Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Novalis Between Spinoza and Fichte

On the Possibility of a Realist-Idealist Philosophy

Lucas Damián Scarfia[*]

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

[*] PhD in Philosophy, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), Argentina. Postdoctoral Researcher, Universidade de São Paulo (USP-FAPESP, 2022-2024). Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer, Universitat de Valéncia (Programa APOSTD – CIAPOS/2023/365, Generalitat Valenciana) – lucas.d.scarfia@uv.es

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.

---

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*).

---

[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).

---

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.

---

[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]

---

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:

---

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

---

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

---

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]

---

[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).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

[GA] *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1962-2012), hrsg. R. Lauth, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog.

Hegel, G. W. F. — [TWA] *Werke in 20 Bänden. Theorie-Werkausgabe* (1970 ff.), hrsg. E. Moldenhauer & K. M. Michel, Frankfurt am. Main: Suhrkamp.

Hölderlin – Sämtliche Werke, *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, 15 Bände, Bd. 4 & 6, (1943-1985), Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Novalis, Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs (1960-2006), begründet von P. Kluckhohn und R. Samuel. Hrsg. R. Samuel in Zusammenarbeit mit H-J. Mähl und G. Schulz. Historische Kritische Ausgabe [HKA], 4 Bde., einem Materialienband und einem Ergänzungsband in vier Teilbänden mit dem dichterischen Jugendnachlaβ und weiteren neu aufgetauchten Handschriften, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

— [NW] *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe* (NW) (1978), hrsg. H-J. Mähl, und R. Samuel, 3 Bde. München-Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag.

Schelling, F. W. J. [SW] *Sämtliche Werke* (1856-1861), hrsg. K.F.A. Schelling. 14 vols. Stuttgart: Cotta.

Translated Editions

Fichte, J. G., *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*. Edited and Translated by Daniel Breazeale, 1994.

— *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and related Writings (1794-1795)*. Edited and Translated by Daniel Breazeale. Oxford University Press, 2021.

— "The Spirit and the Letter within Philosophy." In *Fichte Early Philosophical Writings*. Edited and Translated by Daniel Breazeale. Cornell University Press, 1988.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Faith and Knowledge*. Translated by Walter Cerf & H. S. Harris. SUNY PRESS, 1977.

— *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*. Translated by H. S. Harris & Walter Cerf. SUNY PRESS, 1977.

Hölderlin, J. C. F. "Being Judgement Possibility." In *Classic and Romantic Aesthetics*, edited and translated by J. M. Bernstein, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 191-192.

Novalis. *Fichte Studies*. Edited by Jane Kneller. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

— *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia–Das allgemeine Brouillon*. Edited and Translated by David W. Wood, SUNY Press, 2007.

— *Philosophical, Literary and Poetic Writings*, Edited and Translated by James D. Reid. Oxford University Press, 2024.

— *Philosophical Writings*, Edited and Translated by Margaret Mahony Stoljar, SUNY Press, 1997.

Schelling, F. W. J. *Bruno. On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things*. Translated by Michael G. Vater. SUNNY PRESS, 1984.

— *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge. Four Early Essays*. Translated by Fritz Marti. Associated University Presses, 1980.

Spinoza. "Ethics." In *The Collected Works of Baruch Spinoza (vol. I)*, edited by Edwin Curly, Princeton University Press, 1985.

— "The Theological-Political Treatise." In *The Collected Works of Baruch Spinoza (vol. II)*, edited by Edwin Curly, Princeton University Press, 1985.

— "The Political Treatise." In *The Collected Works of Baruch Spinoza (vol. II)*, edited by Edwin Curly, Princeton University Press, 1985.

Secondary Bibliography

Beiser, Frederick C. *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*. Harvard University Press, 2002.

Biareishyk, Siarhei. "Rethinking Romanticism with Spinoza: Encounter and Individuation in Novalis, Ritter, and Baader." *The German Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, nº 94 (2019): 271-298.

Breazeale, Daniel. "Fichte's Abstract Realism." In *The emergence of German Idealism*, edited by Baur, M. & Dahlstrom, D. O., The Catholic University of America Press, 1999, pp. 95-115.

Frank, Manfred. "Die Philosophie des sogenannten «magisches Idealismus»." In *Auswege aus dem deutschen Idealismus*. Suhrkamp, 2007, pp. 27-66.

— "Philosophische Grundlagen der Frühromantik." *Athenäeum. Jahrbuch für Romantik*, no. 4 (1994): 37-130.

— *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*. Translated by Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, SUNY Press, 2004.

— & Kurz, G. "Ordo inversus. Zu einer Reflexionsfigur bei Novalis, Hölderlin, Kleist und Kafka." In *Geist und Zeichen. Festschrift für Arthur Henkel zu seinem 60 Geburtstag*, edited by Anton, H., Gajek, B & Pfaff, P. Winter, 1977, pp. 75-97.

— "Von der Grundsatz-Kritik zur freien Erfindung. Die ästhetische Wende in den *Fichte-Studien* und ihr konstellatorisches Umfeld." *Athenäum*, nº 8: 75-95.

— "Zur Kapitulation vor des Novalis «philosophischem Werk»." *Philosophische Rundschau (PhR)*, 61 (2014): 91-107.

Haering, Th. *Novalis als Philosoph*. Kohlhammer, 1954.

Hampton, Alexander J. B. "The Role of Plotinus in the Romantic Philosophy of Novalis." *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition,* vol. 17, 2 (2023): 232-255.

Jones, K. A. *Revitalizing Romanticism: Novalis' Fichte Studien and the Philosophy of Organic Nonclosure*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Kneller, Jane. "Novalis' nüchterne Rezeption der spinozistischen ›Gott-Trunkenheit‹." In *Affektenlehre und amor Dei intellectualis. Die Rezeption Spinozas im Deutschen Idealismus, in der Fruhromantik und in der Gegenwart*, edited by Violetta Waibel. Meiner, 2012, pp. 62-76.

Lauth, R. *Schelling ante la doctrina de la ciencia de Fichte*, translated by Alberto Ciria, Servicio de Publicaciones e intercambio científico de la Universidad de Málaga, 2008.

Loheide, Bernward. *Fichte und Novalis Transzendentalphilosophisches Denken im romantisierenden Diskurs*, Rodopi, 2000.

López Domínguez, Virginia E. "El cuerpo como símbolo: la teoría de la corporalidad en el sistema de Jena." In *Fichte 200 años después*, edited by Virginia Elena López Domínguez. Editorial Sudamericana, 1996.

— *Fichte: Acción y libertad*, Ediciones Pedagógicas, 1995.

Mähl, Hans-Joachim. "Novalis und Plotin." In *Novalis. Beiträge zu Werk und Persönlichkeit Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, edited by Schulz, G., Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1986, pp. 357-423.

Molnár, Geza von. "Die Umwertung des moralischen Freiheitsbegriffs im kunsttheoretischen Denken des Novalis." In: *Erkennen und Deuten. Essays zur Literatur und Literatur Theorie*, edited by Woodmansee, M. and Lohnes, W., Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1983, pp. 101-118.

— *Novalis' "Fichte Studies": The Foundations of his Aesthetics*. The Hague Mouton, 1970.

Nassar, Dalia. "Reality through illusion: presenting the absolute in Novalis." *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2006): 27-45.

Navarro, Alejandro M. *La nostalgia del pensar. Novalis y los orígenes del romanticismo alemán*, Thémata/Plaza Valdéz, 2010.

— "La subjetividad extravagante (a propósito del juicio de Hegel sobre Novalis)." *Anales del seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, vol. 26 (2009): 169-184.

Rockmore, Tom "Filosofía trascendental e idealismo en Fichte." *Revista de Estud(i)os sobre Fichte*, vol. 9 (2014): 139-191.

Scarfia, Lucas Damián (2025) "Fichte on Trial. The Atheist, the Nihilist, the Democrat". *Revista de Estud(i)os sobre Fichte* (Pre-Print), vol. 25 (2025). [https://doi.org/10.58079/14ant].

Serrano Martín, V. *Absoluto y conciencia. Una introducción a Schelling*, Plaza y Valdés, 2008.

— "Sobre Hölderlin y los comienzos del Idealismo alemán." *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, 10 (1993): 173-194.

Solé, María Jimena. "Spinoza en el origen del Idealismo alemán: Repercusiones de la «Polémica del spinozismo» en Fichte y Schelling." In *El Arco y la Lira. Tensiones y debates*, nº 1 (2013): 39-54.

Valpione, Giulia. "Novalis' Metaphysics of Having: A Step Towards an Environmental Conception of the Human–Nature Relationship." In *Human Affairs*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2023): 485-496.

Vidal Peña. "Introducción y notas." In: Spinoza, *Ética. Demostrada según el orden geométrico*, Editora Nacional de Madrid, 2004.

Villacañas Berlanga, J. L. "Hölderlin y Fichte o el sujeto descarriado en un mundo sin amor". In *El inicio del Idealismo alemán*, edited by Market, O. and Rivera de Rosales, J., Editorial Complutense, 1996, pp. 343-365.

Wallwitz, G. G. von "Über den Begriff des Absoluten bei Novalis." *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, no. 71 (1997): 421-436.

Wood, David W. "From «Fichticizing» to «Romanticizing»: Fichte and Novalis on the Activities of Philosophy and Art." In *Fichte Studien*, edited by Oncina Coves, F. y Radrizzani, I., 41 (2023): 247-278.