Schelling's own thought, but so too does the possibility of bliss. Yet, *Bliss Against the World* cannot accurately be described as an inherently pessimistic text. Chepurin highlights moments of bliss occurring throughout and despite the theodical foreclosure. He proposes the presence of a "*counter-tradition of bliss against the world*", one that

[8] See Kirill Chepurin "Romantic Bliss—or, Romanticism Is Not an Optimism", *European Romantic Review* 32:5-6 (2021): 519-534.

[9] Mara van der Lugt, *Dark Matters: Pessimism and the Problem of Suffering* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

> non-hierarchically encompasses nomadism and mysticism, blackness and hidden divinity, magic and the mysteries, the bliss of laying on water and looking at the skies and that of the all-consuming revolutionary fire (340).

For example, Magic, is "the underside of modernity that modernity forecloses yet longs for" (56); nomadism "is thus a 'wandering, roving,' non-positional and nonproductive form of being that refuses all hierarchy or place" (336). The practices of magic and nomadism embody the refusal of bliss to bend to the laws of the world. Even in the cells of the pre-trial detention facility that is the world, bliss remains. It may be hidden, but it is still there. The conflict between bliss and the world is inescapable, providing both peril *and* promise. This, I would argue, is the optimism that remains within Schelling's theorization of the cosmic trial as presented by *Bliss Against the World*. Judgment, as a structure of the world, may never arrive, yet bliss as an abolition of the world remains possible. In fact, the argument Chepurin so artfully frames goes further: bliss is a *necessary* condition for the world. The question, then, is if the possibility of bliss that stands against the world is another attempt to offer consolation in the face of suffering, failing to fully acknowledge the reality of individual sufferings that cannot, and ultimately should not, be sublated into a narrative of redemption. It is difficult to answer this question briefly, so I will leave it hanging.

6. Conclusion: Returning to Bliss

Bliss Against the World is a challenging and timely work. Most of this piece has focused on the challenges presented by Chepurin – both the challenges of Schelling's philosophy and the challenges to which his philosophical project ought to be subjected. To end by foregrounding the work's timeliness I want to close with the following: "Bliss" Chepurin writes, "does not judge: it cuts through, burns down, collapses, refuses, or simply does nothing in the face of the world's imperatives of production and work" (341). Bliss cannot be "found" because it resides in no place, yet for the same reason it can never truly be lost. It cannot "save" *us* because it is never ours, but at the same time it is the world which makes us feel in need of salvation. Bliss is here, but we forget it when we remember only ourselves. It slips through our fingers when we believe it can be grasped through more vigorous acts of self-assertion. In these moments, it is difficult to think of anything we need more than bliss. In response, let us cut and burn, let us raze, and let us rest. Let us no longer be ourselves – let us simply do nothing. Then we can exhale, lay upon the waters, and possibly even leave the world behind.

Symphilosophie

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Manfred Frank, *Die Struktur der Subjektivität: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Dieter Henrich*, Vittorio Klostermann, 2024, 220 S., ISBN 9783465046448

Manfred Franks neues Buch *Die Struktur der Subjektivität* entwickelt sich aus einer intensiven, zugleich kritischen und konstruktiven Auseinandersetzung mit Dieter Henrichs Ansatz. Dieter Henrichs Theorie des „anonymen Bewusstseins" gehört zu den bedeutendsten Antworten der zeitgenössischen deutschsprachigen Philosophie auf die Frage nach der Subjektivität. Ziel dieser Theorie ist es, die Grenzen klassischer Selbstbewusstseinsmodelle zu überwinden, die auf reflexiven Akten beruhen, und das Verhältnis zwischen dem Subjekt und seiner unmittelbaren Selbstgegebenheit neu zu bestimmen.

Frank versucht, durch sorgfältige Differenzierungen und eine methodisch kontrollierte Annäherung im Spannungsfeld zwischen Phänomenologie und analytischer Philosophie die Entstehung des Selbstbewusstseins aus nichtreflexiven Strukturen heraus verständlich zu machen. Die Leitfrage des Buches lässt sich durch ein prägnantes Zitat von Novalis zusammen-fassen: „Was die Reflexion findet, scheint schon da zu seyn" (S. 34). Obwohl die Komposition des Buches zunächst etwas fragmentarisch erscheint, entfaltet sich im Verlauf eine kohärente innere Bewegung. Die Abschnitte folgen einer Entwicklung, die vom klassischen Reflexionsmodell mit seinen Paradoxien über alternative Modelle einer nicht-egologischen Subjektivität bis zu einem dynamischen Verständnis von Identität und Differenz reicht, wie es sich in den Denkfiguren Sartres und Schellings zeigt.

Bevor man sich dem Gedankengang des Buches nähert, sollte eine zentrale strukturelle Unterscheidung im Verständnis von Subjektivität geklärt sein, wie sie sich in unterschiedlichen Formen bei Gurwitsch, Henrich und Frank findet. Ein zentraler Punkt in Henrichs Theorie ist die Unterscheidung zwischen zwei Formen der Subjektivität: dem erkennenden Subjekt („egologisch"), das dem kognitiven Denken zugeordnet ist, und dem erlebenden Subjekt („nicht-egologisch"), das Träger eines passiven, vorreflexiven

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Bewusstseinsstroms ist. Henrich verweist in diesem Zusammenhang auf die Konzeption eines „anonymen und passiven Bewusstseins“ bei Gurwitsch, einem Schüler Husserls, um die nicht-egologische Dimension weiter zu konturieren (S. 62, 109). Innerhalb des Reflexionsmodells wird Bewusstsein nicht als Produkt der Reflexion verstanden, sondern durch sie als bereits vorhandene Schicht des Erlebens freigelegt. Diese Auffassung vertreten sowohl Gurwitsch als auch Husserl (S. 113).

Im ersten Teil des Buches beschreibt Frank das Grundmodell reflexiven Selbstbewusstseins, legt dessen innere Widersprüche offen, insbesondere die Gefahr zirkulären und regressiven Denkens, und beginnt seine Analyse mit einer kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit Heideggers fundamentalontologischer Geschichtserzählung. Heidegger betrachtet die Philosophiegeschichte seit Platon als eine „Verfallsgeschichte der Ontologie“ (S. 30), in der das Sein zunehmend im Modus des Seienden als Objekt des Bewusstseins verstanden und vom Subjekt begrifflich vereinnahmt wurde. Diese Entwicklung führt nach Heidegger schließlich zur „Machtergreifung“ (S. 29). Henrich hält diese Sichtweise für „ingeniös, aber grundverkehrt“, weil sie übersehe, dass das Bewusstsein eine eigene Struktur habe, die nicht auf subjektive Macht reduziert werden könne. Henrich widerspricht Heidegger, dass das Subjekt seit Descartes nicht als autarkes Prinzip, sondern als ein relationaler Begriff zu verstehen sei, dessen Struktur auf Abhängigkeit vom Sein beruht. Im Anschluss an seine Kritik an Heidegger richtet Frank den Blick auf die erste Ebene dieser strukturellen Unterscheidung, nämlich auf das reflexive Modell, das eng mit der Konzeption des erkennenden Subjekts verbunden ist.

Frank, wie Henrich, diagnostiziert im reflexiven Modell ein grundlegendes Problem: Es führt zu einem Zirkel und einem Regress, da jede Reflexion bereits ein sich selbst bewusstes Subjekt voraussetzt und somit den Ursprung des Selbstbewusstseins nicht erklären kann (S. 51). Zunächst analysiert er die sogenannte „*De-Se*-Theorie“, wonach sich das Subjekt in der ersten Person selbst zum Objekt wird. Die Entwicklung dieser Position verfolgt Frank von Fichte über Hölderlin und Novalis bis zu Castaneda, Perry, Lewis und Chisholm (S. 46–48). Im Zentrum steht die Unterscheidung zwischen Selbstkenntnis in der ersten Person und Welterkenntnis in der dritten. Veranschaulicht wird dies durch zwei Beispiele: Ernst Mach erkennt sein Spiegelbild zunächst nicht als sich selbst (S. 39), was auf die Differenz zwischen Selbst- und Objektwahrnehmung verweist. Lewis’ Gedankenexperiment der „zwei Götter“ (S. 41–42) zeigt, dass vollständiges objektives Wissen nicht genügt, um zu wissen, wer man ist, wenn die erstepersonale Perspektive fehlt. Auch die HOT-Theorie (*Higher-Order Thought*,

Rosenthal), die Bewusstsein durch höherstufige Gedanken über eigene mentale Zustände erklärt, und die SOR-Theorie (*Same-Order Representation*, Gennaro), die von gleichstufigen Repräsentationen im selben Ordnungssystem ausgeht, gehen davon aus, dass ein Inhalt erst durch Reflexion bewusst wird. Henrich hält dem entgegen: „Man kann nicht dadurch, daß man auf etwas reflektiert, den reflektierten Sachverhalt überhaupt erst zu Bewußtsein bringen“ (S. 53). Diese Analyse zeigt, dass das Reflexionsmodell zwar zur Beschreibung kognitiver Strukturen geeignet ist, jedoch die präreflexive Dimension des Selbstbewusstseins kaum zu erfassen vermag. Aus dieser Einsicht ergibt sich für Frank die Notwendigkeit eines Übergangs zu einem nicht-egologischen Subjektverständnis, das den zweiten Teil seines Buches strukturell trägt.

Der zweite Teil bildet den theoretischen Kern seiner Argumentation. Frank knüpft an Henrichs Funktionsmodell an, das zwischen dem erkennenden und dem erlebenden Subjekt unterscheidet, interpretiert es jedoch neu und entwickelt es im Licht einer phänomenologischen Analyse weiter. Während das egologische Subjekt mit dem kognitiven Vollzug des *cogito* verbunden bleibt, erscheint das nicht-egologische Subjekt als ein passives, anonymes Bewusstseinsfeld, in dem sich Erfahrungen wie Schmerz, Begehren oder Liebe zeigen. Dieses anonyme Bewusstsein entzieht sich einer begrifflichen Fixierung und vollzieht sich in einem präreflexiven, passiven Feld (S. 68). Henrich betont, dass beide Modi funktional miteinander verbunden, aber nicht ableitbar sind und keinem gemeinsamen Prinzip unterliegen (S. 65, 70). Frank folgt dieser Differenzierung, rückt jedoch eine zentrale Differenz zu Henrich ins Zentrum: die Frage, ob im Rahmen eines anonymen Bewusstseins ein Ich-Prinzip notwendig bleibt. Frank kritisiert, dass Henrichs Modell Spuren eines kantisch geprägten Ich-Prinzips nicht vollständig hinter sich lässt (S. 75). Um diesen Einfluss zu korrigieren, bezieht er systematisch Positionen aus der angloamerikanischen Debatte zum Selbstwissen ein, etwa Überlegungen von Larmore, Shoemaker und Burge. Diese verbindet er mit Husserls Theorie der passiven Synthese sowie mit Gurwitschs Konzeption eines Bewusstseinsfeldes. Frank vertieft Henrichs Differenzierung zusätzlich durch eine Analyse des „inneren Zeitbewusstseins“, insbesondere Husserls Konzeption von „Retention“, „Urimpression“ und „Protention“. So begreift er das Bewusstseinsfeld als dynamisch und differenziell, nicht aus einem Ich-Prinzip ableitbar, sondern durch eine vorbegriffliche Struktur bestimmt, was bedeutet, dass seine Ordnung unabhängig von einem aktiv handelnden Subjekt ist (S. 111). Sein Einwand richtet sich letztlich gegen Henrichs Tendenz, dem aktiven Ich-Prinzip und dem „Ich denke“ eine konstitutive Vorrangstellung im Aufbau des Bewusst-

seins zuzuschreiben. Frank plädiert für eine stärkere Berücksichtigung jener anonymen und vorreflexiven Strukturen, die dem Bewusstsein bereits vorausliegen und dennoch Erfahrung ermöglichen (S. 86–111).

Besonders eindrucksvoll gelingt ihm die Auseinandersetzung mit Sartres Versuch, das Ich aus der Anonymität des Bewusstseins herauszubegreifen. Sowohl Sartre als auch Gurwitsch verstehen das Ich nicht als ursprüngliche Struktur, sondern als ein nachträgliches, funktionales „Nebenprodukt" des Bewusstseinsprozesses (S. 116). Ein zentrales Beispiel in Sartres Analyse ist das Problem der Selbsttäuschung des Bewusstseins (S. 150). Er greift Husserls Theorie des Zeitbewusstseins auf und verbindet sie mit dem Gedanken der Präreflexion, um die Ambivalenz von Liebe und Verstellung zu beschreiben. Liebe erscheint als Spannung zwischen Retention und Protention, die nur besteht, wenn sie im *Moment* jeweils neu gestiftet wird (S. 151). Frank kritisiert, dass Sartre das Ich zu direkt aus der anonymen Bewusstseinsstruktur ableitet und dabei die kognitive Dimension des erkennenden Subjekts ausblendet (S. 156).

Im dritten Teil des Buches richtet Frank mehr Aufmerksamkeit auf Sartres und Schellings Überlegungen zur Einheit des Subjekts. Sartre, der Husserls Intentionalität folgt, lehnt jede Objektivierung des Bewusstseins ab. Für ihn bedeutet Selbstbewusstsein nicht Reflexion (S. 167, 169). Entscheidend ist der minimale Unterschied zwischen Bewusstsein und Objekt, eine Differenz ohne substanzielle Identität, ein Abstand, der nur in der Form eines Sich-nicht-Unterscheidens bestehen kann. Sartre schreibt: „Im Bewusstsein haben wir nicht mit Identität, sondern nur mit Indifferenz zu tun, mit einem Sich-nur-nicht-Unterscheiden" (S. 166). Aus dieser Perspektive versteht er das Bewusstsein als ein Nichts, das wie ein „Parasit" auf dem Sein ruht und selbst keine Substanz besitzt (S. 173–174). Frank hält diese Konzeption für unzureichend, um die tatsächliche Differenzierung des Bewusstseins zu erklären. Er bringt daher Schellings „Potenzenlehre" ins Spiel, die Einheit nicht als Gegebenes, sondern als dynamisch entstehende Struktur innerhalb eines differenziellen Prozesses begreift (S. 184). Diese Idee vermeidet die Reduktion auf entweder Natur oder Geist und eröffnet eine neue Möglichkeit der Vermittlung beider Seiten. In Schellings Denken erkennt Frank eine realistische Alternative zu Sartres negativer Ontologie. Diese Perspektive erlaubt es, anonyme Passivität mit konstitutiver Dynamik zu verbinden. Trotz seiner theoretischen Präzision verzichtet Frank am Ende des Buches auf eine abschließende Antwort zur Frage nach dem Ursprung des Selbstbewusstseins. In einer Haltung philosophischer Zurückhaltung, die Heidegger als „Frömmigkeit des Denkens" beschrieben hat, bleibt die Frage

bewusst offen. Der Ausgang bleibt unbezeichnet, gerade weil das Denken selbst sich nicht abschließen lässt.

Insgesamt liegt mit diesem Werk eine herausragende und zugleich fesselnde philosophische Untersuchung vor. Manfred Frank zeigt darin nicht nur eine beeindruckende Vertrautheit mit primären und sekundären Quellen, sondern auch ein feines Gespür für grundlegende philosophische Fragestellungen. Sein Denkstil ist sowohl vorsichtig als auch präzis, und seine Ausdrucksweise besitzt eine stilistische Kraft, die in der heutigen akademischen Philosophie, die zunehmend von formalisierter Argumentation und sprachlicher Verarmung geprägt ist, nur noch selten anzutreffen ist. Besonders hervorzuheben sind mehrere Aspekte des Buches: (1) Erstens zeigt sich eine bemerkenswerte philosophische Ambition und kritische Schärfe. Frank übernimmt nicht nur Henrichs Kritik am klassischen Reflexionsmodell, sondern entwickelt sie weiter, indem er eine struktur-theoretisch fundierte Analyse des Bewusstseins vorlegt, die Erfahrungsnähe, Dynamik und phänomenologische Tiefenschärfe miteinander verbindet. Es handelt sich dabei nicht um eine bloße Rückkehr zu Denkern wie Fichte oder Novalis, sondern um eine reflektierte Fortführung der Traditionen des deutschen Idealismus und der Phänomenologie. Frank arbeitet aus diesen Traditionen jene Elemente heraus, die auch heute noch von theoretischer Relevanz sind, und formuliert sie in einer gegenwartsbezogenen Weise neu. (2) Zweitens gelingt es ihm, den historischen Kontext der kontinentalen Philosophie mit der sprachlichen Klarheit und Argumentationsschärfe analytischer Denktraditionen in ein fruchtbares Verhältnis zu setzen. Besonders in seiner Auseinandersetzung mit der ersten-personalen Perspektive und dem Problem des Selbstwissens bezieht er sich sowohl auf Husserl als auch auf analytische Philosophen wie Perry und Shoemaker. Diese Verbindung zweier philosophischer Strömungen, die im deutschsprachigen Diskurs nur selten systematisch aufeinander bezogen werden, verleiht Franks Denken eine besondere Offenheit. Sie zeigt seine Fähigkeit, strukturelle Spannungen nicht nur zu analysieren, sondern in den Aufbau seiner Argumentation produktiv einzubeziehen. (3) Drittens zeichnen sich seine Auslegungen der Philosophie Heideggers durch bemerkenswerte Präzision und Tiefe aus. Ebenso beeindruckend ist die feine Unterscheidung, die er zwischen dem frühen und dem späten Husserl im Hinblick auf den Begriff der Subjektivität vornimmt. Diese differenzierte Lektüre zeigt, dass Frank in vielerlei Hinsicht als ein ausgewiesener Kenner der phänomenologischen Tradition gelten kann. (4) Viertens überzeugt seine Analyse des Begriffs des „Bewusstseinsfeldes“ durch besondere Klarheit und theoretische Fundierung. Frank weist diesen zentralen Begriff der Phänomenologie weder zurück, noch reduziert er ihn auf bloße

Terminologie. Vielmehr gelingt es ihm, mit analytischer Genauigkeit und konzeptioneller Aufrichtigkeit eine gedankliche Bewegung nachzuzeichnen, in der das Bewusstseinsfeld als ein offenes, sich allmählich entwickelndes Strukturelement sichtbar wird. Unter seiner Leitung entfaltet sich dieser Denkweg ruhig und konsequent und entgeht dabei jenen theoretischen Sackgassen, die Heidegger als „Holzwege" bezeichnet hat.

Trotzdem zeigen sich bei der Lektüre des gesamten Werkes einige Stellen, die zur Diskussion stehen. Erstens kritisiert Frank Henrich dafür, in der Struktur des Bewusstseins ein „aktives Prinzip" einzuführen, und betont stattdessen die Rolle von Passivität und Anonymität. Dabei bleibt jedoch die Dimension der transzendentalen Intersubjektivität auffallend randständig. Möglicherweise hängt dies damit zusammen, dass der Andere in seiner Argumentation bereits als Teil einer reflexiven Struktur mitgedacht wird. In diesem Rahmen erscheint der Andere weniger als genuine Differenz, sondern eher als ein Spiegelbild des Selbst. Diese Sichtweise erinnert stark an Passagen aus Husserls *Cartesianischen Meditationen*. Obwohl Frank die Bedeutung des „inneren Zeitbewusstseins" und der „passiven Synthese" in Husserls phänomenologischer Reduktion anerkennt und darin eine Überwindung des aktiven Prinzips bei Henrich sieht, bleibt die vermittelnde Funktion der transzendentalen Intersubjektivität weitgehend unberücksichtigt. Diese ließe sich jedoch auch als ein verbindendes Prinzip zwischen dem „nicht-egologischen" und dem „egologischen Subjekt" verstehen, eine Funktion, die dem Begriff des Bewusstseinsfeldes strukturell nahesteht. Daraus ergibt sich eine weiterführende Frage: Könnte es sein, dass die vorreflexive Selbstgegebenheit nicht ausschließlich dem anonymen Bewusstseinsstrom entspringt, sondern ihren Ursprung gerade in der Intersubjektivität hat?

Zweitens entsteht in Franks Versuch, Idealismus und Phänomenologie zusammenzubringen, eine gewisse Spannung. Er verbindet verschiedene Theorien auf geschickte und konsistente Weise, aber gerade dadurch entsteht ein ambivalentes Bild, das an die Struktur eines objektiven Idealismus erinnert. In einem solchen Rahmen scheint die Beziehung zwischen Selbst und Anderem nicht mehr im Mittelpunkt zu stehen, vielleicht sogar überflüssig zu werden. Zwar kritisiert Frank Sartres Theorie, weil sie die kognitive Seite des Bewusstseins vernachlässigt, doch mit der Einführung von Schellings Gedanke, dass das Sein dem Bewusstsein vorausgeht, ergibt sich eine neue Spannung. Das Bewusstsein muss sich einerseits aus dem Bewusstseinsfeld ergeben, andererseits aber seine vorreflexive Struktur bewahren. Es muss sich dem Anderen annähern und zugleich Abstand halten. Diese Beziehung erinnert auf ethischer Ebene an Sartres Analyse der Liebe. Eine momentane

Nähe lässt sich nicht in eine dauerhafte Einheit überführen. Was bleibt, sind flüchtige emotionale Spannungen. In diesem Licht wirkt Liebe wie eine subjektive Fiktion: Das Subjekt täuscht sich selbst, wenn es behauptet, ein höheres Wesen zu lieben, und auch dann noch versichert, es werde weiter lieben, wenn die Gefühle längst nachgelassen haben. Solch ein Versprechen ist aus ethischer Sicht kaum mehr als eine leere Geste, so wie Levinas die Philosophie des Subjekts versteht – als eine Haltung, die letztlich auf wohlmeinendem Besitz beruht, ohne dem Anderen wirkliches Genießen zu gewähren.

Drittens zeigt sich bei Franks Rückgriff auf Schellings Potenzenlehre zur Ergänzung von Sartres Theorie zwar der Versuch, dem Konzept der Identität eine neue, prozesshafte Dimension zu geben, doch bleibt die Ausarbeitung dieses Ansatzes eher vage. Diese Knappheit kann leicht den Eindruck erwecken, Frank ziehe sich in eine Art mystifizierende Absicherung zurück. Zwar passt dieser Zugang in gewisser Weise zur anonymen und passiven Struktur des Bewusstseinsfeldes und erinnert an Heideggers Gedanke vom Sein als einem Zusammenspiel von „Verborgenheit“ und „Unverborgenheit“. Doch stellt sich die Frage, ob dadurch nicht auch die zuvor geleistete Arbeit an der Auflösung des Zirkels und des Regresses im Reflexionsmodell an Bedeutung verliert. Die Hinzunahme von Schelling und Sartre mag darauf abzielen, die Grenzen des reflexiven Subjektverständnisses zu überwinden, scheint jedoch Henrichs Strukturmodell nicht wesentlich zu stützen. Vielmehr wird das Verhältnis zwischen Bewusstseinsphänomen und Ich-Struktur dadurch noch undeutlicher. So wie Frank schließlich selbst wieder zur Frage nach dem Bewusstseinsfeld zurückkehrt, deutet sich an, dass genau hier der eigentliche Ausgangs- und vielleicht auch Endpunkt seiner Überlegungen liegt.

Wie auch immer man das Gesamtwerk bewertet, *Die Struktur der Subjektivität* markiert für die Philosophie des Geistes, die Phänomenologie und den Idealismus einen wichtigen Moment der Übergangsreflexion. Frank sichert nicht nur den philosophischen Status des „Ich“, sondern eröffnet zugleich neue Perspektiven für dessen mögliche Transformation. In diesem Sinne ist seine Arbeit nicht nur kritisch, sondern in hohem Maße konstruktiv. In einer Zeit, in der künstliche Intelligenz mit großer Geschwindigkeit voranschreitet und zunehmend als Modell für kognitive Prozesse betrachtet wird, gewinnen Franks Überlegungen eine neue Aktualität. Auch wenn Systeme wie Chat GPT intelligent erscheinen mögen, besitzen sie nach dem Verständnis von Denkern wie Husserl, Gurwitsch, Sartre oder Henrich kein Bewusstsein. Und sie sind auch nicht in der Lage, ein solches hervorzubringen. Das Rätsel des Bewusstseins bleibt ein dichter Nebel, der sich mit

technischen Mitteln allein nicht lichten lässt. Eine abschließende Antwort auf diese Frage bleibt zukünftigen Arbeiten von Frank oder anderen philosophischen Stimmen überlassen.

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Owen Ware, *Return of the Gods: Mythology in Romantic Philosophy and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2025, 280pp., ISBN 97801977 63964

In his excellent new monograph, *Return of the Gods: Mythology in Romantic Philosophy and Literature,* Owen Ware addresses two overriding concerns. First: Why was the Romantic Generation so keenly interested in mythology and the constructive possibilities of myth-making in the modern age? Second: How and why did both German and English-language iterations of Romanticism develop this preoccupation (p. 17)? Ware's answers to these questions are correspondingly twofold. Ware argues, based on a broad but thematically focused reading of representative figures, that both the English and German Romantic traditions give voice to a simmering discontent with Enlightenment rationality. Of particular concern in this connection, Ware claims, is the tendency of analytical rationality and concomitant mechanistic interpretations of the world to produce "fragmented" forms of life – individuals and communities that experience the world in terms of a tension or even antagonism between sense and reason, subject and object, finite and infinite, etc. English-language and German romantics alike sought to remedy this fragmentation by appealing to the *poetic* power of myth (significant differences among their relative valuations and deployments of mythic tropes and forms notwithstanding). Myth, they believed, offered a way of poetically articulating the "unity of all things." As such, myth could simultaneously satisfy reason and sense by activating the imagination's capacity to integrate those aspects of life that modernity had left "fragmented" – though never as a return to sheer immediacy, naiveté, or "simple" wholeness (41). These claims will seem familiar to scholars of Romanticism. But Ware's explanation of these tendencies is particularly strong. It is well-supported by his careful readings, contextual scholarship, and keen sensitivity to the often-implicit resonances between various Romantic authors and texts. One of Ware's

major successes is his deflation of the Romantic tendency to self-mythologization (in the pejorative sense) by showing that their collective turn to myth and myth-making was part of a broader and older reconsideration and revaluation of myth in the late Enlightenment. In that connection, the Romantics' emphasis on the poetic power of myth to engender "unitive cognitions" and to foster the ideal of "reciprocal determination" allowed them to chart a course between interpretations of myth available in the European intellectual milieu of the day (198).

As noted, Ware's book treats the importance of myth in both German and English-language romantics. Admittedly, my review tends to emphasize the German portion of the story, as that is where my expertise lies. But because *Return of the Gods* ambitiously engages Romantic literature in both German and English, it involves no small amount of "toggling" back and forth between times and places. Ware's singular thematic focus and careful rationale for these shifts in content allow him to navigate this complex map without disorienting the reader. In the introduction, the author establishes his approach and aim: he will show that the Romantics' concern with myth is born from the desire to engender "unitive cognitions" of the whole through the exemplary use of the "principle of contraries" (e.g., *Wechselwirkung* or coincidence of opposites). Ware claims that this is the "key" to Romantic theories of imagination and associated views of myth and mythopoesis (15, 214). The introduction also offers a helpful clarification of terms and a justification for Ware's capacious view of the Romantic canon (without which the scholarly fruit born of Ware's contextualism would be greatly diminished).

The first chapter offers a penetrating interpretation of Friedrich Schiller, who Ware rightly identifies as the crucial transitional figure in the romantic revaluation of myth. Crucially, Schiller seeks an ideal poetic form that attains a "total harmony of our powers," though without succumbing to the delusion that any *original* wholeness or naivety can be restored (36). The next chapter deals with Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, and the anonymous author of the "Oldest System Program of German Idealism." Setting their respective comments on myth in the context of Schiller's ideal, Ware shows how these authors explore the potential of mythopoesis for resolving the immanent conflicts or tensions within consciousness, thus insisting (while echoing certain features of Fichte's path to post-Kantian idealism) that such myth-making must be *self-conscious*. Ware also highlights the contributions of Winckelmann (who calls for modern imitation of classical values through myth), Hamann (who sees the fate of classical myth as linked to a decline in the powers of the imagination), and Herder (who is perhaps the first to

explicitly propose the task of developing a "new mythology") (57-62). Chapter Three pivots to Britain to explore the works of Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. Ware offers an account of Blake's exposure to certain proto-Romantic ideas from German-language authors. It is in conversation with the mystical works of Böhme, for instance, that Blake developed his view of progress through "contraries" (85). Ware also makes the novel observation (to this reviewer anyway) that Blake would have been exposed to Winckelmann's classicism when Blake's friend, Henry Fuseli, translated the former's works into English (95-96). That places the seeds of the English turn to myth several years prior to Coleridge's famous and decisive exposure to Romanticism during his studies on the continent. The chapter continues with readings of Coleridge and Wordsworth. Ware argues that these authors shared the early German Romantic desideratum of "unitive cognition" but were rather less sanguine about the prospect of "creating" myths to achieve this. Chapter Four carries us back to Germany to interpret the literary works of Friedrich Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Novalis. Of particular note is Ware's insightful reading of Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which he calls the "paradigmatic novel of the early romantic period" (148). This paradigmatic status is owing to the works' exemplary presentation of the link between mythopoesis and the "jolt" of self-recognition and attainment of self-consciousness from its latency or embeddedness within the (previously) unconscious work of imagination (154-158). Ware then jumps across the English Channel once more to examine the second-generation Romantics John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ware concludes by situating Romanticism within a (broadly) Platonic metaphysical tradition, arguing for the continued relevance of their views of mythology today, and dispelling certain "myths" propounded by critics of the Romantic movement.

In addition to its clear scholarly merit, *Return of the Gods* is a timely work. This is so in at least two senses. First, the book is of a piece with a growing body of recent English-language scholarship expressing a renewed interest in the impact of Platonism and Neoplatonism on romanticism.[1] In this sense, Ware's approach might be understood as a corrective to narrowly post-Kantian construals of Romanticism (this is a strength of the work, but also leaves it open to certain legitimate criticisms – more on this below). Ware never overstates the Platonic resonances of Romanticism, however. He takes great care to indicate that while Romantic uses of myth were dependent in

[1] See, for example: Alexander J.B. Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Platonic Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). And: W. Ezekiel Goggin and Sean Hannan, *Mysticism and Materialism in the Wake of German Idealism* (Routledge, 2022).

significant and even decisive senses upon Platonic and Neoplatonic *topoi* (e.g., *exitus-reditus, coincidentia oppositorum*, the unity of reason and sensibility in beauty, etc.), they are very much of their own historical moment. At the same time, Ware's contextualism does not lead him into reductive historicism. In keeping with the Romantic authors that are his focus, it is precisely his concern with the concrete particularity of the Romantic turn to myth that allows Ware to gesture toward its potentially universal significance. The author's contextualist approach also dovetails with his effort to deflate certain myths about the Romantics – chief among these being perhaps their obfuscatory tendency to self-mythologization with respect to the "originality" of their insights. The anonymous author of the "Oldest System Program of German Idealism" is emblematic of this tendency for Ware. Far from a *sui generis* curiosity, Ware shows how the Romantic turn to myth is an intervention in longstanding Enlightenment debates about myth – Platonism versus primitivism, the wisdom of antiquity versus the audacity of modernity, etc. While the story Ware tells in this connection is filled with familiar characters (Novalis, Schlegel, Schelling, Coleridge, and other Romantics *par excellence*), his reading of transitional figures (proto-Romantics such as Schiller, Herder, and Blake) is crucial for understanding how the presumptions and provocations of an earlier generation of scholars (particularly the classicist J.J. Winckelmann) were transmitted to the Romantics and shaped their approach to mythology.

As I've noted, Ware's most recent outing is laudable for its sharp thematic focus on Romantic and proto-Romantic rehabilitations of myth. This allows him to connect the dots between a wide range of thinkers without diminishing the real differences between them. A sharp focus can cut both ways, however; there are times when Ware's analyses may have been deepened by allowing himself to wander just a bit further afield. This is particularly true of some missed opportunities on Ware's part to engage more directly with the "usual suspects" of German idealism – Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. I'll briefly comment on each of these below.

Ware of course engages with Kant throughout – it is difficult to imagine writing such a book without doing so. But in some places a deeper engagement might have added a bit of nuance to his arguments. One example is in the question of the originality (or lack thereof) of the call for a "new mythology" in the "Oldest System Program of German Idealism." Ware rightly indicates that, despite the anonymous author's claim to originality in this connection, the idea of creating a "new mythology" had been floating around for some years (e.g., in Herder). Ware does not discuss the author's implication that such mythopoesis should assume the systematic role

previously reserved by Kant for "practical postulates." Attention to this dimension of the "System Program" would have raised important questions about the relationship between post-Kantian philosophy of religion and the mythopoetic tasks of Romantic imagination. It might also lend a bit more credence to the anonymous author's claim of "originality."

Fichte, like Kant, is referenced throughout Ware's work. But readers familiar with Fichte's influence may be puzzled by certain elisions or understatements of Fichte's outsized impact on the Romantic generation. In Ware's reading of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen,* for instance, Ware lucidly shows how Novalis narrates the emergence of self-constituting intuition from empirical reflection. But Novalis' concern with this problem was shaped by years of careful engagement with early versions of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and Ware does not indicate this influence as explicitly as he might have. As a result, readers who are familiar with Fichte's influence on Novalis may feel – as I did – left hungry to know more about how Ware understands this relationship. Readers who are unfamiliar with Fichte's influence in this regard are unlikely to know what they are missing.

Finally there is the manuscript's relative neglect of Hegel. Ware critically engages Hegel's understanding of Romanticism vis-a-vis the emergence of secularism. However, he leaves Hegel's overarching rejoinder to the Romantics largely untouched. In a nutshell – and to cast the issue in terms familiar to Ware's analysis – Hegel argues that the Romantics are asking myth to do something that it ultimately cannot achieve, since the representational and narrative forms appropriate to myth are formally incapable of attaining the degree of reflexivity that "complex wholeness" requires (only the systematic comprehension of Absolute Spirit can manage such a feat, for Hegel). To be fair, Ware gestures at this Hegelian critique and contends that treating it in detail would carry him too far afield (21, n25; see also 80, n79). He may be right – that will be for other readers of his book to decide. But while reading *Return of the Gods,* I often found myself tantalized by the possibility that Ware's analyses might offer the basis for a rejoinder to Hegelianism that the author has left unexplored (at least for the time being).

In the last analysis, *Return of the Gods* is a significant scholarly achievement which deepens and expands our knowledge of the intellectual context of the Romantic turn to myth, indicates the shared sources and fundamental sympathies that gave birth to this tendency in both English-language and German Romantic movements, and eloquently demonstrates the enduring relevance of their theories of myth and mythopoesis. Ware's impressively researched and sharply focused book will be a valuable resource for scholars

of the history of European philosophy and literature, as well as those interested in religion, aesthetics, and poetics.

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Laurent Guyot, *Philosophies de la création artistique*, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2022, 306 p., ISBN 9782379242267

Dans *Philosophies de la création artistique*, Laurent Guyot propose une théorie générale de l'art, qui considère des œuvres aussi bien préhistoriques que modernes, afin de montrer que l'art est une expérience du monde grâce à laquelle le sujet se retrouve lui-même. Le pluriel dans le titre indique que cette visée théorique sera déclinée en plusieurs perspectives. L'auteur étudie la nature de la création artistique (chap. 1), le statut ontologique de l'œuvre d'art (chap. 2), la signification du beau (chap. 3), la forme (chap. 4), le langage de la nature (chap. 5), l'intuition intellectuelle (chap. 6), la vocation politique de l'art (chap. 7), le rapport entre art et philosophie (chap. 8) et enfin la tension stylistique entre deux pôles de l'art (chap. 9). L'ambition de présenter une conception totalisante de l'art se nourrit des références philosophiques fondamentales dont se sert l'auteur, spécialiste de Fichte : la pensée esthétique allemande, goethéenne par exemple, et le postkantisme fichtéen, novalisien ou encore schillérien deviennent la toile de fond à partir de laquelle émerge un livre original, précisément en raison du recours à ces sources du passé. L'ouvrage, toutefois, ne se réduit pas à une simple histoire de la philosophie, qui exposerait docilement la théorie esthétique de Schiller ou la théorie de l'intuition intellectuelle de Fichte, même si certains chapitres sont moins personnels que d'autres. Inversement, il ne s'agit pas non plus de considérer des problèmes en philosophie de l'art indépendamment d'une théorie transcendantale, laquelle sert de fondement à l'ensemble de l'analyse. L'enjeu, au contraire, est de mettre en lumière l'actualité de ces pensées allemandes trop souvent reléguées au rang de thèses anciennes n'ayant d'intérêt que pour les historiens des idées. Une telle entreprise théorique paraît d'autant plus nécessaire que, paradoxalement, les conceptions communes de l'art sont le plus souvent des vagues reformulations des thèses « romantiques ». On dit, par exemple, que l'artiste exprime ses émotions ou encore qu'elle est une créatrice. Mais ces lieux communs peuvent-ils être justifiés ?

La thèse centrale est que l'art satisfait une double tendance dans le sujet, celle d'abord de « s'assimiler au monde », c'est-à-dire de « s'identifier à lui par projection » (p. 300), celle ensuite de « s'assimiler le monde » en ramenant l'extérieur dans l'intérieur. Projet idéaliste par excellence, le travail artistique est conçu comme la production d'un analogue de la nature, un langage qui ne se contente pas de répéter ce que « dit » la nature, mais cherche à le dire à sa manière, pour comprendre la structure transcendantale qui sous-tend notre propre présence au monde. C'est pourquoi le chapitre sur le prolongement poétique de la philosophie de Fichte dans l'œuvre de Novalis éclaire l'ensemble du livre. « La poésie est en somme la clef de la philosophie, son but et sa signification », écrit Novalis, faisant de la poésie un « art total » (p. 269), capable de rendre actifs non seulement les organes de la pensée, mais aussi ceux des sens pour romantiser le monde. Laurent Guyot saisit cette clef pour explorer la manière dont les œuvres d'art parfont le geste poétique de l'imagination créatrice, qui n'est plus une simple reproduction imaginative des phénomènes extérieurs.

Présenter l'ensemble des thèses est impossible. Concentrons-nous sur l'une d'elles en particulier. Le chapitre qui offre le plus de prise au lecteur est certainement celui consacré à l'ontologie de l'œuvre d'art, dans lequel l'auteur entend distinguer l'œuvre d'art de la marchandise. Bien qu'il convoque avec profit l'essai « Sur le concept d'achevé en soi » de Moritz, la réflexion porte moins l'empreinte de la théorie transcendantale allemande, ce qui la rend plus facile à discuter. Peut-on assimiler l'œuvre d'art à une marchandise ? La question est urgente, puisque « l'esthétisation de la marchandise » (p. 54) confère souvent aux produits utilitaires une belle apparence et, du reste, les œuvres d'art sont vendues sur le marché de l'art. De fait, la marchandise et l'œuvre sont souvent un seul et même objet. Le tour de force de L. Guyot consiste à placer la différence au niveau de l'essence, en affirmant que lorsque l'on déclare *vendre une œuvre d'art*, on fait une erreur de langage : « sous le sujet grammatical lui-même, on glisse subrepticement et involontairement l'essence, et l'on confond le sujet avec l'essence du sujet » (p. 71). Autrement dit, même si l'œuvre et la marchandise sont matériellement identiques, la propriété « avoir une valeur marchande » n'est essentielle que pour la marchandise. On ne peut pas vendre une œuvre d'art *en tant qu'œuvre d'art,* mais seulement *en tant que marchandise*. Deux arguments justifient la différence entre l'œuvre et la marchandise.

En premier lieu, l'œuvre n'est pas utile, alors que la marchandise l'est : « l'œuvre d'art n'est pas l'objet en tant qu'il remplit une fonction, mais l'objet simplement en tant qu'il est beau » (p. 63). Or, ajoute l'auteur, la beauté n'a

aucune fonction. C'est pourquoi, lorsqu'un objet utile est embelli, il est considéré comme une œuvre d'art indépendamment de son utilité : une belle salière est certes utile ; mais, en tant que chose belle, elle est inutile. Contre l'objection fonctionnaliste selon laquelle une œuvre serait jugée belle précisément en raison de sa nature fonctionnelle, L. Guyot rétorque que « ce qui est plaisant avec les œuvres du fonctionnalisme, c'est la simplicité de la forme qui résulte accidentellement de sa subordination à la fonction de l'objet » (p. 67-68). Et contre l'objection selon laquelle une œuvre peut être utile (comme lorsqu'elle permet d'exercer notre jugement esthétique de manière bénéfique), il répond qu'il ne faut pas confondre utilité et vocation : tandis que l'*utilité* d'un objet correspond à une fin extrinsèque, à savoir la satisfaction d'un consommateur à qui la marchandise est destinée, la *vocation* est la fin de l'œuvre qui n'a d'autre fin qu'elle-même. Ainsi, même si je peux développer mes facultés de discrimination cognitive en admirant un tableau, ce développement n'est pas extrinsèque à l'œuvre : mes facultés se développent précisément en me concentrant sur l'œuvre comme fin en soi.

Cependant, nous pourrions nous demander si les réponses de L. Guyot à ces deux objections sont satisfaisantes. (1) La « simplicité de la forme » d'une œuvre fonctionnelle n'est nullement un résultat « accidentel » de sa subordination à la fonction de l'objet. Lorsqu'on apprécie une chaise Breuer, la simplicité de sa forme est belle précisément en raison de sa subordination à l'usage. Imaginons deux chaises construites par une designeuse : les deux ont chacune une forme simple distincte, sauf que l'une est si simple qu'il est extrêmement inconfortable de s'asseoir dessus. S'il fallait répondre à la question de savoir laquelle est la plus belle, nous choisirions vraisemblablement celle dont la simplicité est au service de la fonction, puisque la chaise inconfortable paraît moins belle que ridicule. Ainsi, la simplicité formelle n'a rien d'accidentel au regard de la fonction de l'objet : la fonction s'accomplit précisément grâce à cette simplicité. (2) Il est difficile de soutenir que l'utilité extrinsèque contredit nécessairement la nature de l'œuvre d'art. Imaginons un artiste qui produise une œuvre avec l'intention explicite d'en faire le moyen de développer la finesse de notre perception esthétique grâce à ses propriétés formelles complexes. Le sujet intéressé s'approche de l'œuvre, non pas parce qu'il la considère comme une fin en soi, mais parce qu'elle est jugée comme un moyen utile pour développer ses facultés. Pourquoi cette œuvre ne serait-elle pas artistique dans ce cas ? N'est-ce pas précisément *parce qu'elle est artistique* qu'elle réussit si bien à développer notre perception ? Il est donc possible qu'une chose *en tant qu'œuvre d'art* puisse servir une telle fin.

En second lieu, selon L. Guyot, l'œuvre se distingue de la marchandise dans la mesure où la valeur artistique ne se réduit pas à la valeur marchande.

Le même objet a une valeur artistique et une valeur marchande, mais sa valeur marchande ne détermine l'objet qu'en tant qu'il est considéré comme marchandise : « le prix, si l'on y réfléchit, reste étranger à l'essence de l'œuvre » (p. 71). La raison en est simple : il n'existe pas de moyen pour quantifier la valeur marchande de l'œuvre en la fondant sur ses propriétés artistiques. Tout au plus, cette valeur réside dans la rareté de l'objet, les matériaux ou le temps de travail nécessaire pour la réalisation de l'œuvre.

On pourrait, toutefois, se demander si la valeur marchande est aussi déconnectée de la valeur artistique que le pense l'auteur. Qu'il n'existe pas de prix « juste » pour une œuvre est indéniable, mais on ne saurait nier une certaine corrélation entre la valeur marchande et la valeur artistique dans de nombreux cas, notamment dans le cas des œuvres non contemporaines, dont la valeur artistique est en partie déterminée par leur importance historique. S'il est impossible de savoir ce qu'est le juste prix d'un tableau de Cézanne, il est évident que sa valeur marchande, plus élevée que celle d'une peinture d'histoire d'Henri-Louis Dupray, dépend de sa valeur artistique supérieure. Encore une fois, il est possible qu'une chose *en tant qu'œuvre d'art* puisse avoir une valeur marchande, à condition que celle-ci soit corrélée à la valeur artistique.

Ces interrogations ne font que mettre en évidence la richesse de *Philosophies de la création artistique,* un ouvrage élégamment écrit et toujours ancré dans l'analyse d'œuvres d'art précises, elles-mêmes éclairées par les écrits d'artistes. L'ouvrage intéressera autant les spécialistes de philosophie allemande que les philosophes de l'art.

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Violetta L. Waibel, Martin Vöhler und Jörg Robert (Hg.): *„… die Freiheit, Aufzubrechen…". Hölderlin – Hegel – Beethoven*, Paderborn: Brill Fink 2025, 350 S., ISBN 9783770569014 (Hardback); ISBN 9783846769010 (E-Book)

Der Band *„… die Freiheit, Aufzubrechen…". Hölderlin – Hegel – Beethoven* versammelt die Beiträge des KonzertSymposions, das im März 2020 an der Universität Wien anlässlich des 250. Geburtstages von Friedrich Hölderlin, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel und Ludwig van Beethoven stattfand. Die von Violetta L. Waibel gemeinsam mit Martin Vöhler und Jörg Robert herausgegebene Edition ist Teil der Reihe Hölderlin-Forschungen und

dokumentiert ein interdisziplinäres Projekt, das Philosophie, Klassische Philologie, Musikwissenschaft und Literaturwissenschaft verbindet und einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Hölderlin-Forschung sowie angrenzender Felder leistet.

Der Kontext ist zweifach: Zum einen wird auf ein bemerkenswertes historisches Zusammentreffen hingewiesen – die Geburt dreier zentraler Persönlichkeiten des europäischen Denkens und der Kunst im Jahr 1770 –, zum anderen geht es darum, die inneren Bezüge ihrer Werke im Hinblick auf das Freiheitsverständnis sichtbar zu machen. Der Band steht im Rahmen der von Violetta L. Waibel initiierten Reihe *Wort – Ton – Gestalt*, die darauf abzielt, Philosophie und Kunst in einen Dialog zu bringen und ihre gemeinsamen ästhetischen wie ontologischen Grundlagen herauszuarbeiten.

Die Stärke des Bandes liegt in seiner konsequent inter- und transdisziplinären Ausrichtung. Sie lässt jene Verbindungen hervortreten, die zwischen Hölderlins Dichtung und Denken, Hegels Philosophie und Beethovens Musik oft nur implizit mitgedacht werden. Freiheit fungiert dabei als Leitfaden und zugleich als zentraler Impuls, an dem sichtbar wird, wie gegen Ende des 18. und zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts Denken, Kunst und Handeln ineinandergreifen. Dabei bleibt der Band nicht im Historischen stehen. In einer Gegenwart, die von neuen Krisen der Freiheit geprägt ist, unterstreicht er den bleibenden Wert dieser Werke als Orte der Reflexion und des kritischen Nachdenkens – Orte also, die auch heute noch Impulse für Freiheit und Kreativität bereithalten.

Die Worte des Titels verbinden Hölderlin, Hegel und Beethoven in einem gemeinsamen geistigen Horizont. Sie bilden den Ausgangspunkt einer Bewegung dialektischer Spannung, die das Entstehen eines neuen Impulses zur Selbstbestimmung und dessen historische Entwicklung in Gang setzt – eine Bewegung, die den Übergang vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert prägt und sich auf je eigene Weise im Denken, in der Dichtung und in der Musik manifestiert. Bei Hölderlin zeigt sich dieser Freiheitsgedanke in der poetischen Sprache, die die Trennung zwischen Göttlichem und Menschlichem zu überbrücken sucht; bei Hegel in der dialektischen Selbstentfaltung des Geistes; bei Beethoven schließlich in der musikalischen Form, in der sich der Gedanke der Emanzipation sinnlich vergegenwärtigt. Dabei geht es nicht um eine Vereinheitlichung dieser Ausdrucksformen. Vielmehr werden ihre strukturellen Entsprechungen nachvollziehbar gemacht und Freiheit zugleich als Idee und als ästhetische Erfahrung sichtbar.

Der hier besprochene Band ist Ausdruck und Spiegel der Spannung zwischen theoretischer Reflexion und ästhetischer Erfahrung, zwischen dem Denken und seinen sinnlichen Manifestationen – eine Spannung, die im

Rahmen des KonzertSymposions besonders lebendig wurde, als philosophische Vorträge und musikalische Aufführungen miteinander verschränkt wurden. Diese Offenheit bildet zugleich das Fundament für den transdisziplinären Charakter des Buches: Beiträge aus Philosophie, Philologie, Ästhetik, Musikwissenschaft und Literaturtheorie treten in einen Dialog, der den Freiheitsbegriff aus verschiedenen Perspektiven untersucht, ohne ihn auf eine einzelne Disziplin oder Ausdrucksform zu reduzieren.

Die Struktur des Buches ist klar und zugleich sorgfältig nuanciert. Der Sammelband gliedert sich in fünf Teile, von denen jeder einem eigenen thematischen Schwerpunkt gewidmet ist und dennoch in enger Verbindung zu den übrigen steht. Der erste Teil, „Freiheitsemphase", rekonstruiert die Entwicklung des Freiheitsbegriffs im Übergang vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert und beleuchtet dabei seine geistigen, moralischen und künstlerischen Dimensionen. So führt er von Kants „Revolution der Denkungsart" über Hölderlins poetische Transformation bis hin zu Beethovens musikalischer Ausprägung eines emanzipatorischen Pathos. Anschließend widmet sich der zweite Teil, „Hölderlin und Beethoven: Fremdheit und geistige Nähe", der produktiven Spannung zwischen Distanz und Nähe in den Werken der beiden Künstler. Gerade hier wird spürbar, wie Freiheit sich als lebendige Bewegung zwischen Individuum und Gemeinschaft, zwischen Aufbruch und Bindung formiert. Im dritten Teil rückt die philosophische Reflexion ins Zentrum. Es wird sichtbar, wie Hegel die Grenzen der Aufklärung überschreitet und in einer gemeinsamen geistigen Konstellation mit Hölderlin einen Freiheitsbegriff entwickelt, der geschichtlich, gesellschaftlich und selbstreflexiv verfasst ist. In Teil IV, „Hegel und Beethoven: Musikästhetik und Musikrezeption", tritt die Musik als Medium der Freiheit in den Vordergrund – ein Medium, das Denken und Empfinden ebenso verbindet wie Theorie und Praxis. Die Musik wird hier zu einem lebendigen Resonanzraum, in dem Ideen und Emotionen aufeinandertreffen. Schließlich öffnet Teil V, „Hölderlins Mythologie der Freiheit", den Blick für die dichterisch-mythologische Dimension des Freiheitsmotivs. Hier zeigt sich, wie Freiheit in symbolischen, kulturellen und poetologischen Formen ihren Ausdruck findet.

So eine Struktur ist nicht nur eine formale Ordnung, sondern deutet zugleich unterschiedliche Zugänge zum Freiheitsmotiv an. Der Band versteht sich weniger als geschlossene Argumentation denn als offener Diskursraum, in dem sich historische, philosophische und ästhetische Perspektiven überlagern. Diese Anlage erlaubt es, den Begriff der Freiheit in seiner Vielschichtigkeit deutlich hervortreten zu lassen – als theoretisches Problem der Moderne, als künstlerische Form ästhetischer Selbstbestimmung, als indivi-

duelle und gemeinschaftliche Erfahrung, die stets auch auf die politischen und historischen Umbrüche ihrer Zeit verweist. Im Folgenden lassen sich exemplarisch Linien nachzeichnen, die diesen interdisziplinären Zusammenhang strukturieren.

Der erste Beitrag, verfasst von Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen, zeigt, dass Beethoven Freiheit keineswegs ausschließlich als politisches Problem verstanden hat, sondern in ihrer ethisch-ästhetischen Tiefendimension, in der Autonomie, Selbstgesetzgebung und künstlerische Form zusammenfallen. Diese Auffassung steht erkennbar unter dem Einfluss Kants und Schillers, ein Einfluss übrigens, den Beethoven mit seinen Zeitgenossen Hegel und Hölderlin teilt. Wie bei ihnen erscheint Freiheit als ein Akt schöpferischer Selbstbestimmung, in dem die Kunst zur Manifestation der moralischen Vernunft wird. An diese Überlegungen schließt Violetta L. Waibel an und entfaltet diese Denkbewegung im Horizont der kantischen „Revolution der Denkungsart". In ihrem Beitrag tritt klar zutage, dass Hölderlin, Hegel und Beethoven Freiheit nicht als äußeres politisches Ziel begreifen, sondern als innere Aufgabe des Geistes. Während Hegel in Antigone den Konflikt zwischen göttlichem und staatlichem Recht als notwendige Spannung innerhalb der sittlichen Ordnung versteht, liest Hölderlin denselben Stoff anders: als Ausdruck einer höheren, ungeschriebenen Ordnung jenseits des positiven Rechts, die auf die sittliche Erneuerung des Menschen zielt. Waibel verbindet diese Idee der inneren Selbstgesetzgebung mit der Figur der Leonore in Beethovens *Fidelio*, in der Freiheit als „große Selbsttätigkeit" im moralischen und ästhetischen Handeln Gestalt gewinnt. Aus allen drei Perspektiven wird deutlich, dass Freiheit um 1800 nicht nur ein politischer, sondern vor allem ein geistig-ästhetischer Begriff ist – ein Prozess, in dem Denken, Handeln und künstlerisches Schaffen zu Formen derselben vernünftigen Selbstbestimmung werden.

Luigi Reitani und Jakob Helmut Deibl öffnen den Blick auf die Spannungen, die Freiheit als Erfahrung des Aufbruchs und der inneren Zerrissenheit kennzeichnen. Reitani zeigt am Motiv des Dämonischen, wie Macht und Freiheit in der Moderne ambivalent werden – zwischen schöpferischer Energie und destruktiver Hybris. Deibl führt diese Spannung weiter, indem er Aufbruch und Bleiben als Grundfigur moderner Existenz deutet: Freiheit erscheint hier als Bewegung im Widerspruch, ein ständiges Ringen zwischen Entgrenzung und Bindung. Beide Studien betonen, dass Freiheit in ihrer Tiefe nicht harmonisch, sondern konflikthaft gedacht werden muss – eine Dialektik, die Hölderlin, Hegel und Beethoven auf je eigene Weise gestalten.

Andreas Arndt und Christoph Jamme knüpfen an diese Problematik an, indem sie die Freiheitskonzepte Hegels und Hölderlins im Lichte der

Aufklärung beleuchten. Arndt zeichnet Hegels Weg von der abstrakten zur konkreten Freiheit nach, einer Freiheit also, die sich geschichtlich und gesellschaftlich entfaltet. Sein Beitrag bietet eine ontologisch und systematisch ausgerichtete Lektüre des hegelianischen Freiheitsbegriffs und zeigt, wie Freiheit erst in ihrer fortschreitenden Institutionalisierung durch Recht, Moralität, Sittlichkeit und Staat wirklich wird. Die Studie legt die innere Struktur des objektiven Geistes frei und erläutert, wie jede dieser Sphären eine spezifische Seinsweise der Freiheit bildet – von ihren abstrakten Formen bis zu ihrer ethischen Konkretisation. Jamme wiederum zeigt, wie Hegel und Hölderlin im Scheitern der Französischen Revolution nach neuen Formen der Versöhnung zwischen Individuum und Gemeinschaft suchen – der eine im ethischen, der andere im ästhetischen Medium. Auf diese Weise wird deutlich, dass Freiheit etwas ist, dessen Vollzug stets gefährdet bleibt und das immer wieder errungen werden muss.

Mit den Beiträgen von Günter Zöller, Melanie Unseld und Jörn Peter Hiekel verschiebt sich der Fokus hin zur Musikästhetik. Zöller beschreibt das Verhältnis zwischen Hegel und Beethoven als „synnoetisch", also als eine geistige Verbundenheit, die über die Unterschiede ihrer jeweiligen Medien hinausreicht. Unseld greift diesen Gedanken auf, indem sie zeigt, wie Beethovens *Fidelio* als Spiegel gesellschaftlicher Strukturen funktioniert, in dem Freiheit nie für sich allein steht, sondern stets historisch bedingt erscheint. Hiekel führt die Diskussion schließlich in die Gegenwart, indem er analysiert, wie Hans Zenders *Hölderlin lesen I* das Erbe von Beethoven und Hölderlin in eine radikal neue und experimentelle Klangsprache übersetzt. So wird die Musik zu einem Raum des Hörens und Denkens, in dem sich Freiheit als offene, bewegliche und zutiefst dialogische Erfahrung entfaltet. Gemeinsam ist allen drei Texten das Verständnis von Musik als einem privilegierten Ort, an dem sich Freiheit, Geist und das Verhältnis von Individuum, Gemeinschaft und Geschichte denken lassen.

Der letzte Teil des Bandes, „Hölderlins Mythologie der Freiheit", erweitert das Freiheitsverständnis um eine symbolische und mythische Dimension. Der erste Beitrag stammt von Martin Vöhler und bietet eine differenzierte Analyse der vielfältigen Rollen, die die Figur des Sokrates bei Beethoven, Hegel und Hölderlin einnimmt. Ausgehend von literarischen und musikalischen Quellen zeigt Vöhler, wie sich Sokrates jeweils als politisches, ethisches oder ästhetisches Modell aktualisiert. Besonders überzeugend und eindrucksvoll ist die Kombination aus detaillierter Werkanalyse und ideengeschichtlichem Kontext, die den gemeinsamen sokratischen Bezug der drei Autoren deutlich macht. Im folgenden Beitrag interpretiert Jörg Robert Hölderlins *Die Wanderung* als poetische Genealogie, die eine mythische Expe-

dition von Schwaben zum Schwarzen Meer nachzeichnet. Der Autor zeigt, wie Hölderlin daraus ein Modell des kulturellen Transfers entwickelt, in dem Eigenes und Fremdes dialektisch ineinandergreifen. Die Hymne fungiert dabei als programmatischer Auftakt der *Vaterländischen Gesänge* und zugleich als poetische Reflexion über kulturelle Identitätsbildung. Anschließend bringt Gudrun Bamberger die Intertextualitäten zwischen Hölderlin und Heinse ans Licht, in denen sich die Freiheit als Balance zwischen Immanenz und Transzendenz entfaltet. Den Abschluss bilden die Beiträge von Marie-Élise und Jure Zovko sowie von Richard Heinrich, die das Verhältnis von Mythos und Vernunft reflektieren. Beide Texte verstehen den Mythos nicht als Gegensatz, sondern als Ergänzung zum Denken – als symbolische Sprache, in der Freiheit und Wahrheit poetisch erfahrbar werden.

Zusammenfassend lässt sich festhalten, dass der Band „… *die Freiheit, Aufzubrechen*…“ die historischen, ethisch-ästhetischen und philosophischen Facetten des Freiheitsbegriffs um 1800 breit und überzeugend beleuchtet. Besonders fruchtbar ist dabei, dass sichtbar wird, wie Philosophie, Dichtung und Musik aufeinander reagieren und sich gegenseitig inspirieren. Freiheit erscheint hier nicht als fest umrissener Begriff, sondern als vielgestaltiges, bewegtes Spannungsfeld zwischen Denken, Handeln und Empfinden, das sich zwischen persönlicher Innerlichkeit, gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit und künstlerischer Gestaltung entfaltet. Hölderlin, Hegel und Beethoven werden dabei als Persönlichkeiten vorgestellt, die den Impuls des Aufbruchs jeweils eigenständig verwirklichen, Ambivalenzen und Herausforderungen des Freiheitsbegriffs thematisieren und zeigen, dass Freiheit sowohl in Gedanken als auch in Werken und Erfahrungen spürbar wird. Sie gewinnt Gestalt, so könnte man sagen, vor allem in Übergängen, Brüchen und neuen Anfängen.

Trotz dieser unbestreitbaren Stärken – der thematischen Breite, der Vielstimmigkeit der Beiträge und der insgesamt sorgfältigen Kontextualisierung des spätaufklärerischen Freiheitsdenkens – bleibt der Freiheitsbegriff bei Hölderlin innerhalb des Sammelbands meines Erachtens vergleichsweise fragmentarisch. Während Andreas Arndt in „Vom Werden und Dasein der Freiheit bei Hegel“ eine klar ontologisch fundierte und systematisch ausgearbeitete Analyse des Freiheitsbegriffs vorlegt, bleiben diese Aspekte in der Behandlung der Freiheit bei Hölderlin im Sammelband nicht in gleicher Weise ausgeführt. Auch Beiträge wie Jakob Helmut Deibls Aufsatz „Aufzubrechen, um zu bleiben“, der Freiheit bei Hölderlin, Hegel und Beethoven aus einer dialektischen Perspektive von Aufbruch und Bleiben heraus interpretiert, oder Christoph Jammes Untersuchung „‚Herrschaft‘ oder ‚Liebe‘?“, die Freiheit über exemplarische Figurenkonstellationen im Spannungsfeld von Aufklärung und Ethos erschließt, nähern sich dem Thema vornehmlich

motivisch und relational, aber eine ausdrücklich ontologisch-systematische Entfaltung bleibt hier, trotz vieler anregender Einsichten, eher im Hintergrund.

Dass sich Hegels Freiheitsbegriff leichter systematisch zu rekonstruieren lässt, liegt auch daran, dass Hegel ihn selbst explizit und in einem durchgehenden begrifflichen Zusammenhang entfaltet. Bei Hölderlin hingegen verteilen sich die einschlägigen Überlegungen auf unterschiedliche theoretische, ethische, poetologische und ästhetische Kontexte. Waibels Beitrag, „‚Aufzubrechen … daß wir das Offene schauen'. Revolution, Freiheit, Recht im Denken Hölderlins, Hegels und Beethovens", bildet hierfür ein besonderes Beispiel: Ihre Interpretation der Antigone-Deutungen bei Hegel und Hölderlin macht sichtbar, wie Motive des Rechts, des Tragischen und einer höheren, ungeschriebenen Ordnung ineinandergreifen. Zwar führt Waibel in der Einleitung zu diesem Beitrag den Begriff der Freiheit ein, doch eine systematische ontologische Analyse erfolgt nicht; die weiteren Ausführungen konzentrieren sich vor allem auf die Verknüpfung von Freiheit, Recht und Ästhetik. Ihre Deutung des Rufes „daß wir das Offene schauen" als Chiffre der Freiheit, die Offenheit als Handlungsraum und als Übernahme von Verantwortung begreift, gehört dennoch zu den stärksten Momenten des Bandes. In diesem Zusammenhang wird deutlich, dass eine ontologische systematische Dimension von Hölderlins Freiheitsdenken im Sammelband nicht in einer systematisch vertieften Form entfaltet wird – was weniger eine Schwäche der einzelnen Beiträge als vielmehr eine Herausforderung der eigentümlichen Struktur des Materials selbst ist. Gerade deshalb wäre ein stärker entwicklungsgeschichtlich orientierter Zugang denkbar: Eine Analyse, die die theoretisch-poetologischen Fragmente im Zusammenhang mit ihren poetischen und brieflichen Korrelaten auswertet, könnte eine noch klarer konturierte und auch ontologisch präzisere Rekonstruktion von Hölderlins Freiheitsverständnis ermöglichen. Ebenso hätte ein eigenständiger Teil des Sammelbandes, der die Freiheitskonzeptionen Hölderlins und Hegels systematisch miteinander ins Verhältnis setzt, die innere Architektur des Buches noch deutlicher vertiefen können.

Zuletzt lässt sich betonen, dass der Band gerade durch die Kombination sehr unterschiedlicher Zugänge an Reiz gewinnt: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge, von historisch-philosophischen Analysen über musikästhetische Betrachtungen bis hin zu hermeneutisch-mythologischen Deutungen, fügen sich zu einem vielschichtigen Bild der Freiheit zusammen. Gerade diese Vielfalt erweist sich als seine größte Stärke, weil die Resonanzen zwischen den Disziplinen neue Einsichten eröffnen, selbst dort, wo die Bezüge nicht ausdrücklich ausgearbeitet sind. Für die aktuelle Forschung zu Hölderlin,

Hegel und Beethoven wie auch für die philosophische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Freiheitsbegriff bietet der Band einen anregenden, in mancher Hinsicht auch erfrischenden Zugang, der zeigt, wie eng Kunst, Denken und Leben zusammenspielen. Gleichzeitig regt dieses Buch dazu an, über den Freiheitsbegriff weiter nachzudenken und interdisziplinär zu diskutieren.

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Luis Fellipe Garcia (ed.), *The Concept of Nature in Classical German Philosophy*. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2025, 301 pp. ISBN: 978-3-11-100239-2

This collected volume contains an insightful introduction and fourteen essays by established specialists and young scholars in the field of *Naturphilosophie* in classical German philosophy, tackling the concept of nature within different intellectual fields and with varying systematic approaches. The book is based on a conference organized at the LMU Munich in April 2021.

The fourteen essays are divided into three main groups. Section I: "Visions of Nature", provides an overall panorama of the *Zeitgeist* with distinct visions of nature from unique thinkers such as Herder and Goethe (article by John Zammito), Ludwig Feuerbach (Silvestre Gristina), and the traditional German idealists, such as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Section II: "Inorganic Nature", deals with aspects of non-living nature as a philosophical foundation for further understanding nature in general, such as Kant's derivative pure concept of force and its application in both physics and psychology (Stephen Howard); as well as Goethe's empirical methodology and its source in Spinoza, Francis Bacon, and Kant (Troy Vine). Section III: "Organic Nature" is above all dedicated to Schelling's and Hegel's theories of nature as a living organism. As Luis Fellipe Garcia points out in his informative introduction, the renaissance of classical German nature philosophy places natural philosophical speculation in a broader context, in which, for instance, the revolutionary developments in biology (Jantzen 1994; Zammito 2018; Gambarotto 2018; Steigerwald 2019) play a crucial role. The articles in this volume dive into the relationship between *Naturphilosophie* and related subdisciplines, such as physiology and anatomopathology (Stefania Achella).

Since this short book review cannot cover every essay, I'll single out those articles on the classical German idealists that emphasize the inner

tension between the idealistic principle and natural sciences, empirical methods, and contemporary stakes. The materialistic and even naturalistic implications in *Naturphilosophie* need serious examination since all philosophical positions aim to elucidate the relationship between nature and humanity.

Laure Cahen-Maurel's innovative paper "Nature as a 'You': Novalis's Philosophical Extension of Fichte" investigates the often-neglected commonality between Novalis and Fichte, as well referencing among others Novalis's "Notes on Schelling's *On the World Soul*" (45-47). The romantic philosopher Novalis replaces Fichte's more abstract "Nicht-Ich" (Not-I) with the more personal "You." However, in contrast to a widespread anti-Fichtean interpretation of this issue, Cahen-Maurel claims that such an idea already exists in Fichte's early *Wissenschaftslehre*. The well-known conception of *Anstoß* for Fichte is the unconscious foundation and a reflexive return to the self, which becomes a "solicitation" on a second person (49-50). The Fichtean schema of *Wechselwirkung* was equated by Novalis with the geometrical method of exhaustion, which further transforms the *Anstoß* into reciprocal love as a foundation for a community of rational and natural beings (53-56).

Johanna Hueck's essay "Schelling on Comprehending Nature as an Absolute Activity: From Intellectual Intuition to Ecstasy of Reason" traces Schelling's critique of self-sufficient subjectivity from an epistemological perspective. The important but problematic conception of intellectual intuition lacks an elaborate methodological explanation (65-68). According to Hueck, the notion of ecstasy in Schelling's *Erlanger Vorlesungen* not only functions as a form of cognition of the Absolute, but also provides a possibility to understand nature as a processual-living subject (69-72).

Anton Kabeshkin's text "Hegel and the Rationality of Nature" provides an alternative reading of Hegel's account of *Naturphilosophie* and natural science. According to Alison Stone's deflationary interpretation, the natural sciences are guided by metaphysics of the wrong kind for Hegel (81-83), whereas Kabeshkin emphasizes the rationalist presuppositions in Hegel's dissertation on cosmology, and Hegel's praise of Goethe's scientific sense (85-87). For Kabeshkin, Hegel's analysis of the category of heat proves that nature philosophy could be useful as a guide for empirical research (88).

The topic of *Naturphilosophie* and natural science continues in Luis Fellipe Garcia's valuable article "From Kant to Schelling: Metaphysics of Nature and the Rise of Modern Science." Garcia puts Schelling and Kant in the same context of the conceptual challenges raised by modern sciences, while Schelling elaborates a concept of transformable nature instead of a

mathematized nature (136-137). Following Watkins and Pollok, Garcia argues for a transcendental reading of Kant's *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe*, in which a metaphysics of nature functions not only as a regulative principle, but also provides the conceptual possibility for natural sciences and corporeal nature in general (142-145). In contrast, Schelling's concept of matter better clarifies the chemical phenomena, which considers matter in its becoming and transformation (152). Garcia offers a precise assessment: Kant follows the order of reasons, while Schelling the order of discovery (150).

Emmanuel Chaput's original text "Hegel's Concept of Inorganic Nature as *Umwelt*" interprets Hegel's conception of inorganic nature from historical, ethical, and exegetical perspectives. Chaput connects Hegel's concept of inorganic nature within organic nature as its own otherness with Uexkull's concepts of *Umgebung* and *Umwelt*, revealing the initial genesis of subjectivity and consciousness within nature (187-188). For Chaput, the observing reason in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* indicates the priority of the human being as a thinking animal (193-195). But Hegel ascribes a certain level of autonomy and freedom to the animal, thereby opening the possibility for certain ethical respect (196-200).

Márcio Suzuki's paper "Nature *versus* Life: Dialectics and Physiology in Schelling" examines Schelling's theory of organic functions in the history of medicine and physiology. According to Suzuki's detailed narrative, the concept of irritability and excitability by Brown and Roschlaub provides the presupposition for the non-empirical evidence and necessity of modern medicine (210-212). The duplicity of passivity and activity in the concept of *Erregbarkeit* aligns precisely with Schelling's view of life as a continuous struggle against nature (212-214). Suzuki then differentiates Schelling's individualism from a finalist explanation of living being and the universal life of species (217-218).

Levin Zendeh's contribution, "The Emergence of Sentience: Hegel's Conception of Animals" reveals the dilemma within Hegel's conceptual framework of sentient animals. Zendeh tries to solve the dilemma between the Hegelian doctrine of interruption and stages, while committing to the contemporary belief: animals are composites of microphysical entities (256). The answer lies in the ideal character of animal subjectivity. A collective of micro-constituents determine its own components non-causally through its self-position (257-259).

The two articles by Benjamin Berger and Victor Béguin both treat ideal versions of natural history. In "Great Chains of Being in Schelling's Würzburg System", Berger presents two models of chains of being in Schelling's 1804 system. The atemporal progression of life consists of plant,

infusoria and animal life (267-272). From infusoria as an indifference point, a bifurcated series of life-forms replaces the traditional model of a single and continuous series of life-forms (272-274). Berger understands Schelling as an immanent rationalist who is concerned with the logic of origination (279) rather than historical transformation. "In What Sense is Nature a Scale of Degrees? Schelling and Hegel on 'Degrees' in Nature" pursues these questions. Victor Béguin reads the hierarchy of *Potenzen* in Schelling's identity philosophy as the universalization of stages in nature toward levels of being in general (285-286). Hegel criticizes the scalar ontology of nature, either as a temporal series (evolution), or as a spatial series (emanation). For him, the proper use of *Stufe* is limited to the stages of spirit, which is capable of development and self-production (289-292).

This collection of essays makes a significant contribution to the ever-burgeoning field of classical German *Naturphilosophie*. The volume offers numerous intriguing and new perspectives and textual details that help us understand the complex relationship between nature philosophy and the idealist positions.

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Luke Fischer, *Philosophical Fragments as the Poetry of Thinking: Romanticism and the Living Present*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2024, xiv + 135pp. ISBN 9781350270091

This is a slim volume from a practicing poet whose works include *A Personal History of Vision* (2017), *The Poet as Phenomenologist: Rilke and the 'New Poems'* (2015) and a collection of bedtime stories, *The Blue Forest* (2015). It treats the romantic fragment not as a piece of literary or philosophical history, but as a living option for the poet's voice that is perennially on a quest to speak the novel or true word ('the living present') to a world where singular insight and agency lie suffocated beneath the pseudo-universality of everyday speech and the cultural idols of relativism, materialism, and scientism. Modeling his practice on the Schlegels' *Athenaeum* fragments, Novalis's *Pollen*, and the clues to the self-transformative structure of nature provided by Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants*, Fischer presents us with a collection of some five hundred "poetological fragments" followed by an essay "The Fragment as

Philosophical Poem." The fragments accumulated organically in notebooks spanning some twenty-years but were focused by his reading of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis as a philosophy undergraduate. Refining his journal entries as any writer might, Fischer discovered the similarity between the "kairotic moment" shared by thinker and poet: the thinker's "living moment of conception" and "impulse or spark" of the poet's speech. Poet and thinker stand as hermenteuts, or perhaps priests and prophets, of a shifted time whose historical figure is still vague or fresh—the very antithesis of mass marketing or internet influencers whose goal is to make what is already the same even more homogeneous.

The salient feature of this thin volume is that the collection of fragments and the essay on fragment as philosophical poem are separate yet reflect each other. The reader is given no instruction on how to construe these dimensionally mismatched mirror images, for the whole is given in the part and the integrity of intellectual vision hidden in the discursive treatise or essay. But both fragment and treatise are 'essays' or attempts in the original significance of the term, attempts to find the shape of the living situation. For Fischer, this living situation is the unbounded expanse that late 18th century romantic writers and systematic thinkers alike surveyed in attempting to unlock the essence of Greek antiquity, promote the freedom that revolution promised, and secure the expanse of science. He does not hesitate to use old language to designate the absolute or the spiritual nor does he hide from the task of speaking ultimate truth in the singular voice (William James's *mystical religion).*

The fragments are grouped under five headings: poetry and language; philosophy and freedom; the alchemical transmutation of philosophy and poetry; art, music and nature; and practical aesthetics and society. The first collects observations about the 'magic' of original speech; I can but offer a few examples:

> What is original springs from an origin. Originality bears the trace of the identity between being and thinking—the living presence of awareness that founds itself. (5)

> The poet is the magical interpreter of the world—poetic translation as transfiguration (Novalis). (14)

The second heading collects reflections on the 'fundamentalisms' of modern life: agnosticism, scientism, materialism, and empiricism, and contrasts their flat sameness to the recursive freedom of historically grounded philosophical thin-king:

> While we tend to think of seasons and much else in cyclical terms, the idea of evolution brings development into these cycles. . .
>
> Winter = idealism. Spring = empiricism. Summer = pantheism. Autumn = hermeneutics.
>
> Winter = Fichte. Spring = Goethe. Summer = Schelling. Autumn = Hegel.
>
> Truth = the movement through all the seasons – the comprehension of their metamorphoses. (36)

A third collection moves from an initial contrast between the abstractness of philosophical language and the liveliness of poetic speech to advocating the practice of attentive receptivity:

> Philosophy is death. Its nothingness inhabits the philosopher, stimulates wakefulness, self-consciousness.
> Death inhabits the poet too, but poetry gently arches over the Styx. (37)
>
> We must learn a thinking that is at once gentle and dynamic = poetic thinking.
> Thinking is an active listening with the spirit. Poetic vision is also a form of listening, even when mediated by sight. Both bear the same gesture of attentive receptivity. (38)
>
> Romanticism is an attempt to recreate the holism of ancient Greece—the pre-divided unity of art, science, myth and philosophy – through the individual will. It seeks to reunite in self-conscious form the historically separated disciplines. (53)

A fourth group of fragments looks at the individual character of the artistic creator and contrasts the specificity of her character and creation with the frozen imagination of the flatscreen image and its simulacrum of intelligence in disembodied speech:

> To a large extent Simone Weil is right that the highest art stems from the impersonal rather than the personal. Though for conceptual reasons I prefer Steiner's terminology in his related point that art has its source in the super-personal (*das Über-persönliche*) as this suggests the transformation of personality rather than its elimination. (61)
>
> Interactive virtual worlds. A new phenomenon. Simulacra that no longer reflect or reveal the world (in contrast to art) . . . The complete severance of the bond – the magical tie – between imagination and being. Imaginal solipsism.

> Virtual subjects—monads without windows. (65)

A final grouping resumes prior reflections on the psychology and ethics of individualism versus groupthink and makes an explicit connection to the romantic fragment:

> Genuine individuality embodies the whole in its unique way.
>
> The fragment exemplifies that the individual can be a whole without subordinating itself to a 'greater whole.'
>
> The fragment is a synecdoche of an individual spirit. An individual person is a synecdoche of the whole of society.
>
> The fragment as a clue for the development of a genuine democracy in which the individual is not subsumed by the collective or the State. (77)

The five-part essay that Fischer places after his fragments is an extended reflection on *synecdoke* or the *pars pro toto* interchange of terms. The 'fragment' is a piece of the whole that rather than being detached from the whole comes to represent the whole in its very singularity. The fragment is emblematic, suggestive, proleptic of a totality of meaning that is yet to be revealed. It refers to a totality that is for now unsayable or vaguely present as a horizon of meaning, but to understand the fragment is to tacitly expand what is says to that systematic horizon. The romantic fragment is the image of what Socrates playfully requires as the wise man's ability to speak concisely or extensively as the occasion demands in contrast to the sophists' practice of extensive, unfocused commentary (*Protagoras* 334D-336B). What is of philosophical interest in this slim work is the twin focus of the romantics' fragment and the systems of the idealist philosophers on the possibility of philosophical unity-in-totality that has been discussed in the last three decades by scholars such as Manfred Frank, Frederick Beiser, Andrew Bowie, and Dalia Nassar. Fischer defers explicit discussion of systematicity and instead speaks of the treatise or essay which in its original sense connotes an origin in personal insight.

Fischer's central discussion of the romantic fragment starts with his decision to place his essay after his fragments. The latter lacks context and leaves it to the reader to fill in the white space that surrounds the isolated text. While the former brings in more context, both start from and preserve a personal insight or creative advance. The totality of the philosophic system, by contrast, obscures the particularity and situated historicity of the author and her time, unless as Hegel insists that whole is nothing other than the

recital of particularity in all its detail as the lifeless past of historical consciousness. Uninterested in the synoptic museum of Minerva's owl, Fischer looks to Novalis and Schelling for hints of a perspective that would capture the evolving and inexhaustible nature of the absolute. Novalis speaks of a highest principle that is at the same time the highest paradox as a ceaseless incitement to activity, a virtual catnip for spirits, not a post-historical nap. And Schelling who produced a cascade of systems attuned to solving disparate problems seemed allergic to the idea of an absolute that would bring a dead conclusiveness to every issue. From the poet's perspective "the ultimate philosophical system would also have to possess the qualities of the fragment, to stimulate the thinking of the highest paradoxes . . . and stir us to creative activity and spiritual *life* (as in the supposition of spirits contemplating Divinity)" [83]. Fischer recalls Friedrich Schlegel's invocation of the ideal of an 'open system' displayed in musical harmonies and biological organisms. Open systematicity is the antithesis of the aphorisms as viewed by some 20th century critics who point to Nietzsche, Beckett, or Blanchot as practitioners of nihilistic deferral of meaning, discord, and rupture from the whole. The romantic crafters of fragments, by contrast, understood that meaning and truth must be understood holistically in a body of interconnection or a hermeneutical horizon. The rubble of Gaza is simply trash and negativity. As Novalis implored in his collection *Pollen* (seeds): "Friends, the earth is barren; we must sew ample seeds that only a modest harvest prospers for us." A seed is a concentrated part derived from a living being and capable of reconstituting life. Says Fischer, "The romantic fragment is a potent and living synecdoche—a part that embodies and conveys a living whole—the beginning of life rather than its end and disintegration into lifeless parts" (88). The incompleteness of the fragment is what permits its evocative power. While the philosophical system may invite the reader to follow a path or participate in an archaeological dig, the fragment invites the reader to go off road and take liberties in thinking. Fischer's discussion is replete with examples from the plastic arts that mimic the fragment's power to communicate: Cezanne's deployment of color in space or the way Michelangelo's *David* serves us as the emblem of Renaissance humanism. To close this section of the essay that in its own fragmentary way offers many paths but no clear highway into its subject matter, Fischer looks to Hegel's critique of F. Schlegel's concept of irony that he perceives to be imbued with a subjectivism suggested by Fichte. In that view, artistic self-consciousness stands apart and above its products rather than nourishing itself on art's substantial themes and concerns. While Hegel shares with the romantics the view that spirit's inwardness or infinity outweighs the finite objectivity of the work, he finds

the romantic practice to be an empty formalism that hurriedly flits through all objective forms only to find its self-satisfaction. Fischer replies that recent literary and philosophical assessments of Jena romanticism find it much closer to the systematic intent of absolute transcendental systems than the subjectivism of Kant and his immediate successors.

A second section of the essay centers on an idea of Heraclitus: "The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals but gives a sign." In an entry in *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, Novalis points to the essence of language as a pointing beyond itself from the audible to the inaudible or the visible to the indivisible. His view that "language is Delphi" means that language itself is fragmentary, that in pointing to something that is partial and incomplete it speaks from a horizon of unsayable fulness. This stands in contrast to all technical attempts to restrict language's semantics and range of application to favored conventional but pseudo-universal uses. "The fullness of language depends on its incompleteness, its fragmentary character" (99). The less said, the more there is to be said. The hermeneutic tradition from Dilthey and Nietzsche to Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricœur, and Derrida is of one voice in finding that the speaker always says more than what she consciously intends or surrounded by banks of retrospective and anticipatory meanings. The solo voice speaks to a chorus, present or virtual, the statement awaits confirmation, the prophecy its fulfilment or lack thereof.

A third section considers the function of a fragment or poem in a collection. It starts with a recollection of Hegel's use of aphorism as either introductory to or summation of a discursive exposition. Fischer invokes the structure of tragedy (reversal of expected meaning and recognition of the unanticipated) to describe the philosopher's intuition of a perspective and its subsequent elaboration and defense. Unless there is some new seeing and naming, there is nothing to talk about. There is a unique constellation of the moment and the acts of thinking and will that make the poetic fragment visionary. "The poet tends to have a notebook ready to hand, so as to light the wick in the steel lantern of words with the flaring match of thought before it dies (105)." The simile seems a bit overwrought, but Fischer goes on to quote Aquinas on the difference between the discursive human intellect and the immediacy of angelic intuition. Fischer recalls his younger self's pride in finding the poet closer to the angelic than the philosopher, but now he finds the fragment to be the middle-ground and mediator of the two.

A fourth section explicates Fischer's saying, "The fragment reflects a flash of eternity" (27). While the directness of its pithy message seems to suggest a haste necessitated by the penumbra of mortality, sudden reversals

of perspective effect a leap into the here and now that the writer with a contemplative intent uses to transcend the everyday or horizontal aspect of meaning and intimate a 'vertical dimension' beyond natural necessity and causal explanation. Fischer cites the Russian philosopher Solovyov's version of mystical idealism influenced by Schelling wherein in a single experience cognitive spiritual cognition is seen as a prolongation of an intuitive intellection that is instantaneous, novel, and revelatory of the absolute or Sophia. Though Solovyov started with a definitive personal experience, his philosophical writings can be seen as a dwelling in noetic insight akin to what generally happens when a thinker grasps onto a new idea. To make this claim is not to simply transpose Aquinas's discursive and angelic intellects. A writer like Solovyov works from a deep historical tradition of mediation on *sophia*—Platonic, Neoplatonic, Gnostic, Kabbalistic, and Theosophical. Reflective discursive elaboration of an idea is just getting clear about what one actually thinks. "Logical reasoning is a charcoal drawing that serves as a mnemonic device of, and substitute for, what dazzles our everyday sight" (113).

Fischer closes his essay with a meditation on the "ambiguity or metaphoricity of being" (63). Language is the business of making connections, promiscuous or precise, factual or imaginative, among the indifferent potentials of myriad words, as was Novalis's practice in *The Universal Notebook* or 'romantic encyclopedia'. Philosophers like Nietzsche and Derrida have noted the fabricated nature of language, suggesting that "all we have [of truth] are metaphorically inflected perspectives on the world which can never reach reality as it is" (115). Fischer observes that philosophers are more likely to speak in architectural or geometrical terms of structures, foundations, horizons and planes than at locating such entities. This is to project a coherence of thought and an interdependence of things more solid than the intuitive, metaphorical leaps that motivate thinking. Typical romantic themes such as the homology of music and mathematics and that of the progressive unfolding of biological life in plants and spiritual life in thinking beings moved Novalis to see in them a mathematical process of *potentiation* (raising a base to a higher exponent or form of expression) or *logarithmization* (lowering the exponent to the base). To the poet, such expressions of the metaphorical systematicity of the cosmos as underpin the intuition of a 'great chain of being' are not to be subordinated to a pre-given totality or system but are to be seen as actualizations of "an open, developing individuated whole" (123). The poet concludes with a concatenation of metaphors that might be found in a bedtime story: "The fragment is vertical, The treatise horizontal. The fragment is the warp. The treatise the weft. The fragment the

point of concentration—the compression of a sphere. The treatise a plane or circle. The treatise is the letter. The fragment the spirit" (*ibid*.).

In comparing the fragment and the treatise rather than fragment and system Fischer has simplified his task and certainly shortened his book. Both fragment and treatise originate in personal insight and an individuality clings to them no matter how moving or convincing their insight. But system touches on the possibility of public truth, the possibility of deception (and self-deception), and the health of cultural (i.e., conventional) standards that underpin the practice of politics and science that were the achievements of the Enlightenment. The world could use a dose of the Athenian multi-tasking that the Jena romantics so much admired.

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Karl Ameriks, *Kantian Dignity & Its Difficulties*. Oxford: OUP, 2024, 226pp. ISBN: 9780198917625

It seems standard for reviewers in their opening remarks to provide a brief overview of the problem at large, as if they are the expert, before turning to describe their interpretation of what the book under review aims to achieve. That would only serve me with a defeating endeavor, as Karl Ameriks in lucid and poignant fashion lays out the various intricacies related to Kant's theory of human dignity. Throughout the book, Ameriks speculates on the historical reception of Kant's theory, indicating its many turns in history, some of which are less than genuine. But *Kantian Dignity & Its Difficulties* is no simple and straightforward affair, as Ameriks posits challenging and thoroughly thought-provoking questions—some of which have no real answer, but must be asked anyway. Why didn't Kant—the champion of reason and enlightenment, the philosopher of human dignity and rights—say anything about the Declaration of Independence with its demand to fulfill universal equality and to promote the pursuit of happiness? Why did subsequent generations of Germans not carry on the Kantian project of dignity and instead dive headlong into obsessions with art and anti-democratic values? These are some of the heavy questions that Ameriks will deal with in the book and, I believe, he offers satisfying and sound responses.

In his introduction, Ameriks describes the many approaches to Kant's moral theory by other commentators, insisting himself on the moral realism standpoint in defense of Kant's commitments. Along the way, Ameriks

begins developing a cogent and much-appreciated argument concerning how moral realism contains hallmark Kantian notions—some of which have previously been deemed too ambiguous and indefensible—such as dignity, respect, character, and worth. Indeed, Ameriks points out the double feature of such terms and how less than careful attention to Kant's usage of those terms often leads to an unwarranted dismissal of his (misunderstood) position (20). As a whole, Ameriks claims that human dignity and the constellation of aforesaid moral concepts amounts to the *universal capacity of every rational agent to respect other moral agents*. His commentary takes the reader through the many moral entanglements of western philosophy like a rabbit making its way in a thicket of briars, but finding passage by way of reliance on Kant's textual guidance. Though, as the subtitle states, those concepts are not without difficulties.

The book is composed of seven chapters that trace the impact of Kant's notion of dignity throughout the subsequent generations of German history and literature, drawing into the philosophical foreground the works of J.G. Herder and Thomas Mann, against the historical background of Germany's moral relapses and catastrophes, with an eye toward expanding Kantian hope for universal happiness beyond the narrow constraints of its troubled twentieth century. At no point does the reader lose touch of the moral thread of the highest good woven into Kant's notion of dignity, as Ameriks often laments at narrow readings that, burdened by slovenly take-aways, quickly dismiss Kant's conception of humanity.

Chapter 1 sees Ameriks staking his ground on the moral realist position with his claim regarding the universal dignity of all humans being the result not of an achievement but simply from the status of being human. In other words, *all humans have basic capacities contributing to dignity including the capacities for respect, duty, character, and worth*. Of course, one simple criticism would be that these qualities would surely increase and decrease depending on the life and actions of a particular human being. Early on, I have the impression that Ameriks anticipated such a question and, as such, notes that these terms, like many others, carry with them an ambiguous and double character, namely, an empirical and intelligible character, which will "vary from person to person" (20). Throughout the chapter, Ameriks meets competing interpretations head on, noting both advantages and problems to what he calls a "mainline interpretation." He notes that, for Kant, it must be that all humans have a basic capacity—which is sort of like the potential that we all have to learn language—for dignity that "grounds a universal duty of respect on account of a capacity for morality that we all have, independently of any specific degree of accomplishment, moral or otherwise" (40).

In the second chapter, Ameriks offers a reappraisal of the Kant-Herder relationship. Given that the following generations would inherit their notions of culture, race, humanity, and so on from these two philosophers, Ameriks views such a reassessment as softening the often-dramatized distinctions between the two. Ameriks consistently rejects the achievement-based model of Kantian morality. However, one cannot help but wonder if the normative concept of worth—especially as Kant employs the term in the context of aiming for the highest good, which then provides the moral condition that makes one *worthy of happiness*—is, in fact, not something that is merely given on account of belonging to the human species, but is rather a worth that is earned. This is not to say that one ever denies dignity for all human persons from the point of view of myself as a moral agent. But certain horrific crimes that strip the life and dignity of others would, one must assume, destroy the dignity and humanity of those offenders. As Ameriks notes, the moral complexity and slippery slope of achievement-based arguments has rendered some of the world's most horrific outcomes in recent centuries.

More than any other, Ameriks has the keen and subtle ability to clearly express the philosophical spirit of an age. In Chapter 2, he returns to his notion of philosophy taking an *elliptical* or spiraling path in which a great thinker, such as Kant, expands his thought beyond the (Wolffian) sphere of his given cultural-philosophical time and reaches back to find a home in thinkers and poets such as Milton and Plato, who share more in common with a Kant in their indestructible search for universality than with their contemporaries. Similarly, Hegel viewed the history of philosophy as an upward and spiraling dialectic through which the revolutionary "turn" of the dialectic contains within it intellectual vestiges of the past while also reaching for a higher rational principle than hitherto expressed. One can also think of the divided line in Plato's *Republic* as signifying the thrust of the individual philosopher from *eikasia* toward *noeisis* and back again, such that every rational achievement leaps from its prized mantel and surges back into an imaginative genesis toward newer and greater ideas. Ameriks exhibits a reverence for the history of western philosophy in his astute understanding and generous offerings of his interpretations. Chapter 2's focus on the relationship between Kant and Herder also carries with it an injunction to our present cultural-academic attitude that the appreciation of other cultures and ideas should not be evaluated from our standpoint alone but should rather appreciate those ideas on their own ground. There are probably zero philosophy departments today that would advocate the exclusion of students or staff on the basis of people deriving from different cultures and ethnicities—

yet, very few programs actively promote or pursue any kind of philosophy outside of Euro-American traditions.

In Chapter 3, Ameriks turns to the themes of race and religion with the historical development of Fascism in Germany as a kind of embarrassing indication of unfinished business with regard to Kantian idealism. Ameriks responds to the allegations by Charles W. Mills that Kant laid the foundation for Nazism in his alleged distinction between a master race and *Untermenschen*. Ameriks quickly indicates how such accusations cannot be reconciled with Kant's developments of the categorical imperative and universal notion of human dignity (72). That Kant's time was, however, punctuated with both silent and overt anti-Semitism is an issue that Ameriks takes seriously but without dismissing Kantian ethics. The putative development of both anti-Semitic ideas and Fascism as a whole, Ameriks claims, owes to distorted and misleading interpretations of Kant. This is especially evident in the nineteenth century when Houston Stewart Chamberlain, among others, reduced Kant's conception of dignity to that of national allegiance. Ameriks comments that "it is necessary to reiterate that any kind of non-universal position regarding human dignity and duty is inconsistent with what Kant had in mind in speaking of the seeds that in part constitute the distinctive and essential identity of all members of our species" (73). It is our task to interpret Kantian ethics in the light of which it was shone in his texts, not through twisted drivel rendered to suit a racist and misguided agenda. Ameriks believes that critics deserve a fair hearing, but in most instances serious oversights stem from almost always neglecting Kant's insistence on universal human dignity and equality, arguably the foundation of his moral theory. More recent sloppy mischaracterizations of Kant's moral theory that Ameriks points out include coupling Kant's remarks on the "feelings" of Africans stated in the *Observations* (1764) with his claims regarding moral feelings in the second *Critique* (1788) (78).

The bulk of Chapter 3 seeks to sort out which allegations against Kant merit serious attention or not. Most of them turn out to be a waste of time, though Ameriks does view Paul Franks's argument regarding some anti-Semitic statements as deserving attention. What is often not taken into consideration is that, while Kant indeed casts seemingly thoughtless aspersions on Judaism, Ameriks indicates that a more charitable view notices that Kant dismisses all organized religions (or any kind of "isms") that prioritize the performance of rituals over individual freedom (89). Moreover, as Ameriks claims, Kant was especially fond of his Jewish student, Marcus Herz—who arguably allowed Kant's critical endeavor to begin through their letters—and Moses Mendelssohn. I would add Salomon Maimon to the list,

for Kant claimed that he achieved a better understanding of critical philosophy than any other thinker of his time.

Chapter 4 takes on a critical attitude of Kant concerning the events in America and in Prussia in the 1770s and 80s. Particularly, Ameriks questions Kant's silence on the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, and also Germany's eastward expansion that, according to Ameriks, resembled a nascent form of Fascism. Admittedly, the silence on these historical events in Kant's enlightenment essay in 1784, for instance—a publication that appears eight years after the Declaration and five years prior to the American Constitution—strikes one as bizarre, given that the tone of the text is saturated with arguments concerning a just republic built on universal human dignity (97–8). As an American whose hero philosopher has been Kant for many years, I have been equally disappointed and perplexed on such silence, left wondering, *what could have been*. What Ameriks does not mention is that the American concept of an individual's inalienable rights, protected by a government whose sole function is to bind together the collective and individual freedoms of the citizenry, is not an idea that derived from Locke, Kant, or any other European thinker. That idea was a uniquely American idea inspired by the Iroquois confederacy.

Just why Kant never commented on American independence *may* owe to the fact that no one had ever seen a revolution such as this, let alone there wasn't any indication that it would succeed. The 1780s saw the American states loosely held together by weak Articles of Confederation, mounting tensions between Federalists and anti-Federalists, rising debt (with no prospect of paying it off), open rebellion over taxes, small and large states quibbling over representation and slavery, etc. Kant may have been suspicious of the possible success or simply believed that the inclinations of most are such that a republic of this sort could only be protected by an elite ruling class. Whatever the case, Ameriks takes umbrage with critics (such as Jeremy Bentham) over the idea regarding the universal capacity of equality (104), a criticism he views as setting Fascism into motion, for it denies universal dignity in favor of ascribing such dignity to talent or achievement alone. As a whole, Ameriks is right to indicate the peculiar absence of any direct commentary by Kant regarding events and figures in the American 1770s and beyond, a time in which Kant was, however, critical of the British *form* of government, but had nothing to say about the Declaration, and so on. Ameriks concludes that rather than assuming that Kant pursued either a racist or chauvinistic form of thinking about America, he simply held to an elitist view in which he likely assumed that, at some point, America would require the introduction of a noble class to sustain its government (111–12).

Moreover, according to Ameriks, this elitist attitude can also explain Kant's remarks on certain ethnicities and cultures in which he clearly views them as inferior in some ways to more advanced cultures.

Chapter 5 compares the now relatively unknown and forgotten contemporary of Kant, Richard Price. The chapter carries the tone of *why couldn't Kant have been a little more like Price, in that the latter was both a renowned intellectual and commentator on major political events of his day?* Though mocked by Burke, Price's notion of "transcendental dignity" would seem to pair well with Kant's notion of universal dignity. No extant evidence suggests that either philosopher influenced the other. Ameriks has many points to make in this regard, but one of the more philosophical reflections in the chapter features comments on the notion of *self-evidence*. Significantly, the most emphatic claim of the eighteenth century was asserted by Jefferson's unforgettable assertion in the Declaration: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among them are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Kant in the first and third *Critiques* supports the legitimacy of subjects aiming for universal truths insofar as their judgments are "holding true" (A822/B850). Moreover, it is nothing less than the apex or telos of Kantian ethics that moral subjects bestowing dignity upon all other moral subjects are promised hope and the worthiness to be happy. Ameriks's attention is focused on what makes these claims *self-evident* (132). He notes how Franklin suggested to insert the term *self-evident* on the basis of his reading of Price, who referred to self-evidence as a belief that requires no special investigation, for it is of such an obvious nature (134–5). Just why then do these obvious shared ideas connecting Kant, Price, and the Declaration not warrant any direct commentary from Kant? Ameriks claims that when one views his sharp condemnation of slavery and treatment of Indigenous peoples, Kant may have decided to remain silent to avoid appearing critical of a new democratic republic (135).

The remainder of the book across chapters 6, 7, and 8 support the view that the German writer Thomas Mann took a revolutionary moral turn late in his life by way of a reform in his interpretation of Kant via his reading of the American poet Walt Whitman. Ameriks characterizes the reception of Kant early in Mann's life throughout Chapter 6 as being typical of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germans: "The unfortunate fact is that, in many ways, the viewpoints that have . . . been characterized as subjectivist Kantianism, irrationalist Romanticism, and nihilist Nietzscheanism have probably had more influence (on many philosophers as well as on culture in general) than the genuine insights of the real Kant, Early

Romantics, and sane Nietzsche" (154). Chapter 7 discusses the relevance of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Wagner, and Nietzsche for Mann, arguing that investigating the aesthetic basis of their philosophies was what attracted modern Germans to their works, but at one point Mann realized the need to throw off the "excessive pride" in German culture and return to "core Kantian values" (167).

In Chapter 8, Ameriks cites the growing distrust of liberal democracy in 1914 Germany and views Mann's attitude toward German values as essentially corrupted by the German neglect of Kant in favor of Nietzsche, among others (183). The growing fondness for Bismark's "expansionist" project coupled with his nation's lack of interest in Kantian morals would, for Mann, eventually give way after WWI. This is evident in a 1922 lecture in which he combined the "universalist and democratic doctrines" of Whitman with the early Romantic philosopher Novalis (185). According to Ameriks, through this outward appeal to American democratic principles conjoined with the ideas of a Romantic from his own country, Mann was able to reform his interpretation of Kantian duty and dignity. From duty construed as a mere *call to serve one's nation* to the universalist Romantic appeal to humanity as a whole, Mann transformed the "warlike" brand of the categorical imperative into a doctrine of humanity aiming to promote a "cult of peace" (187). Thus, by way of this "roundabout route" through Whitman, Ameriks claims that Mann was finally able to return to the more authentic interpretation of what Kant had intended all along (188).

Perhaps had Kant offered any reflections on the principles of liberty bestowed in the Declaration, Ameriks speculates, then just *maybe* German thinkers such as Mann would not have wandered so far away from cosmopolitanism to begin with (189). To my mind, this is the only substantive connection that I have seen being made between Kant and the much later rise of anti-democratic institutions and governments in Germany. As a whole, Ameriks views Mann as being able to cross the bridge with Kantian philosophy to democratic principles, giving the moral concepts of duty and dignity a home not in the overly fetishized aesthetics of German culture, but rather a real political application through liberal principles, a bridge that Kant himself did not cross (192).

One wonders what Ameriks was searching for in the book by traveling down so many historical paths in which he discusses the (misguided) transformations of both Kantian ideas and German culture—if not to rescue a liberal and more redeemable version of Kant that the author had wanted to exist in previous eras. Hence, I was delighted that such wonder was rewarded

in the conclusion, in which he reflects on the peculiar nature of philosophy as a whole.

The book closes with a reflection on the ambiguous and often disregarded pursuit of philosophy that, very often, does not proceed in a "straightforward" manner, as the public expects, nor does it always succeed in bringing about its ambitious plans. Ameriks notes the personal nature of expressing ideas, how they refuse instrumentation or measurement as "rigorous sciences" employ, and that the varieties of competing "normative perspectives" are just some of the elements that prevent philosophy from ever achieving a united standpoint (197). I would add, however, that these elements support Ameriks's insistence on the need for diverse cultural perspectives. And it isn't as if a synthesis of cultural-philosophical attitudes has not ever achieved a new world philosophy. The Kyoto School incorporated western philosophy and Christianity into their novel works that also included East Asian traditions. Kant was at the very heart of that movement, for every graduate student in Japan, for years, was required to write a thesis on Kant.

In any case, Ameriks comments on the fact that two philosophers in the same time period can—and have—championed very similar notions, such as human dignity without having any interaction with another. He claims that the two versions of dignity could support the validity of the idea itself, but it could also point more to the fact that cultures are "more out of touch with another than is generally supposed" (197). We wrongly assume, I think, that, *deep down, we're all the same*. This has the harmful consequence of presuming that some cultures have values that are more advanced than others, which is a rather undemocratic and anti-liberal point of view.

Ameriks suggests that such misleadings can result from, for example, philosophers in subsequent generations "too quickly dismissing" the fundamental but "complex" meaning anchoring Kant's moral philosophy (198). He reminds us that we should recognize, as well, the route that the core ideas of the Declaration took in the history of America and that seemingly perfect ideas, such as *all men are created equal*, followed a roundabout trajectory. As a whole, I find the book to be outstanding. I had said to myself while reading the book, at times, *where is this leading?* And *just how is 'this' related to Kant's notion of dignity?* That attitude owes to an expectation of an ordinary academic history of philosophy. Ameriks instead masterfully rotates in and out of the foreground and background the history of Kantian ideas and the socio-political developments of liberal democracy, with its less than perfect turnings since the birth of liberty. One must celebrate his efforts to interrogate the greatness of ideas in their complexity without relenting to

the fact that such ideas may indeed require *an elliptical path* in which beginning and end are not to be feared, as one must keep going and keep thinking.

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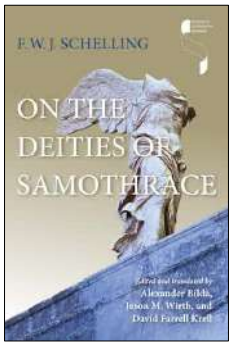

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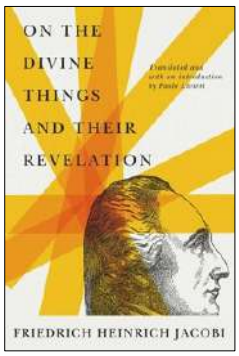

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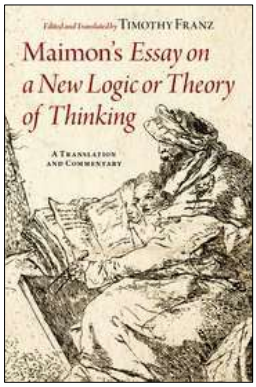

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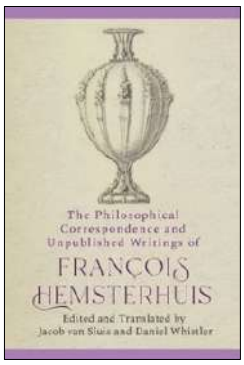

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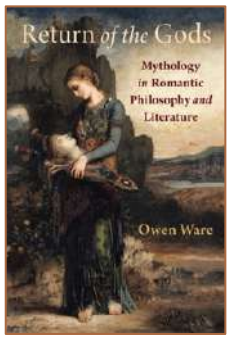

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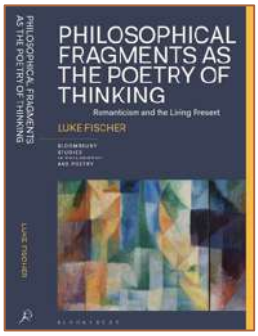

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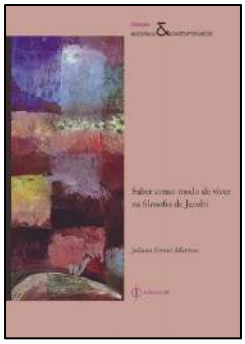

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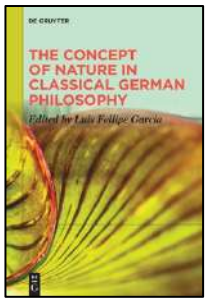

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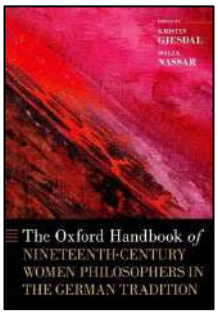

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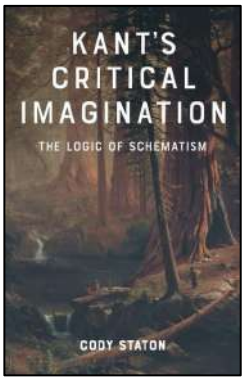

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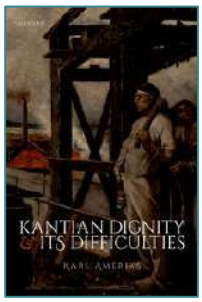

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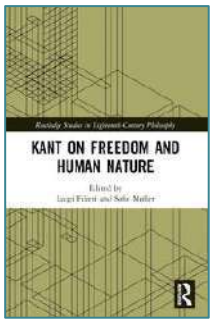

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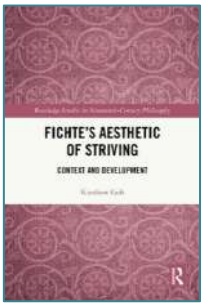

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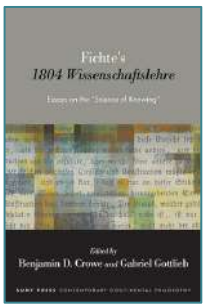

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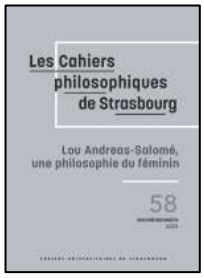

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Conferences — Tagungen — Colloques — Convegni & Call for Papers

CFP. Conference: *Fichte and Social Thought: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*

11-13 June 2026. Seventeenth Biennial Meeting of the North American Fichte Society, University of California, Santa Cruz, U.S.A.
Submission deadline: 15 November 2025.
Contact: Silvestre Gristina, Gabe Gottlieb, fichtesociety@gmail.com
Further Information: https://www.fichtesociety.org

Conference: *Symphilosophizing in German Romanticism: Relationships, Methods, and Ideas*

19-21 March 2025, Internationales Zentrum für Philosophie NRW, Universität Bonn, Germany.
Organisation: Michael N. Forster, Laure Cahen-Maurel

Internationaler Kongress zu Schellings 250. Geburtstag: *System der Welt – Welt der Systeme*

11.-13. Juni 2025, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, München, Germany.
Organization: Internationale Schelling-Gesellschaft
Informationen: https://schelling.hypotheses.org/766