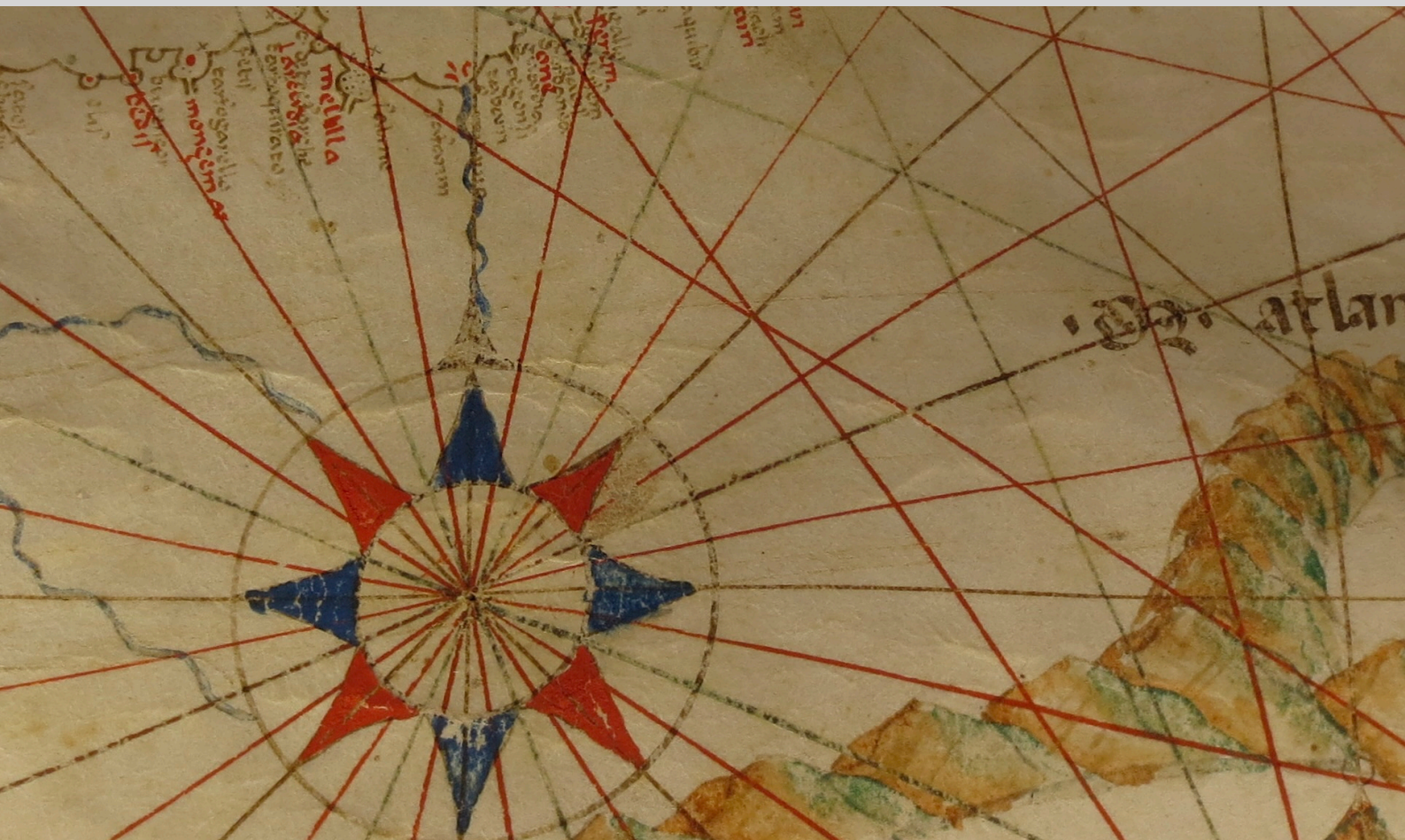


# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## Romanticism and its Kantian Legacy

Volume 6 (2024)



*Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*  
*Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik*  
*Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica*

# *Symphilosophie* 6 (2024)

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*Editor-in-Chief — Herausgeberin — Direction Scientifique — Responsable intellectuelle:*

Dr. Laure Cahen-Maurel  
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn  
Internationales Zentrum für Philosophie NRW  
Institut für Philosophie  
Poppelsdorfer Allee 28  
53115 Bonn  
laure.cahen-maurel@uni-bonn.de  
Email: editors@symphilosophie.com

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Die Romantik und ihr Kantisches Erbe

L'héritage kantien du romantisme

Il romanticismo e l'eredità kantiana

Guest Editors:

Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton, Gesa Wellmann

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# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## Editorial

The year of the 300th anniversary of Kant's birth has just ended. It was rich in events, including the 14th International Kant Congress, devoted to *Kant's Project of the Enlightenment*, hosted by the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Bonn and the Kant-Gesellschaft. The present issue 6 of *Symphilosophie* is focused on the relation between romantic philosophy and Kant's critical project. The main thematic dossier was coordinated by the editorial team of the journal: Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton and Gesa Wellmann, whom I warmly thank for all their wonderful work. Their introduction also presents the different contributions included in this 2024 issue. We are also extremely thankful to the over twenty contributors to this issue, as well as to our associate editor, David W. Wood. In addition, we would like to express our gratitude in particular to Márcio Suzuki for offering us a French translation of a fascinating essay by the late Brazilian philosopher and poet Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho, who passed away in 2023; as well as to Marlene Oeffinger for her remarkable work in translating into English the little-known writings of August Ludwig Hülsen. A second instalment of her translation project is included here, after a first selection was published in the previous issue of *Symphilosophie*. Finally, we are very pleased to announce that the guest editor of our next issue 7 is María Jimena Solé of the University of Buenos Aires. The topic concerns the relationship between romantic philosophy and Spinoza's thought.

Bonn, 12 January 2025

Laure Cahen-Maurel  
Editor-in-Chief

# Symphilosophie

*Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik*

## **Editorial**

Das Jahr des 300. Geburtstages von Kant ist soeben zu Ende gegangen. Es war reich an Veranstaltungen, darunter der 14. Internationale Kant-Kongress, der Kants Projekt der Aufklärung gewidmet war und vom Institut für Philosophie der Universität Bonn und der Kant-Gesellschaft ausgerichtet wurde. Die vorliegende Ausgabe 6 von *Symphilosophie* widmet sich dem Verhältnis von romantischer Philosophie und Kants kritischem Projekt. Das thematische Hauptdossier wurde vom Redaktionsteam der Zeitschrift koordiniert: Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton und Gesa Wellmann, denen ich für ihre großartige Arbeit herzlich danke. In ihrer Einleitung werden die verschiedenen Beiträge dieser Ausgabe 2024 vorgestellt. Wir sind auch den über zwanzig Autoren dieser Ausgabe sowie unserem Mitherausgeber David W. Wood sehr dankbar. Darüber hinaus möchten wir insbesondere Márcio Suzuki dafür danken, dass er uns die französische Übersetzung eines faszinierenden Essays des 2023 verstorbenen brasilianischen Philosophen und Dichters Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho zur Verfügung gestellt hat, sowie Marlene Oeffinger für ihre bemerkenswerte Arbeit an der Übersetzung der wenig bekannten Schriften von August Ludwig Hülsen ins Englische. Ein zweiter Teil ihres Übersetzungsvorhabens ist hier enthalten, nachdem eine erste Auswahl in der letzten Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* veröffentlicht wurde. Schließlich freuen wir uns sehr, Ihnen mitteilen zu können, dass die Gastredakteurin unserer nächsten Ausgabe 7 María Jimena Solé von der Universität Buenos Aires ist. Es geht um das Verhältnis zwischen der philosophischen Romantik und dem Denken Spinozas.

Bonn, 12. Januar 2025

Laure Cahen-Maurel  
Herausgeberin

# Symphilosophie

*Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*

## Éditorial

L'année du tricentenaire de la naissance de Kant vient tout juste de s'achever. Elle a été riche en événements, parmi lesquels la tenue, sous l'égide de l'Institut de philosophie de l'Université de Bonn et de la *Kant-Gesellschaft*, du 14<sup>e</sup> Congrès international sur Kant, consacré au projet kantien de promouvoir les Lumières. Ce numéro 6 de *Symphilosophie* porte une attention spéciale au rapport qu'entretient le romantisme avec la philosophie critique de Kant. Le dossier thématique a été coordonné par l'équipe de rédaction de la revue, Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton et Gesa Wellmann, que je salue et remercie chaleureusement pour le travail qu'ils ont effectué. Leur introduction présente les diverses contributions que comprend ce numéro de *Symphilosophie* de 2024. Nous remercions vivement la vingtaine d'auteurs et de traducteurs qui y ont contribué, ainsi que notre rédacteur en chef adjoint, David W. Wood. Nous tenons à exprimer en particulier notre gratitude à Márcio Suzuki pour nous avoir offert la traduction en langue française d'un essai fascinant du philosophe et poète brésilien Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho, disparu en 2023 ; ainsi qu'à Marlene Oeffinger pour son considérable et remarquable travail de traduction en anglais des écrits, peu connus, de August Ludwig Hülsen, dont elle nous donne ici un deuxième volet, après un premier texte paru dans le précédent numéro de *Symphilosophie*. Enfin, nous avons le grand plaisir d'annoncer que le dossier thématique du numéro 7 de 2025 sera coordonné par María Jimena Solé de l'Université de Buenos Aires. Il portera sur les liens de la philosophie romantique à la pensée de Spinoza.

Bonn, le 12 janvier 2025

Laure Cahen-Maurel  
Directrice de publication et rédactrice en chef

# Symphilosophie

*Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica*

## **Editoriale**

Si è appena concluso l'anno del 300° anniversario della nascita di Kant. È stato un anno ricco di eventi, tra cui il 14° Congresso internazionale su Kant, dedicato al progetto dell'illuminismo di Kant, ospitato dall'Istituto di filosofia dell'Università di Bonn e dalla *Kant-Gesellschaft*. Il presente numero 6 di *Symphilo-sophie* è incentrato sul rapporto tra la filosofia romantica e il progetto critico di Kant. Il dossier tematico principale è stato coordinato dalla redazione della rivista: Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton e Gesa Wellmann, che ringrazio di cuore per l'ottimo lavoro svolto. La loro introduzione presenta anche i diversi contributi inclusi in questo numero 2024. Siamo inoltre estremamente grati agli oltre venti collaboratori di questo numero e al nostro redattore associato, David W. Wood. Inoltre, vorremmo esprimere la nostra gratitudine in particolare a Márcio Suzuki per averci offerto la traduzione in francese di un affascinante saggio del filosofo e poeta brasiliano Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho, scomparso nel 2023, e a Marlene Oeffinger per il suo notevole lavoro di traduzione in inglese degli scritti poco conosciuti di August Ludwig Hülsen. Dopo la pubblicazione di una prima selezione nel numero precedente di *Symphilosophie*, viene qui presentata una seconda parte del suo progetto di traduzione. Infine, siamo molto lieti di annunciare che la curatrice ospite del nostro prossimo numero 7 è María Jimena Solé dell'Università di Buenos Aires. Il tema sarà il rapporto tra la filosofia romantica e il pensiero di Spinoza.

Bonn, 12 gennaio 2025

Laure Cahen-Maurel  
Direttore editoriale







**Research Articles**

**Abhandlungen**

**Articles**

**Saggi**



# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## Introduction: Romanticism and its Kantian Legacy

*Marie-Michèle Blondin\**, *Luigi Filieri†*, *Cody Staton‡*, *Gesa Wellmann§*

This special volume celebrates and engages with Immanuel Kant's legacy and indelible influence on the romantics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In recognition of Kant's enduring importance, we have invited authors to mark his 300<sup>th</sup> birth year with articles, translations, and reviews that take up Kantian themes present in romantic thinkers. Despite the contrast in styles between Kant and the romantics, the importance of Kant's critical system for the core ideas of romanticism is undeniable and inextricable. This year's issue 6 of *Symphilosophie* therefore examines the crucial residual influence of Kant on romantic philosophy.

We especially hope to present an array of perspectives, thinkers, and ideas that both take up Kantian themes in a romantic guise and challenge the presumed assumptions about what constitutes philosophical thinking. To the latter point, some romantics found Kant's connection between aesthetics and morality to reveal a greater affinity between philosophy, art, religion, and nature, than with science, while others found Kant to be the creative source for further work in scientific experimentation. No all-encompassing perspective can summarize what romanticism means or is about, even among the individual thinkers, who all held a wide range of speculative interests about life as a whole. In our endeavors to ask the questions concerning what romanticism is really about and how individual thinkers took up challenging Kantian problems, we discover the opportunity to interrogate novel ways of practicing philosophy itself. To this end, we believe that *Symphilosophie* as an open-access journal can help us to continue jettisoning some of the more

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\* Lecturer in Philosophy, Collège Montmorency, 475 Bd de l'Avenir, Laval, QC H7N 5H9, Canada – [marie.michele.blondin@gmail.com](mailto:marie.michele.blondin@gmail.com)

† Post-doctoral fellow, Universität Mainz – [lfilieri@uni-mainz.de](mailto:lfilieri@uni-mainz.de)

‡ PhD in Philosophy, independent scholar, Canton GA, USA – [mcodystaton@gmail.com](mailto:mcodystaton@gmail.com)

§ Juniorprofessorin, Universität Oldenburg – [gesawellmann@googlemail.com](mailto:gesawellmann@googlemail.com)

deadening layers of academic malaise that plague publishing in many venues and to instead contribute to the life of thought and the life of our community of thinkers. We hold philosophy to be something more than an academic exercise and thus view romanticism to be more than a mere intellectual curio or historical trinket. Romanticism is at once an imaginative standpoint and an engagement with nature, art, and the irreducible other.

Kant was both daring in his efforts to go further than the scholastics and yet not willing to let enthusiasm run wild. That the beauty of nature and the example provided by genius in art could serve as a symbol of morality signaled to the romantics of all kinds that philosophy still has living blood in its veins that will ultimately transform society. We have included contributions that express romantic philosophy from these varying perspectives.

Our main section reflects the broad variety of Kantian topics in numerous romantic thinkers. Eight research articles analyze Kant's influence in the works of Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Karoline von Günderrode, Sophie Mereau, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Ludwig Tieck. The texts bring to light the oscillating reception of Kant's philosophy between critique, continuation, and transformation. We are greatly indebted to authors Bärbel Frischmann, Serena Feloj, Cody Staton, Anna C. Ezekiel, Margherita Giordano, Matthis Glatzel, Eran Horowitz, and Laure Cahen-Maurel for their wonderful contributions.

In addition, we are grateful for four research pieces in the miscellaneous section that do not specifically focus on the Kantian legacy as such, but are concerned with various central aspects of Romantic philosophy. We are delighted to be able to publish the contributions of Frederick C. Beiser, who discusses the multifaceted notion of romantic love; Márcio Suzuki, who deals with the relationship between philosophical and musical discourse; and Cecilia Rose Inkol, who examines the under-researched connections between philosophy and magic in Novalis. Also included in this varia section is an essay by the great Brazilian poet and philosopher, Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho, who passed away last year and for whose contribution we are particularly thankful.

*Symphilosophie* is always pleased to present new translations of original texts for audiences beyond the original language. This year, we offer translations related to the main theme of the issue: David W. Wood provides us with an English rendering of a sample of Novalis's reflections on Kant and the critical philosophy (*On Kant*); Laure Cahen-Maurel translates into French a letter written in 1795 by Sophie Mereau to Immanuel Kant (*Lettre à Kant*); Augustin Dumont and Savannah-Lou Cochran-Mavrikakis supply a French translation of Karoline von Günderrode's *Apokalyptisches Fragment*;

Marlene Oeffinger completes another translation into English for us of some of August Ludwig Hülsen's work, this time his posthumously published *Philosophische Fragmente* (1813); and Cody Staton translates into English a piece by Friedrich Schiller called *Über den Gartenkalender auf das Jahr 1795*. As always, we are grateful to all these contemporary romantic philosophers and scholars for their translations of original source texts, which are accompanied by introductions and commentary.

This issue also contains two longer review essays in English. The first is David W. Wood's "Therapeutics of the Blue Flower", which is a survey of Dietrich von Engelhardt's four-volume project: *Medizin in Romantik und Idealismus* (Medicine in Romanticism and Idealism). The second review essay is by Felix Alejandro Cristiá. Titled "Novalis's Encyclopedistic Philosophy", it concerns Santiago di Napoli's brand new 2024 monograph in Spanish, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*.

These are followed by four book reviews of contemporary authors with works on classical German philosophy. Cody Staton reviews Lara Ostaric's *The Critique of Judgment and the Unity of Kant's Critical System* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); Claudia Melica examines Daniel Whistler's *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022); David W. Wood looks at the edited volume by Katerina Mihaylova and Anna Ezekiel, *Hope and the Kantian Legacy: New Contributions to the History of Optimism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023); and Massimo Palma reviews Oliver Simons's *Literary Conclusions. The Poetics of Ending in Lessing, Goethe, and Kleist* (Northwestern University Press, 2022).

Finally, there is our usual Bulletin containing recent publications, upcoming conferences, and Calls for Papers.



# Symphilosophie

*Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik*

## Zur Kantrezeption Friedrich Schlegels

*Bärbel Frischmann\**

### ABSTRACT

Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) is considered the most original and productive mind of Early German Romanticism. He dealt extensively with the intellectual currents of his time. The Kantian philosophy is a significant stimulus and challenge for his own thinking. Schlegel pays tribute to Kant's great achievement without becoming a follower of Kant. He trains himself on Kant's concept of critique, but goes his own way, which ultimately distances him far from Kant. In this article, Schlegel's reception of Kant is traced over three stages of development, from the early worship of Kant to the later, religiously motivated critique of idealism and reason.

*Keywords:* early German romanticism, critique, reason, freedom, religion

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Friedrich Schlegel (1772 bis 1829) gilt als der originellste und produktivste Kopf der Frühromantik. Er hat sich auf umfassende Weise mit den geistigen Strömungen seiner Zeit auseinandergesetzt. Die Kantische Philosophie bildet dabei eine maßgebliche Anregung und Herausforderung für sein eigenes Denken. Schlegel würdigt Kants große Leistung, ohne dabei zum Kant-Anhänger zu werden. Er schult sich an Kants Kritikbegriff, geht aber eigene Wege, die ihn schließlich weit von Kant entfernen. In diesem Beitrag wird Schlegels Kantrezeption über drei Etappen von der frühen Kantverehrung bis zur späteren, religiös motivierten Idealismus- und Vernunftkritik nachgezeichnet.

*Stichwörter:* Frühromantik, Kritik, Vernunft, Freiheit, Religion

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\* Professur für Geschichte der Philosophie, Universität Erfurt, Seminar für Philosophie, Postfach 90 02 21, 99105 Erfurt, Deutschland – [baerbel.frischmann@uni-erfurt.de](mailto:baerbel.frischmann@uni-erfurt.de)

Friedrich Schlegel (1772 bis 1829) gilt als der originellste und produktivste Denker der Frühromantik, deren Wirkungszeit von etwa 1796 bis 1801, dem Todesjahr von Novalis, angesetzt wird.<sup>1</sup> In dieser Hochphase der intellektuellen Kreativität in Deutschland hat die Frühromantik durchaus einen eigenständigen Beitrag geleistet. So ließe sich denken an die Poetologie, das Ironiekonzept, die fragmentarische und essayistische Arbeitsweise, die Grundlegung für eine Sprachtheorie und philosophische Hermeneutik (vor allem durch Schlegel und Schleiermacher), die Kultivierung der Form der Literaturkritik und der Charakteristiken, Arbeiten zur Naturphilosophie, Projekte wie die Schaffung einer „Neuen Mythologie“ oder einer enzyklopädischen Zusammenführung des zeitgenössischen Wissens, aber durchaus auch gesellschaftskritische Intentionen. Die Ideen der Aufklärung, die Französische Revolution mit der Hoffnung auf eine geistige und soziale Erneuerung sowie die zeitgenössische Dichtung und Philosophie gehören zu den grundlegenden Inspirationsquellen des frühromantischen Schaffens.

Ich möchte in diesem Beitrag nachverfolgen, welchen Stellenwert die Beschäftigung mit Kants Philosophie für Schlegels eigene Theoriebildung und Weltsicht hatte, wie sich die Beurteilung Kants im Laufe seines Lebens veränderte und inwiefern sich umgekehrt die Umstrukturierung seiner philosophischen Auffassungen an seinem Verhältnis zu Kant ablesen lässt.<sup>2</sup> Parallel zur Entwicklung der geistigen Stimmungslage von einer Revolutionseuphorie und einem starken Aufbruchs- und Erneuerungsdenken in Deutschland über eine Phase der Ernüchterung bis hin zu einem wachsenden Konservatismus in der Restaurationszeit nach dem Wiener Kongress (1815) kann auch bei Schlegel verfolgt werden, wie er sich vom Revolutionär<sup>3</sup>, Ironiker und Atheismus-affinen Skeptiker hin zu einem konservativen katholischen Monarchisten entwickelte. Wie sich solche tiefgreifenden Veränderungen der Geisteshaltung letztlich psychologisch, politisch oder sozial erklären lassen, soll hier nicht Gegenstand der Erörterung sein. Für meine Themenstellung richte ich den Fokus darauf, inwiefern die weltanschaulichen und konzeptionellen Verschiebungen in Schlegels Denken sich in seiner Kant-Rezeption niederschlagen. Dies soll im Folgenden chronologisch nachgezeichnet werden, (1) von der frühen Bekanntschaft mit Kants Philosophie in den 1790er Jahren über (2) die mittlere Phase mit der 1808

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<sup>1</sup> Dieser Text ist in Anlehnung an eine frühere Darstellung der Kant- und Fichterezeption von Friedrich Schlegel entstanden. Vgl. Frischmann 2017. Zur Frühromantik allgemein vgl. Haym 1870, Behler 1992, Pikulik 1992, Schanze 1994, Frank 1997, Millán / Norman (Hg.) 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Eine ausführliche und informative Darstellung von Schlegels Verhältnis zu Kants Philosophie findet sich auch in Esianu 2016, v.a. S. 61-128.

<sup>3</sup> Zu Schlegels gewandeltem Bezug zur Revolution vgl. Frischmann 2012.



vollzogenen Konversion zum Katholizismus bis (3) zur späteren, religiös fundierten Philosophie, die Schlegel deutlich ab ca. 1820 ausarbeitet und dann bis ans Lebensende beibehält.<sup>4</sup> Zeitlebens hält Schlegel dabei an dem Anspruch fest, nur jeweils unter verschiedenen Vorzeichen, durch sein Schaffen zu einer geistigen Erneuerung beizutragen.

## 1. Schlegels frühe Kant-Rezeption bis 1800

1790 nimmt Schlegel sein Jura-Studium in Göttingen auf. War in seinen Jugendjahren vor allem Platon der entscheidende geistige Bezugspunkt, öffnet sich im neuen akademischen Umfeld das Interesse für viele zeitgenössische Geistesgrößen, deren Werke der junge Student verschlingt: Goethe und Schiller, Winckelmann und Lessing, Hamann und Herder, Hemsterhuis und selbstverständlich auch Kant. Am 16. Oktober 1793 äußert sich Schlegel in einem Brief an seinen älteren Bruder, August Wilhelm, ausführlicher zu seinem Kantverständnis: „Kants Lehre war die erste so ich etwas verstand, und ist die einzige, aus der ich noch viel zu lernen hoffe“ (23, 140f.)<sup>5</sup>. Er würdigt Kants Leistung: „die Kritik der reinen Vernunft ist ewig“ (23, 142), formuliert aber auch schon einige Vorbehalte. Diese beziehen sich nicht nur auf Kants Stil, die „steife Hülle“, die „Wiederholungen, Abschweifungen, Verworrenheit, Nachlässigkeiten“ (23, 141), die vielleicht auch Kants Alter geschuldet seien. Vielmehr deutet Schlegel an, dass er nicht übereinstimme mit Kants philosophischen Basisannahmen, zu denen Schlegel zählt: „die intelligible Freiheit, der regulative Gebrauch der Ideen überhaupt, die reine Gesetzmäßigkeit als Triebfeder des Willens“ (23, 141). Auch die *Kritik der Urteilskraft* wird kurz erörtert. Hier fragt Schlegel, ob es überhaupt eine philosophische *Kritik* der Urteilskraft im Kantischen Sinne geben könne, welchen Stellenwert der Urteilskraft in der Vermögenslehre generell zukomme und ob die Unterscheidung in reflektierende und subsumierende Urteilskraft sinnvoll sei. Es deuten sich in diesem Brief auch schon skeptische Äußerungen hinsichtlich des Anspruchs an, Philosophie als System zu verstehen. Ein solches System müsse „mit Feuer und Dolch getilgt werden [...], wenn die Wissenschaft gedeihen soll“ (23, 143). Schlegels Alternative wird dann darin bestehen, seine philosophischen Gedanken in der Form von

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<sup>4</sup> Zu Schlegels Entwicklungsgang vgl. auch: Behler 1966, Eichner 1970, Peter 1978, Kurzke 1992, Grunnet 1994, Arndt 2012 und Arndt 2017. Zur Genese der philosophischen Romantik vgl. Dierkes 1994, zur Entwicklung der romantischen Epoche insgesamt vgl. Segeberg 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Schlegel wird zitiert nach der *Kritischen Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, unter Angabe von Band, Seite und ggf. Fragment. Ich gebe dabei Schlegels Abkürzungen in der Auflösung wieder.

Fragmenten oder essayistischen Texten vorzutragen und der starren Systematik die Forderung einer historischen und hermeneutischen Arbeitsweise entgegenzusetzen. Dennoch bildet Kants Philosophie in ihrem Anspruch der kritischen Selbstprüfung der Vernunft und dem aufklärerischen Pathos des Selbstdenkens, in ihrer großangelegten philosophischen Perspektive und ihrem freiheitlichen Gestus einen wichtigen Hintergrund für Schlegels eigene Orientierung. Schlegel geht es dabei nicht ausschließlich um Philosophie, sondern um ein kulturell-geistiges Gesamtverständnis, in dem sich die verschiedenen geistigen Bereiche, Philosophie, Wissenschaft, Kunst, Poesie, Religion, Politik und Bildung, wechselseitig befruchten und potenzieren. Ausdruck findet dieses Anliegen in der programmatischen Formulierung der Frühromantik, dass Philosophie und Poesie, Wissenschaft und Kunst vereinigt werden sollen.

Im Zeitraum 1795-97 lässt sich bei Schlegel eine Phase besonders intensiver Beschäftigung mit Kants Philosophie erkennen. Am 17. August 1795 schreibt er an August Wilhelm: „Künftiger Sommer ist für den Kant bestimmt.“ (23, 248) Wie aus Briefen zu entnehmen ist, entstehen gerade in dieser Zeit schriftliche Skizzen zu Kants Philosophie, die dann allerdings nicht den Weg zur Publikation finden. Einzig die Rezension zu Kants Schrift *Zum ewigen Frieden* erscheint 1796 unter dem Titel *Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus*. Hierin würdigt Schlegel gleich eingangs, dass die Lektüre „jedem Freund der Gerechtigkeit wohlthun“ und zur Bewunderung von Kants Weisheit beitragen werde. (7, 11) In der inhaltlichen Auseinandersetzung richtet Schlegel sein Augenmerk vor allem auf die Frage, wie der zentrale Begriff des „Republikanismus“ bei Kant zu verstehen und wie die Demokratie als Regierungsform zu beurteilen sei. Für Kant ist die „Demokratie, im eigentlichen Verstande des Wortes, notwendig ein *Despotism*“<sup>6</sup>, denn sie kenne keine Gewaltenteilung. Dem entgegen führen Schlegels Überlegungen zu dem Ergebnis, dass die Demokratie die dem Republikanismus angemessene Regierungsform sei.<sup>7</sup> „Der *Wille der Mehrheit* soll als Surrogat des allgemeinen Willens gelten. *Der Republikanismus ist also notwendig demokratisch*, und das unerwiesene Paradoxon (S. 26), daß der Demokratismus notwendig despotisch sei, kann nicht richtig sein.“ (7, 17)

In den leider nur zum kleineren Teil erhalten gebliebenen Notizheften, in denen Schlegel zeitlebens seine Gedanken und Einfälle niedergeschrieben hat, finden sich auch viele Bemerkungen zu Kant und immer neu formulierte Versuche, Kants Texte zu verstehen, einzuordnen und zu bewerten. Vor

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<sup>6</sup> Kant: „Zum ewigen Frieden“, S. 207 (BA 26).

<sup>7</sup> Vgl. auch Zovko 2010, Kap. 4, und Schöning 2017, S. 240-246.

allem in der Zeit bis etwa Ende der 1790er Jahre bleibt Schlegels Beurteilung von Kants Philosophie inhaltlich gesehen überwiegend positiv. Sein Hauptinteresse gilt dabei der Funktion der Kritik für eine Revolutionierung aller geistigen und gesellschaftlichen Bereiche. So schreibt Schlegel 1797 in sein Notizheft: „Alle Stellen von Kant über Wesen der Kritik sorgfältig gesammelt“ (16, 64:47). Kant sei der „Stifter der kritischen Philosophie“ (18, 7:31) und seine kritische Philosophie sei durchaus „revoluzionär“ (18, 62:424). Kant selbst spricht in der Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* von der zu vollziehenden „Revolution der Denkart“<sup>8</sup> bzw. „Umänderung der Denkart“ und verweist auf Kopernikus<sup>9</sup>. Analog bezeichnet Schlegel im *Athenaeum* Kant als „Kopernikus der Philosophie“ (2, 200:220).

Neben dem philosophischen Kritikbegriff interessiert Schlegel aber auch Kritik in einem weiteren Sinne als Auseinandersetzung mit Texten überhaupt. Diese literarische Kritik hat zwei Arbeitsebenen. Anknüpfend an Autoren wie Lessing und Herder geht es um „Kritiken“ als Genre im Sinne einer kritischen Diskussion literarischer Texte, auch in der Poesie, und deren Bewertung. Kritik wäre dementsprechend die „Mutter der Poetik“ (16, 139:646). Doch Kritik erhält für Schlegel eine weitere Dimension, nämlich die der methodologischen Reflexion der philologischen und hermeneutischen Erschließung von Texten überhaupt.<sup>10</sup> Es geht dabei darum zu eruieren, wie Interpretation funktioniert und welches methodische Repertoire für das Verstehen erforderlich ist. Auch diese Grundlagenarbeit gehört Schlegel zufolge zur Aufgabe der Kritik. „Hermeneutik und Kritik sind *absolut* unzertrennlich dem Wesen nach“ (XVI, 50, 178). Vor allem hinsichtlich der literarischen Kritik erarbeitet sich Schlegel selbst stilistisch beachtliche Fähigkeiten, solche Kritiken, Charakteristiken und Essays als Medium intellektuellen Diskurses zu verfassen. Scharfzüngig, provokativ, satirisch und oft treffsicher in seinen Bonmots gewinnt Schlegel rasch an Popularität.

Die Erarbeitung seiner Einschätzungen und Positionen lässt sich jeweils an den Aufzeichnungen in den Heften nachvollziehen. Hier finden sich immer wieder Bezugnahmen auf Kant. Bei aller Würdigung der Philosophie Kants stößt sich Schlegel dabei immer wieder an dessen Stil: Ihm fehle die Leichtigkeit, die Anmut, er sei dogmatisch, pedantisch, mittelmäßig, sprachlich ungeschickt (18, 59:398; 22f.:52), es gebe „logische Schnitzer“ (18, 22:39), er beklagt die „scholastische Form“ (18, 19:2) usw. Andererseits konzidiert Schlegel Kant auch „Witz“ und er lobt Kants „Experimentiren“

<sup>8</sup> Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, S. 22 (B XI).

<sup>9</sup> Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, S. 25 (B XVI).

<sup>10</sup> Zu Schlegels Beitrag zur Hermeneutik vgl. Klein 1971, Michel 1982, Zovko 1990.

(18, 39:226). Doch wenn dabei die Kritik an Kants Philosophie überzogen wird, z.B. als „im Innersten verrenkt und widersinnig“ (18, 63:435) oder als „Confusion“ (18, 63:436), mag in Rechnung gestellt werden, dass es Schlegel hier wohl weniger um ein ausgewogenes Urteil geht als um die Schulung seiner eigenen Urteilsfähigkeit und sprachlichen Treffsicherheit. Die Niederschriften der eigenen Gedanken waren ja nicht direkt zur Publikation bestimmt. So lassen sich auch die vielen widersprüchlichen Bewertungen erklären, die sich in den Heften finden. Einerseits wird Kant für seine Kritik gelobt, dann heißt es: „Kant im Grunde höchst unkritisch.“ (18, 21:35) Und Schlegel hat durchaus auch ein Gespür dafür, dass Kants Philosophie Schwächen hat. Mit der Einschätzung: „Kant ist überall *auf halbem Wege stehen geblieben*“ (18, 59:398), steht er nicht allein. Gerade aufgrund dieser Diagnose, die auch bei Reinhold oder Fichte zu finden ist, haben sich die Systeme der Kantianer entwickelt, um den Kantischen Weg weiterzuführen und die Mängel der Kantischen Philosophie zu beheben.

1795 wird Schlegel, angeregt durch seinen Freund Novalis, auf die Philosophie Fichtes aufmerksam, mit dem er seit seiner Übersiedlung nach Jena 1796 freundschaftlich verbunden ist. Interessant ist zu sehen, dass sich die Bedeutung Kants für Schlegel mit der Zuwendung zu Fichte abschwächt. Fichtes Philosophie kann fortan als eine der wichtigsten philosophischen Anregungen und geistigen Herausforderungen für Schlegel angesehen werden, wobei Fichte durchaus in Parallele zu Kant aufgenommen wird. Über Fichte schreibt er: „er allein ist ein Kantianer“ (18, 37:203). Und im *Athenaeum* heißt es, Fichte sei „in der Form ein Kant in der zweiten Potenz“ (2, 213:281). Dabei teilt Schlegel in dieser Zeit durchaus die Auffassung Kants und Fichtes, dass die Transzendentalphilosophie das „*Fundament* aller Philosophie“ (18, 93:761) darstelle.

Zentrales Motiv der Auseinandersetzung mit der zeitgenössischen Philosophie bildet die Diskussion um die richtige Form der Philosophie. Immer wieder wendet sich Schlegel gegen die Vorstellung, dass Philosophie nur in der Form eines Systems begründet werden könne. Ein solches System ist Schlegels Meinung nach nicht in der Lage, die Vielschichtigkeit des menschlichen Lebens zu fassen. Deshalb fordert er – gegen Kant und Fichte – für die Philosophie einen Typ von Systematik, die gekennzeichnet ist durch Offenheit und Flexibilität. So spricht er von einem zyklischen System oder fragmentarischen System, fordert er Experimentieren oder gar poetische Philosophie. Damit macht Schlegel geltend, dass es kein abschließendes Wissen, keine absolut gültige Wahrheit gebe, sondern nur immer neue Versuche, einen Sachverhalt oder Zusammenhang zu verstehen und zu beschreiben. Wissen sei historisch relativ, kontingent auf bestimmte Um-

stände, Perspektiven und Vokabulare hin. Es gibt für Schlegel verschiedene Möglichkeiten, um eine solche offene Systematik zu gestalten. Beispielsweise ermöglicht die Form des Fragments, Systematizität und Prozessualität so zu verbinden, dass Gedanken immer wieder neu in Beziehung zueinander gesetzt werden können. Eine andere Möglichkeit, die Starrheit und Begrenztheit einer unhistorischen, abstrakt-systematischen Philosophie, wie er sie bei Kant und Fichte wahrnimmt, aufzubrechen, besteht in der Einbeziehung der historischen Perspektive. So fordert Schlegel, das Transzendente zu historisieren. (18, 93:770) Mit seinem Anliegen der Verbindung von Systematik und Historisierung verfolgt Schlegel verschiedene Ziele. Es geht um die Implementierung einer philosophiegeschichtlichen Zugangsweise zur Philosophie, zugleich um ein historisches Verständnis der philosophischen Begriffe, aber auch um eine historische Auffassung von den Gegenständen selbst und die Rückbindung der Philosophie an lebensweltliche Kontexte. Eine wissenschaftliche Philosophie soll nach Schlegel sowohl systematisch als auch historisch sein (18, 85:671). Wenn Schlegel Fichte vorwirft, er sei noch kein „historischer Systematiker“ (18, 33:148), gilt dies parallel auch für Kant. In einem Fragment bringt Schlegel seine Kritik auf den Punkt: „Kants Moral und Fichtes Naturrecht beweisen wie dürftig alle nicht Historisch-philosophischen Systeme ausfallen müssen.“ (18, 61:413) Hiermit nimmt er vorweg, was Hegel dann auf produktive Weise in die Philosophie einbringt, eben die geforderte Historisierung der Philosophie.

## 2. Schlegels Beschäftigung mit Kant ca. 1800 bis 1820

Nach der Jahrhundertwende entfernt sich Schlegel von der Kantischen Vernunftphilosophie, vor allem aufgrund seiner Öffnung für Fragen der Religion. Der Übergang ließ sich schon in den *Athenaeums*-Fragmenten 1799 bis 1800 registrieren, in denen nun explizit religiöse Themen eine Rolle spielten. Dabei mögen vielleicht auch die enge Freundschaft zu Novalis und zu Schleiermacher sowie die Lebensgemeinschaft mit Dorothea beigetragen haben, die jeweils eine starke Religiosität verkörperten. Ernst Behler stellt fest, dass sich in den Jahren nach 1800 „ein so tiefgreifender Wandel in Schlegels Leben bemerkbar macht, daß man diese Zeit den großen Wendepunkt seiner Existenz nennen kann“<sup>11</sup>. Im Zuge dieser geistig-spirituellen Umorientierung wird vor allem die aufklärerische Betonung von Vernunft, Rationalität, Autonomie und individueller Selbstbestimmung sukzessive

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<sup>11</sup> Behler 1996, S. 82.

zurückgenommen, wie sich an Schlegels Texten immer offensichtlicher erkennen lässt.

In der Vorlesung *Transcendentalphilosophie*, die Schlegel 1800 / 01 in Jena hielt, wird deutlich, dass Kant keine prägende Rolle mehr in seinem Denken spielt. An dieser Vorlesung lässt sich schon in ersten Zügen ablesen, dass Schlegel beginnt, die bei Kant etablierte Hierarchie der Bewusstseinsvermögen umzubauen. Dem Verstand wird nun eine höhere Kapazität zugesprochen als der Vernunft, was mit einer konzeptionellen Umdeutung gegenüber dem Kantischen Begriffsgebrauch verbunden ist. Während der Vernunftbegriff dem Kantischen vergleichbar bleibt, weist Schlegel dem Verstand eine höhere Funktion zu: „Der Verstand ist die *höchste Vollendung des geistigen und denkenden Vermögens*“ (12, 13 Fußnote). Nicht die Vernunft, sondern der Verstand gebe das Gesamtverstehen der Welt durch eine umfassende Weltdeutung. Dies wirkt sich auch aus auf den Freiheitsbegriff und die Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Freiheit und Natur.<sup>12</sup> Freiheit wird nun gedacht nicht nur als freier Wille oder freies Denken, sondern auch im Sinne einer in der Natur möglichen Freiheit, denn Natur sei nicht toter Mechanismus, wie Kant dies gesehen habe, sondern „ein Bild der werdenden Gottheit“ (12, 54), mit der der Mensch durch Liebe, nicht durch Vernunft, verbunden sei. Kants Begriff des freien Willens als Beginn einer Kausalreihe lasse sich auf der Grundlage eines mechanistischen Naturbegriffs nicht verstehen. (12, 52) Also müsse auch das Verständnis von Natur selbst verändert werden, wenn der Freiheitsbegriff weiterhin gelten solle.

Die veränderte Sichtweise, die in der Jenaer Vorlesung nur ansatzweise sichtbar wurde, erhält wenige Jahre später in der in Köln gehaltenen Vorlesung *Die Entwicklung der Philosophie in zwölf Büchern* von 1804 / 1805 stärker Kontur. Nicht mehr der revolutionierende, jugendlich-angriffslustige, unorthodoxe Kritiker spricht hier, sondern ein Theoretiker mit gereifterem Problemverständnis und einer sich andeutenden eigenständigen Philosophie. Diese Vorlesung ist aber auch deshalb interessant, weil Schlegel in der umfangreichen Einleitung (12, 109-323) eine Philosophiegeschichte auf der Grundlage einer Identifizierung verschiedener philosophischer Grundpositionen skizziert. Er unterscheidet fünf Richtungen: Empirismus, Materialismus, Skeptizismus, Pantheismus und Intellektualphilosophie (mit ihrem Hauptzweig des Idealismus). Als Mangel aller bisherigen Philosophie sieht Schlegel einen falschen Begriff vom Ding an „als eines unsichtbaren, toten Trägers der Merkmale“, der damit „der *Mittelpunkt* alles Irrtums“ geworden

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<sup>12</sup> Vgl. hierzu auch Valpione 2019.

sei (12, 307).<sup>13</sup> Dagegen fordert er ein genetisches Verständnis, ein Verständnis des Dings als etwas Lebendiges, Werdendes, das eine Geschichte hat (ebd.).

In der typologisierenden Einordnung sieht Schlegel Kants Philosophie zwischen Empirismus und Idealismus. Kant gehöre mit seiner Annahme des Dings an sich und der Lehre von der Erfahrung in den Empirismus, mit der Einführung der Anschauungsformen Raum und Zeit überschreite er den Empirismus in Richtung Idealismus. Doch Kant könne nicht erklären, „wie und woher die Anschauung zu solchen Formen komme, warum gerade zu diesen, warum in diesem Verhältnis und in dieser Zahl“ (12, 287). Problematisch am Idealismus Kants ist für Schlegel, dass er von Denkgesetzen ausgehe, aber nicht angeben könne, wer für die Wahrheit dieser Gesetze innerhalb einer bedingten Ichheit bürgere (vgl. 148). Kant hat seinen Apriorismus, der die Grundlage der Transzendentalphilosophie bildet, nach Meinung Schlegels nicht begründet. Und er deutet an, worin er die geforderte Begründung verankert sehen möchte. Wenn der Idealist vom endlichen Ich ausgehe, falle „die Möglichkeit der Erkenntnis Gottes“ weg, Philosophie und Leben würden so getrennt (12, 156). Das „Ich“ des Idealismus sei ohne Bezug auf die Gottheit, d. h. „die höchste Realität“, die wahrhaft „unbedingte Ichheit“, grundlos und damit „nichts“ (ebd.). Schlegel sucht damit zu zeigen, dass über diesen Idealismus hinaus die Rückbindung des individuellen, personalen Ichs an einen in die Welt eingelassenen göttlichen Geist zu denken notwendig sei, der die Sinndimension der Dinge präge. Das Ich finde in der Welt Ichhaftes nicht aufgrund einer willkürlichen Bedeutungszuweisung, sondern weil die Welt und Ich selbst Gottes Werk seien.

An Kants Philosophie moniert Schlegel weiterhin, dass sie aus verschiedenen Teilen vorangegangener Systeme zusammengesetzt und aufgrund dieser vielen verschiedenen Einflüsse das Kantische System unvollkommen und uneinheitlich sei (vgl. 12, 283f.), ja, letztlich ein Synkretismus<sup>14</sup> (12, 288). Schlegel schätzt aber an Kant nach wie vor die Idee, „daß eine Kritik der Philosophie selbst vorangehen müsse“ (12, 291), nur sei Kants Kritikbegriff zu eng. Auch hier mahnt Schlegel an, dass Kant die historische Perspektive fehle. Es gebe zwar Ansätze einer Geschichte der Philosophie, aber insgesamt sei die „Kritik der philosophierenden Vernunft durchaus nicht historisch genug“ (12, 286). Demgegenüber zielt Schlegel auf einen umfassenden hermeneutischen Kritikbegriff, auf eine „universalphiloso-

<sup>13</sup> Zum Dingbegriff bei Schlegel vgl. Elsässer 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Vgl. hierzu auch Esianu 2016, S. 68ff.

phische Kunst“ (18, 117:1063), die Sinnverstehen und historische Bewertung einschließt.<sup>15</sup>

Einen besonderen Stellenwert in der Umorientierung Schlegels nimmt die Bewusstseinstheorie ein. Interessant ist hier die Beurteilung des Kantischen Vernunftbegriffs. Dieser sei vor allem skeptisch, die Vernunft nur eine negative Erkenntnisquelle, da sie das Unendliche, Transzendente, Übersinnliche nicht erkennen könne (vgl. 12, 287). Diesem Vernunftbegriff schließt sich Schlegel an, aber nicht, um bei der von Kant geforderten Selbstbegrenzung der Vernunft stehenzubleiben, sondern um jenseits der Vernunft weitere Erkenntnisformen zu identifizieren „wie z. B. die höhere Offenbarung, die Lehre von der Erinnerung des Plato, von der Anschauung des Plotin, usw.“ (12, 287). Gegenüber dem Vernunftbegriff Kants wertet Schlegel nun nichtrationale Vermögen wie Gefühl, Liebe, Ahnung, Sehnsucht zu welterschließenden Kapazitäten auf, lässt aber im Gegenzug die rationalen Erkenntnisfunktionen nicht einfach fallen. Vielmehr wendet er sich gegen eine Auffassung von Rationalität, die auf Logik, Formalisierung und Abstraktion verkürzt ist. Ihm geht es nicht um Philosophie nach Vorbild einer strengen Wissenschaft, sondern um die Sinnfülle der Welt, die nur durch einen vielschichtigen Geist zu erfassen sei. Schlegel stellt über die Erfahrungserkenntnis, um deren Begründung es Kant zu tun gewesen sei, eine höhere, geistige Erkenntnis. Diese höhere Erkenntnis dringe in das Innere der Dinge vor, zu deren durch Gott verliehener, immanenter Geistigkeit. Und auch Freiheit lasse sich jetzt nicht mehr an die Autonomie der Vernunft binden. Das Reich der Freiheit sei das Reich des Göttlichen, an dem der Mensch durch sein höheres Bewusstsein, aber auch das ganze Universum, die Natur, Anteil hätten. An die Stelle der Vernunft sei nun „der geistige Mittelpunkt der Erleuchtung und des Glaubens“ getreten (19, 346:296). Damit sei auch Moralphilosophie im wissenschaftlichen Sinne unmöglich, denn das Sittengesetz beruhe nicht auf der Vernunft, sondern auf dem Willen Gottes und dem Glauben (vgl. 13, 64). Schlegel vertritt von nun an einen Idealismus, der mit der Zuwendung zum Katholizismus und der Konversion 1808<sup>16</sup> onto-theologische, spirituell-mystische und transzendenzorientierte Züge annimmt. Damit verändern sich die Grundlagen und Intentionen seines Philosophierens immer deutlicher.<sup>17</sup> So ist ihm die

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<sup>15</sup> Vgl. zu Schlegels hermeneutischem Kritikbegriff ausführlicher Zovko 1990; zu seinen Kritiken vgl. Arndt / Zovko 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Zu Schlegels Konversion gibt der von Eckel / Wegmann 2014 herausgegebene Sammelband aufschlussreiche Informationen und Einblicke.

<sup>17</sup> Vgl. dazu auch Grunnet 1994; Schöning 2002 und 2017; Zimmermann 2009, Arndt 2012 und 2017.



Philosophie selbst nun „Mystik, oder die Wissenschaft und die Kunst göttlicher Geheimnisse“ (3, 100), wie es im Aufsatz *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen* (1804) heißt. Zwar zielt Schlegel weiterhin auf einen „Idealismus“, aber dies ist nicht mehr der transzendente Idealismus der 1790er Jahre, auch nicht der pantheistische Idealismus der Jahrhundertwende, sondern ein religiöser, christlicher Idealismus, der fundiert ist im katholischen Glauben und der Offenbarung.<sup>18</sup>

Wie Schlegel ab ca. 1810 zu Kant steht, lässt sich an verschiedenen Publikationen ablesen. In den Jahren 1812 / 13 hält Schlegel in Wien eine Reihe von Vorlesungen zur *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur*.<sup>19</sup> Ihr Anliegen ist es, eine umfassende Übersicht über die Geistes-, Literatur- und Philosophiegeschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart zu geben. Hierin bemüht sich Schlegel auch um eine Einordnung der philosophischen Leistung Kants. Da es also eher um Einordnung und Erläuterung geht, tritt hier die Polemik und Kritik zurück. Kant gilt im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert als eine der wichtigsten Persönlichkeiten in der deutschen Geisteslandschaft. Dies würdigt Schlegel durchaus. So sieht er positiv, dass Kant an der Religion festhielt und nicht dem Unglauben verfiel, dass er „in dieser Hinsicht eher wohltätig gewirkt“ (6, 397) habe. Stilistisch konzediert Schlegel „neben dem philosophischen Scharfsinn auch Geist und Witz. Aber im ganzen, und besonders im Periodenbau, trägt seine Schreibart überall die Spuren seines mühselig nach Wahrheit ringenden, zwischen Zweifeln umherschwankenden Geistes. Dazu kam die unglückliche Terminologie.“ (6, 397) Dieses Schwankende führt Schlegel darauf zurück, dass Kant die beiden gegensätzlichen Strömungen des Empirismus und Idealismus integrieren wollte, aber deren Mängel nicht tilgen konnte. Seine praktische Philosophie beweise, „welch ein starres Wesen eine aus der praktischen Vernunft allein hergeleitete Sitten- und Rechtslehre bleiben muß“ (6, 398). Weder sei sie mit dem Innern des Menschen noch mit dem Leben verbunden. Kants gesamte Philosophie hänge an der Selbstbeschränkung der Vernunft. Deshalb sei zu konstatieren, dass „eine Erkenntnis von Gott oder göttlichen Dingen durch sie zu erreichen, also nicht möglich sei“ (6, 398). Wo Kant den Anspruch der Vernunft kritisch beschränkte und deshalb nur den „Ausweg eines erkünstelten Glaubens“ (6, 399) gefunden habe, sieht

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<sup>18</sup> Behler (1969) sieht das zentrale Anliegen von Schlegels Spätphilosophie darin, „daß hier die Grundlagen einer neuen Form der christlichen Philosophie gelegt werden sollen, die sich an den in der Neuzeit entwickelten Gegebenheiten des historischen Bewußtseins und der personalen Erfahrung orientiert und auf dieser Basis eine neue Stufe philosophischer Weltorientierung herbeiführen will“ (S. XLI).

<sup>19</sup> Zur Einordnung dieser Vorlesungen vgl. Polaschegg, S. 224-233.

Schlegel die Aufgabe, die Vernunft für das Gebiet einer höheren, „übersinnlichen Erfahrung“ (6, 398) in Dienst zu nehmen. Denn der Vernunftglaube, den Kant vom Glauben übrigließ, könne keinen wirklichen Glauben stützen. Die rationale, kritisch begrenzte Vernunft bei Kant wird als Einschränkung für den Glauben und die Öffnung hin zu einer wahren, spirituellen Religiosität bewertet.

Ähnliche Bemerkungen finden sich auch in Schlegels Rezension „Über J. C. F. Meister“ von 1813, in der es um Begründungsfragen der Moralphilosophie geht. Hier verweist Schlegel darauf, dass Kant zu Recht gezeigt habe, dass die spekulative Vernunft in ihren Ansprüchen begrenzt werden müsse. Doch im praktischen Gebrauch habe er die Vernunft in ihrer Selbstbestimmung gelten lassen. Dagegen wendet Schlegel ein, „daß die Vernunft überhaupt, sobald sie *allein* herrschen und die *Erste* sein will, jederzeit im praktischen so gut, wie im theoretischen Gebiete zu Nichts führe und sich selbst vernichte“ (8, 472), denn sie sei kein selbständiges Vermögen, sondern „ein untergeordnetes und andern Höhern *dienendes* Organ“ (8, 473). Diese „gesunde und Gott gehorsame Vernunft, wollen wir zwar an ihrer gebührenden Stelle als ein Werkzeug des Guten ehren, wenn wir gleich die in der Selbstheit befangene, alles aus sich selbst schöpfende und auf sich allein fußende Vernunft der angeblichen Philosophen und ihrer Systeme überall werden bekämpfen müssen“ (8, 473). Die Stoßrichtung von Schlegels Sichtweise ist klar: Die autonome Vernunft im Sinne Kants führe „im Leben nur zur Anarchie, in der Wissenschaft zur Sophisterei“, letztlich dann „zur Erlöschung und Ertötung des höhern Sinnes, aus dem alle Wahrheit quillt“ (8, 473). Die Idee einer sich selbst ermächtigenden, als autonom verstandenen Vernunft bei Kant oder Fichte müsse bekämpft werden.

Schlegels Blick auf Kants Philosophie ist zunehmend dominiert von der Abwehr der Idee einer autonomen Vernunft als der Orientierungsinstanz für den Menschen. Stattdessen wird die dezidierte Forderung der Unterordnung der Vernunft unter den Glauben immer weiter verfestigt, was aber auch bedeutet, Kants Gedanken der Vernunftautonomie ganz hinter sich zu lassen. Damit deutet sich das Bestreben zur Ausformulierung einer eigenen Philosophie an, die dann in den 1820er Jahren entsteht und von Schlegel statt als Idealismus nun als „Philosophie des Lebens“ gekennzeichnet wird, ein Topos, der sich schon viele Jahre immer einmal wieder in seinen Schriften findet.

### 3. Schlegels späte Philosophie der 1820er Jahre

Schlegels intellektuelle und geistige Entwicklung ist zeitlebens getragen von der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Geschehen in Europa, der Französischen Revolution, den Napoleonischen Kriegen, dem Ende des Heiligen Römischen Reiches, den Stabilisierungsbestrebungen seit dem Wiener Kongress und den dennoch schwelenden sozialen und politischen Konflikten um die Durchsetzung bürgerlicher Freiheiten. Ab 1809 hat Schlegel selbst ein politisches Amt am Wiener Hof inne: Er erhält eine Anstellung beim österreichischen Militär als k.k. Hofsekretär. Ab 1810 untersteht er Metternich und ist mit verschiedenen Aufgaben publizistischer und politischer Art betraut, nimmt in dessen Auftrag am Wiener Kongress 1815 teil, ist 1815-1818 Legationssekretär am Frankfurter Bundestag und wird in dieser Funktion schließlich 1818 pensioniert. Im Zusammenhang mit diesen politischen Aufgaben entwickeln sich auch intensive Beziehungen zu einflussreichen katholischen Kräften in Wien. Schlegel gibt von 1820 bis 1823 die Zeitschrift *Concordia* heraus, die mit Autoren wie Adam Müller, Franz von Baader, Carl Ludwig von Haller, Zacharias Werner und Franz von Buchholz zum Sprachrohr einer als „politische Romantik“ oder „Wiener Spätromantik“ bezeichneten Weltansicht wird.<sup>20</sup>

In seinem Schaffen nach 1818 richtet sich Schlegel nun vor allem darauf, seine philosophischen, religiösen, politischen und geschichtlichen Auffassungen zusammenzuführen. Es entsteht ein Zyklus mit drei Vorlesungen, die 1827 / 28 gehalten werden: zur *Philosophie des Lebens*, zur *Philosophie der Geschichte* und zur *Philosophie der Sprache und des Wortes*. Ihr Kulminationsgedanke besteht darin, im Katholizismus das Fundament und den geistigen Mittelpunkt des gesamten historischen Geschehens, des Staatswesens und des Menschseins, seines spirituellen Daseins und Lebens, aufzuweisen. Dieser Perspektive geht eine Bewertung der zeitgeschichtlichen Situation voran, die Schlegel 1820-23 unter dem Titel „Signatur des Zeitalters“ in der Zeitschrift *Concordia* veröffentlichte. Angesichts der diagnostizierten tiefgehenden Spaltung und Zerrüttung in ganz Europa formuliert er das Ziel „einer allgemeinen Versöhnung“ (7, 490), die aber nur erreicht werden könne durch Gottes Unterstützung: „Es bedarf einer höhern Lösung von oben, einer Hand und Macht, die nie fehlen kann, um den Gordischen Knoten zu lösen.“ (7, 553) Es geht um nichts weniger als eine

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<sup>20</sup> Behler 1996, S. 133. Al-Taie (2017) schätzt ein: „Mit der *Concordia* hat sich Schlegels Romantik endgültig von einem literarisch-philosophischen Projekt zu einem politisch-weltanschaulichen gewandelt“ (S. 300). Zur Spätromantik vgl. auch Segeberg 1944, S. 65-78; Dierkes 1994, S. 460-476.

neu auszulegende christliche Weltansicht von der göttlichen Ordnung und dem Platz des Menschen darin. Darüber aufzuklären, sieht Schlegel nun als seine Aufgabe, als seinen Beitrag dazu, sich für das Gedeihen der Menschheit einzusetzen.

Welche Rolle kann in dieser Spätphilosophie Kant noch für Schlegel spielen? Ernst Behler, der Herausgeber der späten Vorlesungen, urteilt: „Das vielleicht hervorstechendste Merkmal der Schlegelschen Vorlesungen besteht in dem durchgehend vertretenen Anspruch, daß ein völliger Neuanfang des philosophischen Denkens versucht wird.“ (10, XXXI) Dieser Neuanfang schließt es aus, weiterhin an den idealistischen Grundansichten der von Schlegel so bezeichneten neueren deutschen Philosophie festzuhalten. Dem trägt er dadurch Rechnung, dass er nicht mehr von Idealismus spricht, sondern von einer Philosophie des Lebens, womit „das innere geistige Leben, und zwar in seiner ganzen Fülle“ (X, 7), gemeint ist. Schlegel entwickelt in dieser Vorlesung eine eigenständige Philosophie, die er von der neueren deutschen Philosophie strikt abgrenzt. Nur noch in der ersten Vorlesung kommt Schlegel auf diese Abgrenzung zu sprechen. Sie trägt die Überschrift: „Von der denkenden Seele, als dem Mittelpunkte des Bewußtseins; und von dem falschen Gange der Vernunft“ (10, 4). Hier rechnet Schlegel final mit der herrschenden Schulphilosophie seit Kant ab. Sie sei abstrakt, künstlich und eigentlich unverständlich. (10, 8) Diese Kritik trifft damit auch Kant, der nur noch an einer Stelle der Vorlesung kurz Erwähnung findet. Vor allem richtet sich Schlegel gegen die Vernunftphilosophie als eine rationalistische Philosophie, die den Zugang zum Übersinnlichen abgeschnitten habe. (10, 15) Eine solche Philosophie sei lediglich eine „idealistische Verirrung“ (10, 18). Die Vernunft bewege sich nur in „toten Abstraktionen“ (10, 165) und zerstöre das innere, geistige Leben. Aus dieser Verirrung finde man nur den Ausweg durch eine Philosophie, die das höhere geistige Leben zur Geltung bringe. Sie solle ein Wissen liefern, das den ganzen Menschen umfasse (vgl. 10, 166). Diese Philosophie des Lebens sei keine bloße Vernunftwissenschaft, sondern „eine wahre Gottes-Philosophie“ (10, 167). Ihre Aufgabe bestehe nicht darin, die Glaubens-Wahrheiten wissenschaftlich herzuleiten oder zu demonstrieren, sondern im menschlichen Gemüt wahre „Glaubensgefühle“ zu erwecken (10, 170). Schlegels gesamtes Denken und Schaffen ist nun ausgerichtet auf den Zugang zum Göttlichen als der höchsten Wahrheit. Und dieser Zugang sei nicht durch rationale Vernunftseinsicht zu erreichen, sondern nur durch „eine passive Hingebung an Gott“ (19, 310, 109).

Die nun vorgetragene rigide Idealismus-Kritik Schlegels, die nicht nur Kant, sondern auch Fichte, Schelling und Hegel trifft, ist damit auch eine radikale Abkehr von den eigenen philosophischen Positionen der 1790er

Jahre.<sup>21</sup> Schauen wir von hier noch einmal zurück auf Schlegels Werdegang mit besonderem Blick auf seine Beurteilung der Leistungen Kants. Schlegel erfasst durchaus wichtige Aspekte der Philosophie Kants und zeigt Defizite auf, die auch in den zeitgenössischen Debatten diskutiert wurden. Doch es darf nicht übersehen werden, dass Schlegels Interesse nicht einer umfassenden philosophiegeschichtlichen Einordnung und Bewertung von Kants Werk gilt. Sicherlich fehlte ihm hierzu letztlich das solide Erarbeiten der inneren Systematik von Kants drei *Kritiken*. Eher ist Schlegels Interesse darauf gerichtet, Kants Philosophie zeitgeschichtlich einzuordnen und deren Bedeutung für die geistige Entwicklung in Deutschland auszuweisen. Diese Beurteilung verschiebt sich im Laufe seines Lebens von einer zustimmenden Würdigung hin zu einer fundamentalen Ablehnung der idealistischen Vernunftphilosophie überhaupt.

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<sup>21</sup> In dieser Einschätzung herrscht Einigkeit in der Schlegel-Forschung. Arndt (2017) geht in seiner Beurteilung sogar so weit, in Schlegels später Lebensphilosophie „den Auszug aus der Philosophie“ (S. 211) zu sehen.

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# Symphilosophie

*Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica*

## L'immaginazione poetica

### Filosofia e poesia in Kant e Novalis

*Serena Feloj\**

#### ABSTRACT

The article aims to establish a possible relationship between Kant's and Novalis's respective accounts of aesthetic imagination. In the first part of the article, starting with the distinction between productive and reproductive imagination, the free regularity of the aesthetic imagination as non-contradictory will be presented. I will then focus on the role of imagination in the theory of aesthetic ideas and finally refer to the creativity of the imagination as distinct from poetics and fantasy. In the second part, however, we will see how this distinction is annulled by Novalis, who identifies the poetising imagination as the only active force of the subject and the only way to access the absolute. Finally, the question will be raised as to whether philosophy can become poetry.

*Keywords:* Kant, Novalis, imagination, poetry, creativity, freedom, aesthetic ideas

#### ABSTRACT

L'articolo si propone di istituire una possibile relazione tra l'immaginazione estetica in Kant e in Novalis. Nella prima parte dell'articolo, a partire dalla distinzione tra immaginazione produttiva e riproduttiva, si presenterà la libera regolarità dell'immaginazione estetica come non contraddittoria. Ci si concentrerà successivamente sul ruolo dell'immaginazione nella teoria delle idee estetiche e infine si farà riferimento alla creatività dell'immaginazione come distinta dal poetare e dalla fantasia. Nella seconda parte si vedrà invece come questa distinzione venga annullata da Novalis, che identifica l'immaginazione poetante come l'unica forza attiva del soggetto e come l'unica via per accedere all'assoluto. Ci si interrogherà infine sulla possibilità che la filosofia possa farsi poesia.

*Parole chiave:* Kant, Novalis, immaginazione, poesia, creatività, libertà, idee estetiche

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\* Professore associato di estetica, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università di Pavia, Piazza Botta 6, 27100 Pavia, Italia – serena.feloj@unipv.it

Ma può la filosofia diventare letteratura,  
e però continuare a conoscere se stessa?  
S. Cavell, *La riscoperta dell'ordinario*

Nell'*Antropologia dal punto di vista pragmatico* del 1798, Kant pone la distinzione tra immaginazione riproduttiva e produttiva richiamando la sua funzione esibitiva:

l'immaginazione (*facultas imaginandi*) come facoltà di intuire anche senza la presenza dell'oggetto, è di due specie: produttiva o facoltà di rappresentazione originaria dell'oggetto (*exhibitio originaria*) precedente l'esperienza; riproduttiva o facoltà di presentazione derivata (*exhibitio derivativa*) che riporta nell'animo un'intuizione empirica già avuta<sup>1</sup>.

È nell'ambito del giudizio riflettente che compare una dimensione originaria dell'immaginazione: in un giudizio di gusto, l'immaginazione è produttiva, anzitutto poiché ha il compito di intuire l'oggetto e di comporre la sua molteplicità. Con queste due operazioni essa fornisce all'intelletto la materia in base alla quale formulare un giudizio, tuttavia «l'immaginazione produttiva non è creatrice, cioè non è in grado di fornire una rappresentazione sensibile che precedentemente non sia mai stata data alla facoltà di sentire perché deve sempre rifarsi a una qualche materia»<sup>2</sup>. In luogo di una distinzione binaria tra immaginazione riproduttiva e produttiva, si aggiunge allora un terzo tipo di attività immaginativa, quella autenticamente creatrice.

## 1. La regolarità libera dell'immaginazione produttiva

L'immaginazione, nei giudizi di gusto, deve mantenere la propria libertà e, allo stesso tempo, accordarsi con la regolarità dell'intelletto per poter formulare un giudizio. L'accordo di queste due facoltà è già implicito nella definizione del giudizio di gusto: il gusto, infatti, è «una facoltà di valutare un oggetto in riferimento alla *legalità libera* dell'immaginazione»<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I. Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Band VII, Berlin, 1917 [d'ora in poi Anth]; *Antropologia dal punto di vista pragmatico*, in *Critica della Ragion Pratica e altri scritti morali*, a cura di P. Chiodi, UTET, Torino, 2006, p. 588.

<sup>2</sup> Anth, p. 589.

<sup>3</sup> I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 5, hrsg. von der königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, Reimer, 1913 [d'ora in poi KU]; *Critica della capacità di giudizio*, trad. it. a cura di L. Amoroso, Rizzoli, Milano, 1995, p. 247.

nell'uso dell'immaginazione per la conoscenza, l'immaginazione è soggetta alla costrizione dell'intelletto e alla restrizione di dover essere adeguata al concetto di quello; nell'intento estetico, invece, l'immaginazione è libera, affinché, al di là di quell'accordo col concetto, procuri (e tuttavia senza cercarlo appositamente) abbondante (*reichhaltigen*) materiale non articolato (*unentwickelten*) per l'intelletto, che non l'aveva preso in considerazione nel suo concetto, e che esso però impiega non tanto oggettivamente per la conoscenza, quanto soggettivamente, per vivificare le capacità conoscitive, e dunque indirettamente, nonostante tutto, anche in vista di conoscenze<sup>4</sup>.

L'immaginazione, in un giudizio di gusto, fornisce quindi all'intelletto un'esibizione del molteplice dell'oggetto affinché venga riferita al sentimento di piacere e dispiacere. Nella sua attività estetica l'immaginazione è però libera: non è sottoposta alla costrizione dell'intelletto e non deve adeguarsi ai concetti, ma è libera di formare così tante e diverse rappresentazioni che non potrebbero essere riunite un concetto determinato: la materia che fornisce all'intelletto è, infatti, «abbondante» e «non articolata», ossia ricca e non definita.

La libertà dell'immaginazione non è, tuttavia, priva di regolarità:

le figure geometriche regolari, un cerchio, un quadrato, un cubo, etc., vengono presentate ordinariamente dai critici del gusto come i più semplici e indubitabili esempi di bellezza; e tuttavia esse vengono dette regolari appunto per il fatto che non si può rappresentarsele altrimenti che in modo tale da considerarle mere esibizioni di un concetto determinato, che prescrive a quella figura la regola (secondo la quale soltanto essa è possibile) ... [eppure] sarà difficile che qualcuno trovi che ci vuole un uomo di gusto per provare più compiacimento per la figura di un cerchio che per un contorno storpio, più per un quadrilatero equilatero ed equiangolo che per uno sghembo, con i lati diseguali, per così dire deforme<sup>5</sup>.

Occorre, dunque, che l'immaginazione si accordi, nel suo uso libero, con la regolarità dell'intelletto.

Kant attribuisce allora all'immaginazione una «libera regolarità» dell'immaginazione (*freie Gesetzmäßigkeit der Einbildungskraft*), anche se «è un controsenso che l'immaginazione sia libera e abbia da sé una sua propria legalità, cioè che essa compori una autonomia»<sup>6</sup>. Occorre allora spiegare in

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<sup>4</sup> KU, p. 453.

<sup>5</sup> KU, p. 249.

<sup>6</sup> KU, p. 247.

che senso si può parlare di una libera regolarità dell'immaginazione senza cadere in contraddizione.

Innanzitutto, la capacità immaginativa agisce a partire dalla contemplazione della forma dell'oggetto, quindi «nell'apprensione di un oggetto sensibile dato essa è legata a una forma determinata di questo oggetto e pertanto non ha affatto libero gioco (come nel figurare)»<sup>7</sup>. La facoltà di immaginazione deve, quindi, apprendere la forma di un oggetto in vista della formulazione di un giudizio. Essa non è, come il «figurare», del tutto libera di creare la forma dell'oggetto, ma deve raccogliere un molteplice già dato: la sua attività è, sì, produttiva, in quanto fornisce una materia all'intelletto indipendentemente dai concetti, ma è sempre legata a una forma percepita. L'immaginazione deve, quindi, fare sempre riferimento alla materia dei sensi.

L'immaginazione, inoltre, non è in grado di «stabilire per se stessa delle leggi»<sup>8</sup> che guidino la composizione del molteplice verso l'unità, e perciò essa si conforma alle leggi dell'intelletto. Per questo motivo, Ted Cohen e Paul Guyer affermano: «occorre trovare il giusto compromesso tra l'esigenza di libertà da ogni impedimento dell'immaginazione e l'esigenza intellettuale di un ordine regolare; in nessun caso, comunque, c'è una legge per trovare questo compromesso»<sup>9</sup>. Non essendo autonoma, dunque, l'immaginazione richiede la regolarità dell'intelletto per l'apprensione dell'oggetto; in caso contrario, sarebbe senza regole e corrisponderebbe al fantasticare.

Si capisce allora perché la libera regolarità dell'immaginazione possa sfuggire all'accusa di contraddittorietà: l'immaginazione agisce sempre liberamente e indipendentemente dai concetti intellettuali, tuttavia manifesta una certa regolarità nella sua attività di apprensione. L'immaginazione non fornisce a se stessa autonomamente questa regolarità, che le proviene dall'accordo che essa realizza con l'intelletto.

La non-autonomia dell'immaginazione era già stata anticipata da Kant nell'*Introduzione*, anche se in modo piuttosto implicito. Le facoltà superiori sono quelle facoltà dell'animo umano capaci di autonomia e dotate di principi propri; tra queste facoltà (che sono Intelletto, Giudizio e Ragione) non è compresa la facoltà di immaginazione, che è sempre considerata in relazione all'intelletto o, come avviene nell'*Analitica del sublime*, in relazione alla ragione.

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<sup>7</sup> KU, p. 247.

<sup>8</sup> R.A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant. The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgement*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> T. Cohen - P. Guyer, *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, p. 9.

## 2. Le idee estetiche e la creatività dell'immaginazione produttiva

La libera regolarità dell'immaginazione, che Kant descrive in relazione al libero gioco, evolve nel corso dei paragrafi della *Critica della capacità di giudizio*, nonostante mantenga alcuni tratti essenziali. L'immaginazione agisce liberamente in rapporto ai concetti dell'intelletto, opera mediante uno schematismo senza concetto, e tuttavia non agisce indipendentemente dall'intelletto, ma si serve della facoltà intellettiva per dare regolarità alla composizione del molteplice.

Nell'esposizione della teoria delle idee estetiche, nel §49, l'immaginazione assume tuttavia un'inedita dimensione creativa e diviene produttrice di idee:

l'idea estetica (*ästhetische Idee*) è una rappresentazione dell'immaginazione associata a un concetto dato, la quale è collegata con una tale molteplicità di rappresentazioni parziali (*Teilvorstellungen*) nel loro libero uso che per essa non può venir trovata alcuna espressione designante un concetto determinato, una rappresentazione, dunque, che fa pensare, in aggiunta a un concetto, molto di ineffabile (*Unmenbares*), il cui sentimento vivifica le facoltà conoscitive e con la lingua, come mera lettera (*Buchstaben*), collega lo spirito<sup>10</sup>.

La teoria delle idee estetiche era stata in parte anticipata nel §17, dedicato all'ideale del bello. Kant qui sostiene che non è possibile individuare una regola oggettiva che permetta di determinare, mediante i concetti, cosa sia bello. Cercare un principio del giudizio come criterio universale del bello è quindi «fatica vana», tuttavia è possibile individuare un «archetipo del gusto (*das Urbild des Geschmacks*)», che è «una mera idea che ciascuno deve produrre in se stesso e rispetto alla quale egli deve valutare tutto ciò che è oggetto del gusto, tutto ciò che è esempio della valutazione di gusto, e il gusto stesso di ciascuno»<sup>11</sup>. Più esattamente, l'archetipo del gusto è l'ideale del bello (*das Ideal der Schönheit*), che, come «rappresentazione di un ente singolo in quanto adeguato a un'idea»<sup>12</sup>, riposa su un'idea fornita dalla ragione.

L'ideale della bellezza è, dunque, un prodotto del gusto considerato «esemplare», che non può essere rappresentato mediante concetti, ma soltanto in un'«esibizione singola» dell'immaginazione<sup>13</sup>. L'ideale del bello

<sup>10</sup> KU, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> KU, p. 225.

<sup>12</sup> KU, p. 225.

<sup>13</sup> Alfredo Ferrarin sostiene che l'ideale, nella *Critica della capacità di giudizio*, «significa la rappresentazione di un essere singolo in quanto è adeguata ad un'idea. Alcuni prodotti del gusto sono esemplari; ma il modello del gusto è un'idea che dobbiamo produrre in noi stessi, perché è originale e non la possiamo acquisire con l'imitazione. A differenza

«sarà solo un ideale dell'immaginazione, appunto per il fatto che esso non si basa sopra concetti, ma sulla esibizione, e la facoltà dell'esibizione non è che l'immaginazione»<sup>14</sup>.

Si può allora concludere che, in quanto l'ideale della bellezza è un prodotto dell'immaginazione e poiché la facoltà immaginativa, nel suo libero gioco con l'intelletto, sta a fondamento della pretesa di comunicabilità universale del giudizio di gusto, l'esemplarità di questo ideale è ciò che permette di individuare l'universalità regolare e soggettiva del gusto. L'esemplare «può servire da criterio soggettivo di quella finalità estetica, ma incondizionata, nell'arte bella che deve avanzare la legittima pretesa di dover piacere a ciascuno. E solo così è possibile che ad essa, non potendole venire prescritto alcun principio oggettivo, stia a fondamento un principio a priori soggettivo e tuttavia valido universalmente»<sup>15</sup>.

L'ideale della bellezza, quindi, rimanda alla nozione di idea, e deve, infatti, fondarsi su un'idea estetica affinché l'oggetto possa essere giudicato conforme alle facoltà soggettive, secondo il principio di piacere e dispiacere. In tal senso, l'arte bella può essere definita come «espressione di idee estetiche».

Nonostante nella creazione artistica l'immaginazione sia in grado persino di produrre idee, l'idea estetica è associata a un concetto: in questo modo, come sostiene La Rocca, «qui ritorna in maniera apparentemente sorprendente – e, per una lettura riduttiva, clamorosamente contraddittoria – la presenza dei concetti, addirittura del concetto singolare»<sup>16</sup>. Ritorna quindi anche la considerazione che l'immaginazione, di cui l'idea estetica è una rappresentazione, non può agire autonomamente rispetto all'intelletto: l'idea estetica, infatti, è sempre associata a un «concetto dato». Tuttavia, il concetto a cui l'idea estetica viene associata non può mai essere adeguato: l'immaginazione agisce sempre liberamente, sebbene con regolarità, e all'idea estetica è legata una «molteplicità di rappresentazioni parziali», cosicché l'intelletto non è in grado di racchiudere in un concetto determinato questa molteplicità:

poiché il bello deve essere valutato non secondo concetti, bensì secondo quella disposizione dell'immaginazione che è finalistica in vista dell'ac-

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dell'ideale della ragione, l'ideale della bellezza è un ideale dell'immaginazione, che ha funzione esemplare nella sua esibizione in un individuo. Il genio del poeta è il talento che rappresenta idee razionali di esseri invisibili (morte, amore, invidia, ecc.) nell'individualità delle sue opere particolari, riuscendo ad esprimere l'inesprimibile» (A. Ferrarin, *Saggezza, Immaginazione e giudizio pratico*, ETS, Pisa, 2004, p. 136).

<sup>14</sup> KU, p. 227.

<sup>15</sup> KU, p. 523.

<sup>16</sup> C. La Rocca, *Soggetto e mondo. Studi su Kant*, Marsilio, Venezia, 2003, p. 256.

cordo con la facoltà dei concetti in generale, non saranno regole e prescrizioni, ma sarà solo ciò che è semplicemente natura nel soggetto, senza che sia possibile coglierlo sotto regole o concetti, cioè il sostrato soprasensibile di tutte le sue facoltà (che nessun concetto dell'intelletto raggiunge)<sup>17</sup>.

In questo modo Kant avvicina le idee estetiche, proprie di una immaginazione creatrice, alle idee della ragione:

si possono chiamare *idee* tali rappresentazioni dell'immaginazione: da una parte, per il fatto che esse quanto meno tendono a qualcosa che si trova al di là del limite dell'esperienza e così cercano di avvicinarsi a un'esibizione dei concetti della ragione (delle idee intellettuali), il che dà loro la parvenza di una realtà oggettiva, e dall'altra parte, anzi principalmente, perché ad esse, come intuizioni interne, nessun concetto può essere totalmente adeguato<sup>18</sup>.

Si scopre dunque che l'immaginazione può persino trascendere i confini dell'esperienza e produrre delle rappresentazioni che sono idee sovrasensibili. Tuttavia, le idee estetiche e le idee razionali, pur essendo in un rapporto di analogia, sono, per altri aspetti, in contrapposizione, soprattutto se si considerano i piani diversi a cui appartengono. Infatti, le idee estetiche sono riferite all'intuizione mediante un principio puramente soggettivo (il principio di piacere e dispiacere), che indica l'accordo di immaginazione e intelletto; le idee della ragione, invece, sono riferite a un concetto della ragione mediante un principio oggettivo. L'idea estetica è «normale», ossia rappresenta la «regola» del giudizio secondo un principio di finalità soggettiva; l'idea razionale, invece pone come principio del giudizio gli «scopi dell'umanità», che non possono essere rappresentati nella sensibilità. Inoltre, l'idea estetica non può divenire conoscenza perché è un'intuizione dell'immaginazione alla quale nessun concetto è adeguato; l'idea razionale, al contrario, non può essere conoscitiva poiché contiene un concetto del soprasensibile al quale non può mai corrispondere un'intuizione adeguata. Per questo motivo, l'idea estetica viene definita come una rappresentazione «inesponibile» dell'immaginazione, mentre l'idea razionale come un concetto «indimostrabile» della ragione.

L'idea estetica è *inexponibile*, inesponibile, e, quindi, lascia molto di *Unnenbares*, indicibile: essa non è esprimibile mediante un concetto che sia in

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<sup>17</sup> KU, p. 523.

<sup>18</sup> KU, p. 445.

grado di raggiungere l'intuizione che l'immaginazione unisce alla rappresentazione dell'idea estetica<sup>19</sup>.

La Rocca, proponendo una lettura che considera l'esperienza estetica come «scambio tra linguisticità e immagini», sostiene che «l'interpretazione di una forma estetica produce, nel bello, una moltiplicazione di sensi iconici e di significati linguistici in un intreccio inestricabile»<sup>20</sup>. L'immaginazione perciò agisce su una quantità di rappresentazioni tale che essa «dà occasione di pensare molto, senza però che qualche pensiero determinato, cioè qualche *concetto*, possa esserle adeguato»<sup>21</sup>. La Rocca sottolinea come in questo passo del § 49 si possa rimandare alla possibilità di uno schematismo senza concetto: l'immaginazione, infatti, produce, in un'idea estetica, legami tra le immagini che sono volti alla traduzione in un concetto, «senza che questo processo debba acquietarsi in un concetto determinato e nella semplice cognizione concettuale dell'immagine»<sup>22</sup>.

L'attività dell'immaginazione non può trovare un concetto adeguato, in quanto, attraverso le idee estetiche, crea «quasi un'altra natura col materiale che le dà quella effettiva»<sup>23</sup>. Questa «seconda natura» risulta dalla trasformazione del materiale naturale non solo secondo leggi analogiche e consecutive, ma anche «secondo principi che stanno più in alto, nella ragione»<sup>24</sup>. La rappresentazione delle idee estetiche è, dunque, qualcosa che oltrepassa la natura e che va al di là di ciò che può essere compreso in un concetto. In questo modo, sostiene Tomasi, «il concetto viene allora ampliato “estetica-mente in maniera illimitata”» e scaturisce «la possibilità di un rapporto positivo fra l'immaginazione e la ragione, del quale occorre tener conto in vista di una valutazione complessiva della sua [di Kant] concezione del bello»<sup>25</sup>.

Da ciò risulta che l'immaginazione è creatrice quando «non si limita ad affiancare al concetto l'intuizione corrispondente, ma lo amplia, perché l'intuizione che presenta risulta collegata con una tale molteplicità di “rappresentazioni parziali” (*Teilvorstellungen*), da far pensare molto di più di quanto è riportabile al concetto dato»<sup>26</sup>. L'immaginazione creatrice, perciò, si muove «verso ciò che è oltre i limiti della sensibilità, senza pretendere di darne una

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<sup>19</sup> KU, p. 521-523.

<sup>20</sup> C. La Rocca, *Soggetto e mondo*, p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> KU, p. 443.

<sup>22</sup> C. La Rocca, *Soggetto e mondo*, p. 258.

<sup>23</sup> KU, p. 445.

<sup>24</sup> KU, p. 447.

<sup>25</sup> G. Tomasi, *La forma che fa apparire l'idea. Immaginazione, intelletto e ragione nella concezione kantiana della pittura*, «Rivista di estetica», 4, 1997, p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.



compiuta esibizione»<sup>27</sup> e «mette in moto la facoltà delle idee intellettuali (la ragione)»<sup>28</sup>.

### 3. L'immaginazione produttiva e il poetare

La produttività dell'immaginazione si rivela dunque creatività nella teoria delle idee estetiche ed estende i confini dell'esperienza trovando nuova libertà:

nell'intento estetico, invece, l'immaginazione è libera, affinché, al di là di quell'accordo col concetto, procuri (e tuttavia senza cercarlo appositamente) abbondante (*reichhaltigen*) materiale non articolato (*unentwickelten*) per l'intelletto, che non l'aveva preso in considerazione nel suo concetto, e che esso però impiega non tanto oggettivamente per la conoscenza, quanto soggettivamente, per vivificare le capacità conoscitive, e dunque indirettamente, nonostante tutto, anche in vista di conoscenze<sup>29</sup>.

Per questo motivo un'immaginazione creatrice è propria del genio, definito come talento necessario per la produzione dell'arte bella<sup>30</sup> e la poesia, che media tra idea e parola, tra immagine e concetto, è l'arte che più di ogni altra può definirsi bella.

In questo senso è però utile richiamare una distinzione che sarà invece annullata da Novalis: l'immaginazione produttiva non è, cioè, *Dichten*. Il termine kantiano "*Dichten*", inteso come "produzione di immagini", può essere tradotto, più letteralmente, con "poetare"<sup>31</sup>. Si vuole richiamare l'attenzione su questo termine in quanto, sulla base della differenza che Kant istituisce tra l'immaginazione e il «poetare», si capisce meglio in che senso la libertà della facoltà immaginativa non è illimitata. Infatti, l'immaginazione non è, come la poesia, totalmente libera di creare rappresentazioni<sup>32</sup>, ma deve limitarsi all'intuizione di una rappresentazione sensibile già data alla facoltà del sentire. La libertà dell'immaginazione, in altre parole non è una libertà

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<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> KU, p. 445.

<sup>29</sup> KU, p. 451.

<sup>30</sup> Si veda la distinzione che Kant pone tra arte bella e bellezza naturale: «per *valutare* gli oggetti belli in quanto tali si richiede il *gusto*, ma per l'arte bella stessa, cioè per *produrre* tali oggetti, si richiede il *genio*. [...] Una bellezza naturale è una *cosa bella*; la bellezza artistica è una *bella rappresentazione* di una cosa» (KU, p. 437).

<sup>31</sup> È in questo caso significativo ricordare le diverse traduzioni italiane del termine *Dichten*: Alfredo Gargiulo traduce «come nella *poesia*», Leonardo Amoroso usa «figurare», Emilio Garroni e Hansmichael Hohenegger rendono con «immaginare».

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. KU, § 53.

assoluta, in quanto fa sempre riferimento alla materia della sensibilità e al soprasensibile del concetto.

Per lo stesso motivo l'immaginazione è distinta anche dal fantasticare. Il fantasticare, infatti, «consiste nell'illusione di voler vedere qualche cosa al di là dei limiti della sensibilità»; il fantasticare, afferma Kant, è una modalità dell'immaginazione in cui essa è «senza regola»<sup>33</sup>. Kant sostiene, quindi, che la libertà dell'immaginazione estetica non può essere illimitata, e se, invece, godesse di una libertà assoluta, sarebbe un fantasticare senza regole e non richiederebbe l'accordo con l'intelletto<sup>34</sup>.

Nell'*Antropologia dal punto di vista pragmatico* Kant riprende, in modo più approfondito, la propria definizione di fantasia e, contrariamente a quanto farà Novalis, afferma che è un involontario uso dell'immaginazione, in cui il soggetto rimane passivo e perde il controllo del gioco delle facoltà. Per questo motivo Rudolf Makkreel sostiene che «si può ritenere che la fantasia attiva la mente attraverso il suo gioco, sebbene strettamente parlando essa non è attiva nel senso di essere un'operazione volontaria guidata dalla nostra ragione e volontà»<sup>35</sup>.

Come afferma Marcucci, in Kant manca un concetto profondo di fantasia, in quanto, non essendo un pensatore romantico, non si trova una chiara distinzione tra immaginazione e fantasia. Tuttavia, «questo fatto non ci autorizza a dire che l'immaginazione di cui parla Kant sul piano estetico è

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. KU, p. 225.

Per questo passo si preferisce utilizzare la traduzione di Alfredo Gargiulo, piuttosto che quella di Amoroso, di cui finora ci si è serviti. Il motivo di questa scelta è determinato dalla traduzione del termine *Schwärmerei*, che Gargiulo rende con “fantasticare”, mentre sia Amoroso che Garroni preferiscono tradurlo rispettivamente con “esaltazione fanatica” e “fanatismo”, restando più aderente all'uso che ne fa la lingua tedesca. Inoltre lo stesso Kant nelle *Beobachtungen* utilizza il termine *Schwärmerei* in relazione a “*Fanatismus*” e in opposizione al termine “*Enthusiasmus*”. È, dunque, sicuramente più corretto tradurre *Schwärmerei* con fanatismo, che richiama il significato originario del termine, nato per indicare il fanatismo religioso (cfr. J. und W. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig, 1854, Nachdr. München, 1984, Bd. 1) e che Kant stesso utilizza nella *Critica della ragion pratica*. La traduzione di Gargiulo, tuttavia, utilizzando il termine “fantasticare”, individua un modo dell'immaginazione che si differenzia dall'immaginazione estetica produttiva. La traduzione di Gargiulo è, forse, più libera, ma ritengo sia più efficace per definire il concetto di libera regolarità dell'immaginazione.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Pietro Gambazzi: «tra l'immaginazione priva di regole che spesso si piglia gioco dell'uomo (fantasia) e l'immaginazione schematizzante secondo concetti determinati dell'intelletto, sta l'immaginazione libera ma regolare che è posta in gioco dalla bellezza: non vincolata da concetti come la prima, ma senza alcun conflitto con l'intelletto; regolare come la seconda, ma senza alcun vincolo a concetti e regole determinate» (P. Gambazzi, *Sensibilità, immaginazione e bellezza. Introduzione alla dimensione estetica nelle tre critiche di Kant*. Libreria universitaria editrice, Verona, 1981, p. 299-300).

<sup>35</sup> R. A. Makkreel, *Kant's Anthropology and the Use and Misuse of the Imagination*, in *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2001, p. 389.

quella meramente riproduttiva, quando Kant ha più volte affermato, e con notevole insistenza, proprio il contrario»<sup>36</sup>.

Si ha allora, da parte dell'immaginazione, una «libertà senza arbitrarità», una libertà che permette all'immaginazione di essere produttiva e creatrice, di procedere autonomamente fornendo nuovo materiale all'intelletto. Tuttavia, è una libertà «regolare», ossia conforme alla legalità dell'intelletto: l'immaginazione procede quindi con una regolarità priva di legge, come se esibisse un concetto, ma senza che il concetto sia presente come nel processo conoscitivo di un oggetto.

L'immaginazione di cui Kant parla nella *Critica della capacità di giudizio* è, quindi, differente sia dall'immaginazione riproduttiva della prima *Critica*, sia dal fantasticare: l'immaginazione posta in gioco dalla bellezza è una facoltà libera ma regolare. Come la fantasia, non è vincolata a concetti, ma è regolare e senza alcun conflitto con l'intelletto, come l'immaginazione schematizzante della prima *Critica*<sup>37</sup>.

#### 4. Novalis e l'immaginazione poetante

Nell'estetica kantiana, l'immaginazione raggiunge la massima creatività nella produzione di arte bella e, soprattutto, nella produzione poetica. Se, tuttavia, l'immaginazione poetica in Kant rimane vincolata a una forma di libertà regolata, i romantici approfondiranno ed esalteranno la creatività libera e assoluta dell'immaginazione. In tal senso è possibile accostare la creatività dell'immaginazione kantiana all'immaginazione che si può trovare descritta in alcune opere di Novalis. Questo accostamento richiede però alcune premesse. In primo luogo, non considererò la sua produzione letteraria, ma soltanto le sue riflessioni filosofiche, attraverso i *Frammenti* e gli *Studi fichtiani*. In secondo luogo, occorre tenere presente che Novalis si riferisce a Kant prevalentemente tramite la mediazione di Fichte, e tuttavia qui tralascerò uno studio della relazione tra Novalis e Fichte.

Considerando il rapporto fichtiano tra Io e Non-io, Novalis ritiene di superare la concezione kantiana dell'esperienza, che è invece riferita a un io

<sup>36</sup> S. Marcucci, *Intelletto e «intellettualismo» nell'estetica di Kant*, Longo, Ravenna, 1976, p. 98, nota 12.

<sup>37</sup> A questo proposito si veda ancora Marcucci: «il limite le [all'immaginazione] viene proprio imposto dall'intelletto perché, quando essa opera “senza legge”, non produca “stravaganze”, che non sono la bellezza: se è vero che la bellezza viene uccisa dalla “regolarità matematica” propria dell'intelletto e dallo “schematismo oggettivo” dell'immaginazione trascendentale, è altrettanto vero che essa viene distrutta dalle “stravaganze” di una immaginazione libera, ma che si muove a casaccio in un caos di rappresentazioni » (S. Marcucci, *Intelletto e «intellettualismo» nell'estetica di Kant*, p. 151).

pensante, statico e categorizzante. Novalis intende ribaltare la relazione tra intelletto e immaginazione in nome di una nozione più autentica di sensibilità. In questa prospettiva, la libera regolarità dell'immaginazione kantiana viene superata in virtù di una libertà assoluta dell'immaginazione e in relazione alla creatività poetica. Secondo Novalis è infatti il sentimento a condurre il soggetto a scoprire il vero significato della realtà percepita, il suo fondamento.

Nella teoria novalisiana del sentimento, il soggetto «risulta contenere in sé il proprio superamento. Detto in altre parole, le determinazioni del soggetto costituiscono il superamento di sé stesso»<sup>38</sup>. Nell'atto originario (*Urhandlung*), il soggetto deve dunque superare sé stesso e la propria opposizione con la realtà, raggiungendo la dimensione dell'Io assoluto. Non si tratta tuttavia di evadere dal proprio essere, ma di comprendere la natura intima del soggetto: «il sapere proviene da qualcosa – si riferisce sempre a un qualcosa – È una relazione all'esser, nell'essere determinato in assoluto, nell'Io. Nel sapere l'accento, la lunghezza, poggia sull'essere, nell'essere determinato [...] Nel sentire (*Fühlen*) avviene il contrario. L'accento poggia sulla forma, sulla determinazione»<sup>39</sup>.

L'obiettivo di Novalis è quello di passare dalla conoscenza determinata alla comprensione sensibile di ciò che determina la conoscenza. Con un vero e proprio “salto nella fede” sentimentale, Novalis elabora l'idea di un sentimento dell'assoluto, ovvero di un sentimento capace di cogliere l'assoluto che sta dietro alla soggettività determinata: «l'uomo sente il limite che racchiude tutto per lui, per lui stesso, il primo atto; gli deve credere, con la stessa certezza con cui sa ogni altra cosa»<sup>40</sup>. Una volta superato il confine dell'Io, nell'atto originario, scorgiamo un significato più profondo, quello della vita stessa, e in questa forma di vitalismo si comprende la limitazione della filosofia, che non è più in grado di comprendere la vita, e la funzione del sentimento nel porci in relazione con ciò che va oltre l'essere.

In questa rivalutazione del sentimento, anche l'immaginazione assume nuova centralità. Il sentimento, in quanto facoltà, è per Novalis essenzialmente passivo; occorre dunque che l'attività dell'immaginazione permetta il

<sup>38</sup> H. Aldouri, *Before Hegel: Schiller, Novalis, and the Concept of Aufhebung*, «Cosmos and History. The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy», 15, 1/2019, p. 10-30.

<sup>39</sup> Novalis, *Philosophische Studien der Jahren 1795-96. Fichte-Studien*, in Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* [d'ora in poi: NW], historisch-kritische Ausgabe in sechs Bänden, hg. von P. Kluckhohn, R. Samuel, H.-J. Mähl und G. Schulz et al., Band II, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981; *Studi filosofici degli anni 1795-1796. Studi fichtiani*, in Novalis, *Opera filosofica*, a cura di F. Desideri e G. Moretti, Torino, Einaudi, 1993, p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> NW, p. 71.

movimento verso l'atto originario. Le facoltà considerate sono quelle kantiane e la produttività è riconosciuta soltanto all'immaginazione in quanto capacità mediana e creatrice: «il sentimento, l'intelletto e la ragione sono in un certo modo passivi – cosa che i loro nomi indicano immediatamente – invece soltanto l'immaginazione è forza [*Kraft*] – è l'unica attiva – a muovere [...]. C'è una facoltà rappresentativa e una facoltà del sentimento – non c'è una facoltà dell'immaginazione. Facoltà è passività»<sup>41</sup>.

Novalis, quindi, riprende la produttività dell'immaginazione kantiana e ne sottolinea la creatività, intravede la potenzialità dell'immaginazione in Kant e ne esaspera almeno due caratteristiche. In primo luogo, svincola l'immaginazione dalle altre facoltà: l'immaginazione torna, cioè, a essere *vis ræpresentativa* nel senso più ampio del termine, non è quindi una delle facoltà conoscitive, ma anzi è la forza che permette la connessione tra gli elementi dell'esperienza fino a garantire un accesso all'assoluto. Questa posizione dell'immaginazione era già presente, in forma abbozzata, nella terza critica kantiana, laddove Kant prevedeva che l'immaginazione si relazionasse alle diverse facoltà dell'animo (intelletto e ragione) costituendo una sorta di “braccio operativo” della capacità di giudizio. In Novalis l'immaginazione diviene la “forza motrice”.

In secondo luogo, Novalis attribuisce all'immaginazione la capacità di creare qualcosa di nuovo, potenziando decisamente il suo carattere produttivo. In tal senso, in una prospettiva di superamento del pensiero filosofico, si può parlare di “immaginazione poetante”. L'immaginazione non è per Novalis semplicemente una capacità che permette la mediazione tra elementi eterogenei dando luogo a una rappresentazione, ma costituisce l'elemento strutturale dell'essere umano, che va oltre l'io teoretico e permette una vera e propria unificazione di sensibilità e intelletto nell'io assoluto. L'immaginazione poetante mantiene alcuni tratti essenziali dell'immaginazione produttiva kantiana, come l'elemento di spontaneità, ma svincolandosi dall'esigenza di regolarità arriva ad assumere una posizione di dominio nei confronti dell'intelletto. Al contrario di quanto accadeva nella filosofia kantiana, l'intelletto non può presentarsi nulla che non sia già prodotto dall'immaginazione.

Non soltanto l'immaginazione poetante crea una realtà nuova, ma si definisce attraverso il movimento che conduce oltre i confini dell'esperienza. Grazie all'immaginazione, il soggetto non rimane confinato alla sua dimensione empirica, ma scopre il sentimento dell'assoluto e scopre la sfera auten-

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<sup>41</sup> NW, p. 123.

tica che è produzione dell'atto di «divenire uomo»<sup>42</sup>. L'immaginazione, dunque, non è semplicemente produttrice di rappresentazioni, ma è forza generatrice di pensiero e di coscienza, è ciò che attiva ogni facoltà e infine anche il sentimento.

## 5. Poesia e vita: essere è una relazione ritmica

«L'immaginazione ha due prodotti – il vero e l'apparenza»<sup>43</sup>: l'immaginazione permette così di superare la distinzione fichtiana tra io e non-io nell'io assoluto. In questo atto originario, l'immaginazione mantiene un altro tratto essenziale che tradizionalmente (non soltanto in Kant) le viene attribuito, ossia la capacità della mediazione. L'immaginazione conduce il soggetto allo scambio tra essere e non-essere, in un movimento di oscillazione (*Schweben*): «l'immaginazione è il termine medio collegante – la sintesi – la forza di scambio»<sup>44</sup>.

In quanto “forza dello scambio”, l'immaginazione garantisce così al soggetto non soltanto di cogliere l'unità di vero e non-vero, ma anche di produrre la loro stessa unificazione: «essere, essere Io, essere libero e oscillare sono sinonimi»<sup>45</sup>. In definitiva, il soggetto scopre mediante l'immaginazione l'origine della realtà e al tempo stesso, nella sua produttività poetica, si scopre egli stesso creatore della realtà originaria. Si delinea così una sorta di ordinamento sistematico: la filosofia, risultando insufficiente, si configura come prodotto del sentimento; il sentimento (facoltà passiva) risulta essere un prodotto dell'immaginazione (forza attiva e motrice). L'essenza dell'immaginazione e, dunque, il fondamento di tale ordinamento diviene l'attività poetica, laddove l'essere naturalmente poetico del soggetto novalisiano ne determina la tendenza a creare realtà<sup>46</sup>.

L'atto poetico è infine l'atto autenticamente creatore e l'essenza del soggetto, è atto unificante non soltanto di sensibilità e intelletto, ma anche di essere e non-essere, di vero e apparenza. Il soggetto diviene poeta e così diviene uomo. La filosofia è limitata, persino modesta, e tuttavia è consapevole della propria insufficienza: «la filosofia è strettamente limitata alla modificazione determinata – *della coscienza* – Essa è modesta – Resta nei suoi limiti. Comprende quel che è in essa o sotto di essa»<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> G. Adreozzi, *Immaginazione e soggettività: per un confronto tra Novalis e Hegel*, «Aisthema», 6, 1/2020, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> NW, p. 134.

<sup>44</sup> NW, p. 139.

<sup>45</sup> NW, p. 208.

<sup>46</sup> G. Moretti, *Novalis: pensiero, poesia, romanzo*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2016, p. 40.

<sup>47</sup> NW, p. 209.

Se ne conclude, quindi, che la filosofia non riesce ad afferrare la vita, diversamente da quanto è in grado di fare la poesia, grazie alla creatività libera dell'immaginazione:

essere esprime una permanenza del porre, dello scambio, dell'attività, dell'atto produttore [...]. Nell'universo temporale, essere è una relazione ritmica. Essere, verbalmente, esprime il carattere attivo e passivo dell'azione di scambio fra ponente e ponibile, fra sfera e contenuto<sup>48</sup>.

Non la filosofia, che rimane statica, ma la poesia sarà dunque in grado di cogliere il movimento dinamico dell'oscillazione e infine di afferrare la vita. Se lo scopo della filosofia è quello di pensare un fondamento, la ricerca di un principio assoluto non potrà in nessun modo essere compiuta filosoficamente entro i confini dell'esperienza: «ogni ricerca di un principio sarebbe come cercare la quadratura del cerchio»<sup>49</sup>.

Occorre allora rinunciare a ogni ricerca di un principio assoluto sul piano della riflessione e dell'analisi e riconoscere che soltanto nello “slancio sentimentale” possibile tramite la poesia possiamo intuire sensibilmente tale principio assoluto. Il soggetto-poeta viene così a prendere parte, tramite l'immaginazione poetante, all'attività dinamica e generativa dello scambio tra essere e non-essere, così che lo stesso soggetto si scopre partecipante del principio supremo che andava indagando<sup>50</sup>. «Filosofare è sondare [*ergründen*]. Escogitare [*erdenken*] è poetare. [...] il principio supremo non deve assolutamente essere qualcosa di dato, e deve invece essere un libero prodotto, escogitato, inventato»<sup>51</sup>.

La “modestia” che viene attribuita alla filosofia non deve tuttavia lasciar pensare che la teoria di Novalis sia anti-filosofica: senza un fondamento filosofico non si potrebbe infatti produrre poesia poiché l'io empirico non avrebbe modo di ripercorre la propria relazione con il cosmo. La visione romantica di Novalis riconosce l'insufficienza della filosofia, ma ciò non comporta un rifiuto del pensiero filosofico, bensì il riconoscimento della necessità di un'estensione poetica della filosofia. La poesia ha ancora bisogno della filosofia poiché soltanto quest'ultima può istruirci sul valore teoretico della poesia<sup>52</sup>: «se la filosofia rende possibile la poesia *compiuta* [...] è la poesia

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<sup>48</sup> NW, p. 191.

<sup>49</sup> NW, p. 210.

<sup>50</sup> NW, p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> NW, p. 211-13.

<sup>52</sup> D.W. Wood, *From “Fichticizing” to “Romanticizing”: Fichte and Novalis on the Activities of Philosophy and Art*, «Fichte-Studien», 41/2014, p. 257.

per così dire il suo scopo, tramite il quale essa acquista in primo luogo significato e un'esistenza leggiadra»<sup>53</sup>.

In conclusione, la teoria dell'immaginazione poetante di Novalis può essere letta come un'esasperazione e finanche un ribaltamento dell'immaginazione produttiva di Kant. Se Kant vincola l'immaginazione, persino nella sua dimensione più produttiva, alla regolarità dell'intelletto, Novalis compie il dominio dell'immaginazione sull'intelletto riconoscendone un'essenziale attività di forza motrice. Sembra tuttavia che, pur riconoscendo le due prospettive profondamente differenti sull'immaginazione, Kant e Novalis possano trovare un punto di incontro nella poesia. Se per Kant la poesia è il luogo di maggiore creatività dell'immaginazione estetica, che diviene capacità di esprimere idee, per Novalis la poesia, che pure è l'unica in grado di esprimere il principio supremo, risulta interdipendente dalla filosofia. Quello che certamente Novalis ha visto, oltre Kant, è la necessità che la filosofia, per intuire l'assoluto, si faccia poesia.

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<sup>53</sup> Novalis, *Philosophische Studien der Jahren 1795-96. Hemsterhuis-Studien*, in *Novalis, Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, historisch-kritische Ausgabe in sechs Bänden, hg. von P. Kluckhohn, R. Samuel, H.-J. Mähl und G. Schulz et al., Band II, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981; *Studi su Hemsterhuis*, in *Novalis, Opera filosofica*, a cura di F. Desideri e G. Moretti, Torino, Einaudi, 1993, p. 271.



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# Symphilosophie

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## Imagining Nature a Second Time

### Poetry and Gardens in Kant and Coleridge

*Cody Staton*<sup>\*</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between poetry and philosophy, or particularity and universality, by way of the theories of imagination offered by Kant and Coleridge. I examine two ways in which the imagination is said to create a second nature through gardens and poetry. Both Kant and Coleridge describe the beauty of nature as supplying the imagination with the material necessary to reimagine nature or to create a new nature compatible with and reliant upon original nature. For Coleridge and Kant, the poet and gardener imagine nature well beyond the material givenness but instead give rise to reflections on the relationship between the universal and particular.

*Keywords:* Kant, Coleridge, imagination, poetry, nature, landscape gardens

#### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine le rapport entre poésie et philosophie, ou entre particularité et universalité, par le biais des théories de l'imagination proposées par Kant et Coleridge. J'examine deux façons dont l'imagination est censée créer une seconde nature à travers les jardins et la poésie. Kant et Coleridge décrivent tous deux la beauté de la nature comme fournissant à l'imagination le matériau nécessaire pour ré-imaginer la nature ou pour créer une nouvelle nature compatible avec la nature originelle et s'appuyant sur elle. Pour Coleridge et Kant, le poète et le jardinier imaginent la nature bien au-delà du donné matériel, donnant ainsi lieu à des réflexions sur la relation entre l'universel et le particulier.

*Mots-clés :* Kant, Coleridge, imagination, poésie, nature, jardins paysager

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<sup>\*</sup> PhD in Philosophy, independent scholar, 3186 Jade Ct., Canton GA, USA –  
mcdystaton@gmail.com

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once remarked that a person seeking to understand the way that he views the world could be described as follows:

In the Preface of my *Metaphys. Works* I should say – Once & all read  
Tetens, Kant, Fichte, &c – & there you will trace or if you are on the  
hunt, track me.<sup>1</sup>

Of the three German-speaking philosophers, Kant stands out as the most significant for Coleridge. And for a philosopher-poet obsessed with the power of the imagination, this is not at all an astounding discovery. His philosophical reflections are as equally imaginative as are his poetic writings. Who else but Coleridge, an admirer of Kant, could have created Xanadu, a wild paradise that takes readers to the summit of the sublime? Plenty of commentators have appreciated this relation, though none that I know of have investigated Kant and Coleridge on imagination in view of the relationship between poetry and philosophy itself, thus examining the relationship between universality and particularity.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, what the imagination enjoys and truly seeks more than anything is an original and unmitigated connection with nature. This sort of active affinity of imagination and nature becomes the very source for the imagination to continue imagining nature, thus forming the familiar in novel ways. As Kant says in the *Critique of Judgment*, through works of art, especially poetry, the imagination sets out to create nature a second time.<sup>3</sup> The most immediate way that we actively pursue an ongoing and dynamic relationship with nature is through the creation of gardens, which are quasi rearrangements of nature itself. In other words, through gardens we like to imagine how we can poetically and imaginatively emulate the imagination of God, or so I will claim.

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<sup>1</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Kathleen Coburn (New York and London: Routledge, 1957–), ii, 2375. Hereafter cited as *CN*. I would like to sincerely thank the two anonymous readers of my text who offered insightful and encouraging remarks and also pointed to some of the passages quoted as touching on broader issues at work in romanticism as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on Kant and Coleridge on the power of imagination and the trivial indifference as to how Coleridge derived his ideas, see especially Hume, Robert D. “Kant and Coleridge on imagination.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28.4 (1970): 485-496. Similarly, Peter Cheyne develops a thoughtful reflection on the practice of contemplation as comprising the combination of imagination, logic, reason, and aesthetic experience. See Cheyne, Peter, *Coleridge’s Contemplative Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Ausgabe der Koniglich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1901–), §49, AA 5: 314. Hereafter cited as *KU*.

Kant's theory of imagination can be classified as multifaceted and contributing to all aspects of creative life. This is true not only for the poet, but for the very way in which an object becomes a representation for us in the first place. For Kant, the imagination can work on, retrieve, and create any kind of object—be it empirical, aesthetic, or transcendental. In the third *Critique*, he describes the imagination as operating in free play, whereby it is not restricted by the understanding to conform to its rules. What the imagination loves most is to play with the rhythms of nature in the winding streams and billowing clouds and loves equally to recreate that nature in poetry or in gardens.

In his theoretical writings, Coleridge says next to nothing about gardens nor of their comparison to the wildness of nature, nor even of their necessary role as venues for strolling that serve to plunge the romantic poet into reflection. This is somewhat strange given that Coleridge and other English romantic poets spent as much time as possible in the Lake District in Cumbria of northwest England, where some of the country's finest walks can still be had among rolling hills, rock outcroppings, and large stretching lakes. This is certainly not the case for his on-and-off friend and fellow poet Wordsworth, who spent time in that country and dedicated the poem "Grasmere" to the pursuit of "plain living and high thinking" while living there. Most especially in "Tintern Abbey," he writes of the "wild green landscape" in which the "sportive wood run wild." In that collection, he was apparently unimpressed with the contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798 / 1800) by Coleridge, claiming that he would remove the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in the next edition. But Wordsworth floats as light as air as a poet, perhaps never coming down, as he never lifts a finger to say anything philosophical. The same cannot be said of Coleridge, who in all instances of his poetry was after sublime landscapes captured only in the imagination—landscapes such as Xanadu that go beyond the verge of what Kant would call grotesque and toward what Coleridge would characterize as paradise.

Moreover, Coleridge was the most philosophically mature thinker in the English language of his day, perhaps the most reflective since Hume. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge waxes on the aesthetics of poetry, but more importantly he there characterizes the imagination—perhaps owing to his reading of Kant, Tetens, Fichte, and Schiller—as comprising several functions. We will set out to discover the function of the imagination, according to Coleridge and to examine what role Kant plays in this endeavor. My instinct is that, even though we can consider Coleridge to have drawn inspiration from a number of thinkers, the imaginative aquifer for him, the original source of inspiration, comes from nature itself, not from Kant or any

other writer. This reflection on the imagination in Kant and Coleridge—a topic that has been thoroughly discussed already—will promote a broader consideration of the relationship between philosophy and poetry, between the natural and the arranged, and between the universal and the particular.

We will begin by examining Kant's theory of imagination before taking up consideration of Coleridge's original account of imagination. This will allow us to view the standpoint that each take with regard to nature and poetry. Along the way, we will give some voice to the landscape garden and how it, much like poetry, enables the philosopher-poet to consider the nature that we inherit in light of the nature that we create through art. This gives us the further advantage to reflect on the dynamic relationship between universality and particularity.

### 1. Imagination in Kant

Kant's critical conception of the imagination continues to be a source of both inspiration and controversy among commentators. It is clear that his decision to regard the sensible and intellectual powers of the mind as being distinct in kind obliged him to nominate the imagination as the third, mediating power that is both intellectual and sensible, active and passive, productive and reproductive. For our purposes, I will simply highlight the creative aspects of the imagination that will have more to do with our theme here.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is primarily concerned with delineating the transcendental functions of the imagination that create schemata, which serve to create a priori time-determinations that translate the otherwise abstract categories from mere forms for judging into rules that apply to the sensible conditions of time. In the case of determinative judgment, the imagination plays the supporting role for the understanding. Kant's revamped consideration of the imagination came about in the late 1780s when he stumbled upon the idea that the power of judgment, no less than reason and the understanding, required a critique of its use and application. What Kant then discovered was that judgment does not always follow the rules of the understanding. In its reflective mode, judgment either proceeds according to the play of the imagination alone (aesthetic) or makes declarations alongside the understanding's concepts insofar as reason projects a teleological aim for judgment (teleology).

In its aesthetic mode, judgment finds the mere free play of the imagination's reflections on nature's forms to be purposeful in itself, even though no concept of the object's purpose is presented for judgment to subsume; rather, judgment finds pleasure in the imagination's reflections to be

purposive. As a whole, judgment simply forms a different standpoint with regard to the presentations given by the imagination and understanding. In a lecture note, Kant is said to have characterized the two faculties as often having different aims as follows:

Imagination and understanding are two friends who cannot do without one another but cannot stand one another either, for one always harms the other. The more universal the understanding is in its rules, the more perfect it is, but if it wants to consider things *in concreto* then [it] absolutely cannot do without the imagination.<sup>4</sup>

Kant's designation of the *in concreto* schematization of the dog in the first *Critique* indeed refers not to a particular dog, but rather to the universal applicability of the concept through the schema that exhibits it in intuition.<sup>5</sup> The more the understanding learns to rely on the imagination's *in concreto* expressions of the concept, the more concepts the understanding can produce. From the "four-footed animal in a general way," the imagination renders the particularity of given sensible intuitions more universal by way of exhibiting outward the production of concepts, namely, by enabling the understanding to produce more concepts.<sup>6</sup>

In the third *Critique*, we find Kant characterizing the relationship between imagination and understanding in such a way that the latter does the bidding of the former. In §9, Kant describes the "*free play* of the cognitive powers" as contributing to judgments of taste.<sup>7</sup> Rachel Zuckert has observed that Kant refers to the free play in three ways: as a free play of imagination, as a free play of imagination *and* understanding, and as the free play of imagination *with* understanding.<sup>8</sup> These arguments contribute to the general condition of the mind that Kant refers to as the "lawfulness without a law" or the "lawfulness of the contingent," both of which are said to establish the purposive unity of representations without being governed by a concept of the object purpose.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kant, V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 710.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A141/B180. Hereafter cited as KrV.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Kant, JL §16, 9: 99n, §16, 100, and §17, 5: 232.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, KU, §9, 217.

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Zuckert, *Beauty and Biology, An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 279–305. I have discussed this topic more extensively in Staton, "In Search of Play: Schiller's Drive Theory as a Turn Away From Kant [À la recherche du jeu. La théorie schillérienne des pulsions : une mise à distance de Kant]," *Les Cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg*, vol. 52 (2022): 69–95.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kant, KU, 5: 240–41; cf. §15, 5: 226 and §17, 5: 236.

However it is that the imagination plays with nature, we must consider both cognitive powers to be involved, except in instances of entirely free beauties. In this case, I take it that Kant conceives of the imagination as operating independently, such as is the case when it reflects on or plays with “designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper” that, in themselves, “represent nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Kant indicates such shapes as can be found in “flowers, free designs, lines aimlessly intertwined and called foliage: these have no significance.”<sup>11</sup> However, when the understanding does become involved in the act of representation, we discover that a concept of the object’s purpose is presented alongside the aesthetic judgment. This is the case in the “beauty of a horse, of a building (such as a church, a palace, an arsenal, or a garden house) [for they] presuppose a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection, and is thus merely dependent (*adharierende*) beauty.”<sup>12</sup> If Philip Malaband’s interpretation is right, readers need not worry about the inclusion of empirical concepts in instances of dependent beauty, for the latter is not a negative aesthetic judgment, but simply a sub-species of free beauty.<sup>13</sup> This is all to say that aesthetic judgments and the ideas that the imagination creates and reflects on often involve some level of understanding. A gardener could more easily create a winding lane lined by colorful azaleas if he had knowledge of the soil, light, and water conditions to sustain their lives.

What the imaginative gardener or poet do most of all is to rearrange the ordinary into something spectacular for us. In this regard, Kant claims that “the imagination ([in its role] as a productive cognitive power) is very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it.”<sup>14</sup> The imaginative poet reassembles the humdrum and “routine” in order, through imagination, to begin to believe in the power of nature again and to also realize our original orientation and connection to nature, however much we seduce ourselves into believing that we are apart from nature. Kant writes that through such endeavors, “we maybe even restructure experience.”<sup>15</sup> The Kantian thinker of the third *Critique* is not the Newtonian acolyte most people claim that he is, for in §49, he argues that through the imaginative power we may “continue to follow analogical laws,

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<sup>10</sup> Kant, KU, §16, 5: 229–30.

<sup>11</sup> Kant, KU, §4, 5: 207; cf. §16, 5: 229.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, KU, §16, 5: 229–30; cf. 5: 242

<sup>13</sup> Philip Malaband, “Understanding Kant’s Distinction between Free and Dependent Beauty,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52. 206 (2002): 66–81.

<sup>14</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.



yet we also follow principles which reside higher up, namely, in reason (and which are just as natural to us as those which the understanding follows in apprehending empirical nature).<sup>16</sup> Of course, in the creation of a second nature, the imagination exceeds the reach of the understanding, but this activity is no less natural to us than any other mental activity. Kant specifies that, “although it is under that law that nature lends us material, yet we can process that material into something quite different, namely, into something that surpasses nature.”<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, what the imagination creates space or possibility for is the production of aesthetic ideas that emulate the heights of reason’s ideas. An aesthetic idea, he claims, “cannot become cognition because it is an *intuition* (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept can never be found.”<sup>18</sup> But as Andrew Chignell notices, natural beauty enables one’s aesthetic ideas to “contemplate one rational idea in particular—that of the world fully systematized,” namely, as admitting of purposiveness throughout.<sup>19</sup> This would explain why Kant refers to aesthetic ideas as “*unexpoundable* representations of the imagination (in its free play).”<sup>20</sup> What the imagination does is to exhibit form in a way that nature itself did not produce. In its production of aesthetic ideas, the imagination emulates the universality of reason’s ideas without ever reaching such heights. The poet genius transforms the natural world with which he communes by creating an illusory nature to coexist with actual nature. Kant argues that it is “actually in the art of poetry that the power of aesthetic ideas can manifest itself to full extent. Considered by itself, however, this power is actually only a talent (of the imagination).”<sup>21</sup>

We will come back to Kant’s reflections on poetry later on, but I would like to turn to Coleridge’s theory of imagination with an idea toward the end of our discussion to assess how, if at all, Kant’s notion of the imagination creating a second nature played a role in Coleridge’s ideas.

## 2. Imagination in Coleridge

Coleridge’s comments on the history of modern philosophy show him to be an enigma among English writers and philosophers. He is the only thinker of his generation of consequence who finds that Locke, Hume, and others

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<sup>16</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, KU, §57, 5: 342.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Chignell, “Kant on the Normativity of Taste: The Role of Aesthetic Ideas,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85.3 (2007): 431.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, KU, §57, 5: 343.

<sup>21</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

entirely reduced the powers of imagination to mere laws of association. But more problematic as a whole is the fact that the whole of modern thought prior to Kant had mistakenly reduced experience itself to mere atomistic sensations thought to be taken up singularly by the imagination.<sup>22</sup> As to Hume in particular, he writes:

How opposite to nature & the fact to talk of the one *moment* of Hume; of our whole being an aggregate of successive single sensations. Who ever *felt* a single sensation? Is not every one at the same moment conscious that these co-exist with a thousand others in a darker shade, or less light.<sup>23</sup>

One could argue that Coleridge perhaps unfairly characterizes Hume's theory here, but his point is that no simple representation could possibly exist. If one were to follow the logic of Hume's associationism account, it would follow that all seemingly simple presentations immediately contain references to other representations, according to Coleridge.

In contrast to modern philosophers prior to Kant, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* aims to clarify "the powers of association . . . and on the generic difference between the faculties of Fancy and Imagination . . . as laying the foundation Stones of the Constructive or Dynamic Philosophy in opposition to the merely mechanic."<sup>24</sup> Coleridge views his distinction as being the very thrust of his creative impetus toward the *dynamic philosophy* in opposition to the mechanistic style that he seeks to criticize. This was no doubt a deliberate intention on his part to distance his view of the imagination from the view of his on-again, off-again friend, Wordsworth, who included imagination among the powers of perception and association.<sup>25</sup>

Coleridge holds that not only are perceptions an act of imagination, but that there are imaginative acts that exceed the domain of sensible intuition, to put it in Kantian terms. On the whole, Coleridge characterizes the imagination as follows:

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<sup>22</sup> On this, see Kathleen Wheeler, "Coleridge's Theory of Imagination: a Hegelian Solution to Kant?" in Jasper, D. (ed.), *The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher, and Romanticism*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan), 20. Despite a rather bizarre nineteenth century interpretation of Kant as a whole, Wheeler makes some insightful remarks on perception being a power of imagination.

<sup>23</sup> Coleridge, *CN*, II, 2370.

<sup>24</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, E.L. Griggs (ed.) (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 1956–). Letter to R. H. Brabant, 29 July 1815, iv, 971–72. Hereafter cited as *CL*.

<sup>25</sup> See Wordsworth's 1815 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The Primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the external act of creation in the infinite I AM.<sup>26</sup>

Coleridge's assignment of the imagination as serving the role of the "repetition in the finite mind of the external act of creation in the infinite I AM" is very likely drawn from the Book of Exodus, in which God is said to be self-determining or self-defining his continual acts of creation through the work of Moses (Exod. 3: 14). Or, Moses participates in the act of God's creation through the primary imagination's active perception of the world created by God.<sup>27</sup> The poet-philosopher thus communicates directly through nature in the very act of perception. Plato held similar ideas about *methexis*, though whereas he was indeed critical of the poet's capacity to participate in divine creation with any real knowledge of the Good, Coleridge and the romantics view the work of the imagination as the vector through which God reveals the beautiful mystery of nature.

Not only is the imagination the very living power of human perception, but it also actively creates the dynamic life of the self who can say "I am." In the *Biographia*, the imagination is said to be a "sacred power of self-intuition."<sup>28</sup> Coleridge then compares this human quality to the way in which "the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar," or how the imagination in some individuals, "who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucre for antennæ yet to come. They know and feel, that the *potential* works *in* them, even as the *actual* works on them!"<sup>29</sup> The senses are thus organized by the imagination such that the imagination even anticipates the physical development of the body yet to be realized. Although Coleridge was critical of Aristotle, we might think of this power of imagination as a kind of *dunamis* in which the potentiality within and the actuality from without are made possible. The imagination is like the horned fly that will grow and adapt in a new guise into which it has not yet grown. The primary imagination

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<sup>26</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*, edited by Adam Roberts. (Edinburgh: EUP, 2014), xiii, 205. Hereafter cited as *BL*.

<sup>27</sup> I am extremely grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this connection. For a commentary on the quasi-religious philosophy of Coleridge and its development in relation to Kant, see James Vigus, "The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge" in Mander, W.J. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Nineteenth Century Philosophy*. (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 520–40.

<sup>28</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xii, 173.

<sup>29</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xii, 173.

creates space for that which has yet not been realized in perception but will be necessary for that which is to come.

What the primary imagination does is to remove that “film of familiarity” or the habitual from our hearts, thereby allowing us to assume a new standpoint or attitude toward the familiar.<sup>30</sup> More than that, the imagination either creates or finds the object that we need. Shakespeare speaks of how the “imagination bodies forth,” such that

The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
Turns them into shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and name.<sup>31</sup>

Rather than fleeing into the mystical universe of the heavens and becoming lost in the unknown, it is the imagination that indeed ventures out into the unknown, but in doing so this same power forms, shapes, and creates a bodily object for that which was hitherto inaccessible to us. The world that the imagination discovers through a poem or through a garden is the discovery of a familiar world, but with each visit we find something novel. So, Coleridge and Shakespeare argue that where the imagination takes us is local and that we know this place by name. As the Bard has Prince Hal declare in *Henry IV*: “If all the year were playing holidays, to sport would be as tedious as to work, but when they seldom come, they wished-for come” (*Henry IV*, Part 1). It is as if the local garden that you often frequent regularly replaces seasonal plants, yet the perennial trees and shrubs are permanent fixtures. Each visit welcomes you with new accents to the familiar. A poem or great work of literature that one greatly loves will over time also reveal new ways of seeing the characters, of understanding the arc of the narrative, and even allow one to understand oneself in a different light.

For Coleridge, all efforts of the imagination are opposed to the reductive enterprises of mere materialism, or the material drive itself, as Schiller would call it, for Coleridge writes to a friend against Newton that his experiments render the human mind and soul to be a lazy onlooker to the world:

My opinion is this—that deep Thinking is attainable only by a man of deep Feeling, and that all Truth is a species of Revelation. The more I understand of Sir Isaac Newton’s works, the more boldly I dare to utter to my own mind & therefore to *you*, that I believe the Souls of 500 Sir Isaac Newtons would go to a making up of a Shakespeare or a Milton. .

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<sup>30</sup> Coleridge, BL, xiv, 208.

<sup>31</sup> Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act V, Scene 1, 1845–48.

.. Newton was a mere materialist—*Mind* in his system is always passive—a Lazy Looker-on on an external World. If the mind be not *passive*, if it be indeed made in God’s Image, that too in the sublimest sense—the Image of the *Creator*—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system.<sup>32</sup>

It is the imagination that actively looks and thus changes the world through its unique standpoint. Far from a mere passive observer, the primary imagination creates a unique order and connection with nature. We might not be far off when considering this original, immediate, and authentic (non-mediated) connection to the natural world to be a kind of *logos* in the sense in which Heraclitus describes its capacity to interpret the myriad changes of nature, or the way in which the heart-mind (*xin*, 心) in the classical Chinese traditions interpret the rhythmical movements of nature as emerging from *dao* 道.

Primary imagination is an active shaping of the world that is a non-mediated productive encounter that we have with the world. This is where we actively participate with and create the world that we at the same time experience. Primary imaginative encounters involve all our unmediated experiences through which perception assumes a particular standpoint, but these unique and individual perceptions belonging to different individuals are not isolated but rather collective. As Kathleen Wheeler points out, imagination does not merely guide perception, but is the active perceptive power itself.<sup>33</sup> We all actively participate in the creation of the world given to us. Coleridge is thus not interested in giving privilege to the artistic genius but rather considers all humans as being endowed with this capacity to productively perceive the world without recourse to assistance. Primary imagination enables the mind to perceive what would otherwise be that “secret ministry” of nature.<sup>34</sup>

Coleridge’s mariner is one whose imagination developed the capacity to reimagine how to live with the natural world, again, after having sinned against the world by doing a “hellish thing” when he kills the albatross (190). This turn comes about when the mariner in the moonlight recognizes how even the water snakes receive grace from God, a scene upon which he reflects:

O happy living things! No tongue

<sup>32</sup> Coleridge, Letter to Thomas Poole, 23 March 1801, CL, ii, 709.

<sup>33</sup> Wheeler, “Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination: A Hegelian Solution to Kant?” 16–18.

<sup>34</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. “Frost at Midnight” in *The Complete Poetical Works*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: OUP, 1912). Hereafter cited as PW.

Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware:  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware.<sup>35</sup>

It was in that instance of his imagination having recognized how grace is dealt to all living things that the mariner in the “self-same moment” was relieved of the albatross from around his neck. He then develops the ability to use his example of sinning against nature to teach how “he prayeth best, who loveth best, all things great and small; for the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all.”<sup>36</sup> The mariner is Coleridge’s beacon of hope for humanity, in that he, like all humans, succumbs to flawed and failed attitudes toward other living things, but through experience realizes how to transform in the hopes of humanity itself improving. The injunction to ourselves is not an act of contrition or of forgiveness, but simply for the imagination to acknowledge the mutual right of existence for other individuals and other species.

It is here that the imagination of the mariner discovers that “spring of love” gushing from his heart. Our finite human understanding relies entirely on the senses and imagination to furnish it with the material from which we may think, thus consciousness itself, according to Coleridge, relies on the imagination: “What we cannot *imagine*, we cannot, in the proper sense of the word, conceive.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the primary imagination, Coleridge reflects on how individuals seek to recreate what the primary imagination enjoys through the medium of art:

The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Coleridge, PW, Part IV, 198.

<sup>36</sup> Coleridge, PW, Part VII, 209.

<sup>37</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Aids to Reflection in the formation of a manly character on the several grounds of prudence, morality and religion, illustrated by select passages from our elder divines, especially from Archbishop Leighton* (London 1825), aphorism vi, 44. Hereafter cited as *AR*.

<sup>38</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xiii, 205–06.

Coleridge's comment that the secondary imagination dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates is likely borrowed from Hume, who argues in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that the imagination has an "unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas."<sup>39</sup> The exception here is that Coleridge does not believe that either the will or the imagination are bound to the laws of association. It is no coincidence that Tetens writes in his *Philosophische Versuche* that the imagination (*Dichtkraft*) is always "separating (*trennen*), dissolving (*auflösen*), combining (*verbinden*), mixing (*vermischen*), and as a result creating new images."<sup>40</sup> For Tetens, by way of the *Dichtkraft*, the "soul can not only place and order its ideas as a curator of a gallery of images, but it is also a painter that invents and produces new paintings."<sup>41</sup> I think that Coleridge was quite fond of Tetens's ideas about the imagination, as he writes that this secondary power does not merely involve a productive force of creation, but likewise destroys or dissolves "in order to re-create" nature a second time, as if the imagination were an art curator or landscape gardener. "It is essentially *vital*" in that the very guts of its activity involves the production of life.

The secondary imagination is the instrument of the poet, who draws upon his will to recreate nature through the poem. One might think of the will here being construed in the Kantian sense of *Willkür*, the power of choice, and not *der Wille*, the purely practical power of reason that legislates the moral law. Art, and especially poetry, is that very means through which the cipher interprets the mysteries of nature through the medium of language. For Coleridge, this is an imaginative effort to recreate the world created by God through the media of poetry and song. Even the method of writing is distinguishable in a poet by way of being either mechanic or organic, or what Coleridge would refer to as *dynamic*. We will say more about Coleridge's reflections on poetry and about his poetic writings later on, but suffice to say for now that the secondary imagination is a fundamental and authentic means of finding value beyond the material givenness of nature. Forests in themselves are beautiful, but the poem sheds light on what is not immediately seen. So often, the "best things dwell out of sight," as Emily Dickinson notices.

It is not that the primary merely supplies the secondary, as they both have different *modus operandi* and differing aims or goals. In addition to the

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<sup>39</sup> Hume, David. *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 34.

<sup>40</sup> Tetens, J.N. *Philosophisches Versuche ueber die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung* (1777), vol. 1. Leipzig: M.G. Weidmanns Erben und Reich. [Edited by Udo Roth and Gideon Stiening. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014.], I.15.8; I, 139. Hereafter cited as PV.

<sup>41</sup> Tetens, PV, I.13; I, 107.

two modes of imagination just mentioned, Coleridge also speaks about a third mode in which the mind indulges in fantasy or fancy, which is tied to memory and the laws of association: “In association then consists the whole mechanism of the reproduction of impressions, in the Aristotelian Psychology. It is the universal law of the *passive* fancy and *mechanical* memory.”<sup>42</sup> He writes in the fourth chapter of his *Biographia* that sustained reflections on the powers of the mind brought him to the conviction that “fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.”<sup>43</sup> On this point, Coleridge criticizes Wordsworth for coupling these two distinct powers of imagination and fancy: “I reply, that if by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. W. means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the imagination.”<sup>44</sup> Coleridge claims that Wordsworth mistakenly groups them together as one power, for he did not realize that a “man may work with two very different tools at the same moment; each has its share in the work, but the work effected by each is distinct and different.”<sup>45</sup>

Fancy is that which the individual must make recourse to when lacking access to the imagination. Coleridge claims that the difference between imagination and fancy can be likened to the distinction between Cowley and Milton: “Milton had a highly *imaginative*, Cowley a very *fanciful* mind.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, by Coleridge’s estimation, Cowley’s mind was wed to association and memory while Milton broke through to imagination and freed his verse from mechanical nature. As he writes at the close of chapter thirteen:

Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word choice. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, fancy is the artifice the spectator erects as a kind of prop or gimmick to fool us into believing that the ridiculous inauthentic display—the

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<sup>42</sup> Coleridge, BL, v, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Coleridge, BL, iv, 63.

<sup>44</sup> Coleridge, BL, xii, 198.

<sup>45</sup> Coleridge, BL, xii, 198.

<sup>46</sup> Coleridge, BL, iv, 64.

<sup>47</sup> Coleridge, BL, xiii, 206.



origin of all humor—is indeed genuine. So, Coleridge accepts the fact that the mind often lives in fantasy, that we create fanciful artifices or stories to clothe our mind in the kind of drapery that we imagine to make our lives interesting, and it may even be useful from time to time.<sup>48</sup> Philosophers are often guilty of creating such elaborate theories of such sorts in order to assist or prop up their reflections, but most are entirely empty.<sup>49</sup> In his commentary on Milton, for instance, Coleridge notes the work of fancy being operative in Eve succumbing to temptation in her dream.<sup>50</sup> That naked unconscious exposure to the world in dreams is perhaps a thrusting of the unimaginable and rebuked aspects of oneself onto the world, aspects that, when seen as images exterior to ourselves, we then reject about ourselves.

What Coleridge taps into his discussion of fancy may be owed to the drive theory developed just years prior by Friedrich Schiller. From the psychoanalytic point of view, fancy is that aspect of the unconscious shielding itself from the will (secondary imagination driven by the will that wants to pursue life). Fancy is a conscious effort on the part of the I to suppress creativity in order to pursue immediate, sugary satisfaction at the level of material drives. Coleridge was well aware of Schiller, thus it might have been that he had similar thoughts about the repetitive and boring uses or abuses that the imagination could endure at the behest of mere fancy.<sup>51</sup>

Now, we will come to the question of whether or not Coleridge's sketches of the imaginative powers of the mind are Kantian. If we allow that the secondary imagination is that which operates on that which is given in intuition, thus transforming material into a new nature, we can affirm that they have the same idea. But Coleridge's notion of the primary imagination seems to exceed the limits of reason itself, a venture that Kant would declare impossible or enthusiastic, even fanatical. As a whole, Coleridge's chief aim is to articulate the kind of philosophy that could transcend the critical limits imposed by Kant in order to achieve the principle of a total and undivided philosophy, whereby "philosophy would pass into religion, and religion

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Cheyne argues that understanding the creative thrust of Coleridge's view of the mind involves distinguishing between two layers, a higher order of thought and imagination, and the lower order of memory and association. He argues that Coleridge's view of the mind is that genuine reflection happens through thoughts at the extreme higher order. See Cheyne, Peter. "Coleridge's 'Order of the Mental Powers' and the Energic-Energetic Distinction" in Cheyne, Peter (ed.), *Coleridge and Contemplation* (Oxford: OUP, 2017): 171–92.

<sup>49</sup> Coleridge, *AR*, aphorism ii, 109.

<sup>50</sup> See John Beer, "Coleridge and Baxter on Dreaming," *Dreaming: Journal of the Association for the Study of Dreams* 7 (1997): 166.

<sup>51</sup> Coleridge translated Schiller's *Wallenstein* plays in 1800, an affair that he did not enjoy.

become inclusive of philosophy.”<sup>52</sup> After all, experience is itself a magical endeavor, for Coleridge. As he waxes in one of his notebooks:

In the paradisiacal World sleep was voluntary & holy—a spiritual before God, in which the mind elevated by contemplation retired into pure intellect suspending all commerce with sensible objects & perceiving the present deity.<sup>53</sup>

This is to say that the imagination can create a new nature wherein one communes with the spirit of God. Coleridge describes his idea of religion and philosophy merging into one another or allowing for an absolute standpoint in which the finite I realizes its moral destiny in an aesthetic path toward the infinite as follows: “We begin with the I KNOW myself, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in God” (*BL*, xii, 191). Imaginative thought is thus a religious affair: “To think (Ding, denken; res, reor) is to *thingify*” (*CL*, iv, 885). We create the world God wanted us to by way of the imagination and thought and, for Coleridge, it seems that the only limits to thingifying the world are the limits that we impose on ourselves.<sup>54</sup> In what follows, we will discuss the subject matter or object of Coleridge’s reflections, namely, nature itself and the nature created by the imagination. I will begin by drawing a distinction made by Kant concerning nature itself and the nature that we create a second time through gardens.

### 3. Gardens and Nature

I would like to first provide some descriptive arguments of how the two philosophers describe natural beauty, with some comparative remarks to Xanadu given in *Kubla Kahn*, wherein it seems clear that Coleridge depicts that imaginative place as much more sublime than beautiful. We will discuss imaginative creations by examining Kant’s account of nature in connection to landscape gardens, which are truly and literally second natures.

For Kant, the beautiful in nature exceeds the beauty of art beyond all measure: “This superiority of natural beauty over that of art, namely, that—

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<sup>52</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xii, 191.

<sup>53</sup> Coleridge, *CN*, i, 191.

<sup>54</sup> For an argument that Coleridge, like Schlegel, fought against the prevailing trend of totally systematizing philosophy with grounding first principles, see Alexander J.B. Hampton, “Romanticism and System in Coleridge and Schlegel,” *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 5 (2023): 265–99. Hampton characterizes this effort as “striving toward an ideal that could never be fully attained,” precisely because the ideal sought after was freedom (267–68).

even if art were to excel nature in form—it is the only beauty that arouses a direct interest, agrees with the refined and solid [*gründlich*] way of thinking of all people who have cultivated their moral feeling.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, he resists the idea that landscape gardens are anything more than an artful arrangement of nature’s products. At the same time, Kant argues that the English landscape garden “drives the freedom of the imagination to the verge of the grotesque.”<sup>56</sup> Due to the seemingly unrecognizable distinction between the landscape garden and natural beauty, the imagination is not constrained to follow rules and, hence, “taste can show its greatest perfections in designs made by the imagination.”<sup>57</sup> So, while the understanding fails to discover any “utility” or purpose in such a representation, the imagination finds greater freedom when playing with nature’s forms in this way.<sup>58</sup> In characterizing landscape gardens as a kind of painting, Kant considers the English garden to be filled entirely with free beauties, which he describes as presenting nothing in the way of purposes, but pleasing entirely on account of their form.<sup>59</sup>

Kant argues that, in the example of “a beautiful garden . . . the purposes are not sufficiently determined and fixed by their concept, so that the purposiveness is nearly as free as in the case of *vague* beauty,” hence there can be no *ideal* beautiful garden.<sup>60</sup> An ideal must involve a degree of conceptual involvement, but “an ideal of beautiful flowers, of beautiful furnishings, or of a beautiful view is unthinkable.”<sup>61</sup> Just why the beautiful garden represents a middle ground between *vague* (free) and *fixed* (dependent) beauties may have a simple answer: it depends on the arrangement of the natural elements. This task is not unlike that of a painter, for “in painting, in sculpture, indeed in all the visual arts, including architecture and horticulture insofar as they are fine arts, *design* is what is essential,” and because landscape gardens are a kind of painting, some are simply more artfully arranged than others.<sup>62</sup> This is not exactly an astounding claim, as he is simply claiming that the enjoyment of a garden depends on how the gardener shapes the landscape.

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<sup>55</sup> Kant, KU, §42, 5: 299.

<sup>56</sup> Kant, KU, 242.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, KU, 242.

<sup>58</sup> Kant, KU, §51, 323. Despite this, it has been said that Kant offers a poor argument of the landscape garden as mere ornamentation insofar as he supposedly fails to appreciate the way in which topography frames the so-called picturesque landscape. On this, see Michael G. Lee. *The German Mittelweg: Garden Theory and Philosophy at the Time of Kant* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Kant, KU, §51, 323n.

<sup>60</sup> Kant, KU, §17, 233.

<sup>61</sup> Kant, KU, §17, 233.

<sup>62</sup> Kant, KU, 225.

Gardens, for Kant, beyond their functional purposes, are contrapurposeful, unless the design is such that the imagination is sustained in its reflection for an extraordinary length of time. Kant's distinction between the wild jungle of Sumatra and the pepper garden leaves little doubt that the latter fails to animate the imagination in its free play with any vigor approximate to that of the former:

*Marsden*, in his description of Sumatra, comments that the free beauties of nature there surround the beholder everywhere, so that there is little left in them to attract him; whereas, when in the midst of a forest he came upon a pepper garden, with the stakes that supported the climbing plants forming paths between them along parallel lines, it charmed him greatly. He concludes from this that we like wild and apparently ruleless beauty only as a change, when we have been satiated with the sight of regular beauty. And yet he need only have made the experiment of spending one day with his pepper garden to realize that once regularity has [prompted] the understanding to put itself into attunement with order which it requires everywhere, the object ceases to entertain him and instead inflicts on his imagination an irksome constraint.<sup>63</sup>

We have already seen how the creation of a second nature must arise from the imagination wanting a break from the mundane regularity of life. Kant goes on to describe how the regular order of the pepper garden could only entertain us up to the point in which we rediscover the wild and unconstrained beauty of the natural world. Order and regularity deriving from rules simply lull taste to sleep and cannot sustain its desire for beauty for very long. As he writes: "Everything that [shows] stiff regularity (close to mathematical regularity) runs counter to taste" in that regularity becomes too boring and can "serve the understanding only for cognitive purposes."<sup>64</sup> By contrast, "where only a free play of our representational powers is to be sustained (*unterhalten*) (though under the condition that the understanding suffers no offense) as in the case of pleasure gardens, room decoration, all sorts of tasteful utensils, and so on, any regularity that has an air of constraint is [to be] avoided as much as possible."<sup>65</sup> Nor does it seem to be the case that imitation of nature's forms could satisfy taste's original predilection for the beauty of the wild. It appears universal that we could all appreciate a bird singing for hours, he claims, but our own songs grow tiring after a period of time, and were we to mimic the bird singing by studying the patterns of the

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<sup>63</sup> Kant, KU, 243.

<sup>64</sup> Kant, KU, 242.

<sup>65</sup> Kant, KU, 242.

tune in order to replay it with an instrument, for example, this “strikes our ear as quite tasteless.”<sup>66</sup>

Waterfalls, tall canyon rock walls with fissures, a forested mountain vista of fall color all speak to movement in the imagination that cannot be reducible to the enjoyment of mere charms. Enjoying the charms of rhythmic sensations, such as in the sounds of a rippling mountain stream flowing over rocks or the flickering light of a fire is quite different than the imaginative *play of tones* or *wit*, in that the latter involve the imagination’s play with nature, whereas the former plays with the imagination. As he writes in the *Anthropology*: “We play with the imagination frequently and gladly, but imagination (as fantasy) plays just as frequently with us, and sometimes very inconveniently.”<sup>67</sup> The former we find beautiful, whereas the latter is merely agreeable. I think that we can safely declare that this distinction is exactly what Coleridge meant by the differences between fancy and imagination.

Perhaps Friedrich Schiller, who committed himself to a close study of Kant’s third *Critique*, characterized the allure of the beautiful even more clearly: the pleasure that we find in the beautiful derives from the feeling in the imagination that the object *appears* free, and no other condition has a more influential hold on the imagination than the desire for freedom.<sup>68</sup> Hence, the free play is often an interchange between the imagination and understanding, in which the latter’s search for concepts is set into motion by the imagination’s play with the representation’s shape.

Whereas the beautiful is immediately an invitation to pleasure, the sublime initially repulses an individual, but still offers some promise to come closer. Kant cites towering cliffs and waterfalls as examples of the kind of natural terror that nonetheless invites us closer. The sublime in fact becomes an invitation from nature for us to look within and discover our moral destiny. Rather than examining Kant’s account of the sublime, I will simply discuss the wildness of Xanadu as described in Coleridge’s *Kubla Kahn*.

It is not insignificant that the Preface to the poem *Kubla Kahn* opens with a third person account of a “sacred river” that “ran through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea.” Coleridge’s speaker goes on to describe an abundance of “fertile ground” with “gardens bright with sinuous rills, where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree; and here were forests ancient as the hills, enfolding sunny spots of greenery.” This is the overture to his garden paradise spoken of in the third person, before he, as the poet,

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<sup>66</sup> Kant, KU, 5: 242.

<sup>67</sup> Anth, 7: 175. See Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology*, 285.

<sup>68</sup> Schiller, Friedrich. “Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Korner” in: J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 162.

assumes the voice of the one who shall challenge that “romantic chasm.”<sup>69</sup> Despite this towering depiction of stately walls and overwhelming forests, it comes across as stunningly beautiful, irrespective of the enormity of it all. Coleridge continues to describe how “from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething

As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher’s flail.<sup>70</sup>

Whatever the sense of these lines, it is clear that the quickening of natural beauty toward danger approaches, as Coleridge then speaks of “dancing rocks” when Kubla sank into a cavern where the pleasure dome floated away. It was only by way of a “music loud and long” that he could even begin to “revive within” himself “her symphony and song,” such that all who heard the music could likewise build such domes in the air. All of this language speaks of the secondary imagination inventing a sublime array of cliffs and cities in the sky that overwhelm the imagination and defy anything mimetic about fancy. In my view, both levels of imagination are present in Xanadu; of course, we witness the primary imagination’s original and spontaneous creation that is “coinstantaneous with” nature itself, while the secondary imagination recovers that original production via the work of poetic writing and the sound of music that calls the listener toward safety. Fancy is all but banished from Xanadu.<sup>71</sup>

In *Frost at Midnight*, Coleridge speaks reverently about the beauty of nature such that he “saw nought lovely but the sky and stars,” but that his newborn child will “wander like a breeze by lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds, which image in their bulk both lakes and shores and mountain crags.”<sup>72</sup> Of course, all of this imagery is indicative of an imagination capable of both receptivity and productivity, of taking in the finite particular beauties and of actively shaping them through one’s perception. It is not enough that beauty is *there* in nature,

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<sup>69</sup> Coleridge, PW, 297.

<sup>70</sup> Coleridge, PW, 297.

<sup>71</sup> For a sample of similar views regarding the imagination’s role in Coleridge’s Kubla Kahn, see John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927), 324–77; and Michael Raiger, “Fancy, Dreams, and Paradise: Miltonian and Baconian Garden Imagery in Coleridge’s Kubla Kahn,” *Studies in Philology* 10.3 (2013): 637–65.

<sup>72</sup> Coleridge, PW, 242.

one must creatively interact with all of it in order to silence the deadening weight of mimetic fancy and to harness the full potential of imagination. Fancy is that which retreats from nature, and would rather shield the individual through mimetic, dead rhythms rather than release the individual into the unknown potentiality of nature.

As such, Coleridge continues that, through such a process of internalizing the beauty of nature, “so shalt thou see and hear the lovely shapes and sounds intelligible of that eternal language, which thy God utters.”<sup>73</sup> This is also clearly evident in *Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni*, in which Coleridge writes:

Sing ye meadow-streams with gladsome voice!  
Ye pine-groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds!  
And they too have a voice, yon piles of snow,  
And in their perilous fall shall thunder, God!<sup>74</sup>

In other words, God speaks to us through beautiful nature. While Kant argues that nature’s beauty symbolizes the morally good, Coleridge declares that natural beauty *is* the morally good. It should not take much effort to appreciate how Coleridge produced the image of the starry skies above and the moral law within.

One might question why Coleridge does not deliver a theoretical tract on the beauty of nature and the simple answer is that such a process would have been an unnecessary tedium for him. After having produced such beautiful poetry, why should he detain himself with a commentary on works that are already available for anyone with imagination? Such a rhetorical question is similar to Coleridge’s response as to why Kant did not pen replies to those who misunderstood the transcendental object:

When Kant therefore was importuned to settle the disputes of his commentators himself, by declaring what he meant, how could he decline the honours of martyrdom with less offence, than by simply replying, ‘I meant what I said, and at the age of near fourscore, I have something else, and more important to do than to write a commentary on my own works.’<sup>75</sup>

In the end, the two philosophers simply disagree as to the extent that the imagination can and *should* go in its reflections on nature. Coleridge conceives of a kind of imaginative dance with nature that exceeds human (finite) ability

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<sup>73</sup> Coleridge, PW, 242.

<sup>74</sup> Coleridge, PW, 379.

<sup>75</sup> Coleridge, BL, ix, 108.

whereas Kant views this as an imagination saturated with a loss of reason and thereby lost in insanity. Perhaps, for Coleridge, it is a weakness of the will that we succumb to mere rationality in the face of the irrational sublime instead of turning toward the ultimate kind of imaginative knowing that grasps the world beyond reason. In the final section, we will turn toward the highest and ultimate art, as for both philosophers, poetry is the sincerest connection and sustaining activity of life.

#### 4. Poetry as Imagining Nature a Second Time

In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge openly declares that: “No man ever yet was a great poet, without being at same time a profound philosopher.”<sup>76</sup> Elsewhere, he declares that “a great poet must be implicite if not explicitè, a great metaphysician.”<sup>77</sup> Kant similarly held poetry to be the very apex of art, as he writes in the third *Critique* that poetry “holds the highest rank among all the arts . . . It expands the mind: for it sets the imagination free.”<sup>78</sup> But while poetry takes on not only the form of written or oral verse, it can “include the arts of painting, horticulture, and architecture, as well as the arts of composing music and verse (*poetica in sensu stricto*).”<sup>79</sup> We have already seen how Kant considers landscape gardens to be artful arrangements of nature not unlike how a poem is a decorative design of language.

Without doubt, Kant views poetry as the highest form of aesthetic evaluation, “for it lets the mind feel its ability—free, spontaneous, and independent of natural determination—to contemplate and judge phenomenal nature as having (*nach*) aspects that nature does not on its own offer in experience either to sense or to the understanding.”<sup>80</sup> Poetic imagination, both for the writer and reader of poems, allows us to see a second nature, *as if* one could transform life itself through higher feelings of beauty that stretch ever higher toward moral feelings.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, poetry enables the mind to “feel its ability to use nature on behalf of and, as it were, as a schema of the supersensible.”<sup>82</sup> Schematizing nature through poetry produces an aesthetic model that can otherwise only be thought as an archetype of reason.

Poetry *in the strict sense*, for Kant, represents the pinnacle of artistic achievement because it displays the unique originality of the writer that, when

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<sup>76</sup> Coleridge, BL, xv, 220.

<sup>77</sup> Coleridge, CL, ii, 810.

<sup>78</sup> Kant, KU, §53, 5: 326.

<sup>79</sup> Kant, Anth, 7: 246.

<sup>80</sup> Kant, KU, §53, 5: 326.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Kant, KU, §42, 5: 300–01.

<sup>82</sup> Kant, KU, §53, 5: 326.



accomplished, contains nothing of imitation in it whatsoever. Imitation, Ralph Waldo Emerson would later write, is nothing but sheer suicide. What the poet achieves is the creation and communication of an aesthetic idea that no concept can ever match:

By an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible.<sup>83</sup>

No concept can ever be found adequate to the imagination's aesthetic idea because no concept can ever invite the feeling of *spirit* (*Geist*) that a poem induces in the imagination. Kant refers to the spirit in aesthetic ideas as the "animating principle of the mind" that awakens such a spirited feeling when "they arouse *interest* by means of *ideas*. For this sets the imagination into motion."<sup>84</sup> For Kant, spirit is the animating force that awakens ideas, while taste serves to regulate them.<sup>85</sup>

Kant's example for the enlivening power of spirit in aesthetic ideas is, of course, the work of poetry. "A poet," he argues, "ventures to give sensible expression to rational ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation, and so on."<sup>86</sup> One has to wonder if the obvious example of this would not be Dante, who writes in the *Inferno* of how the passage through hell and his ascent improved his spirit:

For better waters, now, the little bark  
Of my poetic powers hoists its sails,  
And leaves behind the cruelest of the seas.

And I shall sing about that second realm  
Where man's soul goes to purify itself  
And become worthy to ascend to heaven.<sup>87</sup>

One can already appreciate the nod that Dante makes toward the second nature that his imagination creates and passes through. Hell exists only in imagination and reason as two different expressions of one idea. By projecting imaginary opposites—heaven and earth, life and death—one can ascend toward that which would be unimaginable without its counterpart. As he says

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<sup>83</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

<sup>84</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 313 and Anth, 7: 225

<sup>85</sup> Kant, Anth, 7: 246.

<sup>86</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

<sup>87</sup> Dante, *Purgatory*, Canto 1, 1–6 (trans. Mark Musa).

in the *Inferno*, “love conducts us to one death” (*amor condusse noi ad una morte*).<sup>88</sup> What Dante does is that he as a poet

Takes [things] that are indeed exemplified in experience, such as death, envy, and all the other vices, as well as love, fame, and so on; but then, by means of an imagination that emulates the example of reason in reaching [for] a maximum, he ventures to give these sensible expression in a way that goes beyond the limits of experience, namely, with a completeness for which no example can be found in nature. And it is actually in the art of poetry that the power of aesthetic ideas can manifest itself to the fullest extent.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, poetry consists of being the “art of conducting a free play of the imagination as [if it were] a task of the understanding.”<sup>90</sup> The poet breaks free of experience but by way of a free play of imagination that makes sensible what is otherwise mystical.

There are good reasons, however, to believe that Milton was the poet whom Kant had in mind as the true poetic genius.<sup>91</sup> For instance, he writes of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as follows:

Poetry offers many materials in the world of invisible beings, so that Milton in his *Paradise Lost*, one of the most magnificent poems, has delivered such things, about which one would otherwise know nothing. When one [otherwise] tries to think of a sublime invisible being or of a malevolent character opposing the Lord of the world and the supreme governor, what kind of ideas can emerge?<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps then it is not merely that the poet conveys the beautiful, but that he in fact is able to communicate the sublime in a way that is also beautiful. As Milton says in the third chapter of *Paradise Lost*:

So much the rather thou, celestial Light,  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 5, 106.

<sup>89</sup> Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

<sup>90</sup> Kant, KU, §51, 5: 321.

<sup>91</sup> Sanford Budick makes this argument in *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>92</sup> Kant, V-Anth / Mensch 25: 991.

<sup>93</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 2007), Book 3, 69.

Milton writes that what the poet truly wishes to achieve is to express something that succeeding generations will not let die. The poet desires above all to say the unsayable and to be remembered in a way that James Dickey expresses as a fervent request from “the God of the wildness of poetry,” namely, “Lord, let me die, but not die out.”<sup>94</sup> The poet and philosopher recognize the reality of our finitude. We can live knowing that we are dying, but those committed to ideas cannot live with the idea of their ideas dying out.

Perhaps the reason why Coleridge has been less popular than other romantics is simply that he did not die out at a young age, as did Keats.<sup>95</sup> This is unfortunate, given that Coleridge viewed a great poet to be similarly a great philosopher, for “poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.”<sup>96</sup> For Coleridge, the question regarding what poetry is nearly at the same time a question concerning who the poet is, as it is a “distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself.”<sup>97</sup> He adds:

The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination.<sup>98</sup>

This is not some whimsical power put into play by way of an angel having bestowed this gift on an individual. The poet is dishonest who does not recognize that it takes the whole of one’s will and the power of understanding to manifest the power of imagination. We need not worry over our second nature neglecting original nature, for not only is our imaginative and poetic creation of the new nature ongoing, but as Coleridge argues, the imagination “blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.”<sup>99</sup> Coleridge thus view natural beauty as superior to art in every way, and as serving as the source of life insofar as the imagi-

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<sup>94</sup> James Dickey, *For the Last Wolverine* in *The Whole Motion*.

<sup>95</sup> Among many other valuable contributions to the works of Coleridge, this is a speculation raised by Malcolm Guite. For an excellent commentary, see *Mariner: A Voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Hodder Faith, 2018).

<sup>96</sup> Coleridge, BL, xv, 220.

<sup>97</sup> Coleridge, BL, xiv, 213.

<sup>98</sup> Coleridge, BL, xiv, 213.

<sup>99</sup> Coleridge, BL, xiv, 213.

nation harmonizes and blends the new nature with constant reflections on the nature that is given. This is a task that demands a philosopher to likewise be a poet and vice versa. It is not enough that we inherit life, we must make something of it.

I take it that what Coleridge means when he argues that a great poet must also be a philosopher is that it requires the kind of imagination to balance and harmonize the universal as it is expressed in the particular individual. And in doing so, “all seasons shall be sweet to thee,

Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing  
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch  
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night thatch  
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall  
Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
Or if the secret ministry of frost  
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.<sup>100</sup>

Here, the imagination’s balancing of the relationship between the individual and the changing seasons is not unlike the relationship between harmonizing poetry and philosophy, and in the orientation or standpoint that one assumes toward particularity and universality. It requires the imaginative power of perception to embrace the universe everywhere *anywhere* it expresses its finite particular instances of beauty. It is both a recognition of the power of the other *there* endowed with grace and the power of the other *here* in my perception. Coleridge closes the fourteenth chapter of the *Biographia* by writing: “Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that is every where, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.”<sup>101</sup>

For Coleridge, there are no rules of instruction that can coerce a genuine imaginative effort toward creation. True poetic production involves originality:

Could a rule be given from without, poetry would cease to be poetry, and sink into a mechanical art. It would be *μορφωσις*, not *ποιησις*. The rules of the imagination are themselves the very powers of growth and production. The words to which they are reducible, present only the outlines and external appearance of the fruit. A deceptive counterfeit of

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<sup>100</sup> Coleridge, PW, 242.

<sup>101</sup> Coleridge, BL, xiv, 214.

the superficial form and colours may be elaborated; but the marble peach feels cold and heavy, and children only put it to their mouths.<sup>102</sup>

Rather than having the imagination instructed by understanding, both Kant and Coleridge claim that the imagination leads in artistic production. We have seen in the previous sections how Kant and Coleridge articulate their theories of imagination. Coleridge's brief sketches do indeed shed light on his feelings as regards the function of imagination in poetry, its proper subject matter, and how imagination likewise brings about a feeling of life. It must be that the function of the primary imagination is to inaugurate a subliminal communication with nature itself that simply defies language. After all, what the poet truly desires is to bring into existence what was previously held to be unsayable in poetry. Dylan Thomas riffs about poems containing "sandstorms and ice blasts of words

such slashing of humbug, and humbug too, such staggering peace, such enormous laughter, such and so many blinding bright lights breaking across the just-waking wits and splashing all over the pages in a million bits and pieces all of which were words, words, words, and each of which were alive forever in its own delight and glory and oddity and light.<sup>103</sup>

Poetry and philosophy seek universality in the particular and the particular in the universal. A poet begins by looking to heaven, only to bring us to earth, again, or vice versa. It is a matter of finding the heavenly on earth or of finding the earthly in the heavenly. Seamus Heaney, for example, will write in his famous poem about his father digging potatoes and that he cannot dig like his father who dug like his father before him, but that he can only dig with the pen. Coleridge is an exception in that he is one of the few who both writes poetry and criticizes it from a philosophical standpoint, something that he was apt to do often.

For instance, Coleridge was well aware of the commentaries that Ben Johnson wrote about Shakespeare, adding that he found Johnson's meditations to be overly-inundated with factuality rather than communicating what the language of the poem actually excites. To most critics and poets, he attributes the problem of "an undue predilection for the *dramatic* form in certain poems, from which one or other of two evils result. Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then

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<sup>102</sup> Coleridge, BL, xviii, 267.

<sup>103</sup> Dylan Thomas, "Notes on the Art of Poetry" in James Scully (ed.), *Modern Poetics* (Columbus: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 210.

it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks.”<sup>104</sup> Balance by way of imagination would eliminate this problem.

Despite their disagreements, Coleridge describes Wordsworth’s poetry as achieving “IMAGINATION in the highest and strictest sense of the word,” even if he is clumsy and even “recondite” in the way of fancy.<sup>105</sup> In other words, Wordsworth knows how to work through the secondary imagination in order to achieve the otherwise ineffable but lacks a “graceful” approach to the ordinary. Quoting Wordsworth’s *Elegaic Stanzas*, the imagination is to “add the gleam, the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration, and the poet’s dream.” So, Coleridge finds Wordsworth’s poetry to be fitting for someone suited to study the particularity of that poet’s words in order to render that unique projection of the imagination to be beautiful. But Coleridge likewise opposes all scientific study of poetry. The highly theoretically-minded poet is too awkward and lacks the kind of natural finesse needed for the imagination to achieve an original voice that would harmonize the universal and the particular. The celebrated poet James Dickey once said that he desired for his writing process to take on the ease that an athlete achieves in competition, or that of a bird that spontaneously and instinctively knows the right effort needed to land on a flimsy branch. Cliff divers who spin and whirl many times in the air as they freefall never see the water and yet always know just when to straighten out their bodies for a safe landing. The poet seeks to perfectly express an idea in the same way that the athlete exerts the perfect amount of energy needed to pull off a feat of athletic excellence that simply amazes onlookers. Dickey describes this effort of the poet as “consciously working toward an unconscious act.”<sup>106</sup>

What the poet in the style of Dickey and Coleridge aim for is an imaginative effort that becomes truly imaginary, in that the blending for a universal completion can be met in the particular instance, such as in the poem or in the high jump of an Olympic athlete, who aims to perfectly achieve greatness (universal) in each and every jump (particular). This is exactly what Coleridge was after in his characterization of poetry, I believe, as he writes as follows:

A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having *this* object in common with it) it is

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<sup>104</sup> Coleridge, BL, xxii, 315.

<sup>105</sup> Coleridge, BL, xxiii, 329.

<sup>106</sup> James Dickey, *Self-Interviews* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1970) 59.

discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*.<sup>107</sup>

Again, we find that classical struggle between universality and particularity to be at play in the very definition of poetry. The poet is to bring about the immediate individuality of an object that invites pleasure while the contemplation of the poet is that of the whole. What this requires on the part of the poet is to entertain a kind of “negative faith,” Coleridge argues.<sup>108</sup> It consists of simply distinguishing illusion from delusion, such that the influence of mere images, which work their influence on fancy, are juxtaposed to actual words and true faith.<sup>109</sup> As Coleridge writes:

The poet asks only of the reader, what as a poet he is privileged to ask: viz. that sort of negative faith in the existence of such a being, which we willingly give to productions *professedly ideal*, and a disposition to the same state of feeling, as that with which we contemplate the *idealized* figures of the Apollo Belvedere, and the Farnese Hercules.<sup>110</sup>

So, then, negative faith is what the poet must posit as being imaginary *and* true in the ideal nature that he creates. John Donne, for instance, in the opening lines of *Song* (1633) dares the reader to bring about inevitable impossibilities precisely because they are beautiful: “Go and catch a falling star . . . tell me where all past years are . . . teach me to hear mermaids singing, or to keep off envy’s singing, and find what wind serves to advance an honest mind.”<sup>111</sup> All of this is a curious combination of imagining that involves astronomical paradoxes, the reversibility of time, and both the avoidance of ill humors and the potential of the weather teaching us virtue. And yet, it all renders a faith paid in full by the reader because Donne asks us only to imagine the magical renderings of nature that we already wish to be true.

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<sup>107</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xiv, 211.

<sup>108</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xxii, 313.

<sup>109</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xxii, 313. The entire quote reads as follows: “The effect is similar to that produced by an epic poet, when the fable and the characters are *derived* from Scripture history, as in the *Messiah* of Klopstock, or in *Cumberland’s Calvary*: and not merely *suggested* by it as in the *Paradise Lost* of Milton. That *illusion*, contradistinguished from *delusion*, that *negative* faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment, is rendered impossible by their immediate neighbourhood to words and facts of known and absolute truth. A faith, which transcends even historic belief, must absolutely *put out* this mere poetic Analogon of faith.”

<sup>110</sup> Coleridge, *BL*, xxiii, 385.

<sup>111</sup> Donne, John. *Song* in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), 264.

What Coleridge advocates is a harmonious balance of classical English poetry with its formalistic and mechanical styles and the then contemporary Romantic approach, a “wish expressed for [in] the union of the characteristic merits of both.”<sup>112</sup> Some might hold that *nature is beautiful if it looks like art*, but we could likewise argue that *art is beautiful when it looks like nature*.

According to Kant, it is from the expression of the beautiful in nature that we can then think the whole of nature as being purposive, as if it were an organized living system filled with a myriad of organisms working toward certain aims in and through nature. This is not unlike the lines of certain poems that both operate within the larger structure of the whole and also contain within themselves enough to communicate a principle for life, such as in the lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who writes:

This, all this, beauty blooming,  
This, all this, freshness fuming,  
Give God while worth consuming.<sup>113</sup>

Xanadu is beautiful because it does not merely look like art. Recall Herder’s argument regarding the kinaesthetic features of sculpture, how *touching* the stone with the eyes is an invitation of the outside to the inner soul and a pushing of the soul outward into the formation of the object of reflection. Xanadu does not merely project an artful arrangement of an idealized paradise—as is the case or goal in the landscape garden—but rather artfully recreates nature a second time. In the production of Xanadu, the primary imagination rediscovers that original orientation that we have to nature, one that secondary imagination can only write about by way of metaphor and that fancy can never relate to, even intermediately through some other source.

Toward the close of *Kubla Kahn*, Coleridge declares that those having passed through Xanadu should “weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread  
For he on honey-dew hath feed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps this third weaving is the declaration that one should weave through the beauty of nature, fully immersing the senses through primary imagina-

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<sup>112</sup> Coleridge, BL, xvi, 223.

<sup>113</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Morning Midday and Evening Sacrifice” in Gerard Manley Hopkins: *A Selection of His Poems and Prose* by W.H. Gardner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 44.

<sup>114</sup> Coleridge, PW, 298.



tion.<sup>115</sup> “And close your eyes with holy dread,” for we have nothing to fear of the sublime; it will set the individual free, “for he on honey-dew hath fed, and drunk the milk of Paradise.” Perhaps also there is nothing approaching the milk of paradise more than to live with one’s whole body and imagination fully integrated with the natural beauty that we can only imagine to be arranged by God or is rather speaking to us in unmitigated ways precisely because God wishes us to discover both our purposes and the purposiveness of nature through the beautiful nature from which we emerge. We can set the imagination free by strolling through and creating gardens, or by reading and writing poetry with such language that requires a continual creation of nature, both in primary and secondary imagination.

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<sup>115</sup> After all, Kant in the crux of his argument concerning the powers of the mind declared that “there must be something that is third” to mediate sensibility and understanding—namely, imagination (KrV, A138–39/B177–78).



# Symphilosophie

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## Karoline von Günderrode's Responses to Kant on Knowledge and *Bildung*

*Anna C. Ezekiel\**

### ABSTRACT

This paper explores two areas in the work of Romantic writer and philosopher Karoline von Günderrode in which she was influenced by Kant: her epistemology and her views on the human vocation. Günderrode developed her claims about knowledge partly as a challenge to Kant's limitation of human experience to the realm of phenomena, while her views on the human vocation respond to Kant's claims regarding moral development and the ideal society. In these areas, Günderrode engaged directly with Kant's work and with work by other thinkers working in the Kantian context. The paper provides a brief introduction to Günderrode as a reader of Kant before investigating Günderrode's ideas about "inner sense" in her dialogue "Die Manen," her exploration of several possible ways of acquiring knowledge in her 1804 collection *Gedichte und Phantasien*, and her account of the human vocation in her short story "Geschichte eines Braminen."

*Keywords:* *Bildung*, epistemology, human vocation, Kant, Karoline von Günderrode

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore deux secteurs de l'œuvre de l'écrivaine et philosophe romantique Karoline von Günderrode sur lesquels Kant a exercé une influence : son épistémologie et ses vues sur la vocation humaine. Günderrode a développé ses thèses sur la connaissance en partie pour défier la limitation kantienne de l'expérience humaine au domaine des phénomènes, tandis que ses positions sur la vocation humaine sont une réponse aux jugements de Kant relatifs au développement moral et à sa compréhension de la société idéale. Dans ces domaines, Günderrode s'est directement confrontée à l'œuvre de Kant, mais aussi d'autres penseurs s'inscrivant dans le courant kantien. L'article présente brièvement Günderrode comme lectrice de Kant, avant d'examiner les idées de Günderrode sur le « sens interne » dans son dialogue « Die Manen » ; son exploration des différentes possibilités d'acquérir des connaissances dans son recueil *Gedichte und Phantasien* de 1804 ; et sa compréhension de la vocation humaine dans sa nouvelle « Geschichte eines Braminen ».

*Mots-clés :* *Bildung*, épistémologie, vocation humaine, Kant, Karoline von Günderrode

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\* PhD in Philosophy, Honorary Fellow, University of York (UK); Visiting Faculty, Parami University (Myanmar) – [anna.c.ezekiel@gmail.com](mailto:anna.c.ezekiel@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

The philosophical work of Romantic writer Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806) has finally begun to emerge from the shadow of her biography, which has been a source of fascination since her suicide. In addition to her reputation as a writer of powerful poetry and dramas, she is now recognized for developing original positions on metaphysics, human identity, consciousness, death, gender and friendship. Günderrode’s philosophical claims are rooted in her study of Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Hemsterhuis, Herder, Schleiermacher, the Early German Romantics and others, and attention to her role as an interpreter of these thinkers has increased enormously in recent years.<sup>1</sup>

This paper focuses on two areas of Günderrode’s philosophy in which she was influenced by Kant in particular: her epistemology and her views on the human vocation. A third area in which Günderrode can be read as responding to Kant—her model of the sublime—will not be considered here. In part, this is because this aspect of her thought has been studied in detail elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> but it is also harder to establish a direct link between Kant and Günderrode in this area.

The paper first provides a brief introduction to Günderrode as a reader of Kant before examining how she responded to Kant’s limitation of human experience to phenomena and his views on moral development. Section 4 looks at Günderrode’s ideas about “inner sense” in her dialogue “Die Ma-

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., “Anna Ezekiel, “Revolution and Revitalisation: Karoline von Günderrode’s Political Philosophy and Its Metaphysical Foundations,” *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30.4 (2022): 666–686; Hugo Herrera, “Urgrund and Access to the Urgrund in Karoline von Günderrode’s Discussion with the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher,” *European Journal of Philosophy* (2023): 1–16; Dalia Nassar, “The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günderrode’s Reading of Fichte,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (2021); Karen Ng, “The Idea of the Earth in Günderrode, Schelling and Hegel,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 527–548; Joanna Raisbeck, “‘Diese Unwissenheit ist mir der unerträglichste Mangel, der größte Widerspruch’: The Search for Pre-rational Knowledge in Karoline von Günderrode,” in *Anti / Idealism: Re-interpreting a German Discourse*, ed. Juliana de Albuquerque and Gert Hofmann (De Gruyter: 2019), 131–146; Alison Stone, “Hegel, Schelling and Günderrode on Nature,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Susanne Lettow and Tuija Pulkkinen (Springer, 2023), 213–230. For a more comprehensive bibliography of secondary resources on Günderrode, including her philosophical thought, see Ezekiel, “Read Günderrode,” *Trail of Crumbs* ([https://acezekiel.com/\\_bibliography/](https://acezekiel.com/_bibliography/)).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2007); Anna Ezekiel, “Metamorphosis, Personhood, and Power in Karoline von Günderrode,” *European Romantic Review* 25.6 (2014): 773–791.

nen.” Section 5 examines Günderrode’s exploration of several possible ways of acquiring knowledge beyond the limits drawn by Kant, focusing on her 1804 collection of poetry and short stories, *Gedichte und Phantasien*. Finally, section 6 considers Günderrode’s account of the human vocation in her short story “Geschichte eines Braminen,” noting where Günderrode responds to Kant’s claims regarding individual and socio-political development.

## 2. Günderrode as a Reader of Kant

Karoline von Günderrode was born in 1780 in Karlsruhe, the oldest of six children in a cash-strapped family of minor nobility. She was encouraged to study philosophy by her mother, who introduced Günderrode to the work of Fichte,<sup>3</sup> and was supported in this enterprise by educated and wealthier friends. These included members of the famous, literary Brentano family, the *Naturphilosoph* Christian Nees von Esenbeck and his wife Elisabetha von Mettingh, and the mythologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer, with whom Günderrode had an affair. These individuals and others provided her with texts that, as a woman of limited means, would otherwise have been outside her reach.

Günderrode’s notebooks do not include records of everything she read and some have likely been lost,<sup>4</sup> but the notes we do have give us a picture of some of Günderrode’s reading materials and the nature of her interests. Among many others, we find notes on Schleiermacher’s *Monologen* and *Reden über die Religion*, Fichte’s *Bestimmung des Menschen*, Hemsterhuis’ *Simon ou des facultés de l’âme*, Schelling’s *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* and *Bruno, oder über das göttliche und natürliche Prinzip der Dinge*, and fragments from three issues of the *Athenaeum*, the 1802 edition of Novalis’ writings, and Friedrich Schlegel’s “Rede über die Mythologie” and “Über die Philosophie. An Dorothea.” Günderrode’s letters also include references to reading materials, including Jacobi, Hölderlin, Goethe, Herder, and “Schelling’s divine philosophy.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dagmar von Gersdorff, “Die Erde ist mir Heimat nicht geworden.” *Das Leben der Karoline von Günderrode* (Insel: Frankfurt, 2006), 16, 63.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Günderrode’s notes on Goethe were only unearthed in 2022 (Holger Schwinn, “‘Silenos ruht in stillen Wiesengründen...’: Neuentdeckte Lyrik und Eintragungen von Karoline von Günderrode in der Schlosser’schen Bibliothek,” *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts* [2022]: 96–129).

<sup>5</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Friedrich Creuzer, 22 March 1805, in Birgit Weissenborn, ed., “Ich sende Dir ein zärtliches Pfand.” *Die Briefe der Karoline von Günderrode* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1992), 205. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

Günderrode's notes on Kant illustrate both Günderrode's intense interest in this philosopher and the difficulties facing women of her generation who wanted to do philosophy. The lengthiest notes that have survived are not on Kant's primary texts, but on Kiesewetter's popularization of Kant's work, *Grundriß einer allgemeinen Logik*,<sup>6</sup> which included an elaboration of the contents for "those who cannot attend lectures" on the topic (e.g., women). Günderrode copied these in more detail than her notes on any other thinker, showing their importance to her. We also find two short passages that the editor of Günderrode's collected work suggests summarize parts of Kant's *Neue Anmerkungen zur Erläuterung der Theorie der Winde* and one of his texts on the Lisbon earthquake.<sup>7</sup> References to *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* in Günderrode's notes are not from the primary source but scavenged, along with quotations from many other thinkers, from a popular collection of edifying quotations.<sup>8</sup> These cobbled-together sources on Kant's thought show Günderrode trying, and to an extent succeeding, to get hold of texts by a philosopher who was clearly important to her but whose work remained largely out of reach to women and those without extensive financial resources.

It is possible that Günderrode read other works by Kant that are not mentioned in her letters or surviving notebooks. She may also have been aware of ideas or texts by Kant through secondary texts or discussions with friends who had read them. A more complete picture of Günderrode's knowledge of Kant must still be constructed from the information we have available.

### 3. The Boundaries of Perception

In her work on metaphysics and human identity, Günderrode developed a model of reincarnation according to which human beings undergo radically

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<sup>6</sup> Johann Gottfried Karl Christian Kiesewetter, *Grundriß einer allgemeinen Logik nach Kantischen Grundsätzen zum Gebrauch für Vorlesungen begleitet mit einer weitern Auseinandersetzung für diejenigen die keine Vorlesung darüber hören können*, second edition vols. 1 and 2 (Berlin, F. T. Lagarde, 1795 and 1796).

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Neue Anmerkungen zur Erläuterung der Theorie der Winde, wodurch er zugleich zu seinen Vorlesungen einladet* (Königsberg: Driest, 1756); Kant, *Geschichte und Naturbeschreibung der merkwürdigsten Vorfälle des Erdbebens, welches an dem Ende des 1755sten Jahres einen großen Theil der Erde erschüttert hat* (Königsberg: J. H. Hartung, 1756). See Karoline von Günderrode, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Walther Morgenthaler (Frankfurt and Basel: Stroemfeld and Roter Stern, 1990–1991) [hereafter "SW"], 3:334.

<sup>8</sup> J. A. Neurohr and Johann Hugo Wyttenbach, *Aussprüche der philosophierenden Vernunft und des reinen Herzens über die der Menschheit wichtigsten Gegenstände mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die kritische Philosophie zusammengetragen aus den Schriften älterer und neuerer Denker* (Jena: J.G. Voigt, 1797).

different forms of existence (and associated strange experiences) before and after their human lives.<sup>9</sup> Much of her work can be read as an attempt to imagine and convey the types of experience she claims we can have beyond our current embodiment as individual human beings. However, Günderrode also claims that we can experience the world beyond ordinary human limits while alive. She presents this as happening in a number of ways: through revelatory visions, dreams, flashes of insight, the workings of “inner sense,” initiation by teachers, masters, and mentors, and journeys underground or to far away countries. In this respect, Günderrode’s work has much in common with investigations by other thinkers of her time, including the Early German Romantics, regarding forms of awareness that extend behind everyday experience and ordinary ways of knowing.

Günderrode often indicates that non-discursive, immediate knowledge is superior to the kind of knowledge that can be gained on the basis of measurable empirical data or deduced through argumentation—the traditional tools and starting points of philosophical and scientific inquiry. For instance, in the poem “Der Adept” a scholar is inducted into an Indian religion, after which he learns “How vain all his former knowledge” was, because “He never knew things’ souls, / Made do with names and appearance.”<sup>10</sup> Because of claims like this, Helene Kastinger Riley claims that “it is inappropriate to talk of Günderrode’s ‘philosophical’ poems, because in her work she always and again and again speaks out against this form of the search for knowledge.”<sup>11</sup>

However, Günderrode’s interest in alternative knowledge forms is not just a rejection of philosophy or science; instead, it stems from a serious engagement with philosophical idealism, especially Kant’s claim that human knowledge is limited to the way things appear to our minds and senses. Günderrode was familiar with this claim, and in one of her letters expresses dissatisfaction with this state of affairs: “it’s totally incomprehensible to me,” she writes, “that we have no consciousness other than perception of effects, never of causes. All other knowledge seems to me (when I think of this) not worthy of knowledge [...]. To me, this ignorance is the most unbearable lack, the greatest contradiction.” She adds that she hopes that, after death, these limits will be removed: “I think if we really ever enter the borders of a second life, then one of our first inner phenomena would have to be that our con-

<sup>9</sup> For details, see the section on “Metaphysics” in the general introduction in Anna Ezekiel, ed., *Philosophical Fragments* (Oxford University Press: forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> SW 1:49; trans. Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>11</sup> Helene M. Kastinger Riley, “Zwischen den Welten. Ambivalenz und Existential-problematik im Werk Caroline von Günderrodes,” in *Die weiblich Muse. Sechs Essays über künstlerisch schaffende Frauen der Goethezeit* (Columbia: Camden House, 1986), 110.

sciousness would grow larger and clearer; for it would be unbearable to drag this limitation into a second life.”<sup>12</sup>

Günderrode does not dispute that Kant has correctly identified the limitations of human cognition and sensory perception; however, she *does* dispute that these are the only ways of experiencing the world. She does this in two ways: by claiming, first, that cognition and sensory perception are not the only ways human beings can know things and, second, that human experience is not the only kind of experience we can have. I have argued elsewhere<sup>13</sup> that Günderrode claims we can experience the world in radically altered forms before we are born and after we die. This paper considers the other challenge Günderrode poses to Kant, that is, her account of *human* ways of knowing that escape or exceed ordinary experience.

#### 4. Inner Sense: “Die Manen”

Like the pieces considered in the next section, “Die Manen” was published in Günderrode’s first collection, *Gedichte und Phantasien*, in 1804. The “Manen” (English: “Manes”) of the title refers to Roman spirits of the dead, which were thought to be able to intercede in the world on behalf of the living. The idea of spirits of the dead that could be contacted by and affect the living was readily integrated with Günderrode’s claims about reincarnation and with her interest in the possibilities for new types of experiences after death.

In “Die Manen,” a teacher explains to his student that the dead “live on” [*fortleben*] in the living and that we can be aware of this connection, as well as other aspects of the world that are hidden to our normal perceptual apparatus, through an “inner sense,” which he also calls an “inner eye,” a “spiritual eye” or “mind’s eye” and “the deepest and finest organ of the soul.”<sup>14</sup>

At the time Günderrode was writing, the idea of an “inner sense” was a popular one that carried a diverse range of meanings. In her book on the inner sense in Günderrode’s work, Helga Dormann notes that this sense was construed “on the one hand as an organ of aesthetic feeling that experiences sensations when ‘viewing the beautiful’” (Hutcheson, Winckelmann,

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<sup>12</sup> Letter to Gunda Brentano, 11 August 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 75–76; trans. Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Ezekiel, “Through Consciousness Parted from Dream: Alternative Knowledge Forms in Karoline von Günderrode,” in *The Being of Negation in Post-Kantian Philosophy*, ed. Gregory S. Moss (Dordrecht: Springer, 2023), 163–180.

<sup>14</sup> SW 1:33–35. Translations from “Die Manen” are by Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*.



Herder) and on the other as a sense that serves an individual's self-perception (Locke, Kant); it was also sometimes defined as an organ through which the individual can communicate with the spiritual world (Swedenborg, Mesmer).<sup>15</sup> Günderrode's version of inner sense can also be linked to Hemsterhuis' conception of the "moral organ" and Schleiermacher's claims regarding introspection as the source and location of genuine religious experience, which he also calls "inner sense."<sup>16</sup> Both these thinkers present this inner sense or organ as a natural capacity that must be developed in order for human nature to be fully realized. Similarly, in "Die Manen," the teacher claims that the inner sense "is totally undeveloped in almost all people and only there in seed form."<sup>17</sup> Most people, he explains, are distracted from the development of their inner sense by the business of everyday life, and are therefore cut off from understanding the real nature of the universe, a deeper connection with other people, and religious experience.

"Die Manen" includes a passage that suggests that Günderrode may have been particularly concerned to respond to remarks regarding the inner sense by Kant. That Günderrode was familiar with Kant's position on this topic is indicated in her letters, where she writes: "In logic I learnt that one can't have intuitions of the outer senses without the characteristics of time and space, and no intuition of the inner sense without the characteristic of time."<sup>18</sup> In "Die Manen," the teacher heads off a potential objection to his explanation of the inner sense by "doubters and vilifiers," claiming "I do not need to explain everything miraculous as fraudulent or as a deception of the senses."<sup>19</sup> This statement is likely a response to Kant's dismissive view of certain accounts of the inner sense, especially that of Swedenborg. The latter is very different from the "inner sense" of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, which Kant defines as "inner intuition" [*innre Anschauung*] or "the intuiting we do of

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<sup>15</sup> Dormann also explores the various meanings attributed to "inner sense" by Fichte, Schelling, Goethe, Novalis, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Alexander von Humboldt, Tieck and Franz von Baader (Helga Dormann, *Die Kunst des inneren Sinns. Mythisierung der inneren und äusseren Natur im Werk Karoline von Günderrodes* [Wurzberg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2004], 99, 113, 115–116, 129–129).

<sup>16</sup> Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 104, 117–19; Ruth Christmann, *Zwischen Identitätsgewinn und Bewußtseinsverlust. Das philosophisch-literarische Werk der Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806)* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2005), 170–71.

<sup>17</sup> SW 1:34.

<sup>18</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Claudine Piautaz, April 1804, Weissenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 125; trans. Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*. By "logic" Günderrode is likely referring to Kiesewetter's account of Kant's ideas in *Grundriß einer allgemeinen Logik nach Kantischen Grundsätzen*.

<sup>19</sup> SW 1:34–35.

ourselves and of our inner state” [*des Anschauens unserer selbst und unseres innern Zustandes*].<sup>20</sup>

In the section “Vom inneren Sinn” in the *Anthropologie*, Kant claims that if we mistake the objects of inner intuition for real objects outside us this can result in deception, madness, and seeing ghosts.<sup>21</sup> He makes a similar point in his 1766 text *Träume eines Geistersehers*, relating this kind of delusion to Swedenborg’s conception of the inner sense as a means of communicating with spirits. Similarly to the *Anthropologie*, in *Träume eines Geistersehers* Kant describes an illness in which “the confused person places mere objects of his imagination outside himself and regards them as things that are really present before him.”<sup>22</sup> Kant’s criticisms of Swedenborg’s claims include numerous points that correspond with Günderrode’s “Die Manen,” including the possibility of an immediate inner connection with the spirit-world, which he calls “an imagined community with spirits” [*einer eingebildeten Geistergemeinschaft*];<sup>23</sup> the idea that everyone has the capacity to connect with the spirit world but only those whose inward spiritual sense has awakened can do so;<sup>24</sup> the claim that individuals connect with the spirits of those with whom they have something in common and that this connection endures through death;<sup>25</sup> and the possibility of an effect by spirits—including spirits of the dead—on the living.<sup>26</sup> The number of correspondences to Kant’s relatively short text, combined with Günderrode’s framing of the teacher’s explanation as a rebuttal of “doubters and vilifiers,” suggest that Günderrode may have been responding to Kant’s criticisms rather than to Swedenborg himself, raising the possibility that she might have read *Träume eines Geistersehers*.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996 [1781/1787]), A33/B49–50; see A107, B66–72.

<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant, s.24 “Vom inneren Sinn,” in *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* [1796/1797], AA VII, 161; see Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 126–127.

<sup>22</sup> AA II, 346; see Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 120.

<sup>23</sup> AA II, 348. Kant also describes this claim as the belief that “The human soul [...] is in an indissolubly joined community with all immaterial natures of the spirit-world” (AA II, 333).

<sup>24</sup> “This kind of apparition can however not be something common and ordinary, but only occur with persons whose organs have an unusually great sensitivity for amplifying [...] the pictures of imagination” (AA II, 339–340).

<sup>25</sup> “When finally through death the community of the soul with the physical world is overcome, life in the other [spirit-]world would only be a natural continuation of those connections that it had already established with it in this life” (AA II, 336).

<sup>26</sup> Kant characterizes his opponent’s argument on this point as: “Departed souls and pure spirits can indeed never be present to our external senses, nor otherwise exist in community with matter, but can work on the spirit of the human being, who belongs with them in one great republic” (AA II, 340–341).

In “Die Manen,” Günderrode mobilizes multiple meanings ascribed to inner sense by her contemporaries and predecessors. Despite their diversity, these meanings and models share a rejection of an account of human nature that limits the possibilities for experience to the shape we give the world through our perceptual and intellectual faculties. The ideas of inner sense that Günderrode invokes in “Die Manen” attempt to integrate into our experience and understanding those aspects of the world that are not available to our normal perceptual apparatus and that elude our conscious grasp.

### 5. The Problem of Knowledge: Günderrode as a Romantic Reader of Kant

Günderrode's account of inner sense places her in a tradition of engaging with Kant's delineation of the limits of human experience that explores the possibility of encountering the world through intellectual intuition—that is, direct, immediate knowledge, undistorted by discursive structures, perceptual constraints, or even the subject-object distinction. Kant denies that human beings can have such a thing as intellectual intuition, because all our intuitions are mediated by our sensory apparatus: “Whatever is presented through a sense is, to that extent, always appearance. Hence either we must not grant that there is an inner sense at all; or we must grant that the subject who is the object of this sense can be presented through it only as appearance, and not as he would judge himself if his intuition were self-activity only, i.e., if it were intellectual intuition.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, there may be such a thing as inner sense, but this sense cannot escape the major condition that applies to all our other (external) senses: it provides knowledge of appearances only and not things as they are in themselves. Genuine intellectual intuition — awareness of our actions not as observers but simply because we are the doer of the actions—is not possible, for Kant.

Whereas Fichte and Schelling disputed this claim,<sup>28</sup> Novalis followed Kant in claiming that intellectual intuition is impossible. For Novalis, knowledge, including knowledge of the self, always requires representation and relies on the division between subject and object.<sup>29</sup> Knowledge of the

<sup>27</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Pluhar, B68; see also B72, B307.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., J. G. Fichte, “Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 46; F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 27.

<sup>29</sup> Novalis, *Schriften. Zweite, nach den Handschriften ergänzte, erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage in vier Bänden*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 4 vols. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960f.), 1:133–135; 2:104–105.

absolute is therefore obtained in inadequate glimpses, such as dreams, drunken or narcotic stupors, or visions (as described, for example, in “Hymnen an die Nacht”) or through forms of mirroring (e.g., in the cave sequence in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*).

Günderrode’s most sustained engagement with epistemological questions emerges in *Gedichte und Phantasien*, much of which was written around the time of her studies of Novalis. It is therefore not surprising that her thinking on this topic is strongly influenced by him. Like Novalis, Günderrode used depictions of unusual ways of encountering the world to consider possibilities for circumventing what she saw as the painful delimitation of human experience by Kant. She explored options for accessing the world behind the phenomena of ordinary experience, often foregrounding problems with these options and expressing several different and sometimes conflicting positions on their possibility and value. In some texts, such as “Ein apokalyptisches Fragment,” “Geschichte eines Braminen,” and the later “Briefe zweier Freunde,” Günderrode describes visions and revelations that communicate genuine truths about the world behind experiences. However, in other works she presents the attempt to pierce the veil of appearances as doomed to failure, as succeeding only in a qualified sense, or as leading to new and different forms of the attempt to transcend the limits established by Kant. Yet others conclude that the search to better understand the world behind appearances is a red herring in the attempt to find happiness.

In the poem “Des Wandrers Niederfahrt,” Günderrode takes up Novalis’ claim that the subject-object distinction is a requirement for knowledge, and his use of a cave metaphor to uncover the relationship of mirroring between the human being and the external world. This long poem is a dialogue between the Wanderer, his guide, and “spirits of earth” who inhabit a cave into which the guide leads the Wanderer. Günderrode’s interest in boundaries, and especially in traversing them, is clear from the opening lines, which take place at the entrance to a cave on a seashore at sunset. These boundaries represent the division between life and death, as indicated by imagery associated with the Wanderer’s guide, whose appellation “Herald of the night” identifies him as a psychopomp.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, in keeping with Günderrode’s claim that new forms of awareness await us after death, these borders represent the boundaries of perception. The descent into the depths of the earth in search of insight into the nature of things reverses the traditional association of light with knowledge: it is in “the old realm of dark midnight” that the Wanderer hopes to find answers regarding the reality of

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<sup>30</sup> SW 1:70.

the world.<sup>31</sup> It is not reason and visible or otherwise measurable events and objects that allow us to understand the world, but attention to what is hidden, invisible and unspoken.

That Günderrode intends the turn to darkness and the underworld as a deliberate critique of Kantian epistemology is suggested towards the end of the dialogue, where the Wanderer states that he wants to “raise the unalloyed treasures / That the gleam [*Schein*] of the living world does not disturb.”<sup>32</sup> Consistently with the connotations of appearance, semblance and pretense associated with the German *Schein*, Günderrode’s use of the term, including its contrast with the genuine treasures to be found in the depths of the earth, indicates deceptiveness or only apparent truth. It also, of course, recalls the related term *Erscheinung*. Günderrode evidently intends the Wanderer’s descent to be read as a turn away from the phenomenal world to which Kant limits human knowledge.<sup>33</sup> A similar dissatisfaction with phenomenal reality is evident in other works by Günderrode: the poem “Der Adept” (considered next), where the protagonist realizes “How vain all his former knowledge” is, as it only gives knowledge of “names and appearance [*Schein*”<sup>34</sup>; “Mahomets Traum in der Wüste” (also considered below), where the protagonist wants to “Separate the being of things” from “deceptive appearance [*Schein*”<sup>35</sup>; and *Immortalita* (considered near the end of this section), in which the hero describes himself as “a stranger on earth” who “wanted to enjoy nothing of its shadow goods” and descends to the land of the dead to satisfy his longing for something greater.<sup>36</sup>

At the conclusion of “Des Wandrers Niederfahrt,” the Wanderer has descended into the depths of the earth, but the spirits of earth inform him that he cannot find what he is searching for: he is “already born to the day; / Divided from the life element” and “Through your consciousness already parted from dream.”<sup>37</sup> The Wanderer’s individuated consciousness separates him from the undivided source of life, about which he seeks to learn. This “primal being” [*Urseyn*] or “primal force” [*Urkraft*] for which the Wanderer

<sup>31</sup> SW 1:70; see Christmann, *Identitätsgewinn*, 165; Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 173–174. Translations from “Des Wandrers Niederfahrt” are by Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>32</sup> SW 1:72. Translations from “Der Adept” and “Der Franke in Egypten” are by Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>33</sup> See Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 176.

<sup>34</sup> SW 1:49.

<sup>35</sup> SW 1:75. Translations of “Mahomets Traum in der Wüste” are from Karoline von Günderrode, “Muhammad’s Dream in the Desert,” trans. Anna Ezekiel, *Trail of Crumbs* (October 2021); reprinted in *Synkrētic* no. 2 (June 2022): 133–144.

<sup>36</sup> SW 1:45. Translations from *Immortalita* are by Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>37</sup> SW 1:73.

is searching exceeds differentiations such as the subject-object division that is necessary for knowledge.

In emphasizing the necessity of the subject-object distinction for knowledge, G nderrode takes up Novalis' claim that human beings, as conscious individuals, necessarily remain alienated from, and unable to cognize, the whole of which they are more fundamentally a part. G nderrode also follows Novalis in providing a consolation for the impossibility of a direct encounter with the infinite in the form of a learning process that gradually approximates or approaches such an experience. For Novalis, the individual is a microcosm of the universe: a manifestation, and therefore a reflection, of the whole. For this reason, we can obtain knowledge of ourselves by learning about the world, and *vice versa*: "We dream of journeys through the cosmos; is the cosmos not within us? [...] The mysterious path goes inwards."<sup>38</sup> "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" includes a similar moment, when the spirits of earth tell the Wanderer "look down, into your soul's grounds; / What you seek here you will find there, / You are just the cosmos' seeing mirror."<sup>39</sup> For G nderrode, like Novalis, the individual is a part of the whole of nature, and can therefore learn about it not only through external observation, but also through insight into him- or herself.

Like "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt," G nderrode's poem "Der Adept" presents the forms of knowledge that can be gained through study of the everyday world as deceptive and inadequate. In this poem, Valus—a scholar who, like the Wanderer, is driven by a need to learn about the world—travels to India in search of more genuine and satisfying wisdom. The poem describes his initiation into the secrets of the priests he meets there, learning (like the Wanderer) that knowledge of the everyday world is misleading. Unlike the Wanderer, however, Valus learns to distinguish the real nature of things as "one thing" [*Eins*], referred to as "the nature-spirit" underlying all the changing appearances of the universe. He is able to "listen in" to nature, to "see its deepest workings": he "sees through everything."<sup>40</sup>

However, in the end this level of knowledge is useless: Valus is repelled by the changing forms of nature, paralyzed by the rapid changes, and isolated from the rest of humanity; he can only hope for death. In this poem, G nderrode links the encounter with the reality of the world beyond human limitations to despair.

As others have noted, Valus' fate in "Der Adept" uses the "revenge of nature" trope associated with the attempt to penetrate nature's secrets, which

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<sup>38</sup> Novalis, *Schriften*, 2:417–419, nr 17.

<sup>39</sup> SW 1:73.

<sup>40</sup> SW 1:49–50.

famously featured in Schiller's 1795 poem "Das verschleierte Bild zu Saïs."<sup>41</sup> According to this trope, anyone who attempts to "lift the veil" of nature (embodied by the statue of the goddess Isis) to see beyond the realm of phenomena will die or go mad. Günderrode refers explicitly to the Isis metaphor in "Geschichte eines Braminen" and her play *Magie und Schicksal*; references to veils and unveiling in "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" also work with this association. In "Der Adept," the image is not referenced directly; instead, Günderrode makes the same point by depicting Valus' view behind the superficial appearances of phenomena as paralyzing and leading to despair.

In both "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" and "Der Adept," Günderrode rejects the possibility of satisfying the search for knowledge beyond the boundaries of normal perception. While in "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" we learn that it is simply impossible, as conscious individuals, to see things as they really are (although we may move towards this knowledge through introspection), in "Der Adept" it is possible to see things as they are but doing so destroys one's mind and sense of self.

The poem "Mahomets Traum in der Wüste" begins in a similar vein to "Der Adept." The protagonist, described as a "Seer," wants to "Separate the being of things" from "deceptive appearance" and succeeds ("The vain shimmer scatters"), only to experience a violent and turbulent vision of "innermost life."<sup>42</sup> Günderrode describes this as "delusion," "drunken delusions," "horror and fury," and alternating "bliss" and "downfall."<sup>43</sup> The earth and ocean boil and catch fire and everything seems to be falling apart:

[...] then the earth  
Quakes, the sea  
Sublimates into clouds,  
Flames blaze from rocky chasms,  
The air, filled with the smell of brimstone,  
Sluggishly lets the tired shaking rest.

In wild dance,  
The corona entwines  
The errant stars, the heavens;  
The ocean roars in its foundations  
And in the earth's deepest gorges

<sup>41</sup> E.g., Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 153. The veiled statue at Saïs also appears in Novalis' work, but instead of going mad, the character who lifts the veil finds his lover (Novalis, *Schriften* 1:95).

<sup>42</sup> SW 1:75, 77.

<sup>43</sup> SW 1:75–76.

The elements dispute.<sup>44</sup>

However, unlike in “Der Adept,” in “Mahomets Traum in der Wüste” the protagonist awakens from his terrifying visions. A voice calls him and affirms the authenticity of what he experienced: “You saw here embodied / What will befall all things / You saw here the history of the world.”<sup>45</sup> The poem concludes with the Seer swearing devotion to “the light.”

By contrast to both Valus and the Wanderer, the Seer in “Mahomets Traum in der Wüste” is able to have a vision of the world beyond human limits and continue to function. The Seer is even able to use the knowledge gained in the darkness to act in the world of light. This throws into question the positions Günderrode presented in “Des Wandrers Niederfahrt” and “Der Adept”; here, it seems that knowledge of the truths of the universe is both possible and survivable, although it is important to emerge from their dizzying and disruptive contemplation. Furthermore, the knowledge gained during these visions can be beneficial, helping to guide action in ordinary life.

In other pieces, Günderrode considers an option for those who, unlike the Seer, cannot be satisfied by concrete activities any more than they (or anyone) can survive in constant contemplation of the truths of the universe. For the characters in “Der Franke in Egypten,” knowledge of any kind cannot satisfy the cravings that drive them. This poem engages another Early German Romantic trope: the idea that love, rather than knowledge, is the means by which we can extend ourselves beyond the boundaries of our individual selves.

Like “Der Adept,” “Der Franke in Egypten” describes a European man’s journey to the east in search of knowledge and fulfilment, motivated by “discontent” and “longing.”<sup>46</sup> However, the Frank finds himself unsatisfied not only by science and the glories of battle, but also by his exploration of Egypt’s ancient treasures (including a descent into the depths of the pyramids that recalls the Wanderer’s descent) and by the Romantic power of imagination<sup>47</sup>: “Not on far shores, not in battles!” he exclaims, “Sciences! Not at your hand, / Not in the colorful land of fantasies! / Dwells the thirsty heart’s satiation.” Instead, he discovers: “Love must beckon the tired pilgrim.”<sup>48</sup> He has fallen for an Egyptian woman, Lastrada, who, like the Frank, describes a “longing,” a “wishing without wish”<sup>49</sup>: in her case (and

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<sup>44</sup> SW 1:76.

<sup>45</sup> SW 1:77.

<sup>46</sup> SW 1:81.

<sup>47</sup> See Christmann, *Identitätsgewinn*, 139.

<sup>48</sup> SW 1:84.

<sup>49</sup> SW 1:84.



that of her father) focused on the distant coasts of Europe, her father's homeland. The poem concludes with the Frank describing his salvation through the experience of love.

"Der Franke in Egypten" thus provides a further alternative to the frustrations of "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" and "Der Adept" and the successful acquisition of deeper knowledge in "Mahomets Traum in der Wüste" by suggesting that it is love, not knowledge, that can lead a person beyond themselves. In addition, the closing lines of "Der Franke in Egypten" suggest that love not only allows connection and communion with the living, but also collapses the boundary between the living and the dead. The Frank claims: "Love must lead to heroes' shadows, / Must speak to us from the spirit world."<sup>50</sup>

Although this idea is only mentioned in passing in "Der Franke in Egypten," it features more prominently elsewhere in Günderrode's work. For instance, at the conclusion to "Geschichte eines Braminen" the protagonist finds a community comprising himself, a living woman, and the spirit of his dead mentor, and in "Die Bande der Liebe" (also published in *Gedichte und Phantasien*) it is love that links the speaker to the dead. The role of love in collapsing the border between life and death is most explicit in Günderrode's play *Immortalita*. Here, the hero Erodion is driven by longing to enter the underworld in search of his beloved, the goddess Immortalita. When he finds her, she helps him pull down the barrier between the worlds of the living and the dead, allowing lovers once more to be joined: "The cliff has fallen," Immortalita announces, "From now on may it be granted to the thoughts of love, the dreams of longing, the inspiration of the poets, to descend from the land of the living to the shadow-realm and go back again."<sup>51</sup>

Günderrode's work on the boundaries of human experience and possibilities for transcending them shares many features with better-known Early German Romantic accounts, especially those of Novalis. These include depictions of journeys to the east and underground in search of special knowledge, with the protagonists urged on by inchoate longings; the frustrations of the subject-object distinction; the mirroring between the human mind and the external world; and the experience of love as a means of finding fulfilment, transcending individual boundaries, and reaching beyond the grave.

Notwithstanding these similarities, Günderrode's response to Kant's limitation of human experience differs from those of Novalis and other Early

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<sup>50</sup> SW 1:8.

<sup>51</sup> SW 1:47.

German Romantics in important ways. These include her ambivalence or epistemological modesty regarding the topics she investigates,<sup>52</sup> her treatment of gender (which affects the meaning and function of love in her account),<sup>53</sup> and differences entailed by her unique metaphysics.<sup>54</sup> A detailed consideration of these differences would take us too far from the purpose of this paper. Hopefully, however, it is clear from the above discussion that G nderrode’s exploration of epistemological questions (a) responds to Kant’s distinction between phenomena and noumenon, and (b) does so in the context of Early German Romantic work that was also shaped by the desire to supercede this distinction.

## 6. Kant, G nderrode and the Human Vocation: “Geschichte eines Braminen”

In addition to her work on epistemology, G nderrode responded to Kant’s work regarding human development and the relationship of the individual to society. This is clearest in her short story “Geschichte eines Braminen,” which was written around 1803 and published in Sophie von La Roche’s

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<sup>52</sup> G nderrode often presents several positions on one topic, highlighting problems with each perspective rather than arguing for a solution, or she explicitly expresses ambivalence about a solution. This is evident in the different and sometimes mutually contradictory conclusions to the quest for secret knowledge in the various pieces in *Gedichte und Phantasien*, as described above. For more examples and analysis, see Anna Ezekiel, “Through Consciousness Parted from Dream”; Ezekiel, “Knowledge, Faith and Ambiguity: Hope in the Work of Novalis and Karoline von G nderrode,” in *Hope and the Kantian Legacy: New Contributions to the History of Optimism*, ed. Anna Ezekiel and Katerina Mihaylova (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 239–254.

<sup>53</sup> G nderrode disposes of the gender dichotomy that played an important role in the thought of, for example, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. Among other things, this allows her to circumvent criticisms of Early German Romanticism as instrumentalizing women and occluding their possibilities for development (see, e.g., B. Becker-Cantorino, “‘Feminismus’ und ‘Emanzipation’? Zum Geschlechterdiskurs der deutschen Romantik am Beispiel der *Lucinde* und ihrer Rezeption,” in *Salons der Romantik: Beitrage eines wiewersdorfer Colloquiums zu Theorie und Geschichte des Salons*, ed. Hartwig Schultz [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997], 35; Anna Ezekiel, “Women, Women Writers, and Early German Romanticism,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Elizabeth Mill n [Palgrave Macmillan, 2020], 475–509; Sara Friedrichsmeyer, *The Androgyne in Early German Romanticism: Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and the Metaphysics of Love* [Bern: Lange, 1983], 104–105, 158).

<sup>54</sup> G nderrode’s metaphysics entail a reconceptualization of both death and personal identity which, among other things, radically alters the meaning of claims regarding the ability of love to transcend the boundaries between life and death. On G nderrode’s metaphysics and their implications for other aspects of her thought, especially death and love, see Anna Ezekiel, “Introduction to ‘Piedro,’ ‘The Pilgrims,’ and ‘The Kiss in the Dream,’” in Karoline von G nderrode, *Poetic Fragments by Tian* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 87–105.

1805 collection *Herbsttage*. In this piece we see Günderrode raising some of the epistemological themes discussed earlier in this paper at the same time as engaging explicitly with Kant's moral and social thought.

"Geschichte eines Braminen" relates the *Bildung* of the narrator, Almor, who describes his transition from a life centered on money and pleasure through a moral awakening and engagement with various religions, followed by travel to Asia in search of his true self and true religion. Like the pieces in the last section, this story explores possibilities for an encounter with aspects of the world that elude scientific investigation or rational thought. In this case, a variety of methods—a journey to the east, introspection, initiation, the study of religions, an "inner voice" and the voices of nature and "spirit"—lead the narrator to grasp the reality behind everyday experience.

Almor, born in Smyrna of mixed Asian and European descent, moves to Europe to pursue business, but after some years he returns to Asia. Günderrode uses Almor's decision to leave Europe as a way to critique Enlightenment values and society, and in particular to criticize two alternative orientations to life that she associates with these: the pursuit of profit and pleasure, and the subjugation of individual needs and desires to social ends. Günderrode places these orientations in a hierarchical relationship. Almor first questions his lifestyle of "earning money in order to spend it again in a pleasant way"<sup>55</sup>; this questioning leads him to develop a moral orientation to life, in which his own needs must be subordinated to the needs of humanity as a whole. In a sense, however, the individualistic and the moral lifestyles are two sides of the same coin. That is, in a society that views individual and social needs as opposed, a person must choose one or the other: the only two options are either a life focused on personal gain or a life that sacrifices individual desires to the benefit of the whole.<sup>56</sup> This is a dichotomy that runs through the rest of "Geschichte eines Braminen" and that Almor strives to overcome.

Günderrode describes her protagonist's moral awakening in Kantian terms. Almor realizes that in order to become wise and virtuous, he must master "sensuality [and] the passions" and, instead of pursuing his own self-interest, consider himself "a citizen of the moral realm" [*Bürger des moralischen Reiches*], the welfare of which he must promote.<sup>57</sup> He describes this new orientation as "the free activity of a thinking being that sets its own purpose for its conduct" [*die freye Thätigkeit eines denkenden Wesens, das sich selbst einen*

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<sup>55</sup> SW 1:304. Translations from "Geschichte eines Braminen" are by Anna Ezekiel in *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>56</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 126.

<sup>57</sup> SW 1:305.

*Zweck seines Thuns setzt*].<sup>58</sup> This phrasing deliberately recalls Kant’s ideal of a rational individual who creates universalizable maxims for their behavior.

After raising himself to a life that embodies Kantian morality, Almor begins to question the subjugation of one part of his personality (the passions) to another (reason). Prompted by his “inner voice” he asks “Why, then, is everything on earth good except human beings? Why should they alone become different than they are?”<sup>59</sup> In a Rousseauian vein, he begins to suspect that social conditioning has corrupted the original “nature and harmony of my essence.”<sup>60</sup> From this point on, Almor will try to free himself from the conventions of his upbringing and society and discover his true, original nature.

At this point Günderrode makes another possible reference to Kant. Almor claims that, by this stage in his development, he had realized that “justice is the basis of civil society and morality the basis of human society.”<sup>61</sup> Günderrode does not provide an exposition of the concepts “civil society” [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] and “human society” [*menschliche Gesellschaft*] but the context makes clear that they are intended to mark a distinction between relationships between human beings that are governed by different kinds of principles: on the one hand, rules or laws, such as those in the institutions of the nation-state and, on the other, moral ideals of how individuals should behave towards each other. It is possible that these categories are intended to map on to Kant’s distinction, in *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, between juridico-civil [*rechtlich-bürgerliche*] society and ethico-civil [*ethisch-bürgerliche*] or ethical [*ethische*] society. While the former involves “coercive laws” [*Zwangsgesetze*], Kant describes the latter as “An association of human beings merely under the laws of virtue” [*eine Verbindung der Menschen unter bloßen Tugendgesetzen*]; these laws, he specifies, are determined freely by the members of this association using “morally legislative reason” [*moralisch-gesetzgebenden Vernunft*].<sup>62</sup> While for Kant this is a desirable state of affairs, Almor hopes to supercede both these kinds of society in favor of one

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<sup>58</sup> SW 1:305.

<sup>59</sup> SW 1:305.

<sup>60</sup> SW 1:306. It is possible that Günderrode derived this idea, not from Rousseau, but from Kant himself. For example, in *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* Kant argues that human beings “mutually corrupt each other’s moral disposition and make one another evil” (Immanuel Kant, “Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,” in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni [Cambridge University Press, 1998], 105 [AA VI, 94]).

<sup>61</sup> SW 1:307.

<sup>62</sup> Kant, trans. Wood and di Giovanni, “Religion,” 106–107 [AA VI, 94–95].

that facilitates the development of the whole of his nature, not only his rational capacities.

In order to achieve this, Almor abandons European society and Enlightenment moral values and travels back to Asia, where at first he lives as a hermit. He claims “I wrested myself away from all relations with human beings” in order to “purify myself from everything alien and become wholly myself again.”<sup>63</sup> This is an important period that prepares Almor for the final level of his development. After separating himself from the problems of society, especially “The struggle [...] of the individual with society,”<sup>64</sup> Almor reconnects with “the speech of my own spirit” and “my individuality”<sup>65</sup> and experiences his first intimations of the divine. He notes that (as Kant claims) the human imagination and desire to know are infinite, and that these drives cannot be satisfied by finite means. However, Günderrode takes this discovery in a different direction to Kant: Almor senses something beyond himself, something he longs to join. We also see the first hints that these two things—one’s true, inner self and the divine—are in fact the same: “my inner sense intimated an invisible and mysterious connection with something that I did not yet know.”<sup>66</sup>

In addition to this sense of being connected to something greater than himself, Almor learns that his development is part of a three-step path that corresponds to what he calls the “three ways” in which a human being can live. The first stage, the “animal” involves attention to one’s physical needs: “health, preservation, propagation,” as Almor puts it. This stage corresponds to Almor’s early focus on satisfying his physical needs and wants through money and pleasure.<sup>67</sup> The second, “human” stage is the level of “morality,” in which Almor claims people take “humankind [as a whole] as their object,”<sup>68</sup> which corresponds to Almor’s dalliance with Kantian morality and his concern for social order. The third stage—the “spiritual” stage—is the “relation to the infinite, divine.”<sup>69</sup> Pursuing this aspect of his existence will be Almor’s goal from now on.

These claims suggest a further possible modification of ideas from Kant. Günderrode’s “three ways” of human life recall Kant’s claim in *Religion* that the human being can be determined in three ways, relating to its “animality,” “humanity,” and “personality.” These involve one’s existence

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<sup>63</sup> SW 1:306.

<sup>64</sup> SW 1:307.

<sup>65</sup> SW 1:307.

<sup>66</sup> SW 1:308.

<sup>67</sup> Riley, “Zwischen den Welten,” 101.

<sup>68</sup> SW 1:310–311.

<sup>69</sup> SW 1:311.

as, respectively, a living being (focused largely on self-preservation and propagation, but also including a basic social instinct), a rational being, and a “responsible” being.<sup>70</sup> Kant explicitly characterizes personality as the most genuinely moral aspect of human existence, relating to concern for all human beings: “The idea of the moral law [...] is personality itself (the idea of humanity considered wholly intellectually).”<sup>71</sup> Günderröde, however, collapses Kant’s concept of personality into that of humanity, relating the “human” way of living to the search for morality and a concern with the idea of humanity as a whole. She then adds the extra level of “spirituality,” which she maintains is a distinct and important area of human experience.<sup>72</sup>

As part of Almor’s articulation of his progress towards a spiritual existence, he recognizes that each individual must freely develop themselves according to whatever best suits their unique nature. There is no one course of development for all human beings. As he explains, some individuals will act in society while others, like himself, will withdraw from it, “for as various as is the outer formation of people, just as various is their inner nature, their life, and their wishes.”<sup>73</sup> Almor claims that a moral, philosophical, or religious approach that subordinates the needs and nature of individuals to the whole, or that universalizes the path that all individuals should take, stunts the nature of each individual and the purpose for which it was created, which is simply to develop according to its own nature.<sup>74</sup>

Almor is now ready for the final stage in his development. Driven onward by Romantic longing, he travels to India. Here, he meets a “wise Brahmin” who explains more about the workings of the “infinite spirit of

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<sup>70</sup> Kant, trans. Wood and di Giovanni, “Religion,” 50–51 (AA 6, 26).

<sup>71</sup> Kant, trans. Wood and di Giovanni, “Religion,” 52 (AA 6, 27–28).

<sup>72</sup> It is very possible that Günderröde read Kant’s *Religion* and that this is a deliberate critique of Kant. However, the question of how human beings relate on the one hand to animals and on the other to the divine has been a long-running theme in European philosophy, so she may instead have adapted the three levels of human existence described by Almor from elsewhere, possibly several sources.

<sup>73</sup> SW 1:307.

<sup>74</sup> Yet another possible hint of a connection to Kant at this point in the story is found in Almor’s claim that “This new view of things brought my mind perpetual peace [*ewigen Frieden*]” (SW 1:311). As Christine Battersby notes (*Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 126), the German phrase “perpetual peace” recalls Kant’s 1795 essay on *Zum ewigen Freude*. This phrase has a long history in the Christian tradition as a reference to heaven, for example in Luther’s statement that “The goal of the worldly regime is temporal peace; the goal of the Christian church is [...] eternal peace” (Martin Luther, “Sermon on the First Day of Christmas, Luke 2:1–14,” in *Martin Luther, Sermons*, ed. Kurt Alend [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002], 45). Kant’s title picks up on this tradition. It is quite likely that Günderröde intended to consider a form of “perpetual peace” that was unrelated to systems of worldly government such as those suggested in Kant’s essay.

nature” that Almor first intimated while in isolation. The Brahmin teaches Almor how:

the forces wander through all forms until they develop consciousness and thought in human beings; how from human beings on an infinite series of migrations that lead to ever higher perfection awaits souls; how eventually, through mysterious ways, they will all unite with the primal force from which they emanated and will become one with it, and still at the same time remain themselves[.]<sup>75</sup>

In this way, Günderrode reconciles the needs of individuals and those of the whole: the self-development of the individual is the same as the self-development of the whole, because the individual is a part of the whole and the means through which the whole develops. The free unfolding of each individual’s nature—manifested in “their inner nature, their life, and their wishes”—is how the universe cultivates itself.<sup>76</sup>

The outcome of the development of each individual according to their inner nature will be, according to Almor, “a time of perfection [...], when each being will be harmonious with itself and with the others, when they flow into each other and become one in a great unison.”<sup>77</sup> This harmonious state will emerge when individuals who have developed themselves according to their own inner natures, free from the distorting affects of social constraints, come together to live in a community. If all these individuals have come to know themselves as emanations of the same underlying primal force or life, their lifestyles will naturally align and create a form of social harmony that does not need laws, religious institutions or systems of morality to enforce sociable behavior. This is why Almor must turn inward and remove himself from society before he can turn outward again to found a new form of community.<sup>78</sup> His time in isolation was needed in order to learn to listen to his inner voice, which is at the same time the voice of nature or the world spirit. Only after this development can Almor participate in an ideal community joined in relationship to the divine. At the end of “Geschichte eines Braminen,” Almor lives in a hut in the wilderness with the daughter of the Brahmin, who has died and now lives on with them in spirit. This exemplifies

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<sup>75</sup> SW 1:312.

<sup>76</sup> For more on this point, including its relationship to the work of Herder, see Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 62–65, 71; Ezekiel, “Earth, Spirit, Humanity: Karoline von Günderrode’s ‘Idea of the Earth,’” in *Romanticism and Political Ecology*, ed. Kir Kuiken (Romantic Praxis Circle: 2024).

<sup>77</sup> SW 1:310.

<sup>78</sup> Dormann, *Kunst des inneren Sinns*, 74.

the community “between human beings in whom the inner sense has arisen and the world-spirit”<sup>79</sup> described earlier by the Brahmin.

Rather than advocating a turn inward, away from social and political concerns, “Geschichte eines Braminen” presents Günderrode’s contribution to the debate on the vocation of humankind. In addition to a likely influence of Schleiermacher, especially regarding the idea of an ideal community of individuals who have developed their inner selves, Günderrode’s text has similarities to Johann Joachim Spalding’s popular 1748 publication *Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen*.<sup>80</sup> Like “Geschichte eines Braminen,” Spalding’s text describes the narrator’s progress through several stages of development, although the stages presented in the two texts do not perfectly align. Other points of contact include Spalding’s advocacy of the possibility of revealed religion (though Spalding, unlike Günderrode, insists that this must be Christian), the focus on subjective experience, through which a greater force is felt to be at work in the individual, and an emphasis on harmony.<sup>81</sup>

It is not known whether Günderrode read Spalding’s text; however, she did read Fichte’s *Bestimmung des Menschen*, which was, in part, a response to Spalding.<sup>82</sup> Fichte’s *Bestimmung* takes the form of a progression from skepticism to an understanding of the limitations of human knowledge and finally to faith in a spiritual realm, the existence of other individuals similar to oneself, the inner voice of one’s conscience, and freedom. On Fichte’s account, each shift in perspective is initiated, like Almor’s, by doubt in the previous stage. Another similarity is to Fichte’s claim that numerous forces drive the emergence of everything in nature, including human beings, and are themselves manifestations of a single force that runs through nature as a whole. A similar claim features in the work of Herder.

And indeed, another likely influence on “Geschichte eines Braminen” is Herder, specifically his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, which Günderrode read in 1799 and described as “a true consolation to me in all my pain.”<sup>83</sup> Herder’s text is concerned with the development of the natural world, the human species and human societies rather than the *Bildung*

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<sup>79</sup> SW 1:312.

<sup>80</sup> Johann Joachim Spalding, *Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1768 [first edition 1748]).

<sup>81</sup> These claims are found in, respectively, Spalding, *Bestimmung*, “Anhang bey der dritten Auflage,” 69–80; 40–41; 51–53.

<sup>82</sup> Günderrode excerpted Fichte’s text in her notes, possibly around the time she wrote “Geschichte eines Braminen” (SW 3: 325; see also 2: 297–298).

<sup>83</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Karoline von Barkhaus, 17 July 1799, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 53–54.



of a particular individual, but nonetheless shares several points with Günderrode's description of Almor's development. These include the claim that the nature of happiness and ideas of what constitutes a good life are culturally conditioned—a possible correspondence with Almor's assertion that “as various as is the outer formation of people, just as various is their inner nature, their life, and their wishes.”

Herder overtly criticizes Kant in the *Ideen*, especially what he perceived as Kant's overemphasis on human rational capacities at the expense of their emotional and other capacities and his privileging of the emergence of an eventual ideal society over the value of earlier human lives. He claims that health and happiness depend on the exercise of the “whole soul, especially its active forces,”<sup>84</sup> rather than on the exercise of reason alone, recalling Almor's questioning of the subjugation of the passions to reason in “Geschichte eines Braminen.” Herder also argues against Kant (especially in *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürglicher Absicht*) that it makes no sense to imagine *that human beings exist only for the sake of the State or that* the “people of all parts of the world” have only lived “so that, at the end of time, [their] descendants could become happy.”<sup>85</sup> Instead, he claims, “nature created all human forms on earth so that each, in their own time and place, might have enjoyment.”<sup>86</sup> For Herder there is a reciprocal relationship between the value of humanity as a whole and the value of individual human beings. Human beings do not just exist for the sake of the species, but the species also exists for the sake of its individuals: “All [God's] means are ends, all his ends means to the greater purposes in which the all-suffusing infinite reveals itself. Therefore what each human being is and can be, that must be the purpose of the human species.”<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Almor's development in “Geschichte eines Braminen” leads him to realize that the interests of individuals and society are not fundamentally opposed, and that the infinite spirit of the universe perfects itself in and through the development of individuals as such.

Kant, in turn, was critical of Herder's text,<sup>88</sup> and it is possible that with “Geschichte eines Braminen” Günderrode intended to enter this controversy on the side of Herder. Nonetheless, Günderrode does not follow Herder slavishly and in this text we see her developing her own position on *Bildung* and her own vision of the ideal society. For Günderrode, the integration of a

<sup>84</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1869 [1785], 95).

<sup>85</sup> Herder, *Ideen*, 99.

<sup>86</sup> Herder, *Ideen*, 99.

<sup>87</sup> Herder, *Ideen*, 104.

<sup>88</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Recension von J. G. Herders *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Theil 2 (1785),” AA 8:62–63.

spiritual component to both subjective experience and social life is crucial, not only to enable the full development of all human capacities but also to bridge the boundary between life and death and allow individuals to maintain their relationships with loved ones even beyond the grave. While G nderrode takes inspiration from a number of sources, the clear references to Kant’s moral thought in this piece demonstrate that she was particularly concerned to respond to Kantian views regarding morality, individual development, and ideal human societies, retaining a value for both individual flourishing and fulfilling social relations.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has not attempted to unpack all of G nderrode’s ideas on knowledge, experience, *Bildung* or the human vocation, nor all the likely influences on her thinking in these areas.<sup>89</sup> Instead, I have highlighted points where G nderrode’s thinking shows a clear relationship to work by Kant, often revealing an attempt to push back against Kant’s thought. These points include G nderrode’s work on the inner sense in “Die Manen,” her explorations of alternatives to the Kantian limitation of human experience to phenomena in *Gedichte und Phantasien*, and her claims regarding the human vocation in “Geschichte eines Braminen.”

Initial investigation of the idea of the inner sense in “Die Manen” suggests that one of G nderrode’s goals in writing this piece may have been to repudiate Kant’s criticisms of Swedenborg in *Tr ume eines Geistersehers*. Similarly, in “Geschichte eines Braminen” G nderrode appears to take Herder’s side in his dispute with Kant regarding the relationship between individual development and social goods. For G nderrode, the good of the whole can only be developed through the free flourishing of individuals, and any attempt either to make human urges conform to reason or to universalize human behavior impedes this flourishing and, thereby, also the good of the whole. G nderrode uses a critique of Kant’s moral philosophy to argue against moralistic or legalistic views of social relations in favor of a model of ideal communities formed on the basis of mutual spiritual development.

G nderrode’s response to Kant regarding the limitation of human knowledge to the realm of experience is more ambiguous. She considers this

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<sup>89</sup> E.g., Joanna Raisbeck notes the influence of Plato and the minister Johann Georg Diefenbach, as well as Kant, on G nderrode’s ideas about knowledge (*Karoline von G nderrode: Philosophical Romantic* [Legenda, 2022], 125–132). Dalia Nassar (“Human Vocation”) has focused on Fichte’s influence on G nderrode on the human vocation. Hugo Herrera considers the relationship of G nderrode’s thought to that of Schleiermacher (“Urgrund and Access to the Urgrund”).

topic in several pieces in her collection *Gedichte und Phantasien*, reaching diverse conclusions in different texts. These range from asserting the possibility of immediate knowledge of things in themselves (“Mahomets Traum in der Wüste”) through concerns about the price of such immediate knowledge (“Der Adept”) to a denial of its possibility (“Des Wandrers Niederfahrt”). In some pieces (“Der Franke in Egypten,” *Immortalita*), she suggests that seeking knowledge of things as they exist outside human perception is a red herring; instead, love may provide a better means of connecting with the world beyond our individual limitations. Despite their diversity, all these investigations are motivated by Günderrode’s dissatisfaction with what she describes as the “unbearable” limitation of human consciousness to phenomena, which she learned about in her studies of Kant.<sup>90</sup>

We are still in the early days of serious scholarship on Günderrode as a philosopher, and there remain many exciting opportunities to explore her contributions to early nineteenth-century debates on knowledge, human development, the relationship of human beings to the rest of the world, and many other topics. Hopefully, the overview of Günderrode’s reception of Kant provided in this paper will provide a useful starting point for closer investigations of her engagement with Kant’s work on these topics.

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<sup>90</sup> Letter to Gunda Brentano, 11 August 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 75–76.

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# Symphilosophie

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## Striving for Perfection

### The Concepts of *Bildung* and *Bestimmung* in Sophie Mereau's Early Works

*Margherita Giordano*<sup>\*</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

Sophie Mereau is a fascinating figure in Early German Romanticism: active in Jena during its peak cultural ferment, she was prominent in its literary and philosophical circles and became one of the most successful women writers of her time. This paper examines her earliest prose works – *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* (1794) and the fragment *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard* (1797). It aims to highlight Mereau's extensive engagement with the contemporary philosophical discourse, especially Kant, by tracing the presence (and original reworking) of two themes in particular: the issue of individual development (*Bildung*) and the definition of the authentic human vocation. Mereau's approach combines ideas and motifs from German Classicism and Early Romanticism, as well as from the philosophy of the Late German Enlightenment. This unique combination allows her to address some of the most significant philosophical issues of her time from a unique point of view.

*Keywords:* individual development, human vocation, Sophie Mereau, early Romanticism, Enlightenment

#### ABSTRACT

Sophie Mereau costituisce una figura particolarmente interessante nel primo Romanticismo tedesco: presente a Jena durante il suo massimo fermento culturale, prende parte ai suoi circoli letterari e filosofici, diventando una delle autrici femminili di maggior successo del suo tempo. Il presente contributo s'incentra sulle sue prime opere in prosa – *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* (1794) e il frammento *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard* (1797). Il suo scopo è quello di evidenziare il pieno coinvolgimento di Mereau nel discorso filosofico contemporaneo, tracciando la presenza (e la rielaborazione originale) di due temi in particolare: la questione dello sviluppo individuale (*Bildung*) e la definizione dell'autentica destinazione dell'uomo. Mereau si avvicina a queste questioni unendo idee e motivi del Classicismo e del primo Romanticismo, nonché della filosofia del tardo Illuminismo tedesco. Questa originale combinazione le consente di affrontare alcune delle questioni filosofiche più significative del suo tempo da un punto di vista originale.

*Parole chiave:* sviluppo individuale, destinazione dell'uomo, Sophie Mereau, Romanticismo, Illuminismo

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<sup>\*</sup> MA, PhD candidate in the PhD Program in Philosophy of the Northwest Italy Philosophy Consortium (FINO), Università del Piemonte Orientale, via Duomo, 6, 13100 Vercelli, Italy – [margherita.giordano@unito.it](mailto:margherita.giordano@unito.it)

In a volume published over two decades ago, Sophie Mereau was presented “as one of the most fascinating figures of German Classicism and Romanticism.”<sup>1</sup> Born in Altenburg in 1770 into the family of a civil servant of the Duchy of Sachsen-Gotha-Altenburg, she received, along with her sister Henriette, an extremely refined education. Having moved to Jena in 1793 following her marriage to the librarian and future law professor Karl Mereau, Sophie soon began to attend the most important intellectual circles of the city, forming an important personal and professional relationship with Friedrich Schiller, who became her mentor and aided her in the publication of her works. In fact, as early as 1790, a short poetic composition by Mereau entitled *Bey Frankreichs Feier* had already appeared in Schiller’s *Thalia*, in which the author explicitly praised the *Genius of Freedom* and the French Revolution. Her poetic activity continued even during her marriage to Karl Mereau and, afterwards, during her tumultuous relationship with the poet Clemens Brentano, and was soon accompanied by the production of novels, short stories, and translations. Her works found great success among her contemporaries, to the point where Mereau became one of the first German women to support herself through her intellectual work, particularly after her divorce from her first marriage, obtained in 1801. During her career, not only did Mereau participate in the most important and vibrant intellectual circles of Jena, but she became one of the focal points around which the cultural life of the city revolved.<sup>2</sup> She hosted weekly gatherings in her own home, in which many members of the Jena intelligentsia took part, and in 1794 she attended Fichte’s lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Vocation of the Scholar*; insights from Fichtean philosophy thus joined her ongoing engagement with Kant and Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Todd Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation. 1771–1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 74. Parts of this paper were presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> FINO Graduate Conference in the History of Philosophy on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> In the afterword to her edition of Mereau’s writings, K. von Hammerstein reports an observation by a student of the University of Jena: “A delightful presence in those gatherings was the Professor Mrs. Mereau [...]. At that time, she was highly celebrated by all who possessed intellect and taste; wherever she appeared, people crowded around her, seeking her attention, and forming a dense swarm of admirers who eagerly awaited a word or a smile from her. Even onlookers formed an impenetrable circle around her.” Katharina von Hammerstein, “Nachwort”, in Sophie Mereau-Brentano, *Wie sehn’ ich mich hinaus in die freie Welt. Tagebuch, Betrachtungen und vermischte Prosa* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 257. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

<sup>3</sup> Mereau was the only woman to attend Fichte’s lectures and, for this reason, her presence was mentioned in the *Intelligenzblatt* of the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* in 1796 (Adrian Daub, *Uncivil Unions. The Metaphysics of Marriage in German Idealism and Romanticism* (London / Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 210. Mereau’s engagement with



The following contribution focuses on Mereau's first published prose work – *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* (1794) – and the fragment *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard*, which appeared in Schiller's *Die Horen* in 1797, in order to show how Mereau uses the narrative aspects of her novels to tackle some of the most pressing questions that were at the center of the late Enlightenment and early Romantic philosophical debates, such as the issue of individual development (*Bildung*) and of human determination<sup>4</sup>, or the problem of the relationship between human beings and nature. The way Mereau approaches these issues reveals a combination of ideas and leitmotifs drawn from German Classicism and Early Romanticism, but also from the philosophy of Late German Enlightenment. It is precisely this original combination that enables the author to engage with some of the most significant philosophical issues of her time from a unique point of view.

### 1. *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* and its Context

In the spring of 1794, a short novel with the title *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, was published in Gotha by Justus Perthes.<sup>5</sup> The author was not specified, but the introduction was signed by an anonymous *Verfasserin* (authoress). At first glance, the novel appears to be a love story with a seemingly simple and unoriginal plot: Albert, a young Swiss Calvinist, intends to complete his education and embarks on a journey to Italy. There, he encounters the beautiful Nanette, with whom he falls deeply in love. A series of mysterious circumstances separate the two lovers, and the rest of the novel unfolds as Albert attempts to find Nanette. His journey leads him to

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Kantian philosophy is documented by a letter in which she asked Kant for a contribution to her philosophical and literary journal *Kalathiskos* (1801-1802), and by several mentions of the Kantian doctrine in the collection of fragmentary and undated observations that Mereau wrote throughout her life.

<sup>4</sup> “Human determination” or “vocation” are among the standard English translations of the German expression *Bestimmung des Menschen*, which denotes a complex set of themes and debates that were central to German philosophy in the second half of the eighteenth century. The term *Bestimmung* is inherently polysemic, encompassing the act of determining (*bestimmen*) something, the properties or predicates – i.e. the *determinations* – of that thing, as well as its purpose or goal (Laura A. Macor, “Destinazione, missione, vocazione: un’espressione pura per la pura idea filosofica di *Bestimmung des Menschen*”, *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, LXX, 1 (2015): 166). In the sense in which it was understood at the end of the eighteenth century, the *Bestimmung des Menschen* integrated these meanings, referring to the ultimate purpose that inherently defines human nature and toward which human beings must actively strive, thereby determining their actions in alignment with this goal.

<sup>5</sup> In the following, reference will be made to K. von Hammerstein's edition of the text, published in Sophie Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung, Amanda und Eduard. Romane* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997).

travel across Europe, particularly in France and Switzerland, until he is finally reunited with his love. Despite its apparent simplicity, however, the narrative progression is often laborious and the events appear to be set in motion by implausible devices. A closer analysis of the text reveals that Mereau's concern with narrative coherence is secondary and subordinated to the reflections that the author delivers through the protagonist's internal monologue, the interaction between characters, or the lyrical description of wide, natural landscapes. This peculiar feature of Mereau's work did not escape the attention of her contemporaries: the novel, as stated in an anonymous review attributed to Nicolai, "entertains [...] not so much through the action, which, apart from some improbable things, is interrupted and delayed by too frequent and long reflections, but rather through the fine reasoning and the pure, noble, and richly illustrated style."<sup>6</sup>

What the reviewers, however, seem not to notice, or at least to choose to overlook, are elements that contemporary scholarship has instead highlighted as particularly interesting and innovative.<sup>7</sup> In several parts of the novel, Mereau intersperses the narration of Albert's story with moments that reveal her deep commitment to the ideals of French Revolution<sup>8</sup>, and where she expresses a harsh critique of oppressive social and statal institutions in European countries, that "leave the path open for so much injustice."<sup>9</sup> This aspect becomes particularly evident in Nanette's story, which constitutes the second narrative line within the novel. It runs parallel to Albert's journey but is only revealed in the second half of the novel, after the two protagonists are reunited. Orphaned at a young age and entrusted, along with her brother Lorenzo, to the care of an aunt, Nanette must face the machinations of their cunning older brother, who seeks to seize their inheritance. Unlike Lorenzo, who was persuaded to take monastic vows only to later flee from the monastery, Nanette was able to recognize their brother's true intentions and

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<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nicolai, *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* 20 (1795): 75-76. A second review, published in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* underlines that "the entire narrative is presented to us more through descriptions than through action" and the whole book has more in common with the genre of pastoral idyll than with the novel. However, "the most profound philosophical thoughts and reflections are not lacking." Friedrich J. Bertuch, Christian G. Schütz, Christoph M. Wieland, eds., *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 3, no. 180 (July 1795): 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Katharina von Hammerstein, "Au bonheur de tous. Sophie Mereau on Human Rights", in *Colloquia Germanica* 42 (2009): 97.

<sup>8</sup> It is in revolutionary Paris, during the celebrations for the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, that Albert and Nanette meet again after their initial separation. Both protagonists appear transformed by their enthusiasm for freedom and celebrate "the divine image of a liberated and happy people." Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

run from him. However, she has not completely escaped his threat, as he remains her legal guardian and thus holds almost unlimited – and legally sanctioned – authority over her.

Every attempt made by Nanette to free herself from his control is only temporary, and she must live constantly on the run, as the laws offer no protection:

Where do women have the right to enjoy direct legal protection? Rather, are they not almost everywhere subjugated to the whims of the man? How little consideration is taken even now for their natural rights, for the undisturbed enjoyment of their freedom and their strengths! Are they not more frequently merely *tolerated* rather than protected?<sup>10</sup>

Even the prospect of marrying Albert cannot offer such protection because the lovers are separated by their different religions, which makes the institutionalization of their union impossible in a society dominated by religious intolerance. There is no other solution, therefore, than to emigrate to the United States of America, depicted at the end of the novel as a vague and utopian place where “the genius of humanity rejoices in its rights again.”<sup>11</sup>

This aspect has long been highlighted by contemporary scholarship as one of the most significant in the novel, given the subversive force of Mereau’s criticism of social and civic institutions, which has often led scholars to consider her a predecessor of modern feminist critique on the issue of women’s rights.<sup>12</sup> What this contribution intends to underline, however, is the presence of other themes, of a more theoretical nature, whose philosophical significance has yet to be fully appreciated.

The fact that Mereau’s novel also has a strong theoretical interest emerges from its very introduction. Here, the anonymous *Verfasserin* immediately establishes a lexical and theoretical opposition between two different phases of life: “There is a time in our life”, our youth, “when our feelings are

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 43. trans. in Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation*, 78.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. At the end of the Eighteenth-century the United States became the epitome of freedom and equality for German intellectuals, and women especially, as they witnessed the failure of their hope for emancipation in the wake of the French Revolution and its exclusions of women from political activity; emblematic was the case of Olympe de Gouges, who in 1791 wrote the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* but was later condemned and executed by the revolutionary government. Many learned women of the time began to feel the inconsistency between the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality and theorizations of the subordinate role of women. On the topic, see von Hammerstein, “*Au bonheur de tous. Sophie Mereau on Human Rights.*”

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Katharina von Hammerstein, *Sophie Mereau-Brentano. Freiheit, Liebe, Weiblichkeit: Trikolore sozialer und individueller Selbstbestimmung um 1800* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1993).

in their first full bloom, when the intoxicated heart [...] chases every shadowy and fantastic image.”<sup>13</sup> It is a state characterized by the rule of sensibility and imagination, but it is destined to end as soon as “the bright glow of reason”, having developed its strength through the errors that the other faculties led us to commit, reaches maturity and “awakens us from a sweet slumber.”<sup>14</sup> By employing the famous metaphor in which the sleep of imagination is interrupted by the light of reason that shows us that our judgments and actions require a higher law, Mereau explicitly draws from an enduring philosophical tradition.

Mereau goes on to state that the novel will focus on the representation of the pure sentiment that is distinctive of youth, but as the plot progresses, she also establishes a constant dialogue between the demands of reason and the needs of feeling, leading us to the conclusion that only in the harmonious coexistence of both can human nature reach its fulfillment.<sup>15</sup> It is a goal that the characters of the novel will only reach after a long and challenging process of personal development and through the fulfillment they find in their love; by implicitly raising the question of what it means to be human and how an individual can fully develop their humanity, this theme also implies the reference to the contemporary debates revolving around the authentic meaning of human existence, or – to use an expression that became paradigmatic during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – its true *Bestimmung* (determination, vocation, destination).

The *Bestimmung des Menschen* constitutes one of the key concepts in the theological, philosophical, and literary reflections of the Enlightenment concerning the problem of human nature and its purpose. This concept gained significant prominence with the publication of the theologian Johann Joachim Spalding’s influential work *Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen* in 1748. The expression refers to a complex set of themes related to the determination of the ultimate purpose of human life – a purpose to which individuals are called both by their own nature and by God, but that must also be determined by individuals themselves through their moral choices.

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<sup>13</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 9, trans. by D. W. Wood, in *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 2 (2020): 191.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-192.

<sup>15</sup> The call for a complete and harmonious development of human faculties became very frequent in the philosophical debates of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; in particular, given their closeness, it is especially interesting to note an affinity between the idea that emerges in the *Blütenalter der Empfindung* and a similar concept expressed by Schiller in *Ueber Anmut und Würde* (1793). A comparison between these two works will be attempted in the following section.

Acquiring awareness of one's *Bestimmung*, with its semantic complexity and the dialectic between heteronomy and self-determination, becomes the responsibility of every individual, since everyone tends towards the realization, fulfillment, and perfection of their own nature and dignity. Spalding, drawing inspiration from the philosophy of Shaftesbury, Stoicism, and his theological background<sup>16</sup>, describes a journey of inner reflection that leads the subject to investigate the meaning of their existence using only natural means, ultimately discovering “why they exist and what they must be according to reason.”<sup>17</sup> Following the guidance of reason and inner feeling, the path outlined by Spalding leads the narrating self to progress through a series of stages, allowing for a gradual ascent from the realm of the senses to virtue, and ultimately to the immortality of the soul and the otherworldly destination of the individual.

In the following decades, Spalding's treatise enjoyed an enormous editorial success, and the question of human destiny was placed at the center of Enlightenment philosophical reflection, to the extent that it became one of its foundational ideas.<sup>18</sup> Around this concept, intense debates ignited, and they involved thinkers of the caliber of Mendelssohn, Kant, Schiller, and Herder. These discussions gradually shifted the focus from the theological interest that still underlay Spalding's work (which aimed at laying the foundations for a moral reform of religion) to a more strictly moral concern, centered around the various possible meanings of the term *Bestimmung*. They

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<sup>16</sup> Spalding is one of the prominent figures in the movement to reform Lutheran theology, known as Neology, that emerged in Germany in the second half of the 18th century. This movement aimed to highlight Christianity's practical value, placing greater emphasis on its moral teachings than on doctrinal content. For a more in-depth analysis of the Neological conception of religion, see Eric Carlsson, “Eighteenth-Century Neology”, in Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, Anthony G. Roeber, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 642-650. On the influence of Shaftesbury and ancient philosophy on Spalding see, among others, Laura A. Macor, “The Place of the Human Being in the World: Johann Joachim Spalding, Religion, and Philosophy as a Way of Life”, in Anne Pollock, Courtney D. Fugate, eds., *The Human Vocation in German Philosophy. Critical Essays and 18th Century Sources* (London/New York/Dublin: Bloomsbury, 2023), 107-123.

<sup>17</sup> Johann J. Spalding, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Gießen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1908), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Norbert Hinske, Stefano Fabbri Bertolotti, “Le idee portanti dell'Illuminismo tedesco. Tentativo di una tipologia”, in *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere Filosofia* 3, 15, no. 3 (1985): 997-1034. Since it will not be possible, within the limited space of this contribution, to delve into the details of Spalding's work or the subsequent developments of the concept in later years, only some general notions will be provided to clarify how Sophie Mereau engages with this theme. For a more in-depth analysis, see Pollok, Fugate, eds., *The Human Vocation in German Philosophy*, or Laura A. Macor, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen (1748-1800). Eine Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013).

also addressed the possibility of conceiving an otherworldly destination for humankind, as well as the question of whether achieving one's own destiny is something attainable for individuals or only for humanity as a whole.<sup>19</sup> The concept was soon related to the ideas of perfection and perfectibility of human nature. Spalding had already emphasized that humans possess "capacities susceptible of infinite growth"<sup>20</sup>, and took this idea as evidence of the soul's survival after the death of the body. Thinkers such as Mendelssohn and Kant subsequently considered this striving for development to be the true *Bestimmung* of humanity, calling individuals to improve their faculties and approach perfection. While Mendelssohn's notion remained tied to the idea that the survival of the soul represents the ultimate guarantee of the realization of this determination<sup>21</sup>, Kant shared Thomas Abbt's skepticism regarding the possibility of knowing what happens after death. However, this unknowability is valuable because it preserves human autonomy: if we had certain knowledge of God's will and our fate in the afterlife, we would be bound by an external obligation to act in accordance with the divine plan. But since we lack such perfect knowledge, Kant argued, we have the freedom to determine ourselves and our actions towards morality and virtue.<sup>22</sup> With

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<sup>19</sup> The heated dispute between Mendelssohn and Thomas Abbt revolved precisely around the possibility for humans to know their destiny after death. This controversy became widely known after the publication of Abbt's *Zweifel über die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Doubts about the Determination of Man) and Mendelssohn's *Orakel, die Bestimmung des Menschen betreffend* (Oracle concerning the Determination of Man) in 1764. For a more detailed overview of the conceptual alternatives associated with the concept of *Bestimmung*, see Anne Pollok, "Introduction", in Pollok, Fugate, eds., *The Human Vocation in German Philosophy*, 2-8.

<sup>20</sup> Spalding, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Thus speaks Socrates in the third dialogue of the *Phaedon, oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (1767): "From the most unknowing creations, up to the most perfect among the created spirits, all have their own determination, befitting of the wisdom of God, and appropriate to their own powers and capabilities, to make themselves and others more perfect." Finite beings are thus called by this determination to become more similar to divine nature; it is an infinite and asymptotic effort that "exists, like the nature of time, in continuous progress. Through the imitation of God one can gradually approach His perfections, and the felicity of spirits exists in this approach; but the path to divine perfection is infinite, and cannot be completely traversed in all eternity. Therefore, the striving in human life knows no boundaries. [...] We can, therefore, continued Socrates, accept with good reason, that this striving toward perfection, this increase, this growth in inner excellence, is the determination of rational beings, and consequently also the highest final goal of creation." The death of the soul would imply an interruption of this infinite striving and is therefore utterly incompatible with the wisdom and goodness of the divine plan. Moses Mendelssohn, *Phädon, or on the Immortality of the Soul*, trans. Patricia Noble (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 134-135.

<sup>22</sup> Macor, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, 208-212. Furthermore, Macor points out the parallel development of a historical interpretation of the concept of determination, found, for example, in the works of Kant and Herder. According to this perspective, the

all these nuances, the concept of *Bestimmung* eventually reached the threshold of Romanticism and was taken up by Mereau. It will be argued in the following that, in her treatment of the concept, Mereau echoes the late-Enlightenment and Classical positions, particularly those of Kant and Schiller, which identified humanity's true vocation as an eternal striving toward perfection. However, while asserting the necessity of a harmonious development of all human faculties, both rational and non-rational, she also argues that individual self-perfection is insufficient unless it translates into concrete actions within the world – thus calling for the consideration of the specific social and cultural contexts in which individuals live and strive to fulfill their vocation. At the same time, by emphasizing the crucial role of humanity's relationship with the natural world and by identifying in love – rather than in the soul's otherworldly destiny – the *locus* where human vocation finds its fullest realization, Mereau appears to develop the concept of *Bestimmung* in a direction that anticipates central themes of *Frühromantik*.

## 2. *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* as a Philosophical Novel: The Concepts of *Bildung* and *Bestimmung*

The connection between *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* and the issue of individual formation and self-formation is evident from the very first pages of the novel. After the brief introduction, Mereau makes a surprising shift in perspective and leaves it to her male protagonist, Albert, to narrate the story.<sup>23</sup> He briefly sketches his childhood and early youth, which he spent in a state of quiet enjoyment of the modest pleasures offered by his homeland, until he was called by his father to a higher mission.

My father wanted to ensure that I was protected from one-sidedness, he wanted to multiply my knowledge, correct my concepts, and give my

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human *Bestimmung* cannot be fulfilled by the individual alone, but only by the human species as a whole, and therefore it must be sought in history. This notion will play a fundamental role in Fichte's reappropriation of the concept.

<sup>23</sup> This narrative device, combined with the fact that the narrator's name is not disclosed until several pages later, subverts the reader's expectations that the story would be told from a female perspective. The ambiguity, undoubtedly an intentional choice, was already noted by her contemporaries. For example, Friedrich Schlegel comments on it in a letter to his brother August Wilhelm dated May 27, 1796: "I recently leafed through Sophie M.'s *Blütenalter*. It is quite whimsical [...]. At first a young creature appears who is flooded with every possible purple passion. It sits there completely placidly in the grass. I say *it* because I was certain it was a girl; but it is supposed to be a boy" (quoted in Katharina von Hammerstein, "Nachwort", in Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 270-271, trans., modified, in Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation*, 84).

judgment a freer and more solid direction. Therefore, he allowed me to travel, and I gladly followed his will.<sup>24</sup>

In a narrative transposition of the metaphor of the awakening of reason that was central to the novel's introduction, Albert must step out of the narrow confines of his home (representing the realm of unreflective feeling and imagination) to gain experience of the external world and improve his faculties, particularly his reason.<sup>25</sup> Much like Spalding's first-person narrator at the start of his journey, Albert immediately discovers within himself a moral sense or feeling that serves as both guide and judge in his discovery of the external world, leading him toward what is right and good.<sup>26</sup> By following its call, Albert opens himself to nature for the first time, discovering a deep, intimate connection with it:

All of nature seemed to be woven into my destiny. The joyful rise of its strength, the lively play of its products, the youthful charm of its forms, everything so visibly bore the color of my inner appearances. In the happy frenzy I gave myself to everything and found myself in everything again.<sup>27</sup>

It is a spontaneous union of the subject and nature, in which the rational and reflective faculties of man play no role, and nature itself appears as a "cheerful commotion of striving mental and physical powers", a lively and harmonious whole where each element is essentially and intimately connected to others as if by kinship.<sup>28</sup> This union – which seems to anticipate one of the leitmotifs of the *Frühromantik's* philosophical reflection and its conception of the relationship between man and nature – ceases when the subject, who until now has experienced the world in solitude, enters human society. Mereau describes this transition as a natural consequence of the experience of harmony with nature: feeling an intimate connection with other creatures, Albert feels the desire to achieve a similar unity with other human beings.

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<sup>24</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> It has also been noted that the transitions of the novel's narrator from a state of immediacy and inner isolation to the outer experience of the world could be interpreted as a fictionalized transposition of the early formulations of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. In this interpretation, the beginning of Albert's journey serves as a metaphor for the departure of the I from its solipsistic isolation and its initial opening to the not-I. See Daub, *Uncivil Unions*, 207-239.

<sup>26</sup> A significant difference between the inner journey depicted by Spalding and Albert's *Bildungsreise* lies in the role Mereau attributes to nature and Albert's relationship with it – a dimension that is not present in Spalding's text.

<sup>27</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



Engulfed in the immensity of the universe, merged into the universal harmony of beings, I felt myself drown in this greatness. I knew no more enchanting thought than to form a whole with all spirits, and, through this unity, I felt irresistibly drawn to all humanity.<sup>29</sup>

What awaits him once he encounters human society, however, is something drastically different. Obligations, superficial relationships, and external demands overwhelm the individual, who risks being swallowed by these constraints and losing their individuality (*Eigenthümlichkeit*). Albert finds himself in a state of restlessness and exertion that, as Mereau states echoing Rousseau's arguments, creates artificial needs that conflict with the laws of nature. Yet, as Albert observes, "Nature formed its humans for a social life", endowing them with organs (such as language and facial expressions) to communicate with each other.<sup>30</sup> This reveals the inadequacy of the immediate yet solitary union with nature that Albert has experienced so far. While he has indeed been free, this freedom stemmed from a lack of connection to other human beings and cannot satisfy the inner drive towards sociability. It is thus necessary to seek a new and superior harmony that allows the subject to feel unity with nature while also being connected in an organic relationship to other human beings. The fulfillment of such harmony – which coincides with the culmination of the *Bildung*-process – will be possible only through Albert's love for Nanette.

In order to arrive at this point, every aspect that pertains to human nature must be developed and brought to maturity, because "we belong to the world of senses as well as to the realm of spirits"<sup>31</sup>: only a process of *Bildung* that allows humans to develop all their different capacities can enable them to fully express the potential of their nature and to fulfill the purpose assigned to them by nature itself.

Only he can hope to have fulfilled the purpose of nature and educated himself for a better condition, who fulfills everything that the current

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. This passage serves as an example of the influence of Kant's philosophy on Sophie Mereau, who on several occasions reflects on the dual nature of humans as both sensible and intelligible beings. Kant's theory of knowledge also emerges from the novel. "Our concepts draw their material from the world of the senses, which our mind processes, and which we must not forget to take into account in our life plan", Albert observes in a passage following the one mentioned in the text (*Ibid.*, 19-20). There are numerous references to Kantian doctrines also in Mereau's *Betrachtungen*, particularly regarding the issue of the unknowability of the thing-in-itself and its implications. For example, see no. 3 in Mereau-Brentano, *Wie sehn' ich mich hinaus in die freie Welt*, 102.

one imposes on him, exercises all his strength, and is completely what he can be.<sup>32</sup>

The description of a journey that leads the subject from an initial state of immediacy to the ultimate reconstruction of a higher harmony through a state of separation and the mediating power of love is further evidence of Mereau's conceptual affinity with romantic thought.<sup>33</sup> This anthropological model seems to replace the stages described by the narrating self in Spalding's text – i.e. sensual pleasures, intellectual pleasures, virtue, religion, and immortality – and guides Albert from an immediate union with nature to the realm of human society, and ultimately, to love.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, however, the emphasis on the individual's need to embark on a path that, through several stages, allows for the complete development of one's faculties and the full expression of one's nature, can be interpreted as a reference to the *Bestimmung* debates. Although Mereau did not use the expression *Bestimmung*

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<sup>32</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 20. The concept of *Bildung* that Mereau develops through Albert's journey closely resembles the one later articulated by the Romantic thinkers. Both perspectives, deeply influenced by Schiller, regard *Bildung* as the development not only of the capacities and powers inherent to humanity as a whole but also of the unique aptitudes and talents of each individual. Moreover, both emphasize the need to cultivate sensibility as much as reason, recognizing that the senses, like reason, are an integral part of human nature. This process of *Bildung* is essential to the self-realization of the individual, which, in turn, constitutes the ultimate purpose and goal of human existence – see Frederick C. Beiser, "The Concept of *Bildung* in Early German Romanticism", in id., *The Romantic Imperative. The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 88-105.

<sup>33</sup> Consider, for example, the *exzentrische Bahn* depicted by Hölderlin in *Hyperion*, a two-volume novel published respectively in 1797 and 1799, where the protagonist's story serves as a device to illustrate the "eccentric trajectory" that every human being traverses "between childhood and perfection." These two moments represent, on one hand, the pinnacle of simplicity and spontaneous harmony with nature, and on the other hand, the peak of development and organization, where a new, mediated accord with nature is achieved. Situated between these two extremes, each individual's existential journey takes shape as the infinite effort to restore the original state of immediate harmony with the world, lost through reflection – see the preface to the penultimate version of *Hyperion* in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke, Stuttgarter Hölderlin-Ausgabe*, III, ed. Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1957), 236. Although Hölderlin's classification as an early Romantic remains controversial and subject to debate, his thought reveals certain affinities with the doctrines of the Jena Romantics. A comparable desire to reunify subject and object, and thus return to unity with the Whole and nature through love, can also be found in Novalis – see, for example, Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) in Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, I, ed. Carl Seelig (Herrliberg-Zürich: Buhl-Verlag, 1945), 121-354.

<sup>34</sup> Another significant difference between Mereau's novel and Spalding's *Bestimmung des Menschen* lies in the fact that, in Spalding's work, the journey of the self is an inner reflection, conducted in solitude as the subject turns inward to understand their own nature. By contrast, Albert's journey unfolds through the narration of his own life and is shaped by concrete, lived experiences.

*des Menschen* but referred to the *Zweck* assigned to humans by Nature, the way she addresses the issue hints at her knowledge of and engagement with this conceptual problem.<sup>35</sup>

Albert's journey is set in motion by a "striving for perfection"<sup>36</sup> which drives him to improve his intellectual faculties as well as his feeling and sensation. Only the balance between all the different human capacities will allow him to truly become what he ought to be. The unchecked dominion of feeling can lead to melancholy and the conflict between the subject and the world, as exemplified by Lorenzo, Nanette's brother, who tragically takes his own life when overwhelmed by a feeling that he cannot freely express. On the other hand, exclusive focus on rationality can transform *Bildung* in a one-sided process that transforms the vitality of the human spirit into "artificial dead knowledge."<sup>37</sup> It is only in the harmonious interplay between rational thought and feeling that human nature can find its full expression.

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<sup>35</sup> It is also worth noting that as early as 1792 Mereau discussed the issue, at least partially, in her correspondence. In the *Varnhagen Sammlung* at the *Biblioteka Jagiellonska* in Krakow there are several letters sent to Mereau by friends and acquaintances and preserved by the writer. In one of these, sent by Henriette Wilhelmine Greißler on December 14, 1792, the author of the letter confides her doubts and fear about marriage to Mereau; specifically, she addresses the idea that the fulfillment of women's nature can be found only in the domestic sphere of marriage and motherhood: "What is often asserted about our inevitable vocation to marriage – I could never believe it with my whole heart: [...] we are all created to work for a common good." Quoted in Lorely French, "Briefform und Lebensstoff, Lebensform und Briefstoff: Die Ästhetik des Briefes bei Sophie Mereau und zeitgenössischen Schriftstellerinnen", in Katharina von Hammerstein, Katrin Horn, eds., *Sophie Mereau, Verbindungslinien in Zeit und Raum* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2008), 255. Although Mereau's response to Greißler has not been preserved and we cannot, therefore, be certain of her position on this matter, the appearance of the expression *Bestimmung zur Ehe* in relation to the question of what may allow for the full realization of one's inherent nature suggests at least a cursory knowledge of the debates on human destination, since Greißler's use of the term in this letter appears to be consistent with the one in the philosophical discourse on the topic. Furthermore, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a specific reflection developed on the particular *Bestimmung des Weibes*, related to the role that women play in society and to what is, or should be, the ultimate goal of a woman's life. Examples of this reflection can be found in Joachim H. Campe's *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter* (1789) or the treatise *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höheren Geistesbildung* by Amalia Holst (1802).

<sup>36</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Throughout the novel, there is a recurring criticism of the *kalte Buchgelehrsamkeit* (cold bookish learning) that fails to provide individuals with the means to develop their own faculties – either those belonging to them as human beings in general or those specific to them as unique individuals – but instead seeks to "stifle humans in themselves through cold ponderings" (*Ibid.*). Mereau proposes an alternative model of *Selbsterziehung* that allows individuals to develop freely and is clearly influenced by Rousseau, as becomes evident when Albert describes the education that Nanette and Lorenzo received from their aunt: "She did not manipulate them. She believed that nature was always good. [...] She taught them concepts, not just words, developed their sense of

The focus on the harmonization of the different components of a person who is, in a Kantian way, suspended between *mundus sensibilis* and *mundus intelligibilis*, brings Mereau very close to the conception expressed by Schiller in his treatise *Ueber Anmut und Würde* (*On Grace and Dignity*) published in 1793 in the journal *Neue Thalia*, edited by Schiller himself. While there is no certain textual evidence that Mereau read Schiller's work, the intellectual and biographical proximity between the two thinkers makes such an influence plausible.

Schiller had been interested in the question of human vocation since his early formative years. Initially, he adhered to the views of Spalding and Mendelssohn, but he gradually developed doubts about the possibility of conceiving an otherworldly human destination. As a result, he adopted a predominantly moral perspective, believing that each individual comes into the world to develop themselves as human beings and is driven by a tendency towards perfection.<sup>38</sup> In *Ueber Anmut und Würde*, Schiller engaged extensively with Kant's philosophy and considered the dual nature of human beings, who belong both to the empirical and intelligible world; he then drew a connection between this doctrine and the concepts of grace and beauty. While humans are beings of nature in every respect, a specific difference sets them apart from other animals, since "in animals and plants, nature not only determines the purpose; *she alone carries it out*. In humans, however, she only determines the purpose, and leaves them to fulfill it *themselves*. It is this alone that makes them humans."<sup>39</sup> Humans are free and from this freedom arises the moral responsibility to fulfill their nature. This does not mean that humans should prioritize the demand of reason at the expense of their empirical faculties. On the contrary, "in that it made him a rational, sensitive being, that is, a human, nature gave the human being notice of his obligation not to separate what it had bound together and, even in the purest expressions of his divine part, not to neglect the sensuous, and not to base the triumph of the one on the subjugation of the other."<sup>40</sup> Only in the true harmony of these principles can human nature be fulfilled, and the realization of the *schöne Seele* (beautiful soul) become possible. Here, the authentic human vocation is revealed, as "human beings do have the task of establishing an intimate agreement

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right and wrong, and sought only to cultivate what she found within them; she did not want to mold them." *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Macor, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, 269.

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity", in *Schiller's "On Grace and Dignity" in its Cultural Context. Essays and a New Translation*, ed. Jane V. Curran, Christopher Fricker (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 141.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150.

between their two natures, of always being a harmonious whole, and of acting with their full human capacity.”<sup>41</sup>

A similar harmony is the goal that emerges at the end of Albert’s *Bildungsreise*: only by fulfilling his love for Nanette does he achieve the full realization of his humanity. When the two lovers reunite amidst the peaks of the Swiss Alps, their love opens the possibility of aesthetic union with nature. However, this ecstatic moment does not lead to the capitulation of rational demands. “Nature *and* reason were our gods”, Albert observes emphasizing how the pinnacle of feeling corresponds to an equal development of reason.<sup>42</sup> Only in this way can the subject reach that “beautiful, invigorating harmony of all the demands of reason and the heart, which [...] alone contains the true happiness of life.”<sup>43</sup>

The fulfillment of this goal is exemplified by Nanette, who is characterized by an “intimate harmony between [...] the way of thinking and feeling.”<sup>44</sup> It is precisely from this balance that her beauty stems, in a reference to Schiller’s concept of the beautiful soul. Nanette embodies the harmonious unification of all the claims of reason and feeling, becoming the ideal towards which the male protagonist strives. He recognizes in Nanette the fulfillment of his own existential journey: “in her company I felt better every day. The indescribable magic of her being seemed to change my whole being and to make me more like her.”<sup>45</sup>

Her role is fundamentally different from that of female characters in most contemporaneous novels, as she is not merely a medium for the male protagonist’s self-development or long-awaited reunion with nature. Instead, she is portrayed as an individual in her own right, engaged in her own journey of *Bildung* and, in fact, at a more advanced level of personal development.

Her spirit had a maturity which mine was still struggling to achieve, and she had taken many steps ahead of me in her self-education. Here I learned to feel and understand what true greatness and independence is.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>42</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, 35. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. Nanette embodies an ideal of femininity in which both feeling and reason are equally strong and developed, thus standing in direct opposition to the traditional ideal of a virtuous woman with a delicate soul, whose realm is exclusively that of *Gefühl* and grace, while rationality remains the exclusive domain of men. Such a conception emerges in Rousseau, but also in Schiller’s *Ueber Anmut und Würde*.

It is now necessary, however, to highlight an additional element of tension: the process of human improvement cannot remain purely internal but must be translated into concrete actions in the world. Even at the peak of their love, the moral and intellectual perfection Albert and Nanette experience does not remain isolated. Instead, it immediately fosters a sincere interest and active commitment in “everything that is important for humanity in general”, namely, to “combat prejudices, bring errors to light, and reveal truths.”<sup>47</sup> One’s inner developmental journey – this is what emerges throughout the novel – must find expression through action in the world. It is in the exploration of this theme that we come to understand how even Nanette, despite having achieved moral and intellectual perfection, has not yet fully realized her human vocation. As mentioned above, she is constantly threatened by her brother, who, by forcing her to live on the run, severely limits her ability to act and assert her will.

Five years after the publication of *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*, Mereau wrote a review of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795 / 96), summarizing the central core of the text as follows:

The great truth, which can never be felt enough, which is expressed throughout the book in all the main characters, is for me this: every human being should learn to understand himself and act accordingly. He should follow his nature and seek to satisfy his inclinations and demands in life with reason and coherence.<sup>48</sup>

The task to which man is called is thus composed of two essential elements: the process of inner perfection through self-formation on one hand, and the ability to express one’s aspirations in the world through free action on the other. However, it is often impossible to achieve this ideal – Mereau emphasizes, revealing particular attention to the real conditions that impact an individual’s pursuit of their destination: laws and social institutions, by imposing unjust restrictions on individual action, undermine the second fundamental condition for the individual to fully realize their vocation as a human being – that is, freedom of self-determination.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Sophie Mereau-Brentano, *Fragment eines Briefs über Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, in Id. *Wie seh’n’ ich mich hinaus in die freie Welt*, 185.

### 3. From the Contemplation of Nature to the Limits of our Knowledge: *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard* and the “Kantian turn” of the Human Vocation

In the previous section *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* emerged as characterized by the interweaving of narrative elements and philosophical concerns. A similar combination also defines Mereau’s second novel, *Amanda und Eduard. Ein Roman in Briefen*, which was published in two volumes in 1803. It consists of 47 letters through which – thanks to the alternation of the two titular characters as narrators – their love story unfolds.

Amanda finds herself trapped in a loveless marriage with Albret; during a concert, she meets the young Eduard and the two fall passionately in love. In Eduard, Amanda finds a kindred spirit with whom to achieve that *Seelenharmonie*, that unity of spirit and feeling, which she desperately longs for. Their relationship, however, is hindered both by Amanda’s husband and by the duties thrust on Eduard by his father. The lovers thus drift apart and face various challenges, until they eventually reunite and marry. Their newfound happiness is short-lived, as Amanda falls severely ill and passes away shortly after their wedding.

The following section will focus on a fragmentary version of the novel, entitled *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard* and published in Schiller’s *Die Horen* as early as 1797. It contains the first eight letters of the novel (arranged in a slightly different order from the final version<sup>49</sup>) and is particularly interesting because it allows us to observe, just a few years after *Das Blütenalter*, the evolution of Mereau’s thought. In addition to her enduring interest in the question concerning human nature in its place in the world, there is evidence of the growing influence of Early Romanticism.

An example of Mereau’s sustained theoretical interests can be found in the extensive digression that opens the first letter of the *Horen*-fragment, in which Eduard addresses Barton, his mentor and friend. Eduard starts his letter by reminiscing about a conversation they shared during a walk atop a hill. There, the contemplation of the natural landscape sparked a reflection on the order that underlies it. Visible nature, Barton explained, is defined by “eternal transformation, process, change”, but underneath this incessant becoming there is “a force that always remains: for only what remains can

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<sup>49</sup> The most significant change concerns the opening letter. In the 1797 version, Mereau begins the novel with two letters from Eduard and introduces Amanda only in the third. In the 1803 edition, however, it is Amanda’s voice that begins the narration, placing the female perspective in a prominent position.

change”<sup>50</sup>; this force permeates every element of the universe, giving it life and form, and intimately uniting it with the other parts and with itself.<sup>51</sup> However, we are not allowed to have a direct knowledge of this force, because “we can only perceive what changes, and that which always remains, we must search for it [...] in its effects.”<sup>52</sup> It is an iteration of Kant’s warning regarding the limits of knowledge. In the fourth letter of the fragment, Eduard describes a new ascent, both physical and ideal. As he climbs a hill, the expansion of the physical gaze upon the landscape corresponds to a parallel intellectual rise towards the contemplation of the laws governing the physical manifestations of nature and, beyond that, towards the eternal secrets of the universe. Here, however, the ascending path is abruptly interrupted:

Oh! That there exists a point where everything is shrouded in mist, where the gaze of the human eye, like that of the human spirit, sadly clings to the boundary set by an incomprehensible force to its insatiable curiosity!<sup>53</sup>

We cannot surpass the limits of our knowledge, yet we feel, deep within our nature, a “free, inextinguishable thirst that departs from the path of necessity”<sup>54</sup>, a yearning to understand what is infinite. It is precisely here that the specific difference between humans and all other beings becomes clear: whereas the latter are capable of fulfilling the purposes to which their nature has destined them, for humans this fulfillment is merely a regulative ideal.

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<sup>50</sup> Sophie Mereau-Brentano, *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard*, in Id. *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung, Amanda und Eduard. Romane*, 227.

<sup>51</sup> The use of the term *Kraft* to describe the foundation from which all the beings in nature originate immediately links Mereau to the contemporary metaphysical debates and to the vitalist frameworks that had emerged in the 18th century as a critique of the mechanistic worldview. Considering the world as a meticulously constructed mechanism governed by mathematical proportions fails to account for the complexity, organization, and purposefulness observed in living organisms and systems, not to mention the materialistic implications that such a position entails. For this reason, German thinkers such as Hoffman, Haller or later Herder and Goethe followed Leibniz in asserting that matter, unlike what Descartes proposed, cannot be reduced to mere extension governed by mechanical laws; rather, it is permeated by immanent principles and active vital forces such as elective affinities, forces of attraction and repulsion, and formative impulses that demonstrate directional movement and move towards a certain purpose. Mereau’s engagement with these discussions also emerges from a fragment that can be found within her *Nachlass*, some parts of which were later reworked in *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* (Mereau-Brentano, *Wie sehn’ ich mich hinaus in die freie Welt*, 189-191). A detailed account of the development of vitalism in eighteenth-century Europe can be found in Peter H. Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard*, 227.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



Their nature relentlessly compels them to seek the mysterious ultimate source of life, only to inevitably fall short of fully reaching it. This destiny is painful, yet it holds a deeply positive value: the endless search for absolute knowledge is the source of all human activity. If we were to be successful in our endeavors, “if [...] the mysterious veil of nature was to be torn asunder, there would be a cessation of all activity, all striving within us. Eternally must we seek.”<sup>55</sup>

As seen above, the conception that emerges at the end of *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* is that the meaning of human existence, its authentic destination, lies in continuous self-development on the one hand and in free self-determination to act in the world on the other; in these passages of her second novel, Mereau appears to further develop this notion by asserting that the condition for the fulfillment of this vocation lies precisely in the impossibility of reaching what exceeds the limits of our knowledge. The author does not explicitly use the term *Bestimmung*<sup>56</sup>, but her argument can be situated within the framework of the debates on the human vocation. More specifically, Mereau appears to refer to Kant’s conception, wherein the impossibility to know our otherworldly destination is the guarantee of our autonomy. Kant argued that if we were privy to God’s plan concerning our fate after death, we would obey his law solely out of external obligation: “most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, only a few from hope, and none at all from duty, and the moral worth of actions [...] would not exist at all.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, we would be mere puppets hanging from strings, and there would be no room for genuine moral action. However, given that “with all the effort of our reason we have only a very obscure and ambiguous view into the future”, we can adhere to the demands of the moral law in a disinterested manner; in this way “there can be a truly moral disposition, devoted immediately to the moral law, and a rational

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>56</sup> In another part of the novel, however, Mereau describes Eduard’s confidence – strengthened by the development of his capacities – in his ability to fulfill his *Beruf zum Glück*: “I trust myself to be strong enough to force the world to fulfill my wishes, no matter how high they may fly, and to argue with fate about my vocation to happiness” (*Ibid.*, 230). The term *Beruf* constitutes one of the lexical options that the German language offers to express the concept of ‘vocation’, ‘destination’, or ‘destiny’, and was extensively employed within the Lutheran tradition and in the philosophical reflections predating Spalding’s *Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen* – on this topic see Laura A. Macor, “*Bestimmung e Beruf* in Friedrich Hölderlin e nel suo tempo: un’analisi linguistico-semantica”, *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 106, no. 3 (July-September 2014): 591-600. The appearance of the term in Mereau’s novel thus serves as an additional hint that Mereau was aware of the cultural debates surrounding this concept.

<sup>57</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* 5, 147, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 118.

creature can become worthy of the highest good.”<sup>58</sup> It is here, therefore, that we can find what satisfies the authentic purpose of our existence, which is first and foremost a *praktischen Bestimmung*, a practical vocation: not the ultimate destination that our soul will reach after death, but the act of free self-determination to moral action.

Similarly, Mereau establishes the limitation of human knowledge as a guarantee for moral action and, more broadly, for all human activity. At the same time, however, she strongly asserts the impossibility of disregarding the call to exceed this limitation; it represents a constant and infinite attempt to asymptotically reach the absolute, and it serves as the origin of all our actions. Mereau thus places at the center of human nature the concept of *Streben* or striving.

Mereau’s use of this notion seems to fall midway between Fichte’s philosophy and its reinterpretation in German Romanticism. Whereas in the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, the term denotes the infinite striving of the finite I to determine the not-I and to make it conform to the demands of reason, thereby asserting itself as an autonomous agent, the German Romantics reject the irreconcilability inherent in Fichte’s dichotomy between the subject and the world. They too acknowledge that the conflict between the subject and nature is both inevitable and necessary for the progress of reason and freedom; however, they view the *Streben* not as the assertion of one’s will over the not-I or the compliance with ethical imperatives, but rather as the spontaneous desire to return to a state of harmonious unity between subject and object, between spirit and nature. In Mereau’s work, both these concepts are present. In accordance with Fichte, human striving is understood primarily in moral and active terms. It entails a process of *Bildung* aimed, as its regulative ideal, at the acquisition of the knowledge of the eternal law of the universe; furthermore, it calls for the ability to freely act upon the world, giving form to its matter and make it conform to reason: when an individual has attained this goal, “with a creative hand, he impresses upon lifeless nature the marks of a thinking being, and the eternal purposes of life pass before his soul in moments of sacred inspiration, comprehensible and pure.”<sup>59</sup> However, Mereau also emphasizes that this striving also entails a desire to overcome the conflict with nature and reach the absolute. In both these meanings, the presence of this theme in the fragment indicates the increasing influence of the new philosophical approaches on Mereau’s thought.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard*, 239.

In Eduard's letter, the idea of striving joins Kant's reflections on human vocation, further developing the author's notion of the *Bestimmung des Menschen*. It is the infinite effort that encapsulates the meaning and destination of our existence. Indeed, it is the ultimate origin of the possibility to act without which, as we have seen, human nature cannot be fulfilled. Furthermore, our pursuit of the absolute drives us to perfect and develop ourselves in order to draw nearer to our ideal goal. This is also what propels Eduard's journey to complete his *Bildung*:

My only wish is to have a thousand lives, to animate all forms, to wander through all relationships, to savor every possible sweet sensation, and my only concern is that some unawakened power may lie dormant in my soul.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4. Love as Culmination of the *exzentrische Bahn*

Amanda, too, is engaged in the attempt to find the higher meaning of her own existence and to fulfill her true nature. In her letters, she writes to Julie, a childhood friend. Upon marrying Albret, Amanda had found herself engulfed "into a world full of glittering illusion"<sup>62</sup>, but she is profoundly unhappy. Not only is there no love between her and her husband, but establishing any meaningful connection is impossible, given the stark contrast between Amanda's sensitivity and Albret's cold and calculating lucidity. On the other hand, Julie has been happily married for a long time and leads a secluded and tranquil life, fully content with her situation. In their correspondence, Amanda elevates her friend to the embodiment of domestic happiness – a happiness which is for her unattainable: "you were still the same. Completely true to all your previous ideas, you continued to live undisturbed in that happy land, which seemed to be fading away more and more for me."<sup>63</sup> Julie represents the traditional model of femininity: she is a quiet and prudent woman who finds satisfaction within the domestic sphere, beyond which she never ventures. In contrast, Amanda lives a glamorous life but finds no peace in her own marriage: being denied the chance for love, understood as the perfect and happy unification of two individuals, is a sacrifice too great for her to bear. Amanda perceives the desire for love as an

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

integral part of her being to the point that she feels compelled by her own nature to seek it beyond the marriage bond.<sup>64</sup>

The contrast of Amanda and Julie can be interpreted not only as the juxtaposition of two different ideals of femininity, but also as a theoretical opposition between two anthropological models. In her own simple, almost idyllic existence, Julie embodies a state of immediate and unreflective harmony between humans and nature – a state that, as mentioned above, is associated in Early Romantic thought with childhood and early youth, as well as with a phase in human history preceding the development of civilization. “You are so harmonious with yourself and your world; your obedient imagination does not carry you beyond the bounds of reality”<sup>65</sup>, Amanda observes. In Julie’s life there is no rupture, no moment of separation that has torn her from the happy condition she enjoyed in her childhood; even her marriage appears as the natural continuation of this state.

Amanda represents the opposite pole, having lived through the experience of separation. The rupture was brought forth not only by her marriage – which compelled her to leave her parental home (and her childhood) for the world of society<sup>66</sup> – but, on a more fundamental level, by the *ungeduldige Streben nach Entwicklung*<sup>67</sup>, a striving for development, whose call she could not ignore. As a human being, she was called to *Bildung*, or the cultivation of her capacities; this task, however, demands that the individual forsake the immediate union they once shared with nature. The development of discursive reason, in particular, requires separation, as judgment and understanding cannot exist without the distinction of a subject and an object.

In the quiet contemplation of a youthfully budding branch, of a simple rural landscape, at that time, I felt undividedly everything that I was ever capable of feeling when gazing upon the most beautiful regions of the Earth, the most touching natural phenomena. [...] That is why I embraced the small world around me with an intimacy and strength that

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<sup>64</sup> Kontje observed that the association of Amanda’s authentic nature with love carries an ambivalent tone; it justifies some progressive elements in the novel (such as Amanda’s assertion of her right to pursue a romantic relationship outside of marriage), yet it does so on very traditional grounds, that is, by linking feminine nature with love and highlighting Amanda’s inclination to surrender to nature, whereas Eduard – by contrast – strives to adopt an active role within it. See Todd Kontje, “Reassessing Sophie Mereau: The Case for *Amanda und Eduard*”, *Colloquia Germanica* 24, no. 4 (1991): 316-319.

<sup>65</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard*, 244.

<sup>66</sup> The novel presents the same Rousseauian critique of society that emerged in *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung*. While life within society is essential for the complete development of human nature, it also generates unnatural needs and external constraints, constantly endangering the individuality (*Eigenthümlichkeit*) of the subject.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

could never be expressed in words [...]. The yearning for youthful emotions is eternally in vain! The material is now developed, the emotion has words – much of what I once dreamt in obscurity, I now understood. The lovely magic of inexperience [...] is no more.<sup>68</sup>

This process is necessary but also painful and sparks an inextinguishable yearning for that original condition. This is further evidence of Mereau's conceptual affinity with romantic thought, as Amanda's journey mirrors, once again, Hölderlin's notion of the *exzentrische Bahn*.

I could not conceive of life as a straight, open road where one can see the end from the moment of entry; rather, I preferred to envision it as a twisted, peculiar path full of romantic spots and shifting lights.<sup>69</sup>

Amanda's story imparts an explicit Romantic undertone to the question of the *Bestimmung des Menschen*, which comes to be identified with the reconstruction of the lost harmony. In the novel, her actions are guided, much like Eduard's, by the attempt to reach the ultimate goal of this existential journey. However, there is a significant difference between the two characters. Eduard firmly binds the fulfillment of his nature to the Promethean effort to reach the absolute and to a path of self-formation which cannot be disjoined from action. Amanda, on the other hand, doesn't place the same emphasis on action, because she sees only one way to reach her destination: "is there not a time in life – Amanda asks in a passage that Mereau adds in the 1803 version – when this youthful enthusiasm returns with all its strength and unity, only more intimate, more beautiful, more sacred? And what time can this be other than when we love?"<sup>70</sup> Foreshadowing, in some respects, the ideas of Schlegel, Novalis, and Schleiermacher<sup>71</sup>, Mereau suggests here that

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* In the final version of the novel, Mereau will further underline the role that the development of rational capacities plays in the separation of the subject from the universal harmony, that "fades away when the matured intellect (*Verstand*), now looks around more clearly and is able to trace the gentle flow of impressions that move the strings of the heart." Mereau-Brentano, *Amanda und Eduard*, 86.

<sup>69</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard*, 245-246.

<sup>70</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Amanda und Eduard*, 86.

<sup>71</sup> The theme of love – understood not only in spiritual but also physical and sensual terms – occupies a central role in Friedrich Schlegel's controversial novel *Lucinde* (1799) (Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, V, ed. Hans Eichner (Bielefeld: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1962), 1-83). In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis describes love as a transformative force that allows individuals to fully realize their potential while simultaneously establishing a reciprocal identification between the lovers—an identification that serves as the basis for the ultimate reconciliation of subject and object (Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, I, 121-354). Similarly, in his *Reden über die Religion* (1799), Schleiermacher interprets love as a reflection of humanity's deep longing for unity with the universe and as the force that allows us to grasp the whole in our intuition. See

only through love can the striving towards the reconstruction of the original harmony succeed and can Amanda fulfill her vocation.

The culmination of this journey – that in the *Horen*-fragment, which ends with the first encounter between Amanda and Eduard, can only be foreshadowed – is found at the end of the second volume of the 1803 edition. Here the lovers finally reunite and solidify their love through marriage, a symbol of their complete unification. The role of love as the mediator between man and nature is sealed in the moment in which, shortly after the wedding, Amanda passes away. The onset of death coincides with the dissolution of the last element that separates the individual from the universe, and only when she dies in the arms of her lover can Amanda fully reach the destination towards which human nature inherently strives, but which remains, in earthly existence, a purely regulative ideal.

Completely dissolved in love and harmony, the sublime music of the stars and worlds resounds in my being. The slight barrier dissipates, and disembodied I immerse myself in the boundless sea of love, where beings are immortal!<sup>72</sup>

At the end of this paper, both *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* and *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard* emerge as the narrative transposition of a thought that, in the different combination of elements that stem from the late Enlightenment debates and ideas more closely linked to Classicism, *Empfindsamkeit*, and Romanticism, reveals its fully philosophical significance.

The issue of individual development in its connection to the question of human (self)determination plays a central role in *Das Blütenalter der Empfindung* and functions as the common thread that connects the two parallel narrative strands of the work – Albrecht's *Bildungsreise* and Nanette's quest for autonomy and independence. Through the experiences of her protagonists, Mereau asserts a position in which the fulfillment of the purpose of human existence simultaneously calls for a path of self-formation that develops one's nature toward perfection and, on the other hand, for the free expression of this nature and its capacities through action in the world. The concept of *Bildung* and *Bestimmung* were central to the late Enlightenment and early Romantic philosophical discussions of the time; therefore, they appear particularly significant and illustrative of the way in which Mereau consciously

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Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Mereau-Brentano, *Amanda und Eduard*, 220.

engages with some of the most important cultural debates of her era and developed her own original contribution.

The fragment *Briefe von Amanda und Eduard*, published in Schiller's *Horen* in 1797, comes only a few years after Mereau's debut novel, but it reveals a significant evolution in Mereau's thought. The ideas of personal development and human vocation still play an important role, providing a framework that situates parts of the narrative within a theoretical context that focuses on the meaning of human existence. However, the introduction of new elements in crucial parts of her doctrine (the definition of human nature as governed by incessant striving, and the characterization of love as the intermediary between humanity and nature) serves as evidence of Mereau's increasing intellectual proximity to early German Romanticism.

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# Symphilosophie

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## Die Psychologie Friedrich Schleiermachers im Horizont der kantischen Vernunftkritik

*Matthis Glatzel\**

### ABSTRACT

This article sets out the significance of Schleiermacher's psychological concept in the context of Kant's critique of reason. Specifically, it first discusses Kant's serious criticism of the rational and empirical psychology emancipated by Christian Wolff, in order to then present Schleiermacher's productive handling of this criticism. This productive approach consists of a circumvention of Kantian dualism through the concept of life in romantic philosophy of nature and a subsequent reduction of rational psychology to a transcendental theory of self-consciousness in Kant. In combining both approaches, Schleiermacher recognises the condition of the possibility of psychology's scientific capability on the basis of a definition of the soul's object guaranteed by the unity of subjectivity.

*Keywords:* psychology, Schleiermacher, self-consciousness, life, soul

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Beitrag legt die Bedeutung von Schleiermachers psychologischem Entwurf im Horizont der kantischen Vernunftkritik dar. Konkret geht er zunächst auf Kants folgenschwere Kritik an der durch Christian Wolff emanzipierten rationalen und empirischen Psychologie ein, um anschließend Schleiermachers produktiven Umgang mit dieser Kritik darzustellen. Dieser produktive Umgang besteht in einer Umgehung des kantischen Dualismus durch den Lebensbegriff der romantischen Naturphilosophie und einer an Kant anschließenden Reduktion der rationalen Psychologie auf transzendente Selbstbewusstseinstheorie. In Kombination beider Zugänge erkennt Schleiermacher die Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Wissenschaftsfähigkeit von Psychologie aufgrund einer durch die Einheit der Subjektivität verbürgten Gegenstandsbestimmung der Seele.

*Stichwörter:* Psychologie, Schleiermacher, Selbstbewusstsein, Leben, Seele

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\* Dipl. Theol., Dr. des., Universität Jena – [matthis.glatzel@uni-jena.de](mailto:matthis.glatzel@uni-jena.de)

Das Lexem ‚Seele‘ verweist gegenwärtig auf eine schillernde Bedeutungsvielfalt. Mit diesen Bedeutungen verbinden sich zumeist Assoziationen, die regelmäßig in die Romantik – oder das, was darunter verstanden wird – führen. Tatsächlich spielt die Romantik für die Begriffsgeschichte der Seele eine große Rolle, allerdings gerade nicht für einen transzendent aufgeladenen Begriff, sondern für ein Konzept, das zu diesem Zeitpunkt noch fest im akademisch-wissenschaftlichen Betrieb verankert war. So war es wesentlich die folgenschwere Kritik Kants, die eine Tilgung des Begriffs aus dem wissenschaftlichen Curriculum zur Folge hatte. Nicht alle Romantiker:innen wollten dieser Entscheidung folgen. Besonders zentral scheint hier ein Text, der von der Forschung bisher weitgehend ignoriert wurde: die *Psychologievorlesungen* Friedrich Schleiermachers.

Ziel des Beitrages ist es, Schleiermachers produktiven Umgang mit Kants Kritik an einer gesamten Disziplin darzustellen. In einem ersten Schritt werde ich dabei Kants Kritik an der Psychologie und dem dahinterstehenden Begriff der Seele nachzeichnen (1), um im Anschluss die Lage dieser Disziplin um 1800 zu skizzieren (2). In den weiterführenden Schritten wird ein Überblick über Schleiermachers frühe Beschäftigung mit der Psychologie skizziert (3), sowie ausführlich die methodische Gestalt seines ab 1818 ausgearbeiteten Entwurfs rekonstruiert (4). Zum Abschluss soll der Versuch unternommen werden, diese Überlegungen in einem größeren ideengeschichtlichen Kontext zu situieren (5).

## 1. Kants Kritik der Psychologie

Das erklärte Anliegen des Königsberger Philosophen Immanuel Kant in seiner berühmten *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* war es, die Möglichkeitsbedingungen der Metaphysik als Wissenschaft auszuloten. Das moderne Moment dieses Projekts liegt wesentlich darin begründet, dass Kant die Metaphysik im Sinne einer Transzendentalphilosophie nicht als Aussagen über Gott und die Ordnung der Dinge verstand, sondern als Reflexion über die Bedingung der Möglichkeit von Erkenntnis. Ausschließlich in dieser Art und Weise ist nach Kant Metaphysik denkbar. Versucht die Vernunft demgegenüber jenseits von Begriff und Anschauung Aussagen zu treffen, verstrickt sie sich in Widersprüche, in sogenannte Antinomien. Im Zuge genannter Antinomien waren Kants Kritik an den Gottesbeweisen der scholastischen Philosophie und des aufklärerischen Rationalismus besonders wirkmächtig. Es war wesentlich Kant, der den Argumentationsgang, vom bloßen Begriff Gottes auf dessen Existenz zu schließen, als Irrtum entlarvte. Während die Kritik der rationalen Gotteserkenntnis vornehmlich bedeutsam für die sich

anschließende und neu konstituierende Theologie war, sollte die, an ähnlicher Stelle geübte, Kritik am Seelenbegriff eine prägende Rolle für die sich um 1800 herausbildende Disziplin der Psychologie haben.<sup>1</sup>

Die gegenwärtige Psychologie wiederum ist eine weitgehend unabhängige Disziplin, die vorwiegend im Kontext der Medizin angesiedelt ist. Berührungspunkte mit philosophischen Überlegungen hat sie nur wenig.<sup>2</sup> Leicht gerät dabei aus dem Blick, dass die Psychologie lange Zeit wie selbstverständlich als Teil der Philosophie verstanden wurde und demnach auch im Horizont zeitgenössischer philosophischer Debatten stand. Bereits in der griechischen Antike können Arbeiten zur Psychologie festgemacht werden. Während Platon in seinem *Phaidon*-Dialog nach der Unsterblichkeit der Seele fragt, ist es Aristoteles, der diese in *De Anima* bereits grundlegend infrage stellt und die Seele als lebensgebendes Prinzip klassifiziert. Im Zuge der aufklärerischen Philosophie spielt die Psychologie schließlich im Richtungsstreit von Rationalismus und Empirismus eine tragende Rolle für die Erkenntnistheorie. Für René Descartes greift die Seele im Erkenntnisakt auf angeborene Ideen zurück, während sie hingegen für John Locke rein passiv ist und die Eindrücke gleich einer weißen Tafel empfängt. Bis tief in das 18. Jahrhundert hinein ist die Psychologie damit wie selbstverständlich ein Teil der Philosophie.<sup>3</sup>

Eine grundlegende Zäsur der europäischen Psychologiegeschichte bildet die Philosophie Christian Wolffs. Dieser unterteilte nicht nur folgenreich in eine empirische und eine rationale Psychologie, sondern etablierte damit erstmals die Psychologie als eigenständige Disziplin des philosophischen Kanons. Die rationale Psychologie hatte als Gegenstand die Seele, konkret ihr Verhältnis zum Leibe sowie ihre Unsterblichkeit. Aufgabe der

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<sup>1</sup> Zur Bedeutung von Kants Philosophie siehe die beiden angeführten Arbeiten von Marcus Willaschek und Otfried Höffe: Vgl. Marcus Willaschek, *Kant: Die Revolution des Denkens*, Originalausgabe (München: C.H.Beck, 2023). Vgl. Otfried Höffe, *Immanuel Kant*, Orig.-Ausg., 8. Aufl., C.H. Beck Paperback Denker 506 (München: Beck, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Zur gegenwärtigen Psychologie und ihrem Selbstverständnis siehe: Vgl. Wolfgang Mack, „Psychologie ohne 'Seele' und 'Leib': Wie es dazu kam, weswegen es aktuell so ist und ob die akademische Psychologie den Begriff der 'leibbezogenen Seele' braucht,“ in *Leibbezogene Seele? Interdisziplinäre Erkundungen eines kaum noch fassbaren Begriffs*, hrsg. von Jörg Dierken und Malte D. Krüger, 1. Auflage, Dogmatik in der Moderne 10 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Zur Geschichte der Psychologie siehe: Vgl. Georg Eckardt, *Kernprobleme in der Geschichte der Psychologie*, 1. Auflage (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2010), S. 21 - 50. Vgl. Eckart Scheerer, „Psychologie,“ in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, hrsg. von Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer und Gottfried Gabriel, 13 Bde. 7 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftl. Buchges, 1989). Vgl. Eckart Scheerer, „Seele,“ in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, hrsg. von Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer und Gottfried Gabriel, 13 Bde. 9 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftl. Buchges, 1995).

empirischen Psychologie war es demgegenüber im Horizont des, durch die rationale Psychologie bereitgestellten, Begriffs der Seele, die Erkenntnisse der rationalen mit Blick auf die innere Erfahrung, die Introspektion zu bestätigen.<sup>4</sup> Daran anschließend avancierte gegen Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts die Psychologie, insbesondere in ihrer empirischen Form, schlussendlich zu einem Modethema. In zahlreichen Zeitschriften wurden die Erscheinungen des Seelenlebens thematisiert und erörtert.<sup>5</sup> Analog dazu wurde das menschliche Innenleben ebenfalls in der Literatur zu einem beliebten Gegenstand der Auseinandersetzung.<sup>6</sup> Die Überführung dieser Überlegungen in eine wissenschaftliche Disziplin war ein wesentliches Anliegen der damaligen Zeit. Entschiedener Widerspruch kam dabei allerdings aus Königsberg.

Im Paralogismen-Kapitel der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* legt Kant eine Wesensbestimmung der rationalen Psychologie vor. Er betont, die rationale drohe in eine empirische Psychologie umzuschlagen, wenn sie ebenfalls auf Einsichten der inneren Erfahrung zurückgreift. Dabei müsse sich die rationale Psychologie streng genommen auf ein Kernelement zurückziehen: „Ich denke, ist also der alleinige Text der rationalen Psychologie, aus welchem sie ihre ganze Weisheit auswickeln soll.“<sup>7</sup> Einziger möglicher Inhalt der rationalen Psychologie ist damit das transzendente Selbstbewusstsein, das seinerseits die Bedingung der Möglichkeit jeder Objekterkenntnis ist. Jede Anschauung von Gegenständen ist an die Bedingung gekoppelt, dass es ein Selbstbewusstsein, ein Ich gibt, das diese Gegenstände betrachtet. Für Kant ist dieses Ich jedoch nicht weiter in seine Bestandteile zerlegbar. Der Grund hierfür ist, dass Wissen nur im Wechselspiel von Begriff und Anschauung möglich ist. Das ‚Ich denke‘ steht dabei allein auf Seiten der transzendentalen Bedingung der Anschauung, aber jenseits jedes Status als mögliches Anschauungsobjekt. Fichtes Projekt der *Wissenschaftslehre* ausgehend vom ‚Ich‘ ein Nicht-Ich zu konstruieren, die es wiederum beide als

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<sup>4</sup> Zur Psychologie Christian Wolffs insgesamt: Vgl. Oliver-Pierre Rudolph und Jean-François Goubet, Hrsg., *Die Psychologie Christian Wolffs: Systematische und historische Untersuchungen*, Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäischen Aufklärung 22 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Vgl. Georg Eckardt et al., *Anthropologie und empirische Psychologie um 1800: Ansätze einer Entwicklung zur Wissenschaft* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2001), S. 134 - 189.

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. Jutta Heinz, *Wissen vom Menschen und Erzählen vom Einzelfall: Untersuchungen zum anthropologischen Roman der Spätaufklärung*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte 6 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Kant, KrV, B, S. 264, zitiert nach: Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (2. Aufl.), Reprint 2021, 9 Bde., hrsg. von Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Gesammelte Schriften - Abtheilung I: Werke 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1911).

Produkte eines absoluten Ich zu deuten gilt<sup>8</sup>, hätte Kant aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach als dogmatisch abgelehnt. In ähnlicher Hinsicht hätte Kant vermutlich Fichtes begrifflicher Aufwertung der *intellektuellen Anschauung* hin zu einer Betrachtungsweise, die ausschließlich die begriffliche Spontaneität thematisiert und in der nicht nur Gott, sondern auch der Mensch in vollständiger Freiheit die transzendentalen Bedingungen seiner Vernunft anschauen kann, kritisch gegenübergestanden.<sup>9</sup>

Im Unterschied zu Fichte geht die rationale Psychologie der Aufklärung noch weiter. Sie schließt von diesem ‚Ich denke‘, dem Tatbestand des Selbstbewusstseins, auf eine eigene Substanz. In der Darstellung Kants verläuft dieser Argumentationsgang wie folgt:

Was nicht anders als Subject gedacht werden kann, existiert auch nicht anders als Subject und ist also Substanz. Nun kann ein denkendes Wesen bloß als ein solches betrachtet, nicht anders als Subject gedacht werden. Also existirt es auch nur als ein solches, d. i. als Substanz.<sup>10</sup>

Nach Kant liegt der Fehler dieser Argumentation darin, dass der erste Satz das Subjekt als Substanz und damit objektive Entität deutet. Der zweite Satz hingegen versteht es als bloßen Vollzug des Selbstbewusstseins und damit eben nicht als objektive Entität. Das Subjekt in dem einen Satz wird demnach fälschlicherweise mit dem Subjekt aus dem anderen Satz identifiziert. Diese fehlgeleitete Identifikation führt nun dazu, dass der Sachverhalt des Selbstbewusstseins fälschlicherweise mit einer eigenen Substanz identifiziert wird. Konkret formuliert Kant hierzu:

Die Einheit des Bewußtseins, welche den Kategorien zum Grunde liegt, wird hier für Anschauung des Subjects als Objects genommen und darauf die Kategorie der Substanz angewandt. Sie ist aber nur die Einheit im Denken, wodurch allein sein Object gegeben wird, worauf also die Kategorie der Substanz, als die jederzeit gegebene Anschauung voraussetzt, nicht angewandt, mithin dieses Subject gar nicht erkannt werden kann.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Fichte, SW / I, GWL, I, S. 91, zitiert nach: Johann G. Fichte, *1. Abth. Zur theoretischen Philosophie I*, Neuauflage, hrsg. von Immanuel H. Fichte, Sämtliche Werke 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> Zum Begriff der intellektuellen Anschauung siehe: Vgl. Virginia López-Domínguez, „Die Entwicklung der intellektuellen Anschauung bei Fichte bis zur Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre (1801-1802),“ in *Zur Wissenschaftslehre*, hrsg. von Helmut Girdt (Brill, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Kant, KrV, B, S. 269.

<sup>11</sup> Kant, KrV, B, S. 275.

Der eigentliche Gegenstand der rationalen Psychologie, die Seele, kann in dieser Form nicht als Substanz verstanden werden, denn die „Einheit des Bewußtseins“, die Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Anschauung, kann ihrerseits nicht als Objekt angeschaut werden. Sie kann es nicht, weil sie ihrerseits die Bedingung der Möglichkeit jeder Anschauung ist. Diese Subjektstruktur als Substanz aufzufassen ist nach Kant demnach ein Kategorienfehler und jede Gegenstandsbestimmung der Seele hinfällig. Es ist wenig verwunderlich, dass Kants Kritik an dieser Stelle folgenreiche Konsequenzen für die Verwendung des Begriffs Seele und der Psychologie überhaupt hatte. Der Begriff verschwand zunehmend aus dem akademischen Diskurs. Symptomatisch steht hier Friedrich Albert Langes Votum aus dem Jahr 1866, der, den Begriff verbannend, eine „Psychologie ohne Seele“<sup>12</sup> forderte.

Doch nicht nur der Begriff Seele und die rationale Psychologie als Disziplin standen im Anschluss an Kants Kritik vor einem erweiterten Rechtfertigungsdruck, sondern auch ihr Komplementär, die empirische Psychologie rang in Folge um ihren Status als Wissenschaft. Sie steht zwar vor anderen Problemen als ihr rationales Gegenstück, doch auch sie kann im kantischen Sinne keine Wissenschaft sein. Spricht Kant in der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in ihrem Zusammenhang von einer „Physiologie des inneren Sinns“<sup>13</sup>, jedoch ohne sie in den Fokus der Kritik zu stellen, findet sich die entscheidende Passage in der Vorrede zu den *Metaphysischen Anfangsgründen der Naturwissenschaften*. Dort formuliert Kant:

Noch weiter aber, als selbst Chemie muß empirische Seelenlehre jederzeit von dem Range einer eigentlich so zu nennenden Naturwissenschaft entfernt bleiben, erstlich weil Mathematik auf die Phänomene des inneren Sinnes und ihre Gesetze nicht anwendbar ist, man müßte denn allein das Gesetz der Stetigkeit in dem Abflusse der inneren Veränderungen desselben in Anschlag bringen wollen, welches aber eine Erweiterung der Erkenntniß sein würde, die sich zu der, welche die Mathematik der Körperlehre verschafft, ungefähr so verhalten würde, wie die Lehre von den Eigenschaften der geraden Linie zur ganzen Geometrie. Denn die reine innere Anschauung, in welcher die Seelen-Erscheinungen construiert werden sollen, ist die Zeit, die nur eine Dimension hat.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus seit Kant*, 2 Bde., hrsg. von Alfred Schmidt, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), S. 877.

<sup>13</sup> Kant, KrV B, S. 266.

<sup>14</sup> Kant, AA IV, MAN, S. 471.



Der angeführten Passage geht eine Kritik der Wissenschaftlichkeit der Chemie voran. Noch deutlicher als dieser Disziplin, sieht Kant den Weg der empirischen Psychologie zur Wissenschaftlichkeit verbaut. Wesentlich nennt Kant dabei zwei Gründe. Zum einen sind die „Phänomene des inneren Sinnes“, also die der inneren Erfahrung gegebenen Eindrücke, nicht mathematisierbar. Im Hintergrund steht ein letztlich positivistisches Wissenschaftsverständnis: Nur das kann Teil wissenschaftlicher Untersuchung sein, was sich konkret messen lässt. Das psychische Innenleben des Menschen gehört für Kant nicht dazu. Zum anderen kritisiert er, dass für die innere Erfahrung lediglich die Anschauungskategorie der Zeit veranschlagt werden kann. Für Wissenschaftlichkeit benötige es jedoch wesentliche beide Kategorien, Raum und Zeit. Neben den angeführten Punkten findet sich schließlich noch eine weitere Kritik Kants, wie er sie wenig später an gleicher Stelle anführt:

[...] noch weniger aber ein anderes denkendes Subject sich unseren Versuchen der Absicht angemessen von uns unterwerfen läßt, und selbst die Beobachtung an sich schon den Zustand des beobachteten Gegenstandes alterirt und verstellt.<sup>15</sup>

Ein weiteres Problem der Methode des inneren Sinns erkennt Kant demnach im Problem des Fremdpsychischen und der schon immer bereits erfolgten Veränderung des Gegenstandes durch die Beobachtung. Hierbei handelt es sich um ein methodisches Grundproblem der Introspektion und Selbstbeobachtung. Ihr Phänomenbereich ist vollständig abhängig vom untersuchenden Subjekt. Wissenschaftlich belastbare Erkenntnisse kann eine solche Wissenschaft nach Kant nicht hervorbringen, denn Wissenschaftlichkeit ist für ihn ausschließlich für die Phänomene der äußeren Sinne denkbar. Nur diese stehen im wissenschaftlich belastbaren Zusammenspiel von Begriff und Anschauung und den Kategorien von Raum und Zeit.

## 2. Die Entwicklung der Psychologie

Dass die Psychologie gegenwärtig selbstverständlicher Teil des wissenschaftlichen Kanons ist und dass sie gleichzeitig mit dem Begriff Seele nicht mehr viel anzufangen weiß<sup>16</sup>, verdeutlicht wesentlich zwei Dinge. Kants Kritik am substanzontologischen Seelenbegriff, wie sie sich in seiner Rejektion an der rationalen Psychologie artikuliert, sollte folgenreich bleiben, seine grundlegende Perhorreszenz jeglicher Wissenschaftsfähigkeit der Psychologie hin-

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<sup>15</sup> Kant, AA IV, MAN, S. 471.

<sup>16</sup> Vgl. Mack, „Psychologie ohne ‚Seele‘ und ‚Leib‘.“

gegen blieb für die nachfolgenden Generationen unbefriedigend. Zwar sollte sich die Psychologie gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts zu einer experimentell-empirischen Psychologie weiterentwickeln, die der Selbstbeobachtung als psychologischer Methode kritisch gegenübersteht, allerdings werden die entscheidenden Weichen für eine solche Psychologie bereits um 1800 gelegt. Auch in der Verteidigung der Selbstbeobachtung als psychologischer Methode geht es um die grundsätzliche Dignität einer erfahrungsbasiert verfahrenen Psychologie.

Deren Entwicklung hemmte Kants Kritik nämlich keineswegs. Bereits 1791 legte Carl Christian Erhard Schmid (1761 – 1812) einen eigenen Entwurf mit dem Titel *Empirische Psychologie* vor. Schmid verstand sich selbst als Kantianer, war allerdings der festen Überzeugung, dass Kants Kritik nicht das letzte Wort haben kann. Zu deutlich sah er die Notwendigkeit einer Überführung der zwischen den Jahren 1785 und 1800 prosperierenden Zeitschriftenlandschaft in eine wissenschaftliche Disziplin. Konkret sah er dabei Kants Kritik an der Methode des inneren Sinns durch methodischen Sorgsam – also kontrollierter Reflexion der subjektiv geprägten Beobachtungen – bewältigbar. Der Psychologe müsse dabei, so Schmid, möglichst neutral und wertfrei beobachten. Im Horizont verallgemeinerbarer Kriterien ließe sich schließlich auch das Problem des Fremdpsychischen umgehen. Wie intensiv Schmid daran interessiert war, der Psychologie zum tatsächlichen Status einer Wissenschaft zu verhelfen, zeigt sich daran, dass er konkret praktische Probleme der Psychologie erörtert. Zur psychologischen Betrachtung brauche es Talent und feine Empfindung, sowie eine Unbefangenheit von vorgefassten Meinungen.<sup>17</sup> Weiterführend benötige es Übung im Beobachten, Bekanntschaft mit dem Gegenstand, sowie „Kenntnis der besonderen Umstände, die das Geschäfte der geistigen Beobachtung erschwehren.“<sup>18</sup> Schwierigkeiten in der Methode erkennt Schmid dabei neben der Mannigfaltigkeit des Stoffes<sup>19</sup> in der Nichtmathematisierbarkeit der Psychologie, womit er sich Kants Kritik an dieser Stelle anschließt.<sup>20</sup> Johann Friedrich Herbart hingegen, Kants Nachfolger auf dem Königsberger Lehrstuhl für Logik und Metaphysik, entwickelte in seiner Schrift *Psychologie als Wissenschaft, neu gegründet auf Erfahrung, Metaphysik und Mathematik* im Jahr

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<sup>17</sup> Vgl. Carl Christian Erhard Schmid, *Empirische Psychologie* (Jena: Verlag der Crökerschen Handlung, 1791), zuletzt geprüft am 30.01.2024, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10044345?page=7>, S. 108.

<sup>18</sup> Schmid, *Empirische Psychologie*, S. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Vgl. Schmid, *Empirische Psychologie*, S. 111.

<sup>20</sup> Vgl. Schmid, *Empirische Psychologie*, S. 114.

1825 den Versuch, die Psychologie im Fahrwasser mathematischer Methoden in den Status einer Wissenschaft zu überführen.<sup>21</sup>

Neben den beiden genannten Autoren wären hier noch viele weitere zu nennen, wie etwa Johann Christian Reil (1759-1813), Johann Christian August Heinroth (1733-1843), Friedrich August Carus (1770-1807), Johann August Eschenmayer (1768-1852) oder Friedrich Eduard Beneke (1798-1854). Allen gemeinsam ist, dass sie die Psychologie unabhängig der kantischen Kritik als wissenschaftliche Disziplin begreifen<sup>22</sup> und gleichzeitig aus der Perspektive der Rezeption vornehmlich Randgestalten der Philosophiegeschichte darstellen. Ein großer angelegtes Forschungsprojekt der DFG, das die damals vorwiegend in Jena stattfindenden Entwicklungen analysiert hatte, hat diese frühe Genese der Psychologie als Wissenschaft untersucht.<sup>23</sup> Dabei wurde hier und in anderen Darstellungen der Psychologie dieser Zeit ignoriert, dass gerade einer der wichtigsten Frühromantiker einen originären Beitrag zu dieser Debatte geliefert hatte. Die Rede ist von Friedrich Schleiermacher.

### 3. Der frühe Schleiermacher und die Psychologie

Schleiermacher kann mit gutem Recht als einer der bedeutendsten Vertreter der deutschen Romantik bezeichnet werden.<sup>24</sup> Er verkehrte im berühmten Berliner Salon der Henriette Herz und lernte dort Friedrich Schlegel kennen, mit dem er einige Jahre seine Dienstwohnung am Anhalter-Bahnhof teilte. Es war wesentlich Schlegel, der Schleiermacher zu seiner berühmten Frühschrift *Reden über die Religion an die gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* moti-

<sup>21</sup> Vgl. Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft neu gegründet auf Erfahrung, Metaphysik und Mathematik* 1 (Königsberg: August Wilhelm Unzer, 1824), zuletzt geprüft am 08.02.2024, [https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/herbart\\_psychologie01\\_1824?p=7](https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/herbart_psychologie01_1824?p=7).

<sup>22</sup> Insgesamt zur psychologischen Landschaft in Deutschland siehe die umfassende Darstellung bei Max Dessoir. (Vgl. Max Dessoir, *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Psychologie*, 2. Aufl. (Amsterdam: E. J. Bonset, 1964).)

<sup>23</sup> Vgl. „DFG - GEPRIS - Empirische Psychologie und Anthropologie - Physiologie oder Seelenlehre?“ zuletzt geprüft am 06.12.2023, <https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/5116496>.

<sup>24</sup> Siehe hierzu den immer noch einschlägigen Aufsatz von Kurt Nowaks (Vgl. Kurt Nowak, *Schleiermacher und die Frühromantik: Eine literaturgeschichtliche Studie zum romantischen Religionsverständnis und Menschenbild am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, Reprint 2021 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2022); und die Dissertation Mirjam Sauers, *Rede und Unendlichkeit: Modelle der Religionskommunikation zwischen Literatur, Rhetorik und Predigt bei Friedrich Schleiermacher* 29 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021).

vierte.<sup>25</sup> Daneben beteiligte sich Schleiermacher auch mit eigenen Beiträgen an der frühromantischen Zeitschrift *Athenaeum*, die von den Brüdern Schlegel in Berlin herausgegeben wurde. In diesem häufig polemischen Format bezogen die Romantiker:innen Stellung zum geistigen Geschehen ihrer Zeit. Hier findet sich etwa auch eine polemische Rezension über Kant, die aus der Feder des jungen Schleiermachers stammt. Konkret schrieb Schleiermacher eine Rezension zu Kants 1798 erschienener *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*. Dieser Text bietet nicht nur eine der ersten Beschäftigungen Schleiermachers mit der Psychologie, sondern bereits hier finden sich die Anlagen, die für den späten Schleiermacher die Programmatik seines psychologischen Kollegs bilden werden.

Die Polemik gegen Kants *Anthropologie* gilt es deshalb als frühe Beschäftigung Schleiermachers mit der Psychologie zu deuten, weil die *Anthropologie* trotz Kants Kritik eine Fortführung des Projekts der klassischen empirischen Psychologie darstellt. So folgt sie weitestgehend dem Aufbau ihres Gegenstücks bei Wolff.<sup>26</sup> Der Unterschied zwischen Kant und Wolff ist dabei, dass für Kant, aus den genannten Gründen, die empirische Psychologie nicht in den Status einer Wissenschaft aufsteigen kann. Damit bildet sie auch keinen Teil der Metaphysik, sondern wird zu einer Art pragmatischen Menschenkunde herabgestuft.<sup>27</sup> Sie führt zu keinen wissenschaftlichen Aussagen, sondern erhält vielmehr den Status einer Ratgeberliteratur.

Innerhalb der *Anthropologie* differenziert Kant zwischen verschiedenen möglichen Formen der Anthropologie. Diese sei einerseits als physiologische Anthropologie, also einer Physiologie, die den Menschen vornehmlich als Körper in den Blick nimmt und einer pragmatischen Anthropologie, die den Menschen zum Weltbürger erziehen möchte, möglich.<sup>28</sup> Dabei könne sie

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<sup>25</sup> Vgl. Hans-Martin Kim, „Berliner Charité-Prediger (1796-1802),“ in Ohst, *Schleiermacher Handbuch*.

<sup>26</sup> Beide beginnen mit dem Erkenntnisvermögen und dem Verweis auf die äußeren und inneren Sinne. In Folge erarbeiten sie das höhere Erkenntnisvermögen in Form von Denken und Rationalität, um im Anschluss das Gefühl und zuletzt das Begehrungsvermögen zu thematisieren.

<sup>27</sup> Vgl. Roderich Barth, „Dogmatik mit Gefühl? Überlegungen zur Re-Psychologisierung der theologischen Hermeneutik,“ in *Die Entdeckung der inneren Welt Religion und Psychologie in theologischer Perspektive*, hrsg. von Annette Haußmann, Niklas Schleicher und Peter Schütz, *Praktische Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), S. 65.

<sup>28</sup> „Die physiologische Menschenkenntnis geht auf die Erforschung dessen, was die Natur aus dem Menschen macht, die pragmatische auf das was er als freihandelndes Wesen aus sich selber macht oder machen kann und soll.“ (Kant, AA VII, *Anthropologie*, 119, zitiert nach: Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, Reprint 2020, 9 Bde., hrsg. von Königlich Preußische Akademie der

jedoch eben nicht in den Status einer Wissenschaft aufsteigen, weil ihre Methode der Introspektion die entscheidenden Kriterien gerade nicht erfüllt.<sup>29</sup>

Schleiermachers Kritik zielt dabei weniger darauf, wiederum Kants Kritik an der Introspektion zu entkräften, wie es sich etwa bei Schmid findet. Vielmehr unterzieht Schleiermacher den, in Kants *Anthropologie* angelegten, Dualismus einer grundlegenden Kritik: „Der in Kants Denkart gegründete und hier ganz eigentlich aufgestellte Gegensatz zwischen physiologischer und pragmatischer Anthropologie macht nemlich beide unmöglich.“<sup>30</sup> Warum Schleiermacher hier den kantischen Dualismus kritisiert, wird im Horizont seiner in Anlehnung an Schelling entwickelten Identitätsphilosophie deutlich.<sup>31</sup> So formuliert Schleiermacher etwa in seinen Notizen für sein Ethik-Kolleg, wie er es im Wintersemester 1812 / 13 in Berlin gehalten hatte: „Also in der Vollendung ist Ethik Physik und Physik und Ethik.“<sup>32</sup> Im Hintergrund beider angeführten Zitate steht in letzter Konsequenz dieselbe Denkfigur und zwar die Ablehnung des kantischen Dualismus. Geist und Natur bilden für Schleiermacher nicht zwei entgegengesetzte Sphären des Seins. Eine Trennung in ein Reich der Natur und ein Reich der Vernunft ist für Schleiermacher nicht denkbar, praktische (Ethik) und theoretische (Physik) Vernunft müssen sich in letzter Konsequenz vielmehr gegenseitig durchdringen.

Spätestens in seiner ab 1811 ausgearbeiteten Dialektik führt Schleiermacher Physik und Ethik auf ein letztes unhintergebares Prinzip, den transzendenten Grund, zurück.<sup>33</sup> Mit diesem auf eine letztgültige Einheit bezogenen transzendentalphilosophischen Entwurf steht Schleiermacher

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Wissenschaften, Gesammelte Schriften - Abtheilung I: Werke 7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1907).

<sup>29</sup> „[...] denn die Veränderung der Lage, worein der Mensch durch sein Schicksal gesetzt ist, oder in die er sich auch als Abenteurer selbst setzt, erschweren es der Anthropologie sehr, sie zum Rang einer förmlichen Wissenschaft zu erheben.“ (Kant, AA VII, Anthropologie, S. 121.)

<sup>30</sup> Schleiermacher, Rezension Anthropologie, S. 366, zitiert nach: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schriften aus der Berliner Zeit 1796-1799*, hrsg. von Günter Meckenstock, Schriften und Entwürfe 2 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Vgl. Andreas Arndt, „Schleiermachers Grundlegung der Philosophie in den Hallenser Vorlesungen,“ in *Friedrich Schleiermacher in Halle, 1804-1807*, hrsg. von Andreas Arndt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013). Zur Schelling-Rezeption Schleiermachers siehe: Vgl. Hermann Süsskind, *Der Einfluss Schellings auf die Entwicklung von Schleiermachers System* (Tübingen, 1909).

<sup>32</sup> Schleiermacher, Ethik 1812 / 13, S. 248, zitiert nach: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Entwürfe zu einem System der Sittenlehre*, 4 Bde., hrsg. von Otto Braun und Johannes Bauer, Werke. Auswahl in vier Bänden 2 (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1913).

<sup>33</sup> Vgl. Andreas Arndt, „Dialektik,“ in Ohst, *Schleiermacher Handbuch*.

damit in Mitten der Debatten der frühromantischen Philosophie und legt dabei einen eigenen Entwurf vor. Motiviert ist dieser Entwurf dadurch, wie es viele Romantiker:innen avisierten, die kantische Philosophie im Horizont eines einheitlichen Prinzips auf ein Fundament zu stellen. Diese Ausrichtung an einer, aller Philosophie zugrunde liegenden, Einheit liegt bereits der Argumentation in der *Anthropologie* zugrunde:

Es liegen dieser Eintheilung allerdings zwei richtige Gegensätze zum Grunde, der: alle Willkühr im Menschen ist Natur, und der: alle Natur im Menschen ist Willkühr; aber Anthropologie soll eben die Vereinigung beider seyn, und kann nicht anders als durch sie existiren; physiologische und pragmatische ist Eins und dasselbe, nur in verschiedener Richtung.<sup>34</sup>

Schleiermacher affirmiert grundsätzlich den kantischen Gegensatz von physiologischer und pragmatischer Anthropologie. Der Mensch ist sowohl Geist als auch Natur, demnach kann er entweder, in den Kategorien Schleiermachers gesprochen, im Horizont der Ethik oder der Physik angesprochen werden. Diese Perspektiven dürfen jedoch nicht völlig voneinander getrennt werden, wenn doch Physik in letzter Konsequenz zur Ethik wird und umgekehrt. Demnach muss auch die Anthropologie eine Vereinigung beider Sphären sein.

Schleiermacher deutet nun im unmittelbaren Anschluss die zeitgenössische Psychologie des späten 18. Jahrhunderts im Horizont dieser Teilung der Anthropologie:

Die ehemalige Psychologie, von der jetzt Gott sey Dank nicht mehr die Rede ist, abstrahirte von dem letzten dieser beiden Sätze, und konnte deshalb auf die Frage nicht antworten, wie es denn möglich sey, über das Gemüth zu reflektieren, wenn in dieser Reflexion keine Freiheit und also keine Bürgschaft für die Wahrheit derselben vorhanden sey.<sup>35</sup>

Schleiermacher spricht hier wahrscheinlich von ehemaliger Psychologie, weil er diese vollständig im Horizont der kantischen Perhorreszenz deutet. Gleichzeitig verrät er im angeführten Zitat noch genaueres über den Grund seiner Ablehnung der empirischen Psychologie. Sie kann nicht über das Gemüt reflektieren, weil dieser Reflexion Freiheit und, noch wichtiger, jegliche „Bürgschaft für die Wahrheit“ fehlt. Die Psychologie hat demnach zwar einen empirischen Gegenstandsbereich, die Phänomene des inneren Sinns, doch ihr fehlt die begriffliche Systematizität, vor deren Hintergrund

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<sup>34</sup> Schleiermacher, Rezension *Anthropologie*, S. 366.

<sup>35</sup> Schleiermacher, Rezension *Anthropologie* 1798, S. 366.

diese Phänomene im wissenschaftlichen Vollzug untersucht werden können. Konkret: Wissenschaft bedeutet Nachvollziehbarkeit, doch die Psychologie kann aufgrund des Fremdpsychischen nicht nachvollziehbar sein. Die Phänomene des inneren Sinns bleiben stets subjektiv, weswegen sie nicht auf gemeinsame Begriffe bezogen werden können. Eine ähnlich gelagerte Kritik findet sich ebenfalls in Schleiermachers *Grundlinien* aus dem Jahr 1803.<sup>36</sup>

Nicht nur Schleiermacher entwickelte im Ausgang von Kant eine scharfe Skepsis gegenüber der noch in Genese begriffenen empirischen Psychologie. Vor allem Fichte stand hier in direkter Auseinandersetzung mit Schmid in Jena. Dabei handelt es sich um einen Streit, der teils in wilder Polemik ausgetragen wurde.<sup>37</sup> Ebenfalls Hegel beäugte die Wissenschaftsfähigkeit der empirischen Psychologie argwöhnisch.<sup>38</sup> Inhaltlich liegt hier zumeist eine ähnliche Kritik zugrunde. Die empirische Psychologie arbeitet ohne Rekurs auf das transzendente Selbstbewusstsein und damit ohne einen einheitlichen Begriff von Subjektivität. Damit werden jedoch die Phänomene des inneren Sinns nicht im Horizont einer begrifflichen Grundlage reflektiert. Diese fehlende begriffliche Grundlage habe nun zur Folge, dass die Psychologie nie auf allgemeine Aussagen führe, sondern stets bei den besonderen Phänomenen stehenbleiben müsse.<sup>39</sup>

Im Horizont dieser Einschätzung muss es verwundern, dass Schleiermacher insgesamt viermal Vorlesungen über die Psychologie ge-

<sup>36</sup> „Denn zuerst muß die Ärmlichkeit jeder bisherigen Seelenlehre Jedem einleuchten, die große Mangelhaftigkeit und Gemeinheit ihres Fachwerkes, welche, was nur irgend über das mechanische hinausgeht, weder begreifen noch construiren kann.“ (Schleiermacher, *Grundlinien* 1803, S. 258, zitiert nach: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schriften aus der Stolper Zeit 1802-1804*, hrsg. von Eilert Herms, Günter Meckenstock, und Michael Pietsch, *Schriften und Entwürfe* 4 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Vgl. Manfred Frank, „Unendliche Annäherung“: *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, 1. Aufl., Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1328 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2011), S. 532-568. Vgl. Temilo van Zantwijk und Paul Ziche, „Fundamentalphilosophie oder empirische Psychologie? Das Selbst und die Wissenschaften bei Fichte und CCE Schmid,“ *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, Nr. 4 (2000).

<sup>38</sup> „Die Psychologie gehört, wie die Logik, zu denjenigen Wissenschaften, die in neuern Zeiten von der allgemeineren Bildung des Geistes und dem tiefern Begriffe der Vernunft noch am wenigsten Nutzen gezogen haben, und befindet sich in einem höchst schlechten Zustande.“ (Georg W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse: (1817)*, hrsg. von Wolfgang Bonsiepen und Klaus Grotzsch, *Gesammelte Werke / Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In Verbindung mit der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft hrsg. von der Nordrhein-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. / In Verbindung mit der Hegel-Kommission der Nordrhein-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften ...*] Bd. 13 (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), S. 206).

<sup>39</sup> Zur Kritik der empirischen Psychologie seitens Kants, Fichtes, Schellings und Hegels siehe: Vgl. Dieter Sturma, „Philosophie der Psychologie,“ *Journal für Psychologie* 10, Nr. 1 (2002), zuletzt geprüft am 01.02.2024, [https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/document/2820/1/ssoar-journpsycho-2002-1-sturma-philosophie\\_der\\_psychologie.pdf](https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/document/2820/1/ssoar-journpsycho-2002-1-sturma-philosophie_der_psychologie.pdf).

halten hatte.<sup>40</sup> In dieser Frage muss sich demnach zwingend ein Umdenken vollzogen haben. Auch wenn dieses Umdenken wohl nur schwerlich genau datiert werden kann, schien es bereits 1816, also zwei Jahre vor Schleiermachers erstem Psychologie-Kolleg abgeschlossen zu sein. So findet sich in diesem Jahr, angezeigt durch einen Brief Schleiermachers an seinen Freund Johann Christian Gaß, eine ganz anders gelagerte Bewertung der Psychologie:

Wie sehne ich mich danach ein und anderes solche specielle Collegium einmal lesen zu können – aber leider fehlen mir noch ganze Disciplinen, an die ich nicht kommen kann, Einleitung ins Neue Testament, Psychologie, Aesthetik.<sup>41</sup>

Schleiermacher reflektiert hier gegenüber seinem Freund Kollegs, deren Ausarbeitung er für die Zukunft plant. Ganz explizit schreibt Schleiermacher hier gegenüber seinem Freund, dass er sein philosophisches System noch wesentlich durch die Psychologie zu ergänzen gedenkt.

#### 4. Die *Psychologievorlesungen* Schleiermachers

Tatsächlich vermeldet zwei Jahre nach diesem Brief das Vorlesungsverzeichnis der noch jungen Berliner Universität ein Psychologie-Kolleg des Theologieprofessors.<sup>42</sup> Das genannte Kolleg ist das erste von insgesamt vier, die Schleiermacher bis zu seinem Tod halten sollte. Der Euphorie des Herausgebers Leopold George<sup>43</sup> und des frühen Rezipienten Wilhelm Dilthey<sup>44</sup> zum Trotz wurden diese Vorlesungen im Unterschied zu prägnanten Arbeiten aus Schleiermachers Gesamtwerk kaum rezipiert. Paradig-

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<sup>40</sup> Zu den *Psychologievorlesungen* Schleiermachers insgesamt siehe: Vgl. Dorothea Meier, *Schleiermachers Psychologie: Eine Phänomenologie der Seele*, Erziehung, Schule, Gesellschaft Band 84 (Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> Schleiermacher, Brief an Gaß, S. 505, zitiert nach: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Briefwechsel 1813-1816*, 15 Bde., hrsg. von Sarah Schmidt und Simon Gerber, Abteilung V: Briefwechsel und biographische Dokumente 13 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Vgl. Wolfgang Virmond, *Die Vorlesungen der Berliner Universität 1810-1834 nach dem deutschen und lateinischen Lektionskatalog sowie den Ministerialakten* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), S. 166.

<sup>43</sup> Vgl. George in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Psychologie: Aus Schleiermachers Handschriftlichen Nachlasse und Nachgeschriebenen Vorlesungen*, hrsg. von Leopold George (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1862), S. VII.

<sup>44</sup> Vgl. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Leben Schleiermachers. Zweiter Band: Schleiermachers System als Philosophie und Theologie*, 1. Aufl., hrsg. von Martin Redeker 14 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), S. 365.



matisch für diese Rezeption hatte der noch junge Walter Benjamin für diesen Text nur scharfe Polemik übrig.<sup>45</sup>

Man könnte meinen, dass Schleiermachers Entwurf deswegen bisher nur eine Randnotiz in der Geschichte der Philosophie geblieben ist, weil es gemeinsam mit den anderen empirisch-psychologischen Entwürfen im Horizont veralteter wissenschaftlicher Paradigmen steht und damit obsolet geworden ist. Doch das Kolleg ist in seinem Selbstverständnis gerade nicht als Fortführung der empirischen Psychologie formuliert, wie es Schleiermacher – mit einigem Selbstvertrauen – in seinem erstes Manuskriptheft formuliert: „Wenig Vorgänger sind erst da, und nur die ersten Schritte können gethan werden.“<sup>46</sup> Im Hinblick auf die Psychologie als Disziplin im Allgemeinen kann im Jahr 1818 nicht mehr von wenigen Vorgängern gesprochen werden. Wie bereits ausgeführt, war die Psychologie in dieser Zeit vielmehr ein weit verbreitetes Modethema. Schleiermacher war dies natürlich bewusst und auch seine Bibliothek zeugt von zahlreichen psychologischen Monographien.<sup>47</sup> Demnach muss das Zitat in der Hinsicht gedeutet werden, dass die Art und Weise, wie Schleiermacher die Psychologie entwirft, in seiner Deutung nur wenige Vorgänger kennt. Tatsächlich nimmt Schleiermacher hier ein Projekt vor, dass in der psychologischen Landschaft des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts singulär ist. Er versucht wesentlich die empirische und rationale Psychologie miteinander zu kombinieren. Die „Psychologie“ oder „Seelenlehre“, wie sie Schleiermacher zwischen 1818 und 1834 seinen Zuhörern präsentiert, ist gerade keine bloß empirische Disziplin, sondern sie beinhaltet ein rationales Moment. Konkret geht es Schleiermacher um eine Verbindung von empirischer und rationaler Psychologie.<sup>48</sup> Diese Verbindung gab es, wie angeführt, bereits bei Christian Wolff, mit dessen Philosophie Schleiermacher vermittelt über seinen Lehrer Johann August Eberhard bestens vertraut war.<sup>49</sup> Das entscheidende bei

<sup>45</sup> „Für ein Seminar [...] mache ich ein Referat über Schleiermachers Psychologie, ein in Notizen und Vorlesungen nachgelassenes Werk das keine philosophische Grundlage hat und nur in seiner Sprachtheorie negativ interessant ist.“ (Vgl. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, 1 Bd.: *Briefe 1910-1918*, Erste Auflage, hrsg. von Christoph Gödde und Henri Lonitz, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2016), S. 420).

<sup>46</sup> Schleiermacher, *Psychologie 1818*, S. 16, zitiert nach: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Psychologie*, 1. Aufl., 16 Bde., hrsg. von Dorothea Meier, Abteilung II: Vorlesungen 13 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> So beinhaltet Schleiermachers Bibliothek die psychologischen Entwürfe Eschenmeyers, Herbarts und Scheidlers. (Vgl. Günter Meckenstock, *Schleiermachers Bibliothek: Bearbeitung des faksimilierten Rauchschen Auktionskatalogs und der Hauptbücher des Verlages G. Reimer*, Schleiermacher-Archiv 10 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993).)

<sup>48</sup> Schleiermacher, *Psychologie 1818*, S. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Vgl. Ulrich Barth, „Jugend- und Wanderjahre (1768 – 1796)“, in Ohst, *Schleiermacher Handbuch*.

Schleiermacher ist nun, dass er die rationale Psychologie im Horizont der kantischen Vernunftkritik im Sinne einer Theorie des transzendentalen Selbstbewusstseins umdeutet. Damit bietet er eine Reformulierung der wolffschen Psychologie unter kritizistischen Bedingungen.

In diesem Horizont steht demnach auch die unterschiedliche Bewertung der Psychologie beim frühen und beim späten Schleiermacher, denn mit Blick auf die Manuskripte wird deutlich, dass sich eine derart radikale Umdeutung der Psychologie durch Schleiermacher keineswegs feststellen lässt. Die in *Anthropologie* und *Grundlinien* diagnostizierte Kritik betrifft keineswegs die Psychologie insgesamt, sondern immer nur ihre empirische Form. Es ist eben jene empirische Psychologie, die Schleiermacher auch noch in seinem Psychologie-Manuskript in ähnlichem Wortlaut kritisiert. Sie liefere im strengen Sinne keine wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis, sondern vornehmlich Anekdoten aus der Seelenlehre.<sup>50</sup> Dabei fehle ihr wesentlich die Systematizität. Doch auch die rationale Psychologie nimmt Schleiermacher kritisch in den Blick.<sup>51</sup> Die reine rationale Psychologie kann auch nach Schleiermacher keine substanzontologischen Aussagen über die Seele beweisen.<sup>52</sup>

Im Kern lautet der Vorwurf, dass beide Formen, sei es die empirische oder rationale Psychologie in reiner Form überhaupt nicht zum Tragen kommen können. Dies ist nicht möglich, weil nach Schleiermacher Empirie ausschließlich im Horizont von Begriffen möglich wird, Begriffe wiederum ohne Empirie keine Erkenntnisse liefern können. Im Hintergrund dieser Entscheidung steht ein wissenschaftstheoretisches Anliegen.<sup>53</sup> Als Kantianer geht Schleiermacher selbstverständlich nicht hinter die kopernikanische Wende zurück. Das Zusammenspiel von Begriff und Anschauung ist die notwendige Bedingung jeder Erkenntnis. Im Unterschied zu Kant geht Schleiermacher weiter und stellt fest, Empirie und Spekulation, Erfahrung und Begriff müssen einander durchdringen. Mit den Begriffen treten wir an die Wirklichkeit heran, doch diese werden regelmäßig durch die Erfahrung modifiziert und verändert. Es stellt sich nun wesentlich die Frage: Welche Elemente bieten für Schleiermacher die empirische und welche die rationale Psychologie?

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<sup>50</sup> Vgl. Schleiermacher, *Psychologie 1833* / 34 Berlin, S. 877.

<sup>51</sup> „[...] also ist die Psychologie a priori eine Täuschung.“ (Schleiermacher, *Psychologie 1818*, S. 16.)

<sup>52</sup> So verbannt Schleiermacher die Frage nach der Unsterblichkeit der Seele aus der Psychologie. (Schleiermacher, *Psychologie 1818*, S. 24.)

<sup>53</sup> Zu den wissenschaftstheoretischen Überlegungen bei Schleiermacher siehe: Vgl. Sarah Schmidt, *Die Konstruktion des Endlichen: Schleiermachers Philosophie der Wechselwirkung*, Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie 67 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), S. 310.

#### 4.1. Empirische Psychologie

In der Forschung ist umstritten, welche Rolle die empirische Psychologie tatsächlich für Kant spielt.<sup>54</sup> Zweifelsfrei ist es jedoch wesentlich sein Dualismus, vor dessen Hintergrund die empirische Psychologie und ihr Gegenstandsbereich in Rechtfertigungsdruck gerieten. In den Bereich der Natur fallen die Phänomene der äußeren Sinne, in den Bereich der Vernunft die allgemeinen logischen Gesetze, wie die der transzendentalen Erkenntnis oder der Mathematik.<sup>55</sup> Auf lange Sicht löste die Psychologie dieses Dilemma, indem sie das Psychische als Teil der Natur deutete und im Horizont experimenteller Methoden untersuchte.<sup>56</sup> Demnach orientiert sich die Psychologie spätestens seit Hermann Ebbinghaus und Wilhelm Wundt vorwiegend am Methodenideal der Naturwissenschaften. Charakteristisch für die frühe Phase der empirischen Psychologie ist dabei, dass hier ein Bewusstsein darüber wachgehalten wird, dass sich das psychische Innenleben nicht ohne weiteres in den kantischen Dualismus einordnen lässt. Andreas Arndt hat diese Gemengelage präzise auf den Begriff gebracht:

Mit dem Ausschluss der rationalen Psychologie einerseits und der Auflösung der empirischen Psychologie in ‚Weltkunde‘ andererseits scheint sich die Seele selbst als der eigentümliche Gegenstand der Psychologie verflüchtigt zu haben. Die Psychologie [...] bedurfte daher zur Klärung ihres Gegenstandes, ihrer Prinzipien und ihres Status als Wissenschaft ein neues Fundament. Dieses konnte nur dadurch gewonnen werden, dass die Art und Weise ihrer Behandlung durch Kant, die strikte Trennung von Natur und Freiheit, Sinnlichkeit und Vernunft, überwunden wurde.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Vgl. Dina Emundts, „Kant über innere Erfahrung,“ in *Was ist und was sein soll: Natur und Freiheit bei Immanuel Kant*, hrsg. von Udo Kern (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007). Vgl. Katharina T. Kraus, „Rethinking the Relationship between Empirical Psychology and Transcendental Philosophy in Kant,“ in *Psychologie*, hrsg. von Dina Emundts und Sally Sedgwick, Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus 15 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019). Vgl. Dietmar H. Heidemann, „Innerer und äußerer Sinn: Kants Konstitutionstheorie empirischen Selbstbewusstseins,“ in *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung*, hrsg. von Volker Gerhardt, Rolf-Peter Horstmann und Ralph Schumacher (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2001). Vgl. Abhaya C. Nayak und Eric Sotnak, „Kant on the Impossibility of the 'Soft Sciences',“ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55, Nr. 1 (1995). Vgl. Gerhard Schönrich, „Kant und die vermeintliche Unmöglichkeit einer wissenschaftlichen Psychologie,“ *Psychologie und Geschichte* 2, Nr. 3 (1991).

<sup>55</sup> Vgl. Heidemann, „Innerer und äußerer Sinn.“

<sup>56</sup> Vgl. Eckardt, *Kernprobleme in der Geschichte der Psychologie*, S. 71f.

<sup>57</sup> Andreas Arndt, „'Spekulative Blicke auf das geistige Prinzip': Friedrich Schleiermachers Psychologie,“ *Dialogische Wissenschaft*, 1998, S. 383.

Die Überwindung des von Arndt angeführten Gegensatzes ist im Kern ein romantisches Projekt. Die Trennung des Menschen in Natur und Freiheit, Geist und Materie ist es wesentlich, die die Romantiker:innen<sup>58</sup> zu überwinden suchten. Dabei konnten sie auf eine Prägung zurückgreifen, wie sie der frühe Schelling in seinen naturphilosophischen Erörterungen erarbeitet hatte, den naturphilosophischen Lebensbegriff.

Im Kern geht es mit diesem Begriff um eine Verschränkung spinozistischer und aristotelischer Anliegen. Spinozistisch, weil hier Geist und Materie, Leib und Seele als zwei verschiedene Perspektiven des einen Seins gedeutet werden<sup>59</sup>, aristotelisch, weil die Seele als das formgebende Prinzip des Leibes gedeutet wird.<sup>60</sup> Im Unterschied zur kategorialen Trennung im kantischen Dualismus, durchdringen sich Vernunft und Natur in dieser Logik gegenseitig. Leben besteht schon immer in der Vereinigung von Geist und Natur. Die Natur wird damit nicht als eigene Sphäre von einem Reich der Freiheit abgegrenzt, sondern ihrerseits als von Freiheit, Geist und Vernunft durchdrungen interpretiert. In dieser Form spielt der Begriff eine tragende Rolle für zahlreiche der empirisch-psychologischen Entwürfe des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts.<sup>61</sup> In der Logik des naturphilosophischen Lebensbegriffs stehen das organische und das geistige Sein in einer, letztlich monistisch begründeten, Kontinuität. Die der Introspektion gegebenen Phänomene, die noch in Kants Dualismus nicht eindeutig bestimmt werden

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<sup>58</sup> In diesem Falle soll durch die geschlechtsneutrale Angabe an dieser Stelle nicht etwa eine historische Situation beschönigt werden, sondern vielmehr darauf hingewiesen werden, dass durchaus auch Frauen sich aktiv in diese Debatten einbrachten. (Vgl. Dalia Nassar und Kristin Gjesdal, Hrsg., *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2021). Vgl. Joanna Raisbeck, *Karoline von Günderrode*, *Germanic literatures* 26 (Oxford: Legenda, 2022), Dissertation.)

<sup>59</sup> Vgl. Michael Pauen, „5. Spinoza und die Identitätstheorie (2p1–2p13)“, in *Baruch de Spinoza: Ethik in geometrischer Ordnung dargestellt*, hrsg. von Michael Hampe und Robert Schnepf (Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Zur Psychologie des Aristoteles siehe: Vgl. Hubertus Busche, *Die Seele als System: Aristoteles' Wissenschaft von der Psyche*, *Paradeigmata* 25 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> So findet sich das Leben als Ausgangslage der Entwürfe etwa bei Eschenmayer, Heinroth, Schulze und Steffens. (Vgl. Carl August Eschenmayer, *Psychologie in drei Theilen als empirische, reine und angewandte* (Stuttgart, Tübingen: Johann Georg Cotta, 1817), zuletzt geprüft am 30.01.2024, <https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/Vta2/bsb10255081/bsb:BV005112481?page=5>. Vgl. Johann Christian August Heinroth, *Lehrbuch des Seelenlebens oder der Seelenstörungen und ihrer Behandlung: Vom rationalen Standpunkt aus entworfen* (Leipzig: Friedrich Christoph Wilhelm Vogel, 1818). Vgl. Henrich Steffens, *Anthropologie*, 2 Bde. 2 (Breslau: Josef Max, 1822). Vgl. Gottlob Ernst Schulze, *Psychische Anthropologie*, 3. Aufl. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1826), zuletzt geprüft am 30.01.2024, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10255534?page=5>.)

können, woraus auch ihr Schattendasein resultiert, treten für die, sich dem romantischen Lebensbegriff verpflichtet fühlenden, Psychologen des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts in eine Stufenfolge zwischen dem organischen und dem rein geistigen Sein. Vor dem Hintergrund dieser gedanklichen Figur werden sie als Gegenstand der Erfahrung gerechtfertigt.

Analog zu diesen Entwürfen greift auch Schleiermacher auf das Leben als Grundlage seines psychologischen Entwurfs zurück. Es dient ihm als empirische Ausgangslage seiner Psychologie. Der konkreten Nennung dieser Ausgangslage geht eine ausführliche Erörterung der verschiedenen Optionen innerhalb des Leib-Seele-Problems voran. In produktiver Abgrenzung von Dualismus, Materialismus und Spiritualismus<sup>62</sup> votiert Schleiermacher für den naturphilosophischen Lebensbegriff im Sinne Schellings.<sup>63</sup> Während Leben als Phänomen nach Schelling potenziell auf die gesamte Natur ausgreift<sup>64</sup>, thematisiert Schleiermacher in seinen *Psychologievorlesungen* ein Teilelement dieses Phänomens, das Seelenleben.<sup>65</sup> Seelenleben meint dabei das Leben wie es dem einzelnen im Horizont der inneren Erfahrung gegeben ist. Damit steht es konkret inmitten der angeführten Stufung zwischen dem organischen und dem rein geistigen Leben.

Im Unterschied zu den anderen Entwürfen der empirischen Psychologie des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts ist das methodische Grundproblem der Psychologie für Schleiermacher damit jedoch noch keineswegs gelöst. Kann im Horizont des Schellingschen Lebensbegriffs der kantische Dualismus umgangen werden, steht Schleiermacher nach wie vor vor der Frage, inwiefern von der Seele als einem einheitlichen Gegenstand der Psychologie gesprochen werden kann. Dabei ist die Psychologie für Schleiermacher gerade notwendig auf einen solchen einheitlichen Gegenstand verwiesen. Eben jene Gegenstandsdiskussion gerät im Horizont der empirischen Methode aus dem Fokus<sup>66</sup> und als Resultat dieser fehlenden Gegenstands-

<sup>62</sup> Vgl. Schleiermacher, *Psychologie* 1830, S. 133.

<sup>63</sup> „Wir gehn also vom Leben aus. Dies ist als Einzelnes im Gegensatz gegen alles andere und als lebendiges hat es den Grund seines Verhaltens im Gegensatz in sich, und der ist das Bestreben sich darin zu erhalten.“ (Schleiermacher, *Psychologie* 1818, S. 20.)

<sup>64</sup> Vgl. Bernhard Rang, „Schellings Theorie des Lebens,“ *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 42, Nr. 2 (1988).

<sup>65</sup> „Seelenleben, das wir betrachten [...]“ (Schleiermacher, *Psychologie* 1833 / 34 Berlin, S. 982.)

<sup>66</sup> So schreibt Schmid „Alle unsere Vorstellungen oder innere Erscheinungen und Wahrnehmungen begreifen wir unter dem Ausdruck *Seele*.“ (Schmid, *Empirische Psychologie*, S. 153.) und für Beneke werden die „Erscheinungen der Seele“ (Friedrich Eduard Beneke, *Erfahrungsseelenlehre als Grundlage alles Wissens* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1820), zuletzt geprüft am 30.01.2024, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10042728?page=5>, S. 8.) zum Untersuchungsgegenstand. Beide reflektieren jedoch nicht, wie weiterhin von einem einheitlichen Gegenstand

reflexion forderte Friedrich Albert Lange im Jahr 1866 schließlich, den Begriff und die Frage nach dem Gegenstand endgültig aus der wissenschaftlichen Psychologie zu verbannen.<sup>67</sup>

## 4.2. Rationale Psychologie

Schleiermacher deutet die rationale Psychologie ganz im Sinne Kants. Den substanzontologischen Seelenbegriff hält Schleiermacher ähnlich wie Kant für überholt.<sup>68</sup> Ebenfalls ähnlich wie Kant versteht Schleiermacher unter rationaler Psychologie bloße Selbstbewusstseinstheorie.<sup>69</sup> Wiederum im Unterschied zu Kant kennt er ein produktives Anschlussmoment jener rationalen Psychologie für die Psychologie überhaupt.

Das Problem, das Schleiermacher in der empirischen Psychologie, die in seiner Darstellung auf die Inhalte des Seelenlebens rekurriert, sieht, ist, dass sie ohne einen einheitlichen Gegenstand operiert. Eine solche Gegenstandsbestimmung wird nach Schleiermacher möglich, wenn die Erscheinungen des Seelenlebens im Horizont eines einheitlichen Grundes menschlicher Subjektivität gedeutet werden.

Diese Einheit der Subjektivität bildet einen weiteren Punkt, an dem Schleiermacher streng genommen über Kant hinausgeht. Wie vielfältig dargestellt, ist es das zentrale Anliegen der nachkantischen, frühromantischen Philosophie, die durch Kant vorgebene Teilung der Philosophie zu überwinden.<sup>70</sup> Bekanntermaßen entwickelte Kant sowohl eine Kritik der reinen als auch der praktischen Vernunft. Das hieraus resultierende Problem war, inwiefern beide Kritiken als auf ein einheitliches Prinzip zurückgehend verstanden werden können. Den Lösungsversuch, wie ihn Kant in seiner *Kritik der Urteilskraft* vornahm, sollte für seine Nachfolger unbefriedigend bleiben. Das Grundanliegen frühromantischer Philosophie war demnach die

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gesprochen werden kann. Herbart reflektiert diese methodische Schieflage, hält den Begriff jedoch noch im Sinne einer Heuristik für rechtfertigbar. (Vgl. Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft neu gegründet auf Erfahrung, Metaphysik und Mathematik*, S. 24.)

<sup>67</sup> Vgl. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus seit Kant*, S. 877.

<sup>68</sup> Ausdruck findet dies in Schleiermachers Ablehnung einer potenziell beweisbaren Unsterblichkeit der Seele. (Schleiermacher, *Psychologie* 1818, S. 24.)

<sup>69</sup> Dass Schleiermacher hier Kant folgt, drückt sich in folgender Notiz aus: „Ersteres könnte nur Ichlehre sein sofern das Ichsagen allem Beobachtungstoffe vorangeht.“ (Schleiermacher, *Psychologie* 1818, S. 6.)

<sup>70</sup> Vgl. Frank, *„Unendliche Annäherung“*. Vgl. Andreas Arndt und Walter Jaeschke, *Die klassische deutsche Philosophie nach Kant: Systeme der reinen Vernunft und ihre Kritik, 1785-1845*, 1. Aufl. (München: C.H. Beck, 2012), Vgl. Valentin Pluder, *Die Vermittlung von Idealismus und Realismus in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie: Eine Studie zu Jacobi, Kant, Fichte, Schelling und Hegel*, Spekulation und Erfahrung Abt. 2, Untersuchungen Bd. 57 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013), Zugl.: Bochum, Univ., Diss., 2010.

Suche nach einem einheitlichen Prinzip, um die kantische Psychologie schließlich zu vollenden.

Als genuiner Debattenbeitrag Schleiermachers muss vordergründig seine ab 1811 ausgearbeitete Dialektik verstanden werden. Die hier ange-stellten Überlegungen stehen mitunter auch im Horizont des nach-kantischen Einheitsproblems. So sucht Schleiermacher hier nach einem einheitlichen Prinzip von Denken und Wollen, theoretischer und praktischer Vernunft. Als diesen Einheitspunkt identifiziert Schleiermacher das Gefühl, das er weiter als ein unmittelbares Selbstbewusstsein klassifiziert. Die da-hinterstehende Programmatik wird im Horizont der subjektivitäts-theore-tischen Prämissen Schleiermachers deutlich. Jeder volitive und kognitive Akt ist durch ein Objekt bestimmt. Das Wollen greift intendiert auf das Objekt seiner Begierde, während das Denken vom Objekt seines Erkenntnisinhaltes abhängig ist. Gleichzeitig besteht in Denken und Wollen gleichermaßen ein Bewusstsein darüber, wer das Subjekt des Aktes ist. Damit bilden Denken und Wollen jeweils ein stetiges Verschränkungsmoment von Selbst- und Objektbewusstsein. Die Psychologie Schleiermachers setzt in ihrer empi-rischen Ausgangslage in diesem Verschränkungsmoment an. So thema-tisieren die *Psychologievorlesungen* mit den aufnehmenden und aus-strömenden Tätigkeiten nichts anderes, als das, was die Dialektik unter den Begriffen Denken und Wollen fasst. Im Horizont der Dialektik wird damit deutlich, dass das Seelenleben noch nicht auf die anvisierte Einheit der Subjektivität verweist. Das in Selbst- und Objektbewusstsein gespaltene Lebensmoment bietet gerade kein unmittelbares Selbstbewusstsein, denn ein unmittelbares Selbstbewusstsein kann nur ein solches sein, das gerade nicht mehr durch ein Objektbewusstsein vermittelt ist.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Die Deutung dieses Zentralstücks von Schleiermachers Philosophie ist in der Forschung umstritten: Falk Wagner deutet das unmittelbare Selbstbewusstsein im Sinne der Reflexionsaporie Fichtes. (Vgl. Falk Wagner, *Schleiermachers Dialektik: Eine kritische Interpretation* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1974), Zugl.: München, Univ., Habil.-Schr., 1971-1972, S. 141-146.) Manfred Frank versteht es als ein mangelndes Bewusstsein des Selbst, da es „für sein eigenes Sein nicht aufkommt, sondern vom Sein ‚schlechthin abhängt‘.“ (Vgl. Manfred Frank, *Selbstgefühl: Eine historisch-systematische Erkundung*, Orig.-Ausg., 1. Aufl., Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1611 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), S. 190.) Andreas Arndt geht demgegenüber davon aus, dass jenes Selbstbewusstsein seinerseits statt auf eine generische Subjektivität auf die Individualität rekurriert. (Vgl. Andreas Arndt, „Unmittelbarkeit als Reflexion: Voraussetzungen der Dialektik Friedrich Schleiermachers,“ in *Internationaler Schleiermacher-Kongress Berlin 1984*, hrsg. von Kurt-Victor Selge, Schleiermacher-Archiv 1 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1985).) Ulrich Barth hingegen deutet das unmittelbare Selbstbewusstsein als ein Bewusstsein des Lebens im Sinne der Erlebnispsychologie des späten 19. Jahrhunderts. (Vgl. Ulrich Barth, *Aufgeklärter Protestantismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), S. 368.)

Das unmittelbare Selbstbewusstsein wird für Schleiermacher erst im Horizont des Absoluten denkbar. In dieser konkreten Rolle ruft er es in seinem zweiten Psychologie-Manuskript aus dem Jahr 1830 auf:

Der Gegensatz zwischen dem bewußten Sein als Gattung und dem dem Bewußtsein gegebenen Sein muß im SelbstBewußtsein aufgehoben werden, also es muß dabei afficirt sein von einem Anderen. Also offenbar von einem worauf es nicht reagiren kann. = absolutes Abhängigkeitsgefühl.<sup>72</sup>

Die eine letzte Einheit verhindernde Spaltung des Selbstbewusstseins erscheint im angeführten Zitat in Form des „bewußten Sein[s] als Gattung und dem dem Bewußtsein gegebenen Sein“. Schleiermacher verweist hier auf eine Figur, die er zuvor als Gattungs- und Naturbewusstsein bestimmt hatte: Der Mensch versteht sich demnach sowohl als Teilhaber einer Gattung, gleichermaßen aber auch als ein Teil der Natur. Gewährleistet ist diese Einheit durch das religiöse Bewusstsein, das Schleiermacher als Repräsentanz des Absoluten im menschlichen Bewusstsein klassifiziert. Das Selbstbewusstsein im religiösen Bewusstsein verweist nicht mehr auf ein innerweltliches Objekt, sondern auf den allen innerweltlichen Objekten vorausgehenden transzendenten Grund. Damit steht es nicht mehr in der Verschränkung von Selbst- und Objektbewusstsein und bietet die gesuchte Einheit der Subjektivität.

In dieser Hinsicht wird das religiöse Bewusstsein schließlich konstitutiv für die Psychologie. Die hier gefundene Einheitsbedingung der Subjektivität ist es, die Schleiermacher auf die anthropologisch-empirische Einheit im Lebensbegriff bezieht. Die Phänomene des Seelenlebens werden demnach im Horizont eines einheitlichen Begriffs reflektiert. In dieser Korrelation von Begriff (Subjektivität) und Anschauung (Seelenleben) erkennt Schleiermacher die Bedingung der Möglichkeit von einem einheitlichen Gegenstand zu sprechen. Aufgabe der Psychologie als Seelenlehre ist es dabei, die Strukturmomente einer solchen Seele weiter auszuloten. Wesentlich vor dem Hintergrund dieser programmatischen Innovation hält Schleiermacher die Durchführung einer Psychologie und die Rede von einer Seele des Menschen auch im Nachgang an Kant für möglich.

## 5. Das Scheitern und das anhaltende Problem

Tatsächlich bietet Schleiermacher damit eine Innovation, die vorsichtig auch als ein Erbe der Romantik bezeichnet werden kann: die Auslotung der

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<sup>72</sup> Schleiermacher, Psychologie 1830, S. 163.



Bedingung der Möglichkeit einer Verbindung einer wie auch immer gearteten geistigen und einer wie auch immer gearteten materiellen Welt. Dahinter steckt die Einsicht, dass es wesentlich der Mensch ist, der sich sprachlich betätigt bzw. als kulturschaffendes Wesen in den Vordergrund tritt. Dabei schwebt er jedoch mit seiner Vernunft nicht im luftleeren Raum, sondern ist in eine natürliche Leibgebundenheit gegründet. Die Vernunft verweist damit auf ihre eigene Geschichte. Damit insistieren Schleiermacher und die romantische Anthropologie<sup>73</sup> insgesamt darauf, dass die menschliche Vernunft nicht unabhängig von ihrer natürlichen Verkörperung gedacht werden kann.

Mit Blick auf Psychologie und Anthropologie ist der Versuch Materielles und Geistiges im Sinne einer Totalität zu deuten im Zuge des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts aus der Mode gekommen. Es scheint hier vornehmlich der kantische Dualismus prägend gewesen zu sein. Die einseitig empirische Psychologie entwickelte sich zunehmend zu einer experimentell verfahrenen Disziplin, die sich explizit dem naturwissenschaftlichen Methodenideal verpflichtet sah.<sup>74</sup> In ihrer besonders radikalen Ausgestaltung, dem Behaviorismus des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts, führt dies zu einer grundsätzlichen Perhorreszenz einer Eigenlogik des Geistigen und des Bewusstseins.<sup>75</sup> Grob vereinfacht gesagt kann schließlich auch in der analytischen Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts ein Fortwirken der Subjektphilosophie gesehen werden.<sup>76</sup> In seiner Vermittlung durch die Natur gerät das Subjekt hier nicht in den Blick und Sprache als Ausdruck einer geistigen Welt wird in Unabhängigkeit zur materiellen und natürlichen Welt verstanden.

Der Versuch, beide Bereiche wieder aufeinander zu beziehen, findet sich vornehmlich bei Randgestalten der Philosophiegeschichte. Wilhelm Dilthey etwa, selbst Autor der ersten Schleiermacherbiographie<sup>77</sup>, versuchte die, wie er es nannte, beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie zur Grundlage aller Geisteswissenschaft zu erheben.<sup>78</sup> Das Anliegen war dabei,

<sup>73</sup> Zum Begriff siehe: Vgl. Manfred Engel, „Romantische Anthropologie: Skizze eines Forschungsprojektes,“ *Historische Anthropologie* 8, Nr. 2 (2000).

<sup>74</sup> Vgl. Eckardt, *Kernprobleme in der Geschichte der Psychologie*, S. 71 - 107.

<sup>75</sup> Vgl. John B. Watson, *Behaviorismus* (Köln, Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1968).

<sup>76</sup> Für die analytische Philosophie gerät im Rahmen eines *linguistic turns* vornehmlich die Sprache als Inhalt der Philosophie in den Blick. Dabei begreift sie die Sprache in einer Eigenlogik und in Unabhängigkeit zu ihrer Entstehung in einem menschlichen Bewusstsein. Elisabeth Leiss führt diesen Aspekt vor dem Hintergrund der Philosophie Richard Rorty aus. (Vgl. Elisabeth Leiss, *Sprachphilosophie*, De Gruyter Studium (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), S. 146-152.)

<sup>77</sup> Vgl. Dilthey, *Leben Schleiermachers. Zweiter Band*.

<sup>78</sup> Vgl. Wilhelm Dilthey, „Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie,“ in *Die Geistige Welt. Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens. Erste Hälfte. Abhandlungen zur Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*, hg. v. Georg Misch, 3. Aufl. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961).

trotz der Unterschiede<sup>79</sup>, Schleiermachers Projekt in seinen Grundzügen sehr ähnlich. In Rekurs auf das Leben des Bewusstseins sollte die Welt des objektiven Geistes, der Kunst und Kultur, hergeleitet werden. Literarische Erzeugnisse, etwa Gedichte, sollen, so Dilthey, im hermeneutischen Prozess nacherlebt werden. Im Hintergrund steht die feste Überzeugung, dass Sprache, die in dieser Logik eine Verschriftlichung des Erlebten darstellt, auf eine lebendige, natürliche Grundlage rekurriert. Ein ähnliches Projekt verfolgte etwa auch Edmund Husserl, der zwar die Philosophie Diltheys als Psychologismus kritisierte<sup>80</sup> und doch mit seiner Phänomenologischen Psychologie ein ähnlich gelagertes Projekt verfolgte. In ähnlicher Programmatik wie Schleiermacher<sup>81</sup> forderte er eine Verbindung von Transzendentalphilosophie und Psychologie. Auch hier steckt das Bedürfnis über den kantisch manifest gewordenen Dualismus von Freiheit und Natur hinauszugehen, empirisches und transzendentes Subjekt aufeinander zu beziehen. Die Inhalte der Psychologie, so Husserl, müssen in der eidetischen Reduktion in letzter Konsequenz auf transzendente Bewusstseinsstrukturen rückführbar sein.<sup>82</sup> Das natürliche des psychischen Innenlebens wird demnach auch hier mit dem transzendentalen, also logisch-geistigen verbunden.

Das implizite Anliegen dieser Projekte ist es, die Sphäre eines wie auch immer gearteten Innenlebens der wissenschaftlichen Beschäftigung und Untersuchung zugänglich zu machen, weil diese eine wichtige Vermittlungsfigur des materiellen Seins und der menschlichen Kultur und Sprache bildet. Wenn Philosophie ihrem Anspruch nach auf das gesamte Sein rekurrieren möchte, dann kommt sie nicht umhin diese Vermittlungssphäre kategorial zu bestimmen. In dieser Logik verweisen damit die empirischen Psychologen und auch Schleiermacher auf eine Lücke, dem kantischen Dualismus

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<sup>79</sup> Der entscheidende Unterschied zwischen Dilthey und Schleiermacher ist an dieser Stelle, dass die Transzendentalphilosophie für Dilthey keine Rolle mehr spielt.

<sup>80</sup> Vgl. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Philosophische Bibliothek v.601 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2017), S. 63-71.

<sup>81</sup> Gleichsam zu Schleiermachers Forderung einer Verbindung von rationaler und empirischer Psychologie fordert Husserl eine Verbindung von Psychologie und Transzendentalphilosophie.

<sup>82</sup> „Wir verstehen also, daß in der Tat eine unlösliche innere Verschwisterung zwischen Psychologie und Transzendentalphilosophie gegeben ist. Nun ist aber von da aus auch voranzusehen, daß ein Weg zu einer Transzendentalphilosophie über eine konkret ausgeführte Psychologie sich müsse führen lassen.“ (Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, hrsg. von Elisabeth Ströker, Philosophische Bibliothek 641 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2012), S. 223.)

entgeht. Nichtsdestotrotz sind alle Projekte, was im Horizont ihrer philosophiegeschichtlichen Rezeption deutlich wird, letzten Endes gescheitert.

Doch wo liegt hier das eigentliche Problem? Warum hält sich der kantische Dualismus so wirkmächtig, obwohl doch evident scheint, dass die geistige Welt als Konsequenz aus der natürlichen Welt folgt, denn es kann Sprache, Kultur und geistige Entitäten zwingend nur dann geben, wenn es auch Menschen gibt. Mit Blick zurück auf Schleiermacher werden die inhärenten Spannungen deutlich, die letzten Endes allen Projekten zugrunde liegen. Schleiermacher deutet, wie angeführt, das geistige und materielle Sein in einer Totalität, wie sie sich in seinem Lebensbegriff artikuliert. Damit überstrapaziert er diesen Totalitätsbegriff, denn dieser rekuriert sowohl auf das organische Sein als auch auf das menschliche Bewusstsein und ignoriert damit, dass geistiges und materielles letztlich einer dezidierten Eigenlogik folgen. Es bräuchte demnach eine Binnendifferenzierung innerhalb des weiten Lebensbegriffs, was wiederum erneut die klassisch dualistischen Probleme nach sich zieht. In seinem Monismus hingegen unterliegt Schleiermacher demselben Problem, wie er es seinerseits dem Materialismus zum Vorwurf gemacht hatte.<sup>83</sup>

Letztlich verstrickt er sich dabei in einen Widerspruch. Er postuliert, dass leibliches und geistiges Sein des Menschen einerseits einer Eigenlogik folgen, andererseits jedoch problemlos gleichermaßen, sind sie doch beide Leben, Gegenstand empirischer Untersuchung sein können. Es bleibt jedoch unklar, wie die postulierte Eigenlogik sich auch in der methodischen Untersuchung niederschlägt. Das methodische Problem der Introspektion reflektiert Schleiermacher gerade nicht. Das Syndrom eines solchen Projekts, das zumeist unter dem Etikett einer geisteswissenschaftlichen Psychologie lief, war dem Projekt demnach bereits bei Schleiermacher immanent. Dilthey wurde etwa von Ebbinghaus scharf kritisiert<sup>84</sup>, weil er wesentlich den wissenschaftlichen Status seiner avisierten Psychologie nicht klären konnte,

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<sup>83</sup> So argumentiert Schleiermacher konkret gegen den Materialismus: „aber ist nun ein Unterschied zwischen den verschiedenen Thätigkeiten, so muß man doch eine so und eine anders componirte Materie voraussetzen, und so kommen wir wieder auf den Unterschied von innern und äußern Veränderungen, von Veränderungen die dem Bewußtsein involviren und solche die nicht, was wir immer gegen einander abwägen müssen, und die Schwierigkeit bleibt immer die nämliche.“ (Schleiermacher, *Psychologie 1818 Hamburg*, S. 214.)

<sup>84</sup> Vgl. Mark Galliker, „Das geisteswissenschaftliche Forschungsprogramm der Psychologie: Diltheys 'Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie' sowie die Antwort von Ebbinghaus,“ in *Diltheys Werk und die Wissenschaften: Neue Aspekte; [die Ergebnisse der Dilthey-Tagung aus Anlass von Diltheys 100. Todestag]*, hrsg. von Gunter Scholtz (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2013).

Husserls Programm blieb demgegenüber eine ewige Systemskizze, die nie ausgestaltet worden war.<sup>85</sup>

Das letztlich dahinterstehende Problem hatte Kant bereits im Horizont des Fremdpsychischen reflektiert. Die „Phänomene des inneren Sinns“ entziehen sich gerade dem für Wissenschaftlichkeit notwendigen Rahmen. Für Aussagen auf die Natur haben wir Gewissheit und damit Wissenschaftlichkeit, weil sie intersubjektiv überprüft werden können. Aussagen der Logik und der Mathematik hingegen können ebenfalls überprüft werden, weil sie allgemein nachvollziehbar sind. Ihr Vermittlungsbereich, das Psychische hingegen, scheint sich als Vermittlungsgeschehen diesem Zugriff zu entziehen.

Alle genannten Versuche unternehmen demnach das Projekt über die engen von Kant gesteckten Grenzen der Wissenschaftlichkeit hinauszugehen. Auch wenn Kant in seiner Zurückhaltung Recht behalten sollte, wie anhand des Scheiterns aller Entwürfe deutlich wird, hatten doch die Romantiker:innen und insbesondere Schleiermacher ein elementares Problem vor Augen: die Vermittlung der natürlichen mit der geistigen Welt.

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<sup>85</sup> So urteilt etwa Christian Bermes zu Husserls Krisis-Schrift, in der die programmatische Verbindung von Psychologie und Transzendentalphilosophie forderte: „Die *Krisis*-Schrift existiert weniger als Buch denn als Vorhaben.“ (Christian Bermes, „Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie“, in *Husserl-Handbuch: Leben - Werk - Wirkung*, hrsg. von Sebastian Luft und Maren Wehrle (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2017), S. 97.)

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# Symphilosophie

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## “God’s First Hieroglyph”

### Novalis’s *Lehrlinge zu Sais* and Tieck’s *Runenberg* as Commentaries on Kant’s Isis-Inscription

*Eran Horowitz\**

#### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intricate relationships between Kant’s philosophical ideas and the early Romantic works of Novalis and Tieck, particularly focusing on their respective texts *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* and *Der Runenberg*. Kant’s exploration of the aesthetic appreciation of nature provides a foundation for discussions of irony and *Bildung* in these narratives. Through a comparative analysis, this article highlights the transformative and often perilous journey toward self-discovery and knowledge depicted in these works, emphasizing the inherent tension between human understanding and the natural world. The study further explores how irony is employed in these narratives to reflect the complexities of *Bildung* and the challenges involved in attaining a comprehensive understanding of nature.

*Keywords:* aesthetics, Sais, comparative literature, irony, hieroglyphs

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel untersucht die komplexen Beziehungen zwischen Kants philosophischen Ideen und den frühromantischen Werken von Novalis und Tieck, insbesondere ihre Texte *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* und *Der Runenberg*. Kants Erforschung der ästhetischen Wertschätzung der Natur bildet die Grundlage für Diskussionen über Ironie und Bildung in diesen Erzählungen. Durch eine vergleichende Analyse werden die transformierenden und oft gefährlichen Reisen zur Selbstentdeckung und zum Wissen hervorgehoben, die in diesen Werken dargestellt werden, und die inhärente Spannung zwischen menschlichem Verständnis und der natürlichen Welt betont. Die Studie untersucht weiter, wie Ironie in diesen Erzählungen verwendet wird, um die Komplexität der Bildung und die Herausforderungen, ein umfassendes Verständnis der Natur zu erlangen, widerzuspiegeln.

*Stichwörter:* Ästhetik, Sais, vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft, Ironie, Hieroglyphen

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\* MA in German Studies, PhD candidate in Comparative Literature, Tel Aviv University, Chaim Levanon St 55, Tel Aviv-Yafo, 6997801, Israel – [eran.witz@gmail.com](mailto:eran.witz@gmail.com)

## 1. “God’s First Hieroglyph”

Kant’s footnote from his 1790 *Kritik der Urteilskraft* preceded the Romantics’ interest in and problematization of the cult of Isis:

Vielleicht ist nie etwas Erhabeneres gesagt oder ein Gedanke erhabener ausgedrückt worden, als in jener Aufschrift über dem Tempel der *Isis* (der Mutter Natur): ‘Ich bin alles, was da ist, was da war, und was da sein wird, und meinen Schleier hat kein Sterblicher aufgedeckt.’<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps nothing more sublime has ever been said, or a thought ever been expressed more sublimely, than in that inscription above the temple of *Isis* (*Mother Nature*): ‘I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and no mortal has lifted my veil.’<sup>2</sup>

This footnote is taken from a scientific textbook by Segner, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian-Prussian scientist, which invites his readers—quite paradoxically—to delve into the secrets of nature using scientific study. Additionally, the footnote is followed by a paragraph that suggests the Herderian idea about the problem of signification: no absolute, adequate expression could be found for a ‘concept,’ nor could a concept totally grasp nature.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Kant proposes two levels of difference: between nature and its concept and between the concept and the words given to it. Kant calls these capacities Imagination (*Vorstellung*) and Understanding (*Verstand*). This problem does not go unanswered in the *Kritik*. It is the Genius who possesses them both.<sup>4</sup> In another much more famous passage, Kant defines the Genius as one who “gives the rule to art,” precisely based on his unconditional relationship with nature.<sup>5</sup> Still, Kant’s remark contains another element that opens a path toward the early Romantics’ appreciation of the myth: no mortal has unveiled Isis. This notion invites other interpretations of the myth or the possibility of an unconditional appreciation of nature in general, namely, of stories that account for non-geniuses, simple, or universal figures that approach nature, either through learning or through traveling.

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Leipzig, 1922), 171.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, including the First Introduction, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 185.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Including the First Introduction, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, with an introduction by Mary J. Gregor (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 317.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 175

In this article, I want to interpret texts that describe the initiatory process Kant suggests, combining it with the mystical, dangerous, and alongside what he sees as its inherent moral dangers. I will read Novalis’s *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* and Ludwig Tieck’s *Runenberg* as ironic commentaries on the formative (*Bildung*) aspect of Kant’s treatment of the myth. Specifically, I aim to show how Kant’s suggestive notes about the transformative power of the experience of nature, with its inherent dangers, were interpreted ironically by these two early Romantic writers: in Novalis, as acknowledging the impossibility of knowing nature, and in Tieck, as a cautionary tale of the dangers that acquaintance with nature entails. Indeed, Novalis and Tieck might have been acquainted with the Isis inscription through other sources, as the following discussion suggests. Yet Kant’s related thoughts of aesthetics, morality, and mortality play a vital philosophical role in the formative aspect of these writings. Before proceeding to close readings of the texts, a short history and elaboration of the Isis inscription interpretative tradition and the concepts of *Bildung* and irony are needed.

The earliest account of the veil of Isis is found in Plutarch’s *Histories*, in his account of the Persian conquest of Egypt. According to Plutarch, this temple contains the inscription: “I am all that has been, is now, and will be; no mortal has ever lifted my veil.”<sup>6</sup> The fashionable interest of the 18th and 19th centuries in the character of Isis as an emblem of nature can be attributed to Athanasius Kircher in his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, a bestseller in the mid-17th century. French encyclopedias and dictionaries from the latter half of the 18th century describe Isis as interchangeable with nature, depicted as a multi-breasted, beautiful woman covered by a veil.<sup>7</sup> Her beauty corresponds to nature’s beauty, her breasts to nature’s nourishing quality, and the veil to man’s “ignorance” about her mechanisms. The myth of Isis is related to the problem of Egyptian hieroglyphs, which were only deciphered in 1822. In his 1751 *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, Diderot wrote of language: “Poetic expression is a web of hieroglyphs which depict thought. In this sense, one might say that all poetry is emblematic.”<sup>8</sup> The mainly German fascination with hieroglyphs can be ascribed to the influence of Swedenborg, who described the relationship between the representant and the represented as a hieroglyph. The earliest prominent connection between the mystical

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in A. Leslie Willson, “Hesse’s Veil of Isis,” *Monatshefte* 55, no. 6 (November 1963), 313.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 238.

<sup>8</sup> See Liselotte Dieckmann, “The Metaphor of Hieroglyphics in German Romanticism,” *Comparative Literature* 7, no. 4 (Autumn 1955): 306-312.

theory of hieroglyphs and the myth of Isis can be traced to Herder, who, in his 1774 *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, saw nature as “God’s first hieroglyph.”<sup>9</sup>

In another part of his *Kritik*, Kant speaks of the correct way to aesthetically appreciate the pyramids—a physical human genius creation that he has never seen. In a passage from the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant almost initiates the beholder of such monuments: “In order to get the full emotional effect,” he writes, one must not look at them from “too far” nor from “too close.” Too far would not let one appreciate their magnitude, and too close would make the lower parts “vanish from his imagination” when he reaches the higher parts.<sup>10</sup> There, one might see the operation of his theory of the sublime or the aesthetic experience that exceeds the imagination. Nevertheless, both here and in his treatment of the Isis inscription, the language (as Assmann remarks<sup>11</sup>) remains initiatory, even pedagogical, rather than mystical. Hamann, a fervent reader of Kant, resisted his “violent divorce”<sup>12</sup> between Nature and God. Nature was not the hieroglyphical creation of God, as it was for Kant and later for Schlegel. Nature was rather where God immanently manifested. This Spinozistic view was later shared by Goethe, as he confesses in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.<sup>13</sup> Yet for Kant, as Monica Birthe Hoesch brilliantly observes, the usage of the Isis inscription and the references to Egyptian thoughts in general could not have expressed an inclination to pantheism, given his aversion to such theories.<sup>14</sup> But the readers of these two currents of thought might have sought an initiatory path within the secret language of nature.

The notion of irony, popularized by Friedrich Schlegel, was highly influential among his contemporaries. Its diversity, spanning from definitions such as “irony is the form of paradoxes”<sup>15</sup> to a succession of infinitely

<sup>9</sup> Herder, *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1774), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 108

<sup>11</sup> Jan Assmann, *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais – griechische Neugier und ägyptische Andacht* (1999), 62.

<sup>12</sup> Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Josef Nadler, 6 vols. (Vienna: Verlag Herder, 1949–1957), vol. 3 (reprinted Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1999), 3.

<sup>13</sup> See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke*. Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, Band 10 (Hamburg: 1948 ff.), 75–93

<sup>14</sup> Monica Birth Hoesch, “I Am All That Is, That Was, and That Shall Be, and No Mortal Has Lifted My Veil: Kant, Novalis, Goethe, and the Veiled Goddess Isis” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2005), 93.

<sup>15</sup> *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Erste Abteilung: Kritische Neuausgabe, Band 2 (München, Paderborn, Wien, Zürich, 1967), 147–164. First published in *Lyceum der schönen Künste*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Berlin, 1797), 152.



progressive dialectical discourse,<sup>16</sup> opens a possibility, I will argue, for a description of an educational process that enriches Kant’s view while examining its actual, human dimensions. By actual and human, I mean not only the prosaic enumeration of what Kant suggests potentially and theoretically for either a Genius or (in his citation of the Isis inscription) a dead person but also a widening and deepening of his thought to simpler, identifiable (non-genius) protagonists. Schiller, a close reader of Kant, took the first step in this direction. In his ballad *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais* (*The Veiled image at Sais*),<sup>17</sup> the apprentice asks the sage, “What would one have if one doesn’t have everything?” – referring to complete knowledge about creation. The Egyptian sage confirms, giving the example of harmony in which one note fails and thus ceases to be harmonious. But the fervent apprentice seeks to penetrate the truthful knowledge of nature. He enters the temple and violently removes the cover (*Schleier*) from Isis. Then, he decays slowly in grief and dies. His last words are: “Weh dem, der zu der Wahrheit geht durch Schuld, Sie wird ihm nimmermehr erfreulich sein.” (*Woe — woe to him who treads through Guilt to Truth!*)<sup>18</sup> In a related manner, Thomas Mann, in his reflection on the formative journey (*Bildungsweg*) of his *Zauberberg* protagonist, said: “There are two paths to life: one is the regular one, direct, honest. The other is bad, it leads through death – that is the way of genius.”<sup>19</sup> This small passage relates many elements present in Kant’s ‘hieroglyphical’ discussion, specifically his thoughts on man’s ability to decipher and experience nature.

## 2. Die Lehrlinge zu Sais

Friedrich von Hardenberg, known as Novalis, was an enthusiastic commentator on the most significant philosophical writings of the time and was a devoted reader of Kant. David W. Wood, in his introduction to the translation of Novalis’s *Kant Studien* (*Kant Studies*), quotes from his 1791

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<sup>16</sup> What Paul de Man called “endless parabasis”, see: “On the Concept of Irony”, from: Paul De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, edited and with an introduction by Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 1. (München, 1962), 224–226. English translation: Friedrich Schiller, *The Poems and Ballads of Schiller*, trans. Edward Bulwer Lytton (New York: T.Y. Crowell, [Date Unknown]), 88-89.

<sup>18</sup> It could thus be said that Schiller’s treatment of the truth is not yet irony (as in Novalis) but the pathos of the sublime. *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Hermann J. Weigand, *The Magic Mountain: A Study of Thomas Mann’s Novel Der Zauberberg* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 6.

notebook entry “Philosophy: Schiller, Herder, Lessing, I myself, Kant.”<sup>20</sup> Wood further mentions the comment made by Schlegel that Novalis was intensely preoccupied with Kant’s ethics.<sup>21</sup> Already in his *Kant Studien*, Novalis relates the study of the natural world to questions of development, illusion vs. truth, and knowledge of nature. See, for example, his surprising commentary on the relationship between the absolute and the singular:

The difference between illusion and truth consists in their varied connection – Truth is connected with the absolute, positive universe – Illusion only relates to specifically selected paradoxical parts of the universe, which it then elevates to an absolute totality – Hence, illusion is illness.<sup>22</sup>

These thoughts appear in a slightly different manner in his *Blüthenstaub (Pollen)*. The notion of illness, later to appear also as the emblem of the *Romantic-Classical* opposition in Goethe, further emphasizes what I will later show as the manifestation of the negative, or ironic, appreciation of the acquaintance with nature. Moreover, as Azade Seyhan observes, Kant’s “second Copernican revolution” was crucial for Novalis because it placed what has to be represented – ethical and aesthetic notions alike – in the human: “Kant places the firm, resting, legislative power a priori in us —the older philosophers placed it outside ourselves. In this way, he validated the counter position in philosophy—as in astronomy.”<sup>23</sup>

In her analysis of the *Fichte Studien*, Jane Kneller argues that Novalis turned to Kant precisely because of his “explicit criticism of Fichtean ‘seeking the unconditioned,’ it is at least not surprising that Novalis returned, if only briefly, to the study of Kant immediately after his ‘Auseinandersetzung’ with Fichtean philosophy.”<sup>24</sup> Specifically, as Theodore Ziolkovski comments, Novalis was interested in the image of Isis: “In 1798 Novalis (...) had encountered the image in Rosicrucian writings as well as in the works of Kant and Schiller, but he adapted it for his own purposes. In a distich among the paralipomena to his fragmentary novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* Novalis wrote:

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in: David W. Wood, “Novalis: Kant Studies (1797)”, *The Philosophical Forum* 32, no. 4 (2001): 324.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 325

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 336

<sup>23</sup> Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 24.

<sup>24</sup> Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, ed. Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xvi.

(One person succeeded – he lifted the veil of the goddess at Sais – But what did he see – He saw the wonder of wonders – Himself.)”<sup>25</sup>

My reading of Novalis will thus focus on the positive human process of “nearing” the absolute, approaching *Bildung* as self-knowledge through the otherness of nature while seeking an essentially ethical harmony between humans and between man and nature. Interestingly, as Frederick C. Beiser comments in his *Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism*, Schlegel called this *Bildungsideal*, in an ironic reference to Kant, “the Genius Imperative.”<sup>26</sup> This formative ideal, or *Bildungsideal*, is described by Novalis in the first pages of his story *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*:

Auch ich will also meine Figur beschreiben, und wenn kein Sterblicher, nach jener Inschrift dort, den Schleier hebt, so müssen wir unsterblich zu werden suchen; wer ihn nicht heben will, ist kein echter Lehrling zu Sais.<sup>27</sup>

I, too, then will inscribe my figure, and if according to the inscription, no mortal can lift the veil, we must seek to become immortal; he who does not seek to lift it, is no true novice of Sais.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the unfinished novel details the process of seeking to lift the veil and become immortal under its manifold poetical forms. First, I will explore the idea of *Verwandtschaft*, the familial relation between man and nature that suggests a certain kind of self-formation through the study of nature. The inherent irony of this thought will be interpreted according to the Schlegelean enumeration of the process of approaching understanding through the gradual development of the incomprehensible (*Unverständliches*). Second, I will read the novel’s treatment of the concept of Harmony, which is central to *Bildung* theory, as can be seen in Morgenstern’s introduction of the term *Bildungsroman*.<sup>29</sup> Third, I will interpret the delicate treatment of the idea of the image, the *Bild*, as it manifests in the novice’s reflections on and in nature.

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<sup>25</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, “The Veil as Metaphor and as Myth,” *Religion & Literature* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 72.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>27</sup> Novalis, HKA 1, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, trans. Ralph Manheim, illustrated by Paul Klee (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2005), 17.

<sup>29</sup> In his fundamental essay about the *Bildungsroman*, Karl Morgenstern wrote that the individual comes “toward true nature by means of a collaboration of inner dispositions with outer circumstances, (...) a perfect equilibrium, combining harmony with freedom.” Karl Morgenstern, “On the Nature of the 'Bildungsroman,’” trans. Tobias Boes, *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (March 2009), 656.

My arguments will all depart from the above-mentioned negative understanding of the absolute, which calls for a process-oriented – or, in short, narrative – interpretation of the Isis inscription. The justification for such a reading arises from Novalis’s claim, introduced by Kneller in her chapter from *Kant and the Power of Imagination* on Novalis: “Philosophizing is just scientizing [*wissenschaften*], thinking through thought, knowing knowledge – treating the sciences scientifically and poetically.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, the way to investigate the inner self and how it “reaches others,”<sup>31</sup> is the way that Novalis develops and *poeticizes* the Kantian system.

Before my close reading of the *Lehrlinge zu Sais* (*The Novices of Sais*) and the main argument, I would like to briefly introduce Novalis’s philosophy of the continuum between man and nature and the tension between the singular human being, society, and the universal unity. He writes in his *Blüthenstaub*:

Vor der Abstraktion ist alles eins, aber eins wie Chaos; nach der Abstraktion ist wieder alles vereinigt, aber diese Vereinigung ist eine freye Verbindung selbständiger, selbstbestimmter Wesen. Aus einem Haufen ist eine Gesellschaft geworden, das Chaos ist in eine mannichfaltige Welt verwandelt.<sup>32</sup>

Before abstraction, everything is unified but in a chaotic way. After abstraction, there is unity again, but now it’s a harmony of independent, self-determining beings. What was once a mere aggregate has become a society, with chaos transformed into an ordered, diverse world.<sup>33</sup>

As a geologist and engineer who worked in mines, he developed a unique view on the partiality of the study of nature, which was related to but different from that of Goethe. Novalis recognized humanity’s incapacity to grasp the entirety of nature through self-observation, whereas Goethe insisted on the universal truth of the subjective-physiological study of nature. For him, the color blue should be defined according to the human experience of the sky. In contrast, Novalis recognized the profound cleavage between the natural and the artificial (*Das Künstliche*), wherein humanity is damned to its artificiality: “Man versteht das Künstliche gewöhnlich besser, als das Natürliche.” (“One usually understands the artificial better than the natural.”)<sup>34</sup> Never-

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<sup>30</sup> Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Band 2 (Stuttgart: 1960 / 1977), 453.

<sup>33</sup> Novalis, *Pollen*, no. 95; cf. Frederick C. Beiser, ed., *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Novalis, *Pollen*, *ibid.*, 26.

theless, Novalis held a strong opinion about the existence of a continuum between man and nature. I will inspect the nature of this metaphysical stance before presenting a dialectical solution based on ironic formation in his *Lehrlinge*. In his article “Human History as Natural History in *The Novices of Sais* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*,”<sup>35</sup> Denis F. Mahoney shows how Novalis poetized his lessons from his natural sciences studies into his two novels, demonstrating the parallels he tried to draw between natural history and the history of the human spirit. Both, Novalis argued, are made of layers. In earlier times, human society had its “golden age,” like gold lying deep in the ground. For him, “romanticizing” meant finding those earlier layers and, as his only theological essay shows, striving back toward them as a society.<sup>36</sup> The notion of gradual revelation as gradual excavation, I will argue later, could be seen as a challenge to Kant’s theory of the cleavage between man and the “language of nature”. Learning to decipher the hieroglyphs in Novalis’s novella corresponds to a transformative, immersive, and reflective experience. In a 1792 letter written to his brother Wilhelm, Friedrich Schlegel describes his first meeting with Novalis with an anecdote about the young man’s moral philosophy: that there is no evil in the world because all things strive back to a common “golden age.”<sup>37</sup>

Novalis’s *Lehrlinge* expands this notion and ironically problematizes it through different discourses about the connection between man and nature. The novel’s first paragraph reveals a deepening of the Egyptian hieroglyph metaphor.

Mannigfache Wege gehen die Menschen. Wer sie verfolgt und vergleicht, wird wunderliche Figuren entstehen sehn; Figuren, die zu jener großen Chifferschrift zu gehören scheinen, die man überall, auf Flügeln, Eierschalen, in Wolken, im Schnee, in Kristallen und in Steinbildungen, auf gefrierenden Wassern, im Innern und Äußern der Gebirge, der Pflanzen, der Tiere, der Menschen, in den Lichtern des Himmels, auf berührten und gestrichenen Scheiben von Pech und Glas, in den Feilspänen um den Magnet her, und sonderbaren Konjunkturen des Zufalls, erblickt.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Dennis F. Mahoney, “Human History as Natural History in ‘The Novices of Sais’ and ‘Heinrich von Ofterdingen,’” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques* 18, no. 1 (1992): 111-124.

<sup>36</sup> “Die Christenheit, oder Europa”, in Novalis, *Schriften*, Band 3, Stuttgart 1960–1977, 507-525. Entstanden 1799. Erstdruck in: *Schriften*, 4. Auflage, Berlin (Reimer) 1826.

<sup>37</sup> See Max Preitz, *Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis: Biographie einer Romantikerfreundschaft in ihren Briefen: auf Grund neuer Briefe Schlegels* (Stuttgart: H. Gentner, 1957), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Novalis, HKA 1, 78.

Various are the roads of man. He who follows and compares them will see strange figures emerge, figures which seem to belong to that great cipher which we discern written everywhere, in wings, eggshells, clouds and snow, in crystals and in stone formations, on ice-covered waters, on the inside and outside of mountains, of plants, beasts and men, in the lights of heaven, on scored disks of pitch or glass or in iron filings round a magnet, and in strange conjunctures of chance.<sup>39</sup>

This passage presents man as wholly belonging to nature, inscribed alongside other natural objects in the same *Chifferschrift*—i.e., hieroglyphic script. The language of the human is one with that of all orders of nature: the organic and the inorganic, animals, plants, and rocks. Nevertheless, as with Kant, the language within which the human *is* written and the language which he speaks are not necessarily the same. These two levels of language, one scriptural and one common, correspond to Kant's original differentiation between imagination (*Vorstellung*) and expression (*Ausdruck*). However, belonging to the same order to be deciphered by expression creates a dialectical, reflective motion—a knowledge of the self and of the Other, which could be defined as an ironic formation. A clear-cut definition of this formational challenge from *Die Lehrlinge* can be found in a passage that clearly echoes Schlegel's text:

Von weitem hört ich sagen: die Unverständlichkeit sei Folge nur des Unverstandes; dieser suche, was er habe, und also niemals weiter finden könne. Man verstehe die Sprache nicht, weil sich die Sprache selber nicht verstehe....<sup>40</sup>

I heard a voice say from afar that the incomprehensible is solely the result of incomprehension, which seeks what it has and therefore can never make further discoveries. We do not understand speech, because speech does not understand itself, nor wish to...<sup>41</sup>

The connection here is thus threefold (man – language – nature) and precedes, in known ways, 20th-century discourse about language. This challenge, again, is not unsolvable. After the passage cited above, Novalis claims that the only way language understands itself is by speaking. Imagination and expression—which, for the analytical Kant, were thoroughly separated—are conjoined through poetic expression. Yet this poetic expression revolves around the subject that speaks it, creating a dialectical motion of reflection. One might derive from this reasoning that the disciple's

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<sup>39</sup> Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Novalis, HKA 1, 78.

<sup>41</sup> Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, 5.

mistake in Schiller’s poem was in differentiating between himself and “the truth,” seeking it outside and reinforcing the barrier while mistakenly thinking he would remove it.

The unfinished novel is framed (ironically, one might say) through its title as a story about formation or development. Nevertheless, it is written in the plural first person. Moreover, it can be argued that the subject of *Bildung*, the Novices, also includes the reader. Yet, pupils and teachers are separated. The “we” of the formational subjects is posed before an Other, more—or infinitely more—knowledgeable. The teacher, Novalis writes, learned to treat all as one: to see “people in clouds” and “stones in people.” The objects, for him, are not compared to one another but, as Novalis emphasizes throughout the text, are already perceived as one and the same. The immediate, sensorial experience of all components of nature constitutes the explicit *Bildung* project of the pupils of Sais. As one of the instructors of Sais says: “Das Denken ist nur ein Traum des Fühlens, ein erstorbenes Fühlen, ein blaßgraues, schwaches Leben.” (“Thought is only a dream of feeling, a dead feeling, a pale-gray feeble life.”)<sup>42</sup>

Many commentators see in this view an incarnation of the Fichtean *Philosophie* that seeks to see the objective world as an all-comprising *Ich*.<sup>43</sup> The source of the Romantic concept of harmony between divergent parts, as Peter Hanly points out in his *Between Heidegger and Novalis*,<sup>44</sup> is the ancient Greek notion of *harmonia*, found in Plato’s *Symposium*. There, Heraclitus’s concept of harmony is presented according to the musical metaphor: “In variance from itself it agrees with itself, like the harmony of bow and lyre.”<sup>45</sup> This train of thought draws a fine line between irony and *Bildung* in Novalis according to the Schlegelian thought of irony and Morgenstern’s definition of *Bildung* as harmony between the self and the non-self, enlarging the self to include the societal contradictions within it. It also incorporates the Fichtean formula of the all-comprising *Ich*, when Novalis, in his notebooks that came to be known as the *Fichte Studies*, writes: “I = not I. Highest principle of all science and art.”<sup>46</sup> The *Ich* is not differentiated from nature, and its only way to grasp nature is by being it—wild as the wind, high as the skies, loving as a band of flowers. However, Novalis’s text also insinuates that mere experience is not enough; it should be accorded quiet observation (*Stille Beobachtung*).

<sup>42</sup> Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, 73.

<sup>43</sup> Dennis F. Mahoney, “Human History as Natural History in ‘The Novices of Sais’ and ‘Heinrich von Ofterdingen,’” 114

<sup>44</sup> Peter Hanly, *Between Heidegger and Novalis. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 34

The hierarchy of observation and experience sets the difference between the different voices of the educators in the text. While one educator claims that “being” nature is nothing but projecting inner drives, making nature a “terrible beast” (*entsetzliches Tier*), the other says that experiencing “natural” feelings suffices and surpasses every reflection. This course of thought in the text destabilizes the *Bildung*-science-poetry-irony equivalent and invites a crack in the *harmonia*.

Novalis’s text is undoubtedly polyphonic, and many different voices of educators speak within it. The multiplicity of voices corresponds to the capricious form of the text, turning into a hazardous outgrowth of a plant. The text often mentions randomness as the operating principle of growth. Towards the end of the text, unending lust towards nature is presented as a necessary and sufficient condition to achieve the wanted *Verwandtschaft* (familial relation) with it. Still, the text is unfinished and, as Alicia Kuzniar claims, is unfinishable, as it is an endless envy towards a whole (*Das Ganze*) and an endless absolute *Bildung*.<sup>47</sup> The succession of discourses demonstrates an almost natural chain of predators that grow while annihilating each other, unable to ever reach the “final Irony” for which Schlegel desperately calls in his *Über die Unverständlichkeit*.<sup>48</sup> The romantic tendency to seek a universal principle (of which Charles, for example, talks in his *Modernism between Benjamin and Goethe*<sup>49</sup>) leads to the paradoxical longing for a principle of all principles.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, early Romantics such as Novalis and Schlegel seemingly rebelled against Kant’s too-harmonious, too-analytical system.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, this wish for a system—infused with angst—calls Kant back into mind. Specifically, when speaking of the aesthetic appreciation of nature,

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<sup>47</sup> See Alice A. Kuzniar, *Delayed Endings: Nonclosure in Novalis and Hölderlin* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008). See, for example, the chapter entitled “Temporalization vs. Temporality”, 40-50.

<sup>48</sup> “What gods will rescue us from all these ironies? The only solution is to find an irony that might be able to swallow up all these big and little ironies and leave no trace of them at all.” In Schlegel, *On Incomprehensibility*, 267.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew Charles, *Modernism Between Benjamin and Goethe* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 44.

<sup>50</sup> Schlegel, “Über die Unverständlichkeit,” in: Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Erste Abteilung: Kritische Neuausgabe, vol. 2 (München, Paderborn, Wien, Zürich: 1967), 368.

<sup>51</sup> See the comment from Novalis’s *Miscellaneous Observations*, from the notebooks he wrote before Friedrich Schlegel edited them into the wider known *Pollen* that appeared in 1798: “The more narrow-minded a system is the more it will please worldly-wise people. Thus, the system of the materialists, the doctrine of Helvetius, and also Locke has received the most acclaim amongst this class. Kant even now will find more followers than Fichte.” In: Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 42.



Kant makes repeated reference to a calm (*beruhigendes*) feeling. This point, which did not gain sufficient critical attention, appears exactly in the paragraph preceding the Isis reference:

So sagt z. B. ein gewisser Dichter in der Beschreibung eines schönen Morgens: »Die Sonne quoll hervor, wie Ruh aus Tugend quillt.« Das Bewußtsein der Tugend, wenn man sich auch nur in Gedanken in die Stelle eines Tugendhaften versetzt, verbreitet im Gemüthe eine Menge erhabener und beruhigender Gefühle und eine gränzenlose Aussicht in eine frohe Zukunft, die kein Ausdruck, welcher einem bestimmten Begriffe angemessen ist, völlig erreicht.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, for example, a certain poet, in describing a beautiful morning, says: ‘The sun flowed forth, as serenity flows from virtue.’ So the consciousness of virtue, even if we only think of ourselves as in the position of a virtuous person, spreads in the mind a multitude of sublime and calming feelings and a boundless outlook toward a joyful future, such as no expression commensurate with a determinate concept completely attains.<sup>53</sup>

It might, therefore, be argued that the limitedness of vision (Kant speaks in terms of *Augenverbot*), man’s incapacity to represent to himself the coherent system of nature, invites a thought about morality, virtually absent from the text. The problem of comprehending (*begreifen*) that seeks an accurate expression (*Ausdruck*) remains unanswered in Kant, but this non-answer is not ignored by the poet (*Dichter*). Rather, the consciousness of virtue—a human rather than a natural quality—brings him calm. This notion operates negatively, I suggest, in Novalis’s text. The intensive and absolute identification of nature, alongside the striving towards a unification of being, imagination, and expression, brings about an immoral, death-inciting natural existence that arouses angst in the narrator(s). For example, Novalis describes the disciples as seeking a “nature of natures”:

Es fragt sich, ob wir die Natur der Naturen durch diese spezielle Natur wahrhaft begreifen lernen können, und inwiefern unsre Gedanken und die Intensität unsrer Aufmerksamkeit durch dieselbe bestimmt werden, oder sie bestimmen, und dadurch von der Natur losreißen und vielleicht ihre zarte Nachgiebigkeit verderben.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 316.

<sup>53</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 184-5.

<sup>54</sup> Novalis, HKA 1, 97.

The question arises, whether we can learn to understand the nature of natures through this specific nature, and to what degree our ideas and the intensity of our attention are determined by it, or else determine it, thus snatching it away from nature and perhaps destroying its delicate flexibility.<sup>55</sup>

This brings forward perhaps the most powerful crisis in the text: the hidden danger (or wish) towards death. One of the educators in the text emphasizes that, calling nature “a terrible mill of death,” circling viciously and eternally. The ideal triad of being-imagining-expressing nature would, therefore, not come without a deterioration of the mind, which would mean, again paradoxically, not existing. This irony resembles that of Schiller’s text—namely, that the knowledge of nature leads the disciple to silence, illness, and early death. In his view, these are an objectification of the mind and the body—the mind turning into a natural force, a slave to the drives (*Triebe*), and the body to inorganic matter. Therefore, I suggest that contrary to the conception of Novalis’s text as a poetical incarnation of Fichte’s system, it adheres to Kant’s idea of the inherent, insurmountable *difference* between man and nature. In other words, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* demonstrates the Kantian citation that insinuates the deadly danger that awaits in revealing nature’s veil.

This could be demonstrated by Novalis’s diverse use of the German root *Bild* in the text. The concept of *Abbild* (copy, image) with its religious connotations (man being made in the image of God in Genesis) is frequently mentioned concerning the question of the epistemological hierarchy of the knowledge of nature: the teachers are in disagreement about whether nature is an *Abbild* of man or the opposite. If the first is the case, a teacher says, then it is just because of man’s imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) that he mistakenly sees nature in his own (horrifying) image.<sup>56</sup> The teacher supporting the position of the *Vernunft* uses the verb *bilden* (forming, educating), saying that self-work on human moral behavior will make nature open “by itself” in front of him.<sup>57</sup> Then, inclining to a meta-poetic discussion, nature is called the “reflection of humanity” (*Gegenbild der Menschheit*). Therefore, only the artist can create the natural world as an image that follows his ways (*auf seine Art nachbilden*<sup>58</sup>); for lovers, it is said afterward, nature is only an *Abbild* of the loved one.<sup>59</sup> Then, speaking of the diversity of the world, a teacher says all objects in nature are images (*Bilder*) signifying the different sounds of a

<sup>55</sup> Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, 78-9.

<sup>56</sup> Novalis, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, p. 14

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

language, thus returning to the initial definition of the mystical study of nature as a hieroglyphical science<sup>60</sup>—the only definition given from the speaking “we” of the text, simultaneously with more and less authority, given not by a teacher but by its multi-headed (or infinite) disciples (*Lehrlinge*). The universe is thus a *Gespräch*, a conversation, with the German word resonating with the very act of speaking (*Sprechen*). This symphony of the German language, providing multiple definitions, contradicting itself but developing little by little a harmony, finally coming back to its initial tone constitutes exactly an ironical (constantly changing with internal contradictions while striving towards itself) *Bildung*, with the text striving towards education, explicitly in its title and implicitly with its treatment of the *Bild* leitmotif that overtones *Bildung*.

### 3. Der Runenberg

In his early works while a student, Tieck’s works were “parodies of the cult of the Genius.”<sup>61</sup> Roger Paulin comments that Tieck’s critique of Enlightenment during the years 1797-1800, after having known Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Nicolai in the Belin Salons of Rahel Varnhagen and Dorothea Veit, concerned not the basic assumptions and aspirations of the movement, but instead its capacity for poetic (i.e., literary) freedom. This, he found in Schlegel’s *Universalpoesie* (universal poetry) and its “steten Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung”,<sup>62</sup> (constant alternation between self-creation and self-annihilation). Although around 1800, Tieck announces he “never studied the transcendental philosophy thoroughly,” Jürgen Brummack comments that the idea of the sublime – specifically in its interplay between the *Schrecklichen* (terrifying) and the *Schönen* (beautiful) – played an essential role in the metaphysical motivations of his writings in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, Brummack comments that § 49 of Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* particularly influenced Tieck when he composed his own thoughts about the sublime.<sup>63</sup> This small section, consisting of six pages, is also where the note about the Isis inscription appears.

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<sup>60</sup> Tieck, on the other hand, treats art as an *understandable* hieroglyphic writing: “Sie redet durch Bilder der Menschen und bedient sich also einer Hieroglyphenschrift, deren Zeichen wir dem Äußern nach kennen und verstehen.” In Tieck and Wilhelm Wackenroder: *Werke und Briefe*. Berlin und München 1984, 191.

<sup>61</sup> Roger Paulin, “Tieck in Berlin”, in: Claudia Stockinger and Stefan Scherer, ed., *Ludwig Tieck: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 27.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>63</sup> Jürgen Brummack, “Poetologische und kritische Schriften von 1792 bis 1803”, in *Ibid.*, 328.

To further deepen the discussion of irony in the Romantic *Bildung* of nature through Tieck's 1804 novella *Der Runenberg*, it is essential to examine its plot and key themes. The tale begins with a "young man" named Christian who has left human society to find loneliness (*Einsamkeit*). His departure is explained by his view of society as a Platonic cave, where people live in a "state of unknowing"<sup>64</sup> and even nature is confined to a "little garden." On his first journey, Christian reaches the Runenberg, where he meets a beautiful woman who enchants him. Overcome by a sense of awe and fear, Christian finds a sparkling gem, which he takes with him. Upon returning home, Christian's life takes a dark turn. Preoccupied with his experience from the Runenberg, his relationships quickly deteriorate, particularly with his fiancée and his father. The once bright and cheerful Christian becomes increasingly obsessed with the gem and the memories of his supernatural experiences. His descent into madness peaks when he abandons his family and home, driven by an irresistible urge to return to the Runenberg. The story ends ambiguously, with Christian disappearing into the mountains, leaving his fate uncertain.

Like in Novalis's text, the notion of *Bildung* is crucial. As Klaus F. Gille argues in his "Der Berg und die Seele: Überlegungen zu Tiecks' *Runenberg*,"<sup>65</sup> the tale invites a reading as a parody of a *Bildungsroman*, notably of *Wilhelm Meister*, which was published shortly before. Gille focuses on the tension between morality and sensuality, saying that if for Meister education consisted of reconciling the two, here they were 'torn apart'.<sup>66</sup> A full interpretation of this text is beyond the scope of this discussion, but I will focus on two decisive moments in the tale: with a beautiful, veiled woman

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<sup>64</sup> "Die Ebene, das Schloß, der kleine beschränkte Garten meines Vaters mit den geordneten Blumenbeeten, die enge Wohnung, der weite Himmel, der sich ringsum so traurig ausdehnte, und keine Höhe, keinen erhabenen Berg umarmte, alles ward mir noch betrübter und verhaßter. Es schien mir, als wenn alle Menschen um mich her in der bejammernswürdigsten Unwissenheit lebten." In Ludwig Tieck: *Werke in vier Bänden*, vol. 2 (München, 1963), 61. ("The plain, our patron's castle, and my father's little hampered garden, with its trimmed flower-beds; our narrow dwelling; the wide sky which stretched above us in its dreary vastness, embracing no hill, no lofty mountain, all became more dull and odious to me. It seemed as if the people about me were living in most lamentable ignorance." in Tieck, 203).

<sup>65</sup> Klaus F. Gille, „Der Berg und die Seele: Überlegungen zu Tiecks ‚Runenberg‘“, *Neophilologus* 77, no. 4 (1993): 611.

<sup>66</sup> Sinnlichkeit und Sittlichkeit sind, anders als für die Weimarer Klassik, durch eine unüberbrückbare Kluft getrennt, machen das Individuum Christian zum Bürger zweier Welten, in denen es nur um den Preis ständiger Loyalitätskonflikte bestehen kann. *Ibid.*, 617. ("Sensuality and morality, unlike in Weimar Classicism, are separated by an unbridgeable chasm, making the individual Christian a citizen of two worlds in which existence is only possible at the cost of constant conflicts of loyalty.")

and with a mandrake root. These encounters determine Christian’s fate and serve as emblems of the inherent danger of knowledge, identification, imagination, and expression of nature. Unlike Gille, who focuses on sensuality as the driving power towards nature, I would like to speak of a passion similar to that of Novalis in his *Lehrlinge zu Sais*. Certainly, the incarnation of nature as a veiled, beautiful woman bears notes of sensuality, yet Tieck’s description avoids any sensual or sexual references. Instead, he focuses on the luring beauty and mystical knowledge that she offers with her jewels. Therefore, I will read the encounter scene as a representation of the inherent danger of too deep, too close knowledge of nature—and, imbued with irony, of the self.

After leaving the restricted realm of his family, and while wandering in the mountains, Christian encounters a “big womanly figure” who does not seem to “be among the mortals.” The representation of nature as a luring woman stems from proto-biblical traditions of Lilith and medieval concepts of Mother Earth. However, the central distinction in this text is between the woman of the mountain and the “young girl” of the village whom he marries. This contrast is tied to two natural elements: flowers and stones, symbolizing two extremes of nature. The old woman exposes precious stones, immortal but lifeless, while the young girl is compared to a flower, foreshadowing her insufficiency for Christian’s immortal envy, reminiscent of the “limited flower garden” of his parents’ castle. Moreover, in the midst of their marriage, he cruelly admits to her:

Nein, nicht jenes Bild bist du, welches mich einst im Traum entzückte  
und das ich niemals ganz vergessen kann, aber doch bin ich glücklich in  
deiner Nähe und selig in deinen Armen.<sup>67</sup>

No, thou art not that form which once charmed me in a dream, and  
which I never can entirely forget; but I am happy beside thee, and  
blessed that thou art mine.<sup>68</sup>

The *Bild* he refers to is of the old woman’s unclothing, her removing of her veil (*Schleier*) and her revealing of the “more than earthly beauty” (*überirdische Schönheit*). Thus, the distinction here is not between the *Sittlich* and the *Sinnlich*, but between the organic and the inorganic, the timely and the immortal. Intertwining with the latter, following Kant’s model, this suggests

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<sup>67</sup> Ludwig Tieck: *Werke in vier Bänden*, vol. 2 (München, 1963), 70.

<sup>68</sup> I am using the Carlyle translation to English: *Jean Paul, Johann Karl August Musäus, and Ludwig Tieck*, Translations from the German by Thomas Carlyle (Vol. 3 of 3): *Tales by Musäus, Tieck, Richter* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1827), 209.

an ‘immortal’, inorganic (and thus also immoral) state. Borrowing from Kant, there is a connection between the living, human, limited, moral being—and the immoral and infinite nature, which is not to be understood by humans unless leaping to a state of death or folly. The *Bild* of the woman changes from the first encounter (*Überirdische Schönheit*) to the second (*ein altes Weib von der äußersten Häßlichkeit*). Nevertheless, the temptation to return to her does not cease but intensifies. Christian is drawn back to the forest for the same reasons that the Schillerian figure unveils Isis: not only out of thirst for knowledge but for becoming one with this inorganic, immobile knowledge.

This could be regarded according to Freud’s division of nature into organic and inorganic in his “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*), instead of the prevalent division of human and natural. In the Freudian sense, the human is enclosed within this circle while aspiring towards a shifting state, again, into the inorganic, the stone.<sup>69</sup> The contrast between flowers and stones appears throughout the novella. For example, in their last meeting before Christian’s departure, his father warns him: “Cast this writing from thee, which makes thee cold and cruel, which will turn thy heart to stone.”<sup>70</sup> (“Wirf diese Schrift weg, die dich kalt und grausam macht, die dein Herz versteinern muß.”) The *Schrift*, or the script, that the father refers to is the tablet of stones given to him by the mountain lady. It might be suggested that the ability to read this would make his heart turn to stone (*Versteinern*). In other words, only turning into stone would permit him to read the hieroglyphical language of stones.

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<sup>69</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, introduction by Gregory Zilboorg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 21, 32, 33, 55. See also Schelling in *Von der Weltseele*: “Das Princip des Lebens ist nicht von außen in die organische Materie (etwa durch Infusion) gekommen ... sondern umgekehrt, dieses Princip hat *sich* die organische Materie *angebildet*.” (Hamburg: Perthes, 1798), 302. The subject of a cycle between the organic and the inorganic was discussed by romantic thinkers such as Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert in his *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft, Siebente Vorlesung: Von der sogenannten anorganischen Natur*: “Es bauet sich fröhlich eine neue Zeit aus den Trümmern der versunkenen alten auf, hoffend wenn auch nicht durch die Dauer der körperlichen Masse, doch durch die Kraft des Geistes das Werk ihrer Hände fester in die Tiefe der fernsten Zeit zu gründen, als jene untergegangene Vorzeit.” (“A new era joyfully builds itself up from the ruins of the sunken old one, hoping to establish the work of its hands more firmly into the depths of the farthest time, not through the permanence of physical matter, but through the power of the spirit, than that bygone past.”) In: Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft*, (Dresden, 1808), 215. Freud’s interpretation adds passion to this Romantic-scientific equation, which agrees with Tieck’s intensive treatment of beauty and erotic passion in this tale and his other writings.

<sup>70</sup> Tieck, *The Runenberg*, 216.

Again, in Kantian terms, Christian is haunted by an uneasiness (*Unruhe*). By his parents’ house and with his spouse in the city, he has no peace of mind. Elisabeth attests to his father that she “cannot understand her man anymore.” The calm feeling in Kant, as demonstrated earlier, stems from the human acceptance of distance and from the virtue of the represented object. The tale demonstrates this Kantian system with the transition of the beautiful to the ugly: as a representation or imagination, it represents Christian’s perception. Morally, Christian’s fascination becomes increasingly problematic as he gradually distances himself from his spouse. The formational aspect of this tale is cautionary. As Tieck writes elsewhere, “we do not know what a tree is.”<sup>71</sup> Like Novalis, whose story supports his argument about man’s understanding of the *Künstliche* rather than the *Natürliche*, Tieck provides a cautionary narrative following Kantian logic, warning against removing the distance from nature in the imagination-expression (*Vorstellung-Ausdruck*) process discussed earlier.

One incident stands out in the tale that demonstrates this process: the plucking out of the mandrake root:

Gedankenlos zog er eine hervorragende Wurzel aus der Erde, und plötzlich hörte er erschreckend ein dumpfes Winseln im Boden, das sich unterirdisch in klagenden Tönen fortzog, und erst in der Ferne wehmütig verscholl. Der Ton durchdrang sein innerstes Herz, er ergriff ihn, als wenn er unvermutet die Wunde berührt habe, an der der sterbende Leichnam der Natur in Schmerzen verscheiden wolle. Er sprang auf und wollte entfliehen, denn er hatte wohl ehemals von der seltsamen Alrunenwurzel gehört, die beim Ausreißen so herzdurch-

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<sup>71</sup> Tieck’s *Runenberg* can be regarded as a critical reflection on the Romantic assumption of a continuum between non-human worlds and human consciousness. Tieck, I argue, points to and questions this continuum, which presupposes a shared language between humans and non-human nature. See Tieck in his own words (written jointly with Wackenroder) about the capacity of understanding nature, from his discussion on art: “Wir wissen nicht, was ein Baum ist; nicht, was eine Wiese, nicht, was ein Felsen ist; wir können nicht in unsrer Sprache mit ihnen reden; wir verstehen nur uns untereinander. Und dennoch hat der Schöpfer in das Menschenherz eine solche wunderbare Sympathie zu diesen Dingen gelegt, daß sie demselben, auf unbekanntem Wegen, Gefühle oder Gesinnungen, oder wie man es nennen mag, zuführen, welche wir nie durch die abgemessensten Worte erlangen.” (“We do not know what a tree is; not what a meadow is, not what a rock is; we cannot speak with them in our language; we only understand each other. And yet, the Creator has placed such a wonderful sympathy for these things in the human heart that, through unknown paths, they convey to it feelings or sentiments, or whatever one may call them, which we could never attain through the most measured words.”) My translation, in Wilhelm Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe* (Berlin and Munich, 1984), 191.

schneidende Klagetöne von sich gebe, daß der Mensch von ihrem Gewinsel wahnsinnig werden müsse.<sup>72</sup>

Unthinkingly, he pulled a straggling root from the earth; and on the instant, heard, with affright, a stifled moan underground, which winded downwards in doleful tones, and died plaintively away in the deep distance. The sound went through his inmost heart; it seized him as if he had unwittingly touched the wound, of which the dying frame of Nature was expiring in its agony. He started up to fly; for he had already heard of the mysterious mandrake-root, which, when torn, yields such heart-rending moans, that the person who has hurt it runs distracted by its wailing.<sup>73</sup>

Laura Isengard interprets the motive of language in Tieck's tale,<sup>74</sup> focusing on the imagery of the mandrake root. She shows how in folklore, from biblical and medieval times, the mandrake was compared to human beings, both in its shape of a two-legged root, through its ascribed psychological-aphrodisiac effects, to Hildegard von Bingen, the medieval monk and mystic, who argued for a common natural origin of man and mandrake.<sup>75</sup> Isengard argues that this moment goes against the (romantic) belief in a continuum between man and nature. Indeed, it is precisely the educational moment of learning about death and the suffering attached to it with the root's scream that teaches him about death in two respects: his ability to cause death and to experience it. Here lies the characteristic intersection of violence, self-annihilation, and language—which is the focal point of ironic *Bildung* in this story with respect to nature. Being himself nature (the mandrake as human) at the same time as violently annihilating a piece of nature—this reflexive moment extracts a scream from the root. A scream being a mode of expression, maybe the most primal, might be suggested as a meta-poetical indication of the origin of language, or its essence, as violence.

Adding another layer to Isengard's discussion of "a shared language between humans and the non-human nature," a scene from the *Divine Comedy* could be one of the cultural sources of the mandrake scene.<sup>76</sup> In the 13th *canzone* of the *Inferno*, the narrator encounters a bush:

Therefore the Master said: 'If thou break off

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<sup>72</sup> Tieck, *Der Runenberg*, 91-2.

<sup>73</sup> *Tales by Musæus, Tieck, Richter*, 201.

<sup>74</sup> Laura Isengard, "Nature's Say: Negotiating the Human-Nature Continuum in Ludwig Tieck's *Der Runenberg*," in: Adrian Renner and Frederike Middelhoff, eds. *Forces of Nature: Dynamism and Agency in German Romanticism* (De Gruyter, 2022), 205-225.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>76</sup> To my knowledge, this has never been discussed in literature about this tale.



Some little spray from any of these trees,  
The thoughts thou hast will wholly be made vain.’  
Then stretched I forth my hand a little forward,  
And plucked a branchlet off from a great thorn;  
And the trunk cried, ‘Why dost thou mangle me?’  
After it had become embrowned with blood,  
It recommenced its cry: ‘Why dost thou rend me?  
Hast thou no spirit of pity whatsoever?  
Men once we were, and now are changed to trees;  
Indeed, thy hand should be more pitiful,  
Even if the souls of serpents we had been.’<sup>77</sup>

Tieck was one of the most enthusiastic readers of the *Divine Comedy* and studied it thoroughly.<sup>78</sup> The context in the original text is Dante’s need to verify “on his own” Virgil’s argument that people turned into trees. He does that through the same violent act of plucking a leaflet.<sup>79</sup> The striking similarity between the scenes, which also comment on the same question (could humans turn into plants), has not been studied before.

Some interesting ideas can be extracted from Tieck’s remake of this scene from the *Inferno*. Firstly, these natural beings can feel pain and are aware of their human past—the very presence in the inferno indicates that it has been a person who has died. Secondly, and inferably, there is a cry for empathy among organic beings that can experience and cause pain; even the impartial traveler and narrator of the *Comedy* finds himself engaged in such interaction. Thirdly and most importantly, Virgil warns Dante of insanity when he intends to tear the branch: this sheds another light on this moment, suggesting that insanity is inherent to a direct, violent relationship with nature.<sup>80</sup> This idea correlates to the passion that drove Christian, the protagonist of *Der Runenberg*, into nature. If in other texts interpreted in this chapter man is driven into nature seeking solitude or knowledge, here the

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<sup>77</sup> Dante, *Divine Comedy*, translated by Henry Longfellow (Boston, 1867), 75.

<sup>78</sup> See: Eva Hölter, “Dante’s Long Road to the German library: Literary Reception from Early Romanticism until the Late Nineteenth Century”, in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*, A. Audeh & N. Havely eds. (Oxford University Press, 2012), 225-247.

<sup>79</sup> The first section of *Inferno* 13 is important for the intertextual dynamic between the *Aeneid* and the *Commedia*. The fact that a man has become a tree is termed “unbelievable” — “cosa incredibile” (unbelievable thing) — in *Inferno* 13.50. It is therefore something that cannot be accepted on the basis of a prior account, no matter how authoritative, but which, if it is to be believed, must be verified through one’s own actions and experience. Hence, because the account in Vergil’s *Aeneid* is deemed literally “in-credible”, Virgilio instructs Dante to break the branch in order to verify that the tree is truly a man.

<sup>80</sup> According to Isegard, this also echoes Schelling’s statement: “Die Natur soll der sichtbare Geist, der Geist die unsichtbare Natur seyn.”

“death instinct” is present from the very beginning in Christian’s envy of hunting. This encounter summons familiarity with the inherent death of nature, echoing the Schlegelean “final irony” of death or insanity.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article, I have aimed to show that the Kantian Isis-inscription set the tone for two emblematic Romantic tales written in early 19th-century Germany. Two author-philosophers, Novalis and Tieck, were readers of both Kant’s and Fichte’s philosophies. I have proposed a reading of these stories as *Bildung* narratives that demonstrate, concretely, what Kant proposed in a scattered and potential manner. I have proposed close readings of passages from both stories that show the unfolding of a process that Kant suggested for the appreciation of nature: its imagination followed by the expression of that imagination. This stance, for Kant, keeps the beholder from dangerously approaching bare, unimaginable, or unrepresentable nature. For him, representation is enabled through moral comparison and appreciation, which spreads calm. However, morality prevails in Kant’s thought not only as an emblem of the good but of the human in general—and specifically, as what differentiates the human from the natural. I have read *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* and *Der Runenberg* as cautionary, moral tales about the dangers of abandoning the moral human sphere for a union with nature that surpasses human imagination and expression.

In *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, I have shown how Novalis problematizes the notions of familial relations between man and nature but how *harmonia* could nevertheless be established between them. I have shown how this formational process is gradual and endless, advancing through deepening levels of reflectional irony or knowledge of the self. Knowing nature withholds a merging, even dissolving within a “we” that exceeds the human individual. *Harmonia*, a state widely sought after in *Bildung* tales, is reached only where the possibility of expression no longer exists. The notion of *Bild*, alongside its biblical resonances, further problematizes the concept of the human-nature continuum: man is nature’s *Abbild* and could only grasp himself as such. Not only in the natural context but also in the dual context of love, the other person constitutes a *Gegenbild*. These notions propose an endless process of appreciating and approaching but never reaching a “final” knowledge or identification, corresponding to Schlegel’s idea of irony. Thus, it could be proposed that the novella materializes Kant’s theory of appreciation through Schlegel’s Romantic irony.

Focusing on two moments in Tieck’s *Der Runenberg*, I have shown how Kant’s theory materializes as an ironical cautionary tale about the danger of too close an acquaintance with nature. The woman gives Christian a tablet filled with precious stones, a metaphor for language’s hieroglyphical script. This womanly figure, therefore, does not tempt him for her sensual qualities but for her emblematic representation of nature. Merging with her withholds the danger of turning to inorganic, dead matter—which poses a stark contrast to the moral, finite, civilized life proposed by his marriage and family lives. The encounter with the mandrake root resonates, as I have shown, with Dante’s *Inferno*, where the human-nature continuum exists, but through death. This cautionary quality of both texts thus demonstrates Kant’s focus on the necessity of the human and on the moral qualities of the relationship to nature.



# Symphilosophie

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## L'anthropologie philosophique chez Kant et Novalis

*Laure Cahen-Maurel\**

### ABSTRACT

This article presents a reading of the famous fragment 16 of Novalis's *Pollen* vis-à-vis Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, two writings published in the same year of 1798. It aims to show that fragment 16 of *Pollen* is *in nuce* a reformulation of the traditional question of anthropology, which Kant viewed during the same period as reuniting the whole field of philosophy. Kant's philosophical anthropology remains essentially empirical at base and understands the pragmatic element from the external point of view in relation to the collective existence of human beings. In contrast, Novalis's philosophical anthropology proposes a transcendental extension of anthropology in which poetry constitutes a legitimate instrument. In short: in both thinkers we are dealing with forms of pragmatic philosophical anthropology, but the path taken by Kant follows a more empirical direction, compared to the new path of Novalis's anthropology that underscores more the transcendental pole.

*Keywords:* Kant, Novalis, anthropology, person, genius, imagination, poetry

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article offre une lecture croisée du célèbre fragment 16 du recueil *Pollen* de Novalis et de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* de Kant, deux écrits parus la même année, en 1798. Son ambition est de montrer que le fragment 16 de *Pollen* est d'abord la reformulation *in nuce* de la question classique de l'anthropologie, telle qu'à la même époque elle est apparue à Kant rassembler tout le champ de la philosophie. Là où l'anthropologie philosophique de Kant demeure essentiellement empirique et comprend l'élément pragmatique avant tout du point de vue extérieur, sous le rapport de l'existence collective de l'homme, l'anthropologie philosophique de Novalis propose une extension transcendantale de l'anthropologie, dont la poésie est un instrument légitime. En d'autres termes, on a affaire dans les deux cas à une anthropologie pragmatique, mais le chemin emprunté par Kant suit une direction plus empirique, tandis que la voie nouvelle de l'anthropologie novalissienne insiste davantage sur le versant transcendantal.

*Mots-clés :* Kant, Novalis, anthropologie, personne, génie, imagination, poésie

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\* Docteure en philosophie, *Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin* (collaboratrice pédagogique et scientifique), Internationales Zentrum für Philosophie NRW / Institut für Philosophie der Universität Bonn, Poppelsdorfer Allee 28, 53115 Bonn, Allemagne – laure.cahen-maurel@uni-bonn.de

## 1. La question : « Qu'est-ce que l'homme ? »

Le fragment suivant, qui nous exhorte à suivre le chemin de l'esprit dans les profondeurs de l'intériorité, est un des plus célèbres de tout le corpus novalissien<sup>1</sup> :

16. La fantaisie place le monde futur, relativement à nous, soit en hauteur, soit en profondeur, ou encore dans la métempsychose. Nous rêvons de voyages à travers l'univers : l'univers n'est-il donc pas en nous ? Nous ignorons les profondeurs de notre esprit. – Le chemin mystérieux va vers l'intérieur. C'est en nous, ou nulle part, que se trouve l'éternité avec ses mondes, le passé et l'avenir. Le monde extérieur est le monde des ombres, il projette ses ombres dans le royaume de lumière. Certes, à présent, l'intérieur nous paraît si sombre, solitaire et informe, mais comme nous verrons les choses différemment quand cet obscurcissement sera passé et que l'ombre projetée se sera éloignée. Nous jouirons plus que jamais, car notre esprit a souffert du manque<sup>2</sup>.

Le fragment fait partie du premier recueil publié par Novalis de son vivant, en mai 1798 : *Pollen*<sup>3</sup>. C'est aussi celui qui a sans doute le plus contribué au jugement selon lequel l'œuvre de Novalis opèrerait, à cette date, un tournant mystique, irrationaliste, de la philosophie vers la poésie et la religion<sup>4</sup>. Postérieur à la confrontation avec la théorie fichtéenne de la subjectivité (du Moi) menée dans les *Études fichtéennes* (1795 / 96), *Pollen* ne serait-il pas en effet la résultante d'une prise de conscience, en forme de rupture, de ce qui

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<sup>1</sup> Cet article développe des recherches qui ont été présentées à deux reprises, d'abord sous le titre « *Der vollständige Mensch*. Elements of an Anthropology in Novalis » dans le colloque international *More than a Machine. On the Human Being in Kant and Post-Kantian Philosophy*, organisé par Manja Kisner et Giovanni Pietro Basile les 20 et 21 juin 2023 à la Radboud University de Nijmegen (Pays-Bas) ; puis dans une communication intitulée « Novalis's Response to Kant's Philosophical Anthropology », donnée en ligne le 21 mai 2024, dans le cadre du *Simposio de investigación sobre romanticismo, estética y cultura*, animé par Naím Garnica et Agustín Lucas Prestifilippo. Je remercie vivement les organisateurs de ces deux événements pour l'occasion qu'ils m'ont donnée de soumettre mes recherches à un public expert.

<sup>2</sup> Novalis, *Blüthenstaub* (1798), frag. 16, in Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs, historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (= HKA), hg. von Paul Kluckhohn und Richard Samuel, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1960 sq., vol. 2, 1981, p. 417-419. Sauf indication contraire, la traduction française est de moi. Cf. Novalis, « *Pollen* », in *Semences*, trad. Olivier Schefer, Paris, Éditions Allia, 2004, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> *Blüthenstaub* est paru dans la toute première livraison de la revue *Athenaeum* des frères Schlegel.

<sup>4</sup> Voir notamment Jurij Striedter, *Die Fragmente des Novalis als Praefigurationen seiner Dichtung*, Munich, Fink, 1985 ; et Ursula Flickenschild, *Novalis' Begegnung mit Fichte und Hemsterhuis*, Berltsum, van Sluis, 2010 [1947], en particulier p. 109.

rendrait la philosophie insuffisante à fonder de manière purement immanente à la conscience l'être-soi – l'identité – du sujet humain<sup>5</sup> ? Porté dans sa texture même par un entrelacs de rythmes et de sons, le fragment 16 de *Pollen* appelle, de fait, à l'esprit du lecteur toute une série d'images poétiques. L'image d'un au-delà, ou d'un après, et celle de la métempsychose avec elle, qui disent le passage de la vie à la mort, ou au contraire de la finitude à l'immortalité. L'image de l'exploration cosmique de l'univers et celle réciproque de la découverte de soi. Mais aussi, bien sûr, l'image du chemin, du mystère, de l'opacité, de la solitude et de la souffrance. Ou inversement : celle de l'ombre seulement passagère, de la lumière, de la jouissance.

Je voudrais prendre le contre-pied d'une interprétation de *Pollen* comme d'un « tournant », où la poésie prendrait le pas sur la philosophie, et contribuer à montrer qu'en vérité, les choses sont moins simples. En particulier je défendrai l'hypothèse générale suivante : dans l'économie de l'œuvre novalissienne, le fragment 16 de *Pollen* est philosophiquement absolument central ; il contient *in nuce* le projet d'une anthropologie philosophique. Ou plus exactement, le fragment 16 de *Pollen* est d'abord la reformulation de la question classique de l'anthropologie, telle qu'à la même époque elle est apparue à Kant rassembler tout le champ de la philosophie. Le point de vue de Novalis converge pour une part avec la réflexion kantienne, et pour une part – s'agissant surtout du sens interne et de la connaissance de soi – la dépasse en suivant Fichte. Mais la manière dont le penseur romantique fait de la poésie un instrument de la détermination pragmatique de l'humain est dans le droit fil de Kant. J'en conclus que loin de traduire une quelconque mise à distance des philosophies transcendantales de Kant et de Fichte, *Pollen*, à partir donc de 1798, non seulement assume leur héritage mais leur donne un *prolongement inédit*, en particulier dans une *perspective anthropologique*<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Sur ce point, on se reportera aux analyses de Manfred Frank dans – entre autres – « Philosophische Grundlageder Frühromantik », *Athenäum. Jahrbuch für Romantik* 4, 1994, p. 37-130 ; et l'Introduction à *Auswege aus dem Deutschen Idealismus*, Francfort, Suhrkamp, 2007, p. 7-26.

<sup>6</sup> Pour une compréhension des romantiques comme kantien, voir – entre autres – les travaux pionniers de Manfred Frank précités (note 5 ci-dessus) ; de Jane Kneller, notamment *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, et « The Poem of the Understanding: Kant, Novalis, and Early German Romantic Philosophy », in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Elizabeth Millán Brusslan, London, Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020, p. 19-39 ; ainsi que Lara Ostaric, « Creating the Absolute : Kant's Conception of Genial Creation in Schlegel, Novalis and Schelling », *Kant Yearbook*, 2016, p. 63-85. Ces travaux présentent toutefois une lecture plus *gnoséologique* de l'héritage kantien du romantisme, centrée principalement sur la théorie de la connaissance. Sur le volet moral de cet héritage, on se reportera à l'ouvrage tout récent de Karl Ameriks, *Kantian Dignity and its Difficulties*, Oxford,

Répondre à la question « Qu'est-ce que l'homme ? », c'est en effet penser l'articulation des deux sphères de la nature et de la liberté. L'humanité ne saurait être réduite à une espèce animale comme une autre. Être double par essence, l'être humain est à la fois, par son corps, arrimé au monde des choses et de la nature, et, par son esprit, libre de développer et d'élargir à l'infini ses possibilités. Mais il y a plus. La question de l'homme n'est pas seulement un pont surmontant la dualité de la philosophie théorique et de la philosophie pratique, que Kant attribue à cette constitution anthropologique. L'interrogation sur l'humain est, d'après Kant, la synthèse des trois questions formulées dès la *Critique de la raison pure* (1781-1787) : « Que puis-je savoir ? », « Que dois-je faire ? » et « Que m'est-il permis d'espérer ? »<sup>7</sup>. Pour le dire autrement : dans la tradition du criticisme, la réflexion anthropologique n'est rien d'autre que le terrain de la médiation qui articule en une unité la métaphysique, la morale et la religion<sup>8</sup>. Les spécialistes de Kant ont pu voir dans l'architecture de la première partie de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, intitulée « Didactique anthropologique. De la manière de connaître l'homme intérieur aussi bien que l'homme extérieur », le déploiement de ces trois questions sous l'angle des trois facultés de l'esprit qui leur correspondraient respectivement : la faculté de connaître, le sentiment de plaisir et de déplaisir, la faculté de désirer<sup>9</sup>.

Non seulement Novalis n'était pas sans connaître la première *Critique*, d'après ce qu'il nous est donné d'en savoir (explicitement) par un ensemble de notes, datant de 1797, sur l'œuvre kantienne, qui nous est resté sous le titre posthume *Études sur Kant*<sup>10</sup>. Le recueil *Pollen* est donc aussi le fruit de ces lectures. Mais Novalis a été parmi les tout premiers lecteurs de l'*Anthro-*

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- Oxford University Press, 2024. Enfin, pour une lecture plus anthropologique du kantisme lui-même, en lien avec la philosophie romantique, voir Márcio Suzuki, « What is Life? At the Roots of Romantic Philosophy: Kant's Philosophical Vitalism », *Symphilosophie. Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*, n°3, 2021, p.191-226.
- <sup>7</sup> Dans le « Canon de la raison pure ». Voir Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 804-805 / B 832-833, in *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, hg. von der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (= AA), Berlin, Reimer, 1900-1955, 1966 sq., Bd. III, p. 522 ; *Critique de la raison pure*, trad. Alexandre J.-L. Delamarre et François Marty, in Emmanuel Kant, *Œuvres philosophiques*, t. 1, Paris, Gallimard, 1980, p. 1365.
- <sup>8</sup> Selon la nouvelle formulation du *Cours de logique*, au milieu des années 1790. Voir Immanuel Kant, *Logik*, Einleitung III : « Begriff von der Philosophie überhaupt », AA IX, p. 25.
- <sup>9</sup> Voir notamment Alain Renaut, « Présentation », in E. Kant, *Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, trad. Alain Renaut, Paris, GF-Flammarion, 1993, p. 10.
- <sup>10</sup> Voir Novalis, *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien*, HKA 2, p. 385-394 ; *Études sur Kant et Eschenmayer*, trad. Olivier Schefer, in Novalis, *Semences*, Paris, Allia, 2004, p. 58-66.



*pologie du point de vue pragmatique*, dès sa publication par Kant en juin 1798<sup>11</sup>, au terme de quelque trente années de cours sur le sujet. On trouve des traces explicites de cette lecture dans le projet d'encyclopédie dit du *Brouillon général*, un ensemble de réflexions que Novalis a commencé à rédiger sur ses lectures philosophiques et scientifiques de l'époque, entre la fin de l'année 1798 et le début de l'année 1799. Aux entrées n° 1000 à 1004 du *Brouillon général*, Novalis aborde l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, qualifiant de « fine » la tentative du Kant anthropologue d'exposer scientifiquement l'observation empirique des faits de la conscience et l'expérience extérieure :

1002. Kant est un fin observateur et expérimentateur –<sup>12</sup>.

Tout en projetant systématiquement un éclairage sur l'arrière-plan kantien de la pensée de Novalis, j'esquisserai ici quelques éléments de réponse donnés à son tour par le poète-philosophe romantique aux deux premières des trois interrogations décisives de la philosophie, la question de la connaissance et celle de la liberté, rapportées au projet anthropologique d'établir ce par quoi l'homme est proprement homme, ni animal ni pure raison, mais un être à la fois sensible *et* raisonnable<sup>13</sup>. Il conviendra, pour ce faire, de comparer le fragment 16 de *Pollen* au propos de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, qui lui est légèrement postérieur ; et de lire, parallèlement au fragment de *Pollen*, les entrées du *Brouillon général* qui font directement écho au dernier ouvrage kantien, mais aussi, pour être complet, ce qu'indiquent les *Études sur Kant* de 1797. Je reviendrai donc constamment sur le fragment 16 de *Pollen* pour en analyser le contenu à la lumière de l'anthropologie kantienne.

Comme nous le verrons, là où l'anthropologie philosophique de Kant demeure essentiellement empirique et comprend l'élément pragmatique avant tout du point de vue extérieur, sous le rapport de l'existence collective de l'homme, l'anthropologie philosophique de Novalis propose une extension transcendantale de l'anthropologie. En d'autres termes, on a affaire,

<sup>11</sup> Date de la première édition l'ouvrage établie par Kant avec l'appui des nombreuses *Nachschriften* des auditeurs de ses cours. Sur la genèse du livre, voir Heiner F. Klemme, entrée sur Kant du *Handbuch Anthropologie: Der Mensch zwischen Natur, Kultur und Technik*, hg. von Eike Bohlken und Christian Thies, Stuttgart, Metzler, 2009, p. 11-16.

<sup>12</sup> Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, HKA 3, p. 457 ; cf. *Le brouillon général*, trad. Olivier Schefer, Paris, Allia, 2000, p. 242.

<sup>13</sup> Je n'approfondirai pas la troisième question, qui relève de la philosophie de la religion. Sur ce point, on se reportera à l'article récent d'Anna Ezekiel, « Knowledge, Faith, and Ambiguity: Hope in the Work of Novalis and Karoline von Günderode », in *Hope and the Kantian Legacy: New Contributions to the History of Optimism*, ed. Katerina Mihaylova and Anna Ezekiel, London *et al.*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, p. 239-254.

dans les deux cas, à une anthropologie pragmatique, mais le chemin emprunté par Kant suit une direction plus empirique, tandis que la voie nouvelle de l'anthropologie novalissienne insiste davantage sur le versant transcendantal. Les aspects exposés ici d'une anthropologie transcendantale chez Novalis, sens interne et théorie de la personne, génie et *Bildung*, imagination et poésie, ne sont toutefois que des éléments : ils n'épuisent pas la reconstruction du discours de Novalis sur l'humain<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. La double directionnalité du chemin

La Préface de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* contient des affirmations célèbres destinées à faire comprendre en quel sens précis et rigoureux l'étude de l'être humain peut être décisive pour la philosophie. L'anthropologie kantienne se démarque, tout d'abord, de la métaphysique traditionnelle (précritique). Cette métaphysique d'école (*Schulmetaphysik*) avait pensé le sujet humain, jusque dans la première moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, à l'aune d'une théorie rationnelle de la psychologie. Or la *Critique de la raison pure*, c'est bien connu, a déconstruit du point de vue de la philosophie transcendantale les illusions de la raison au sujet de l'idée d'âme entendue comme « substance ». Elle a substitué à l'idée métaphysique de l'âme la notion, problématique, du sujet transcendantal, c'est-à-dire l'identité du *je pense* comme pure structure formelle de tout jugement. Le propos de l'anthropologie est de prendre la suite de la philosophie transcendantale. Plus précisément, son ambition explicite est de prendre en charge ce dont l'interrogation : « Qu'est-ce que l'homme ? » se trouve investie en substituant à la métaphysique le programme d'une doctrine mondaine, empirique, du sujet humain. La véritable anthropologie philosophique relève, en effet, pour le penseur critique qu'est Kant, d'une « connaissance du monde » (*Weltkenntnis*)<sup>15</sup>, en vue d'éduquer la jeunesse à y naviguer, dans la tradition post-métaphysique inaugurée par la philosophie des Lumières à partir de la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> L'élément de l'organologie comme théorie d'un usage libre du corps ne sera pas non plus abordé ici. Je l'ai traité dans la lecture que j'ai proposée de la philosophie novalissienne de l'« idéalisme magique ». Voir Laure Cahen-Maurel, « Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine », *Symphilosophie: Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*, no. 1, 2019, p. 129-165 ; et auparavant, *L'art de romantiser le monde. La peinture de Caspar David Friedrich et la philosophie romantique de Novalis*, Berlin et al., LIT Verlag, 2017. On se reportera également, à ce sujet, aux analyses d'Olivier Schefer dans « L'"idéalisme magique" de Novalis », *Critique*, 2003 (6), n° 673-674, p. 514-527.

<sup>15</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, AA VII, , p. 119 ; *Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, trad. Alain Renaut, p. 41.

En deuxième lieu, la Préface de l'ouvrage de Kant distingue entre connaissance « physiologique » et connaissance « pragmatique » de l'humain. L'anthropologie philosophique visée par Kant est autre chose que l'étude des traits physiques de l'homme en tant qu'il appartient au règne animal et à la nature physique. Elle scrute, non pas « ce que la *nature* fait de l'homme », mais « ce que l'homme, comme être agissant par liberté (*als freihandelndes Wesen*), fait ou peut et doit faire de lui-même (*aus sich selber macht oder machen kann und soll*) »<sup>16</sup>.

Enfin, outre l'accent mis sur le rôle actif du sujet humain empirique, la Préface présente également l'élément pragmatique comme connaissance de l'homme en tant que « citoyen du monde » (*Weltbürger*), c'est-à-dire comme étude de l'homme sous le rapport de son existence collective, de sa relation à ses semblables.

Novalis a relevé explicitement tout cela dans le *Brouillon général*. Tout en s'interrogeant sur ce que recouvre exactement le terme « monde », il prend acte du propos de l'anthropologie kantienne : l'entrée n° 1000 note « l'opposition entre l'école et le monde » et remarque qu'il n'est de faire (*Machen*) et de transformation concrètement effective que relatifs<sup>17</sup>.

Deux distinctions supplémentaires sont soulignées dans la Préface de Kant à son ouvrage de 1798 : celle entre connaissance « générale » et « locale » et celle entre connaissance endogène et exogène, les deux distinctions s'entre-impliquant mutuellement. L'anthropologie philosophique au sens de Kant expose, en effet, la forme la plus générale de la connaissance de ce qu'est l'être humain. Elle concerne moins l'investigation des variations des êtres humains au regard de la diversité des peuples et des cultures dans le temps et dans l'espace que l'investigation de la structure matricielle de l'humain à travers le pouvoir en principe indéfini d'appropriation de la nature par la liberté, qui se donne ainsi réalité. Toute connaissance locale sur l'homme acquise par le biais plus traditionnel du voyage (*das Reisen*<sup>18</sup>), d'expéditions dans des contrées lointaines, est reléguée par Kant au second plan en regard de ce principe général d'appropriation par une personne de sa propre nature. Quant à la seconde distinction, Kant affirme la préséance méthodologique d'une connaissance de la personnalité de l'homme acquise « chez soi » (*zu Hause*) sur une connaissance anthropologique élargie des humains dans leur diversité, acquise « à l'extérieur » (*auswärts*) par le recours aux voyages<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>17</sup> Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, HKA 3, p. 457 ; trad., p. 242.

<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, AA VII, p. 120 ; trad., p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem.*

Le fragment 16 de *Pollen* s'ouvre notoirement avec le motif du voyage : « Nous rêvons de voyages à travers l'univers : l'univers n'est-il donc pas en nous ? ». Étroitement associé au rêve, le motif, ici, n'est toutefois pas ethnographique, mais bien plutôt utopique. Il est réduit à la figure onirique du voyage interplanétaire, récurrente dans la littérature et les essais sur l'astronomie des XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, à l'instar du vol vers la lune dans le songe de l'astronome allemand Johannes Kepler, auteur, en 1609, d'un écrit intitulé *Le Songe ou l'Astronomie lunaire*, ou du voyage des *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) du Français Bernard de Fontenelle. Mais le motif se retrouve également chez Kant lui-même en réponse à la question : « Que m'est-il permis d'espérer ? », troisième des interrogations fondamentales de la raison humaine. En conclusion de la troisième partie de l'*Histoire générale de la nature et théorie du ciel* (1755), le philosophe de Königsberg soulève en effet la question d'une vie future de l'âme après la mort en ces termes :

Ne devrait-elle [l'âme immortelle] jamais avoir part à une contemplation plus proche des autres merveilles de la création ? Qui sait, ne lui est-il pas réservé de pouvoir faire connaissance de près, un jour, avec ces globes éloignés de l'univers [...] <sup>20</sup>.

Or, au fragment 16 de *Pollen*, le motif a perdu sa fonction fantasmagorique ou eschatologique : il se fait découverte progressive, cheminement méthodique – philosophique. Ce qui est conforme à ce qui se dit dans la Préface de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* sur la bonne méthode philosophique d'une connaissance mondaine du sujet humain.

Le chemin, dont l'image se substitue chez Novalis à celle du voyage, est un chemin « mystérieux », qui « va vers l'intérieur » – mystérieux parce que « nous ignorons les profondeurs de notre esprit ». Les commentateurs, à l'instar de Richard Samuel, ont vu dans cette image la trace d'une intertextualité avec les *Lettres philosophiques sur le dogmatisme et le criticisme* de Schelling, que Novalis a lues en juin 1797 et qui décrivent l'intuition intellectuelle comme le « pouvoir secret, merveilleux », en nous, de l'acte « éternel » d'un Moi non sensible, hors du temps, qui se pose lui-même<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*, AA I, p. 367 ; *Histoire générale de la nature et théorie du ciel*, trad. François Marty, *Œuvres philosophiques* I, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Stuttgart, Cotta, Bd. I, 1, 1861, p. 317 sq. : « Uns allen nämlich wohnt ein geheimes, wunderbares Vermögen bei, uns aus dem Wechsel der Zeit in unser Innerstes, von allem, was von außenher hinzukam, entkleidetes Selbst zurückzuziehen, und da unter der Form der Unwandelbarkeit das Ewige in uns anzuschauen. Diese Anschauung ist die innerste, eigenste Erfahrung, von welcher allein alles abhängt, was wir von einer übersinnlichen Welt wissen und glauben [...]. In diesem Moment der Anschauung schwindet für uns die Zeit und Dauer dahin:

Novalis connaît aussi de près l'origine fichtéenne du concept de l'intuition intellectuelle, ayant mené auparavant une lecture de fond de la *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (*Assise fondamentale de la Doctrine de la science*). Et s'il est vrai que les liens textuels et intellectuels avec l'écrit de Schelling sont ici évidents, conformément au geste syncrétique caractéristique de la pensée de Novalis, qui se laisse rarement réduire à une seule influence mais fait coexister le plus souvent plusieurs références, la comparaison avec Kant, par rapport auquel tous les penseurs postkantien se positionnent, n'en ouvre pas moins – telle est ma conviction – des pistes herméneutiques partiellement inédites.

Le chemin du fragment 16 de *Pollen* comporte en réalité deux directions : il peut et doit se déployer tant vers l'intérieur, en tant que chemin de l'idéalisme, du rentrer en soi de l'esprit, que vers l'extérieur, en tant que mouvement réciproque, réaliste, et regard du sujet sur les choses qui l'entourent. Autrement dit, Novalis ne perd pas le monde de vue, la perspective empirique, mondaine, réaliste et scientifique qui régit l'anthropologie kantienne. C'est ce que dit explicitement le fragment 24 de *Pollen*, dont le fragment 16 est solidaire :

24. [...] Le premier pas est un regard jeté vers l'intérieur, contemplation isolante de notre soi. Celui qui en reste là ne parvient qu'à mi-chemin. Le deuxième pas doit être un regard efficace vers l'extérieur, une observation par elle-même active et soutenue du monde extérieur. [...] <sup>22</sup>.

Cette double directionnalité trouve un parallèle dans le double moment de la « Didactique anthropologique », première partie de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* de Kant, qui consiste à « connaître l'homme intérieur aussi bien que l'homme extérieur ». Mais c'est ici que l'on mesure une première différence majeure entre le propos de Kant et celui de Novalis sur l'homme, par où Novalis, comme avant lui Fichte et Schelling, transgresse l'interdit kantien jeté sur l'idée d'une capacité humaine d'intuition intellectuelle.

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nicht *wir* sind in der Zeit, sondern die Zeit – oder vielmehr nicht sie, sondern die reine absolute Ewigkeit ist *in uns*. » Cf. Richard Samuel, HKA 2, p. 747.

<sup>22</sup> Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, frag. 24, HKA 2, p. 423 ; trad. mod., p. 74 : « Der erste Schritt wird Blick nach Innen, absondernde Beschauung unsers Selbst. Wer hier stehn bleibt, geräth nur halb. Der zweyte Schritt muß wirksamer Blick nach Außen, selbstthätige, gehaltne Beobachtung der Außenwelt seyn. »

### 3. Le Journal intime : débarquer à Anticyre ?

Pour Kant, la connaissance de l'homme intérieur – l'approfondissement idéaliste en soi-même pour conquérir son chez-soi – conduit l'anthropologie à une impasse en matière d'objectivité scientifique. Ou plutôt, il y a sur ce point une tension caractéristique du criticisme. Plus exactement, une tension propre au dualisme de cette philosophie. D'un côté, l'anthropologie kantienne n'a son fondement et son point de départ qu'avec le concept de « personne ». Or, dans sa détermination anthropologique, la *personnalité* au sens de Kant est d'abord le réquisit d'un pouvoir d'*aperception*. Elle suppose notre capacité à être conscient d'une identité numérique et persistante par-delà les changements que nous traversons dans le temps : l'identité d'un Je. L'âme humaine doit être spécifiée de cette manière – en tant que personnalité – pour la distinguer de l'âme d'un animal. C'est sur cette affirmation que s'ouvre le tout premier paragraphe de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, intitulé « De la conscience de soi » :

§ 1. Que l'homme puisse posséder le Je dans sa représentation, cela l'élève infiniment au-dessus de tous les autres êtres vivant sur la terre. C'est par là qu'il est une *personne*, et grâce à l'unité de la conscience à travers toutes les transformations qui peuvent lui advenir, il est une seule et même personne, c'est-à-dire un être totalement différent par le rang et par la dignité de choses comme les animaux dépourvus de raison [...] <sup>23</sup>.

Dans la typologie de l'anthropologie philosophique, l'âme humaine se situe, en d'autres termes, sur un plan distinct de celle des animaux en vertu de sa possession d'un tel pouvoir intellectuel supérieur, plus encore qu'en vertu de notre dignité d'être moral, qui est l'objet de la philosophie pratique.

D'un autre côté, pourtant, Kant critique l'auto-observation excessive du Je. Sa critique stigmatise les diaristes, à l'image d'un Blaise Pascal ou d'un Albrecht Haller, qui couchent par écrit l'observation minutieuse de leurs états intérieurs. Pareille observation quotidienne, répétée, de soi-même conduit, selon Kant, à la *Schwärmerei*, autrement dit soit à l'exaltation mystique, comme dans le cas du *Mémorial* du janséniste Pascal, soit à la maladie mentale comme pathologie clinique, que Kant regarde comme l'« abaissement le plus profond de l'humanité qui provienne toutefois de la nature » <sup>24</sup>. C'est ce qui l'amène à donner plus loin, au § 4, un avertissement :

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<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, AA VII, p. 127 ; trad., p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, § 52, p. 214 ; cf. trad., p. 167.

Pour ce qui touche, en tout cas, à l'intention véritable de ce paragraphe, à savoir l'avertissement (*Warnung*) donné ci-dessus de ne s'occuper nullement de reconstituer, comme si on devait l'écrire avec application, une histoire intérieure du cours involontaire (*unwillkürlichen*) de ses pensées et de ses sentiments, la raison en est que c'est là exactement la voie qui, dans la confusion mentale de prétendues inspirations supérieures et de forces qui exercent sur nous leur influence sans notre participation et en venant d'on ne sait où, conduit à l'illuminisme ou au terrorisme. [...] Quiconque sait multiplier les récits à propos de ses expériences intérieures (qu'il s'agisse de grâce, de tentations), s'expose, en voyageant ainsi à la découverte et à l'exploration de lui-même, à ne parvenir qu'à débarquer préalablement à Anticyre<sup>25</sup>.

On retrouve dans ce passage du § 4 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* le motif du voyage évoqué plus haut. Ici, pourtant, la référence au voyage dans son propre univers mental fait surgir l'image de la folie : voyager à la découverte de son intériorité, c'est, aux yeux de Kant, débarquer à Anticyre, ville grecque antique de Phocide, vers laquelle affluaient de nombreux malades en quête de l'hellébore poussant dans ses environs et que les hommes de l'Antiquité croyaient propre à guérir la folie. On peut noter au passage la confusion dont l'hellébore fait souvent l'objet, confusion de cette fleur en réalité toxique avec la gentiane, fleur bleue. Autrement dit : la fleur de la folie, présente en creux sous la plume de Kant, contraste avec le rêve de la fleur bleue, par lequel s'ouvre l'*Heinrich von Ofterdingen* de Novalis, roman inachevé ultérieur au livre de Kant.

Si le § 4 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* conseille de se montrer circonspect à l'égard de l'écriture intime de ses observations et perceptions intérieures, c'est parce que Kant considère qu'une telle série de traces se rapportant à la subjectivité de son auteur ne fait que donner une consistance trompeuse à l'identité de la personne et que « sans en prendre conscience, nous faisons ici la pseudo-découverte de ce que nous avons nous-même introduit en nous »<sup>26</sup>. Les déterminations empiriques du sens interne ne sauraient en effet être considérées comme constituant véritablement l'objet d'une expérience. Même méthodiquement rassemblées dans un Journal intime, ces perceptions ne sont pas objectives par nature. Ce ne sont que des déterminations contingentes et éphémères de l'individu résultant d'un état d'affectation passive, *unwillkürlich*, c'est-à-dire retiré à l'empire du sujet. Ce contenu qui m'apparaît est certes mien, mais est en même temps aussi une chose extérieure en ce qu'il échappe à la maîtrise volontaire des repré-

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133 ; trad., p. 59-60.

<sup>26</sup> *Idem* ; trad., p. 60.

sentations – à la conceptualisation –, de sorte que « la performance du transcendantal se voit suspendue »<sup>27</sup>. Il faudrait parler à leur sujet de *pseudo* ou de *quasi-expérience*. C'est pourquoi se scruter soi-même avec insistance est selon Kant un mouvement, qui n'est pas progressive découverte, mais projection. Cela consiste à prendre les intuitions du sens interne, que notre imagination nous présente spontanément, affranchie de la règle du concept, pour l'intuition d'un objet hors de soi. Or tel est le principe de toute exaltation visionnaire (*Schwärmerei*).

La perspective anthropologique kantienne comporte donc une part irréductible de dualisme, alors même que l'anthropologie est censée fournir la solution au problème de l'unité du système de la philosophie. Il y a chez Kant séparation de l'être pensant et de l'être sensible, de la conscience discursive et de la conscience intuitive, de l'aperception transcendantale et de l'aperception empirique. L'aperception transcendantale est aperception entendue comme conscience réflexive de soi, marquée du sceau de l'unité, cette unité du *je pense* accompagnant nécessairement tous nos jugements. Or la *Critique de la raison pure* a montré que l'identité du *je pense* – du sujet transcendantal – était seulement le réquisit formel de l'unité. L'aperception empirique de la personnalité est, quant à elle, conscience intuitive de soi, caractérisée par la diversité, la labilité, la contingence.

L'aspect le plus remarquable de ce dualisme est la double opacité de l'identité du sujet humain : une obscurité foncière de sa teneur, de la dimension matérielle de la conscience ; une indéterminité abstraite dans sa dimension formelle. L'unité logique de l'aperception transcendantale, qui constitue pour Kant le principe suprême de tout l'usage de l'entendement humain, et par suite de l'expérience, y compris sur le terrain de l'anthropologie, est en soi une unité vide, si bien que le Je de l'être pensant demeure une inconnue, un X, selon une image célèbre des « Paralogismes de la raison pure »<sup>28</sup>. L'opacité, dans la vision anthropologique de Kant, touche, en d'autres termes, à l'incapacité du Moi à devenir lui-même de manière intuitive l'objet d'une conscience de soi comme unité transcendantale persistant dans le temps, à travers la diversité changeante de ses déterminations empiriques.

C'est pourquoi, il s'agira, dans l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, de déplacer le regard du contenu du sens interne « vers cette dimension pour ainsi dire *extérieure* (donc relevant du sens externe) du psychisme que nous

<sup>27</sup> Pour reprendre une formule d'Antoine Grandjean dans *Métaphysiques de l'expérience. Empirisme et philosophie transcendantale selon Kant*, Paris, Vrin, 2022, p. 278.

<sup>28</sup> Voir Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 346 / B 404, AA III, p. 265.



fournissent les “conduites signifiantes” »<sup>29</sup>. L'objet du discours sur l'homme doit être redéfini : la psychologie empirique doit être remplacée par une anthropologie pragmatique. Ce qui signifie que l'introspection est désormais hors champ de l'anthropologie et que l'être humain ne peut se faire connaître que *de l'extérieur*, par son comportement social, dans ses relations à l'égard de ses semblables.

L'avertissement kantien contre l'instauration pathologique d'une pseudo-connaissance de soi par l'observation de ses états intérieurs, de ses affects, Novalis lui est déjà contrevenu au moment où il lit, à sa parution, l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* : l'année précédente, en 1797, il a lui-même tenu un Journal intime, après la mort de sa fiancée, Sophie von Kühn, Journal qui a contribué à la mauvaise réputation du « penseur romantique » comme *Schwärmer* et personnalité morbide, malade. Un passage fameux de ce texte est le récit, consigné à la date du 13 mai 1797, soit concomitamment à sa lecture de Kant, de son expérience auprès de la tombe de l'aimée, où il pense avoir perçu sa présence par-delà la mort :

Le soir, je me suis rendu auprès de Sophie et, là, j'ai éprouvé une joie qui ne peut être décrite – instants fulgurants d'enthousiasme – je soufflai sur la tombe comme on souffle sur la poussière – les siècles étaient comme des instants – sa proximité était perceptible – je crus qu'elle allait apparaître à tout moment. [...] Dans la soirée, j'eus encore quelques bonnes idées <sup>30</sup>.

Quelle que soit la valeur philosophique qu'on accorde à une telle vision, il n'est en tout cas pas surprenant que ce soit, dès lors, précisément la question de l'identité personnelle, ainsi que la mise en garde de Kant en matière d'introspection qui aient particulièrement retenu l'attention de Novalis à la lecture de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*. Outre les critiques qu'il adresse aux explications kantiennes de certains comportements humains et phénomènes culturels, Novalis, en effet, commente spécifiquement, aux entrées 1003 et 1004 du *Brouillon général*, le concept de la personne et l'avertissement du § 4 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* :

1003. La synthèse d'âme (*Seele*) et de corps (*Leib*) se nomme « personne ». La personne se rapporte, à son tour, à l'esprit comme le corps se rapporte à l'âme [...].

<sup>29</sup> Alain Renaut, « Présentation », p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Novalis, « 8. Journal » (18 avril-6 juillet 1797), HKA 4, p. 35-36. Cette expérience, Novalis la transformera en poésie dans les *Hymnes à la Nuit* de 1800.

1004. Du pluralisme et de l'omnilisme. / La mise en garde de Kant contre l'observation de soi / Son explication erronée de la naïveté. / Son commentaire incorrect du *remarquable pluriel* dans le langage *public* / – tel que « vous » [*ihr*], « ils » [*sie*], etc.<sup>31</sup>.

Il serait facile de méconnaître l'importance de ces brèves citations et allusions à l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* de Kant. Ces deux courtes entrées du *Brouillon général* laissent pourtant entrapercevoir le premier élément de ce que l'on pourrait appeler l'anthropologie philosophique de Novalis, à savoir : une théorie de la personne que le poète-philosophe romantique va élaborer, comme on va le voir, en une théorie de la personne en tant que « génie infini »<sup>32</sup>.

À l'encontre du préjugé d'une *Schwärmerei* romantique, je voudrais en effet montrer, à présent, dans quelle mesure la position de Novalis sur ce qu'est l'humain est en réalité celle d'une connaissance pragmatique de soi, autrement dit de ce qui est sous l'empire du sujet. Loin de verser dans la folie, cet « abaissement le plus profond de l'humanité qui provienne toutefois de la nature »<sup>33</sup>, selon la formule kantienne précédemment citée, l'introspection à laquelle le fragment 16 de *Pollen* nous exhorte est au contraire, bien comprise, l'*élévation* de la nature humaine au rang de médiation intérieure à l'esprit vers la liberté. La doctrine novalissienne demeure à ce titre conforme au projet kantien d'une anthropologie pragmatique. Mais elle dépasse son dualisme foncier – la séparation de l'être pensant et de l'être sentant – en actant le monisme de l'intuition intellectuelle fichtéenne. Car Novalis le notait dès 1797 :

Toute la méthode kantienne – toute la manière kantienne de philosopher est unilatérale<sup>34</sup>.

Pour le comprendre, il convient maintenant de faire un détour par le *Brouillon général*, où se trouve explicitée cette nouvelle théorie de la personne.

#### 4. Théorie de la personne comme « génie infini »

Dans l'entrée 1003 du *Brouillon général*, la personne n'est pas explicitement définie en termes d'identité ou d'unité persistant dans le temps, mais en termes de composition, comme entité composite. Loin de n'être que l'élément simple et purement formel de la conscience, une unité abstraite,

<sup>31</sup> Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, HKA 3, p. 457.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, entrée 63, HKA 3, p. 250-251.

<sup>33</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, AA VII, p. 214.

<sup>34</sup> Novalis, *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien*, HKA 2, p. 392 ; trad., p. 64.

indéterminée, dépourvue de toute teneur de réalité ou d'objectivité, comme chez Kant, la personnalité, pour Novalis, n'est pas seulement forme, elle a un contenu positif : c'est d'abord une synthèse d'âme (*Seele*) et de corps (*Leib*).

Mais il y a plus : tandis que chez Kant, on l'a dit, la personnalité constitue le point de départ et le fondement insondables de l'anthropologie, ici et dans d'autres passages du *Brouillon général*, Novalis situe la personne à l'intérieur d'une hiérarchie anthropologique plus large. À la base de cette hiérarchie, il y a le corps propre (*Leib*) comme sphère des déterminations empiriques du sens externe, soit des déterminations de la nature. Puis vient l'âme (*Seele*) et les sentiments, en tant que sphère des déterminations empiriques du sens interne, à laquelle seules sont subordonnées les déterminations extérieures du corps et de la nature et où le sujet humain risque de tomber dans la *Schwärmerei* par l'observation intérieure de ce qui en soi n'est pas sous son contrôle<sup>35</sup>. Il y a ensuite la personne, en tant qu'individu doué de volonté et ayant la pensée de soi-même, c'est-à-dire le pouvoir d'aperception réflexive ou transcendantale, pouvoir de dire « je », même si pour Novalis, contrairement à Kant, ce n'est pas une dimension seulement formelle et abstraite de la conscience de soi. Enfin, au sommet de la hiérarchie, se trouve l'esprit. L'esprit – *Geist* en allemand – est donc un pouvoir intellectuel supérieur, une instance qui dépasse la personne conçue comme incarnation et affectivité ou sentiment, mais aussi volonté. Autrement dit : pour Novalis, la personnalité psychologique, empirique, représente encore ou exprime, comme le corps, l'extériorité de la vie spirituelle.

Que signifie le fait que l'esprit soit, dans l'anthropologie de Novalis, un principe supérieur à la personne ? Il faut ici comprendre que Novalis s'accorde avec Fichte à considérer, contre Kant, qu'une intuition intellectuelle, non sensible et originaire, est possible pour l'être humain fini, comme en atteste cet autre fragment célèbre de *Pollen* : « Nous ne pourrions jamais totalement nous comprendre (*begreifen*), mais nous ferons et pourrions faire bien plus que de nous comprendre »<sup>36</sup>. Novalis reprend, ici, la terminologie philosophique propre à la connaissance d'entendement, à savoir la saisie par conceptualisation (*begreifen*), pour affirmer que celle-ci n'est pas le mode de traitement ou d'accès adéquat pour la connaissance de soi. L'accès à son soi transcendantal, non empirique, qui ne saurait être un objet d'expérience, est à penser, pour Novalis comme pour Fichte, comme une autre forme de

<sup>35</sup> Sur la question du rapport de l'âme et du corps, voir Violetta Waibel, « “Innres, äußres Organ”. Das Problem der Gemeinschaft von Seele und Körper in den ›Fichte-Studien‹ Friedrich von Hardenbergs », *Athenaum. Jahrbuch für Romantik*, 2000 (10), p. 159-181.

<sup>36</sup> Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, frag. 6, HKA 2, p. 413 ; « Pollen », in *Semences*, p. 70.

connaissance, ainsi qu'on le lit encore dans les *Études sur Kant* de 1797, qui contiennent déjà le motif du chemin :

15. Concept *de sens*. [...] Existe-t-il encore une connaissance *extra-sensorielle* ? Un autre chemin est-il ouvert, permettant de sortir de soi et d'atteindre d'autres êtres, ou d'être affecté par eux ?<sup>37</sup>

La réponse novalissienne à la question : « Que puis-je savoir ? » réside donc dans cette faculté d'intuition intellectuelle, qui est le fait du Moi – du *Ich* – qu'il nomme également l'esprit, le *Geist*, lequel se subdivise en raison, entendement et imagination. Cet esprit ne saurait être saisi empiriquement ou physiquement : il ne peut être saisi que comme connaissance intuitive de son identité purement spirituelle.

On comprend dès lors la différence essentielle entre le propos de Kant et celui de Novalis sur l'homme : l'idée kantienne de la personne devient chez Novalis quelque chose comme un germe qui n'est pas encore développé, alors que l'identité de la personne demeure ultimement un X inconnaissable chez Kant. Selon Novalis, une telle identité du *je pense* ne doit pas rester ce qu'elle est en tant que conscience de notre personnalité ordinaire, dans notre vie de tous les jours : elle doit être approfondie, cultivée davantage et surtout devenir en elle-même l'objet d'une reconnaissance consciente, d'une élévation à un niveau de conscience supérieur, selon un mouvement de potentiation qualitative que Novalis appelle aussi « romantisation »<sup>38</sup>. Dans la hiérarchie de l'anthropologie novalissienne, ce germe de personnalité au sens de Kant qui s'est développé jusqu'à atteindre une forme de conscience plus élevée, supérieure, s'appelle « génie », ou plutôt « génie infini ».

L'entrée 63 du *Brouillon général*, explicitement intitulée « Théorie de la personne » (*Personenlehre*), présente cette hiérarchie et ce processus d'élévation du germe de la personne au génie :

63. THÉORIE DE LA PERSONNE. Une personne authentiquement *synthétique* est une personne qui est en même temps plusieurs personnes – un génie. Chaque personne est le germe (*Keim*) d'un génie infini. Elle peut être décomposée en plusieurs personnes, sans cesser pour autant d'être une. [...] Une personne est une *harmonie* – pas un mélange, ni un mouvement – ni une *substance* comme l'« *âme* ». Esprit et personne sont un. [...]<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Novalis, *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien*, HKA 2, p. 390 ; trad. mod., p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> Novalis, « Poëticismen », *Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen* frag. 105, HKA 2, p. 545 ; « Poëticismes », *Semences*, p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, HKA 3, p. 250-251 ; trad., p. 32.

Novalis, on le voit, ne reconduit pas les illusions de la métaphysique – celles de la psychologie rationnelle relatives à l'idée d'âme – que le criticisme kantien a déconstruites. Il développe une conception non pas substantielle, mais relationnelle de la personne et reste, en cela, comme Kant, sur le terrain d'une conception mondaine de l'anthropologie. Sa « théorie de la personne » reprend, tout en la modifiant, l'idée que Kant se fait du génie et du *Geist* comme « principe d'animation » (*belebendes Prinzip*) en l'homme<sup>40</sup>. Pas seulement la théorie, que Novalis connaissait, des §§ 46-49 de la *Critique de la faculté de juger*, mais aussi celle des §§ 57-59 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, où le concept organique de germe (*Keim*) est également utilisé par Kant<sup>41</sup>. Pour mieux comprendre la théorie de la personne propre à Novalis, il est donc nécessaire de la comparer avec le concept kantien du génie.

Tout d'abord, le génie est, pour Kant aussi, un principe synthétique. Ce n'est pas une faculté – ce n'est pas la seule faculté de l'imagination : c'est le *jeu* de tous nos pouvoirs cognitifs entre eux, sensibilité, imagination, entendement, mais aussi raison ; et l'état d'harmonie de ces facultés fonctionnant ensemble, une fois surmontée leur polarité. Le fait que l'harmonie des facultés de l'esprit humain se manifeste dans le génie est énoncé par Kant au § 57 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* :

Mais les forces de l'âme (*Gemütskräfte*) doivent en cela être dynamisées de façon harmonieuse par l'intermédiaire de l'imagination, dans la mesure où, si tel n'était pas le cas, elles perdraient leur capacité d'animation, mais au contraire se contrecarreraient réciproquement ; or cette dynamisation harmonieuse doit être produite par la *nature* du sujet : raison pour laquelle on peut aussi appeler « génie » le talent « par lequel la nature donne à l'art sa règle »<sup>42</sup>.

Nous retrouvons ce point explicitement exprimé dans la *Personenlehre* de Novalis, selon laquelle « une personne est une *harmonie* ». Ces lignes du § 57 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* recèlent, de fait, les potentialités spéculatives les plus fécondes du kantisme pour Novalis, qui trouve avec le concept du génie l'inverse exact du concept de la folie que Kant associait à l'introspection au § 4 et dont il dresse la typologie des différentes manifestations aux §§ 45 à 53 – soit juste avant d'aborder l'opposé de la défaillance de l'esprit, à savoir ses talents. Là où la folie est un état de perturbation mentale dans laquelle s'instaure « un cours arbitraire (*willkürlich*) des

<sup>40</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 49, AA V, p. 313.

<sup>41</sup> Voir Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, § 59, AA VII, p. 226.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, § 57, AA VII, p. 225-226 ; trad., p. 182.

pensées, qui a sa propre règle (subjective), mais qui va à l'encontre des règles (objectives) concordant avec les lois de l'expérience »<sup>43</sup>, et où se creuse l'écart entre sujet sentant et sujet pensant, le génie est cet état mental où s'instaure au contraire un accord harmonieux entre la liberté (subjective) de l'imagination affranchie de son rôle d'auxiliaire de l'entendement dans ses prestations de connaissance et la légalité (objective) de l'entendement qui dote cette matière intuitive, contingente, d'un horizon de sens cohérent.

Il importe toutefois d'être également attentif, ici, aux différences entre le propos de Novalis et celui de Kant. Chez Kant, l'accent est mis sur le génie en tant qu'*harmonie naturelle de l'esprit inconscient*. Lorsque Kant déclare que dans le génie, c'est « la nature [qui] donne à l'art sa règle », cela signifie que l'œuvre d'art produite par le génie n'aurait pas pu être conçue intentionnellement par l'artiste, conformément à une intentionnalité nécessairement conceptuelle. Le génie dénote donc en réalité, pour Kant, une dépossession du sujet humain artistique : il indique que la maîtrise volontaire de l'artiste sur sa configuration artistique est limitée parce qu'il ne peut pas contrôler le succès de son œuvre. Le génie kantien désigne donc un moment impersonnel de la production artistique qui échappe à l'empire de l'artiste lui-même.

Certains interprètes se plaignent de la mystification du génie chez les romantiques. Or, la mystification du génie artistique est déjà présente chez Kant. En présentant le génie comme une étincelle inexplicable de la nature intervenant dans la production artistique, Kant fournit le modèle de la glorification du génie comme d'un don naturel que seules quelques personnes possèdent, alors que la plupart des autres ne le possèdent pas. Dans une telle pseudo-explication, le succès de la production artistique est attribué à une capacité mystérieuse du sujet artistique. Kant reprend cette idée de mystère au § 57 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* :

En fait, la raison pour laquelle on désigne par ce terme mystique l'originalité exemplaire du talent, c'est que celui qui la possède ne peut pas s'en expliquer les apparitions, ni même se rendre à lui-même compréhensible la manière dont il accède à un art qu'il n'a pas pu apprendre<sup>44</sup>.

Avec ce génie pouvant être regardé comme spontanéité naturelle, nous avons donc affaire ici, une fois de plus, comme avec la question de l'existence du principe unificateur de l'aperception transcendantale – de la personne –, à

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, § 45, AA VII, p. 202 ; trad., p. 151.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, § 57, AA VII, p. 225 ; trad., p. 181-182.

un aspect du kantisme où le principe essentiel est auto-causé d'une manière que la philosophie ne peut apparemment pas formuler.

Là où la conception qu'a Novalis du génie diffère profondément de celle de Kant, c'est au sens où Novalis pense le génie en relation avec un état spontané, autoproduit, d'harmonie spirituelle, ainsi que d'unité ou d'unicité de l'*esprit conscient*. Entre les deux penseurs, il y a un contraste portant sur l'opposition entre le naturel et le spirituel, l'inconscient et le conscient. C'est pourquoi, pour Novalis, l'esprit en tant que génie et la personne, c'est-à-dire l'esprit conscient de soi, forment une synthèse. Ou, comme le dit l'entrée 63 du *Brouillon général* : « Esprit et personne sont un ».

En outre, alors que Kant se fait du génie une conception élitiste, celle d'un grand esprit ou d'une grande individualité, traduisant le latin *genius* par la locution allemande *eigenthümlicher Geist*, littéralement : « esprit singulier », la conception qu'en a Novalis est beaucoup plus égalitaire : il considère le génie comme une faculté humaine universelle. Ainsi qu'on peut le lire encore à l'entrée 63 du *Brouillon général*, chaque personne a en soi le germe, la disposition naturelle, pour devenir un génie. Ainsi, dans l'anthropologie philosophique de Novalis, le génie n'est pas réservé à quelques personnes spéciales, mais chaque personne est potentiellement (en germe) un génie, raison pour laquelle le génie donne matière à un discours philosophique, à une connaissance générale de ce qu'est l'humain.

Enfin, le génie chez Kant est avant tout un génie artistique, alors que le génie chez Novalis est beaucoup plus transdisciplinaire et encyclopédique. Novalis parle de génie philosophique, mathématique, moral, politique, etc. Car, pour lui, le génie est le principe synthétisant dans l'être humain. Et, comme on l'a vu, non seulement la personne est une synthèse, mais la personne véritablement synthétique est un génie.

En résumé, Novalis avance une théorie de la personne comme génie qui combine, pourrait-on dire, deux sections distinctes de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* de Kant : la théorie de la personne des premiers paragraphes du texte et la théorie du génie aux §§ 57-59. La théorie de Novalis dépasse la position de Kant dans la mesure où elle met l'accent sur la personne en tant qu'harmonie concrète, consciente d'elle-même et plus universelle, et comme synthèse subordonnée au principe supérieur de l'esprit. Il s'agit d'un esprit connaissable au sens où l'idéation inconsciente du génie peut, selon Novalis qui suit sur ce point Fichte, être élevée à la conscience de soi et que le talent naturel de la personne se trouve ainsi spiritualisé. Si le génie est l'esprit dans l'état d'harmonie de la totalité de ses pouvoirs cognitifs, sensibles et intellectuels – pour Kant, l'artiste inconscient de ce qu'il fait (germe impersonnel) –, le « génie infini » est l'esprit conscient

de l'état d'harmonie dans lequel sont ses pouvoirs cognitifs, le Moi de son Moi, soit pour Novalis et Fichte, le philosophe transcendantal en tant qu'artiste (le germe devenu personnel et qui s'est développé en fleur); ou, pour Novalis, une personne « synthétique », plusieurs en une. Et, chez ce dernier, ce génie du génie, ou Moi de son Moi, peut encore être potentié, élevé au carré, au niveau supérieur d'un génie du génie du génie, autrement dit à l'esprit parfait (*vollkommen*), de lui-même éthique (pluraliste, pas égoïste).

C'est ce que confirme, sous la rubrique « Anthropologie », l'entrée 258 du *Brouillon général*, qui concerne la complétude et la perfection de l'être humain, soit le problème de la conformité de l'humanité à son propre concept :

258. ANTHROPOLOGIE. [...] (L'artiste complet, *et parfait*, de manière générale est *de lui-même* éthique – même chose pour *l'homme complet* et parfait *de manière générale*.)<sup>45</sup>

L'anthropologie de Novalis n'est plus ordonnée en dernière instance à une perspective (phylogénétique) morale ou juridico-politique comme chez Kant, mais à une perspective éthique, à l'échelle de l'individu. Être « de soi-même éthique », c'est, pour Kant, être saint : le saint n'a pas besoin de morale, puisque toutes ses actions sont en elles-mêmes morales. Mais là où Kant distingue entre l'être humain et le saint, en raison de la double nature de l'homme, empirique et rationnelle, sensible et intelligible, qui nous oblige à penser constamment ses actions à l'intersection de deux ordres hétérogènes de causalité, la causalité par liberté et la causalité naturelle ; et que le franchissement du fossé qui sépare la nature de la culture passe par un processus de civilisation de l'humanité en tant qu'espèce morale, la transition vers un niveau supérieur, demeure, pour Novalis, immanent à la finitude de l'être humain. La culture harmonieuse de toutes les facultés de notre esprit travaillant ensemble aboutit à une sorte de spontanéité éthique : nos facultés sensibles inférieures sont en accord avec nos pouvoirs cognitifs supérieurs, et chaque faculté peut être élevée à un niveau supérieur. Le programme de la formation de soi (*Bildung*) romantique ne consiste donc pas seulement à développer, discipliner et affiner nos pouvoirs cognitifs supérieurs, mais aussi à développer, à discipliner et à affiner la sensibilité en tant que faculté esthétique, ou le pouvoir de l'amour comme faculté éthique, source vitale de

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<sup>45</sup> Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, HKA 3, p. 286. Cf. trad., p. 68.



notre humanité, de la même manière que la raison elle-même peut être développée, disciplinée et affinée<sup>46</sup>.

Revenons, pour finir, au fragment 16 de *Pollen*. Certes, le motif du chemin mystérieux vers l'intérieur prend déjà en partie son sens à la lumière de ce qui vient d'être dit de la personne comme génie (infini) – terme « mystique » aux propres dire de Kant –, tel qu'on en trouve la théorie dans le *Brouillon général*, postérieur à *Pollen*. Mais il n'acquiert son sens plein que lorsque l'on comprend le rôle de cette faculté particulière de l'esprit humain décisive pour le génie, à savoir : l'imagination. La théorisation par Fichte de l'imagination est absolument cruciale pour Novalis<sup>47</sup> ; et j'ai montré ailleurs qu'elle est au fondement de sa théorie de la magie et de sa philosophie dite de « l'idéalisme magique »<sup>48</sup>. Je vais maintenant reprendre brièvement la question de l'imagination chez Kant en lien à Novalis, avant de conclure par quelques réflexions sur la théorie fichtéenne de l'imagination, qui s'inscrit elle-même dans la continuité de Kant.

## 5. L'imagination contre la *Phantasie*

Avec la question de l'imagination, ce qui est en jeu anthropologiquement, c'est le rapport de la rationalité à son autre ou plutôt à l'apparemment irrationnel. L'imagination se situe sur le plan des images et non pas des concepts, elle est affaire de sensibilité et d'intuition, pas de jugement, de logique ou de connaissance. C'est pourquoi cette faculté n'appartient pas, pour Kant, à la même famille des pouvoirs cognitifs de l'homme que les trois facultés officiellement « supérieures » que sont la raison, l'entendement et la faculté de juger. Le criticisme maintient une stricte hiérarchie entre ces trois facultés et l'imagination, cantonnée au niveau inférieur des intuitions sensibles, dont le § 5 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique* affirme que la vaste majorité nous demeure « obscures » – à nous, esprits finis –, car inconscientes<sup>49</sup>. L'imagination, entre autres, est ce par quoi l'homme est proche de l'animal. Mais le criticisme opère simultanément un tournant. À l'encontre des rationalistes classiques qui ne percevaient dans l'imagination

<sup>46</sup> Sur la notion romantique de la *Bildung*, on se reportera à l'ouvrage de Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism*, Cambridge, MA, et Londres, Harvard University Press, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Voir à ce sujet Augustin Dumont, *L'opacité du sensible chez Fichte et Novalis. Théories et pratiques de l'imagination transcendante à l'épreuve du langage*, Grenoble, Jérôme Millon, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Voir Laure Cahen-Maurel, « Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine ».

<sup>49</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, § 5, AA VII, p. 135 ; trad., p. 62.

qu'une source d'erreur et d'illusion, Kant ouvre l'ère d'une véritable philosophie de l'imagination en montrant qu'une doctrine de l'entendement humain appelle une prise en compte de l'imagination comme son complément indispensable pour penser de manière adéquate la connaissance en tant qu'opération de mentalisation à la fois sensible et intellectuelle. Une opération où les concepts purs de l'entendement doivent être remplis d'un contenu intuitif, recouvrant un objet possible de l'expérience.

Au-delà de la hiérarchie des facultés de l'esprit humain, Kant associe foncièrement à l'imagination l'opacité. La *Critique de la raison pure* qualifie sa fonction médiatrice de schématisation, selon une formule restée célèbre, d'« art caché » :

Ce schématisme de l'entendement pur, en vue des phénomènes et de leur simple forme, est un art caché dans les profondeurs de l'âme humaine, et dont nous aurons de la peine à arracher à la nature les secrets du fonctionnement pour les mettre à découvert sous les yeux<sup>50</sup>.

Pouvoir de l'esprit, l'imagination a trait aux profondeurs de la vitalité et de la nature en nous. Et pourtant, la philosophie de Kant a, la première, tenté l'entrée dans cette opacité, dans cette profondeur obscure dans laquelle le regard peut si difficilement pénétrer.

Un premier élément d'éclairage projeté par Kant sur cette opacité a consisté à dépasser la réduction de l'imagination au seul rôle de reproduction. L'imagination n'est pas qu'une faculté intérieure d'évocation, un pouvoir qu'a l'esprit humain d'évoquer les apparences sensibles d'objets absents ou possibles, autrement dit la faculté dérivée, secondaire, dépendante de la mémoire et de l'expérience, de conserver la trace mentale d'une perception. Cette fonction seulement reproductrice de l'imagination est reléguée par Kant dans le domaine de la psychologie empirique, dont l'anthropologie pragmatique doit prendre le relais. La philosophie critique, quant à elle, pousse plus loin la compréhension de l'imagination en mettant en lumière une fonction productrice, et non pas seulement reproductrice, de son pouvoir d'intuition. L'imagination productrice est un pouvoir original, spontané et transcendantal du psychisme humain, qui est en même temps un pouvoir incarné de configuration sensible.

Il importe de souligner ici que deux modalités de la productivité de l'imagination coexistent dans la philosophie critique de Kant. Elles correspondent d'ailleurs à deux termes allemands distincts, connotés de manière

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<sup>50</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 141 / B 180-181, AA III, p. 136 ; trad., p. 887.

opposée : l'*Einbildungskraft* au sens strict, productivité transcendante volontaire, intentionnelle (*willkürlich*), normée et maîtrisée, pouvoir synthétique au fondement de toute connaissance du réel aussi bien que faculté d'invention artistico-poétique de l'irréel, est autre chose que la *Phantasie*, production involontaire (*unwillkürlich*) et inconsciente ou irréfléchie d'images soit fantasmées, soit rêvées, où l'imagination joue avec nous plutôt que nous ne jouons avec elle. Une longue séquence de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, les §§ 28 à 37, aborde d'une manière détaillée cette distinction qui se trouve déjà dans la *Critique de la faculté de juger*<sup>51</sup>. Et la *Schwärmerei*, dont il a été question plus haut à propos de l'introspection, est rattachée par Kant à cette forme plutôt négative de l'imagination productrice qu'il nomme *Phantasie*, stigmatisée pour ses errements.

La philosophie romantique de Novalis met à son tour l'accent sur l'imagination productrice, plutôt que simplement reproductrice. Et même si les deux modalités de l'imagination productrice coexistent également dans sa pensée, Novalis a retenu de sa lecture de Kant et de Fichte la différence capitale entre production d'intuitions volontaire et involontaire, en vertu de laquelle on ne saurait utiliser indifféremment les deux termes *Phantasie* et *Einbildungskraft*. Bien plus : le fragment 16 de *Pollen* ne prend tout son sens que si l'on comprend qu'il joue l'imagination productrice transcendante (*produktive Einbildungskraft*), sous le contrôle du sujet, contre l'imagination fantaisiste (*Phantasie*). Ou plutôt qu'il élève la modalité inférieure qu'est cette dernière au rang supérieur de la première. Car il n'y a pas deux facultés d'imagination. Il y a une faculté unique (en tant faculté d'intuition sensible), avec plusieurs usages. La *Phantasie* est donc bien un usage de l'imagination, mais un usage inférieur, s'exerçant de manière plus *sauvage* : cet état de nature de l'imagination peut et doit être ordonné à l'action de l'homme.

Le fragment 16 de *Pollen* s'ouvre avec la mention explicite de la *Phantasie* : « La fantaisie place le monde futur, relativement à nous, soit en hauteur, soit en profondeur, ou encore dans la métempsycose. » Mais il présente cette *Phantasie*, dont surgissent les images eschatologiques du Paradis et de l'Enfer (ou des Enfers), comme relevant de la projection subjective, de la représentation que notre imagination se donne d'un au-delà dont on ne saurait, de fait, faire l'expérience, autrement dit d'une vision entièrement déliée de tout lien au réel. Et elle relève de la *Schwärmerei* pour qui espère et croit en l'existence réelle, objective, d'une vie après la mort. À la *Phantasie* appartiennent aussi les images du rêve et de la rêverie : celle qui, dans le fragment 16 de *Pollen*, montre des « voyages à travers l'univers », tel

<sup>51</sup> Voir Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, B 73, B 122 et B 211.

que le songe d'un voyage vers la lune de Kepler, déjà évoqué plus haut. Or, même s'il est une instance plus positive de la *Phantasie*, en ce qu'il contribue à notre vitalité, le rêve est pour Kant hors champ de l'anthropologie pragmatique, dans la mesure où la production des images oniriques est involontaire, retirée à l'empire du sujet :

§ 37. Explorer ce qu'il en est, dans leur nature, du *sommeil*, du *rêve*, du *somnambulisme* [...], sort du domaine d'une anthropologie *pragmatique* ; car on ne peut tirer de ce phénomène nulle règle de *comportement* dans l'état onirique, – ces règles n'ayant de valeur que pour l'homme éveillé qui veut ne pas rêver ou dormir sans pensée. [...] <sup>52</sup>.

Sur ce point, le point de vue de Novalis converge avec celui de Kant.

Certes, à la différence de la *Phantasie*, mouvement involontaire de projection de l'intérieur vers l'extérieur, la maîtrise volontaire des représentations par l'*Einbildungskraft* productrice n'est pas explicitement nommée au fragment 16 de *Pollen*. Mais c'est que Novalis joue ici sur le fait qu'elle repose tout entière sur « l'invisibilité » de l'esprit – du *Geist* –, pour reprendre la formule de Kant lui-même au § 57 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*<sup>53</sup>. Une invisibilité que seul un mouvement, qui n'est pas projection, mais progressive découverte par approfondissement méthodique en soi-même, dans les profondeurs de son intériorité, peut révéler et permettre de s'approprier. L'être humain, pour Novalis, ne se constitue comme personne qu'à la condition de s'approprier par la liberté de son esprit la nature de son propre esprit comme producteur. Or, si le projet d'une anthropologie philosophique, pragmatique, contenu *in nuce* au fragment 16 de *Pollen* joue cette *Einbildungskraft* volontaire contre la *Phantasie*, c'est que Novalis suit, selon moi, la conception fichtéenne d'une imagination transcendante comme source de la conscience, de toutes les productions signifiantes de l'esprit.

L'esprit, en régime fichtéen, n'est pas que activité conceptuelle, unité logique, aperception pure. Il n'est plus ce sujet transcendantal sans réelle consistance ni vie véritable, n'étant pas un objet de l'expérience : il est au contraire pure activité (acte de synthèse), qui devient consciente d'elle-même, non comme objet, mais en tant qu'agir vivant. Si bien que Fichte redéfinit l'esprit, le *Geist*, comme imagination transcendante non seulement productrice de toute connaissance, mais « créatrice » (*schöpferisch*), au sens fort, de la réalité humaine, transcendante et pas seulement psychologique,

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<sup>52</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, § 37, AA VII, p. 189 ; trad., p. 134.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, § 57, AA VII, p. 225 : « Denn Unsichtbarkeit (der Ursache zu einer Wirkung) ist ein Nebenbegriff vom Geiste ».

de la conscience individuelle, finie, qu'elle engendre et régit ; « formatrice » (*Bildnerin*) de la conscience dans son unité<sup>54</sup>. Pour le dire autrement : la hiérarchie kantienne des facultés de l'esprit humain est revisitée dans la Doctrine de la science de Fichte. Sans verser dans une absolutisation de l'imagination, telle qu'elle porterait tout l'édifice de la *Wissenschaftslehre*, la raison demeurant pour Fichte une faculté supérieure, l'imagination n'est en pas moins le seul pouvoir de l'esprit humain, pouvoir « merveilleux »<sup>55</sup> et « méconnu »<sup>56</sup>, dit Fichte, capable de ramener la raison pure – l'unité subjective-objective du *Ich*, du Moi fichtéen – sur le terrain qui est véritablement le sien : celui, vivant, de l'intuition intellectuelle. En effet, l'imagination fait entrer la raison en tant que dimension intemporelle du rationnel dans l'élément du temps, sens interne, la faisant ainsi devenir la matière d'une intuition.

L'esprit entendu comme imagination créatrice est ainsi le principe de la configuration idéale (et non pas purement organique) de la vie : il confère une forme au matériau du sentiment, à la matière des intuitions et déterminations empiriques du sens interne, élevant ainsi à la conscience des idéaux et des idées qui gisent au plus profond de l'âme humaine, dans ses profondeurs les plus mystérieuses. Ce principe est, selon Fichte, commun à l'art et à la philosophie. La seule différence est que l'artiste se contente de ressentir cet esprit, alors que le philosophe, en tant qu'artiste transcendantal, non seulement ressent, mais connaît cet esprit : il fait preuve de réflexivité, il jette un regard conscient en lui-même sur les processus de son esprit, alors que l'artiste produit ses créations sans être conscient de lui-même, de ce qu'il fait quand il crée quelque chose.

Quel indice, s'il en est un, permet toutefois d'affirmer que l'on est bien ici, au fragment 16 de *Pollen*, dans le domaine de l'imagination créatrice, maîtrisée ou volontaire, au sens fichtéen ? La multiplication des polarités, hauteur / profondeur, nous / univers, extérieur / intérieur, passé / avenir, éternité / temporalité, ombre / lumière, jouissance / souffrance, mais aussi (selon moi) nommé / innommé, *Phantasie* / *Einbildungskraft*, en est l'indice. Car, par « synthèse », Fichte, à la différence de Kant, n'entend pas seulement le fait de rassembler des éléments divers, mais aussi le fait de

<sup>54</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Geist und Buchstaben*, 1<sup>re</sup> version 1794, in *Von den Pflichten des Gelehrten*, Hambourg, Meiner, 1971, p. 126-127.

<sup>55</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794 / 95), in *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (= GA), hg. von Reinhard Lauth, Hans Gliwitzky, Erich Fuchs, Peter K. Schneider, Günter Zöllner *et al.*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 1962-2012), vol. I/2, éd. Reinhard Lauth et Hans Jacob, 1969, p. 350, 353 *et passim*.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

surmonter des contradictions apparentes. La dynamique de l'imagination créatrice au sens de Fichte est celle d'une oscillation dialectique, d'un flottement – le *Schweben* – entre des pôles opposés, dont seule l'imagination a le pouvoir de surmonter la contradiction en relativisant, en remettant en mouvement les partages apparemment fixés. Pris séparément – analysés par l'entendement –, les opposés logiques s'excluent absolument l'un l'autre. Seule l'imagination, dans son flottement et son mouvement d'oscillation pendulaire d'un pôle à l'autre, peut unir ce que l'entendement (ou raison logique) sépare en faisant se rencontrer les opposés, lorsqu'elle parvient à trouver leur point de contact, la caractéristique qu'ils ont en commun. La dynamique de l'imagination se concentre ainsi en un « point » d'équilibre – une fulguration ou lumière de l'esprit – au moment où le point de jonction entre les opposés est saisi, où l'unité du Moi s'intuitionne.

## 6. L'union de la poésie et de la philosophie

Cette fonction de l'imagination productrice fichtéenne, à qui il revient, et à elle seulement, de relier les dualités dans un rapport de convenance, d'harmoniser les tensions dialectiques, de surmonter les contradictions logiquement insurmontables, en parvenant à ce point où les contraires se touchent, à cette caractéristique de leur être qui leur est commune, Novalis la retient et lui associe le motif de la lumière, par opposition à l'opacité. Il est en effet question dans les *Études fichtéennes* du fameux « flottement » (*Schweben*) de l'imagination fichtéenne comme d'un « point lumineux » :

Être libre est la tendance du Moi – l'imagination productrice est le pouvoir d'être libre – l'harmonie est la condition de son activité, la condition du *flottement*, entre des opposés. [...] Flottement entre des extrêmes qu'il faut nécessairement réunir et nécessairement séparer. De ce point lumineux du flottement découle toute réalité – tout est contenu en lui – objet et sujet sont par lui, et non lui par eux<sup>57</sup>.

Tout se passe, par conséquent, comme si Novalis avait trouvé chez Fichte, non seulement dans sa conception de l'intuition intellectuelle mais dans sa conception de l'imagination créatrice, un pouvoir intellectuel supérieur à l'aperception pure kantienne. Autrement dit : le pouvoir transcendantal de lever l'opacité du sens interne que Kant regardait comme indépassable. C'est-à-dire le pouvoir d'élever l'être humain de sa constitution animale au

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<sup>57</sup> Novalis, *Fichte-Studien*, frag. 555, HKA 2, p. 266. Cf. *Les années d'apprentissage philosophique. Études fichtéennes 1795-96*, trad. Augustin Dumont, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2012, p. 212-213.

rang de cette « puissance supérieure », dont il est question chez Kant au § 5 de l'*Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, capable de lever la confusion et l'obscurité qui affectent la vaste majorité de nos intuitions sensibles en faisant advenir la lumière :

Que le champ de nos intuitions sensibles et de nos sensations dont nous ne sommes pas conscients, quand bien même nous pouvons conclure sans le moindre doute que nous les avons, autrement dit : le champ des représentations *obscur*, soit immense en l'homme (et qu'il le soit aussi chez les animaux) ; qu'en revanche les représentations claires ne contiennent que des points infiniment peu nombreux accessibles à la conscience ; qu'en quelque sorte, sur la grande *carte* de notre esprit, seules quelques régions soient *illuminées*, – cela peut susciter en nous un étonnement admiratif sur notre propre essence ; car une puissance supérieure n'aurait qu'à s'écrier : que la lumière soit !, et par là, sans le moindre effort, si nous prenons par exemple un lettré, avec tout ce qu'il a dans sa mémoire, pour ainsi dire la moitié d'un monde s'offrirait à ses yeux.<sup>58</sup>

Le « royaume de lumière » intérieur du fragment 16 de *Pollen*, avec son obscurcissement seulement passager (là où chez Kant la carte de notre esprit est plongée dans une obscurité foncière, qui est la règle et au sein de laquelle les quelques points éclairés sont l'exception), ne serait, par suite, pas seulement l'expression poétique d'un platonisme et néoplatonisme novalisiens, conformément à une lecture classique de ce fragment. Il serait tout aussi bien une façon de « fichtiser mieux que Fichte » lui-même, selon l'expression célèbre de Novalis<sup>59</sup> ; c'est-à-dire de produire une version plus poétique du fichtéanisme.

La poésie est, avec la philosophie, l'autre produit de l'activité de configuration idéale de la vie qu'est l'imagination créatrice. Elle fait donc, pour Novalis, en convergence sur ce point avec Kant, partie intégrante d'une anthropologie pragmatique. Citons les mots de Kant :

§ 71. Je ne prends en considération ici que les arts de la parole, *éloquence* et *poésie*, parce que ceux-ci sont orientés vers une disposition de l'âme (*Gemüt*) qui éveille immédiatement celle-ci à l'activité et qu'ils ont par

<sup>58</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, § 5, AA VII, p. 135 ; trad. mod., p. 62-63.

<sup>59</sup> Novalis, « Logologische Fragmente », *Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen*, frag. 11, HKA 2, p. 524 ; « Fragments logologiques », *Semences*, p. 122.

conséquent leur place dans une *anthropologie pragmatique*, où l'on cherche à connaître l'homme d'après ce qui doit être fait de lui<sup>60</sup>.

## 7. Conclusion

L'ambition des pages qui précèdent était de montrer que le fragment 16 de *Pollen* est d'abord la reformulation *in nuce* de la question de l'anthropologie, qui à la même époque est apparue à Kant rassembler tout le champ de la philosophie. Novalis, comme on l'a rappelé, transgresse l'avertissement donné par Kant à l'encontre de la connaissance de soi par l'introspection. Mais réfléchir, avec Fichte, l'intuition intellectuelle, c'est pour Novalis se donner les moyens d'une théorie transcendantale de la personne qui n'est pas une entité seulement nominale, sans forcément devoir sombrer dans le soupçon kantien de folie (*Schwärmerei*). C'est bien plutôt le contraire : c'est se donner les moyens d'une connaissance pragmatique de soi, autrement dit de ce qui est sous l'empire du sujet, et comprendre l'élévation la plus haute de la nature humaine au rang de médiation intérieure à l'esprit vers la liberté, qui a pour nom le « génie » et dans laquelle la faculté d'imagination bien comprise joue un rôle décisif. Loin de n'avoir qu'un statut régulateur dans l'horizon moral de l'histoire, il y a dans l'être humain selon Novalis un germe qui doit être développé pour que l'homme puisse devenir harmonieusement complet et parfait en tant qu'individu, dans sa double nature d'être sensible *et* intelligible. Là où l'anthropologie philosophique de Kant demeure essentiellement empirique et comprend l'élément pragmatique avant tout du point de vue extérieur, sous le rapport de l'existence collective de l'homme, l'anthropologie philosophique de Novalis propose une extension transcendantale de l'anthropologie, dont la poésie est un instrument légitime. En d'autres termes, on a affaire, chez les deux penseurs, à une anthropologie pragmatique, mais le chemin emprunté par Kant suit une direction plus empirique, tandis que la voie nouvelle de l'anthropologie novalissienne insiste davantage sur le versant transcendantal.

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<sup>60</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, § 71, AA VII, p. 246 ; trad. mod., p. 208-209.



**Translations**

**Übersetzungen**

**Traductions**

**Traduzioni**



# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## On Kant

*Novalis*

Introduced and translated by David W. Wood\*

It is often not realized that the German romantic thinker Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772-1801), more widely known by his pseudonym *Novalis*, placed his own philosophy of magical idealism directly in the heritage of Immanuel Kant's transcendental project. This genealogy is highlighted in one of the 1798 *Teplitz Fragments*:

Voltaire is a pure empiricist, like many French philosophers – Ligne imperceptibly inclines towards the transcendent empiricists. These form the transition to the dogmatists – from there we arrive at the enthusiasts or the transcendent dogmatists – then to Kant – from there to Fichte – and finally to Magical Idealism.<sup>1</sup>

Novalis only dared to continue and transform the conceptions of Kant and Fichte, because he had already closely studied the history of philosophy, writing down in his notebooks hundreds of pages of reflections and reactions to the thinkers in question. Some of the most detailed philosophical notebooks, such as his *Kant Studies*<sup>2</sup>, *Fichte Studies*<sup>3</sup>, and the 1798 / 99 *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*<sup>4</sup>, have long been available in complete English translations.

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\* Dr. phil. in the history of philosophy (Université Paris-Sorbonne & LMU Munich) – david.wilfred.wood@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Novalis, *Teplitzer Fragmente*, no. 375 (HKA II: 605).

<sup>2</sup> Novalis, “Kant Studies”, translated by David W. Wood, *Philosophical Forum* 32 (2001): 323-338.

<sup>3</sup> Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, edited and translated by Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, edited and translated by David W. Wood (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007).

DAVID W. WOOD

For this special issue on Romanticism and its Kantian Legacy, the following pages merely aim to provide a brief sample in English of some of Novalis's principal references to the critical philosopher. They are presented in four small groups:

- I. Diaries and Letters
- II. Fragments
- III. Kant Studies
- IV. Romantic Encyclopaedia

Naturally, this selection is not exhaustive. It includes some lesser-known and previously untranslated passages and fragments. The origins of the German source texts are indicated in the footnotes.

# Texts

## I. Diaries and Letters

Theatre: Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, original.

Philosophy: Schiller, Herder, Lessing, myself, Kant.

Jurisprudence: Pütter.

Statesman: Herzberg.

Poets: Wieland, Ossian, Klopstock, Goethe, Schiller, Bürger.

History: Schiller, Tacitus, me.

Novel: original: Wieland, Ardinghello.<sup>1</sup>

Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* is a lovely legal specimen – a carefully crafted tissue of chicanes. Kant has become *juristic* – something you accused Leibniz of – and he has been like this from the very beginning. The philosophical faculty (like the most blatant sinner) is the best to defend. The philosophical presentation of this conflict could have been an incredibly beautiful defence of the philosophical faculty. In relation to the Bible, Kant is not *à la hauteur*.<sup>2</sup>

I can't recall if I've already told you about my dear *Plotinus*. He is a philosopher born for me, and I've just learned about him from Tiedemann – I was struck by his similarity to Fichte and Kant – his *idealistic* similarity to them. He is dearer to my heart than those two. Somebody told me that my discovery isn't new and that this wondrous conjunction has already been mentioned in Maimon's *Life*. But why didn't it cause a stir? There is so much that has not been ploughed in Plotinus – and a fresh proclamation would be certainly worthwhile. Regarding the *Athenaeum*'s new format, and if it really continues, I'll probably contribute some *literary epistolary news* in a fleeting and light style. – Perhaps I'll start off by saying something about Plotinus as well etc.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diary, Jena, 1791 (HKA IV: 4).

<sup>2</sup> Novalis to Friedrich Schlegel, 7 November, 1798 (HKA IV, 264). Cf. *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 173.

<sup>3</sup> Novalis to Friedrich Schlegel, 10 December, 1798 (HKA IV, 269). Cf. *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 183.

## II. Fragments

In general, the categories necessarily contain the possible matter – the real form, the necessary I or both together.

Kant established the possibility, Reinhold the reality, and Fichte the necessity of philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

The Kantian categories exist merely for the accidental substance.<sup>5</sup>

The more narrow-minded a system is, the more it appeals to smart people. Thus, the materialists' system, Helvetius's doctrine, and even Locke, have garnered the most praise among this class. This is why Kant will always find more disciples than Fichte.<sup>6</sup>

This principle of perpetual peace presses in upon us from all sides, and soon there will only be one science and one spirit, just as there is one prophet and one God.<sup>7</sup>

On the Kantian and ante-Fichtean treatments of philosophy on the whole – the classification of the soul forces, reason (*Vernunft*) as their unifying and centering principle – unification of the forces of the soul and nature – unification of their central monads – the highest central monad.<sup>8</sup>

A joke about Kant and his followers.<sup>9</sup>

Similarity and dissimilarity between Asmus and Ligne and Voltaire. Even Jacobi belongs among the transcendent empiricists. An empiricist is: someone whose manner of thinking is an effect of the outer world and fate – the passive thinker – whose philosophy is given to him. Voltaire is a pure empiricist, like many French philosophers – Ligne imperceptibly inclines towards the transcendent empiricists. These form the transition to the dogmatists – from there we arrive at the enthusiasts or the transcendent dogmatists – then to Kant – from there to Fichte – and finally to Magical Idealism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Fichte Studien*, no. 69 (HKA II: 143).

<sup>5</sup> *Fichte Studien*, no. 584 (HKA II: 277).

<sup>6</sup> *Blüthenstaub (Pollen)*, no. 113 (HKA II: 461, 463).

<sup>7</sup> *Logologische Fragmente*, no. 16; (HKA II: 527).

<sup>8</sup> *Poëticismen*, no. 86; (HKA II: 543).

<sup>9</sup> *Poëticismen*, no. 90; (HKA II: 543).

<sup>10</sup> *Teplitzer Fragmente*, no. 375 (HKA II: 605).

(In accordance with its nature, all *explanation* must *descend*, be analytic, and proceed as Kant has constructed motion in the phoronomy.)<sup>11</sup>

(Kant's procedure with metaphysics – which for him is synonymous with philosophy. His famous question). (It is the question regarding the possibility and method for the construction of philosophical genius).<sup>12</sup>

Kant's theory of the gradual vivification of forces put to a practical use. In general, the theory of stimulation is still a rich source for mechanical improvements. The attempt to mechanically explain the organic will perhaps not be realized until one has successfully attempted to organically explain the mechanical.<sup>13</sup>

### III. Kant Studies

*Critique* develops the organ of reason by directing our attention to this organ. – We obtain through the critique a more *secure sense* for the organ of reason so that we learn to deploy it and strictly distinguish its functions from all the others.<sup>14</sup>

Philosophizing is none other than *doing science*, the thinking through of thoughts / cognizing knowledge – and treating the *sciences* in a scientific and *poetical* manner. Are *practical* and poetical one and the same? – And does the poetical absolutely signify the practical *in specie*?<sup>15</sup>

The concept of *sense*. According to Kant, pure mathematics and pure natural science relate to the forms of outer sensibility – What science then relates to the forms of inner sensibility?

Does *extra-sensory* knowledge really exist? Might another path be available through which we can move outside of ourselves in order to reach other beings and to become affected by them?<sup>16</sup>

Kant posits the *fixed*, stationary, law-giving *a priori* power *within us* – whereas earlier philosophers posited it outside us. In other words, the inverted procedure was deployed in philosophy compared to the one in astronomy. In astronomy, *the earth* was first thought to be stationary with the heavens

<sup>11</sup> *Freiberger Naturwissenschaftliche Studien, Großes physikalisches Studienheft* (HKA III: 61-62).

<sup>12</sup> *Freiberger Naturwissenschaftliche Studien, Arithmetica Universalis* (HKA III: 168).

<sup>13</sup> *Technische und Mechanische Bemerkungen* (HKA III: 740).

<sup>14</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 388).

<sup>15</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 390).

<sup>16</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 390).

revolving around it – whereas in philosophy the I (*Ich*) was first conceived in motion, as though it orbited around objects. – The revolutionary aspects of these two sciences have subsequently become interchanged.<sup>17</sup>

The entire Kantian method – the entire Kantian manner of philosophizing, is one-sided. – It would not be wrong to designate it as *scholasticism*. It is undoubtedly a maximum of its kind – one of the most remarkable phenomena of the human spirit.<sup>18</sup>

#### **IV. Romantic Encyclopaedia**

COSMOLOGY. From now on, God and nature must be separated – God has nothing to do with nature – God is the goal of nature – the entity with which nature should one day be in harmony. Nature should become *moral* and then an entirely new light will be shed on the Kantian moral God and morality. The moral God is far superior to the magical God.<sup>19</sup>

Kant's concept of *schema*.<sup>20</sup>

*Criteria = characteristics*. So far in both philosophy and natural history people have always started from individual *criteria*. This has led to the construction of *one-sided series of systems* – where a single characteristic is a logical *unity* (*I*) so to speak. – And if the characteristic is either countable or comparable (gradual) – we end up with an arithmetic or a gradual (geometric) series of systems. Of course, many of the criteria were chosen without a critique and the result is now a confused system. Thus, a critique of philosophical criteria is of the utmost importance for philosophy – just like a critique of natural historical criteria is for natural history. Kant tried to supply the former. Kant's principles of critique and a *report of his undertaking*. [...] The elements or single characteristics are planets – which revolve around a central characteristic, the sun. Their theory encompasses the laws of their relations and mutual motions and variations, since all theory is astronomy. Their natural system is their life system – the system of their mechanism. The errors of Ptolemy and Tycho de Brahe have likewise dominated here. A single, subordinate characteristic became the main characteristic which generated wrong one-sided systems. The optical illusion similarly dominated where the

<sup>17</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 391).

<sup>18</sup> *Kant- und Eschenmayer-Studien* (HKA II: 392).

<sup>19</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 60 (HKA III: 250).

<sup>20</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 350 (HKA III: 303).



celestial body with all its worlds seemed to orbit round the one single characteristic. Many people became obsessed with this and it resulted in false conclusions. Kant here played the role of Copernicus, declaring the empirical I (*Ich*) along with the external world to be a planet, and placing the center of the system in the moral law or moral I – while Fichte is Newton, the discoverer of the laws of the inner celestial system – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Copernicus.<sup>21</sup>

PHILOSOPHY. The true philosophical system must contain the pure history of philosophy. The latter applied to the special chronicle of the development of philosophy among humanity – yields the history of human philosophy. Fichte is the reviser of the Kantian critique – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kant – the higher organ, insofar as Kant is the lower organ. To what extent has he perfected this? He sets the reader down at the point where Kant takes them up. His *Wissenschaftslehre* is therefore the philosophy of the critique – its introduction – its purer part. It contains the principles of the critique. Yet to my mind, it is still greatly lacking in this ideal. It only encompasses one part of the philosophy of the critique – and is just as incomplete as the critique itself. – It was Kant’s plan to supply a universal – an encyclopaedic critique – yet he was not able to fully carry this out, and with respect to its individual elements, he wasn’t so fortunate in his execution. The same is true of the Fichtean revision of the Kantian plan for the critique.<sup>22</sup>

One could picture a highly instructive series of specific presentations of the Fichtean and Kantian systems, e.g., a poetical, a chemical, a mathematical, a musical presentation etc. A presentation, where one studies it as a scientist of philosophical genius – a historical presentation, and so forth. I have a large number of fragments on this.<sup>23</sup>

ENCYCLOPEDISTICS. The theory of right is nothing but political logic. Just as logic is nothing but juridical philosophy. Metaphysics is related to logic, as ethics is to the theory of right. (On the rights of morality in the State—and inversely, on the morality of rights). (Are laws moral?) Logicized metaphysics and the metaphysics of logic. Kant appears to have treated ethics *juridically*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 460 (HKA III: 333-335).

<sup>22</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 463 (HKA III: 335-336).

<sup>23</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 464 (HKA III: 336).

<sup>24</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 472 (HKA III: 339).

## NOVALIS

A critique of human intelligence (as the *highest degree of the meter* that we possess) must be the propaedeutic, as it were, of every other critical discipline. (The lower sensible – higher sensible, general sensible etc. faculty of knowledge). The critique of the entire human being differs from this – perhaps it requires the foregoing along with the critique of practical reason, as Kant calls it.<sup>25</sup>

(Critique of the critique = philosophical critique). (Perfection of one *critique by means of the other*).<sup>26</sup>

Kant's question: "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?" may be specifically expressed in the most varied manner.

- e.g. = Is philosophy an *art* (dogmatics) (science)?
- = Is there an art of invention without data, an absolute art of invention?
- = Can diseases etc. be created at will etc.?
- = Can we conceive verse according to rules, and insanity according to fundamental principles?
- = Is perpetual motion etc. possible?
- = Is genius possible—can genius be defined?
- = Can the circle be squared? –
- = Is *magic* possible?
- = Can God, freedom and immortality be demonstrated?
- = Does a calculation of the infinite exist?
- and so on.<sup>27</sup>

There is a great deal worth objecting to in Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*. (Relation of the will to the productive imagination).<sup>28</sup>

The genuine gain with Fichte and Kant lies in the *method* – in the *regularization of genius*. Here flashes of inspiration and methods are exhausted, so to speak, and arranged into a system. The individual results were almost already entirely present – however, the spirit of the system – the *critical* spirit was lacking, and without it the entire possession was unstable and unmanageable. The spirit becomes represented – through the purposeful reunion of the elements – through criticism – a process uniting *sense* and *will*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 540 (HKA III: 359).

<sup>26</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 541 (HKA III: 360).

<sup>27</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 650 (HKA III: 388).

<sup>28</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 782 (HKA III: 421).

<sup>29</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 921 (HKA III: 445).

With respect to the majority of his results, Plotinus was already – a critical idealist and realist. / The method of Fichte and Kant is not yet complete or presented precisely enough. Both still do not know how to experiment with facility and diversity – absolutely not *poetic* – Everything is still so awkward, so tentative.

The *method for freely generating* truth may yet become greatly broadened and simplified – thoroughly improved. There now exists a true art of experimenting – The *science of active empiricism*. (*Theory* arises from *tradition*). (All *theory* relates to art – praxis).

We must everywhere call to mind the truth – everywhere be capable of *presenting* it (in the active, productive sense).<sup>30</sup>

Kant is a fine observer and experimenter.<sup>31</sup>

On pluralism and omnism. / Kant's warning [in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*] against self-observation / His defective explanation of naiveté / His incorrect elucidation of the *remarkable plurality in public language* / – like “you” [ihr], “they” [sie] etc. (On the *soul's* courting of the *body* –).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 924 (HKA III: 445).

<sup>31</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 1002 (HKA III: 457).

<sup>32</sup> *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 1004 (HKA III: 457).



# Symphilosophie

*Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*

## Lettre à Kant

*Sophie Mereau*

Traduction et présentation par Laure Cahen-Maurel\*

Je traduis ici la lettre fameuse que Sophie Mereau (1770-1806) adressa à Kant en décembre 1795, dans l'espoir d'obtenir du maître de Königsberg qu'il contribue à son projet de revue littéraire et philosophique. La revue ne verra le jour qu'en 1801, pour s'interrompre l'année suivante, en 1802. Sophie Mereau l'avait intitulée *Kalathiskos*. Les Grecs de l'Antiquité désignaient par ce terme une petite corbeille à laine, « emblème de l'activité féminine par excellence, le tissage »<sup>1</sup> ; les Romains, une corbeille à ouvrage. Figurant souvent comme attribut des représentations de la femme au travail sur les vases grecs, mais aussi comme attribut de Cérès, déesse de l'abondance et de la fécondité, comme dans la célèbre fresque *Flore ou le Printemps* de la Villa Arianna, à Naples, ce panier était également utilisé à l'époque romaine pour les cueillettes de fleurs ou la récolte de fruits. Tisser et collecter, telle était l'idée que Sophie Mereau avait en vue pour sa revue. Destiné à recevoir les fruits de l'esprit, il ne devait pas être d'usage seulement féminin.

Sophie Mereau signe sa lettre du nom de son premier époux : elle avait été mariée une première fois au professeur de droit Friedrich Karl Mereau, avant de devenir, en 1803, la femme de Clemens Brentano. Elle est pourtant

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\* Docteure en philosophie, *Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin* (collaboratrice pédagogique et scientifique), Internationales Zentrum für Philosophie NRW / Institut für Philosophie der Universität Bonn, Poppelsdorfer Allee 28, 53115 Bonn, Allemagne – laure.cahen-maurel@uni-bonn.de

<sup>1</sup> Magali Cullin-Mingaud, *La vannerie dans l'Antiquité romaine. Les ateliers de vanniers et les vanneries de Pompéi, Herculaneum et Oplontis*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2010, p. 176 et sq.

connue pour avoir été la première femme, en Allemagne, à vivre de sa plume en faisant de son activité d'écriture et de traduction un véritable métier. Traductrice de Madame de Staël en allemand, jeune protégée de Schiller, elle a étudié la philosophie critique de Kant et de Fichte à Iéna, devenant ainsi la première étudiante femme de Fichte, dont elle a suivi les séminaires sur la *Wissenschaftslehre* et les leçons sur la vocation du savant. Sa lettre à Kant témoigne de sa réception enthousiaste du *Projet de paix perpétuelle* publié en 1795. Son roman philosophique, *Das Blüthenalter der Empfindung* (*La Floraison des sentiments*), qu'elle joint à sa lettre, fait écho, dans un esprit féministe, aux vues de Kant et de Fichte sur l'autonomie, la vérité, la raison et les sentiments<sup>2</sup>. La lettre restera sans réponse.

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<sup>2</sup> Voir Sophie Mereau, *La Floraison des sentiments* (1794), préface et extrait traduits de l'allemand et introduits par Laure Cahen-Maurel, *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*, vol. 2, 2020, p. 189-198.

**Von Sophie Mereau. [Brief 689]<sup>1</sup>**

[December 1795.]

Wenn ich auch nach dem Ausspruch meines eignen Gefühls den Schritt welchen ich jetzt zu thun bereit bin, für gewagt erklären muss, so finde ich doch nichts darinn wodurch wahre Schicklichkeit beleidigt werden könnte. Ich weiss vielmehr dass wir bey Menschen höherer Art die Fesseln jener leeren Convenienz, die sich in jedem Land verändert, und die zwischen gemeine Menschen oft heilsame Schrancken setzt, kühn zerbrechen können, und dass gebildete Wesen sich an die Sache selbst halten, wo jene ewig an der leeren Form hängen bleiben. Nach dieser Voraussetzung glaube ich ohne Bedencken und ohne weitere Rücksicht auf Entfernung, Geschlecht und Geistesverschiedenheit, mich selbst in das ganz einfache Verhältniss einer Bittenden gegen Sie, verehrungswürdigster Mann, versetzen zu dürfen.

Mit Hülfe einiger Freunde will ich mit dem neuen Jahr ein Journal anfangen, mehrere hiesige Schriftsteller wollen mir Beiträge liefern. Bey einer solchen Unternehmung träumt wohl ein jeder, der nicht lediglich für Gewinn schreibt, mehr oder weniger stolz. Ich träumte sehr stolz, denn ich hielt es nicht für unmöglich Sie für mich zu gewinnen. Etwas aus Ihren Papieren, was Sie vielleicht Kleinigkeit nennen, einige hingeworfene Bemerkungen, denen Ihr Geist Licht und Ihr Name Glantz verleiht, würden mich sehr glücklich machen Können Sie, so unterstützen Sie meine Unternehmung – dringender zu bitten, wage ich nicht, weil ich die zarte Linie die hier das Ungewöhnliche vom Unbescheidenen trennt, zu überschreiten fürchte

Achten Sie es der Mühe werth, das Weib, welches Muth genug hatte sich geradezu an Sie zu wenden, näher kennen zu lernen, so lesen Sie das Buch, welches ich hier beilege. Dies ist der einzige Grund der mich bewegen konnte, dem grossen Kant ein Geistesproduct darzubieten, dessen Fehlerhaftes ich selbst am lebhaftesten fühle

Mögte ich einer baldigen Antwort entgegen sehn dürfen! – Ich habe mich zutrauungsvoll an Sie gewandt – Sie sind gewiss gut, so groß u. berühmt Sie auch sind. Welche edle Humanität athmet aus Ihrem ewigen Frieden! Welche Hofnungen wissen Sie in den Herzen aller gutmüthigen Menschen

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<sup>1</sup> La présente traduction se fonde sur l'édition de la correspondance de Kant établie par l'Académie royale des sciences de Prusse dans les *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*. Immanuel Kant, *Briefwechsel*, Lettre 689, in *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, hg. von der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, Reimer, 1900-1955, 1966 sq., vol. XII, p. 52.

zu entzünden! – Es hängt nur von Ihnen ab, ob ich zu dem ernstesten Gefühl von Ehrfurcht gegen Sie, das ich mit Stolz in meiner Seele nähre, noch das süßere der Dankbarkeit hinzufügen soll – Leben Sie wohl!

Mein Name ist: *Professorin Mereau* in Iena

### **Lettre de Sophie Mereau à Kant**

[Décembre 1795]

Bien que je doive, si je me fie à mon seul sentiment, déclarer audacieux le pas que je m'apprête à faire, je n'y trouve rien qui puisse offenser la véritable décence. Je sais que s'agissant d'êtres d'une espèce supérieure nous pouvons hardiment briser les entraves de cette convenance vide qui change d'un pays à l'autre et met souvent entre des êtres vulgaires des barrières salutaires ; que des êtres plus cultivés s'en tiennent à la chose même, tandis que les autres restent dans tous les cas attachés à la forme vide. Selon ce préalable, je crois pouvoir me mettre sans hésitation et sans autre considération de distance, de sexe et de différence d'esprit, dans la position toute simple de qui a une requête à adresser à l'homme vénérable que vous êtes.

Je veux, avec l'aide de quelques amis, inaugurer une revue en cette nouvelle année. Plusieurs écrivains d'ici sont prêts à y contribuer. Quiconque qui n'écrit pas seulement pour le profit, en s'engageant dans une telle entreprise, conçoit, certes, de plus ou moins grandes espérances. Pour ma part, j'en conçois de très grandes, ne tenant pas pour impossible de vous gagner à ma cause. Quelques-unes de vos notes, que vous considérez peut-être comme bagatelles, quelques-unes de vos remarques jetées sur le papier, auxquelles votre esprit confère de la lumière et votre nom de l'éclat, feraient ma joie. Si cela vous était possible, vous soutiendriez ainsi mon entreprise – je n'ose demander plus, car je crains de franchir ici la ligne délicate qui sépare l'inhabituel de l'outrecuidance.

Si vous estimez qu'il vaille la peine de faire plus ample connaissance avec la femme qui a eu assez de courage pour s'adresser directement à vous, lisez le livre que je joins à cette lettre. C'est l'unique raison qui a pu me pousser à offrir au grand Kant un produit de mon esprit, dont je sais trop combien il est imparfait.



## LETTRE À KANT

Puissé-je voir arriver bientôt une réponse tant espérée ! – Je me suis adressée à vous en toute confiance – si grand et célèbre que vous soyez, vous êtes certainement bon. Quelle noble humanité émane de votre paix perpétuelle ! Quels espoirs vous savez allumer dans le cœur de tous les hommes de bonne volonté ! – Il tient à vous que j’ajoute à la profonde et constante vénération que j’ai pour vous, dont je suis fière, celui plus doux de gratitude. – Bien à vous !

Mon nom est : *Professeure Mereau*, de Iéna.



# Symphilosophie

*Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*

## Un fragment apocalyptique

*Karoline von Günderrode (1780-1806)*

Traduction et présentation par Augustin Dumont\* et Savannah-Lou  
Cochran-Mavrikakis†

Née Karoline Frédérique Louise Maximiliane von Günderrode à Karlsruhe (Allemagne) le 11 février 1780, la poétesse et dramaturge romantique allemande est l'aînée de six enfants. Trois ans après la mort de sa sœur Louise, deuxième née, Günderrode entre au Chapitre Évangélique de Dames Nobles de Francfort-sur-le-Main le 24 mai 1797, à l'âge de 17 ans. Quelques années plus tard, en 1801, Günderrode rencontre pour la première fois Bettina Brentano. Les deux femmes deviennent rapidement amies. Par l'intermédiaire de Brentano, Günderrode est introduite dans le cercle des romantiques de Heidelberg. Le 26 juillet 1806, alors en voyage avec deux amies à Winkel, Günderrode reçoit une lettre lui signifiant une rupture amoureuse avec le philologue Friedrich Creuzer. Après l'avoir lue, elle se suicide au bord du Rhin avec un poignard, sanctionnant son désir de mourir jeune.

De Günderrode, nous connaissons quatre-vingt-treize textes publiés, dont vingt dans *Gedichte und Phantasien* – où l'on trouve surtout de la prose et de la poésie (*Lyrik*) –, vingt-six dans *Poetische Fragmente* – comportant des drames de manière presque exclusive – et seize dans *Melete* – un recueil dans lequel on lit surtout de la prose, mais aussi des drames et de la poésie lyrique<sup>1</sup>.

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\* Professeur agrégé en philosophie allemande, Université de Montréal, Faculté des Arts et des Sciences, Département de philosophie, Pavillon 2910, Boulevard Édouard-Montpetit, Montréal (QC) H3C 3J7 – [augustin.dumont@umontreal.ca](mailto:augustin.dumont@umontreal.ca)

† Doctorante en philosophie, Université de Montréal – [savannah-lou.cochran-mavrikakis@umontreal.ca](mailto:savannah-lou.cochran-mavrikakis@umontreal.ca)

<sup>1</sup> Karoline von Günderrode, *Sämtliche Werke und ausgewählte Studien: historisch-kritische Ausgabe (SW)*, éd. par Walter Morgenthaler, 3 vol. (Basel: Stroemfeld / Roter Stern, 1990), vol. 2, p. 390.

Par ailleurs, on retrouve vingt-trois lettres dans la correspondance entre G nderrode et Bettina Brentano, publi e par cette derni re en 1840.  crites entre 1804 et 1806, ces lettres ont  t  ensuite remani es et fictionnalis es par Bettina Brentano<sup>2</sup>. Le commentaire critique de Wilhelm Oehlke<sup>3</sup> permet tout de m me de leur accorder une authenticit  d'ensemble.

En 1920-22, Leopold Hirschberg publie les  uvres compl tes de G nderrode<sup>4</sup>. Une autre  dition des  uvres compl tes,  dit es par Walther Morgenthaler, est publi e en 1990<sup>5</sup>. Si la place laiss e aux femmes dans le romantisme et dans l'id alisme allemands a  t  limit e<sup>6</sup>, G nderrode est une figure importante   l'intersection de ces deux mouvements, au tournant du XIX<sup>e</sup> si cle. Depuis les ann es 1930, nombre de chercheuses et de chercheurs se sont int ress s   la figure de G nderrode et ont r habilit  la complexit  de son destin comme de son  uvre<sup>7</sup>, m me s'il est rest  longtemps classique de lire sa po sie et ses pi ces th atrales depuis le seul prisme de sa biographie tourment e<sup>8</sup>. L'int r t pour l' uvre de G nderrode ne se limite plus, aujourd'hui,   quelques r f rences vagues, comme celles de l'essayiste Margaret Fuller, qui avait traduit en anglais la correspondance entre G nderrode et Arnim (1842).   ces premiers travaux, il faut aussi ajouter les textes de l'historien allemand Ludwig Geiger, auteur d'une biographie pr coce de G nderrode (1895), ou ceux des Fran ais Henri Blaze (1846), Victor Cherbuliez alias Valbert (1895), Th odore de Wyzewa (1896), Genevi ve Bianquis (1910) et Olivier Apert (1997), ces deux derniers ayant traduit des parties de l' uvre de G nderrode. Mais  galement les  tudes plus r centes de Steven Martinson (2005) ou encore de Barbara Becker-Cantarino (2007). Depuis une grosse vingtaine d'ann es, on note un regain d'int r t pour

<sup>2</sup> Genevi ve Bianquis, *Caroline de G nderrode 1780-1806, ouvrage accompagn  de lettres in dites* (Paris: F lix Alcan  diteur, 1910), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Waldemar Oehlke, *Bettina von Arnims Briefromane* (Berlin: Mayer & M ller, 1905).

<sup>4</sup> Leopold Hirschberg, *Gesammelte Werke der Karoline von G nderrode*, 3 vol. (Berlin: Verlag Goldschmidt-Gabrielli, 1920).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. note n 1.

<sup>6</sup> Dagmar von Hoff, « Aspects of Censorship in the Work of Karoline von G nderrode », *Women in German Yearbook* 11 (1995) ; voir aussi Barbara Becker-Cantarino, « "Gender Censorship": On Literary Production in German Romanticism », trad. par Jeanette Clausen, *Women in German Yearbook* 11 (1995).

<sup>7</sup> Otto Heuschele, « Dank an das Leben. Ausgew hltes Werk. 1925-1950 », in *Karoline von G nderrode* (Freiburg, M nchen: Alber, 1950), 109-51 ; Margarete Mattheis, *Die G nderrode. Gestalt, Leben und Wirkung* (Berlin: Junker und D nnhaupt, 1934) ; Richard Wilhelm, *Die G nderrode. Dichtung und Schicksal. Mit zeitgen ssischen Bildern und Briefproben* (Frankfurt: Identit ts-Verlag, 1938).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Anna C. Ezekiel, « Introduction », in *Poetic Fragments*, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), p. 2 et 5.

Günderrode<sup>9</sup> dans la recherche philosophique anglophone sur le romantisme. On songe notamment à Christine Battersby (1995), et plus récemment à Anna Ezekiel (depuis 2014), Dalia Nassar (2022), ou encore Karen Ng (2023).

Le poème que l'on donne ici à lire dans une version française rafraîchie et plus précise que celle d'Armel Guerne, a été écrit entre 1802 et 1804 selon Morgenthaler<sup>10</sup>. Il provient du premier recueil de Günderrode, *Gedichte und Phantasien* (1804). Le *Fragment apocalyptique* a été également publié à titre posthume dans la correspondance entre Günderrode et Brentano. Il aurait été envoyé avec une lettre, dans laquelle Günderrode décrit la chambre de son amie Bettina, où se côtoient la Bible, Homère, un livre d'Ossian et la peinture *Lucretia* de Cranach. Le *Fragment apocalyptique*, écrit à la première personne, offre une exploration indissociablement vertigineuse, angoissante et rédemptrice de la nature et de l'insertion de la subjectivité en elle. La narratrice – car il s'agit d'un récit poétique –, qu'on peut bien dire être Günderrode elle-même, puisque le texte entend traduire son rêve à destination de l'amie chère, exprime le désir de se précipiter dans le tout du monde, il témoigne de l'abolition du temps dans la fusion avec la nature, mais problématise aussi bien la difficile transmission du sens de cette expérience. Ce fragment poétique de quinze strophes interroge en définitive l'énigme du « destin » du monde en le liant de manière indissoluble à la destinée du sujet qui, d'un seul tenant, évolue en son sein *et* lui fait face, à l'image des personnages du peintre romantique Caspar David Friedrich.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Anna C. Ezekiel, « Narrative and Fragment: The Social Self in Karoline von Günderrode », *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 2, 2022, p. 160.

<sup>10</sup> Günderrode, *SW*, vol. 3, p. 8.

# Un fragment apocalyptique

*Karoline von Günderrode*

## *Ein apokaliptisches Fragment*<sup>13</sup>

1. Ich stand auf einem hohen Fels im Mittelmeer, und vor mir war der Ost, und hinter mir der West, und der Wind ruhte auf der See.
2. Da sank die Sonne, und kaum war sie verhüllt im Niedergang, so stieg im Aufgang das Morgenroth wieder empor, und Morgen, Mittag, Abend und Nacht, jagten sich, in schwindelnder Eile, um den Bogen des Himmels.
3. Erstaunt sah ich sie sich drehen in wilden Kreisen; mein Puls floh nicht schneller, meine Gedanken bewegten sich nicht rascher, und die Zeit in mir gieng den gewohnten Gang, indes sie ausser mir, sich nach neuem Gesetz bewegte.
4. Ich wollte mich hinstürzen in das Morgenroth, oder mich tauchen in die Schatten der Nacht, um mit in ihre Eile gezogen zu werden, und nicht so langsam zu leben; da ich sie aber immer betrachtete, ward ich sehr müde und entschlief.
5. Da sah ich ein weites Meer vor mir, das von keinem Ufer umgeben war, weder im Ost noch Süd noch West, noch Nord: kein Windstoß bewegte die Wellen, aber die unermessliche See bewegte sich doch in ihren Tiefen, wie von innern Gährungen bewegt.
6. Und mancherlei Gestalten stiegen herauf, aus dem Schoos des tiefen Meeres, und Nebel stiegen empor und wurden Wolken, und die

## *Un fragment apocalyptique*

1. Je me tenais dans la Méditerranée sur un haut rocher, et devant moi était l'Est, et derrière moi l'Ouest, et le vent reposait sur la mer.
2. Alors le soleil plongea et à peine fût-il recouvert dans le coucher que s'éleva dans le lever à nouveau le rouge de l'aube, et que matin, midi, soir et nuit se pourchassèrent dans une hâte vertigineuse, autour de l'arche du ciel.
3. Stupéfaite, je les voyais tourner en cercles effrénés ; mon pouls n'allait pas plus rapidement, mes pensées ne se mouvaient pas plus promptement, et le temps en moi suivait son cours habituel, pourtant hors de moi il se mouvait selon une nouvelle loi.
4. Je voulus me précipiter dans le rouge de l'aube, ou m'immerger dans les ombres de la nuit, afin d'être entraînée avec elles dans leur hâte, et de ne pas vivre si lentement ; mais comme je les contemplais toujours, je devins très fatiguée et m'endormis.
5. Dès lors, je vis une vaste mer devant moi qui n'était ceinte d'aucun rivage, ni à l'Est, ni au Sud, ni à l'Ouest, ni au Nord ; aucune risée n'agitait les vagues, mais la mer incommensurable se mouvait tout de même dans ses profondeurs, comme agitée par une effervescence intérieure.

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<sup>13</sup> Karoline von Günderrode, « Ein apokaliptisches Fragment ». Dans *Sämtliche Werke und ausgewählte Studien. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, édité par Walter Morgenthaler, 1: 52-54. Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld / Roter Stern, 1990.

- Wolken senkten sich, und berührten in zuckenden Blitzen die gebährenden Wogen.
7. Und immer manichfaltigere Gestalten entstiegen der Tiefe, aber mich ergriffen Schwindel und eine sonder|bare Bangigkeit, meine Gedanken wurden hie hin und dort hin getrieben, wie eine Fackel vom Sturmwind, bis meine Erinnerung erlosch.
  8. Da ich aber wieder erwachte, und von mir zu wissen anfieng, wußte ich nicht, wie lange ich geschlafen hatte, ob es Jahrhunderte oder Minuten waren; denn ob ich gleich dumpfe und verworrene Träume gehabt hatte, so war mir doch nichts begegnet, was mich an die Zeit erinnert hätte.
  9. Aber es war ein dunkles Gefühl in mir, als habe ich geruht im Schoose dieses Meeres und sey ihm entstiegen, wie die andern Gestalten. Und ich schien mir ein Tropfen Thau, und bewegte mich lustig hin und wieder in der Luft, und freute mich, daß die Sonne sich in mir spiegle, und die Sterne mich beschauten.
  10. Ich ließ mich von den Lüften in raschen Zügen dahin tragen, ich gesell|te mich zum Abendroth, und zu des Regenbogens siebenfarbigen Tropfen, ich reihte mich mit meinen Gespielen um den Mond wenn er sich bergen wollte, und begleitete seine Bahn.
  11. Die Vergangenheit war mir dahin! ich gehörte nur der Gegenwart. Aber eine Sehnsucht war in mir, die ihren Gegenstand nicht kannte, ich suchte immer, aber jedes Gefundene war nicht das Gesuchte, und sehnend trieb ich mich umher im Unendlichen.
  12. Einst ward ich gewahr, daß alle die Wesen, die aus dem Meere gestiegen waren, wieder zu ihm zurückkehrten, und sich in wechselnden Formen wieder erzeugten. Mich befremdete die- se Erscheinung; denn ich hatte von keinem Ende gewußt. Da dachte ich, meine Sehnsucht
6. Et diverses sortes de formes montaient des entrailles de la mer profonde, et des brumes s'élevaient et devenaient nuages, et les nuages s'enfonçaient et touchaient, en de fulgurants éclairs, les ondes parturientes.
  7. Et des formes toujours plus variées affluaient de la profondeur, mais le vertige et une angoisse étrange me saisissaient, mes pensées étaient emportées ça et là, tel un flambeau par un vent de tempête, jusqu'à ce que mon souvenir s'éteigne.
  8. Mais alors que je me réveillais de nouveau et que je commençais à reprendre conscience de moi, je ne savais pas combien longtemps j'avais dormi, si cela avait été des siècles ou des minutes ; car si j'avais eu de tels rêves confus et accablants, rien cependant ne m'était arrivé qui eût pu me faire souvenir du temps.
  9. Mais il y avait un sentiment obscur en moi, comme si j'avais reposé dans les entrailles de cette mer et eus afflué d'elle, comme les autres formes. Et je me parus à moi-même telle une goutte de rosée, et je me mouvais joyeusement ça et là dans les airs, et je me réjouissais que le soleil se reflète en moi, et que les astres me contemplassent.
  10. Je me laissai emporter au loin dans les courants rapides des airs, je me joignis au rouge du crépuscule et aux septicolores gouttelettes de l'arc-en-ciel, je me faufilai avec mes camarades de jeu autour de la lune, alors qu'elle voulut se cacher, et accompagnai sa trajectoire.
  11. Le passé était pour moi anéanti ! Je n'appartenais qu'au présent. Mais une nostalgie était en moi, qui ne connaissait pas son objet, je cherchais toujours, mais chaque trouvaille n'était pas celle recherchée et, désirante, je flottais à la dérive dans l'infini.

- sey auch, zurück zu kehren, zu der Quelle des Lebens.
13. Und da ich dies dachte, und fast lebendiger fühlte, als all mein Bewußtseyn, ward plötzlich mein Gemüth wie mit betäubenden Nebeln umgeben. Aber sie schwanden bald, ich schien mir nicht mehr ich, und doch mehr als sonst ich, meine Gränzen konnte ich nicht mehr finden, mein Bewußtseyn hatte sie überschritten, es war größer, anders, und doch fühlte ich mich in ihm.
14. Erlöset war ich von den engen Schranken meines Wesens, und kein einzler Tropfen mehr, ich war allem wiedergegeben, und alles gehörte mir mit an, ich dachte, und fühlte, wogte im Meer, glänzte in der Sonne, kreiste mit den Sternen; ich fühlte mich in allem, und genos alles in mir.
15. Drum, wer Ohren hat zu hören, der höre! Es ist nicht zwei, nicht drei, nicht tausende, es ist Eins und alles; | es ist nicht Körper und Geist geschieden, daß das eine der Zeit, das andere der Ewigkeit angehöre, es ist Eins, gehört sich selbst, und ist Zeit und Ewigkeit zugleich, und sichtbar, und unsichtbar, bleibend im Wandel, ein unendliches Leben.
12. Une fois, j'aperçus que des êtres qui s'étaient élevés de la mer y retournaient de nouveau et s'y réengendraient de nouveau en des formes changeantes. Ce phénomène me surprit ; car je n'avais connaissance d'aucune fin. Alors je pensai que ma nostalgie aurait aussi à retourner à la source de la vie.
13. Et alors que je pensais à cela et que je le sentais presque plus vivement que ma propre conscience, mon cœur était soudainement ceint de brumes entêtantes. Mais elles s'estompèrent peu après, je ne me parus plus moi-même, et néanmoins [j'étais] plus que jamais moi-même ; mes limites, je ne pouvais plus les trouver, ma propre conscience les avait franchies, elle était plus grande et autre, et néanmoins je me sentais en elle.
14. Délivrée que j'étais des bornes étroites de mon être et n'étant plus une goutte particulière, j'étais restituée au tout, et tout m'appartenait, je pensais et sentais, j'ondoyais dans la mer, rayonnais dans le soleil, tournais avec les astres ; je me sentais en tout, et je jouissais de tout en moi.
15. Donc, qui a des oreilles pour entendre, qu'il entende ! Ce n'est pas deux, pas trois, pas des milliers, c'est l'Un et tout ; ce n'est pas le corps et l'esprit séparés, où l'un ferait partie du temps, l'autre de l'éternité, c'est l'Un, qui s'appartient à soi-même et qui est temps et éternité à la fois, et visible, et invisible, demeurant dans le changement, une vie infinie.



# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## Philosophical Fragments from August Ludwig Hülsen's Literary Estate

(1813)

*August Ludwig Hülsen*

Translated, introduced, and annotated by Marlene Oeffinger\*

The following text is part of August Ludwig Hülsen's literary estate, his so-called *Philosophical Fragments*, which were first published posthumously in their entirety in the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift von Deutschen für Deutsche* in 1813, accompanied by a preface by Hülsen's former student and friend, Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouqué, and an afterword by Friedrich Schelling, to whom Hülsen was introduced by Fichte in 1797.<sup>1</sup>

Hülsen published only a small number of texts during his lifetime<sup>2</sup>, ending his literary life—and all correspondence with the Jena Romantic Circle—in late 1803.<sup>3</sup> He nevertheless remained avidly and actively engaged

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\* PhD in Molecular Biology (Edinburgh), M.Sc. (Vienna); PhD candidate in English Literature, Department of English, Concordia University, 1400 Blvd De Maisonneuve Ouest, Montreal, QC H3G 1M8, Canada – marlene.oeffinger@concordia.ca

<sup>1</sup> The fragments were initially published in 1813 by F. Schlegel and F. Baron de la Motte Fouqué, however, the actual date of their conception remains unknown. Cf. Ulrich Krämer, "... *meine Philosophie ist kein Buch*". *August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1809)* (Frankfurt a. Main: P. Lang, 2001), 351-354.

<sup>2</sup> Hülsen published one book, the *Preisschrift*, three essays, and one philosophical letter between 1796 and 1800.

<sup>3</sup> Hülsen communicated his retreat from literary life in letters to August W. Schlegel and Sophie Bernardi in December 1803 (see Krämer, 278). Hülsen's retreat from literature was also noted by Friedrich Schlegel in his journal *Europa* as regrettable and "a loss for philosophy" ["*ein Verlust für die Philosophie*"]. See Friedrich Schlegel, *Europa* 1.1 (1803): 49. Krämer, among others, sees Hülsen's retreat from the literary life and philosophical circles as deliberate as he became increasingly critical of the Jena circle members' interest in medievalism (see Krämer, 278-280; and Ezequiel Posesorski, *Between Reinhold and Fichte: August Ludwig Hülsen's Contributions to the Emergence of German Idealism* (Karlsruhe:

in philosophy and the natural sciences while living at his farm estate in Wagersrott.<sup>4</sup> During this time, Hülsen became particularly interested in the romantic-speculative natural sciences, conducting and discussing experiments with his friend Erich von Berger<sup>5</sup>, and it has been suggested that the *Philosophical Fragments* may have originated during this period.<sup>6</sup> Yet some uncertainties regarding the history of their composition still remain, and it has also been hypothesized that the text may instead represent fragments of earlier works intermingled with the writings of a “mature Hülsen.”<sup>7</sup>

While fragmentary both in their conception and structure, Hülsen’s *Philosophical Fragments* do not follow the style of the Romantic fragment as conceived by Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel insofar as the fragments within each part are not independent splinters of thought, but logically linked passages connected by demonstrative pronouns and conjunctions, which can be read as a continuous, coherent text following specific expositions. The following fragments, which comprise part B of the *Philosophical Fragments*, take up Hülsen’s arguments as set out in his *Preisschrift*<sup>8</sup>, his only book, and his essay “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, published in the *Athenaeum* in 1799.<sup>9</sup>

Addressing the ongoing debate between Kantian and anti-Kantian philosophers on the significance of Kant’s achievement, Hülsen, who had enrolled at the University of Kiel in 1794 to study under Reinhold in order to deepen his knowledge of both Kant’s and Reinhold’s philosophies,

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KIT Scientific Publishing, 2012), 201). Hülsen moreover held the belief that no printed text or letter could express true philosophical knowledge (*ibid.*, 16-17; 172).

<sup>4</sup> Hülsen moved to the farm estate in Schleswig-Holstein, which was purchased for him by some friends including Berger, in May 1804 and lived there, leading a life as a farmer, until March 1809, when he moved to Stechow. See Krämer, 261-263; Posesorski, 201.

<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian philosopher Henrik Steffens (1773-1845) visited Hülsen in 1807 and reported that Hülsen and von Berger had become deeply interested in the new natural sciences and conducted several physical experiments. (See Krämer, 276-277)

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Posesorski, 202.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Martin Oesch, “Hülsens idealistische Romantik”, in: *Romantische Utopie - Utopische Romantik* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1979), 117. Krämer, drawing on Oesch, notes that there is “no indication of the date of origin of the individual texts or the reason for their creation” [...] “or that they all originate from the same time” [...] “since they [the three parts] seem to be relatively disparate entities.” (“Keinerlei Hinweis auf die Entstehungszeit der einzelnen Texte oder auf den Anlass ihrer Entstehung” [...] “oder dass sie alle aus der gleichen Zeit stammen” [...] “da sie relativ disparate Gebilde zu sein scheinen.”); see Krämer, 352.

<sup>8</sup> A.L. Hülsen, *Prüfung der von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aufgestellten Preisfrage: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolff für Progressen gemacht?* (Altona: J.F. Hammerich, 1796).

<sup>9</sup> For an English translation, see A.L. Hülsen, “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 5 (2023): 391-410.

contended in the *Preisschrift* that only a reconstruction of the systematic possibility of consciousness would solve the philosophical controversies—namely a system of knowledge through the self-conscious and self-reflective determination of self-identity that is produced and articulated in time, creating a universal history of reason and a spiritual [*geistig*]-historical determination [*Bestimmung*] of the human being and human consciousness.<sup>10</sup> Part B of the *Philosophical Fragments* lays out a dialectic for Hülsen’s system of self-reflective positing.

While Kant considered positing as an *a priori* existential proposition identical with the concept of being<sup>11</sup>, Hülsen thought this state to be a proto-conscious moment, “a formal mode of observation” when the human being “and his world [*i.e.*, matter] are absolutely separated”: as the human being observes the world as an “object and consequently real”, the spirit, as subject and the ideal, “made itself absolute through contemplation.” But this is not the metaphysics of a thinking subject (*i.e.*, self-positing) as it was for Fichte<sup>12</sup>; rather, Hülsen contends that as “we posit something as *being* [*Seyend*] in general by its relation to itself, namely  $A=A$ ”, it becomes an absolute contradiction, absolute opposites, which can only exist in harmony, otherwise it would be empty. As subject and object (*i.e.*, spirit and matter) are absolute opposites, existent only through and with another, they are so in harmony and thus as one in intuition: “the subject is only itself as an object, and the object is only in the subject.” Yet while the spirit is an “eternal idea as absolute being”, matter is “of finite time,” and, for Hülsen, it is this interplay of “intuition in time” and the “intuition of the idea” that enables “self-intuition of the spirit”, *i.e.*, positing, and spirit transfiguring matter into itself.<sup>13</sup> This departing and returning of the spirit into itself amounts to what

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Posesorski, 101-186; Krämer, 287-319.

<sup>11</sup> “The concept of position or positing is completely simple and identical with the concept of being.” [“Der Begriff der Position oder Setzung ist völlig einfach, und mit dem vom Sein überhaupt einerlei.”] (see Immanuel Kant, *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (Frankfurt: Meiner (2011): 14; and Immanuel Kant “Transcendental Logic: Transcendental Dialectic” (A598 / B626), *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 503.

<sup>12</sup> Fichte considered positing a metaphysical act and hence absolute and infinite, and self-positing as a self’s pure a priori activity (see Johan Gottlieb Fichte, *Sämmtliche Werke*, hg. von Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Berlin, 1965) [Nachdruck der Ausgabe 1845, Band 1, 96]

<sup>13</sup> In his essay “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, Hülsen also writes: “But we also comprehend Man only in so far as he comprehends himself [.]; in order to get to the true content of a concept, it cannot be considered as a priori given, but instead we must go back to its initial object and let it arise before our eyes through actual intuition; then, it appears as the result of repeated contemplation and is in itself nothing other than

Hülsen has called ‘free acts’<sup>14</sup>, or “multiple and different moments of time”<sup>15</sup>, conceptually similar to Kant’s inner intuition.<sup>16</sup> Yet abandoning a pure *a priori*, they transform Hülsen’s human being into an evolutionary agent of a logical-historical character. “[T]he human being’s striving for unity with himself” develops then into the content of history, and, in Hülsen’s view, the combined striving of the whole of humankind for the highest good into a synthesis of moral virtue and happiness—not unlike Kant’s categorical imperative.

Irrespective of whether the *Philosophical Fragments* represent writings of only Hülsen’s later years, or his notes over a span of time, together with his published works, they will nonetheless contribute to a better understanding of Hülsen’s philosophical position within German idealism.

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the free and steadfast gaze with which we regard our own acts.” (see A.L. Hülsen, “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 396.

<sup>14</sup> Hülsen drew on the Fichtean *Tathandlung* (‘act’) as an inner cognitive act that is not empirical but rather underpinned a person’s consciousness and moral agency. He considered any such act, including positing, as reflexive self-knowledge insofar as it denoted an acting agent as well as a product of a non-self-conscious practical act of self-positing. See A.L. Hülsen, “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 391-410; D. W. Wood, “Fichte’s Absolute I and the Forgotten Tradition of *Tathandlung*”, in: *Das Selbst und die Welt: Beiträge zu Kant und der nachkantischen Philosophie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019), 167-192.

<sup>15</sup> See A.L. Hülsen, “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 393.

<sup>16</sup> Kant’s form of inner intuition as temporally ordered states of the mind (see “Transcendental Aesthetics, Section II: Of Time” (A22 / B37, A33 / B49-50) in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 157, 161. In “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, Hülsen further writes: “It is hence the mere nature of our spirit that makes the condition of time necessary (see A.L. Hülsen, “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 399.

# Philosophical Fragments from August Ludwig Hülsen's Literary Estate<sup>1</sup>

1813

*August Ludwig Hülsen*

## Preface

By presenting the literary legacy of my friend Hülsen to the public in the following pages, I am fulfilling the wish expressed to me by some of the first writers of our fatherland; and in doing so, I am also fulfilling a service to many other excellent men in a way that is likely unknown to me. These few fragments are, in fact, the entire literary legacy of a richly flourishing mind, if we want to take that expression at its truest sense. Hülsen sought to experience life much more than to write [about it], and what he wrote, he addressed much more often to one or the other like-minded friend than to a broader audience.<sup>2</sup> Yes, I would dare say that it was precisely in such letters that his whole being expressed itself much more purely, powerfully, and precisely than in any of his writings intended for print. Without claiming that Hülsen, with his often-expressed preference for the ancient philosophers, and especially for Socrates, ever really found or could have found in them the complete satisfaction that his mind required, he resembled them at least insofar that it was not in the lecture halls but the arcades of an academy where teachings [*Lehre*] in conversational form flowed most divinely from his mouth. Anyone who has ever heard him speak about the oscillations of a pendulum and their profound meaning will remember with wholehearted joy

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<sup>1</sup> The original German version of this text is entitled "Philosophische Fragmente aus dem Nachlaß August Ludwig Hülsen's" and was initially published in the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift von Deutschen für Deutsche* 1.1 (1813): 264-302, edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, following Hülsen's death in 1809, with a preface by Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouqué, and an afterword by Friedrich Schelling. Parts A and B were later published in German in *Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar*, edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 257-267.

<sup>2</sup> During his life Hülsen published one philosophical letter entitled "Philosophische Briefe an Hrn. v. Briest in Nennhausen, Erster Brief, Über Popularität in der Philosophie", published in German in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teuscher Gelehrten* 7.1 (1797): 71-103, edited by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer.

the light that shone forth from his eyes, while the words, as if breathed into him by the World Spirit, sprang clearly and delightfully from his lips. Even the wholly non-scientifically minded and unprepared listened in silent and joyful reverence, and a deep presentiment of his profound thoughts spread through their expanded chests.—How much of this is reflected in the fragments that follow, I cannot exactly determine, being too intimately acquainted with Hülsen’s manner and the memory of his oral discourse. But here, too, this divine element can be found.—Who could read the conclusion to the first fragment<sup>3</sup> without being moved!

And, as it is the divine essence [*Wesen*] of spirit [*Geistes*], it is at times in itself with blessed intuition, all knowing, recognizing everything!<sup>4</sup>

And considering that the gap is filled by deeds, that before continuing to write, Hülsen truly went even deeper into blessed contemplation; through the painful gateways of sickness and death - who did not feel a deep, rousing melancholy running through his inner being!

The sharing of these pages is an enquiry as to whether an audience to whom Hülsen—announced and recommended early on by Fichte and Friedrich Schlegel—had begun to emerge as an important phenomenon, still retained enough love for him, despite the later literary taciturnity of this noble spirit, to provide a friendly reception to a small volume collected with humility from his letters and other essays. If so, the strongest and most tender rays of this light, which is as mild as it is serious, would at last reach general circulation.

I will contribute to such an enterprise to the best of my ability, but the main part would remain reserved for Erich von Berger<sup>5</sup>, the author of

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<sup>3</sup> The Romantic fragment, as conceived by Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, sought to dissolve established delimitations of philosophical writing, which, in their view, restrained thinking. Instead, the fragment form, as individual ‘splinters’ of text, was intended to both mimic and initiate thought and allowing to reflect freely. Unlike Novalis’ and Schlegel’s fragments, Hülsen’s fragments are not independent splinters of thought but rather individual passages that are logically linked in writing and thought, so that they could be read as a continuous, coherent text.

<sup>4</sup> While Fouqué refers to these lines as “the conclusion to the first fragment”, these are the concluding lines of fragment 31 at the end of part A of Hülsen’s “Philosophische Fragmente”.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Erich von Berger (1772-1833) was a Danish-German philosopher and close friend of Hülsen after they met at the University of Kiel in 1794. In 1795, when studying at the University of Jena, both became members of the *Gesellschaft der freien Männer* (Society of Free Men). In April 1796, Berger and Hülsen travelled together from Jena to Switzerland, where they lived until the fall of 1797, and in 1803 Berger invited Hülsen to join an agricultural community in Holstein (see Henning Ratjen, ‘Berger, Johann Erich von’. In: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (ADB). Band 2 (Leipzig: Duncker &

*Philosophische Darstellung der Harmonien des Weltalls* [*Philosophical Representation of the Harmonies of the Universe*] and other interesting writings, since I —although already a pupil of Hülsen as a young boy—have travelled along completely different paths; for my idealistic friend thought so little of strict discipleship that in his teachings the seed of independent thought and action was powerfully sown. And so, I have become a completely different person, one whose views and convictions are not necessarily presented in the following pages, while Berger’s much later friendship with Hülsen flourished in mutual pure freedom and independence to the most perfect accord; for between them, there was a pure providential harmony of minds and aspirations. But in fullest agreement with both of them, I, too, have never ceased to be understood by them and to understand them, so that I may confidently join Berger in laying a hand on this representation of Hülsen, hopefully contributing from my point of view to a more all-rounded completion of the picture. It will now be up to you, German compatriots, whether you wish to show yourselves favorable and conducive to such an undertaking through a friendly reception of the following pages.

*Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouqué*<sup>6</sup>

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Humboldt, 1875), 376-75; Guido Naschert, “August Ludwig Hülsens erster Beitrag zur philosophischen Frühromantik”, *Athenäum* 8 (1998), 111-135; and Manfred Frank, “Unendliche Annäherung.” *Die Anfänge der Philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt a. M., 1997), 900.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouqué (1777–1843) was a Romantic German writer. He first met Hülsen when the latter became Fouqué’s private tutor from 1789-1794.

# Philosophical Fragments<sup>1</sup>

*August Ludwig Hülsen*

## B.

32<sup>2</sup>. What the human being [*der Mensch*] beholds [*anschaut*], he calls his world. If it stands opposite him like an object to a subject, then his view is a formal mode of observation, and he and his world are absolutely separated. He himself is the antithesis [*Gegensatz*] in this contradiction [*Widerspruche*]. As such, he cannot resolve it, and thus he can never penetrate into his world, nor the world into him.

33. Spirit and matter were the two great objects of this contemplation. Once this illusion took root, they revealed themselves to him in a necessary manner. Matter, as the object and consequently real; spirit, as the subject, ideal. Both could not exist as exclusive absolutes. But as the subject, the spirit made itself absolute through contemplation, in accordance with the true principle: as certain as anything is, it can only be so through the absolute. Thus, logical [*konsequente*] thinkers sacrificed matter as the object, in the denotation [*Bedeutung*] of the real, and what remained to them as the only all-encompassing world was merely the subjective mode of representation [*Vorstellungsweise*] – idealism.

34. In this idealism, spirit is figuratively the light, matter the darkness. And as darkness is only the boundary [*Begrenzung*] of light, so the matter is the mere boundary of spirit. This shadow of reality was retained, so that the light of spirit did not penetrate all the world but could reflect itself in the dark and return grounded in universal understanding [*verständlich*]. Thus, the struggle with darkness remained the old contradiction of the ideal and the real<sup>3</sup>, which

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<sup>1</sup> This English translation contains only part B of the original text, which includes fragments 32 to 60.

<sup>2</sup> Hülsen did not number the fragments in the original German version of this text which was posthumously published in German in the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift von Deutschen für Deutsche*; Fragments of parts A and B were later numbered in *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 257-267.

<sup>3</sup> With the phrase “the old contradiction of the ideal and the real”, Hülsen points to an ongoing discussion in the Jena Romantic circle about Fichte’s definition of his *Wissenschaftslehre* as “Real-Idealismus” or “Ideal-Realismus” (“The *Wissenschaftslehre* holds the centre between both systems and is a critical idealism, which could also be called a real-idealism or an ideal-realism.” [Die Wissenschaftslehre hält zwischen beiden



was not settled peacefully, but after all vain efforts was itself pushed into the darkness.

35. The contemplation of matter as a boundary of spirit is the *finite* contemplation. As fact, it is, at the same time, the most general imagination of a spirit-less time lost in matter. As such, it could be of salutary significance.

36. The absolute is only *One* [*Eines*], and therefore all-encompassing; it is not a subject with the exclusion of the object, or vice versa. But if it [the absolute] is at all, it is necessarily in itself also the one and the other, and consequently as the one simultaneously the other.

37. Considered in this unity of absolute being, the spirit is the subject, the ideal; the idea the object, the real; both part of the identity of the one and the other.

38. The spirit in relation to itself, taken as pure ideal [*ideel*], is the unbounded original living light emerging from out of itself. The idea in relation to itself, and consequently taken purely as object or real, is the unbounded original eternal matter. In the absolute unity of spirit and idea, spirit is the eternal light in matter—its transparency<sup>4</sup>; idea is the eternal matter in light—its vitality. Spirit and matter are eternally near one another in light and clarity.

39. We posit something as *being* [*Seyend*] in general by its relation to itself, and there is absolutely nothing without this relation, namely  $A = A$ .<sup>5</sup> A

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Systemen bestimmt die Mitte, und ist ein kritischer Idealismus, den man auch einen Real-Idealismus, oder einen Ideal-Realismus nennen könnte.], see Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke* (SW), Band I, hg. von Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Berlin 1965 (Nachdruck der Ausgabe 1845), 281), which was also a topic of investigation in various fragments and letters by Schlegel, Novalis, and Schleiermacher.

<sup>4</sup> Compare also Goethe's theory of the origin of dioptrical colors: "Colours are called dioptrical when a colourless medium is necessary to produce them; the medium must be such that light and darkness can act through it either on the eye or on opposite surfaces. It is thus required that the medium should be transparent, or at least capable, to a certain degree, of transmitting light. Transparency itself [...] is already the first degree of the opposite state" (see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Part II, Physical Colours" in *Theory of Colors*. Translated by Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1970), 59, 61.

<sup>5</sup> See also Novalis's "Remarks on the *Wissenschaftslehre*", in *Fichte Studies*, Fragment 553: "a is a – seems to me to be nothing but a repetition of the bringing forth of the a to being. It can express a strengthening. No connotations are involved, and it qualifies therefore as a logical copula. Often such an identity judgment expresses a sharpened distinction – a sharp attention to the peculiar character of that which is in danger of being confused with something else. The sphere a is determined through the sphere a. a is the name of

contradiction, therefore, 'is' a *contradiction*, insofar as it cannot *be* at all. If it nevertheless 'is', it is only because it is not, that is, only as harmony.

40. An absolute contradiction in relation to itself contradicts itself in the absolute, *i.e.*, it is absolute harmony precisely as contradiction, and in that [harmony] once again absolute contradiction; consequently, the one is as absolute as it is the other, and the one precisely through the other.

41. Absolute opposites are absolute. Thus, they *are* only absolute in opposition, and, consequently, absolutely *one* and the opposite simultaneously, and *one* only through the other and with the other at the same time.

42. So are subject and object. Their opposition is precisely their absolute being [*Seyn*], which subsists only in their opposition. But their being as unity is *intuition* [*Anschauung*]. The subject is the intuiting aspect in both, but it looks at itself as the *object*. Thus, the subject is only itself as an object, and the object is only in the subject. The intuition is therefore being itself [*das Seyn selbst*] and being intuition.

43. The subject in its relation as intuiting aspect, taken as pure ideal, is the *spirit*. The object in its relationship as the intuited, pure real, is *matter*. Spirit and matter are therefore absolutely opposed to each other; yet in this opposition *they* are at the same time absolutely *one*.

44. Spirit looks at itself as matter, and hence matter is [spirit] itself in its penetration. The absolute, therefore, in the identity of spirit and matter, is pure absolute spiritual being in intuition. It is only this one being [*dies eine Seyn*], the *universe* in general, and apart from it there is nothing.

45. That the rational mind does not perceive this clarity is to be proven [*zu erweisen*]; yet, that our spirit beholds it in the divine idea cannot be proven.

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an unknown sphere. The first a is a characteristic posited, the second a is an essential posited – the former is presupposed, the latter is posited. The concept a is set in opposition to the a that is available.

Their common sphere, their scene, is the I – the subject. The first a is already available in the I – the other also – They are only connected.

/These reflections on this simple proposition must deliver to us the foundations of all philosophy/

a is a emerges from predication of the simple; simply on account of quantity, quality, relation, modality or their composites.” Novalis, *Fichte Studies*. Translated and edited by Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 163, in response to Fichte, SW 1, 92-93.

46. Spirit as spirit, its ideal divine abundance, is absolute *light*. Matter as matter, its real divine abundance, is absolute *gravity* [*Schwere*].<sup>6</sup> In the identity of absolute being, both are absolute *life*: for being [*das Seyn*] is in both its absolute relation as one.

47. As ideal, the spirit is all light; as real, matter is all gravity.

48. Every intuition of a human being is his living light, and thus an intuition of its spirit. The human being himself is wholly this spirit, when he is wholly living light, wholly intuition.

49. Every intuition of our spirit is determined by itself on the one and same object. In this, however, it has a simultaneous, twofold relationship: that of the eternal idea as absolute being, and that of finite time in formal appearance.

50. Every intuition in time is neither the first nor the last. Yet every intuition in the idea [*die Idee*] is eternally both at the same time. The former, therefore, is forever a repetition of the One [*des Einen*]; the latter is always originating in itself, eternally the One [*die Eine*].

51. The intuition in time, as repetition of the One [*des Einen*], is the formal reproduction of the emerging spirit; [while] the intuition in the idea is the self-intuition of spirit. As repetition of the One [*des Einen*], the object is eternally the already known, the past; as original intuition, its object is forever that which has not-yet-been, the new. Both, the known and the new, are eternally together in themselves; primarily, however, in intuition the known is rendered through time as finite, the new, through the idea, as eternally real mode of contemplation [*Betrachtungsweise*]. Both in *one* intuition is the assimilation of time into the eternal idea, whereby spirit transfigures matter into itself [*zu sich selber verklart*], and the formal appearance itself partakes intimately in the eternally transparent life.

52. Towards the outside, the object of our observation is everywhere infinitely multifaceted and manifold, just as our intuition is as infinitely different through particularity [*Eigenthumlichkeit*] on the inside. But the eye

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<sup>6</sup> Hülsen considers the concept of *Schwere* as general modality of all matter (see Adelung, *Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, Ausgabe letzter Hand, Leipzig 1793–1801).

was provided with only the one aspect, and this intuition is permanent and connects all manifold things through the one eternal gaze.

53. This one abiding object [of intuition] is life, the eternal and omnipotent in the totality of all its relations. If nature provides us with the spectacle of a great, infinitely varied life, then it, too, is the one all-animating mother, and through this it severs its relationship to itself – the contradiction which our intuition of a manifold cannot avoid without a higher unity. Laudably, human beings strove to solve this problem, and in firm view of their objective, they were not afraid to call death into the world of life, that it may take hold of what their intuition could not grasp. Often did this terror seize the whole of nature, with worthy consequence. Other times, it only affected each individual life so that the greater whole would – incomprehensibly – be kept more alive. In the common view of the inconsistent formal philosophy<sup>7</sup>, the modest principle, born out of uncertainty, was to live and let live. It left the divine ground [*göttlichen Grund*], whose depth it could for once not reach, to rest on itself, and merely made observations on the usefulness of all life.

54. But whatever explanation we may attempt, we will never succeed in comprehending the roots of life in a finite manner. The temporal change of phenomena, as a beginning and an end, is in relation to life a completely empty concept, both in essence and in form. Therefore, nothing is gained if we destroy the latter and let the essence [*das Wesen*] return and exist in the eternal One. Nor will we be able to save the whole unless each individual, in relation to itself, is unique in form and essence, and thus eternal and unrejuvenated. The divine creating principle, as absolute abundance in itself, is thereby also absolutely undemanding [*unbedürftig*], and cannot request from one what it would like to bestow onto another. It would simply be annihilated itself.

55. If we now consider life in an eternal manner, we include its temporal relations themselves into the idea, as absolute time, and as such, time, as an alternation of coming into being [*Entstehen*] and passing away [*Vergehen*], has completely ceased to exist for it. Once in relation to itself, as life, it is also

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<sup>7</sup> This is a possible reference to Fichte's *Formular-Philosoph* ("The formal philosopher thinks this and that, observes himself in this thinking, and then presents the whole series of what he could think as truth, for the mere reason that he could think it. The object of his observation is he himself." [Der Formular-Philosoph denkt sich dies und jenes, beobachtet sich selbst in diesem Denken, und nun stellt er die ganze Reihe dessen, was er sich denken konnte, als Wahrheit hin, aus dem Grunde, weil er es denken konnte. Das Object seiner Beobachtung ist er selbst]; see Fichte, SW III, 5.

completely united in essence and form, and in both, therefore, autonomous and eternal [*unvergänglich*]. One cannot separate oneself from absolute intuition in order to explain something in a finite way, for it is nothing but the absolute, and all life must be revealed in it in an eternal manner. It is true that we cannot behold an infinitely manifold life for itself in an eternal manner, however, nature, through its relationship to itself, solves this contradiction for us as its life is united in an eternal manner—timeless, absolute, and as such eternally inseparable and simply whole in itself. In nature, the great manifold life is finally its own eternal creation, and since it, as eternal, is indestructible in its inherent peculiarity, so in each individual nature prevails, as one and undivided, and in each individual life its peculiarity; the relation [of life] to itself is simultaneously the relation in the *one* nature, and it is, for that very reason, autonomous. One with it [nature], and eternally itself a whole.

56. That way, nature also created the human being in a primordial and eternal manner, as a whole. In him, however, nature wanted to perfect its great, glorious creation as a transfiguration of itself, of its deepest, innermost being, in the light of his intuition. Nature is therefore this whole entity in the abundance of his consciousness and the totality of all his relations. By virtue of this divine nature residing within him, the human being hence strives for unity with himself, as a unity in the eternal harmony of nature. If it is nature's divine power and its own eternal perfection, then it also resides inside the human being in an eternal capacity; however, he achieved this perfect oneness of himself as harmony in nature only during the early life of unconscious innocence, the deep blissful peace of the childlike age of the world<sup>8</sup>, which

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<sup>8</sup> Hülsen refers to this “the childlike age of the world” also in his essay “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, as “a legend of an original Golden Age of the world: a state of most intimate harmony and love, where the disturbance of reality, inequality rooted in varying relations within a society, did not yet exist; a beautiful and harmonious springtime of life, when an innocent mankind was happy and content, and only peaceful deities walked among them [...] which had been passed down to the descendants of those fortunate ones and has always been held sacred, was intimately connected with the belief in a future in which heavenly peace would again return to mankind, and joy and harmony would dwell among us undisturbed once more.” He notes, however, that it is not merely enough to dwell on this idle play of imagination, creating a necessity for reason, to “seek reason in ourselves and our actions alone”. (See A.L. Hülsen, “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 398-99. Similarly, the *Athenaeum* Fragment 243 notes: “The mirage of a former golden age is one of the greatest obstacles to approximating the golden age that still lies in the future. If there once was a golden age, then it wasn't really golden. Gold can't rust or decompose: it emerges victoriously genuine from all attempts to alloy or decompose it. If the golden age won't last always and forever, then it might as well never begin, since it will only be good for composing

has come to us only as a sacred legend, pre-dating history. But the unconscious innocence of this early child-like life is not the perfect creation of nature. It is only the divine, perfect model for a new day's labor, which the human being is to begin and accomplish in the power of nature. In acquired freedom—blissfully contemplating the harmony of the one life, the whole in light and clarity—and never-changing and eternal: this is how nature wanted to reveal itself in the human being, so the human being was to recognize himself as nature. The epoch of this new creation as a continued striving towards perfect unity, the self-intuition of nature, is time in general<sup>9</sup>, its content [is] history. Where, in the transfiguration of his spirit, the human being has succeeded in imbuing the life of time with the eternal idea and, with it, eternal love, time has run its course and, although he dies, he will forever lead a blissful, harmonious and immortal life without change and death.<sup>10</sup> Such divine moments were for many the price of an arduous life, and, every time one sank back into the struggle of time, his soul longed so fervently for redemption that he breathed a sigh of renewed courage into the blessed heaven of life.

57. The human being's striving for unity with himself is at the same time the combined striving of the whole of humankind. It is only outwardly that the one life of nature is separated by the opposition of the lineages [*Geschlechter*], and only seemingly so through the infinite repetition of their separate [*individuellen*] being [*seyn*] in the individual beings of humanity. Inwardly—in nature itself—there is no separation. In itself, therefore, as the *one* life of nature, human beings are connected with one another in an *eternal manner*. Nature has also reproduced this inner sacred unity externally through the union in the State.<sup>11</sup> In it [the State] there lies a profound divine meaning,

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elegies about its loss. [AW].” Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> Hülsen's self-intuition of nature and the human being is conceptually linked to Immanuel Kant's form of inner intuition as temporally ordered states of the mind (see “Transcendental Aesthetics, Section II Of Time” (A22 / B37, A33 / B49-50), in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 157, 161. In “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, Hülsen further writes: “It is hence the mere nature of our spirit that makes the condition of time necessary”, *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 399.

<sup>10</sup> Strack and Eicheldinger link this passage to John 11, 25-26: “[H]e that believed in me, although he be dead, shall live: And everyone that liveth, and believeth in me, shall not die for ever.” Holy Bible, Douay-Rheims Version; however, it is unknown if Hülsen intended this as a reference to scripture; see Strack & Eicheldinger, 408, n. 56; 265,25.

<sup>11</sup> In his essay “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, Hülsen describes the State as social circumstance in which the human being's natural condition as social being comes to bear insofar as individuals are all equivalent parts of a whole who “mutually inter-act with one another and re-act to each other, and only through their difference produce

which undignifiedly has often been explained as an external compulsion, a declaration which did not even touch the outside of life, much less the inner spirit of it.

58. In the union of the State, the human being appears first and foremost as individual, as a complementary part, namely to a whole. Precisely for this reason and as a result of it, it is also his idea which—in the most perfect union through an unchanging attitude, in the formation of the same through a law—unites the parts into an equal inner unity, so that in all of them, as in *one* body, only *one* spirit and *one* life prevail. However imperfectly this may have been achieved so far, the *one* life, as the united idea, is nevertheless the necessary relation to each individual human being, and he, therefore, the whole and the one eternal purpose of all unification in the State. Thus, the individuality as a means is once more abolished, and, through sanctification of the law of the eternal idea, every life is sanctified in itself and intended for the perfect unity of nature.

59. Just as the human being's striving for unity with himself—as harmony with nature in its self-intuition [*Selbstanschauung*—is the sole content of all history, it must particularly express itself in its supreme connections, in the history of sciences. The sciences have always been the repeated attempts to capture the pure inner content of our knowledge, without association [*Relation*] and in an eternal manner. Here, therefore, it is particularly evident how all these endeavors assumed the eternal idea and tried to express it as pure cognition; in them, there has always been a higher unification of minds [*Geister*]. For whatever accidental part the individuality retained, it was nowhere mentioned, and the conflict between the originators [*Urheber*] and cultivators [*Pfleger*] of the sciences always arose only out of the demand for the intrinsic and essential universality of a science. It should also consequently be considered as cognition of *one* spirit, and, for that reason, it is exalted men, worthy of praise, who researched with rigor and did not tire in the struggle to demolish one appearance and to maintain the other. In both, it was the one and eternal idea they kept alive and vigorously encouraged among their own minds [*eigenthümlichen Geistern*]. There are dark times when we find the auditorium [*Schauplatz*] empty. But all of a sudden

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and maintain the harmony of the whole”, while also existing as wholes in themselves. However, as the actual human being is circumstance of nature, so is the State only an institution in nature whose “conditions mean nothing if their principles are not grounded in nature.” See A.L. Hülsen, “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 391-410.

God's fire descends once more from the heavens, devours the mortal and in strong characters it establishes the holy flame of life. In it the striving of the sciences has been preserved, and their significance documented in the idea of eternal unity. This unity reveals itself also in the scientific forms. As arrangement into a systematic whole, each one is the idea in which science seeks to complete itself spherically. Nevertheless, even here, we find a divided effort, and we have to wonder how the idea which guided the scientific endeavor did not at the same time lead it towards the unity of all sciences. But when we venture back to the prehistoric time of our life, to the time of living intuition, we discover it to be just that. Living intuition is the immediate unity of the eternal idea and therefore timeless in itself, like everything that happens in an eternal way. It was thus a time when, as in our earliest childhood, the pure nature of our spirit expressed itself without separation from the One wherein, unconsciously or with self-intuition, our life is preserved, eternal, immortal. Every history is preceded by an eternity, which lingers as a sacred legend for a long time to come.<sup>12</sup> In this manner, history preserves for us great monuments of that time, even in the languages of all nations, which, as pure revelations of nature, are alive with the idea and have only come into being in an eternal manner. These monuments fell silent in the finite contemplation of human beings, the actual night of life, but preserved themselves in themselves for the new day, as consecrated signs of divine mysteries.

60. When nature began the history of its great creation, outwardly the finite separated itself from the eternal, the human being from nature, but not nature from the human being. For in it, everything is eternal, and its divine harmony can never be tarnished. In the self-intuition of human beings, however, nature's transfiguration had to be attained as *freedom*; for the eternal necessity in the unity of being is in itself without connection, and, therefore, as generative light it is eternal night for itself. The necessity in itself, however, is the divine freedom of self-intuition as light in light; as such, the human

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<sup>12</sup> Both Schelling, in the afterword to these fragments, and Christoph Jamme, have drawn parallels to this phrase as Platonic in thought (see Christoph Jamme, "Geselligkeit und absolutes Sein. Weisen des Anschlusses an Fichte im Umkreis der 'Freien Männer'." In: *Denken unterwegs. Philosophie im Kräftefeld sozialen und politischen Engagements. Festschrift für Heinz Kimmerle zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*, Amsterdam 1990, 93). In his essay "On the Natural Equality of Human Beings", Hülsen further notes that a "legend of a Golden Age [...], which had been passed down to the descendants of those fortunate ones and has always been held sacred, was intimately connected with the belief in a future in which heavenly peace would again return to mankind, and joy and harmony would dwell among us undisturbed once more." *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 398-99.



being should learn to find himself, himself as unrestricted life in eternal unity with nature. Thus, it was in this provision that life had to first and foremost find itself separated from nature by an absolute antithesis over which a dark fate ruled. Opposite the mother stood the son consigned to himself, while in her innermost life she held him eternally to her bosom and did not allow the divine power to run dry so that one day he may return to her with a clear countenance and to share the blessed life with her. She also lived on in his language, which he had received from her, and revealed to him her spirit in the eternally new stimulation of time.

### Afterword to the Preceding Fragments

I was pleased to be able to include these estimable relics of an esteemed mind in this journal; and, since someone else took the liberty of writing the preface, I will add a short afterword.

Ludwig August Hülsen first became known through a text that sought to address the question put forward by the Berlin Academy: *What Progress has been made in Metaphysics since Leibniz?*<sup>2</sup> in which the question was not answered but was itself subjected to an examination. The author's quiet dialectical gift, more tangible than demonstrative, more inwardly effective than outwardly prominent, was already noticeable in that work; a cheerful irony hovered over the whole, anticipating him as one of the few minds superior to the subject matter, who so rarely stand out in the sciences. The manuscript was followed by contributions to the *Athenaeum*; a treatise on the natural equality of human beings and fragments from a journey to Switzerland.

It will be up to those of his friends who are more familiar with his later life and intellectual development to explain more clearly how it happened that his contribution to the sciences was limited to these few works, and the fragments presented here are in fact the entire literary estate of Hülsen. For apart from the reason that consisted of his personal idiosyncrasy, other, external causes and circumstances, ought to also have played a part. The author of this afterword knows nothing of these; he met the commemorated only once in his life, but never forgot the impression of his remarkable personality. A strong, highly educated being, combining heart-warming mildness of speech and gesture with strength and steadfastness [*gediegener Männlichkeit*]<sup>1</sup>; this is how he still appears before the author, as he did in 1797, unexpected but immensely pleasing, the first person in whose company he believed to feel the fresh, strong air of life once more after a devastating illness.

Anyone who had met Hülsen even once had to recognize that whatever he may do, say, or write in public would hardly outweigh his personality. If in others one is only too often aware of the discrepancy between scientific skill and assumed high principles on the one hand, and a poor personality on the other, then Hülsen's personality, in comparison, was so consummate that it was impossible to regard him simply as a scholar. Indeed, it was obvious

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<sup>1</sup> In the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century, the term "gediegene Männlichkeit" referred to an inner quality of constancy that is purely focussed on the essential. See *Goethe-Wörterbuch*, Band 3 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), and *Goethe-Wörterbuch*, Band 5 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011).

that if he were to express himself in his entirety, it could hardly be done in a rhetorical and rational scientific form (which still prevails in the presented fragments), but only in a freer form taken from life itself and furnished with life's circumstances. Even if his own circumstances did not permit such an act, we can still experience in what he has left us the wonderful fulfillment of a calm, contented spirit, who, while not contending with subjects, maintains with all the more certainty an inner equanimity to provide a pure image of them.

If we were to represent his mindset by a simile, we would say that the general mood of his writings reminds us of the impression of a slightly overcast sky resting above the surface of a clear lake and its surroundings. The subjects emerge from it unchanged; it provides only a subdued image of them, without a vivid cast of its actual colors; but all of a sudden, the delicate haze parts and a mighty ray of sunlight illuminates and penetrates it, even down to its deepest ground, and the reflected subjects appear in their full force and diversity of their outlines and colors.

Like with all of Hülsen's scientific treatises, these sudden rays of light can also be found in the preceding fragments of which I may cite as an example the passage in which he states that every search for truth already in itself expresses the relationship to a spirit, namely to one who does not necessarily search but rather truly perceives; or how, shortly afterwards, he [Hülsen] describes the appearance (the non-substantial or non-being) surprisingly clear as that which conceals truth insofar as it cannot be perceived, but then explicates its symbolic relation to truth (# 21-23)<sup>2</sup>; or the truly Platonic phrase (# 59)<sup>3</sup>: "Every history is preceded by an eternity, which lingers as a sacred legend for a long time to come."—But in order to experience the effect of such sudden illuminations, one must of course first have situated oneself with him in that state of content tranquility and quiet which allows the highest things merely to approach, yet without seeking to grasp them.

If it were possible, at the sight of such a beautiful and in its own way perfect spirit, to think of what it could still be lacking, and if the whole as it is and as we have once come to love it were not changed by every addition, then one could say that the increasing (potentiating) power through which one is able to renounce any found or felt happiness, to subordinate it, and to treat it as the means of an even higher development, had revealed itself less in him. But since this power certainly lay within him, it can only be said that

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to part A, fragments 21, 22 and 23 in Hülsen's "Philosophische Fragmente."

<sup>3</sup> This refers to part B, fragment 59 in Hülsen's "Philosophische Fragmente", and this translation.

it did not reach its full potential, and perhaps only lacked the needed stimulation which is afforded either by the teacher's profession or the contact with like-minded, highly stimulating and striving minds. If, therefore, that grounding in the one may create a semblance of similarity between him and those others who know nothing more to say than that all is one and all is eternal and all is in most perfect harmony, he who would thus compare or even place him in the same line with them, would only grasp the farthest exterior of his essence.

And so we may grant him, whose life's calling did not demand of him the work of scientific completion, those divine moments that, as he himself says, were for some the price of an arduous life, and in which his spirit, clearly seeing through everything, even the particular, without the need to give voice to it, nevertheless rested with blessed contentment, and perhaps acknowledge the earlier completion compared to others, whom a longer design of life and work is provided in these circumstances.

I should be pleased to be able to contribute to the ongoing publication of his written legacy, especially his letters, through which alone a picture of his personality can be painted even for those who did not know him, and, to contribute something, even if only little, to the memory of a friend with whom, as long as he lived, one might wish to be able to live, and with whom, after he has departed, one can look forward to being reunited.

*(Schelling)*

# Symphilosophie

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## Concerning the Garden Calendar of 1795

*Friedrich Schiller*

Introduced and translated by Cody Staton\*

By the late eighteenth century, strolling gardens had become a craze of the public throughout Europe. Whereas the French insistence on formalism in gardens satisfied the rules of the intellect with its symmetrical lanes, vegetation wrenched and twisted into topiary and espaliers, the emergence of the English landscape garden drove the imagination into the opposite direction of near lawless design through serpentine lanes, ponds, and paths leading to different rooms, the rejection of geometrical patterns, and the feeling of movement in every perspective. In this short public address by Schiller, he advocates for the German taste in gardens to strike a balance between the two extremes and to discover its unique style on a par with its nation's taste in other aesthetic and moral categories. Schiller comments on the addition of the garden at Hohenheim to the 1795 calendar tour of gardens made by the theorist Christian Clay Lorenz Hirschfeld. Schiller commends this addition for the surprising and seeming contradictions brought into harmony when viewed from the point of view of each contributing to the whole. Schiller praises this garden for its exaltation of both art and nature, for the man of high culture is brought back to feeling, while the simple man is elevated through imagination and reason. This is no doubt a continuation of Schiller's theory given in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* that imaginative play not only harmonizes both matter and form, but also elevates them both by incorporating higher aspects of each into one another. For Schiller, the artful arrangement of the garden excels at achieving this act of play.

The German text can be found in Friedrich von Schiller, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Original-Ausgabe, 18<sup>th</sup> volume, Wien: 1820, 266–76.

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\* PhD in Philosophy, independent scholar, Canton GA, USA – [mcodystaton@gmail.com](mailto:mcodystaton@gmail.com)

## Text

Since Hirschfeld's writings on garden art, the love of beautiful artistic gardens has become more and more common in Germany, but not much to the advantage of good taste, because there was a lack of fixed principles and everything was left to the mere power of individual choice (*Willkür*). In order to correct the misguided taste in this art, this calendar provides excellent tips that deserve to be examined more closely by the art lover and to be followed by the garden lover.

Is it not altogether unusual to begin doing something and to then ask yourself whether it is at all possible? Indeed, this seems to be particularly the case with the aesthetic gardens that have become so pervasively popular. Our northern taste comes from such an ambiguous origin and has so far shown such an uncertain character that the true art lover may be forgiven for hardly granting [these gardens] even a passing glance, and for leaving it all to the play of dilettantism (*Dilletantism*). Uncertain as to which class of the fine arts that it should actually belong to, garden art for a long time was associated with architecture, with sculpted living vegetation under the rigid yoke of mathematical forms, whereby the architect dominated lifeless, heavy earthen objects (*Masse*). The tree had to hide its higher organic nature so that art could demonstrate its power over the tree's common physical nature. It had to give up its beautiful, independent life for a spiritless symmetry while its light, floating stature [was sacrificed] for an appearance of solidity, such as the eye demands from stone walls. Garden art has come back from this strange and errant path of late, but only to lose itself on the opposite path. Taste in gardens thus fled from the strict discipline of the architect into the freedom of the poet, suddenly exchanging the harshest servitude for the most unruly [poetic] license, and from then on wanting to receive its law from the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) alone. The eye was then forced to jump from one arbitrary and unexpected decoration to the next, for the imagination (*Phantasie*), left to its own devices, is adventurous and colorful and will transform its images, while nature, whether considered in a large or small area, was made to present the whole array of its phenomena on a sampling tray (*Musterkarte*). Just as in the French gardens, [the imagination] was deprived of its freedom, but compensated for it by a certain architectural

harmony and size, so now, in our so-called English gardens, it sinks into childish infancy in which it distinguished itself through an exaggerated striving for informality and variety removed from beautiful simplicity by evading all rules. It remains in this state for the most part, favored very little by the soft character of time, which flees from all definition of form and finds it infinitely more convenient to model objects according to its ideas rather than conforming to them.

Since it is so difficult to assign aesthetic garden art its place among the fine arts, one could easily come to the conclusion that it cannot be included here at all. But one would be wrong to allow the failed attempts to testify against their possibility at all. The two opposite forms under which it has appeared with us so far contain something true and both arose from a well-founded need.

As far as architectural taste is concerned, it cannot be denied that garden art is in the *same* category as architecture, although it has been very wrong to try to apply the conditions of the latter to the former. Both arts initially correspond to a physical need, which initially determines their forms, until the developed sense of beauty presses for freedom from these forms and at the same time taste makes its demands along with the understanding. When viewed from this standpoint, the two arts are not completely free, for the beauty of their forms will always remain conditioned and limited by this inexhaustible physical purpose. Both also have in common that they imitate nature not through an artificial medium but through nature itself, if even they imitate it at all, as they may rather create new objects. Hence, it may have been that [gardeners] did not adhere very strictly to the forms presented by the reality (*Wirklichkeit*) [of nature itself], as they did not care about regarding nature as a means to their own ends, and of thus doing violence to nature, so long as the understanding was satisfied with order and harmony and the eye was satisfied through [the appearance] of majesty and grace. One could then believe that one was all the more justified in doing so, since obviously in [landscape] gardening (*Gartenkunst*), as in architecture, the physical purpose is very often promoted precisely through this very sacrifice of natural freedom. The founders of this architectural taste in garden art can, therefore, be forgiven to some extent for allowing themselves to be seduced by the similarity that exists in many respects between these two arts, and for confusing their very different characters by choosing between order and freedom and giving favor to the former at the expense of the latter.

On the other hand, the poetic taste in gardens is also based on a very true fact of feeling. An attentive observer of himself could not fail to notice that the pleasure with which we are filled by the sight of landscape scenery is

inseparable from the idea that they are works of nature, not of artists. So, as soon as gardening taste aimed at this type of enjoyment, it had to be careful to remove all traces of an artificial origin in the garden. [The gardener] thus made freedom his supreme law, just as his architect predecessor had made regularity his law; for the former, nature had to prevail, while for the latter the hand of man had to triumph. But the end to which he strove was far too great for the means to which his art had limited him, and he failed because he stepped outside his limits and thus carried garden art into painting. He forgot that the reduced standard which the latter uses could not be very well applied to an art that represents nature in itself, as it can then only be moving insofar as it is absolutely confused with nature. It is of no wonder, then, that in his struggle for diversity he fell into frivolity and into arbitrariness (*Willkürliche*) because he lacked the space and strength for the transitions through which nature prepares and justifies its changes. The ideal toward which he strove contained no contradiction in itself; but it was contrary to its goal and, hence, absurd, because even the happiest success did not reward the enormous sacrifices.

So, if garden art is finally to come back from its excesses and, like its other sisters, rest between definite and permanent boundaries, then one must first of all have made it clear to oneself what one actually wants, a question which, in Germany at least, has not yet been addressed, nor does it seem to have been thoroughly thought through. A very good middle way will then probably be found between the rigidity of French garden taste and the lawless freedom of the so-called English taste. It will become clear that this art should not rise to such high levels as those who, in their designs, forget nothing except what the means of execution would like to persuade us, and that it is absurd to enclose the world into a garden wall, but that it is very feasible and sensible to make a garden that meets all the requirements of the good farmer in order to form a characteristic whole both for the eye and the heart and mind.

This is what the ingenious author of the fragmentary contributions to the development of German garden taste has excellently pointed out in this calendar, and of all that has ever been written on this subject we know of nothing that would be so satisfactory to healthy taste. It is true that his ideas are only jotted down in fragments, but this negligence in form does not extend to the content, which consistently shows a fine understanding and a delicate artistic feeling. After having identified and properly named the two main paths that garden art has taken so far and the various purposes that can be pursued in gardens, he endeavors to bring this art back to its true limits and to a reasonable purpose, which he rightly indicates as “increasing the



enjoyment of life through an interaction with the beautiful landscape that nature can give us.” He very correctly distinguishes the garden landscape (the actual English park)—in which nature appears in all its grandeur and freedom and appears to have devoured the garden—from the garden where art as such can become visible. Without denying the aesthetic merit of the former, the author is content to expose the difficulties connected with its execution, which can only be overcome by extraordinary force. He divides the actual garden itself into large, small, and medium varieties, briefly outlining the boundaries within which the invention of each of these three types must remain. He vehemently opposes the Anglomania of so many German gardeners, and is thus against bridges without water, against the hermitages on country roads, and so on. He reveals the misery resulting from an addiction to imitation and a misunderstanding of the principles of variety and freedom from coercion.

But by narrowing the boundaries of garden art, the gardener teaches it to be all the more effective within it by striving for a specific and interesting character through the sacrificing of what is unnecessary and counter-productive. He, therefore, does not consider it impossible to create symbolic and at the same time emotive (*pathetische*) gardens, which should be just as capable of expressing and creating a certain emotional state as musical or poetic compositions.

In addition to these aesthetic remarks, the same author has begun a description of the large gardens in Hohenheim in this calendar, which he promises to continue next year. Anyone who has either seen this justly famous garden for themselves or only knows it by word of mouth must find it pleasant to wander through it in the company of such a fine art connoisseur. He will probably be no less surprised than the reviewer to see an idea prevailing in a composition that one was so inclined to consider to be the work of arbitrariness, which does little honor to the author or the one describing the garden. Most travelers who have had the privilege of visiting the Hohenheim garden have, not without great astonishment, seen Roman tombs, temples, dilapidated walls, etc., alternating with Swiss huts or smiling flowerbeds with black prison walls. They could not understand how the power of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) allowed itself to combine such disparate things into a whole. The idea that we have before us a rural colony that settled among the ruins of a Roman city suddenly removes this contradiction by bringing a spiritual unity to this baroque composition. Rural simplicity and sunken urban splendor, the two extreme states of society, border each other in a touching way, whereby the serious feeling of transience is beautifully lost in the feeling of victorious life. This fortunate mixture pours out a deep, elegiac

tone through-out the entire landscape, which keeps the sensitive observer oscillating between rest and movement, reflection and enjoyment, and continues to resonate long after everything has disappeared.

The author assumes that only someone who has seen [this garden] in full summer can judge the entire value of this place. We would also like to add that only those who approach it in a certain way can fully appreciate its beauty. To fully enjoy it, one must be brought to it through the newly built princely castle. The route from Stuttgart to Hohenheim is, so to speak, a sensual history of garden art that offers interesting observations to the attentive traveler. In the orchards, vineyards, and farms along which the country roads run, the first physical beginnings of garden art appear stripped of all aesthetic decoration. But now French garden art welcomes the observer with proud gravity under the long and rugged poplar walls, which connect the open landscape with Hohenheim by arousing anticipation in their artistic form. This solemn impression increases to an almost embarrassing tension as one wanders through the chambers of the ducal palace, which has few equals in splendor and elegance and combines taste with extravagance in a certain rare way. Through the splendor that strikes the eye from all sides and through the artistic architecture of the rooms and furnishings, the need for simplicity is carried to the highest degree and the most solemn triumph is prepared for the rural nature that suddenly immerses the traveler in the so-called English village. Meanwhile, the monuments of sunken splendor—against whose mournful walls the planter leans his peaceful hut—render a peculiar effect on the heart. With secret joy, we see ourselves avenged in these crumbling ruins on the art which, in the magnificent building next door, had exercised its power to the point of abuse. But the nature that we find in this English garden is not the one that we had expected. It is a nature animated with spirit and exalted by art, which not only satisfies the simple man, but also the man who has been spoiled by culture and, by stimulating the former to think, leads the latter back to feeling.

Whatever one might object to such an interpretation of the Hohenheim grounds, the founder of these works deserves thanks for not having done anything to undermine them. And one would have to be very dissatisfied if one were not just as inclined to accept the deed for the will in aesthetic matters as in moral matters the will is the deed. When the painting of this Hohenheim complex is finally complete, the informed reader will be interested to see in it a symbolic character portrait of its remarkable creator, [a man] who knew how to force waterworks from nature in his gardens where hardly any spring could be found.

## CONCERNING THE GARDEN CALENDAR OF 1795

Every reader of taste who has seen these gardens in person will agree with the author's judgment regarding the gardens at Schwetzingen and the Seifersdorf Valley near Dresden. They will not be able to refrain from declaring that a sensibility that hangs tablets of written moral sayings on trees is an affectation, and any taste that randomly mixes mosques and Greek temples together is barbaric.



**Miscellaneous**

**Varia**

**Varia**

**Miscellanea**



# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## The Romantic Concept of Love

*Frederick C. Beiser\**

### ABSTRACT

This paper argues that there are four central features of the concept of love among the German romantics. These are: 1) an opposition to dualism, whether between the mental and physical or the spiritual and sexual; 2) an insistence that love be based on individuality; 3) a commitment to the social and political importance of love; and 4) a belief in the religious or metaphysical dimension of love.

*Keywords:* German romanticism, love, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article défend l'idée selon laquelle le concept romantique de l'amour se caractérise par quatre traits principaux : 1) une opposition au dualisme, le dualisme du mental et du physique, du spirituel et du sexuel ; 2) une insistance sur le fait que l'amour doive reposer sur l'indivi-dualité ; 3) un engagement en faveur de l'importance sociale et politique de l'amour ; et 4) une croyance en la dimension religieuse ou métaphysique de l'amour.

*Mots-clés :* romantisme allemand, amour, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher

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\* Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Syracuse University, College of Arts & Sciences, 531 Hall of Languages, 900 South Crouse Ave., Syracuse, NY 13244, USA – fbeiser@syr.edu

For the German romantics, there is no more important concept than love.<sup>1</sup> The very name “romantic” seems to imply as much. The concept appears constantly in the writings of the young romantics, especially those of Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis and Schleiermacher. Love was the dominant concept of their ethics, their politics and their religion. In his novel *Lucinde* Friedrich Schlegel wrote of “*die Religion der Liebe*”.<sup>2</sup> That phrase perfectly encapsulates the romantics’ new *credo* and worldview.

The romantic concept of love was innovative, indeed revolutionary in its day. It has also been highly influential. In fundamental respects, it has laid down the foundations for our own *modern* concept of love. When we think about love today, we betray our romantic roots. We believe that marriage should be based on love; we demand that love should be free, unconstrained by convention, tradition and authority; we assume that love expresses the innermost desires and feelings of the individual; we suppose that the object of love is not an abstract ideal but a unique individual; and we recognize that the quest for love might involve having many partners. All these are very modern assumptions; but they are also *romantic* assumptions. They began with the romantic movement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today, whether we recognize it or not, we are all romantics.

For all its importance and influence, it is not easy to pin down the meaning of the romantic concept of love. The romantics gave the term many meanings, where its meaning depends on its specific context and use. They never define the concept; nor do they analyze it into its sufficient and necessary conditions. If we are to understand what the romantics mean by “love” (*Liebe*), we have to *reconstruct* its meaning from many scattered sources and contexts, each of which stands in need of reconstruction.

Reduced down to its simplest elements, there are four central features of the romantic concept of love: 1) its opposition to dualism, whether between the mental and physical or the spiritual and sexual; 2) its insistence that love be based on individuality; 3) its commitment to the social and political importance of love; and 4) its belief in the religious or metaphysical dimension of love. We will examine each of these elements in turn.

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<sup>1</sup> This piece was first presented at the 18<sup>th</sup> annual NYU Conference on Issues in Modern Philosophy: Love and Friendship, November 10, 2023. I would like to thank the organizers for their invitation.

<sup>2</sup> *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler *et. al.* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1979), V, 12. (Abbreviated KA.)



## 1. Opposition to Dualism

When we compare the romantic concept of love with the Christian or neo-Platonic traditions, its most salient feature is its opposition to the dualism characteristic of these traditions. Love does not take place in a purely ideal or spiritual realm where it transcends everything physical; rather, it has its roots in the physical realm, which is transformed into the spiritual. The romantics are therefore utterly opposed to the separation of the ideal and the real, the mental and the physical, the spiritual and the sexual. Friedrich Schlegel gave emphatic and explicit expression to this opposition when he wrote: “The total separation and fragmentation of human powers, which are only healthy in free unification, is the real original sin of modern culture.”<sup>3</sup> Novalis too rejected dualism when he said that “The opposition between body and spirit is one of the most conspicuous and dangerous...”<sup>4</sup> And Schleiermacher, no less an opponent of dualism, claimed that the ideal of human perfection was “the unification of a high degree of the sensitivity of feeling with a high degree of the consciousness of reason.”<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to dualism, the romantics insist that love is *the unity* of the mental and physical, the ideal and the real, the spiritual and the sexual. The spiritual must be sexualized, the sexual must be spiritualized. Love cannot be entirely spiritual, as if the sexual were only an impurity; but it also cannot be completely physical, as if it were only a matter of sexual pleasure. For the romantics, love is the realization of the *whole* human being, where all aspects of humanity are redeemed and united into an indivisible whole.

We can characterize the romantic concept of love as a *via media* between the Christian and empiricist traditions. The Christian tradition made love entirely spiritual; the empiricist tradition saw love as completely physical because it was equated with the feeling of pleasure. The romantics oppose these extremes by insisting that love is *both* spiritual and physical, that it is the *interdependence* of these elements. If the spirit of love must be embodied, the body of love must be spiritualized.

The romantics stress the importance of the physical dimension of love, and even teach that its spiritual dimension has its roots in the sexual or physical. However, they refuse to reduce its spiritual to its sexual or physical dimension. What makes any empiricist reduction fail, in their view, is that the empiricists cannot explain even the *experience* of love, which is their

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<sup>3</sup> Review of Jacobi's *Woldemar*, KA II, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien*, in *Novalis, Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), II, 836.

<sup>5</sup> Schleiermacher, *An Cecilie, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hans-Joachim Birkner et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988) I/1, 200-1. (Henceforth abbreviated as KGA.)

foundation for the concept. The experience of love for the romantics consists in *longing* (*Sehnen*), which is more than mere desire. It is the *striving* for unity, the *need* for wholeness, where that unity or wholeness is achieved only in and through another person. The object of longing is therefore not just pleasure, a mere feeling; rather, it is a whole state of being, unity or wholeness with the other.

The romantics developed their concept of love in reaction against two 18<sup>th</sup> century novels, Rousseau's *Julie* (1761) and Jacobi's *Woldemar* (1794).<sup>6</sup> Both Rousseau and Jacobi conceive the ideal relationship for their heroes as Platonic friendship, where male and female sublimate their sexual feelings onto a higher intellectual plane. They wanted their readers to believe that sex was not only demeaning but also dispensable for friendship, which is the true ideal of love. The romantics, however, were not buying it. They found St. Preux's relationship to Julie, or Woldemar's relationship to Henriette, oppressive, affected and self-deceptive. The sexual needs of Julie and Henriette were natural and irrepressible, just as much in need of satisfaction as those of their male partners.

## 2. Entwinement of Individualities

Another basic feature of the romantic concept of love is individuality. Love, the romantics maintain, consists in the awareness and appreciation of someone's individuality, i.e., what is unique to, and singular about, a person. The object of love is not, therefore, an ideal, a perfect form, which is common to many individuals; rather, it is the individual alone, the concrete particular person.

The experience of love involves, therefore, the entwining of personalities, where lover and beloved discover, express and explore their distinctive personal characteristics through one another. These characteristics are only implicit or potential before the experience; but through it they become explicit and actualized. Love is the stimulus for individuality, the means and instrument for our awareness of it; but it is also an end in itself, that for the sake of which we develop our individualities.

For the romantics, the most valuable characteristic of a human being is not their rationality, still less their sensuality, but their individuality. Rationality and sensuality are universal qualities which everyone has as a human being, so that they are common or familiar. But individuality differs with each individual, so that it is rare or unique. The concept of individuality

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<sup>6</sup> Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse, Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), II, 6-741; and Jacobi, *Woldemar*, in *Werke* (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1820), V.

seems to isolate and separate human beings from one another, so that people have to develop their individuality on their own. But the romantics insist that we develop our individuality only in and through others, through the give and take of social interaction. Individuality is the glue that makes a society cohere, that forms it into an organic whole.

Individuality was the central concept of romantic ethics, its distinguishing feature from the two major ethical traditions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely, utilitarianism and the Kantian-Fichtean ethics of duty.<sup>7</sup> Their ethics of individuality was a reaction against both these traditions, which had failed to recognize the importance of individuality. The utilitarians gave supreme importance to happiness, in the attainment of which individuality played no necessary role. The Kantian-Fichtean ethics stressed the importance of ratio-nality, of acting on universal principles which are valid for everyone alike. Individuality had no place, therefore, in the formulation or performance of duty. Fichte even went so far to say that the goal of ethics was to eradicate indivi-duality, so that all people would become identical in a perfectly rational society.<sup>8</sup>

An important corollary of the romantic concept of love was the repudiation of sexual roles or stereotypes. If love is a realization of individuality, then it must not involve conformity to stereotypes, which are generic ways of acting. Friedrich Schlegel realized this perfectly well when he said that masculinity need not involve activity, and femininity need not involve passivity; there would be only true freedom, he wrote, when men explore their passivity and women their activity.<sup>9</sup> This rejection of sexual stereotypes is one of the most modern aspects of the romantic concept of love.

The romantic concept of love was first formulated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. One of the essential stages in its development came from the discussion of the concept of love in the writings of the Dutch philosopher Franz Hemsterhuis. In his *Lettre sur les désirs*,<sup>10</sup> Hemsterhuis put forward the thesis that the goal of the longing soul was complete unification with its object, so that there is no separation at all between lover and beloved.

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<sup>7</sup> The *locus classicus* for the romantic concept of individuality is Schleiermacher's *Monologen* (Berlin: Spener, 1800), 40-1.

<sup>8</sup> See his *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* in *Werke*, ed. I.H. Fichte (Berlin: Vet & Comp, 1845.1846), VI, 310.

<sup>9</sup> Schlegel, *Ueber die Philosophie*, KA VIII, 46. See also Schlegel, *Ueber die Diotima*, KA I, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Franz Hemsterhuis, *Lettre sur les désirs* (Paris, 1770). See the German translation, 'Ueber das Verlangen', *Vermischten philosophischen Schriften des Herrn Hemsterhuis* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1797).

Hemsterhuis argued that the soul could not attain this goal completely, because in its present state on earth its striving was limited by the need to use organs and media, which separated it from its object. Love did *not* involve individuality for Hemsterhuis because complete union with its object means the removal of all individuality, which separates one person from another.

One of the first reactions to Hemsterhuis's theory came from a proto-romantic thinker, Johann Gottfried Herder. In an article in the *Teutsche Merkur*,<sup>11</sup> he argued that love could not be the complete identity of lover and beloved because then there would be no one to benefit from the experience; lover and beloved would just disappear in a total unity. Love required not only the moment of unity or identity, Herder argued, but also the moment of separation, where lover and beloved retained their distinctive identities apart from their fusion. Love therefore required something paradoxical, Herder concluded, namely, identity-in-difference, unity-in-plurality.

The lessons of Herder's article were not lost upon another proto-romantic thinker, one whom we do not usually regard as a romantic at all: G.W.F. Hegel. We usually think of Hegel in his later years when he engaged in a hostile critique of romanticism, specifically Schlegel's concepts of irony and divine egoism. But in his early years, those from the late 1790s to early 1800s, Hegel was very much part of the romantic movement, a close ally of his romantic friends, Schelling and Hölderlin. Some of Hegel's early manuscripts from this period reflect on the concept of love.<sup>12</sup> Hegel develops the thesis that love consists in identity-in-difference, not only the union of lovers but also the different identities between them. Out of these reflections grew Hegel's famous concept of spirit (*Geist*), which involved the moments of unity and difference in the concept of love. This concept of identity-in-difference is notoriously obscure and it seems to be utterly mystical; but we can begin to understand it if we regard it as what it originally intended to be: an analysis of the necessary and sufficient conditions of love.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Herder, *Liebe und Selbstheit*, *Der Teutsche Merkur*, December 1781, 211-235. Cf. *Johann Gottfried Herder, Werke* (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), IV, 405-424.

<sup>12</sup> These fragments, which are identified by their *incipit*, are 'Positiv wird ein Glaube genannt...', which was written in July 1797, *Werke* I, 239-3; '...so wie sie mehrere Gattungen kennenlernen...', *Werke* I, 243-4, which was written in the summer of 1797; and '...welchem Zweck denn alles Uebrige dient...', *Werke* I, 244-50, whose first draft was written around November 1797, and whose second draft was written around autumn-winter 1798. References to *Werke* are to the *Werkausgabe* edition, ed. Evan Moldenhauer and K. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> See my *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 110-123.

### 3. Social and Political Commitment

The romantics were so enamoured with the concept of love that they even made it the basis of society and state. The bonds of society and state should be formed by love, they believed, rather than forged by law. Society and state should be more like a family, held together by affection, than like a business, formed by self-interest. This *social* and political role of love was conceived by Schlegel in his lectures on *Transcendentalphilosophie*, by Novalis in his *Glauben und Liebe*, and by Schleiermacher in his *Brouillon zur Ethik*.<sup>14</sup>

It seems wildly idealistic, even fantastic, to make love the basis of society and state, for love is very limited in its extent, restricted to those I know and have affection for. I can *respect* my fellow citizens, it seems, but I can hardly *love* them. I respect my mailman and my lawyer, and I might even like them; but I do not love them. Love seems more appropriate for a sect or club; but nothing as large as society or the state.

But this common objection against the romantic theory fails to understand, I think, the object of love: it is not the individual person, or even the mass of persons, but the social or political body as a whole. Political bodies or groups can be individuals no less than persons. A society, state, community or country can be individual too because they are wholes or unities which have unique or *sui generis* characteristics. There can be love for such individuals too, because we also speak of love of a country, a nation or a land. Love in this sense involves feelings of affection, just as love of a person does. Such love is called patriotism, an affection which they romantics admired and fostered.

The romantics viewed love as the antithesis to, and antidote for, self-interest, which was the competing theory of the basis of the state. They were hearty opponents of social contract doctrine, which made self-interest the basis of the state. The problem with self-interest, the romantics argued, is that it cannot secure allegiance to the state if the interest of the individual is threatened. A completely self-interested individual will not obey the law in any case that requires self-sacrifice, for example, in cases of paying taxes or wartime. The romantics had historical experience with this problem, having seen how, in 1806, the Prussian army, composed of conscripts and mercenaries, collapsed in the face of the French.

The great advantage of making love the basis of society and state, the romantics argued, is that love is freely given, flowing from the heart of the

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<sup>14</sup> Schlegel, *Transcendentalphilosophie*, KA XII, 52-3, 70-1; Novalis, *Glauben und Liebe, Werke*, II, 300-1; and Schleiermacher, *Brouillon zur Ethik (1805/06)*, ed. Hans-Joachim Birkner, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1981), pp. 49, 56, 59.

individual, whereas the law applies constraint, punishing those who disobey it. Love cannot be commanded, it is often said; but that it is its strength, not its weakness. For this reason, the romantic thought of love is the ally of freedom. While the law punishes wrong-doers, love forgives them, and in forgiving them sets them free.

The romantics saw love as the basis for all the “sympathetic virtues”, i.e., virtues like sympathy, kindness, charity and benevolence. These were for them the most basic virtues, the heart of any *Tugendlehre*. They were less disposed to a *Pflichtenlehre*, and were completely opposed to Kant’s moral philosophy because it made all virtues into duties. A duty made an action or practice onerous, presupposing that one had an inclination *not* to do it, and prescribing penalties for all failures in execution.

#### 4. The Metaphysical Dimension

The fourth and final characteristic of the romantic concept of love is its religious or metaphysical dimension. This is the least modern characteristic of the romantic concept, which never renounced its Christian heritage. This religious or metaphysical dimension appears as soon as we put the experience of love in its cosmic context. When two individuals fall in love, they not only exchange personal feelings; the experience is not only about them. This is because no feeling is purely personal, a property of the individual alone; feelings take place in the cosmos and they are therefore also manifestations of the universe as a whole. When I love you, God also loves you through me.

This religious dimension is clear and emphatic in all three romantic authors. Schlegel writes that “the sense of the world” becomes clear to us only through love,<sup>15</sup> and that love, like nature, is to be referred to divinity.<sup>16</sup> Novalis tells us that “the heart is the key to life and the world”, that love is “the final goal of history”, “the one of the universe” and that “God is love”.<sup>17</sup> And Schleiermacher is perfectly explicit: “God must be in the lovers; their embrace is really his enclosure, which they together feel and later will. I do not admit any pleasure in love without this enthusiasm and without the mystical...”<sup>18</sup>

We are inclined to see the religious dimension of the romantic concept of love as its most self-indulgent and extravagant aspect. It is enough to make

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<sup>15</sup> *Lucinde*, KA V, 67.

<sup>16</sup> *Transcendentalphilosophie*, KA XII, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Novalis, *Vorarbeiten*, *Werke* II 396, and *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, *Werke* II, 480 and 486.

<sup>18</sup> Schleiermacher, *Vertraute Briefe über Friedrich Schlegels Lucinde* (Lübeck: Friedrich Bohn, 1800), p. 44.

a positivist cringe. And yet it is the necessary consequence of perfectly plausible premises. To understand how, let us take a brief look at romantic metaphysics.

The romantics' religious conception of love is ultimately rooted in their metaphysics, specifically, their *Naturphilosophie* or philosophy of nature, which was formulated chiefly by Schelling in the late 1790s and early 1800s.<sup>19</sup> *Natur-philosophie* was first and foremost a rejection of Cartesian dualism, which was based on a specific concept of matter. Descartes saw matter as sheer extension, as what occupied space; matter was inert, in the sense that it could not move unless it was moved upon. Toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this concept of matter hit upon hard times—it could not explain the new phenomena of magnetism and electricity—and it was eventually rejected in favor of a more dynamic concept, one which saw motion as central to matter, as part of its very essence. This new dynamic concept already blurred the distinction between *life* and matter, and ultimately that between *mind* and matter. According to Aristotle, what is characteristic of life is its power of self-movement; but it was just self-movement that seemed involved in the dynamic concept of matter. The mind now seemed to be a higher degree of organization and development of the living powers of the body; and, conversely, matter was only a lower degree of organization and development of the living powers of the mind. The mediating concept between mind and body here is living force, *vis viva*, which is the power of self-movement inherent in matter.

The father of this dynamic view of matter was Leibniz, who developed it in reaction against the mechanical physics of Descartes. The concept was further developed by Herder, who made it the basis of his organic concept of nature. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* grew out of the dynamic view of matter first developed by Leibniz and then popularized by Herder. The romantics in turn adopted Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as their own philosophy of nature.

We must place the romantic concept of love within this organic concept of nature. Their acceptance of *Naturphilosophie* explains how they could maintain the physical basis of love without lapsing into materialism, given that force, which has its highest manifestation and development in love, is inherent in matter itself. It also shows how the experience of love could be part of nature as a whole. Since I am part of nature, and since nature forms an organic whole, every part of which is inseparable from it, my feelings are

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<sup>19</sup> See Schelling, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (Breitkopf und Härtel, 1797), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1857), II, 74-343; and *Von der Weltseele* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1798), II, 379-583.

a product of nature herself; they are indeed an expression, manifestation or revelation of her living powers. Even if I am not aware of nature acting through me, it is still doing so because I am part of her.

For love to have a religious dimension, we only have to add a pantheistic concept of God to this organic concept of nature. The whole of nature that acts through me, and that forms an inseparable unity, is infinite because there is nothing outside it. But if it is infinite, we can then regard it as God itself.

All the romantics—Schlegel, Schleiermacher and Novalis—were Spinozists and pantheists in this sense. They believed in the infinity of nature as well as the organic concept of nature. They were therefore perfectly justified in attributing a religious dimension to the experience of love. What two lovers saw in one another is what God saw in and through them; their love was the manifestation of all the dynamic powers of nature, which is nothing less than the revelation of God.

Extravagant metaphysics? Perhaps. Self-indulgent mysticism? Perhaps that too. But there was a rhyme and reason to it all. It was at least consistent, a valid consequence from two plausible premises: an organic concept of nature and pantheism. Add these premises together, and we have to see love in a cosmic, indeed religious, context. Love becomes nothing less than the *self*-revelation of God through you and me.

So, there you have it. The romantic concept of love in its entirety, in all its four dimensions: 1) the non dualistic, 2) the individual, 3) the social-political and 4) the metaphysical. As far as I know, there are no other dimensions. But these are surely enough. The presence of these four dimensions should show you what a rich, complex and dense concept the romantic concept of love was.



# Symphilosophie

*Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*

## *La fille naturelle de Goethe à Berlin*

### Réflexions fichtéennes sur la *Darstellung*

*Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho*

Présentation et traduction par Márcio Suzuki<sup>\*</sup>

L'auteur de ce texte, Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho (1942-2023) était poète, essayiste et professeur d'histoire de la philosophie moderne à l'université de São Paulo, au Brésil. Son doctorat – *O espírito e a letra. Crítica da imaginação pura em Fichte (L'esprit et la lettre. La critique de l'imagination pure chez Fichte)*, publié en 1975 – est une lecture serrée de la *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), dans laquelle il reconstruit toute l'articulation interne du texte, montrant qu'il s'agit d'un « livre à l'envers », à lire de la fin au début : la partie pratique prime la partie théorique, les deuxième et troisième principes ne sont pas moins indispensables aux conditions transcendantales de la connaissance et de l'action que le premier, la dialectique se fait toujours par une oscillation pendulaire entre la conscience naturelle et la conscience philosophante, etc. L'un des enjeux fondamentaux de son interprétation est que la question de l'*exposition (Darstellung)* – rapport entre l'esprit et la lettre – est déjà clairement thématisée dans l'*Assise fondamentale de la doctrine de la science*, c'est-à-dire : que l'exposition du savoir n'est jamais définitive, mais toujours approximative, « performative-perfective », autrement dit un mouvement interne de présentation et d'approximation infinies de l'absolu.

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\* Professeur, Département de Philosophie, Universidade de São Paulo / CNPq Brazil, Av. Prof. Luciano Gualberto, 315, Sala 1007, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, SP, CEP 05508-010, Brésil – marciosuzuki@usp.br

Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho écrivait ses textes sur l'histoire de la philosophie en *essayiste*, justement – on peut le supposer – en raison de cette compréhension d'un processus inachevé, d'un recommencement incessant de la réflexion et du mode d'exposition ; et même sa thèse académique fut conçue comme un *essai* et déclarée comme telle – un *essai*, bien sûr, *sui generis*, parce que rigoureusement construit et très approfondi, sans viser l'exhaustivité vu la richesse de l'objet traité. Selon lui, Novalis aurait très bien compris ce sens de la *Darstellung* fichtéenne, comme exposition du suprasensible dans le sensible, comme *Tätigkeit*, comme « action pratique dans le monde », à travers des « textes que nous appelons aujourd'hui littéraires »<sup>1</sup>.

Cette identification de la littérature comme *Darstellung* apparaît dans la lettre de Fichte à Schiller, dans laquelle le *Wissenschaftslehrer* analyse les deux représentations de *La fille naturelle* de Goethe à Berlin. L'essai publié ici et qui fait à son tour le commentaire de cette lettre est articulé de manière rigoureuse, y compris dans la numérotation des sections<sup>2</sup>. Dans la première section, l'auteur contextualise brièvement les représentations de la pièce et son échec retentissant dans la capitale prussienne ; ensuite, il résume copieusement l'intrigue, afin que le lecteur qui ne connaît pas le drame puisse suivre le fil de l'argumentation. Dans la deuxième partie de l'essai, Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho traduit généreusement ladite lettre de Fichte à Schiller. La troisième section utilise l'idée de mise en scène théâtrale pour introduire le problème de la *Darstellung* philosophique, son lien avec l'imagination créatrice et la relation entre l'esprit et la lettre. L'originalité de l'idée fichtéenne de *mise en scène* se traduit par la possibilité qu'elle ouvre à la fois de critiquer et de rejeter l'idée classique de représentation, mais aussi de proposer à l'avance une forme alternative à l'ontologie de la présence. La section suivante cherche à montrer comment le concept de « lumière » introduit dans l'Exposition de 1804 est, en fait, un déploiement de la question de la *Darstellung* telle qu'elle est présentée dans l'*Assise fondamentale* de 1794. Contrairement aux lectures « évolutionnistes » du parcours philosophique de Fichte, la *Darstellung* est proposée comme le fil rouge qui guide toutes les expositions depuis la première présentation du système. Tous les nouveaux problèmes, tous les nouveaux sujets pouvant se présenter doivent être abordés dans cette perspective, c'est-à-dire suivant une ligne non pas « évolu-

<sup>1</sup> « Filosofia alemã e tradução [Philosophie allemande et traduction] ». Entretien avec Marcio Sattin, *Cadernos de filosofia alemã* 1 (1996), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Le texte a été publié pour la première fois sous le titre « Teatro e Teoria: *A Filha Natural* em Berlim (Théâtre et théorie : *La fille naturelle* à Berlin) » dans la revue *Discurso*, n° 8 (1978), p. 53-66. Il est paru après dans le recueil *Ensaio de filosofia ilustrada (Essais de philosophie illustrée)* dont la première édition a été publiée en 1987 et la seconde, augmentée, en 2004.

tionniste », mais « expositive ». La cinquième partie dresse une approche très suggestive de la relation entre *exhibition* aristocratique (le « théâtre du monde » selon les termes de la noblesse de cour) et *inhibition* bourgeoise, montrant à quel point Fichte serait politiquement et sociologiquement conscient des concepts qu'il emploie. Le texte se boucle avec un petit commentaire sur le rapport entre Fichte et Goethe.

L'essai parle de lui-même, et il serait superflu de développer la façon dont la philosophie et la littérature s'y entremêlent habilement, sans laisser de place au dualisme tant combattu par le monisme fichtéen. Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho a été traducteur d'œuvres de Fichte, mais aussi de Schelling, de Nietzsche et de Walter Benjamin, en portugais. La « prunelle de ses yeux » était le recueil de fragments de Novalis intitulé *Pólen* (« Pollen », *Blütenstaub*). Ce volume amorçait une collection publiée par la maison d'édition Iluminuras, dotée désormais de plusieurs titres et dont l'accent porte sur, mais pas seulement, l'idéalisme et le romantisme allemands<sup>3</sup>.

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1.

Au tournant du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, encore sous le choc de la Révolution française, Goethe écrit la tragédie (*Trauerspiel*) *La fille naturelle*, dont le sujet lui a été suggéré par Schiller et inspiré par la lecture des *Mémoires historiques* de Stéphanie-Louise de Bourbon-Conti (Paris, 1798), où sont racontées les mésaventures d'une noble française pendant la période d'insécurité qui a suivi la Révolution. En 1803, la pièce est jouée deux fois à Berlin, avec un échec retentissant auprès du public et de la critique, et même huée le premier jour. Parmi le public, aux deux représentations, se trouve un spectateur enthousiaste – peut-être le seul : le philosophe Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

La pièce expose le destin d'Eugénie, seul personnage à porter un nom propre, bien qu'allégorique, en référence à son origine éminente : elle est la fille illégitime du Duc, oncle du Roi, et de la Princesse – dont la mort récente lui permettra de passer de l'existence cachée à l'éclat de sa véritable place dans le monde. *Reconnue* par son père et par le souverain, elle peut enfin apparaître ou, dans le langage de la morphologie de Goethe, *s'épanouir* (*Erscheinen*). Cependant, les sombres perspectives qui s'opposent à ce désir sont déjà symbolisées dans le premier acte. Alors que le Duc vient de confier au Roi, lors d'une pause dans la chasse, sa paternité secrète, on apprend que l'audacieuse amazone inconnue, qui fait partie de l'entourage et qui est (secret de polichinelle que tout le monde feint d'ignorer) la fille du Duc, vient de faire une chute mortelle : elle est portée sur scène comme morte, à la grande consternation de son père.

Lorsqu'elle reprend connaissance, Eugénie croit rêver : son père l'a reconnue devant le Roi et celui-ci, ravi, promet de la présenter à la cour lors de sa prochaine fête d'anniversaire. Le secret doit être gardé jusque-là, car le souverain est entouré d'intrigants et la situation politique est inquiétante. On sent, de façon énigmatique, que même entre le Roi et le Duc, règnent la méfiance et le danger. Eugénie n'a pas même le droit d'exprimer sa joie ou d'utiliser la clé que le Duc lui confie pour accéder au coffret-armoire contenant les vêtements et les accessoires qui conviennent à son statut de noble : elle a un frère, qui ne verra certainement pas son ascension d'un bon œil. La fille naturelle se console en pensant que ses qualités de douceur et d'esprit le séduiront, et son enthousiasme l'emporte de toute façon sur ses inquiétudes.

Mais chez lui, déjà, le Secrétaire conspire avec sa fiancée, la Préceptrice, pour tenter d'obtenir sa collaboration dans le dessein – qui intéresse son frère – de déchoir Eugénie de ses droits. La Préceptrice, qui aime beaucoup Eugénie, n'a pas d'échappatoire : elle acceptera de conduire son élève en

exil, tandis que ses complices répandront la nouvelle de sa mort, car le Secrétaire ne cache pas que la destitution est la solution la plus clémentine. « Eugénie ! Si seulement tu pouvais renoncer... » Mais Eugénie, qui arrive chez elle étourdie de bonheur et se précipite dans sa chambre pour écrire un sonnet exprimant sa stupéfaction, toute à son espoir, ne sent pas le danger. Lorsqu'elle reçoit le coffret-armoire de son père, son empressement est plus fort que ses paroles : elle va essayer ces parures, les offrir à sa Préceptrice, partager sa joie avec elle, sans écouter ses sombres avertissements. « Irréversible, chère amie, est mon bonheur. – Le sort qui vous frappe est irréversible. »

Au troisième acte, l'intrigue est consommée : le Secrétaire et l'Abbé, son complice, convainquent le Duc de la mort d'Eugénie, lui rappelant, à lui qui veut mourir, ses devoirs d'homme d'État en ce moment de crise. Eugénie, que son père croit morte dans un accident de cheval, se trouve dans le port le plus éloigné du royaume, conduite par la Gouvernante qui a reçu pour ordre de l'emmener aux Îles. Au généreux et droit Conseiller Judiciaire qu'ils rencontrent en attendant l'embarquement, la Préceptrice montre le sauf-conduit qu'elle détient et qui lui donne les pleins pouvoirs sur sa pupille. Le juriste est consterné par cet acte de force, mais doit accepter les explications qui lui sont données : l'existence d'Eugénie est devenue la pomme de discorde entre deux puissants partis, dont l'affrontement menace la stabilité du royaume. Il existe cependant un espoir de pardon pour elle : il lui suffit d'accepter de renoncer à son statut de noble en épousant un bourgeois.

Eugénie s'en remet entièrement à cet homme à l'allure digne, si bouleversé par son destin, révélant sa perplexité face au revers monstrueux dont elle est victime, à cette seconde chute – punition pour son innocente indiscretion ? Jalousie de son frère ? Un complot qui implique son père et le Roi et menace de détruire le monde ? Le Conseiller ne peut leur expliquer ; des puissances supérieures s'opposent à ce qu'elle retrouve son statut. Cependant, séduit par l'excellence d'Eugénie, il lui offre le seul moyen de salut qui lui reste en la demandant en mariage. En vain : les rêves de gloire d'Eugénie sont encore trop vivaces, elle sait que le renoncement serait définitif, et ne peut qu'exprimer sa gratitude pour la noble proposition. Même les supplications de la Préceptrice ne parviennent pas à la convaincre d'avoir recours à cet ultime moyen. Convaincue que sa compagne fait partie du complot, Eugénie décide d'appeler les gens du port, qui restent indifférents et la prennent pour une folle.

Ses appels à l'aide, que la Préceptrice ne tente pas d'arrêter, sont une succession de déceptions. Le jeune Gouverneur, qui s'approche avec sa suite pour assister au départ du navire, compatit avec l'étrangère et lui propose son

aide, mais se détourne aussitôt après avoir jeté un œil sur le sauf-conduit. Eugénie demande à voir ce papier si puissant. La Préceptrice ne refuse pas, mais le courage manque à la jeune fille : de peur d'accroître son désespoir en voyant la signature du Duc ou du Roi, Eugénie préfère se résigner et se réfugier dans la religion. Elle s'élance alors vers le groupe de religieuses qui s'approche et supplie l'Abbesse de l'accueillir. Une fois de plus, lorsque l'Abbesse s'apprête à la prendre dans ses bras, la Préceptrice intervient et lui montre la lettre qui décide de tout. Même l'Église s'incline devant un tel pouvoir. Serait-ce Dieu ? Eugénie, pleine de courage, déplie le papier : « La main et le sceau du Roi ! »

L'heure de l'exil approche. La malheureuse veut se jeter à la mer, mais hésite. Entre la mort, l'exil et la déchéance, son esprit ne se repose pas. La peur de l'un la pousse vers l'autre. Un moine vient à sa rencontre. Eugénie veut le consulter comme un oracle. Le vieux sage ne peut que la conseiller en termes généraux : « – Entre deux maux détestés, choisis celui qui vous laisse le plus de place pour les actes pieux. Au lieu du mariage sans amour qui te menace, fais de bonnes actions et apporte la consolation aux Sauvages des Îles. » Au fond de ces paroles, Eugénie sent cependant un conseil plus urgent, une réalité plus terrible : se sauver, abandonner ce royaume menacé de ruine.

Et Eugénie comprend. L'immense pouvoir du Roi, exprimé dans ce sauf-conduit, est en fait un aveu d'impuissance : l'acte d'un « fantôme qui s'acharne vainement dans l'illusion de s'emparer du bien perdu ». Qu'en est-il de l'abandon de la patrie à l'heure du danger ? Même si elle reste inconnue, même si elle est reléguée dans l'obscurité, n'aura-t-elle pas un jour de la valeur ?

Lorsque le Conseiller vient lui apporter son cadeau d'adieu, regrettant d'avoir perdu si tôt le bonheur entrevu, Eugénie lui fait part de son changement d'avis, non par lâcheté mais par bravoure. Elle accepte de lui appartenir comme épouse, pourvu qu'il veuille bien l'accueillir comme un frère et lui permettre de vivre retirée, inconnue de tous, dans son domaine à la campagne, jusqu'au jour où, peut-être, des liens plus étroits les uniront. Confiante dans la parole de cet homme sérieux et honnête, Eugénie n'hésite plus à accomplir son renoncement. « C'est la plus belle preuve qu'une femme puisse donner ! Je n'hésite pas, je me hâte de vous suivre ! Voici ma main : allons à l'autel ! »

2.

Le 18 août 1803, Fichte écrit à Schiller de Berlin<sup>1</sup> :

J'ai très attentivement assisté à la représentation de *La fille naturelle* de Goethe les deux fois où elle a été jouée ici, et je crois que je me suis ainsi élevé, par ce médium, à tous les aspects possibles de l'œuvre. Bien que j'aie vénéré et aimé *Iphigénie*, *Tasso* et, dans un autre domaine, *Hermann et Dorothee* de Goethe, et que j'aie à peine considéré que quelque chose de supérieur fût possible, je préfère néanmoins cette œuvre à toutes les autres et la considère comme la plus grande œuvre maîtresse du maître<sup>2</sup> jusqu'à présent. Claire comme la lumière et, comme elle, insondable, chacune de ses parties se contractant vivement dans l'unité absolue et se déployant en même temps dans l'infini, comme elle. Cette rigoureuse cohérence organique fait qu'il m'est totalement impossible d'abstraire ou d'omettre l'une ou l'autre de ses parties. Ce qui n'est pas encore tout à fait clair dans la première partie, comme les allusions mystérieuses à une relation secrète entre le Duc et son fils, les machinations ténébreuses de l'un et de l'autre, et d'autres encore, préparent sans aucun doute ce qui va suivre et remplissent déjà l'âme d'un merveilleux frisson.

Qu'une œuvre d'une telle profondeur et en même temps d'une telle simplicité soit capturée et présentée (*dargestellt*) dans son esprit profond par n'importe quelle compagnie théâtrale existante est une chose à laquelle il faut certainement renoncer. Cependant, le bon spectateur doit percer le caractère borné de la mise en scène (*Darstellung*) pour parvenir à son idéal, puis percer celui-ci pour voir l'œuvre. C'est la voie que j'ai dû suivre et qui me semble juste lorsqu'il s'agit d'œuvres dramatiques. C'est peut-être pour cela que Zelter, qui a commencé par la lecture de la pièce et s'est formé à partir de là sa propre représentation (*Darstellung*) idéale, a été plus difficile à satisfaire en contemplant sa représentation effective que je ne l'ai été, moi qui, par ailleurs, ne peux me vanter d'être très facile à satisfaire. Or, attendre du spectateur ordinaire, en premier lieu, cette élévation au-dessus du caractère borné de la mise en scène (*Darstellung*) – dans des œuvres ordinaires, il en est dispensé, car la représentation (*Darstellung*) et la chose (*Sache*), parce qu'elles sont toutes les deux vulgaires et plates, coïncident très bien – ; attendre de lui, en outre, une attention soutenue pendant deux à trois heures, précisément parce que le tout est un tout et qu'il ne comprend aucune des parties s'il ne les comprend pas toutes – alors que dans les pièces de théâtre ordinaires, il peut être absent quand il veut et de nouveau attentif quand il veut, et malgré tout avoir toute chance d'apercevoir un tout, c'est-à-dire un entier... grain de sable – ; attendre de lui,

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Fichte, GA, III, 5, p. 203-207. (Note de la traduction.)

<sup>2</sup> En allemand : *höchstes Meisterstück des Meisters*. (Note de la traduction.)

enfin, le sens, qui fait totalement défaut, de *l'intériorité* de l'être humain et de *l'action* qui se déroule sur cette scène – c'est pour cela que le metteur en scène, la ville et la cour estiment que dans les deux derniers actes de cette œuvre il n'y a pas d'action du tout ; et assurément, Goethe aurait pu s'épargner ces deux actes par la simple narration : Eugénie accorde sa main à un Conseiller Judiciaire –, toutes ces attentes, on comprend avec quels visages elles sont accueillies. Mais moi, plus je vieillis et suis accablé chaque jour par quelque bêtise ici, et plus vous nous envoyez de chefs-d'œuvre de là-bas, plus je me conforte dans le sentiment implacable que, en effet, le meilleur, et seulement le meilleur, doit être mis sous les yeux du public, sans aucune condescendance pour l'ennui et l'inconfort de l'inculture ; qu'on ne doit en aucun cas rafistoler le mauvais et, plaise à Dieu, y attacher le bon, mais sans réserve anéantir le mauvais et créer le bon ; que le mauvais ne s'améliorera jamais, sauf quand on ne se rendra tout simplement plus compte que le mauvais existe.

Parmi les acteurs, Madame Fleck, dans le rôle d'Eugénie, remporte de loin, à mon avis, la palme. En particulier son interprétation au deuxième acte a été inspirée et inspirante pour exprimer l'attente joyeuse dans le sonnet, dans la fantaisie poétique qui suit immédiatement – puis lorsqu'elle revêt l'ornement, dans l'exultation de son noble sentiment de générosité, etc. Elle n'a rien gâché, pour autant que je m'en souviens. Iffland a très bien joué (*stellte...dar*), en particulier au troisième acte, le père aimant qui s'efface, dans la croyance erronée de la perte, et il a fait forte impression sur son public. Mais il est resté le tendre père d'une de ses pièces de famille bourgeoises : la distinction du premier vassal, de l'époux secret de la fière Princesse, du père de la fille éminente ; l'importance de la sombre et menaçante constellation à l'horizon politique de ce royaume ont été perdus. Pas cependant, me semble-t-il, au détriment de la pièce pour le vrai spectateur : ceux qui connaissent Iffland par d'autres rôles ne le tiendront pas pour identique à un tel personnage, et ils suppléeront volontiers, à l'indication du poète, ce qui manque de dignité, d'élévation et de profondeur. Mattausch était imposant dans le rôle du Roi. En tant qu'Abbé, Bessel (qui joue habituellement des rôles insignifiants) mérite également une mention. Il n'a pas joué sans vigueur, et le spectateur bienveillant pouvait mettre la grossièreté de ses manières sur le compte de la vie de village du seigneur ecclésiastique. Bethmann, dans le rôle du Conseiller Judiciaire, n'a pas joué avec négligence, comme on a voulu le lui reprocher ; mais que peut-on faire de cet organe sans malléabilité, monocorde ? Herdt dans le rôle du Moine n'a pas laissé être sa nature pour mettre les accents comme la respiration naturelle l'exige ; mais tout était *compris* et chacun pouvait dès lors se redire le rôle de façon plus correcte. Beschort a joué le Gouverneur de façon polie et élégante, comme il en a l'habitude, et cela n'a pas nui au rôle. Le rôle de la Préceptrice a été confié à une chanteuse, Madame



Schiel, qui s'en est tenue, par une prudence en soi louable à un moment où il était permis que sa voix chantée décline, à la déclamation. Certes, elle apportait avec elle la gesticulation du théâtre lyrique, mais il était exclu qu'elle chante et pour ce qui est de parler, elle n'en avait pas les moyens. Je pense avoir deviné l'intention et le sens général du rôle, mais les deux fois, je n'ai pas discerné les paroles et il reste, partant, une lacune dans ma connaissance du texte. Aucun personnage goethéen ne peut naître de la superficialité profondément enracinée de Schwadke, qui a joué le rôle du Secrétaire. Cet homme devrait être tout-à-fait exilé dans les pièces de conversation du théâtre anglais.

Encore une anecdote, très édifiante et instructive pour moi : le rôle de la Nonne a été joué le premier jour par Madame Herdt, qui s'est comportée de telle manière que le public a éclaté de rire – et pour cette fois, d'ailleurs, parfaitement à juste titre. Comment le metteur en scène s'en sort-il au deuxième jour ? Eh bien, il supprime tout bonnement le rôle – rien qu'un de ces personnages inutiles qui apparaissent aux deux derniers actes, a-t-il sans doute pensé (qu'il faille, l'angoisse croissant, tenter tous les moyens de salut avant de recourir à l'ultime solution ; et qu'il faille aussi, incidemment, faire défiler sous les yeux du spectateur, selon leur esprit le plus intime, toutes les catégories sociales du royaume qui court à sa perte – c'est ce que pareils critiques, bien entendu, ne saisissent pas). En revanche, il laisse inchangé le rôle d'Eugénie, de sorte que désormais le regard audacieux porté sur le sauf-conduit en possession de celle qui l'accompagne intervient sans intermédiaire et immédiatement après son refus de le voir de peur d'apercevoir un des deux prénoms aimés. Que Goethe en retire un enseignement sur la façon d'accélérer l'*action*, si souvent hésitante dans ses œuvres !

Une question : comment l'auteur conçoit-il la représentation extérieure (*Darstellung*) de la station dans le port, de ce *chœur* dont les représentants individuels se détachent pour se mêler à l'action (ce que, d'ailleurs, les gens d'ici ne saisissent pas non plus ; la Gazette d'Unger, par exemple, est d'avis qu'ils entrent et disparaissent comme des promeneurs désœuvrés). Est-il question qu'un début, au moins, de vie et de labeur incomensurables soit réellement visible et que la fantaisie le poursuive ensuite à l'infini, ou bien le spectateur doit-il voir cet amas rien qu'avec l'œil de la fantaisie ? Dans la mise en scène présentée ici, ce n'est que vers la fin du quatrième acte, quand Eugénie prend des dispositions en vue de convoquer le peuple, que soudain, à point nommé, deux ou trois pauvres miséreux, portant une malle d'habits d'étudiants et quelques petits ballots ornés de marques de boutiquier, passent au fond de la scène, qui le reste du temps demeurerait vide d'êtres vivants. Pour moi, c'est trop ou pas assez. Ai-je raison ou tort ?

## 3.

Point à la ligne. Le texte de Fichte, lu ici comme une curiosité (le philosophe va au théâtre...), est certes intéressant comme document sur la conception esthétique d'une époque. Mais il l'est plus encore comme document de première main : son auteur – bien que, contrairement aux romantiques, à Schelling ou Hegel, il n'ait jamais songé à élaborer une philosophie de l'art ni même à laisser une trace de ses *goûts* artistiques – est l'inventeur d'une théorie de l'imagination extrêmement raffinée et, poussant jusqu'à ses ultimes conséquences la découverte kantienne de la réflexion transcendante, opère une mutation sur le plan philosophique qui sera décisive pour toute l'esthétique pensée et pratiquée à l'époque du romantisme allemand. Dans ce contexte, on comprend la valeur, outre sa rareté, que peut receler un témoignage, où l'on voit comment le philosophe se situe face à une œuvre d'art : par exemple, l'implacable « élitisme » avec lequel il condamne toute concession au goût populaire, en faveur du spectateur *actif*, capable de participer à l'épiphanie de l'œuvre elle-même.

Mais pour le lecteur de Fichte, l'axe d'intérêt se déplace vers un motif plus interne. Il s'agit en effet d'un texte dont le thème est une représentation théâtrale : une manifestation scénique de l'œuvre, pour laquelle le mot *Darstellung* (Kant traduit : *exhibitio*), qui désigne un problème central de la spéculation fichtéenne (et de tout l'idéalisme allemand), est utilisé dans son sens concret de *mise en scène*. Et cela à un moment où la question qui occupe le centre des préoccupations de Fichte est précisément la tâche de la *Darstellung* (exposition) de son système de la Doctrine de la science, comme l'atteste sa correspondance de l'époque : « Je suis, comme je l'ai dit, encore entièrement absorbé par la Doctrine de la science, non pour la découvrir ou la corriger, mais pour l'élever à la pure clarté » (lettre à Schiller, 9 juin 1803)<sup>3</sup>. Un travail acharné, qui n'a rien à voir, notons-le, avec le simple fait d'écrire ou de refondre une œuvre, déjà considérée comme achevée et sans défaut, mais qui nécessite de refaire ses opérations. Une réflexion ininterrompue, qui consomme à elle seule toute l'énergie du philosophe, jusqu'à lui causer des difficultés de subsistance : « Trois ans de travail incessant sur la Doctrine de la science, presque sans aucune occupation lucrative, à cause de l'impossibilité absolue d'interrompre cette suite de méditations, à moins de l'abandonner entièrement, ont consumé le peu qui nous restait » (*ibid.*).

On aurait tort de minimiser, comme une simple contingence, l'aspect laborieux lié à la tâche d'*exposer* la Doctrine de la science : l'importance de l'« exposition » est inséparable de la nouveauté du point de vue qu'elle intro-

<sup>3</sup> J. F. Fichte, GA, III, 5, p. 164. (Note de la traduction)

duit dans la philosophie. Sur ce point, la position de Fichte est d'emblée claire. Fondée sur l'exploration par Kant des actes transcendants qui constituent l'objectivité, sa théorie de la *Darstellung* du suprasensible dans le sensible – qui se configure dans la distinction entre esprit (*Geist*) et lettre (*Buchstabe*) – ne peut être interprétée métaphysiquement, comme une dépréciation de la représentation au nom de la plénitude de la présence. Au contraire, « esprit », dans ce contexte, est synonyme d'« imagination créatrice », et ne signifie pas une quelconque réalité suprasensible dont la « lettre » serait une copie d'occasion : c'est la production même du sensible, qui, en tant que son produit, le désigne légitimement et lui assure la seule visibilité dont il soit capable. C'est *dans la* lettre, et non au-delà d'elle, que l'esprit prend corps et réalité. Et admettre que cette réalité n'est que *phénoménale*, ce n'est pas la doter d'une substantialité métaphysique propre ou en postuler, au-delà, une autre : c'est simplement reprendre les mots d'Anaxagore – *Opsis gar ton adelon ta phainomena*<sup>4</sup>.

C'est pourquoi le discours spéculatif, la *Darstellung* de la Doctrine de la science, n'est pas un discours sans fin en ceci qu'il poursuivrait vainement la *Darstellung* de « quelque chose » qui serait au-delà de toute *Darstellung*. Il est sans cesse repris parce qu'il remplit strictement sa condition de *Darstellung*, passage du suprasensible au sensible qu'il faut sans cesse réactiver pour ne pas se figer dans cette dichotomie imaginaire, transition *entre* l'esprit et la lettre dont la fonction est d'éviter que cette *dualité* ne se réifie dans un *dualisme* statique.

Cette dualité, comme toutes celles qui opèrent dans ce discours (idéal et réel, Moi et non-Moi, conscience et être...), se résout dans la dialectique, proprement fichtéenne, entre des termes limites toujours en suspens, dialectique qui se met en branle dès que Fichte place le foyer de la réflexion transcendantale dans une oscillation nucléaire de l'imagination entre des contraires absolus – cet entre-deux, *antérieur aux termes de la médiation*, est précisément la trace par laquelle la pensée littéralement se glisse pour atteindre la vérité (en elle-même illettrée, aphasique) du transcendantal. *Ainsi critiqué*, le dualisme – la réification des contraires – se révèle n'être que le simple fruit de l'illusion transcendantale, et avoir de « l'esprit » (se débarrasser de l'illusion) consiste précisément à ne pas considérer les deux termes (extérieur et intérieur, exhibition et inhibition, littéralité et oblitération...) comme des paires d'opposés, mais plutôt comme les phases d'une pulsation – ce qui affecte tout le panorama de la présence : le visible travaillé par un

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<sup>4</sup> « *Les phénomènes sont la vision de l'invisible.* » Anaxagore, frag. 21A. (Note de la traduction).

nouveau réseau de visibilité, où le discours philosophique s'expose et propose une lecture à contre-courant du sens commun et, en ce sens, comme le notait Fichte en 1812 (*Œuvres posthumes*, II, 324), « un voir contre nature »<sup>5</sup>.

La notion de *Darstellung* désigne précisément cette rupture interne avec le lissage de la représentation, et son organe propre est l'imagination, dont Fichte dit :

Quel que soit ce qui contient le fondement ultime d'une représentation, au moins ceci est clair : ce n'est pas à son tour une représentation, une transmutation doit en cela se produire avant que ce soit apte à se retrouver dans notre conscience comme matière d'une représentation. La faculté de cette transmutation est l'imagination. Elle est formatrice (*Bildnerin*). Je ne parle pas d'elle dans la mesure où elle rappelle, relie, organise des représentations que nous avons eues auparavant, mais dans la mesure où, en général, elle rend quelque chose représentable. Elle est, dans cette mesure, créatrice, créatrice de la conscience une : dans cette fonction, on n'en est pas conscient, précisément parce qu'avant cette fonction, il n'y avait pas de conscience du tout. L'imagination *créatrice*, c'est l'*esprit*. (*Geist und Buchstaben*, 1<sup>re</sup> version 1794, in : *Von den Pflichten des Gelehrten*, p. 126-127.)

Il ne s'agit pas de remettre en cause cette antériorisation de la *Darstellung* à la chose elle-même (*die Sache selbst*), sur laquelle Fichte avait déjà attiré l'attention de Schelling (lettre du 31 mai / 7 août 1801) et qui est l'une des caractéristiques par laquelle il sera reconnu comme l'un des philosophes-clés de la crise de la notion classique de représentation. Ni de montrer en quoi elle permet d'abandonner légitimement l'hypothèse « évolutionniste », qui a longtemps été le seul recours des commentateurs de Fichte pour rendre compte de la multiplicité *des Darstellungen* de la Doctrine de la science. Ce que le texte sur la mise en scène de *La fille naturelle* suggère avant tout, c'est une interrogation sur la continuité de ce sens « métaphorique » de *Darstellung* avec son sens « propre », ou encore, comment la posture fichtéenne – et même la posture de spectateur – renvoie à une restauration de la parenté originelle des deux mots grecs, *theoria* et *theatron*, et de leur origine commune dans le paradigme de la vision (*theomai*).

#### 4.

La Doctrine de la science, *Darstellung* de 1804, à laquelle Fichte a travaillé pendant ces « trois années de silence et de méditation » (comme le dit

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<sup>5</sup> Les œuvres de Fichte sont citées à partir des *Sämtliche Werke*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1971. (Note de la traduction).

Gueroult : Fichte, vol. II, p. 105)<sup>6</sup>, est précisément celle où il introduit le mot *lumière* dans le vocabulaire de la philosophie.

Le choix de ce mot pour désigner le principe unique qui produit génétiquement, en tant que contraires corrélés, l'être et le concept, renvoie d'abord au déplacement du foyer de réflexion vers la clarté de l'*évidence*, mais aussi au caractère *génétique* de cette évidence, inobjectivable, qui ne se montre toujours, déjà dédoublée, que dans ses résultats : l'*être* et le *voir*. Pour qu'il y ait extériorisation ou réalisation (au sens d'*Erscheinung*) de la lumière pure, Fichte écrit que « le concept doit être posé pour être annulé par la lumière immédiate : car c'est précisément en cela que consiste l'extériorisation de la lumière pure : le résultat, cependant, et pour ainsi dire la somme morte de cette extériorisation de la lumière pure, c'est l'être en-soi, qui, parce que la pure lumière est en même temps l'annulation du concept, devient inconcevable » (*Œuvres posthumes*, II, 118). Grâce à cette action réciproque de la lumière sur elle-même, l'impénétrabilité de l'être au concept naît de la relation entre les deux et n'a pas besoin d'être expliquée par une substantialité ou une qualité cachée, sans qu'avec cela le poids ontologique ne pèse sur le pôle « conscience ». N'accordant une véritable autonomie qu'à l'alternance *entre* les deux pôles (« nous » et « l'absolu »), ce « monisme » de l'*Erscheinung* de la lumière est le seul à démonter l'alternative fatale de la métaphysique et à résoudre la « difficulté » millénaire de toute philosophie qui n'a pas voulu être dualiste et qui a pris au sérieux la recherche de l'unité : « ou bien nous devons succomber, ou bien c'était Dieu. Nous ne voulions pas, Dieu ne devait pas » (*ibid.*, p. 147). Dans l'intellection (*Einsicht*) génétique, l'autonomie des deux termes (le « je » et l'« être ») pris séparément est dissoute, et la seule perspective capable de surmonter la facticité de la disjonction entre le sensible et le suprasensible est ouverte. Dans cette visibilité pure, qui engendre la vision et le visible, la Doctrine de la science trouve ce qu'elle promet, « une solution complète à l'énigme du monde et de la conscience » (*ibid.*, p. 251).

La Doctrine de la science, *mise en scène*, est précisément la dramatisation de cette intellection : insoutenable en tant que *théorie* – concevoir l'inconcevable – elle se réalise en tant que théâtre – l'*Erscheinung* mise en action. Et Foucault le confirme. « Fichte boiteux annonce : moi fissuré, moi dissous » (*Theatrum Philosophicum*)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> M. Gueroult, *L'évolution et la structure de la Doctrine de la science chez Fichte*, Paris, Publications de la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, 1930. (Note de la traduction).

<sup>7</sup> M. Foucault, *Nietzsche, Freud e Marx : theatrum philosophicum*. Porto, Anagrama, 1980. (Note de la traduction).

De ce point de vue, il n'est pas surprenant que la première exigence d'une bonne *Darstellung*, qui par nature doit se déployer *pars extra pars*, soit l'organicité du tout, où, au-delà de la simple *accumulation* des parties, se manifeste leur *articulation*, qui fait de chaque partie une *pars totalis*. Dans une totalité organique, comme doit l'être toute œuvre vivante, les composantes sont reliées entre elles par une détermination réciproque, et ce n'est que dans le tout que leur présentation successive retrouve tout son sens. C'est ce que dit, depuis l'exposé de 1794, l'avertissement au lecteur critique de la Doctrine de la science : « Aux futurs critiques de cet écrit, je demande de faire attention à l'ensemble et de considérer chaque pensée individuelle du point de vue de l'ensemble » (*Œuvres*, I, 89). Et c'est en contrepartie de cette première exigence de la *Darstellung* que la Doctrine de la science formule la seconde des deux conditions qu'elle exige de son lecteur : la capacité de soutenir son attention dans la durée, afin qu'il « suive les fils du raisonnement et n'ait rien oublié de ce qui précède lorsqu'il se trouve dans ce qui suit » (*ibid.*, 88).

Mais la première de ces deux conditions, présupposée chez le lecteur, est plus fondamentale : « la faculté de liberté d'intuition interne » (*ibid.*), dont l'absence peut à jamais interdire l'accès à la philosophie transcendantale. C'est cette faculté qui permet d'atteindre l'intériorité de ce qui est mis en scène, de percevoir le double jeu entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur, et même de dépasser les limites nécessaires ou contingentes de la *Darstellung* pour saisir l'essence de l'œuvre. C'est à cela que Fichte se réfère lorsqu'il parle d'« esprit » et, enfin, c'est par là que le philosophe lie inextricablement, avec la rigueur qui lui est propre, la spécificité de la Doctrine de la science au paradoxe de la *Darstellung*, dans le texte bien connu de 1794 : la Doctrine de la science ne se communique pas par la *lettre*, mais seulement par l'*esprit*, car :

ses idées fondamentales doivent être produites dans tous ceux qui l'étudient par l'imagination créatrice elle-même, comme elle ne saurait manquer de l'être dans une science qui part des fondements ultimes des connaissances humaines, puisque toute l'opération de l'esprit humain part de l'imagination, et que l'imagination ne peut être appréhendée que par l'imagination » (*ibid.*, p. 285).

*Non pas* la capacité de s'élever, par une simple figuration allégorique, à une communauté transparente de « purs esprits », mais la faculté de s'associer, par la productivité de sa propre imagination, à l'opération de l'« esprit » qui se manifeste dans la « lettre » – et donc de participer à la production de la *Darstellung*.

Loin d'entraîner une dépréciation de la mise en scène – dépréciation qui ne serait propice qu'à une théorie allégorique de la *Darstellung*, viciée par le dualisme et nécessairement réifiante – cette exigence parle au contraire au nom de l'association intrinsèque entre « théâtre » et « théorie ».

En 1803, Fichte exige rigoureusement la même chose des spectateurs de Goethe – y compris de lui-même : capacité à s'élever au-dessus de la *Darstellung* limitée, attention ferme et prolongée, sens de l'intériorité de « ce qui se passe sur cette scène », voilà les tenaces qualités d'esprit qu'exige l'œuvre elle-même, simplement pour pouvoir être *vue* dans sa clarté, car la scène vit du spectateur capable de saisir la « profondeur et la simplicité » idéales de l'œuvre. Et c'est à l'absence totale de ces qualités dans le public berlinois que le philosophe se réfère lorsqu'il se plaint de vivre dans la « capitale de la barbarie » (*Mittelsitz der Barbarei* ; à Schiller, 23 juillet 1803<sup>8</sup>). Conclure, cependant, que face à ce public il faudrait se rendre à l'évidence et renoncer à la présentation de l'œuvre – voire, dans une option plus conséquente, à la production même du « meilleur » – serait contradictoire avec l'importance même de la *Darstellung*. Seule sa défense intransigeante, son affirmation sans condescendance malgré l'hostilité en vigueur, est compatible avec l'excellence qui doit naître et occuper la place qui lui revient : la scène.

Cela est confirmé par la distinction soigneusement établie par Fichte entre la mise en scène et la lecture individuelle de l'œuvre. Malgré les défauts de la mise en scène berlinoise, la *Darstellung* idéale du lecteur – l'actualisation de l'œuvre dans l'élément de l'imagination, réalisée dans l'isolement du cabinet – n'est pas meilleure parce qu'elle est « plus proche » ou parce qu'elle est une reproduction plus « fidèle ». Elle rencontre certes moins d'obstacles dans sa *liberté de figuration*, mais elle est inefficace, sauf pour l'insatisfaction qu'elle génère par rapport à la *Darstellung* réelle. Le privilège qui pourrait lui être accordé – alors, certes, au nom d'un élitisme désobligeant – est contredit par le souci de Fichte – lui qui n'a pas lu la pièce mais entre en contact avec elle au théâtre – pour la mise en scène concrète, jusque dans les détails du jeu des acteurs, du comportement du metteur en scène et du public, du mouvement de la scène et du rythme du spectacle. Ainsi l'appréciation de la qualité des acteurs, qui va de la pleine « présence d'esprit », l'efficacité subjective et objective du *Geist* dans la performance « inspirée et inspirante » (*begeistert und begeisternd*) de la première actrice, à l'heureuse coïncidence entre la caractéristique de l'acteur et un trait du personnage, ou l'aide apportée par le spectateur actif pour pallier un rôle incorrectement dit, jusqu'au degré minimum d'esprit, que ce soit dans l'opacité inexpressive d'un

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<sup>8</sup> J. G. Fichte, GA, III, 5, p. 193. (Note de la traduction).

acteur, qui crée un vide dans l'ensemble, ou bien dans le vide réel créé par le travail du metteur en scène, avec l'élimination d'un des rôles. D'où la question finale, concernant la présence de figurants sur scène et le choix nécessaire, qui n'a pas été fait dans la mise en scène, entre une représentation réaliste et une représentation conventionnelle de la population : « Est-il question qu'un début, au moins, de vie et de labeur incommensurables soit réellement visible et que la fantaisie le poursuive ensuite à l'infini, ou bien le spectateur doit-il voir cet amas rien qu'avec l'œil de la fantaisie ? »

D'autre part, il ne faut pas penser que la *Darstellung* imaginaire du lecteur puisse se confondre avec l'œuvre elle-même, à l'état subjectif, dans l'attente de sa réalisation. L'œuvre elle-même est invisible et condition de visibilité : sa clarté (ou sa *limpidité*) est la même que celle de la *lumière*, qui la rend visible et invisible, qui est partout et nulle part – et il serait contradictoire de penser qu'une *Darstellung*, même privilégiée, puisse l'épuiser, en lui donnant une objectivité totale. Le rapport entre l'œuvre et la *Darstellung*, encore une fois, n'est pas celui de la simple reproduction, mais de la production interne. En ce sens, l'œuvre se distingue de la *Darstellung* réelle et idéale parce qu'elle fonctionne comme une Idée ; le « bon spectateur » aperçoit (*erblickt*) à travers « le caractère borné de la mise en scène (*Darstellung*) [...] son idéal », puis, à travers celui-ci, « l'œuvre ». Et ce n'est pas un hasard si Fichte, pour éradiquer tout malentendu qui pourrait réintroduire le dualisme métaphysique, propose à plusieurs reprises de traduire le mot grec *Idea* par *Gesicht* (vision), en citant comme exemple l'équivalence : « le prophète voit des idées » – « le prophète voit des visions ».

En effet, si Fichte pense le spectacle, la scène, la *Darstellung*, comme le simple habillage extérieur d'une idée, objectivée pour être rendue visible dans le monde des phénomènes, cette visibilité n'en est pas moins la seule – et indispensable – condition de la vie de l'idée elle-même, qui n'a d'*existence* que dans l'*exposition*, et ce n'est pas sans ironie que le philosophe commente l'opinion du critique de théâtre berlinois, qui considérait la pièce de Goethe comme une œuvre pour le goût de l'élite, dont la jouissance devait s'épuiser dans la lecture. « Il concluait plus ou moins sur le résultat suivant : ces choses sont très bonnes à lire dans une pièce fermée devant un ou deux amis, mais le théâtre exige quelque chose de différent. Et c'est encore la voix la plus amicale que l'on ait entendue publiquement » (Lettre du 20 juillet). Pour plus de clarté, il convient d'ajouter que le mot « théâtre », dans la terminologie littéraire allemande, ne se réfère jamais à l'œuvre écrite (le terme technique est *Drama*), mais uniquement à l'œuvre mise en scène.

Dans ce contexte, le fait que la pièce de Goethe elle-même, dont Fichte est un ardent défenseur, ait pour thème la question de l'*Erscheinung* (qui se



traduit, à différents niveaux, « phénomène », « apparition », « épanouissement ») et pour devise les deux vers prononcés par Eugénie au deuxième acte :

Qu'est-ce que l'apparence si lui manque l'être ? Que serait l'être s'il n'apparaissait pas ?

## 5.

Mettant en scène les vicissitudes d'Eugénie, *La fille naturelle* compose, en vers décasyllabiques, un jeu de métaphores ou, comme le dit Goethe, « une chaîne de purs motifs » – autour du passage du caché à l'ouvert, de la nuit au jour, du cercle de l'existence privée à la scène publique, et des dangers auxquels cette « mise à nu » conduit à s'exposer soi-même, en vertu du réseau (*Netz*) d'intérêts qui étrangle ce passage à la visibilité.

Eugénie, d'illustre naissance, est le nouveau, le pur, le *naturel* qui surgit (*aus hohen Haus entsprossen*) illégitimement dans les failles d'un monde d'apparences lourdement codifiées, où chaque individu n'a que le nom de son rôle (le Duc, la Princesse, le Roi, la Préceptrice...) et où la « vérité » d'Eugénie, sa haute *essence* publiquement assumée, serait excessive. On le comprend : ce réseau d'apparences, vidé de son être, où les fonctions deviennent des étiquettes sans substance, a besoin d'être réifié pour se sauver de la corrosion qui le mine. En cela, la manifestation d'Eugénie, qui n'appartient à aucun parti, qui n'a aucune culpabilité, qui n'aspire qu'à exister avec l'éclat (*Schein*) de son essence (*Wesen*), devient automatiquement subversive, provoque le mécanisme d'occultation, de répression auquel tout le monde conspire, de censure qui, de la part du pouvoir politique, n'est pas une preuve de force, mais un symptôme de faiblesse. Dans le langage de Fichte, ce serait l'« esprit » qui, pour s'affirmer, provoque rupture et déplacement à la surface de la « lettre », et constitue une menace en raison de l'excellence même de sa nature qui, en dernier ressort, pour exister, doit accepter d'être dénaturée.

Le danger, pour ceux qui abordent la tâche et la question de la *Darstellung* de manière positive, est le jeu même entre l'apparence et l'essence, une correspondance qui ne remplit pas spontanément la formulation que lui donne Eugénie dans le deuxième acte.

Faut-il conclure, dans ce cas également, que l'essence, selon la solution du cinquième acte, ne peut se sauver de la destruction qu'en renonçant à l'apparence et en se retirant dans la pure intériorité ? Le texte ne manque pas de souligner que cette intériorité, le renoncement à la *mise en scène* dans la réalité, est le propre de la condition bourgeoise, le cercle de la vie privée où la conscience s'épuise dans la fructification « théorique » de sa propre

excellence, empêchée de s'actualiser. Que ce renoncement puisse se traduire par l'acceptation de la séparation – occidentale et moderne – entre « théâtre » et « théorie » ne serait d'ailleurs pas une conclusion si éloignée. Après tout, cette intériorité de la conscience privée est précisément le lieu, loin du *théâtre*, que la révolution bourgeoise semble avoir réservé à la *théorie* (dont la *Darstellung* était peut-être – comme le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle l'a pensé plus tard, pour s'en consoler – une autre révolution).

En insistant sur le fait que la pièce de Goethe a sa place sur scène et non dans une salle fermée, en critiquant le réseau de conditionnements esthétiques, culturels – et même métaphysiques – dans lequel les critiques, le public et même les responsables du spectacle se reconnaissent pour faire obstacle à la mise en scène de *La fille naturelle*, Fichte ne cherche-t-il pas, à son tour, à mettre en évidence une stratégie de *dissimulation* ? Et ne pourrait-on pas supposer, dans ce cas, que l'enthousiasme du philosophe pour l'« œuvre maîtresse du maître » est la conséquence d'une lecture qui en fait, sur scène, une *Darstellung* autoréférentielle ? Ce que l'on peut montrer, en tout cas, c'est qu'il pose le problème de la mise en scène, par rapport à elle, dans les mêmes termes qu'il vit la tâche d'*exposer la philosophie*. C'est pourquoi il ne pouvait pas être d'accord avec l'évaluation rétrospective que Goethe faisait de son propre travail en 1825 : « Mon Eugénie est une suite de purs motifs : et cela ne peut pas faire fortune sur la scène. »

## 6.

L'une des hypothèses des biographes est que Fichte, en envoyant à Schiller une critique aussi détaillée de la représentation de la pièce à Berlin, avait l'intention de la porter à l'attention de Goethe, avec lequel il n'entretenait pas de relations étroites. C'est effectivement ce qui s'est passé. Le 29 août de la même année, dans une lettre adressée à Zelter à Berlin, Goethe fait remarquer : « Fichte a écrit à Schiller une très belle et aimable lettre sur Eugénie. Remercie-le pour moi ».

# Symphilosophie

*Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica*

## Cos'è un tema?

### Discorso filosofico e discorso musicale: Baumgarten, Sulzer, Kant, Friedrich Schlegel

*Márcio Suzuki\**

#### ABSTRACT

German philosophy and aesthetics, from Baumgarten to Friedrich Schlegel via Sulzer and Kant, establish an intimate, not merely analogical, link between philosophical and musical discourse. The aim of this text is to outline the stages of the constitution of this link, whereby philosophical thought and musical composition are not seen as absolutely different activities, but as forms of enquiry that could be characterised as “reflective-affective”.

*Keywords:* musical discourse, philosophy, Baumgarten, Sulzer, Kant, Friedrich Schlegel

#### ABSTRACT

La filosofia e l'estetica tedesche, da Baumgarten a Friedrich Schlegel, passando per Sulzer e Kant, stabiliscono un legame intimo, non soltanto analogico, tra discorso filosofico e discorso musicale. Lo scopo di questo testo è quello di delineare le tappe della costituzione di questo legame, per cui pensiero filosofico e composizione musicale non sono viste come attività assolutamente diverse, ma come forme di indagine che potrebbe essere caratterizzate come “riflessiva-affettiva”.

*Parole chiave:* discorso musicale, filosofia, Baumgarten, Sulzer, Kant, Friedrich Schlegel

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\* Professore, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Universidade de São Paulo / CNPq Brazil, Av. Prof. Luciano Gualberto, 315, Sala 1007, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, SP, CEP 05508-010, Brasile – marciosuzuki@usp.br

Senza alcuna pretesa di esaustività, lo scopo di questo saggio è seguire un filo argomentativo che può essere notato in alcuni testi di Baumgarten, Sulzer, Kant e Schlegel, i quali hanno riflettuto sul ruolo del *tema* nella musica e, al contempo, nella storia della filosofia in generale<sup>1</sup>. Con questi quattro autori, l'estetica in Germania compie un'impresa notevole, stabilire un'equivalenza, e non solo un'analogia, tra il discorso filosofico e quello musicale.

In almeno due passaggi dei suoi scritti, Baumgarten cerca di definire cosa sia un tema. In uno di questi, egli scrive che tema in un discorso è “concetto, la parte che è la ragione sufficiente dei pensieri delle parti rimanenti”. Nell'originale latino:

*Thema in oratione est conceptus, eius pars, in qua ratio sufficiens est cogitatarum eis partium reliquarum.*<sup>2</sup>

In questa definizione di tema, Baumgarten ricorre alla nozione di ragion sufficiente, che svolge, com'è noto, un ruolo centrale nelle filosofie di Leibniz e di Christian Wolff, nonché in quella dello stesso autore della *Metafisica*. Inoltre, al di là del principio di ragione, appaiono due nozioni importanti: quella di concetto (*conceptus*) – che Baumgarten, a seconda della sua abitudine di mettere in vernacolo i termini latini, traduce in tedesco come *Begriff* o *Haupt-Satz einer Rede* – e quella di pensieri (*cogitationes*). Il tema, oppure il concetto principale (*Haupt-Begriff*), è la ragione delle altre parti del discorso, ma soprattutto del collegamento tra queste parti, le quali sono, a loro volta, altrettanti concetti o pensieri.

La seconda definizione di tema rintracciabile all'interno dell'opera di Baumgarten si trova nelle *Riflessioni sulla Poesia*, ed è leggermente (ma assai significativamente) diversa della prima:

Il tema è ciò la cui rappresentazione contiene la ragione sufficiente delle altre rappresentazioni presentate nel discorso, ma che non ha la sua nelle altre.

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<sup>1</sup> In una versione ridotta, questo testo è stato presentato nella giornata di studi “Autonomia dell'Arte e Bellezza fra Antico e Moderno” realizzato il 6 dicembre 2019 presso il dipartimento di Lettere Lingue Arti dell'Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro”, e organizzato da Lorella Bosco e Paulo Butti de Lima. La ricerca per questo studio è stata finanziata dalla *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* – CAPES (Brasile), Finance Code 001 Revisione e commenti critici di Mario Spezzapria. L'autore desidera ringraziare i due *referees* per i loro commenti, suggerimenti bibliografici e correzioni, che sono stati di grande aiuto per chiarire a sé stesso (e, si spera, a beneficio del lettore) il significato del legame qui discusso tra musica e filosofia.

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, *Acroasis logica in Christianum L. B. de Wolff*. In: Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, III, 5. Hildesheim / Zurigo / New York, Olms, 1983, § 426, p. 131.

Id, cuius repraesentatio aliarum in oratione adhibitatum rationem sufficientem continet, suam vero habet in aliis est *thema*.<sup>3</sup>

Invece di pensieri, questa definizione parla di rappresentazioni, una modifica che, in sé, non è sostanziale. L'aggiunta, invece, lo è: un discorso, ossia un discorso poetico, deve contenere un unico tema, che è la "ragion sufficiente" delle altre parti, le quali, a loro volta, prese insieme o singolarmente, non possono essere la ragione sufficiente del tema, a rischio di far perdere la sua unità e il suo nesso<sup>4</sup>. Il soggetto di un poema è il suo principio di articolazione, e non può a sua volta avere ragion d'essere altrove, tranne che nel poeta stesso. Questa caratteristica conferisce al tema una condizione quasi unica: a differenza di qualsiasi altra cosa, la quale deve avere una sua ragion d'essere, il potere creativo di un poeta risiede proprio nel trovare un tema che non dipenda da nient'altro che da sé stesso, cioè una proprietà, che lo rende diverso da ogni altro tipo di idea, perché esso deve essere un'idea tale da unificare molte rappresentazioni in un unico insieme. Anticipando il romanticismo e l'idea di autonomia del genio creatore, il poeta dev'essere per Baumgarten *il produttore di un mondo (factor et creator mundi)*<sup>5</sup>; il poema deve diventare, per così dire, quasi un mondo a se stante<sup>6</sup>. Baumgarten riassume questa sua concezione al paragrafo 69 delle *Riflessioni*:

Se le rappresentazioni poetiche, che non sono temi, sono determinate dal tema, si connettono con il tema fra di loro e si succedono come causa ed effetto; dunque c'è una regolarità osservabile nel modo in cui si succedono e perciò nell'opera di poesia c'è ordine. Ora è poetico connettere le rappresentazioni poetiche, che non sono temi, con il tema, § 68; dunque l'ordine è poetico.<sup>7</sup>

Certo, quest'idea di tema non si limita alla letteratura. Baumgarten sembra addirittura averla estratta dalla musica, come si vede al paragrafo 78 della *Metafisica*:

<sup>3</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, Halle: Grunert, 1735, § 66. p. 25. Traduzione italiana: *Riflessioni sulla Poesia*. A cura di Pietro Pimpinella e Salvatore Tedesco. Milano: Aesthetica, 1999, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> "Se più temi sono presenti, allora non sono connessi; supponiamo infatti che A sia il tema e B anche; se fossero connessi o la ragione sufficiente di A sarebbe in B o quella di B in A, dunque o A o B non sarebbe il tema, § 66. Ma il nesso è poetico, § 65; dunque l'opera di poesia con un solo tema è più perfetta di quella che ha più temi, § 6, 11." Baumgarten, *Riflessioni*, § 67, pp. 58-59.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, § 68, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, § 68, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, § 69, p. 59.

Se molte cose sono poste una accanto all'altra o una dopo l'altra, sono collegate. Il legame tra molte cose è uno oppure diverso, § 10, 38. Nel primo caso, è coordinamento, e la sua identità è l'*ordine*. In passato, la scienza dell'ordine era *la musica in senso lato*.<sup>8</sup>

Sarebbe interessante sapere dove Baumgarten abbia trovato l'idea che il coordinamento tematico sia equiparabile a un ordine in senso musicale. Comunque, le spiegazioni di Baumgarten non passarono inosservate da Kant, il quale in una riflessione riguardante proprio questo paragrafo della *Metafisica*, scrive che è un controsenso (*Unsinn*) pensare che la musica sia scienza dell'ordine, laddove si debba procedere con metodo<sup>9</sup>. Questa riflessione, tuttavia, è per dire così un *hàpax* nel *corpus* kantiano, perché il filosofo di Königsberg non dimentica mai la lezione baumgartiana quando deve organizzare le sue meditazioni filosofiche. Così come altri due lettori di Baumgarten, George Friedrich Meier e Johann George Sulzer (dei quali era ugualmente lettore abituale), Kant pensava che l'invenzione concettuale dovesse essere guidata come da un tema poetico, pittorico o musicale. Sono due i modi in cui l'indagine filosofica è condotta, cioè per coordinamento o per subordinazione delle note caratteristiche<sup>10</sup>. La subordinazione è chiamata "conoscenza intensiva" o perfezione logica, mentre il coordinamento è una "conoscenza estensiva" o perfezione estetica<sup>11</sup>. La conoscenza intensiva o logica si basa su un'unità *quantitativa* al contrario di quanto avviene nel caso della conoscenza estetica, orientata in base all'unità *qualitativa*. Kant è molto chiaro nell'affermare che nel discorso filosofico non si deve mescolare la perfezione logica con la perfezione estetica. Ciononostante, anche per lui l'ordinamento del pensiero (o dei pensieri) non può fare a meno di un'unità che è sempre qualitativa, estetica. In una riflessione sull'antropologia possiamo leggere: "La disposizione [o ordinamento = *Anordnung*] riguarda il disegno [*dessein*], l'abbozzo o il tema. La musica è, per così dire, una bella conoscenza sensibile".<sup>12</sup> In un'altra riflessione, egli scrive: la possibilità di formare un tutto è dovuta, nella pittura, al raggruppamento, e nella musica, al tema<sup>13</sup>. Il tema è, pertanto, ciò che dà unità sia in pittura, sia nel teatro, sia nella musica<sup>14</sup>. Ma una tale unità qualitativa non può essere assente neanche dall'ordinamento concettuale, come afferma la stessa *Critica della ragion pura*:

<sup>8</sup> A. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, § 78, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> "Unsinn, worin Methode ist". I. Kant, Rif. 3545, AA 17:044.

<sup>10</sup> I. Kant, *Logik*, AA 09: 061.

<sup>11</sup> I. Kant, *Logik*, AA 09: 037-38.

<sup>12</sup> I. Kant, Rif. 806, AA 15: 355.

<sup>13</sup> I. Kant, Rif. 332, AA 15: 131.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Met. Dohna 28:633: "Die Einheit ist entweder qualitativ, oder quantitativ. Die erstere besteht in der Inseparabilität des Mannigfaltigen. – Die letzte ist die der

E difatti, in ogni conoscenza di un oggetto vi è unità del concetto, quella che si può chiamare unità qualitativa, in quanto con essa viene pensata soltanto l'unità della raccolta del molteplice delle conoscenze, qualcosa come l'unità del tema in un'opera teatrale, in un discorso, in una favola.<sup>15</sup>

Per Kant, investigare un concetto significa qualitativamente trattarlo come un tema. È proprio Baumgarten, però, a introdurre la differenza fra due stili di pensiero, e cioè tra il modo in cui un concetto è tratto dal pensiero “logico-dogmatico” e da quello “estetico-dogmatico”. Il pensiero logico-dogmatico investiga un concetto pensando ad estrarne idee chiare e distinte, in altri termini, egli si occupa solo della perfezione logica. Per il pensiero estetico-dogmatico, invece, il concetto funge da rappresentazione principale (*Hauptbegriff*), alla quale egli cerca di collegare il maggior numero di rappresentazioni associate, ciò che mostra la perfezione estetica di un discorso:

Gli stili di pensiero logico-dogmatico e estetico-dogmatico, desunte le denominazioni dalla loro parte più importante, non solo differiscono per la forma, ma anche per la materia, nella quale sembravano ad un primo sguardo convenire. Come il primo segue sopra ogni cosa i principi del suo tema, così il secondo segue ciò che deriva dai principi insieme alle relative conseguenze. Come il primo estrae gli universali nei quali è contenuto il suo tema, così il secondo si rivolge soprattutto ai concetti inferiori [*thematis inferioris*] contenuti nel medesimo tema.<sup>16</sup>

Oltre alla questione della differenziazione tra i punti di vista logico ed estetico, due altri punti balzano agli occhi in questo brano: nella cognizione artistica, le rappresentazioni accessorie o secondarie (*Nebenvorstellungen* o *Nebengedanken*), che accompagnano la rappresentazione o il concetto principale, sono qui chiamati “temi inferiori”. Possiamo chiederci se Baumgarten, oltre ai sotto-temi di un poema, non stia qui pensando ai sotto-temi di una composizione musicale. In tal caso, ciò che Baumgarten dice in questo passaggio sulle conseguenze che devono essere derivate da un concetto sono pensate da lui come lo sviluppo da un tema principale in sotto-temi.

Derivare rappresentazioni o concetti associati da un concetto principale è stato un problema al quale si è dedicato ugualmente Johann Georg Sulzer, che ha lavorato intensamente alla questione di come trovare e sviluppare un

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Zusammenhang einer Größe aus dieser Einheit. Im ersten Sinne nennen wir es z. B. die Einheit des Theater Stückes, oder dergleichen.”

<sup>15</sup> I. Kant, *Critica della ragion pura*, AA 03: 098. A cura di Costantino Esposito. Milano, Bompiani, 2012, p. 217.

<sup>16</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, *L'estetica*. A cura di Salvatore Tedesco. Milano: Aesthetica, 2000, § 569, p. 194.

tema. Alla voce “invenzione” della *Teoria generale delle belle arti*, egli indica che la scoperta di un tema, che esige genio e applicazione, può essere fatta in due modi: o il fine della opera è stato fissato e si cercano i mezzi per realizzarla; o si ha un “oggetto interessante”, e si scopre che può essere impiegato per un certo scopo. L’oratore e l’architetto lavorano sempre al primo modo. Un poeta drammatico e un pittore seguono di solito l’altra strada: leggendo una storia, possono trovare un buon soggetto per un dramma o per una pittura storica. Ma la scoperta del soggetto può avvenire anche per caso, e presumibilmente le trovate più importanti sono state fatte in questa maniera, quando il “soggetto principale” si presenta all’artista senza che questi lo stia cercando. È così che

[...] un grande compositore mi ha detto che più di una volta ha trasformato cose che ha sentito di passaggio da qualche parte in tema o contenuto di un pezzo musicale [*Tonstück*], che lui stesso non avrebbe mai inventato così bene, se avesse deciso di cercare qualcosa che dovrebbe avere il carattere di questa espressione.<sup>17</sup>

Ma è lo stesso Sulzer a tradurre magistralmente in termini musicali le idee baumgartiane sul rapporto tra rappresentazione principale e rappresentazioni associate, ciò che si può vedere leggendo la voce *Hauptsatz* della *Teoria generale delle belle arti*:

*Hauptsatz* in un pezzo musicale è un periodo in cui sono comprese l’espressione e tutta l’essenza della melodia, e non accade solo inizialmente, ma viene ripetuto per tutto il pezzo musicale, con toni e variazioni diverse. L’*Hauptsatz* è generalmente chiamato tema [...]

*Hauptsatz* ist in einem Tonstück eine Periode, welche den Ausdruck und das ganze Wesen der Melodie in sich begreift, und nicht nur gleich anfangs vorkömmt, sondern durch das ganze Tonstück ofte, in verschiedenen Tönen, und mit verschiedenen Veränderungen, wiederholt wird. Der Hauptsatz wird insgemein das *Thema* genennt [...]<sup>18</sup>

*Hauptsatz*: il linguaggio tecnico musicale possiede fortunatamente una parola per esprimere in musica la *Hauptvorstellung* o *Hauptbegriff* della filosofia. E la

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<sup>17</sup> J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, voce *Erfindung*. Leipzig, Weidmanns Erbe und Reich, 1771s, v. 1, p. 338a. Le citazioni seguono la prima edizione, poiché probabilmente è quella a cui Kant aveva accesso.

<sup>18</sup> J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, voce: *Hauptsatz*, v. 1, p. 522a. Sul *Hauptsatz* come tema musicale, cfr. le voci del vocabolario di Adelung e dei fratelli Grimm.



parola è tanto più significativa, in quanto essa indica l'essenza stessa della musica:

La musica è in realtà il linguaggio della sensazione [oppure sentimento: *Empfindung*], la cui espressione è sempre breve, perché la sensazione in sé è qualcosa di semplice, che si manifesta attraverso poche estrinsecazioni. Per questo motivo, una frase melodica molto breve, di due, tre o quattro battute, può esprimere una sensazione così determinatamente e correttamente che l'ascoltatore riconosce esattamente lo stato d'animo della persona che canta. Se un pezzo musicale non avesse altro proposito che porre in luce una sensazione, una frase così breve, se fosse concepita fortunatamente, sarebbe sufficiente per farlo. Ma questa non è il proposito della musica; essa deve servire a mantenere l'ascoltatore per un po' nello stesso stato d'animo. Ciò non può essere fatto semplicemente ripetendo la stessa frase, per quanto essa sia splendida; perché la ripetizione della stessa cosa è noiosa e fa crollare immediatamente l'attenzione. Quindi si doveva inventare una specie di canzone in cui la stessa sensazione, con la giusta varietà e in varie modifiche, potesse essere ripetuta così spesso, fino a quando non avesse fatto la giusta impressione.<sup>19</sup>

Questo paragrafo è una testimonianza documentale molto importante, perché ci fa vedere come per Sulzer la musica non sia più un'espressione o un linguaggio delle sensazioni, com'era in Rousseau, bensì un linguaggio il cui scopo è trasmettere un contenuto e mantenere l'ascoltatore in un certo stato d'animo. Cioè – contrariamente a quanto afferma il musicologo Carl Dahlhaus – la concezione musicale di Sulzer non può essere identificata con quella di Rousseau<sup>20</sup>. Sulzer è già pienamente consapevole che il discorso musicale non è soltanto imitativo, ma gode di autonomia. Un'autonomia, però, che non è esclusivamente formale, perché legata all'idea che la musica contenga uno stato d'animo, una *Stimmung*. Questo collegamento della *forma musicale* con il *Gemüt* viene mostrato nel paragrafo seguente della voce *Hauptsatz*:

Da ciò è emersa la forma della maggior parte delle composizioni musicali di oggi, i concerti, le sinfonie, le arie, i duetti, il trio, le fughe ecc. Tutte queste hanno ciò in comune: che solo un breve periodo, commisurato all'espressione della sensazione, viene messo da fonda-

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Secondo Dalhaus, Sulzer avrebbe avuto una concezione sentimentale (*empfindsam*) della musica, propria di un *Biedermeier* (C. Dahlhaus, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1978, p. 13). Sembra che il musicologo tedesco non abbia letto con sufficiente attenzione le voci della *Teoria generale delle belle arti*, né colto lo spirito dell'opera di Sulzer, ispiratore diretto dell'educazione estetica schilleriana.

mento come *Hauptsatz* in una parte principale; tale *Hauptsatz* è supportato, o addirittura interrotto, da piccoli pensieri intermedi appropriati; l'*Hauptsatz* è così spesso ripetuto insieme a questi pensieri intermedi in diverse armonie e tonalità, e anche con piccoli cambiamenti melodici che sono appropriati all'*Hauptsatz*, fino a quando l'animo dell'ascoltatore non sia sufficientemente occupato dalla sensazione, la quale è, per così dire, avvertita da tutti i lati.<sup>21</sup>

Il brano mostra come Sulzer stia pensando non solo alla musica vocale, ma anche a tutti i generi di musica strumentale, compresi quelli in cui c'è maggiore indipendenza dal linguaggio discorsivo e dall'approccio mimetico. La sua spiegazione è in sintonia con gli sviluppi musicali del suo tempo, e la sua concezione dell'autonomia musicale ha il vantaggio di non essere formalista, perché da lui collegata al sentimento, allo *stato d'animo*, al *Gemüt*. Un'opera musicale deve avere un tema o una proposizione principale a cui si legheranno una serie di *piccoli pensieri intermedi* (*kleine, Zwischengedanken*), in grado di intrattenere l'ascoltatore con il sentimento che occupa la sua mente. I pensieri o concetti associati circondano e modulano un pensiero o concetto principale, proprio come il tema, in Baumgarten, è accompagnato da *thematis inferioris*. Queste caratteristiche dell'estetica musicale di Sulzer gettano una luce meno formalista anche sull'autonomia estetica kantiana. Spesso non si tiene in dovuta considerazione come Kant conoscesse molto bene Baumgarten e Sulzer e pensasse a questi problemi estetici in termini molto simili. Sullo sfondo di tale retroterra baumgartiano-sulzeriano, la sua autonomia estetica non è assolutamente formalista, perché ogni opera artistica o letteraria deve avere un tema, una rappresentazione principale, un'idea estetica (*ästhetische Idee*) a cui sono collegate molte rappresentazioni affini, che danno alla mente molto a cui pensare. Il gioco delle rappresentazioni parziali legate alla rappresentazione principale intrattiene la mente con un *sentimento* (*Gefühl*) dell'indicibile che vivifica (*belebt*) le sue facoltà.

In una parola: l'idea estetica è una rappresentazione della forza di immaginazione associata a un concetto dato, la quale è collegata con una tale molteplicità di rappresentazioni parziali nel loro libero uso che non può venire trovata per quella idea alcuna espressione designante un concetto determinato, una rappresentazione che così permette di pensare, in aggiunta a un concetto, molto di indicibile, il cui sentimento

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<sup>21</sup> J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, voce: *Hauptsatz*, v. 1, p. 522a-b. Non si deve dimenticare che in musica *Satz* indica il tempo, ma anche le parti di una composizione così come in logica il termine indica una proposizione.

vivifica le facoltà conoscitive e con il linguaggio, come semplice lettera, collega lo spirito.<sup>22</sup>

La capacità di un'idea estetica di animare i poteri della mente si basa su questo, ovvero sulla capacità di articolare una *Menge von Teilvorstellungen* o addirittura una *Menge von Empfindungen und Nebenvorstellungen* in un insieme artistico coeso<sup>23</sup>. Nella musica, l'idea estetica e le sue rappresentazioni parziali sembrano esser legate agli affetti del compositore, del musicista e degli ascoltatori, ma il modo in cui questo legame deve essere inteso rappresenta uno spartiacque tra i commentatori della *Critica del giudizio*, che su questo punto si dividono in posizioni meno o più formaliste. In un passaggio piuttosto intricato del paragrafo 53 della *Critica del giudizio*, si legge che la musica, attraverso i suoi suoni, è in grado di comunicargli affetti che ogni parlante produce nell'ascoltatore esprimendo un'idea o un pensiero in un linguaggio articolato. In altre parole, un'opera musicale non trasmette direttamente un'idea o un pensiero, cosa che avviene solo nel linguaggio articolato, ma può trasmettere *i sentimenti o gli affetti che accompagnano la comunicazione di un'idea o di un pensiero*. Non è quindi assolutamente rilevante che la musica agisca sulla fisiologia come stimolo, perché il suo stimolo può essere comunicato universalmente, e questa sua comunicabilità universale non è solo una comunicabilità analogica, ma una comunicabilità nel senso pieno del termine: la musica è un linguaggio universale di sensazioni o un linguaggio di affetti, comprensibile (*verständlich*) da chiunque lo ascolti:

L'attrattiva della musica, che si lascia comunicare così universalmente [*Der Reiz derselben, der sich so allgemein mitteilen läßt*], sembra basarsi sul fatto che ogni espressione del linguaggio ha nel contesto un tono che è adeguato al suo senso [*jeder Ausdruck der Sprache im Zusammenhange einen Ton hat, der dem Sinne desselben angemessen ist*]; e poi sul fatto che questo tono designa più o meno un affetto del parlante e, d'altro canto, lo produce anche nell'ascoltatore, un affetto che suscita poi inversamente in quest'ultimo anche l'idea che è espressa nel linguaggio da un tale tono; ma anche sul fatto che, come la modulazione è per così dire un linguaggio universale delle sensazioni [*so wie die Modulation gleichsam eine allgemeine jedem Menschen verständliche Sprache der Empfindungen ist*], comprensibile da parte di ogni uomo, così l'arte musicale esercita questo linguaggio per sé sola in tutto il suo vigore, cioè come linguaggio degli affetti [*Sprache der Affekten*], e comunica dunque universalmente, secon-

<sup>22</sup> I. Kant, *Critica del giudizio*. A cura di Massimo Marassi, Milano, Bompiani, 2014, § 49, p. 327.

<sup>23</sup> I. Kant, *Critica del giudizio*, § 49, AA 05: 316; trad. italiana, p. 325.

do la legge dell'associazione, le idee estetiche che vi si trovano naturalmente collegate [...]”<sup>24</sup>

Come ogni opera d'arte o letteraria, un brano musicale non è guidato da un concetto (che lo renderebbe oggetto di un giudizio determinante), ma da un'idea estetica che si traduce in una *regola*, la quale, pur dovendo essere originale, può, nonostante ciò, essere comunicata e compresa da chiunque la ascolti. Le “idee estetiche non sono concetti né pensieri determinati”, ma soltanto “la forma della composizione di queste sensazioni (armonia e melodia)”. Questa forma sostituisce o prende il posto della forma del linguaggio, per esprimere “l'idea estetica di un insieme determinato” grazie a una “disposizione proporzionata di queste sensazioni”<sup>25</sup>. La forma del linguaggio può essere così sostituita dalla forma musicale delle sensazioni: *statt der Form einer Sprache*, dice il testo kantiano.

Ciò che si riesce a trasmettere in queste poche righe ha giustamente dato molto da pensare ai suoi commentatori: l'incrocio tra linguaggio, forma e sensazione / affetto è una sintesi unica, la cui singolarità è rafforzata da ciò che viene detto in seguito: l'idea estetica nella musica, che permette l'unità di un insieme coeso di sensazioni, esprime “una quantità indicibile di pensieri che si riferiscono a un certo tema, che costituisce l'affetto dominante del brano musicale”<sup>26</sup>. Kant sembra avere una solida base per tracciare questa equazione tra il tema e l'affetto dominante (*herrschender Affekt*), ma prima di indagare quale possa essere il suo punto di appoggio, sarebbe utile schematizzare un po' meglio le correlazioni messe in atto. Un piccolo schema potrebbe aiutare a visualizzare il quadro che Kant ha in mente:

	<i>Conversazione/ Parlare usuale</i>	<i>Discorso Filosofico</i>	<i>Belle Arti/ Letteratura</i>	<i>Musica</i>
<i>Tipo di Linguaggio</i>	Linguaggio articolato	Linguaggio articolato/ “discorsivo”	Linguaggio visivo/ linguaggio letterario/linguaggio scenico (drama, danza)	Linguaggio musicale (melodia, ritmo, armonia)
<i>Unità qualitativa - Tema</i>	Soggetto	Concetto/ Idea (Tema)	Idea estetica	Idea estetica (= affetto dominante)
<i>Rappresentazioni parziali o secondarie</i>	Idee e immagini per associazione	Concetti subordinati e/o ordinati	Rappresentazioni parziali o correlate	Sensazioni ( <i>Empfindungen</i> )/ affetti associati

<sup>24</sup> I. Kant, *Critica del giudizio*, § 53, AA 05: 328; trad. italiana, p. 352.

<sup>25</sup> I. Kant, *Critica del giudizio*, § 53, AA 05: 329; trad. italiana, p. 352.

<sup>26</sup> I. Kant, *Critica del giudizio*, § 53, AA 05: 329; trad. italiana, p. 352. Molto importante per quanto segue, il termine *Gedankenfülle* era già comparso in precedenza nella KU, quando si trattava di spiegare il rapporto tra genio e gusto I. Kant, *Critica del giudizio*, § 50, AA 05: 319; trad. italiana, p. 332. Ovviamente, “brano” (*Stück* in tedesco) non deve essere inteso qui come una parte, ma sì come l'intera composizione musicale.

Per capire cosa è in gioco nel rapporto tra discorso filosofico e discorso musicale, è interessante confrontare due letture divergenti sulla concezione musicale di Kant: quella di Carl Dahlhaus e quella di Pietro Giordanetti.

Nel suo “Zu Kants Musikästhetik”, il musicologo tedesco sostiene che l’orientamento di Kant verso la dottrina degli affetti (*Affektenlehre*) non è “sistematico, necessario”, ma storicamente “contingente”, in quanto come temi “a cui la musica deve riferirsi per suscitare idee estetiche e poter così apparire come unità, sono pensabili anche contenuti diversi dagli affetti”<sup>27</sup>. Se questo sembra rendere giustizia alla radicalità con cui Kant intende l’autonomia estetica, la distinzione tra una necessità intrinseca al pensiero kantiano e una contingenza storica non è però in linea né con lo spirito né con la lettera del testo commentato. Pietro Giordanetti, invece, ha una posizione molto più in sintonia con il testo della *Critica del giudizio* nella sua interezza. Nella sua opera sulla musica in Kant, lo studioso italiano ricostruisce precisamente lo sfondo storico dell’estetica musicale del filosofo tedesco a partire dalle sue prime annotazioni sul soggetto, senza trascurare nessuno dei suoi fattori importanti: gioco delle sensazioni, genio, spirito, matematica, tema, affetto, affetto dominante. Giordanetti riassume il paragrafo 53 della *Critica del giudizio* come segue:

Esclusivamente la forma matematica dell’unificazione delle idee estetiche come sensazioni rende possibile l’espressione delle idee estetiche: l’espressione dell’affetto dominante in una composizione musicale si può quindi ottenere solo per mezzo della matematica; la forma matematica non sussiste indipendentemente dal contenuto, ma lo esprime, dà espressione all’affetto dominante nella composizione musicale, affetto che si identifica con l’idea estetica del tema. Matematica e affetto, forma e contenuto non sono tenute separate l’una dall’altro, ma costituiscono i due aspetti della composizione musicale: della musica strumentale con un tema.<sup>28</sup>

A differenza di Dahlhaus, Giordanetti non esita a mettere gli affetti al centro dell’estetica musicale kantiana, insieme alla matematica. E questo è tanto più significativo, in quanto sottolinea che il punto focale del paragrafo 53 è la musica strumentale:

<sup>27</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, “Zu Kants Musikästhetik”, in id. *Gesammelte Werke*, a cura di Hermann Danuser, Laaber: Laaber, 2003, v. 5, p. 440. Il testo è stato pubblicato originariamente in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 10, 4 (1953), pp. 338-347. Ma Dahlhaus non specifica quali potrebbero essere questi “altri contenuti”.

<sup>28</sup> Pietro Giordanetti, *Kant e la musica*. Milano, CUEM, 2001, p. 191.

[...] la musica senza testo è in sé un fenomeno unitario e l'ascoltatore percepisce contemporaneamente forma e attrattiva, l'elemento matematico e l'affetto.<sup>29</sup>

Kant sa che la musica può fare a meno di parole e testi, proprio perché il discorso musicale ha una struttura che si ordina come il discorso articolato e, quindi, pretende anche di raggiungere l'universalità di una comunità di ascoltatori, di un *Gemeinsinn* musicale.

Ciò ci porta a chiederci: da dove trae Kant la sua conoscenza musicale, cioè come può già in qualche modo anticipare qualcosa che apparirà più chiaramente solo nel Romanticismo? Il lettore ricorderà che, nella voce della *Teoria generale delle belle arti* dedicata al *Hauptsatz*, Sulzer indicava già il ruolo fondamentale della frase principale “nelle composizioni musicali odierne” (concerti, sinfonie, arie, duetti, trii, fughe ecc.)<sup>30</sup>. Questo è un primo indizio del fatto che, ad eccezione della proporzionalità matematica, che deriva da Eulero<sup>31</sup>, le fonti più importanti del pensiero musicale kantiano si trovano nell'*Allgemeine Theorie* del filosofo svizzero.

Come Sulzer definisce la musica? La sua risposta è diretta: lo scopo (*Zweck*) della musica è suscitare sensazioni o sentimenti (*Empfindungen*)<sup>32</sup>. Ciò significa che essa non deve dare espressione a “oggetti della forza rappresentativa [*Gegenstände der Vorstellungskraft*] che abbiano una qualche influenza attraverso la mera conoscenza riflessiva delle loro qualità o nessuna relazione con il sentimento”: il linguaggio (*Sprache*), e non la musica, è stato inventato per rendere pensieri e rappresentazioni, è il linguaggio articolato che “cerca di insegnare e di anteporre le immagini alla fantasia”: “In generale, quindi, la musica non agisce sull'uomo nella misura in cui egli pensa o ha poteri rappresentativi, ma nella misura in cui egli sente.”<sup>33</sup>

Dopo aver definito il fine della musica, Sulzer si chiede quali siano i mezzi che essa utilizza per raggiungerlo, cioè come i suoni musicali si trasformino in un linguaggio del sentimento che sia comprensibile (*eine verständliche Sprache der Empfindung*). Qui si anticipa letteralmente la stessa terminologia usata nella terza *Critica*<sup>34</sup> per rendere conto di quell'altra forma di discorso udibile e comprensibile (*verständlich*), che può essere colto ascoltando, per così dire, il controcanto contenuto nel parlare comune. Questo canto del sentimento che si svolge parallelamente al discorso che

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>30</sup> Si veda *supra* la nota 19.

<sup>31</sup> Come insiste Giordanetti in tutto il suo libro.

<sup>32</sup> J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, voce: Musik, v. 2, p. 266a.

<sup>33</sup> J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, voce: Musik, v. 2, p. 266b.

<sup>34</sup> Vedi nota 25 sopra.

vuole esprimere le rappresentazioni è la definizione stessa di musica strumentale: essa è una musica

[...] il cui canto consiste semplicemente in suoni inarticolati e che non ha bisogno di parole per rendere comprensibile [*verständlich machen*] ciò che esprime. Tutta la musica si basa sul potere, già presente nei suoni inarticolati, di esprimere diverse passioni; e, se non potessimo parlare il linguaggio dei sentimenti senza parole, nessuna musica sarebbe possibile. Sembra quindi che la musica strumentale sia la parte più importante di questa bell'arte.<sup>35</sup>

La musica suonata dagli strumenti, senza parole o testi, è la *Hauptsache*: forse in nessun altro passaggio Sulzer chiarisce meglio che l'“essenza” della musica risiede nella musica strumentale. Poi, certo, Sulzer chiarisce meglio il suo punto di vista sul rapporto tra musica strumentale e musica vocale: ovunque si tratti di “presentare o dipingere gli oggetti della sensazione” (*wo die Gegenstände der Empfindung selbst müssen geschildert werden*), è necessario il supporto del linguaggio articolato. Un nuovo argomento, però, rende ancora più esplicito il parallelismo tra le due lingue, un argomento che per il resto è piuttosto semplice: i toni della tristezza, del dolore e del lamento possono essere compresi anche in una lingua sconosciuta; possono commuoverci intensamente, ma la commozione sarà ancora maggiore se chi si lamenta parla in un lessico familiare, perché qui egli può lasciar trasparire le circostanze del suo lamento. Tuttavia,

[...] quando lo stato d'animo deve esser mosso e intrattenuto solo dal sentimento, senza dover avere davanti un oggetto specifico, è sufficiente la musica strumentale.<sup>36</sup>

La correlazione tra lo strumento e l'espressione dell'affetto da parte della voce umana deve quindi essere il criterio decisivo per i brani strumentali, e per questo l'oboe è particolarmente adatto. Ancora più importante è il modo in cui Sulzer intende i principi a cui il compositore deve ispirarsi: il rischio che un concerto, un trio, un asolo o una sonata finiscano per essere un semplice “rumore ben suonante” (*ein wohlklingendes Geräusch*) è grande se non si dispone di una *Richtschnur* che dia forma all'insieme. Questo rischio è sufficientemente scongiurato nelle sinfonie e nelle ouvertures che fungono da preludio a un'esecuzione, perché qui l'“invenzione” deve esprimere il carattere del protagonista del brano. Ma i concerti, i trii, gli assoli e le sonate

<sup>35</sup> J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771), voce: *Instrumentalmusik*, v. 1, p. 559a.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*

non hanno questo supporto, e la loro invenzione è lasciata al caso, a meno che non si trovi una via d'uscita:

Per evitarlo, il compositore fa bene a rappresentarsi sempre il carattere di un personaggio o di una situazione, di una passione, e a tendere la fantasia fino a credere di sentir parlare una persona che si trova in quelle circostanze. Può aiutarsi cercando nei poeti passaggi patetici e focosi o soavi e teneri, recitandoli con il tono che gli è più congeniale, per poi abbozzare il suo brano musicale intorno a questo sentimento. Non deve mai dimenticare che un brano musicale in cui non si esprime alcuna passione o sentimento in un linguaggio comprensibile [*in einer verständlichen Sprache*] non è altro che un semplice rumore.<sup>37</sup>

Quello che abbiamo cercato di mostrare diventa ora evidente: gli elementi di teoria musicale presenti in Kant provengono direttamente da Sulzer<sup>38</sup>. Soprattutto, però, non va trascurato che il parallelo che il filosofo svizzero stabilisce tra suono e linguaggio articolato si basa sulla nozione più generale di tema: una composizione musicale deve sempre avere un sentimento, un affetto, ma per evitare che sia diffuso, vago, senza consistenza, si ricorre all'immaginazione, che deve creare fittiziamente o ricordarsi di una persona posta in una situazione in cui esprime questo sentimento. L'emozione viene

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*, pp. 559b-560a.

<sup>38</sup> Non bisogna però dimenticare il debito di Sulzer nei confronti di Rousseau. Nella Lettera XLVIII di *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, un cantante della corte di Milord Edouard spiega a St. Preux la superiorità della musica italiana rispetto a quella francese. Il testo fa parte della nota controversia (la *Querelle des Bouffons*) fra Jean-Philippe Rameau e Jean-Jacques Rousseau sulla superiorità dell'armonia o della melodia, ma vale la pena di citarne alcuni passaggi a titolo di paragone: “m’ayant récité, sans chant, quelques scènes Italiennes, il me fit sentir les rapports de la musique à la parole dans le récitatif, de la musique au sentiment dans les airs, & partout l’énergie que la mesure exacte & le choix des accords ajoute à l’expression. Enfin, après avoir joint à la connoissance que j’ai de la langue, la meilleure idée qu’il me fut possible de l’accent oratoire & pathétique, c’est-à-dire *de l’art de parler à l’oreille & au cœur dans un langage, sans articuler des mots* [...]”; “A chaque phrase quelque image entroit dans mon cerveau, ou quelque sentiment dans mon cœur; le plaisir ne s’arretoit point à l’oreille; il pénétoit jusqu’à l’ame [...] Mais quand après une suite d’airs agréables, en vint à ces grands morceaux d’expression, qui savent exciter & peindre le désordre des passions violentes, je perdois à chaque instant l’idée de musique, de chant, d’imitation; je croyois entendre la voix de la douleur, de l’emportement, du désespoir; je croyois voir des meres éplorées, des amans trahis, des tyrans furieux; & dans les agitations que j’étois forcé d’éprouver, j’avois peine à rester en place. [...] Non, Julie, on ne supporte point à demi des pareilles impressions; elles sont excessives ou nulles, jamais foibles ou médiocres; il faut rester insensible ou se laisser émouvoir outre mesure: ou c’est le vain bruit d’une langue qu’on n’entend point, ou c’est une impétuosité de sentiment qui vous entraîne & à laquelle il est impossible à l’ame de résister. » Gli ultimi tre passaggi sono citati nella voce *Musik* dell’*Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*.



così *tematizzata* per il genio, per l'invenzione artistica, cioè prende forma o, in termini kantiani, diventa adatta alla comunicabilità universale.

Se questo non bastasse a dimostrare la base sulzeriana dell'estetica musicale kantiana, un'ultima prova serve a coronare il nostro percorso: nella stessa voce sulla musica strumentale, leggiamo una variante della spiegazione qui presentata, quando Sulzer dice che in una rappresentazione drammatica le sinfonie e le ouvertures preparano “in anticipo lo spettatore all'effetto principale che predominerà nell'esecuzione”<sup>39</sup>.

La parola chiave qui è *Hauptaffekt*, che Kant ha tradotto come “affetto dominante” (*dominierender Affekt*) nel paragrafo 53 della KU, una traduzione, che, sebbene concettualmente correttissima, non permette di cogliere la correlazione fra *Hauptsatz* e *Hauptaffekt* sentita nei testi sulzeriani e nella teoria musicale dell'epoca.

Pur essendo un profano di teoria e storia della musica, l'autore di queste righe si permette di azzardare un'ipotesi. Non si può negare che l'intera concezione sulzeriana (e kantiana) della musica strumentale sia ancora in qualche modo legata, se non alla testualità, almeno al paradigma vocale. Tuttavia, questo attaccamento alla voce non deve essere esagerato, perché ciò che è importante per Sulzer è che la voce funzioni effettivamente come *mezzo euristico*, come espediente per inventare risorse espressive per la composizione, il ritmo e la strumentazione. Sulzer (e, con lui, Kant) è un testimone fondamentale delle trasformazioni della musica del suo tempo, del momento in cui i generi strumentali diventano autonomi. È così che l'ouverture e la sinfonia cessano di essere solo il preludio allo spettacolo scenico. Ma questo processo di autonomizzazione, di allontanamento del paradigma mimetico, contrariamente a quanto presuppone una visione strettamente formalista, è possibile solo perché è sostenuto da una relazione coerente, un rafforzamento reciproco tra tema e affetto, tra *Hauptsatz* e *Hauptaffekt*. Un'ulteriore conferma di ciò sarà data dal passo successivo.

Se infatti la *Critica del giudizio* è una sorta di cassa di risonanza trascendentale dell'argomentazione sviluppata nella *Teoria generale delle belle arti*, allora bisogna speculare sul perché, a differenza di quanto è avvenuto per l'affetto principale, sia stato tralasciato un concetto fondamentale della *Tonlehre* dell'epoca, altrettanto ben elaborato da Sulzer. Il primo mezzo che la musica utilizza per raggiungere il suo fine, come si legge nel lemma *Musik* della *Teoria generale*, è il canto, la cui definizione si riferisce certamente alla voce umana<sup>40</sup>, sebbene il termine (*Gesang*) includa anche le voci di altri

<sup>39</sup> J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, voce: *Instrumentalmusik*, v. 1, p. 559a.

<sup>40</sup> Il canto è “una sequenza di singoli toni, in quanto procedono più lentamente o più rapidamente secondo la particolare natura del sentimento in cui si presentano,

strumenti, poiché il canto è, appunto, una melodia o, più precisamente, *una frase melodica, ein melodischer Satz*, espressione che viene tradotta ugualmente come “un pensiero in musica” – *ein Gedanken in der Musik*<sup>41</sup>. Cercando di spiegare cosa sia un pensiero musicale, la sequenza del testo finisce per identificare meglio anche cosa sia un tema in musica:

Tutti sentono [*Jedermann empfindet*] che si possa concepire un numero infinito di frasi di questo tipo, ognuna delle quali contiene il carattere di un certo sentimento o una sua particolare sfumatura. Il canto è composto da diverse frasi, ognuna delle quali porta il segno del sentimento. È facile capire come una frase del genere possa esprimere una dolce contentezza, una vivace giovialità, un'allegria saltellante, oppure una tenerezza commovente, un dolore violento, una rabbia furiosa, ecc. Così, il linguaggio delle passioni può essere imitato attraverso suoni inarticolati. In ogni specie, i suoni possono essere indicati da una o più voci, attraverso le quali il sentimento che si vuole suscitare colpisce anch'esso più o meno fortemente, calmando o scuotendo l'animo. In questo troviamo già una immensa forza capace di influenzare gli animi. Eseguiti con tono appassionato, questi pensieri melodici sono dunque il primo mezzo [per raggiungere lo scopo della musica].<sup>42</sup>

Questa spiegazione dei pensieri melodici chiude il cerchio in cui si identificano tema, pensiero e affetto:

Hauptsatz	Hauptaffekt	Gesang
Sätze	Affekte	Gedancken

La struttura della musica è simile a quella del linguaggio, essendo costituita da frasi (*Sätze*) che, proprio come nell'uso linguistico, esprimono pensieri. Se torniamo a Baumgarten, la correlazione fra Thema ↔ Thematis // Concetto ↔ Concetti inferiori era già in qualche modo chiara, ma è Sulzer che introduce in essa l'*Affektenlehre*.

In virtù della sua posizione trascendentale pura, Kant non può seguire fino in fondo i suoi contemporanei, non può accettare l'ultima correlazione sulzeriana canto ↔ pensieri, perché la musica non attiva un *Gedankenspiel*,

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scivolando o sussultando, dal petto o solo dalla gola, separati l'uno dall'altro a intervalli più o meno lunghi, più forti o più deboli, più alti o più bassi, eseguiti con maggiore o minore uniformità di tempo”. J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, voce: *Musik*, v. 2, p. 559a-267b.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*, pp. 267b-268a.

ma solo un *Tonspiel*<sup>43</sup>, un gioco di sensazioni o, al massimo, un gioco di idee estetiche. In realtà si può affrontare la questione da un altro punto di vista, non solo genetico, ma anche strettamente concettuale, chiedendoci se Kant, pur conoscendo i testi di Baumgarten e Sulzer, non sia stato costretto a introdurre la nozione di *ästhetische Ideen* al posto del termine *Gedanke* – e non solo nel caso della musica. Questo perché il linguaggio delle arti in generale non può essere *discorsivo*, o soltanto discorsivo, cioè esso non esprime solo concetti e rappresentazioni dell'intelletto e della ragione, ma ha bisogno di una zavorra sensibile per essere una vera *Darstellung*, una presentazione *intuitiva*<sup>44</sup>. In ogni caso, per quanto è stato detto, sembra evidente che Kant sia giunto a una migliore comprensione dell'insieme organico delle opere d'arte, basata sul rapporto tra un'idea estetica e idee estetiche secondarie o parallele, grazie alla lettura di quanto scritto da Baumgarten e Sulzer sul rapporto tra tema e sottotemi, tra tema, melodia, affetto e pensiero.

Sulzer, da parte sua, interpreta il discorso musicale da una prospettiva filosofica molto feconda: sfruttando il prospettivismo leibniziano (ogni monade è una visione del mondo dal punto di vista del corpo), egli mostra che le diverse frasi musicali modulano la frase principale, dandole ogni volta una sfumatura diversa e intrattenendo così l'ascoltatore fino a fargli capire il tema “da tutti i lati”<sup>45</sup>. In tal modo, la musica realizza esteticamente un *approccio fenomenologico* al suo oggetto: ogni frase musicale è un profilo, una *Abschattung*, del suo tema-affetto, la cui “comprensione” è data dall'insieme dei suoi profili<sup>46</sup>.

Se ci rivolgiamo alla musica del tempo, il divario kantiano fra tema e pensiero sparisce del tutto, proprio grazie all'estetica baumgartiana. Quando descrive i diversi modi di arrivare a un tema nella voce “invenzione” della *Teoria generale delle belle arti*, Sulzer afferma che un compositore, come tutti gli altri creatori, può creare per caso; ad esempio, il compositore musicale può giungere casualmente *a un pensiero*: “*der Tonsetzer kommt von ungefehr auf einen Gedanken*”. Non è assolutamente casuale che Sulzer impieghi qui la parola *Gedanke*, perché è certamente consapevole del significato di *tema* nel

<sup>43</sup> I. Kant, *Critica del giudizio*, § 53, AA 05: 331; trad. italiana, p. 358.

<sup>44</sup> Sulla nota differenza tra intuitivo e discorsivo, cfr. *Critica della ragion pura*, AA 03: 85.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. *supra* nota 21

<sup>46</sup> Nel suo libro sull'immaginazione e l'interpretazione in Kant, Rudolph Makkreel commenta un testo della *Vorlesung über Metaphysik* L1 (AA 28: 235-236) proprio in questo senso fenomenologico, evidenziando la parentela di Kant con Merleau-Ponty (*Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: the Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*, Chicago / London, The University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 18, nota 15). Con la sua matrice wolffiano-baumgartiana, l'*Abbildung* kantiana sarebbe un'anticipazione dell'*Abschattung* husserliana. Ma questo è ancora più vero nel caso di Sulzer.

linguaggio tecnico musicale di quegli anni. Come spiega Charles Rosen nel suo libro *La generazione romantica*, al tempo di Mozart “la parola tecnica tedesca per ‘tema’ era ‘*Gedank*’ [sic]”<sup>47</sup>. A sostegno di quest’affermazione, il musicologo americano fa riferimento a un frammento di Friedrich Schlegel, dove si legge:

A taluno suol parere strano e ridicolo che i musicisti parlino dei pensieri [*Gedanken*] che sono nelle composizioni loro; e spesso può anche accadere che si avverta ch’essi hanno più pensieri [*Gedanken*] nella loro musica che sopra di essa. Ma chi ha senso per le mirabili affinità di tutte le arti e scienze, non vorrà considerare la cosa dal piatto punto di vista della cosiddetta naturalezza, secondo la quale la musica deve essere soltanto il linguaggio del sentimento, e troverà in sé non impossibile una tendenza di tutta la musica puramente strumentale verso la filosofia. Non deve la pura musica strumentale crearsi un testo? E in essa non viene il tema così svolto, confermato, variato e contrastato come l’oggetto della meditazione in una serie di idee filosofiche?<sup>48</sup>

In questo frammento, Schlegel usa indistintamente sia *Gedanke* (pensiero) sia tema, dando a questa parola una “nuova risonanza intellettuale”, secondo Rosen, risonanza che comunque già era ben presente, come si è visto, dopo Baumgarten. Diamo ulteriormente ascolto a quanto dice l’esperto di musica classica:

Ciò [la nuova risonanza intellettuale della parola “tema”] rende la musica un modello astratto per il pensiero, una struttura che sottostà alla logica e al linguaggio, una forma di ragione pura che precede il linguaggio, se fosse possibile affermarne l’esistenza. L’osservazione di Schlegel è direttamente ispirata dallo stile sonatistico del tardo Settecento e da quell’elemento che risulta molto evidente agli ascoltatori di un concerto pubblico: il trattamento del tema. I termini ‘*entwickelt, bestätigt, variiert e kontrastiert*’ confondono variamente le funzioni di sviluppo, ripresa ed esposizione, e possiamo notare come la forma-sonata, quale modello, giunse infine a sembrare tanto fondamentale, come se contenesse gli elementi basilari della ragione [...]”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Rosen, *La generazione romantica*, tr. it. di Guido Zaccagnini. Milano, Adelphi, 2012, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Atheneumfragmente*, fra. 444. In: *Kritische-Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Monaco / Paderborn / Viena, Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967, v. 2, p. 254. Traduzione italiana a cura di Vittorio Santoli, *Frammenti critici e studi di estetica*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1937, p. 127, apud Rosen, p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Rosen, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

*La musica come modello astratto per il pensiero, una forma di razionalità pura che precede il linguaggio, che contiene i primi componenti della ragione:* la spiegazione di Rosen è degna di nota, perché fa emergere quella correlazione tra discorso filosofico e discorso musicale che la filosofia tedesca stava sviluppando, sin da Baumgarten. Non meno interessante sarebbe chiedersi se non sia riconoscibile una certa risonanza baumgartiana o sulzeriana nel frammento 444 dell'Ateneo. Dopotutto, è stato lo stesso Friedrich a scrivere in uno dei suoi frammenti di letteratura: “Tra tutti i dotti wolffiani, Sulzer era certamente colui che aveva più peculiarità” o “era certamente il più peculiare” (Unter allen Gelehrten Wolffianer hatte Sulzer wohl am meisten Eigenheit“).<sup>50</sup>

Per Schlegel, ogni testo letterario deve essere letto, cioè sentito secondo la sua musica. È così, per esempio, che un

[...] saggio sistematico dovrebbe essere un tema con variazioni. In virtù dell'*analogia*, gli episodi del saggio sono lì a conferirgli universalità e a scherzare [*spielen*] con l'elemento storico della critica, senza oltrepassarne i confini.<sup>51</sup>

E che anche un testo filosofico debba avere la sua *Stimmung*, il suo umore musicale proprio, è ciò che si può dedurre da uno dei frammenti più importanti di Schlegel, il numero 220 dell'Ateneo, che tratta del *Witz*. Lì si legge, a proposito di Kant e i suoi seguaci:

Kant, il Copernico della filosofia, ha per natura forse ancora più spirito sincretico e *Witz* critico di Leibniz: ma la sua situazione e la sua *Bildung* non sono così *witzig*; le sue trovate [*Einfälle*] sono anche come melodie dilette: i kantiani le hanno cantate fino a ucciderle; quindi si può facilmente sbagliare e considerarlo meno *witzig* di quello che è.

Al posto di *Einfälle* (trovate), Schlegel avrebbe potuto scrivere *Gedanke*. Questo avrebbe reso forse più evidente lo sviluppo che da Baumgarten, passando per Sulzer e Kant, va al romanticismo filosofico-musicale.

Vale la pena ricordare che, per Friedrich Schlegel, la musica moderna è un'arte sentimentale, e questo “sentimentale” (*dieses Sentimentale*) è definito da lui come “il fiato sacro che ci muove nei suoni della musica”, l'ingrediente essenziale non solo di essa, ma anche di tutta la poesia veramente romantica:

<sup>50</sup> F. Schlegel, *Kritische-Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, v. 16, p. 575.

<sup>51</sup> F. Schlegel, *Philosophische Fragmente*, IV, 331. In: *Kritische-Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, v. 18, p. 222. Su l'eredità schlegeliana del testo letterario come musica in Kierkegaard, cf. M. Suzuki, “Ironie, musique, concept. Schlegel, Kierkegaard, Hegel”, in *Esthétique et logique*, a cura di Charlotte Morel, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2012, pp. 255-280.

MÁRCIO SUZUKI

La fonte e l'anima di tutte queste emozioni è l'amore, e lo spirito dell'amore deve aleggiare ovunque, visibilmente e invisibilmente, nella poesia romantica.<sup>52</sup>

Il sentimento d'amore contenuto in tutta la musica, in tutta la poesia romantica è un sentimento che ci parla, che ci rivolge la parola: *uns anspricht*; non è "un sentimento sensibile, ma un sentimento spirituale"<sup>53</sup>, che ci mette in comunicazione con gli altri, sia in pensieri, sia in affetti – che, al fine, valgono lo stesso.

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<sup>52</sup> F. Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, In: *Kritische-Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, v. 2, pp. 333-334.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*, p. 333.

# Symphilosophie

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## The Philosopher as Magus

### Novalis and the Esoteric Tradition

*Cecilia Rose Inkol\**

#### ABSTRACT

This article presents an account of Novalis's engagement in the sphere of magic and esoteric philosophy: his theory of magic; his philosophy of Magical Idealism; his engagement with the esoteric tradition in his philosophizing and poetry; and his esoteric studies. Drawing on the esoteric tradition, Novalis develops an original theory of magic as a practice of the will and of faith, connected with love, language, artistic creation, the senses, and politics. Inspired by esoteric efforts and concepts, he develops an analogical theory of the sciences in which all disciplines are intertwined. He envisages philosophy as a divinatory, Freemasonic and alchemical endeavor. I examine the alchemical nuances underpinning Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and Novalis's references to the Presocratic proto-chemist Empedocles. Drawing on extensive evidence, I claim that Novalis presents a philosophy which is esoteric in character and that to fully understand Novalis, it is imperative to include the esoteric tradition in one's analysis. I argue that Novalis was not just a philosopher, but a magus.

*Keywords:* Novalis, magic, esotericism, Empedocles, alchemy

#### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article rend compte de la façon dont Novalis a investi le domaine de la magie et de la philosophie ésotérique à travers une analyse de sa théorie de la magie ; de sa philosophie dite de l'« idéalisme magique » ; de sa confrontation avec la tradition ésotérique dans sa philosophie et dans sa poésie ; et, enfin, de ses études ésotériques. Novalis développe une théorie de la magie comme pratique de la volonté et de la foi liée à l'amour, au langage, à la création artistique, à la sensibilité et à la politique. Il développe une théorie analogique des sciences dans laquelle toutes les disciplines sont entrelacées. Il envisage la philosophie comme une entreprise divinatoire, franc-maçonnique et alchimique. Les références de Novalis à l'alchimie et à Empédocle dans l'*Heinrich von Ofterdingen* sont ici examinées. À l'appui de nombreuses preuves textuelles, ma thèse est donc que Novalis élabore une philosophie à caractère ésotérique et qu'il est nécessaire de tenir compte de cette tradition pour comprendre pleinement Novalis. Je soutiens que Novalis n'était pas seulement un philosophe, mais un mage.

*Mots-clés :* Novalis, magie, ésotérisme, Empédocle, alchimie

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\* MA, PhD candidate, York University, Toronto, 4700 Keele St, North York, ON, M3J 1P3, Canada – [ceciliainkol@gmail.com](mailto:ceciliainkol@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

This article presents an account of Novalis's engagement in the sphere of magic and esoteric philosophy: his theory of magic; his philosophy of Magical Idealism; his engagement with the esoteric tradition in his philosophizing and poetry; and his esoteric studies. Drawing on this heritage, Novalis develops an original theory of magic as a practice of the will and of faith, connected with love, language, and artistic creation, and pertaining to the senses. Novalis also understands magic as political in nature, as at work in the social sphere. Predicated on the magical notion of analogy, and inspired by esoteric encyclopedic efforts, he develops an analogical theory of the sciences in which all disciplines are intertwined with one another, a notion which he puts to practical effect in his philosophizing and poetry which draw upon an array of fields and subjects, incorporating chemistry, physics, geology, and medicine with esoteric concepts. He develops a conception of philosophy as a form of divination, as true free-masonry, and as an alchemical endeavor. His poetic works are rife with alchemical symbolism and motifs; this article will particularly examine the alchemical nuances underpinning Novalis's poetry-and-prose unfinished masterwork *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Novalis's references to and connection with the Presocratic magician-poet-philosopher and proto-chemist Empedocles will be investigated. Novalis's esoteric studies are examined, and I situate his ideas in the esoteric tradition of the creative imagination. I also render an account of how Novalis's esotericism has been interpreted (or misinterpreted) in scholarship.

Esotericism is a multifarious tradition of philosophy of the unseen, of the invisible. This tradition posits the existence of mysterious forces which supersede the materialist model of reality, imparting to existence a dimension of meaning that exists beyond the material frame. Often it is concerned with the elicitation of practical effects through application of metaphysical understanding. The esoteric tradition is related to hidden meanings, clandestine dimensions, secrets, and mystery, landscapes which particularly intersect for Novalis with the poetic arts and artistic sensibility.

Understanding the role of the esoteric tradition in Novalis's thought offers a point of entry and key to his whole philosophy. It is also a neglected yet crucial facet of his thought, hence that is why this topic is being treated here. Drawing on extensive evidence, I claim that Novalis presents a philosophy which is esoteric in character and that to fully understand Novalis, it is imperative to include the esoteric tradition in one's analysis.



Striving to make philosophy more universal and holistic, seeking to tune into the hidden, unseen dimension of life and to elicit practical effects in his philosophizing, Novalis incorporates esotericism in his thinking. I claim that Novalis was not just a philosopher, but a magus. I will demonstrate this by examining Novalis's philosophy particularly as it relates to his overlooked views on magic. The latter is a multifaceted concept in his work. To better grasp the role and power of magic in his thought involves investigating its connections with countless other fields, including among others music, poetry, the imagination, freemasonry, and alchemy.

In what follows, therefore, I will marshal together a great deal of textual material – much of which is still neglected or underappreciated in the research – to justify and support this reading of Novalis as a philosophical magus.

## 2. The Philosopher as Poet, Magician

For Novalis, philosophy is the “theory of poetry,” the true philosopher a poet. Poetry for Novalis is a magical practice, “the magician is a poet,”<sup>1</sup> he recounts, magic a theory of language.<sup>2</sup>

What is magic for Novalis? Endeavoring to restore magic to a place of honor, Novalis explains magic in several interrelated ways: magic is defined in terms of love, madness, faith, and language. It is also connected with nature and pertains to how one employs the senses.

Novalis understands love as the basis of magic, writing that love “works magically.”<sup>3</sup> Novalis gives the examples of the first touch of the hand of one's beloved as an instance of love as magic, the first kiss and so on, saying that the spell and magic of love in such moments is wondrous, eternal, and indissoluble.<sup>4</sup> Novalis understands love as endowed with a supramundane, spiritual aspect. He espouses the biblical notion of God as love,<sup>5</sup> writing: “God is love. Love is the highest reality—the primary cause.”<sup>6</sup> In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, he writes that love is the “eternal secret” which rests with Sophia.<sup>7</sup> Love is the beginning and the end, the highest reality and purpose

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<sup>1</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments II” in: *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Margaret Stoljar (Albany, N.Y.: University of New York Press, 1997), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Novalis, “General Draft”, *Philosophical Writings*, 125.

<sup>3</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, ed. and trans. David W. Wood (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments II”, *Philosophical Writings*, 68.

<sup>5</sup> John 4:7-21 (New International Version).

<sup>6</sup> Novalis, “General Draft”, *Philosophical Writings*, 123.

<sup>7</sup> Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in: *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, ed. and trans. M.J. Hope (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1891), 149.

of world history.<sup>8</sup> Attraction too is a form of magic. Novalis contends that the allure of the object of one's desire is a veritable form of enchantment, relating enchantment to madness:

All enchantment is an artificially aroused madness. All passion is enchantment—a charming girl is a more real enchantress than we think.<sup>9</sup>  
... madness and enchantment are very similar.<sup>10</sup>

Schiller has been cited as a source of inspiration for Novalis's understanding of love and attraction as magic. For in Schiller's "Theosophy of Julius," inspired by esotericism and Kabbalism, love is described as an almighty magnet.<sup>11</sup> Novalis's understanding of love, enchantment and magic as madness are Platonic references. According to a letter written by Schlegel upon first meeting Novalis, Schlegel reports Novalis's favorite authors to be Plato and Hemsterhuis.<sup>12</sup> Plato's *Phaedrus* extols the virtues of madness, saying that "the greatest blessings come by way of madness" citing the prophetic achievements of the Delphic prophetesses, priestesses of Dodona and the Sibyl. The *Phaedrus* goes on to recount that in bygone days, madness was held to be a divine gift, and that great poetry is touched by madness, for skill alone does not make a good poet. Plato defines love as divine madness, saying that the highest form of divine madness is when one who attains the full vision of the mysteries, becomes a 'lover' of the eternal.<sup>13</sup>

Novalis defines magic as a way of using the senses, writing:

Magic is the art of using the world of the senses at will.<sup>14</sup> ... The active use of our organs is nothing more than *magical, wonder-working thinking*, or arbitrary use of the physical world—for willing is nothing more than the magical, *powerful* faculty of thought.<sup>15</sup>

Through employing the sense organs willfully, one creates one's experience of the world, one can transform the corporeal world and one fashions one's

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<sup>8</sup> Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 121; Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 106.

<sup>10</sup> Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 158.

<sup>11</sup> See Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine," *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 1 (2019): 160-1.

<sup>12</sup> O'Brien, Wm. Arctander. *Novalis: Signs of Revolution* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 276.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 244a-253c.

<sup>14</sup> Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 181.

own subjectivity. The will is the capacity to create magic through directing thought and the senses. More will be said on this in a later section.

Magic is an act of faith, and magic requires faith. Magic's effectiveness is reliant upon personal faith; it is only through faith that magic can achieve its effects in one's subjectivity and in the world. Novalis writes that the conviction of God as present among us enables God to be active among us,<sup>16</sup> and says that faith engendered the world.<sup>17</sup> Given that faith "is the effect of the will on the intelligence," then the "power of faith is the will."<sup>18</sup> Faith is the psychical manifestation of the will.

According to Novalis, Nature is connected with magic and poetry: "Nature is a magic city turned to stone," in which the plants, stones, elements, animals possess infinite individuality and are past historical beings.<sup>19</sup> Here:

the physical Magician [Magus] knows how to enliven Nature, and as with his *body*, to use it at will.<sup>20</sup>

That is to say, in Novalis's Magical Idealism the philosopher is a magus and "true philosophy" is envisaged as "realistic idealism."<sup>21</sup> The poetic act is idealizing, and poetry is understood as "true idealism," the "self-consciousness of the universe."<sup>22</sup> Thus, to romanticize something is to render it ideal. Whilst the empiricist is bound to passive thinking, the result of conceiving of the external world as given, the magical idealist employs the extra-mechanical power of the imagination<sup>23</sup> to create magic and render something to ideality.<sup>24</sup> Magical idealism employs a "pure" thought, image, or sensation arising from beyond mechanistic laws to create transformations of oneself and the world.<sup>25</sup> In this way, one can "infuse poetry into existence,"<sup>26</sup> enliven and poetize nature.

Magic is furthermore entwined with language, language as the medium of magic. The words of the poet are "magic words,"<sup>27</sup> and the true letter is

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<sup>16</sup> Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings* 155.

<sup>20</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics", *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, 220.

<sup>22</sup> Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 158.

<sup>23</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Novalis, "On Goethe", *Philosophical Writings*, 107.

<sup>25</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 152.

<sup>26</sup> Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts", *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, 178.

<sup>27</sup> Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 54.

poetic.<sup>28</sup> A single word can be sanctified, poetized<sup>29</sup> and is endued with conjuring power, every word an incantation.<sup>30</sup> Even grammar is philological and philosophical.<sup>31</sup> The act of defining a word is a practice of magic. Novalis refers to a definition as a “generating name,” saying that the “real definition is a magic word.”<sup>32</sup> Explicitly citing Kabbalistic ideas, Novalis espouses that the sign exists in sympathy with what it signifies.<sup>33</sup> Each person possesses her own particular individual language, her individual language as an expression of her spirit. One’s individual language is the key to one’s genius,<sup>34</sup> genius as poetic activity;<sup>35</sup> genius is defined as the ability to treat the objects of one’s imagination as though they were reality.<sup>36</sup>

The spirit is poetic.<sup>37</sup> Poetry is a mode of apprehension. Poetry offers a more profound understanding of life than propositional knowledge and rational scientific investigations are capable of gleaning. Propositions cannot capture an idea, for the idea supersedes all propositions which can be formulated about it.<sup>38</sup> And the poet is better able to understand nature than the mind of the scientist.<sup>39</sup> In short:

Poetry is absolute truth. That is the gist of my philosophy. The more poetic, the more truthful.<sup>40</sup>

Novalis describes poetry as the “hero of philosophy,” the key to its purpose, and meaning. Philosophy elevates poetry to the status of a principle.<sup>41</sup> Poetry sanctifies the most common activity with the highest sympathy, unifying finite and infinite registers.<sup>42</sup> If the philosopher only creates order, the poet loosens all bonds.<sup>43</sup> Inspired by the esoteric *Ars Combinatoria* tradition which

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<sup>28</sup> Novalis, “Miscellaneous Observations”, *Philosophical Writings*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”, *Philosophical Writings*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Novalis, “Teplitz Fragments”, *Philosophical Writings*, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments II”, *Philosophical Writings*, 80.

<sup>33</sup> Novalis, “General Draft”, *Philosophical Writings*, 125.

<sup>34</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”, *Philosophical Writings*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Novalis, “Miscellaneous Observations”, *Philosophical Writings*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments II”, *Philosophical Writings*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 182.

<sup>40</sup> Novalis, “Fugitive Thoughts”, *Novalis: His Life, Thoughts, and Works*, 178.

<sup>41</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”; Novalis, “Logological Fragments II”, *Philosophical Writings*, 54, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”, *Philosophical Writings*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

includes Leibniz and Ramon Llull,<sup>44</sup> Novalis envisages poetry and philosophy as combinatory operations. Poetry elevates something by means of its generation of a novel combination with the whole.<sup>45</sup> As a poetic endeavor, philosophy is the free, imaginary art of creating wholeness from multiplicity; the highest philosophy is constructed from all philosophies.<sup>46</sup>

Novalis develops a mythology of the poet's role in human culture. In the beginning, the poet and priest were not separate vocations, he writes. Later ages would separate their vocations, but the true poet has always been a priest and vice versa.<sup>47</sup> The first art was hieroglyphic. In this art, language or communication was unified with representation or poetry. Its unity was sundered through naming, leading to language in its "true sense," then to its multifarious forms as fine art, philosophy and poetry.<sup>48</sup> This notion will be further elaborated in a later section.

To summarize this section: Novalis equates poetry, magic, and philosophy. Understanding philosophy and poetry as magical arts endues philosophy and poetry with ontological power to create practical effects in the world and in oneself. Novalis seeks to make the mundane extraordinary; through magic, he bequeaths love with a higher, more mysterious aspect, and by defining magic as a practice of the senses, magic becomes a mode of perception. The magus's quest to enliven nature, to render it to ideality, to its highest poetic truth, enables her to overcome mechanistic laws and all perceived limitations. For Novalis, poetry is the original, primordial, and combinatory art.

### 3. Language and Poetry as Music and Mathematics

Novalis relates that language was originally much more musical, but has since become prosaic, unmusical, more like noise. "It must become *song* once *again*," he declares.<sup>49</sup> It is the task of the poet to reawaken language in new melodic variations; the poet's magic words are tones and intonations, her poetry musical. "Language is a musical instrument of ideas,"<sup>50</sup> Novalis

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<sup>44</sup> Martin Dyck, *Novalis and Mathematics: A Study of Friedrich Hardenberg's Fragments on Mathematics and its Relation to Magic, Music, Religion, Philosophy, Language, and Literature* (Vol 27. University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 28; Novalis had in his library Hindenburg's tomes on combinatorial analysis, part of the tradition of Leibniz's *Ars Combinatoria* and Ramon Llull's *Ars Magna*.

<sup>45</sup> Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 70.

<sup>49</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 129.

writes, language endued with a “musical spirit.”<sup>51</sup> History as movement and development is musical, and philosophy is “musical history.” When “the philosopher appears as Orpheus” the Whole will “arrange itself together into true sciences.”<sup>52</sup> Melody, rhythm, meter, and beat are at work in every art and craft. Life itself and destiny as rhythmical. There is rhythm in all skill, skill as the development of rhythm.<sup>53</sup> The soul itself is acoustic.<sup>54</sup> Music exists in natural elements, in plants, animals, stones, and in how they relate to each other. “Musical relations seem to me to be actually the basic relations of nature,” he writes.<sup>55</sup>

In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, poetry is equated with music and magic in two stories recounted by merchants that in addition to taking inspiration from Herodotus’s *Histories*,<sup>56</sup> reference the Pythagorean, Orphic and Empedoclean traditions. Pythagoras and Orpheus were both reputed to be able to tame wild beasts<sup>57</sup> and Pythagoras was known to cure through music, able to direct the virtue of the soul of those who heard his music.<sup>58</sup> The Pythagorean tradition is underpinned by the notion of number as musical, living and spiritual,<sup>59</sup> and Iamblichus relates that the Pythagoreans derived the notion of number as imbued with the essence of Gods from Orphic writers.<sup>60</sup> Pythagoras was reputed to be able to perceive the past and future, and Iamblichus relates that Pythagoras bequeathed to the Greeks the disciplines and researches which would enable them to “perceive the true principles and causes of the universe.”<sup>61</sup> And the poet-philosopher and prophet Empedocles claimed to be able to control the weather at will, among other feats.<sup>62</sup>

One of the stories told by merchants in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* follows from the prelude of the legendary bards in a narration of a particular poet’s

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<sup>51</sup> Novalis, “Monologue”, *Philosophical Writings*, 83.

<sup>52</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 77.

<sup>53</sup> Novalis, “Teplitz Fragments”, *Philosophical Writings*, 109.

<sup>54</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Novalis, “Last Fragments”, *Philosophical Writings*, 154.

<sup>56</sup> Herodotus, *Histories* (New York: Penguin, 1996) I 23f.

<sup>57</sup> Iamblichus, “The Life of Pythagoras” in *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, ed. David Fideler, trans. Kenneth Guthrie (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1987), 70.

<sup>58</sup> Iamblichus, “On the Pythagorean Life” in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavinyas, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 20-22.

<sup>59</sup> David Fideler, “Introduction” in *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> Iamblichus, “The Life of Pythagoras” 94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 224.

adventures who is ejected from a ship at sea, miraculously saved by a dolphin that ferries him to the shore.

In olden times, all nature was more animated than now. [...] We have heard that in past ages there were poets among the Greeks who could charm into life the spirits of the woods, call up gardens in the desert, tame wild beasts, calm the wildest tribes and accustom them to law and order and the enjoyment of the arts of peace, change roaring torrents into placid streams, and excite even the stones to the rhythmic measures of the dance. They were prophets and priests, law-givers and physicians; taught the deepest lore, and could discern the secrets of the future—the secret nature of all things; the virtues and healing power in numbers, herbs, and all creatures. They reduced nature to fixed laws.<sup>63</sup>

The merchants recount the tale of one such poet, rich in jewels, who sought to travel to distant lands. He solicits sailors to ferry him, but their covetousness is aroused by his treasures, though he warns them against taking his treasures. But his warning is not heeded. They plot to throw him overboard and steal his treasures. The poet makes a request to sing a swan song prior to being thrown overboard; the sailors agree to it, stopping their ears so that they would not succumb to his song. But nature would respond to the poet's song. The waves chimed his song, the sun and stars arose in the sky, thousands of fishes leaping in the green waters surrounding the ship. With his wonder-working flute in hand, the poet leaps into the waters, saved by a graceful dolphin who ferries him to shore, and later returns his treasures, whilst the sailors meet their demise.<sup>64</sup>

Another story recounted by the merchants tells of a king's daughter, herself an embodiment of poetry, who falls in love with a commoner, the son of a naturalist. Her beloved teaches her the secrets of nature and "how the world had been created by a wondrous action of sympathy, and how the stars joined together in harmonious motion."<sup>65</sup> Given that the king would not approve of their union, they hide in a subterranean dwelling as she gives birth to a child. They return to the King's palace one year later as the poet-magician enacts a poetic ritual to gain the approval of the king and the public. With lute in hand, he sings the "creation of the world, the beginning of the stars, plants, animals, and men, of the long-forgotten days when love and poetry were lords of all." Then he describes

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<sup>63</sup> Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 67.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

the advent of hate and cruelty, their ceaseless strife with love; ending in the triumph of love over all, the end of sorrow, the return of the Golden Age, and the restoration of nature to the never-ending youth and beauty.<sup>66</sup>

The King's eagle carries the king's diadem to the poet-singer; the poet gives it to his child. The assembly cheers in approval, and the king embraces the couple, holding his grandchild aloft in the air. Then we are told that this "happy land" has evanesced, old legends only recounting that Atlantis has been "swallowed by the sea."<sup>67</sup>

Herodotus's *Histories* recounts anecdotes of runaway princesses (featured in the second tale told by the merchants), preceding a narrative of the life of Solon, which includes his visit to Egypt. Herodotus's *Histories* also recounts the narrative of the bard Arion, inventor of the dithyramb, who is threatened by sailors who want to steal his money, but he is saved by a dolphin after singing a famous Apollonian hymn. Interpreting Arion as an Orpheus-like figure, Novalis attributes Arion's dolphin rescue as result of his dominion over nature through his music. Herodotus's sailors who force the poet overboard face justice when they return to the port safely, but in Novalis's rendition they are shipwrecked. Both versions recount the bard's fortuitous escape on the back of a dolphin.<sup>68</sup> Iamblichus recounts a similar story about Pythagoras; after learning from the Phoenicians, Pythagoras reputedly went to Egypt on a boat of sailors who originally wanted to sell him into slavery, but they were charmed by him instead.<sup>69</sup>

In another reference to the Pythagorean tradition which understood mathematics as creative, musical, living, and a magical expression of the divine, Novalis connects magic and music with mathematics. He writes:

All enjoyment is music conjoined with mathematics. Mathematics is the highest form of life.<sup>70</sup>

Mundane mathematics refers only to law. "Genuine mathematics is the true element of the magician."<sup>71</sup> Novalis differentiates between arithmetician and the mathematician, saying that an arithmetician does not necessarily understand mathematics and vice versa. Mathematics is the "life of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-83.

<sup>68</sup> Frederick Hiebel, *Novalis: German Poet—European Thinker—Christian Mystic* (University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 103.

<sup>69</sup> Iamblichus, "On the Pythagorean Life," 17-18.

<sup>70</sup> Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 229.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*



gods,” religion is “pure mathematics,” and all spiritual messengers are mathematicians.<sup>72</sup>

To conclude this section, music and mathematics are crucial for Novalis’s philosophy because he identifies poetry, language, history, and philosophy as musical in constitution. By relating that true science will only be arrived at once the philosopher appears as Orpheus, Novalis is iterating a musical theory of knowledge, understanding knowledge as fundamentally musical. The Pythagorean and Orphic traditions relay accounts wherein Pythagoras and Orpheus are able to perform magic through music, and this is an understanding Novalis harnesses—music as a form of magic. Music is also related to mathematics in the Pythagorean tradition, understanding mathematics as a spiritual endeavor, an understanding Novalis likewise puts to effect in his philosophizing.

#### 4. Poetry as Artistic Creation, Magician as Artist

Poetry is creation. All poems must have a living individuality.<sup>73</sup>

A magician is an artist of madness.<sup>74</sup>

The spirit is the artist.<sup>75</sup>

To become a human being is an art.<sup>76</sup>

Poetry and magic are practices of artistic creation connected with the generative power underlying one’s subjectivity. The artist’s capacity to create music or painting is a form of magic. The artist doesn’t really need the chisel to paint; she can use anything as a magic wand. Art and music are just mediums in the broader category of magic; they are ways of practicing magic.<sup>77</sup> Knowledge makes requisite expression, materialization, externalization.<sup>78</sup> I evince my understanding through creation and transmutation of my thoughts into things, or vice versa. Novalis writes: “if you cannot make your thoughts into external things, then make external things into thoughts.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Novalis, “Fugitive Thoughts,” 178.

<sup>74</sup> Novalis, “Last Fragments”, *Philosophical Writings*, 158.

<sup>75</sup> Novalis, “General Draft”, *Philosophical Writings*, 121.

<sup>76</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”, *Philosophical Writings*, 65.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>79</sup> Novalis, “General Draft”, *Philosophical Writings*, 126.

Every literary work comprises a living individual, a novel individual combination. The artist creates life: “the artist has vivified the germ of self-formative life in his sense organs.”<sup>80</sup> In addition to creating living artistic works, the artist fashions her own subjectivity. The self is constructed, an artistic construction:

The philosopher approaches this construction by creating artificial elements [...] Self is not a product of nature [...] but an artistic one—an art—a work of art.<sup>81</sup>

The veritable artist can create herself however she pleases, a self-creation. She fashions her own subjectivity. “The true artist can make himself anything that he likes.”<sup>82</sup> “The artist turns himself into everything he sees and wants to be.”<sup>83</sup> The greatest magician would be able to enchant herself such that her enchantments would seem to her as autonomous phenomena engendered by others. Perhaps such is at work with us, Novalis muses.<sup>84</sup>

The power of the artist to create is predicated on the creative power of her subjectivity, a notion he derives from Fichte. Novalis conceived he had found in Fichte’s conception of the imagination the key unlocking a forgotten understanding he found traces of in Boehme and Paracelsus, though the Kantian signature was too deeply inscribed in Fichte for Novalis to conceive of him as a veritable continuator of Boehme.<sup>85</sup> Fichte made the “transcendental” poesy possible in the way he revealed the ground of all activity in the systematic way that the “Ich” (‘I’) projects itself. Novalis envisions his “logology” as the new science that expands Fichte’s philosophy.<sup>86</sup>

Whereas the scholar and craftsman are mechanical in their combination of disparate forces, the philosopher and artist organically “combine freely by means of a pure idea and separate according to a free idea.”<sup>87</sup> The artist as “completely transcendental,” she “stands on the human being as a statue does on a pedestal.”<sup>88</sup> Only the artist is privy to the meaning of life; she perceives hidden meanings and is able to discern what is important among a multiplicity of appearances:

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<sup>80</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments II”, *Philosophical Writings*, 72.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>82</sup> Novalis, “Fugitive Thoughts,” 178.

<sup>83</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”, *Philosophical Writings*, 56.

<sup>84</sup> Novalis, “Teplitz Fragments”, *Philosophical Writings*, 109.

<sup>85</sup> Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2000), 117.

<sup>86</sup> O’Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 138.

<sup>87</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments II”, *Philosophical Writings*, 78.

<sup>88</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”, *Philosophical Writings*, 55.

Only an artist can divine the meaning of life.<sup>89</sup>

The real observer is an artist; he guesses at hidden meanings, and perceives among many appearances which are the truly important.<sup>90</sup>

## 5. Magic as Political

One word of command moves armies—the word liberty—nations.<sup>91</sup>

Novalis envisions that his new poesy and logology will revolutionize society and transform knowledge. Art offers an oblique presentation of the Absolute and propels the will of the individual upon reality as an effect. Though it needs to work “in accordance with an ideal,” art has the capacity to exercise practical power.<sup>92</sup> Crystallized in February 1800, Novalis envisioned *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a political allegory. Hardenberg refers to it as “his political novel” meant to evince “the transition from the finite to the infinite.”<sup>93</sup>

*Heinrich von Ofterdingen* expands his earlier thinking to show how a post-Fichtean poetics imparts a politics with a “magical” or “transcendent” character self-consciously employing poetic ritual to create harmonious political institutions and extol poesy as an ideal. In *Heinrich*’s Atlantis story about the commoner who obtains the approval of the King and the assembly through his musical, poetic performance, the evidence for magic exists in its shared effects—the poet does not just imagine but obtains public approval through a poetic ritual that fashions a new reality.<sup>94</sup> There is a message in it concerning the poet’s rightful position in society, poetry as legitimate source of political power. Atlantis is described as a poetical kingdom; we are told that poetry was a great preoccupation of the king, his daughter the embodiment of the spirit of poetry itself, her beloved a poet of philosophical learning, the offspring of the princess and her beloved bequeathed the king’s crown. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis writes that what makes the king in this poetical kingdom is not his crown or sceptre but

the feeling of complete satisfaction, the plenitude of earthly joy, the sensation of superabundant possessions.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>90</sup> Novalis, “Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics,” 235.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>92</sup> O’Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 116.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>95</sup> Novalis, “Heinrich von Ofterdingen,” 78.

## 6. Poetry and Philosophy as Connected with All Other Sciences Through Analogy

Every science will be poesy—after it has become philosophy.<sup>96</sup>

All analogy is symbolical.<sup>97</sup>

August Coelestin Just, the friend and supervisor of Novalis, writes in his biography of the latter:

His keenest wish was to bring back all art and science to first principles, and raise them to the dignity of true science, uniting them all in one complete whole. According to his conviction, there was a perfect harmony and union between them. With this object, he excluded no subject from his study.<sup>98</sup>

Connected on the one hand with Novalis's notion of the first art as hieroglyphic, a single art which sundered into disparate arts and disciplines, and inspired on the other by the encyclopedic endeavors of Leibniz's *scientia generalis* and Descartes's *mathesis universalis* which sought to encompass all knowledge,<sup>99</sup> Novalis espouses that all sciences exist as mutually interwoven with another.<sup>100</sup> All cognition and knowledge can be reduced to comparisons and resemblances.<sup>101</sup> Every separate art and science is predicated on only partial harmonies.<sup>102</sup> The mutual interweaving of all sciences stipulates that philosophy can never be completed. Philosophy will only be truly understood once all other sciences achieve perfection.<sup>103</sup>

All sciences are connected through the magical art of analogy, how all ideas are interwoven with one another: "All ideas are related: analogy means *air de famille*." Given that the human exists in analogical relationship with the universe, all knowledge is predicated on the self, on self-knowledge:

The most wonderful and eternal phenomenon is oneself. Man is the greatest of mysteries. [...] Philosophy, science, and literature all seek to solve the riddle.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 125.

<sup>97</sup> Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 226.

<sup>98</sup> August Just, "Life of Novalis," 29.

<sup>99</sup> Dyck, *Novalis and Mathematics*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 221.

<sup>101</sup> Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 60.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>103</sup> Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 221.

<sup>104</sup> Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts," 187.

Analogy is connected with the faculty of wit. Novalis defines wit as the “principle of affinities” and the “menstruum universal.”<sup>105</sup> Wit resides at the juncture between imagination and judgment. In its spiritual aspect, Novalis says that there is a form of wit which “is only a magical play of colors in higher spheres.”<sup>106</sup>

For Novalis, the original unity of all disciplines coincides with a lost primordial meaning. The Romantic agent gleans the original meaning by making it new through poetization. “The world must be made Romantic,” for one to

find the original meaning again. To make Romantic is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power. [...] By endowing the commonplace with higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it Romantic.<sup>107</sup>

There is an original ancient truth; truth is unchanging, but novelty exists in terms of how the ancient truth is expressed anew, and this is the task of the poet.

All truth is ancient. The stimulus of novelty lies only in variety of expression. The more contrast in its forms, the greater the pleasure of recognition.<sup>108</sup>

The consequences we can draw from this for Novalis’s philosophy are: i) Novalis extols poetry as universal science that combines all disciplines, including magic. This is Novalis’s theory of everything. ii) Novalis extols knowledge as fundamentally creative yet eternally unchanging. He articulates the existence of a primordial truth which is eternal, but knowledge is the creative, poetic reconstruction of the eternal. This understanding he predicates upon a magical or poetical history of an original unity which was sundered.

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<sup>105</sup> Novalis, “Miscellaneous Observations”, *Philosophical Writings*, 32.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>107</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”, *Philosophical Writings*, 60.

<sup>108</sup> Novalis, “Monologue”, *Philosophical Writings*, 85.

## 7. Philosophy as Divination, Connected with Prophecy and Memory

Nothing is more poetic than memory and premonition, or the conception of the future.<sup>109</sup>

The antiquities are at once products of the future and of times past.<sup>110</sup>

Philosophy is antihistorical from the ground up. It moves from the world of the future and the necessary to the real. It is the study of the general sense of divination. It explains the past from the future, whereas in history the contrary is the case.<sup>111</sup>

The veritable poet is all-knowing.<sup>112</sup> She is a prophet of the future, who unites past and future within herself. Novalis cites memory and premonition of the future as what is most poetic. In the mundane everyday, they are joined in limited form. But a spiritual present binds them together, their mixture the poet's element.<sup>113</sup> The worlds of eternity, the past and future, exist within oneself.<sup>114</sup> Philosophy as ahistorical, moving from future world to the necessary and real, comprises a study of divination, explaining the past from the standpoint of the future.<sup>115</sup> Novalis identifies analysis in a general sense with divination, divination as the "art of discovery reduced to rules."<sup>116</sup> Imagination perceives the future world "in a relation of metempsychosis to ourselves."<sup>117</sup> Originating in the ancient world, divination lies in the magical realm.

## 8. Philosophy as Alchemy, True Freemasonry

Connected with the notion of philosophy as divinatory practice, Novalis writes that the philosopher's stone is the "fullness of the future" "which is everywhere and nowhere, everything and nothing."<sup>118</sup> He relates the task of philosophy to the endeavor of attaining the philosopher's stone; it is concerned with ideal rather than material attainment.

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<sup>109</sup> Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 121.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>112</sup> Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 80.

<sup>113</sup> Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 45.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>115</sup> Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 136.

<sup>116</sup> Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 218.

<sup>117</sup> Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 25.

<sup>118</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 177.

There is no philosophy *in concreto*. Philosophy, like the philosopher's stone—the squaring of the circle etc. — is simply a necessary task of the scientist—the *ideal of science* in general.<sup>119</sup>

But philosophy can offer one “God, freedom and immortality.”<sup>120</sup> Following the esoteric and Neoplatonic<sup>121</sup> maxim that the human can attain to divinity, Novalis espouses that every person who “lives from God and through God, will himself become God.”<sup>122</sup> He writes that God can only be known by a God,<sup>123</sup> and that God exists in all things. Novalis writes: “He who seeks God will find Him everywhere.”<sup>124</sup>

Novalis envisions a ‘true freemasonry’ binding all veritable thinkers in a spiritual hierarchy:

The basis of all eternal attachment is an absolute tendency in all directions. On this rests the power of the hierarchy, of true freemasonry, and the invisible bond of true thinkers—herein lies the possibility of a universal republic.<sup>125</sup>

In his mundane life, Novalis was a mining engineer, a connection which enlivened his imagination for its alchemical resonances, resonances which would find poetic expression in his creative life through *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. He relates the craft of mining to the alchemical endeavor, saying that “there is no craft which makes men nobler and happier, which awakens greater faith in heavenly wisdom and forethought.”<sup>126</sup> The miner is not selfish in her endeavors to glean the metallic powers: “It is enough for him that he knows the hiding-places of the metallic powers, and can bring them forth to light; but their brilliancy does not raise thoughts of covetousness in his pure heart.”<sup>127</sup> The miner does not seek attainment of precious metals, she only desires knowledge, alongside loving union and peace: “How patiently does the miner work on in the deep abyss, away from the tumult of the world, desiring only knowledge, and loving union and peace.”<sup>128</sup> The miner “breaks

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>121</sup> Algis Uzdavynys, “Neoplatonic Hermeneutics and the Way to God,” in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavynys (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 112.

<sup>122</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 47.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>124</sup> Novalis, “Fugitive Thoughts,” 197.

<sup>125</sup> Novalis, “Miscellaneous Observations”, *Philosophical Writings*, 36.

<sup>126</sup> Novalis, “Heinrich von Ofterdingen,” 95.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

down the intervening obstacles till he reaches the true golden strata. Thus the miner is exposed to all the caprices of fortune, though he retains the belief that only through diligence and perseverance can he overcome them, and obtain the bravely guarded treasure.”<sup>129</sup> Referencing the Pythagorean connection between magic and music, the miner has a special musical sensibility: “song and the zither are part of a miner’s life. No class of men are more susceptible to melody.”<sup>130</sup>

*Heinrich von Ofterdingen* opens with the titular character dreaming of Novalis’s famous image of the blue flower, its petals opening to reveal “a lovely tender face.”<sup>131</sup> Novalis’s famous emblem of the blue flower has an alchemical origin. A 1582 Alchemical Illustration from Basle credited to H. Reussner depicts three flowers growing out of the “Mercurial tail-eater” Ouroboros. The blue center rose of the depicted is referred to as the “flower of wisdom.”<sup>132</sup>

## 9. The Alchemical Process in Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

Klingsohr in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* recounts an alchemical fairy tale of the marriage of Fable and Eros. The plot concerns the attempted usurpation of Eros by the Scribe and the renewal of the kingdom, finally brought to fruition by princess Freya’s marriage to Eros. Eros departs from the family to undertake a series of adventures and the scribe schemes the mother’s death inside a cave where the three Fates dwell. The villainous Scribe and cohorts were in midst of immolating the primal mother on a great pyre, its flames devouring the sun. The Sun falls into sea as black dross, startling the scribe and cohorts.

I interpret this as a reference to the first alchemical stage of purification, the nigredo or black sun. I will now outline in more detail various alchemical stages to be found in this fairy tale.

The first stage of the black sun comprises “a dark material fire” that distinguishes spirit and soul from what has been putrefied.<sup>133</sup> The sisterly trio of the Fates force Fable to spin dresses from tarantula webs. Fable is instructed to soak thread in spider juice so it won’t break and interweave flowers which have grown in fire; otherwise, the sisters will ensure Fable’s death. Fable’s singing ensures the spiders spin the dresses.<sup>134</sup> Then Fable

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>132</sup> Alexander Roob. *Alchemy and Mysticism* (Köln: Taschen, 2020), 342.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>134</sup> Novalis, “Heinrich von Ofterdingen,” 148.



goes to Arcturus and asks the king for fire flowers. The king calls the gardener named Zinc and requests from him flowers. The gardener brings a vessel full of fire and sows shining seeds therein. Flowers spring up, which Fable brings to the spiders, who fasten the flowers to the dresses.<sup>135</sup> The sisters approve of the dresses and deceitfully promise Fable long life and rewards in return.

The second alchemical stage proceeding from the nigredo is the albedo, a white stage of further purification. Zinc is a metal with special alchemical significance; it is reputed that alchemists would burn zinc to produce a wooly precipitate referred to as ‘philosopher’s wool.’ I interpret Fable’s spinning of the dresses in this light. With the ends of the threads still in the dresses, the spiders eat the sisterly trio of the Fates. Fable looks from a cleft in a rock and sees Perseus with a great shield of iron. The shears fly to the iron shield and Fable asks him to use them to trim the wings of Eros, and then to immortalize the sisters upon his shield and finish the great work. Fable says:

The flax is spun. The dead have lost their power. The living will rule and use all things. The hidden will be manifested, and the seen hidden. The curtain is about to rise on a new scene. Yet once more I crave a boon, then I will sit and spin to all eternity.<sup>136</sup>

Fable goes with Turmaline, the gardener, and Gold to gather the ashes of her mother. They traverse until they come to an immobile old giant. Gold places a coin in his mouth. Fable touches his eyes and pours out a vessel upon his forehead. As the water trickles down his face, his face becomes animated. Fable tells the old giant: “The earth is again light,” the “old days are returning,” the garden of the Hesperides “will soon bloom again, and perfume the air with its golden fruit.”<sup>137</sup>

Fable hands the urn containing the ashes to Sophia, who embraces her tenderly. Sophia tells Fable:

Dearest child, your zeal and faith have won you a place amid the eternal stars. You have chosen the undying potion, the Phoenix is yours. You will be the soul of our life. Now wake up the bridegroom.<sup>138</sup>

Fable rejoices and calls her companions Gold and Zinc. Gold melts a coin, impelling a glittering stream. Zinc winds a chain around Ginnistan’s neck. The chain touches the flood, her bridegroom awakens, who draws his bride to his bosom. The metal turns into a clear and liquid mirror, a mirror which

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

reflects things truly, destroying all hurtful illusions. She takes the urn, shakes the ashes into a bowl upon the altar. Sophia hands the bowl to Eros, and all imbibed from it, the mother's presence felt among them. Sophia declares:

The great secret is now revealed, but remains unfathomable. The new world rises from pain, and eternity is revealed to tears. The heavenly mother lives in each of her children. Do you not feel the new life within you?<sup>139</sup>

Gold is the end of the alchemical endeavor, an emblem of the alchemist's refined soul. The primal mother is revived in spirit through the alchemical process, the earth renewed, its hero Fable, with her companions Gold and Zinc, impar-ting that Fable's poetic imagination is the key to alchemical transmutation and renewal.

Novalis offers some insight into why tourmaline would be involved in an alchemical process from his scientific studies in Freiburg; he writes: "Tourmaline is at once constantly magnetic and constantly electric—it possesses the *greatest irritability* against both forces."<sup>140</sup> Tourmaline is a pyroelectric semi-precious mineral, referred to as the "electric" crystal. The term *pyro* derives from the Greek word which means 'fire' for the effect which is elicited when tourmaline is heated. Tourmaline generates electric charges when heated.<sup>141</sup> The notion of the world as again light can be viewed as an alchemical transmutation in a philosophical fragment in which Novalis writes that metaphysics and astronomy comprise a single science: "The sun is to astronomy what God is to metaphysics. Freedom and immortality are like light and heat."<sup>142</sup> The sun as an emblem of God is a Platonic<sup>143</sup> and alchemical notion, as seen in the works of Neoplatonic esotericist Robert Fludd<sup>144</sup> and in alchemist Georg von Welling's *Opus-Mago-Cabbalisticum*.<sup>145</sup>

The mother who the scribe views as his enemy is chaos; in early Greek myth, chaos is the mother of eros. Chaos must be transmuted through flame. In his philosophical writings, Novalis articulates the flame as a symbol of the

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>140</sup> Novalis, "Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies (1798/99)" in *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 199.

<sup>141</sup> Yuriy M. Poplavko. *Electronic Materials: Principles and Applied Science* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2018), 545.

<sup>142</sup> Novalis, "General Draft," 127.

<sup>143</sup> Algis Uzdaviny, "Plato's Dialogues and Letters," in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdaviny, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 68.

<sup>144</sup> William Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1988), 108.

<sup>145</sup> Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 19.

genesis of life and self-transcension, and in this way a symbol of philosophy philosophizing itself, in which it is consumed and renewed.<sup>146</sup> In another instance Novalis articulates fire as a symbol of one's being and of religious feeling.<sup>147</sup> Hiebel evinces Novalis's symbolism of the flame as a symbol of Christ. Understanding the flame as symbol of Christ, imbibing from a chalice containing the mother's ashes becomes a communion ceremony.<sup>148</sup> Sophia makes the proclamation that tears shall be ashes, new world birthed. Connected with the image of the flame is the Phoenix which rises from the ashes. The Phoenix is an ancient alchemical emblem symbolizing the resurrection of Christ. In the alchemical milieu, the Phoenix was equated with the Lapis or philosopher's stone, characterizing the renewal of life. Hence why Sophia tells Fable: "Yours is the Phoenix." Hiebel writes:

And Fable perches on the wings of the Phoenix, hovering above the throne that has finally become transformed into a marriage bed. The meaning of this transformation is what the alchemists termed the 'chymical marriage.' Fable under the influence of the Scribe is but the didactic prosody of rationalism. But Fable on the pinions of the Phoenix becomes the priestess of Christ.<sup>149</sup>

## 10. The Philosopher's Stone

Another alchemical image meriting mention in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is the princess's red stone in the Atlantean fairy tale told by the merchants. In it, Novalis describes a mysterious red carbuncle that can be interpreted as a poetic emblem of the alchemists' philosopher's stone. After meeting the princess for the first time, the son of the naturalist finds a large, dark red "carbuncle" in the forest, one side brilliant and sparkling, the other inscribed with mysterious ciphers. It was the costly carbuncle of the princess, gifted to her by her mother, a talisman of protection which ensured she could not fall into another's power against her will.<sup>150</sup> Hiebel calls the princess's stone "a symbol of the heart."<sup>151</sup> In my interpretation, Novalis's description of it suggests that the talisman can be interpreted as an image of the philosopher's stone.

The philosopher's stone is most frequently envisioned in the alchemical imagination as red or white, although it has been described as black powder;

<sup>146</sup> Novalis, "General Draft," 64.

<sup>147</sup> Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments," 108.

<sup>148</sup> Hiebel, *Novalis*, 65.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>150</sup> Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 74-75.

<sup>151</sup> Hiebel, *Novalis*, 104.

sometimes it is even yellow, blue, or green. Matching up with Novalis's description, Raymond Lull refers to the philosopher's stone as "carbunculus," and Paracelsus characterizes it as red, comprised of a solid body akin to a ruby, yet flexible and transparent. Bereward describes it as the color of wild poppy, its smell akin to heated sea salt.<sup>152</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century alchemist Starkey envisions the philosopher's stone as "sparkling red."<sup>153</sup> Emma Jung writes that according to tradition, the philosopher's stone is both priceless and exceedingly common, discarded by others, its cheapness can be interpreted to mean that the philosopher's stone indwells all as a seed and a potential.<sup>154</sup> Other names for the philosopher's stone include: the Essence, Stone of the Wise, Magnum Opus, Quintessence, Universal Essence. 13<sup>th</sup> century writer Wolfram von Eschenbach equates the philosopher's stone with the holy grail, saying that its power enables the phoenix to withstand fire and rise again rejuvenated from ashes.<sup>155</sup> The holy grail and the philosopher's stone are also connected with mysterious writings and with Christ. Emma Jung writes that the holy grail is reputed to articulate the will of God through writing which appears upon it.<sup>156</sup> For the Christian alchemist, the philosopher's stone is equated with Christ, as seen in the works of Fludd and Khunrath.<sup>157</sup> Gottfried Arnold describes Christ as "the heavenly lovingness of the ruby or carbuncle-stone."<sup>158</sup> Carl Jung has evinced the philosopher's stone as a symbol of the inner spiritual human, a symbol of God encrypted in nature, analogous to Christ as the divine having assumed a human form and endured suffering.<sup>159</sup> The philosopher's stone as the stone of the heart fits well with Novalis's understanding: "The heart is the key to the world and to life," he writes, equating Christ with the heart.<sup>160</sup>

The philosopher's stone true name, writes alchemist Basil Valentine, is All in All. In this way, the Stone was conceived as God immanent in creation, whilst simultaneously transcending it; this was a way for the Christian alchemist to refer to Christ.<sup>161</sup> In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis can be

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<sup>152</sup> C. J. S. Thompson, *Lure and Romance of Alchemy* (London: George G. Harrap, 1932), 71.

<sup>153</sup> Ronald Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2010), 17.

<sup>154</sup> Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, trans. Andrea Dykes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 157.

<sup>155</sup> Jung and von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, 152.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>157</sup> Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 19.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>160</sup> Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments," 107.

<sup>161</sup> Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 20.

interpreted as referencing the philosopher's stone as all that lives in all and the heart in a single verse:

Ein jeder lebt in Allen,  
Und All' in jedem auch.  
Ein Herz wird in euch wallen,  
Von einem Lebenshauch.<sup>162</sup>

Each will in all be dwelling,  
And all in each one too;  
One heart in you be swelling,  
One breath the whole imbue.<sup>163</sup>

Fitting with *Heinrich von Ofterdingen's* depiction of the gardener accompanying Turmaline and Gold on an alchemical quest to make the world again light, the philosopher's stone was also conceived by the alchemists as a seed. The alchemists conceived the philosopher's stone to exist in embryonic form within all things as a central point, spark or seed that could be made to grow until it fully encompassed the subject. All natural objects, not just humans and living beings, were conceived to possess this central point or seed, which if nurtured, could engender the highest manifestation of the object or subject. To develop the seed of gold that resides within oneself, it is requisite that the alchemist purify her base desires, transmute them to achieve harmony.<sup>164</sup> Paracelsus referred to this seed as "a small spark of the eternal invisible fire."<sup>165</sup> The seed as the central node is articulated by Gottfried Arnold: "in general, the Center is the innermost ground of every thing, for which reason there are various Centra. In man, the Center is God Himself, or the faded image of God..." Georg von Welling likewise writes that eternal joy can be found in "the center of peace, that is, in God" and refers to "the tincture which is Christ Jesus himself, the beginning and the end, the center of the revealed divine eternity." Louvigni refers to Christ as the "centre of peace."<sup>166</sup> Novalis invokes the alchemical notion of the central point in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen's* famous poetic interlude *Astralis*:

Wollust ist meines Daseins Zeugungskraft,  
Ich bin der Mittelpunkt, der heilige Quell,  
Aus welchem jede Sehnsucht stürmisch fließt,

<sup>162</sup> Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen: Ein Roman* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987), 136.

<sup>163</sup> Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, translated by Palmer Hilty (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1964), 134.

<sup>164</sup> Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 25.

<sup>165</sup> Quoted in *Goethe the Alchemist*, 26.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in *Goethe the Alchemist*, 26.

Wohin sich jede Sehnsucht, mannigfach  
Gebrochen, wieder still zusammen zieht.<sup>167</sup>

Sweet lust is of my life the fountainhead,  
I am the midpoint and the holy spring,  
Whence every stormy longing dashes forth,  
And whither every longing, being broken,  
Returns again to restful quietude.<sup>168</sup>

In addition to elucidating alchemical valences in Novalis's work, this section has explicated that Novalis interprets the task of philosophy as the attainment of the philosopher's stone, thereby equating philosophy with the endeavor of alchemy. He understands the philosopher's stone as the heart and as Christ.

### 11. The Magic of Empedocles

The final sections of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* authored just prior to Novalis's death can be interpreted as referencing Empedocles. In an analogy to Novalis's own life, Heinrich's love Mathilda has died, but his journey continuing onward, he meets a pilgrim, a girl named Cyane. Cyane leads him to the physician Sylvester, who relates to Heinrich that he was raised near Mount Etna, where his father, an astrologer and healer, attracted many visitors from far off lands.<sup>169</sup> I interpret these as a litany of references to Empedocles. From study of his work, one gleans that Novalis's poetic references are not frivolous, but are endued with hidden meaning.

Cyane's name is redolent of the mystical blue flower in which he perceived Mathilda's face, its meaning dark blue. Her name has another, more mytho-logical connotation: in Greek myth, Kyane is a naiad who witnesses Hades's abduction of Persephone to the underworld, and the spring wherein Persephone was said to be abducted.<sup>170</sup> Kyane is also connected with the cultic mysteries of Empedocles, a doublet of Persephone as her own story mirrors that of Persephone.<sup>171</sup> Persephone, under the moniker Nestis, is one of Empedocles' four elements conceived as divinities; her element is water. The name Sylvester too has a meaning which can be interpreted to hint at Empedocles; the name Sylvester means 'wooded' or 'wild.' Empedocles referred to the four elements as roots,<sup>172</sup> and his

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<sup>167</sup> Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen: Ein Roman*, 155.

<sup>168</sup> Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, translated by Palmer Hilty, 151.

<sup>169</sup> Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 169.

<sup>170</sup> Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, 97.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

philosophy is riddled with metaphors related to trees and wood. The ideas of the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles were appropriated by alchemists; in a sense he can be viewed as the father or forerunner of alchemy.<sup>173</sup> Empedocles was a poet, prophet, magician, healer, and philosopher who claimed to possess supernatural powers. He maintained that he was able to retrieve dead souls from Hades and professed to possess knowledge of ‘pharmaka,’ meaning spells or remedies, which will endow immortality.<sup>174</sup> Legend has it that Empedocles sought to prove his immortality in the fiery lava of Mount Etna, its landscape inextricably bound up with him.

As a poet-philosopher and magical practitioner with an interest in medicine, Novalis surely would have felt great kinship with Empedocles, whilst Empedocles’s claim to be able to retrieve souls from Hades, the realm of the dead, would have appealed to Novalis on a personal level. Novalis’s personal mythology is strongly reflected in his creative work as a way of processing and granting a higher meaning to his personal tragedies, poetry as a modality of healing. Further resonances with Empedocles can be gleaned in his philosophical writings. Empedocles refers to a Golden Age prior to human incarnation ruled by the force of Love;<sup>175</sup> he also conceives that the force of Love will reign again in the future, notions which coalesce with Novalis’s notion of an original paradisiacal unity which sundered, but which will be achieved again in futurity.

## 12. Novalis’s Alchemical and Esoteric Studies

Novalis’s father insisted that that poet-lawyer Novalis attend Freiberg’s famous mining academy, where he studied under Johann Wilhelm Ritter’s (1776-1810) tutelage. Ritter would teach him electrical physiology and alchemy.<sup>176</sup>

The works of alchemist-philosopher Jakob Boehme were popular among the German Romantics, first referenced by members of the Jena circle in 1798 in a letter from Schlegel to Novalis, Schlegel mentioning that Ludwig Tieck has undertaken a study of Boehme. Tieck introduced Novalis to Boehme, Novalis commemorating the introduction with a poem where he refers to Tieck as “herald of the morning Glow.” August Just writes in his biography of Novalis that following his fiancée Sophie’s death, he “became

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>175</sup> Robin Waterfield, ed., “Empedocles of Aracragas, in *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153.

<sup>176</sup> Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 34-5.

devoted to the writings of Lavater and Zinzendorf, various book of Roman Catholic devotion, and even Jacob Boehme's works." He also writes that Novalis found in Boehme's works "the highest poetry." It is known that Novalis borrowed Boehme's works from the Weimar library in August 1799. Novalis was immersed in a study of Boehme in the winter of 1799-1800. However, in his Pietist upbringing,<sup>177</sup> he would have already encountered Boehme's Christocentric vision and Sophianic mysticism; the Pietist branch founded by Zinzendorf has been cited as especially occult-minded.<sup>178</sup> Novalis extols Boehme as a Romantic poet-prophet and in mythical form through his poetic imagination; Boehme appears as a character in his poem *An Tieck*. Novalis saw Boehme as a prototype and precursor of his own Romantic endeavor as a poet-philosopher.<sup>179</sup>

Hans-Joachim Mähl's 1963 article "Novalis und Plotin" demonstrates the influence of Neoplatonism on Novalis. In addition to his Pietist upbringing, Novalis's familiarity with ancient and early Neoplatonism laid the groundwork for his later reception of Boehme. Mähl writes that Novalis became familiarized with Neoplatonism as early as mid 1798.<sup>180</sup> Novalis read Sprengel in the fall of 1798, through which he acquired knowledge of emanation theories deriving from ancient Persia, the Kabbalah, and Paracelsus. His notes from this study evince that he particularly retained the notions of a divine origin of language, divine emanation and of all things as joined through mysterious sympathies as an outcome of divine emanation. Novalis extracted lengthy excerpts from this study pertaining to Paracelsus concerning Paracelsus's relation to ancient emanation theories, his theory of signatures, and his conception of cosmic sympathies and harmony. Also during that time, Novalis studied Tiedemann; in his studies of Tiedemann, Novalis retained passages pertaining to Paracelsus (especially related to the notion that one only perceives God in the way He manifests through His creatures), the Boehme commentator Pordage, and Giordano Bruno. By December, Novalis was occupied with Tiedemann's extensive Plotinus exposition. Mähl extracts these main themes from Novalis's Tiedemann studies: emanation theory and the concept of the world soul (neither were new to Novalis), ecstasis as a path to intuition of the divine and as inner light, Plotinus' theory of the One and hypostases as sharing a kinship with Fichte's logic of the ego principle's self-unfolding, and Plotinus's figurative language,

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<sup>177</sup> O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 242.

<sup>178</sup> Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 48.

<sup>179</sup> Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 81-83.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-80.



the notion that poetic creativity can infiltrate the creative workings of nature through imitation of it.<sup>181</sup>

### 13. The Imagination: Novalis and the Esoteric Tradition

The noted scholar of esotericism Antoine Faivre cites imagination as a hallmark of esoteric thought.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, for Novalis, imagination underpins life. Novalis in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* extols imagination as source of reality. The imagination for Novalis is the source of magic, the poetic organ, and the principle of reality that enables one to overcome the determinism of fate, as poetically evinced in Fable's overcoming of the Three Fates. Imagination bequeaths one with freedom, and as the power of conscience, it enables one to access the highest realities.

As Novalis studied Paracelsus, Boehme, and alchemy, there are congruences between Novalis's conception of the imagination with those espoused by Paracelsus, Boehme, and in alchemical thought. Like Novalis, Paracelsus bequeaths the imagination with the power to create effects in the world and as linked to faith. Paracelsus envisions the imagination as intermediary between being and thinking, perceiving it as incarnating thought through the image. The human's three great faculties he defines as soul (*Gemüth*), imagination and faith. He defines the *Gemüth* as the "bursting of sidereal power into us, the preeminent connection of our opening to the invisible world, which governs us from inside ourselves." Faith "produces imagination, this produces a star, and this in turn an effect. Faith produces imagination in God."<sup>183</sup> Novalis describes magic as a "starlike force" saying that through magic, the human "will become powerful like the stars," and that the human is "intimately related to the stars."<sup>184</sup> Also related to stars, one recalls how in Klingsohr's tale of Fable and Eros in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Sophia tells Fable: "Dearest child, your zeal and faith have won you a place amid the eternal stars."<sup>185</sup> Whilst Novalis's espousal of eternal life amongst the stars can be connected to Paracelsus's sidereal concepts, the notion of stellar eternal life originates in the Egyptian mythic and magical tradition that seeps into Platonic and Neo-Platonic discourse.<sup>186</sup> In an

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-83.

<sup>182</sup> Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>183</sup> Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 102.

<sup>184</sup> Novalis, "Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies," 208.

<sup>185</sup> Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen", 153.

<sup>186</sup> Algis Uzdaviny, "Porphyry's On the Cave of the Nymphs and the Spiritual Exegesis of Homer" In *The Heart of Plotinus*, ed. Algis Uzdaviny, 233-4.

additional connection with Paracelsus, Novalis's conception of the human as "messiah of nature," the human as charged with the duty to redeem nature also exists in Paracelsus.<sup>187</sup>

Like Boehme, Novalis envisions an original paradisiacal state of unity that was sundered, and the original human as endowed with divine powers. Boehme also employs flame symbolism to denote the sacred. In Boehme's understanding, the original fall occurred through a misuse or perversion of imagination, but one can revert it to its original direction and achieve original unity again. When one's faith is exalted sufficiently, the sacred flame shines forth. For Boehme, God's manifestation is achieved through His imagination, the imagining of a veritable image, imagined in the mirror of Sophia. Boehme associated imagination with magic, writing: "Imaginatio macht Wesenheit," the imagination determines the essence.<sup>188</sup> One recalls in Klingsohr's tale of Eros and Fable in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* that Sophia counsels the other characters to consult the mirror "which reflected everything in its genuine shape, and destroyed all hurtful illusions."<sup>189</sup> The image of the mirror which reflects the true nature of things recurs in the work of esotericist Rudolf Steiner.<sup>190</sup>

The alchemical text the *Rosarium Philosophorum* relates that the great work can only be achieved with true imagination rather than fantastical imagination.<sup>191</sup> "Imagination alone reveals to me what this present world is," Novalis writes.<sup>192</sup> For Novalis, imagination evinces the highest truth, as "the higher organ" and his poetic endeavor seeks to reveal truth. Whilst poetry has a certain basis in illusion, it is illusion which is reflective of a higher truth:

Poetry heals the wounds given by reason. Its elements are of a totally opposite character, and may be described as elevated truth and agreeable illusion.<sup>193</sup>

#### 14. Scholarly Misconceptions: Novalis and the Esoteric Tradition

Whilst there is positive momentum with respect to the recognition of Novalis's esoteric inspiration in the academic sphere,<sup>194</sup> on the converse side,

<sup>187</sup> Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, 134.

<sup>188</sup> Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 106.

<sup>189</sup> Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen", 153.

<sup>190</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds: How Is It Achieved?* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1969), 152.

<sup>191</sup> Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 109.

<sup>192</sup> Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 167.

<sup>193</sup> Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts," 177.

<sup>194</sup> Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism," 161.

Novalis's magic has a history of having been terribly misinterpreted and misunderstood. Major interpreter O'Brien writes that Novalis was not a philosopher, seer, priest, nor magician, only a writer of fictions.<sup>195</sup> Kneller notes that Novalis's use of the term magic is "flamboyant," but that all it referred to was the use of metaphor, symbolism and analogy as a way of viewing nature.<sup>196</sup> O'Brien seems to have missed or overlooked Novalis's notion of the philosopher as poet, in which poetry is especially a *theory of magic*. As a famed poet, Novalis puts his theory of magic into practice; that Novalis puts his magical theory to effect renders Novalis a magician, or a practitioner of magic, a magus. Beyond this crucial missed point, O'Brien's interpretation completely dismisses or evinces a complete lack of awareness of the esoteric tradition. Novalis's use of the term magic is not "flamboyant" either; this is an entirely inappropriate descriptor, and it is not just a way of seeing nature poetically. This term has been employed countless times in the long history of the esoteric tradition. And it is not just a way of viewing things, but a way of eliciting practical effects in the world and in oneself. One wonders if such misinterpretations are the result of a lack of awareness of the esoteric tradition, or a reluctance to reference the esoteric tradition's influence upon philosophy given that academia is still recovering from its long-standing prejudice against the inclusion of esotericism within its scope, despite its historical significance in the history of philosophy.<sup>197</sup>

## 15. Conclusion

Esotericism is concerned with secret meanings, forces, and dimensions. With a poetic and artistic disposition, Novalis is drawn towards the unseen or esoteric dimension, and he seeks secret meanings. Understanding the artist as the one who perceives the invisible, who can glean hidden meanings with imaginative perception, Novalis champions the artist as the agent who can divine the original meaning, renew it. Novalis's artistic disposition toward the unseen and esoteric dimension takes him to the realm of death, granting him insight into it, allowing him to reconcile death to life through his poetry and philosophizing. Through his poetry, he grants a mythic, higher meaning to his personal tragedy of the death of his beloved Sophie, his own personal myth as impetus for poetical cosmic redemption.

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<sup>195</sup> O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 73.

<sup>196</sup> Jane Kneller, "Early German Romanticism: The Challenge of Philosophizing," in *The Routledge Companion to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy*, ed. Dean Moyer (Florence: Routledge, 2010), 312.

<sup>197</sup> Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

Novalis's aim with his philosophy and poetry is magical, seeking to effect practical transformation in the world and in oneself; it seeks nothing less than the completion of the alchemical work itself, the alchemical work as comprising the deification of the world. Novalis seeks to overcome death, redeem the past, entwine past and future. He seeks to make the world beautiful, to baptize it in the Sophianic mirror, to raise it to a higher power, make it Romantic, to render the world song once again. He seeks the regeneration of the original primordial paradise. He wants to reconcile all things which appear disparate, including all disciplines and knowledge, and render their apotheosis.

Magic provides Novalis with an ancient and metaphysical framework that enables him to formulate a theory of knowledge that is creative, predicated on creativity; it allows Novalis to formulate an original unity of all disciplines, and he renders a mythic theory of history through the magical lens, intertwining history, magic, and myth. With its understanding of language as ontologically effective, the magical tradition enables Novalis to formulate how the poet can create practical effects through her poetizing; it enables Novalis to assert how poetry transforms the reality of the world.

As predicated on the poetic principles of metaphor, analogy, and symbolism, the esoteric tradition can be viewed as a poetic art, and this is how Novalis interprets it. Novalis provides a novel, original interpretation of the esoteric tradition wrought through a poetic lens. He re-interprets the esoteric tradition, combining it with other philosophical influences, granting it new meaning, a poetical meaning. His magical science of reality presents an esoteric theory of poetry, music, and philosophy. The esoteric tradition gives Novalis creative philosophical material, and he maps his ideas upon it.

Linking poetry and music to the magical tradition bequeaths it with associations, meanings, and powers it would not otherwise have—such a linkage enriches his poetry, offers it a metaphysical foundation, providing his poetry with an added depth, weight, and power. By linking his poetry with the esoteric tradition, he is also encrypting secret meanings in his work, imbuing his work with a dimension of mystery, situating it within an edifice of mystery.

As I have endeavored to evince, for Novalis, magic, alchemy, and philosophy are ultimately synonymous. His philosophical and poetic writings explicitly reference astrology, alchemy, Kabbalism, the esotericist Franz Baader,<sup>198</sup> and Neoplatonism.<sup>199</sup> This article has presented an account of

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<sup>198</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 112.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

Novalis's engagement in the domain of magic, his theories of magic and Magical Idealism, his esoteric studies and practical engagement with esotericism. Magic for Novalis is a praxis of the will and faith, related to love, language, artistic creation, the senses, and politics. Drawing on the magical conception of analogy and inspired by esoteric encyclopedic endeavors, he envisages all sciences as fundamentally intertwined with one another, effectively transposing all disciplines into the esoteric domain. He conceives of philosophy as divination, as veritable Freemasonry, and as alchemy. The alchemical underpinnings of Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, its references to the Presocratic proto-chemist Empedocles have been elucidated.

Finally, this article has rendered an account of Novalis's esoteric studies and situated him in the esoteric tradition of the creative imagination. It has argued that Novalis was a magus, not just a writer of fictions. It has defended the claim that Novalis's philosophy is esoteric in character, and that to fully understand Novalis's life and thought, it is therefore imperative to include the esoteric tradition in one's analysis.

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**Review Essays**  
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# Symphilosophie

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## Therapeutics of the Blue Flower

On Dietrich von Engelhardt's  
*Medizin in Romantik und Idealismus*

*David W. Wood\**

Dietrich von Engelhardt, *Medizin in Romantik und Idealismus: Gesundheit und Krankheit in Leib und Seele, Natur und Kultur* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2023), 4 Vols., LII + 1964 pp. ISBN 978-3-7728-2950-5



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\* Dr. phil. in the history of philosophy (Université Paris-Sorbonne & Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich) – david.wilfred.wood@gmail.com

## 1. The Blue Flower

The blue flower is the poetic symbol of the Romantic Circle par excellence. First appearing in Novalis's unfinished novel *Henrich von Ofterdingen*, the blue flower has come to embody a longing for the infinite, the eternal, and the absolute.<sup>1</sup> This is not surprising, since Novalis was trained in the transcendental philosophies of Kant, Reinhold, and Fichte, where all these ideas play crucial roles.<sup>2</sup>

The botanical motif of the blue flower has well-known empirical roots in a number of real-life blue flora, such as the lotus, gentiana, and heliotrope. Less recognized is how the blue flower and Novalis's method of "romanticizing the world" constitute a unifying thread for his entire metaphysics.<sup>3</sup> Like the chain of magnetized iron rings in Plato's dialogue *Ion*, they permit him to interlink vastly disparate concepts and fields into an encyclopaedic whole. These include i. science: the fields of botany (heliotrope), chromatics (blue, azure, Cyane), mineralogy (a heliotrope is a blood-speckled gemstone), and astronomy (bluish star); ii. art, literature, poetic mythology – heliotrope as a sundial, like the transmuted giant in the fairy tale<sup>4</sup> – and the story of Cyane; with "Edda as the actual blue flower"<sup>5</sup>; iii. religion: the blue lotus at the cosmic birth of Brahma<sup>6</sup>; and iv. biography: where in a parallel with Friedrich von Hardenberg's own pseudonym of 'Novalis', the heliotropic flower's face organically follows the course of the sun.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the blue flower invites

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<sup>1</sup> See Novalis, *Henrich von Ofterdingen*, in: Novalis, *Schriften, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960ff.), vol. I: 195 (= HKA). Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Like these philosophers, Novalis also used other symbols, such as the "Nacht" (Night), which can represent an Arcadian image of immortality. See Novalis, *Hymnen an die Nacht I* (HKA I: 131), and Night 1 of Edward Young's *The Complaint or Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality* (1742-1748).

<sup>3</sup> Novalis's method is based mathematical exponentiation (cf. HKA II: 545; III: 299-302). The presentation in the first chapter of the *Disciples at Sais* is indebted to Ernst Chladni's sound figures (cf. HKA I: 79-82).

<sup>4</sup> Novalis, "Klingsohr's Fairy Tale" in *Henrich von Ofterdingen* (HKA I: 310); this giant is inspired by the giant in Goethe's *Fairy Tale* and by Plato's Atlantis myth (HKA II: 648-651).

<sup>5</sup> On the figures of Cyane (blue) and Edda, see HKA I: 348-351.

<sup>6</sup> See Georg Forster's German translation of the tale *Sakontala oder der entscheidende Ring* (Mainz & Leipzig: Fischer, 1791), 264-266, 309-310, 317 (cf. HKA I: 341-343). 'Sakontala' became a nickname for Sophie von Kühn (HKA IV: 422). Forster's genius was recognised early when he continued Lomonosov's history of Russia and published *Voyage Round the World* (1777).

<sup>7</sup> When sending *Pollen* to A.W. Schlegel in 1798, Hardenberg wrote: "Novalis is an old family name of mine" (HKA IV: 251). The early Latinate name was *de novali* = tiller of new soil, inversely relating to *nova* (astra), echoed in Novalis's "Astralis" (HKA I: 317-319). Cf. Jeremy Adler, "Higher Light", *Times Literary Supplement*, April 18 (2008): 3-5.

a fourfold anagogical reading of Novalis's work, like we find in the writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Goethe.

Deciphering the deeper significance of the blue flower becomes an initiatory quest for the young poet Henrich von Ofterdingen.<sup>8</sup> One could say that this pursuit is initially philosophical: Ofterdingen first sees in a dream the calyx of a blue flower metamorphose into the face of his beloved and then he awakens. Elsewhere Novalis had cryptically written:

One person succeeded in lifting the veil of the Goddess at Sais. – But what did he see? He saw – wonder of wonders – *himself*.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, externally contemplating the blue flower may internally ignite the lamp of self-knowledge. This is none other than a romantic manner of speaking about what is termed in the Fichtean philosophy, the intuition of the I. For in line with the theory of *Anerkennung* (recognition), we learn more objectively about ourselves through encountering the I of others. Novalis reports that this is what his beloved Sophie was to him:

My favourite study basically shares the same name as my fiancée. She is called Sophie. Philo-Sophie is the soul of my life and the key to my inner self. Since making her acquaintance I've become wholly amalgamated with this study.<sup>10</sup>

The culmination of Heinrich von Ofterdingen's quest for the blue flower is therapeutical. Like a reborn Orpheus<sup>11</sup>, he now feels called to be a poet-physician, to wander through the world reviving the health of his hearers.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the blue flower is medicinal in the most civilising sense. In the words of a famous fragment:

Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The opening is set in medieval times in the town of Eisenach on Saint John's eve, near the location of the Wartburg castle (HKA I: 195-202).

<sup>9</sup> (HKA I: 110).

<sup>10</sup> Novalis to F. Schlegel, 8 July 1796 (HKA IV: 188). Hardenberg compares Sophie's countenance to some of the "most sublime" individuals in the world, like the Renaissance painter Raphael (HKA IV: 222). He calls her his "*Schutzgeist*" (guardian spirit), a designation inscribed on his engagement ring (HKA I: 384-5).

<sup>11</sup> Novalis views his relationship to Sophie von Kühn in the katabasis tradition of Orpheus and Eurydice (cf. HKA I: 337-347).

<sup>12</sup> Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (HKA I: 337-347). Jacob Böhme was set to return at the end of the novel.

<sup>13</sup> Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien, 1799-1800* (HKA III: 653).

This therapeutical thought is not just an isolated poetic expression, but is complemented in Novalis's oeuvre by numerous technical reflections on contemporary medical theories, such as his 1798/99 "Medizinisch-naturwissenschaftliche Studien" (Medical-Natural Scientific Studies) and "Medizinische Bemerkungen" (Medical Observations).<sup>14</sup> Medicine should also be treated philosophically, as he states in the *Brouillon*: "The philosophy of medicine – and its history, are exceedingly large and still utterly unexplored fields."<sup>15</sup>

All these medical, medicinal, and therapeutical references in the writings of Novalis and the other romantics have long fascinated readers and researchers.<sup>16</sup> In a highly welcome and colossal undertaking of nearly 2,000 pages, Dietrich von Engelhardt – Emeritus Professor and Director of the Institute of Medical and Science History at the University of Lübeck in Germany – has published four new volumes on the treatment of medicine in German romanticism and German idealism. They show that the therapeutic inclination of a thinker like Novalis was not unusual for his time, but should be viewed as part of a much larger constellation of scientific philosophies and movements.

Von Engelhardt's project is the fruit of a lifetime of scholarship, and bears the general title: *Medizin in Romantik und Idealismus: Gesundheit und Krankheit in Leib und Seele, Natur und Kultur* (Medicine in Romanticism and Idealism: Health and Illness in Body and Soul, Nature and Culture). It is volume number 17 in the prestigious series: "Medizin und Philosophie / Medicine and Philosophy", published by frommann-holzboog, and edited by Urban Wiesing, Matthias Bormuth, and Giovanni Maio.

The four volumes in brief: Volume 1 is von Engelhardt's comprehensive 600-page monograph interpreting the main medical theories and tendencies of the epoch in question. Volume 2 is a 490-page anthology of primary source texts by the German idealistic and romantic thinkers and physicians, including *inter alia* pieces by Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Ritter, Carus, G.H. Schubert, Troxler, and Windischmann. Volume 3 is essentially a biographical review of the most important physicians and medical practitioners

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<sup>14</sup> (HKA III: 179-194; 612-637).

<sup>15</sup> Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 142 (HKA III: 267); *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, see Dietrich von Engelhardt's earlier chapter: "Novalis im medizinhistorischen Kontext" in Herbert Uerlings (ed.), *Novalis und die Wissenschaften* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997), 65-85; and Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love, and Medicine", *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 129-165.



from around 1800 (480 pages). Volume 4 contains an exhaustive research bibliography, listing over 6,400 titles (390 pages).

I will now provide a more detailed overview of this quartet of volumes, drawing attention to some of their more philosophical aspects.

## 2. Monograph

Dietrich von Engelhart's substantial monograph – titled *Darstellung und Interpretation* (Presentation and Interpretation) – consists of an introduction (I, 1-8); a section on the historical and philosophical background to the period (I, 9-88); a long discussion of the medical principles of the time (II, 89-303); a section on the “dialogue with the medical past and present” (II, 305-444); a section on the reception of romantic physicians in journals, papers, and periodicals (II, 445-531); and finishes with a summary of future perspectives, and a bibliography (II, 533-599).

A main thesis of von Engelhardt is that a “more metaphysical form of natural science and medicine” developed in Germany as an offshoot of the works of thinkers like Paracelsus, Jacob Böhme, Hemsterhuis, and Schelling, which then impacted numerous other sciences and arts (I, 1). Even though we now designate the period from 1800-1830 in Germany as the period of “romanticism” or rather “late romanticism”, von Engelhardt is careful to point out that *romantic* natural science or medicine is in many ways not a unified group or movement, but often constitutes a complex nexus of writers and researchers who react in the most disparate ways to the leading philosophical systems (I, 3). Not everyone at the time belongs under the umbrella of romantic philosophers and physicians, with Franz Anton Mesmer, J.C. Reil, Johannes Müller, Jan Evangelista Purkyne as borderline cases, while Madame de Staël even includes Schiller and Goethe (I, 4).

Despite the many divergences among the romantic and idealist philosophers, von Engelhardt argues that the romantic physicians of the period share a number of key ideas and methods in common. Some of these are:

- The identity of nature and spirit, in which the laws of nature correspond to the laws of the spirit.
- Deployment of the methods of analogy, potencies, and metamorphosis in the cognition of bodily processes, including health and illness.
- Nature and culture are viewed as a unity, and hence humanity has a responsibility in its dealings with nature.

- Natural science and medicine are reciprocally interlinked; with the human being the primary focus.
- An interest in combining empiricism, metaphysics, and encyclopaedism.
- An inner nexus between the biography and work, or the personality and science. (I, 5-6, 89-99)

And just as the Jena Romantic Circle preferred fragments, von Engelhardt draws a parallel with the literary style of the romantic physicians:

Der Überzeugung romantischer Naturforscher und Mediziner vom begrenzten menschlichen Erkennen entspricht die bewusst gewählte literarische Gestalt; ihre Beiträge erscheinen oft in unsystematischer, fragmentarischer, aphoristischer, auch poetischer Form, die widerspiegeln soll, wozu die menschliche Vernunft im Studium der Natur, auch der Gesundheit und Krankheit in der Lage ist. (I, 4)

(The conscious choice of their literary format corresponds to the conviction of romantic natural scientists and physicians that there are limits to human cognition; their contributions often appear in unsystematic, fragmentary, aphoristic, and even poetic forms, which were to mirror what human reason was capable of in its study of nature, health, and illness.)

After the Introduction, von Engelhardt presents an overview of the historical and philosophical background to this period. There is first a brief excursus back to the epochs of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Seneca, and Galen, with the founder of Christianity pictured as the ideal of a therapeutic doctor (*Christus medicus*) (I, 10-12).<sup>17</sup> (The great Paracelsus is treated in-depth by Engelhardt later in the monograph, I, 306-335).<sup>18</sup> Next is the modern age of Descartes and Locke, followed by the Enlightenment (I, 12-15), with so-called “philosophical positivism” explained in relation to thinkers like Leibniz, Stahl, Helmont, Christian Wolff, and Sulzer (I, 15-24). However, the central focus of this chapter remains three leading philosophers and philosophical systems of the time: the critical philosophy of Kant, and the respective *Naturphilosophien* of Schelling and Hegel (I, 27-88). (For names of specific texts, see below concerning the Anthology of Volume II).

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<sup>17</sup> A tradition later echoed in the aural name of a book by the biographer of Jacob Böhme. See Abraham von Franckenberg, *Raphael oder Artzt-Engel* (Silesia, 1639).

<sup>18</sup> Here Engelhardt often refers to the revolutionary study of Michael Benedict Lessing, *Paracelsus, sein Leben und Denken* (Berlin: Reimer, 1839) (see esp. I, 314-331).

Particular topics for Kant are the relationship between medicine and the other faculties at the university, the significance of dietetics, the seat (*Sitz*) of the soul in the body, psychic illness, and the temporalization of nature (especially salient are the medical reflections in Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*). Also treated are points of contact between Kant and various contemporary physicians and their medical theories (e.g. those of Christian Gottlieb Selle, Marcus Herz, Johann Benjamin Erhard *et. al.*) (I, 34-46).

With regard to F.W.J. Schelling, Dietrich von Engelhardt explains that a vital concern of his *Naturphilosophie* is the living organism and its potencies in relation to the three functions of reproduction, irritability, and sensibility; these have their correspondences in the three systems of the organism: the nervous, blood, and digestive systems (I, 48-56, 70-71). At base, illness for Schelling is a "Störung der Erregbarkeit" (disturbance of excitability) (I, 57). Von Engelhardt underscores again the wide resonance and "enormous respect" that physicians of the time had for Schelling's metaphysical ideas, compared to the "much more limited" influence of Hegel's system (I, 62, 84). For Hegel, illness is a "disturbance of the organism and its identity", or: a "*disproportion* of its being (*Seyn*) and its self (*Selbst*)" (I, 72). Hegel develops a typology of illnesses and their courses (I, 73-79), with therapy following three paths: firstly, bodily illness can be simulated by inorganic substances; secondly, by a weakening process to isolate the illness (using hunger, diet etc.); or thirdly, psychic or soul illness can be treated using hypnosis and akin therapies (I, 79-82).

In the following parts von Engelhardt emphasizes the importance of autobiographical writing for the romantic thinkers. This is done in relation to medical issues concerning health and illness in the mutual mirroring between the "I and the World" (I, 137-150), with classic examples of the genre being Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser* or Henrich Steffens's *Was ich erlebte*; where life itself is often framed as a curative *Reise* or journey (I, 139-155). Interesting too is the detailed discussion of the Carus-Goethe relationship, highlighting Carus's characterization of Goethe as someone "gesunde Krankheit fähig" (capable of being healthily sick) (I, 192). This was after Carus had personally met Goethe in Weimar, impressed by the latter's strong bodily constitution and inner fire in his eyes, despite almost being 72 years of age (I, 191-205).

Dietrich von Engelhardt also includes some important pages on Novalis's views on medicine (I, 358-375). He stresses Novalis's deep interest in therapeutics, and that his notebooks on medicine are now present in the HKA (as noted above). He brings to light that Novalis had even planned a review of Andreas Röschlaub's *Untersuchungen über Pathogenie* (3 vols; 1798-

1800); a “critical review of the classifications of the human body”; and a “critique” of Kurt Sprengel’s *Handbuch der Pathologie*, all of which unfortunately did not materialize (I, 359, 362, 364), no doubt due to overwork and encroaching illness. Novalis was particularly impacted by the works of Carl Friedrich von Kiemeyer, and John Brown – which had been promoted in Germany by figures like Röschlaub (I, 363) – as well as by the works on pathology by Kurt Sprengel (I, 364) and C.W. Hufeland (I, 368). A recurrent theme in Novalis’s work and biography is “dietetics” and its medicinal character (I, 367-370). Finally, Novalis also formulates an artistic connection between medicine, the patient, and the poet. According to the poet-philosopher, we don’t just need ordinary medicine and medicaments, but a form of therapeutics for spiritual health that must be furnished by exponentialized poetry. Here von Engelhardt cites another famous fragment by Novalis:

Poetry is the great art of the construction of transcendental health. The poet, therefore, is the transcendental physician. (I, 371)

There is of course much more to say about von Engelhardt’s large monograph, particularly the noteworthy original research on the reception of romantic medicine presented in section V (I, 445-530). The countless close philosophical and empirical studies of this period should help to further put to rest the thoroughly outdated view of the idealists and romantics as irrational and impractical dreamers. One can therefore agree with von Engelhardt’s concluding words:

Insgesamt widersprechen bei allen abweichenden Akzentuierung die Quellen und Zeugnisse ... dem verbreiteten und kritischen Bild der Romantik als einer Epoche der Ablehnung und Missachtung der Realität. Programme und Ziel war ... die Verbindung von Theorie und Praxis, Spekulation und Empirie, Subjektivität und Objektivität, Wissenschaft und Kultur. (I, 531)

(Of course there are different accentuations, but overall these sources and documents contradict ... the widespread and critical view of Romanticism as an epoch that rejected and disregarded reality. Its programme and goal was ... the joining of theory and praxis, speculation and empiricism, subjectivity and objectivity, science and culture.)

### 3. Anthology

Volume two is an *Anthologie historischer Texte* – an anthology of 46 historical medical writings, texts, excerpts, and essays of the idealistic and romantic

period. It is divided into eight sections. I'll mention some of the more philosophical texts and merely note some of the other authors.

Section one is entitled “Philosophical Writings” and contains texts by philosophers in relation to medicine. As mentioned, according to von Engelhardt, around 1800 philosophers and physicians were much more likely to take each other’s work into account, with Kant, Schelling, and Hegel being the most referenced philosophical thinkers. Indeed, their works formed the framework for various influential medical theories of the time (II, 3).

Included in this anthology is Kant’s discussion of the place of medicine within the university, from his book *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798). The first short text from the latter is the “Eigentümlichkeit der medizinischen Fakultät” (The Distinctive Characteristic of the Faculty of Medicine), in which Kant argues that medical practitioners draw their ideas from nature and so are freer than many other scholars, since they are not sanctioned by higher authorities but by nature itself. In this respect they are related to the teachings of the philosophical faculty, with the doctor aiming at the public good (II, 5-6). The second Kant excerpt is “Der Streit der philosophischen Fakultät mit der medizinischen” (The Conflict of the Philosophical Faculty with the Medical Faculty), which is Kant’s reply to the physician Hufeland concerning the power of the mind to control morbid feelings. Here Kant sets out some of his own personal principles of dietetics, discussing hypochondria, and the best regimes of sleep, eating and drinking, and breathing etc. (II, 6-21).

Three pieces from F.W.J. Schelling are next. i. An excerpt from his 1799 *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (First Draft of a System of Nature Philosophy); ii. The 1803 *Über das Studium der Medizin und der organischen Naturlehre überhaupt* (On the Study of Medicine and of the Organic Theory of Nature in General); and iii. a selection from the 1810 *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* (Stuttgart Private Lectures) (II, 22-46). For von Engelhardt, these writings have been chosen since they concern the deduction of the “foundational principles of organic life in their significance for health and illness as well as for medical therapy.” (II, 3)

These are followed by three short pieces from the late 1830 Hegel: “Die Naturphilosophie”, which discusses illness, healing and death; “Die Philosophie des Geistes” (Philosophy of Spirit), on “self-feeling” and treatments; and “Die Logik” (Logic), which is surprisingly on life and death (II, 47-58).

Section two of the anthology is called “General Medical Writings”, with fragments by the romantic scientist Johann Wilhelm Ritter; as well as texts by Jacob Fidelis Ackermann; Carl Gustav Carus, Carl Friedrich von

Kiellmeyer; Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus; Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert; Franz Joseph Schelver; and Ritgen. Section three is titled “Anatomy and Physiology”, with pieces by Carus, Franz von Walter, and Burdach. While section four is on “Pathology and Nosology.”

Some rather fascinating selections are present in section five: “Therapy.” Lorenz Oken’s 1807 *Idee der Pharmakologie als Wissenschaft* (Idea of Pharmacology as Science), which employs the theory of polarity (II, 295). It contrasts “geistige” (spiritual) and “material” (material) remedies, with galvanism and mesmerism belonging to the former and animals and vegetable substances to the latter, concluding with references to the effects of plants like belladonna and opium on the nervous system (II, 300-301). Eye-opening too are Justinus Kerner’s 1829 reflections on the Seeress of Prevorst, printed in a text that bears the subtitle: *Eröffnungen über das innere Leben des Menschen und über das Hereinragen einer Geisterwelt in die unsere* (Disclosures about the Inner Life of the Human Being and the Influence of a Spirit World in our World). These passages concern Kerner’s experiments on “magnetic sleep”, which he compares with the “temple sleep” in antiquity, like in the centres of Asclepius at Piraeus or Pergamum, where the ill patient would communicate the appropriate remedy to the priestly therapeutae upon waking (II, 321-330). The topic of animal magnetism had earlier fascinated the philosopher J.G. Fichte, who in 1813 thought it might help shed light on the deeper unity of nature in terms of a *fluide universel* (I, 351).

The final three sections of the anthology contain texts on the topics of: vi). “Doctor and Patient”; vii). “Travels – The World and I in Dialogue”, with G.H. von Schubert’s journeys to the middle east – including Cairo, Mount Sinai, and Beirut (II, 399-417); and lastly, viii). “History of Medicine.”

#### 4. Biographical Vignettes

Volume three of the collection is biographical and devoted to – *Mediziner der Romantik* – physicians or medical doctors of the epoch of romanticism. Presented in alphabetical order, it contains brief vignettes of the lives of forty-three prominent physicians, beginning with **Jacob Fidelis Ackermann** (1765-1815) and ending with **Karl Christian Wolfart** (1778-1832). Each vignette has the structure of a short curriculum vitae, often with a portrait of the physician, followed by a list of their writings. A novel feature is the listing of reviews of their works that were published in learned periodicals of the time, as well as further supporting research literature. I’ll highlight around

ten of the physicians in volume three that are significant for romantic philosophy.

Without doubt one of the most talented figures of the late romantic period is the doctor and painter **Carl Gustav Carus** (III, 52-97). Born in 1789 in Leipzig, he studied natural science and medicine at the city's university, before moving and practicing in Dresden, dying there in 1869 after a long and productive life. Besides his medical work, he is now celebrated for his own striking romantic paintings and his friendship with perhaps the most quintessential romantic painter of all: Caspar David Friedrich. Carus had contact with Ludwig Tieck, Goethe, Schelling, and Lorenz Oken; and von Engelhardt reminds us that Carus's conception of the unconscious was later significant for Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung (III, 52-53). After this brief biography, the entry concludes with a lengthy bibliography of Carus's writings and the reception of his thought (III, 54-97). Of special note is Carus's work on the vertebrae, e.g. *Über die Ur-Teile des Schalen- und Knochengeriistes*, published in the journal *Isis* in 1823 – and his text on landscape painting – *Neuen Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei* (1815 / 1831) – both of which were indispensable for Goethe.

In this same connection, it is also worth mentioning the life and work of **Johann Christian August Heinroth** (1773-1843), who in his *Lehrbuch der Anthropologie* (1822) characterized the mode of cognition of the genius of Weimar as “gegenständliches Denken” (object-based thinking), i.e. a cognitive method that enters into the object itself (cf. III, 163-178).

Two other key physicians are **Joseph Ennemoser** (1787-1854) – renowned for his research on “animal magnetism” (III, 115-122), and **Adolph Carl August von Eschenmayer** (1768-1852) (III, 115-133). The latter's life and work in relation to Schelling's philosophy of nature is now more well-known thanks to recent publications by scholars like Benjamin Berger and Daniel Whistler, cited in the research bibliography (III, 130).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, a further Schelling connection in this volume is the inclusion of the philosopher's younger brother: **Carl Eberhard Schelling** (1783-1854), who received his doctorate with a study on the idea of life and likewise became interested in animal magnetism (III, 333).

**Justinus Kerner** (1786-1862), cited above, is someone who at one point helped care for the sick Friedrich Hölderlin (III, 193). Editor of the journal *Magikon*, Kerner is still rightly famed for his ground-breaking study of the vision-inflicted somnambulist Friederike Hauffe, the so-called *Seeress*

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<sup>19</sup> See, among others, Benjamin Berger, Daniel Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy, 1801: Nature and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

of *Prevorst* (III, 193-213). **Andreas Röschlaub** (1768-1835) became noted for following the theories of the Scottish physician John Brown and interpreting them in the sense of Schelling's philosophy of nature (III, 316). He is another figure familiar to the romantic circle. In his encyclopaedic text, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, Novalis casts a critical eye on Röschlaub's theories.

**Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert** (1780-1860) studied medicine in Jena, where he was influenced by Goethe, Schelling's philosophy of nature, and Johann Wilhelm Ritter's theories of galvanism, writing a dissertation on galvanic therapy and deafness. He is remembered as one of the major figures of late romanticism for his pioneering publications on the "nocturnal side of nature" and "dream symbolism" (III, 352-368). The Swiss doctor and philosopher **Ignaz Paul Vitalis Troxler** (1780-1866) similarly studied in Jena. He attended the lectures of Schelling and Hegel and wrote a dissertation on pathology. Later he was named professor of philosophy in Basel and then Bern. Troxler published on philosophical and medical topics, including his 1803 *Ideen zur Grundlage der Nosologie und Therapie* (Ideas for a Foundation of Nosology and Therapy), which Schelling called: "Indisputably in its general part the best that has so far been written on medicine according to natural philosophical views." (III, 383).

**Carl Joseph Hieronymus Windischmann** (1775-1839), was born in Mainz and wrote his dissertation on physiology in Würzburg. For von Engelhardt, Windischmann too was less philosophically influenced by Kant but more by the philosophies of Schelling and Hegel. Windischmann was named professor of philosophy at the newly founded University of Bonn in 1818, with obligatory lectures in medicine. He defended the union of medicine with philosophy and theology, was a translator of Plato's *Timaeus* (1804), but faced criticism for an 1807 text on *Wiedergeburt* (rebirth) (III, 434-441).

## 5. Research Bibliography

The final volume four of this collection is a "*Forschungsbibliographie*", a comprehensive research bibliography extending from the year 1800 to the present time, with more than 6,500 titles of texts in multiple languages by around 3,000 authors. What is extremely helpful too is the pdf version of the four volumes, which is fully searchable and user-friendly in its pagination display feature, and should be a compulsory addition to any university library.

Dietrich von Engelhardt deserves much praise for this four-volume project, and we must salute the extraordinary efforts of the man behind this



gigantic undertaking. His work greatly extends and re-evaluates our knowledge of the state of medicine during the age of German idealism and romanticism. It documents in detail a vitally important but often underappreciated facet of philosophy and science around the year 1800, reminding us of its genuine empirical basis. This collection will prove to be an invaluable resource for students, scholars, and all interested readers of this revolutionary cultural epoch.



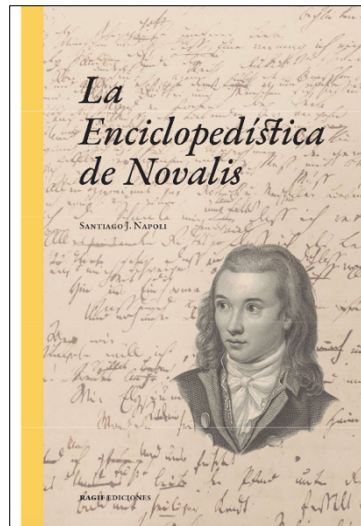
# Symphilosophie

*International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*

## Novalis's Encyclopedistic Philosophy

*Felix A. Cristiá\**

Santiago J. Napoli, *La enciclopedística de Novalis. La experiencia crítica del conocimiento y sus modelos*, Argentina, Ragif Ediciones, 2024, 285 pp. ISBN 978-987-48998-8-0



Goethe's *Faust* was the first work I chose to read on my own initiative as a young person. At the time, all I knew about the great German writer was that he represented the spirit of Romanticism. Much later, immersed in the turbulent world of academia, I learned that this categorization was a colloquial oversimplification, and that the term proto-Romanticism would be more historically accurate to describe the poet's era. Now, the categories seem endless: Early Romanticism, Late Romanticism, Weimar Classicism, *Sturm und Drang*, post-Romanticism, Gothic, Decadentism. When referring to writers and poets, they are labeled as Romantics; when speaking of Romantic philosophy, it is often better to use the term Idealism.

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\* Independent scholar. Writer, M.A. in Philosophy, University of Costa Rica. Address: New Jersey 07103, U.S.A – cristiabatista@outlook.com

In the face of such historical divisions of thought, I cannot help but think that this fragmentation is precisely what the early Romantics sought to avoid: the predominance of particularities. In this sense, the posthumous work of Novalis becomes especially significant, as he was emblematically Romantic—fragmentary yet driven by a longing for the universalization of knowledge.

The first time I encountered the name Novalis was in a quote read by Harry Haller in *Der Steppenwolf*. Motivated by curiosity, I soon searched bookstores to find any of his works (in Spanish) but to no avail. Fortunately, Novalis's poetic works have increasingly been translated into Spanish, and, albeit to a lesser extent, so have his philosophical writings.

Novalis, the pseudonym of Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, likely leaned more toward the tragic than toward the luminous, closer to the mystical without fully becoming a visionary. I was unsure whether the difficulty of finding his works in Spanish stemmed from the inherent challenges of systematizing or categorizing a body of work in a language other than the one in which it was conceived.

Of course, this does not mean that Novalis was unknown in Spanish-speaking countries during the Romantic era. While Spanish and Hispanic American Romanticism did not enjoy the same dissemination or reach as its German and English counterparts—partly because the movement arrived later—some authors, such as Esteban Echeverría and Enrique Gil y Carrasco, engaged with German and French Romantic ideas. The latter, in particular, was influenced by Novalis;<sup>1</sup> however, their focus was more on aesthetic concerns than on philosophical or scientific ones.

Santiago J. Napoli, in his book *La enciclopedia de Novalis. La experiencia crítica del conocimiento y sus modelos* (Novalis's Encyclopaedia: The Critical Experience of Knowledge and Its Models), which inspires me to write today (and to add a few observations I find relevant), suggests that it is precisely Novalis's fragmentary writing that allows for interpretation from various perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Napoli is among the scholars who have dedicated

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike other romantics of exalted tone like Espronceda or Zorrilla, Enrique Gil y Carrasco deeply assimilated the philosophical and aesthetic elements of the German movement, including the concept of the sublime from Kant and Burke, and the spirituality of nature found in authors like Novalis. In his poetry, the intimate dialogue with nature as the poet's interlocutor reflects Novalis's influence, particularly his *Flor azul* (*die blaue Blume*), a symbol of unattainable aspiration and poetic ideal. See: Carlos Miguel-Pueyo, "El romanticismo de Enrique Gil: un diálogo con lo sublime," in *Enrique Gil y Carrasco y el Romanticismo* (Spain: Actas del Congreso Internacional El Bierzo, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Santiago J. Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis. La experiencia crítica del conocimiento y sus modelos* (Argentina: Ragif Ediciones, 2024).

themselves to exploring the poet's work and promoting it in Spanish, focusing on a lesser-known facet of the German poet—at least in Spanish-speaking countries—namely, the *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (*The General Draft*).<sup>3</sup>

In the notes compiled within this draft, Novalis embarks on an endeavor that he envisioned as analogous to the Bible in its role as a “book of books.”<sup>4</sup> A “scientific Bible,” in the sense that it would encompass epistemological—and, in a broader sense, gnoseological—implications, aiming to synthesize the real and the ideal; in this sense, a pure piece of Romantic work. This project, known as *encyclopaedia* or *encyclopedistics*, aspires to be “a contribution to the cognitive universe.”<sup>5</sup> In essence, it constitutes a critical experience of knowledge, with *critical* understood as self-reflection and *experience* as experimentation.

Napoli's book is divided into **seven chapters**. It begins by presenting the historical context and background that explain how Novalis sought to transform the modern encyclopedic tradition, as well as the brief history of *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* and its subsequent editions. The book also delves into the semantics of encyclopedistics and its unique gnoseological approach.

Novalis's friends, Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, were responsible for editing the first, abbreviated version of the drafts, titled *Schriften* (*Writings*). The issue with this edition is that it does not adhere to the order seemingly left by its author; instead, it conforms to a more arbitrary interpretation, organized by thematic classifications—likely aligned with the early Romantic ideals of which Schlegel and Tieck were key exponents. This approach, Napoli tells us, contributed to the enduring image of Novalis as “the quintessential Romantic poet, associated with fantasy, longing, and melancholy.”<sup>6</sup>

This gives us an idea of how the organization of Novalis's notebooks in posthumously published editions reflected criteria foreign to their author's

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<sup>3</sup> This text has been translated into English. See Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das allgemeine Brouillon*, edited and translated by David W. Wood (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Novalis is not the only one with such a goal. The early German Romantics viewed the Bible as a model, not for its content, but for its quality as a “system of books.” We can find the idea of an infinite, absolute book, in Schlegel's Fragment 95 of *Ideas*. Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971). Schlegel wrote a letter to Novalis in October 1798, expressing to his friend his desire to “write a new Bible,” which would gather all modern knowledge, just as Greek poetry had formed an organic whole. See: George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 18. All translations of references originally written in Spanish are my own.

<sup>6</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 37.

intentions, shaping the image constructed around him. However, the German thinker's proposal was far more ambitious. He sought to work his "way through all the sciences,"<sup>7</sup> beginning with mathematics, which, as we will see later, he placed in a privileged position within his method.

Napoli offers a brief history of the encyclopedia in its German, French, and English iterations to contrast these traditions with Novalis's proposal. While the French encyclopedic project of D'Alembert and Diderot—arguably the most similar to Novalis's due to its classificatory and integrative nature—focuses on organizing and uniting knowledge, the German thinker's proposal moves toward the universality of epistemic elements underlying such classification, making his proposal perhaps fundamentally a question of method.

Encyclopedias require constant updating. Could encyclopedistics for Novalis, then, be the science that brings together the principles enabling such perpetual renewal? This idea is not far-fetched if we consider that, within his draft, Novalis describes his project as, among other things, a universalization of knowledge that is, initially, historical and geographical in scope, as well as a theory of pure objects. His proposal thus transcended the epistemic boundaries of traditional encyclopedias, aiming for the organization and unification of theoretical and practical knowledge—a universalization of all learning, where "knowledge is presented neutrally, so that it can combine, integrate, and ultimately enhance itself."<sup>8</sup>

**In the second chapter**, Napoli examines the principal influences on Novalis's encyclopedistics, particularly the inspiration and critique of geologist Gottlob Abraham Werner, who was the poet's professor. Drawing on the classificatory and definitional schemes outlined in Werner's *Von den äußerlichen Kennzeichen der Fossilien* (*On the External Characteristics of Minerals*), Novalis sought to apply these methods to other sciences, aiming to integrate theory and taxonomic practice. This reflects an early preoccupation with systematic organization.

One notable example is entry 333 of the *Brouillon*, where Novalis offers a critical reference to Werner's work: "A word corresponds to a proposition. (A proposition is a word raised to a higher power. Every word can be raised to a proposition, to a definition)."<sup>9</sup> Here, we observe Novalis's interest in how words and propositions function as the building blocks of logical

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<sup>7</sup> Entry 229 of Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 49.

structure—a concern that would resurface a century later, most notably in Wittgenstein's philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Werner's scientific theory emphasized the characteristics of minerals, various taxonomic terms, and empirical data, which Novalis reimagines as “words that intensify into propositions, propositions that intensify into sciences, and sciences that, in turn, intensify toward an absolute universal science.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, Novalis positions himself as both an inheritor of the modern encyclopedic tradition, with its combinatory nature, and takes it even further, advancing it toward a more integral form of scientific knowledge.

As part of the critique of his professor, Novalis concludes that the concepts in Werner's theory function only in isolation, falling short of the systematic integration that the poet deemed essential. While he recognizes the value of empirical experience, Novalis rejects Werner's excessive empiricism. With these considerations in mind, he embarks on the task of transcending an epistemological model, moving toward an idealist system. This idealist approach requires scientists to integrate particular forms of knowledge into a universal framework. But how could this be achieved?

**The third chapter** introduces three conceptual operations that are key to Novalis's encyclopedistics as an epistemological theory: classification, combination, and romanticization. These operations reflect the inherently reflexive and epistemological character of his theory as it relates to scientific knowledge. Together, they form the foundation of his critical-scientific methodology.

The classificatory operation involves gathering, dividing, and concluding, underscoring the importance of experimentation and data collection. For Novalis, however, observation already entails explanation, and the collection of data already implies evaluation—contrary to the common practice of collecting data for subsequent assessment. Dividing information leads to the systematization of knowledge, with the category serving as the classificatory unit, which he describes as “the alphabet of human thoughts.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, Novalis also identifies a potential pitfall at this

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<sup>10</sup> In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein proposes that propositions are logical pictures of reality, where each word has the potential to contribute to a meaningful statement or proposition. In this way, Wittgenstein touches on the idea that the sense of propositions is derived from the possibilities of combination within language (see *Tractatus* 2.1 - 3). Proposition 3.3: “Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning.” Here Wittgenstein emphasizes that individual words (or “names”) only attain meaning when they form part of a proposition. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Anthem Press, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 104.

stage: the danger of becoming ensnared in the vast world of classifications. The scientist must not lose sight of the ultimate goal—the synthesis of the collected information.

The combinatory operation, though not explicitly defined in Novalis's notes, suggests both an epistemological and a mathematical combinatory analysis. In the Novalisian system, there is an underlying critique of the conventional scientific methods of his time, which often disregard the relationship between experiences and results, leaving them neither organized nor compared.<sup>13</sup> This focus on dynamic processes aligns with the broader interests and debates of Romantic thinkers. The combinatory operation allows to “obtain the unknown elements from out of the given data,”<sup>14</sup> embodying an idealist approach that seeks to integrate and transcend empirical data by relating it to other domains of knowledge, such as history and philosophy.

At this juncture, analogy becomes a vital concept.<sup>15</sup> Novalis encourages historians to articulate events and consider their interconnections. Although his understanding of analogy remains undefined—similar to the vagueness surrounding “combinatorics”—Napoli points it out as a network of interrelations among sciences, which today might be termed homology. This pedagogical function serves as a precursor to future scientific methodologies.

Romantic operations refer to the qualitative integration of heterogeneous elements which initially cannot be combined. Despite Napoli's significant effort to clarify this operation, it remains shrouded in ambiguity, which, of course, must be understood in light of the broad manner in which Novalis himself speaks about “romanticizing.” This integration is achieved through logical-mathematical reasoning. As noted in entry 291 of the *Brouillon*, he returns to the idea of homogenization to reconcile opposites (a process we might associate with Romantic annihilation), with the human being serving as the reference point or principle for these processes—specifically, as Napoli notes, the epistemologist.

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<sup>13</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 110. Napoli refers to entry 805 of the *Brouillon*.

<sup>14</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 100. Here Novalis is inspired by the mathematician Georg Simon Klügel.

<sup>15</sup> Franz von Baader, whose interests spanned both physics and poetry, profoundly influenced the German Romantics through his use of philosophical analogy. In his view, humanity and nature are interconnected as microcosm and macrocosm, each reflecting the same underlying laws and forces. See: Giulia Valpione, “Hábitos y costumbre. Política en el Romantik,” in Garnica, Naim, *La actualidad del primer romanticismo alemán: Modernidad, filosofía y literatura* (Argentina: Editorial Científica Universitaria de la Universidad Nacional de Catamarca, 2019).



By romanticization, understood in a mathematical-epistemological sense, Novalis likens the process to “algebraization.” Mathematical operations, according to him, are homologous to this form of synthesis. In this light, romanticization is also envisioned as universalization—a poetic (that is, creative) tendency. This constitutes a “romantic poetic perspective of the sciences.”<sup>16</sup> However, this exercise, which involves elevating any experiment or theory to its highest potential through a mathematical operation, remains unresolved;<sup>17</sup> Novalis does not explain the “how.” This ambiguity can be attributed to the fragmentary and unfinished nature of his work, which only sketches out a method.

In Novalis’s vision, the sciences ultimately merge into philosophy, revealing the encyclopedistics project’s overarching aim: the construction of an “infinite totality.” This totality represents a unified system of knowledge in which all disciplines—science, art, and philosophy—interconnect and complement one another, revealing a deeper, harmonious understanding of reality. For Novalis, this synthesis transforms fragmented fields of inquiry into an organic whole.

**Chapters 4 and 5** delve into encyclopedistics as a theory of knowledge and its connections with mathematics, which Novalis grants a central role as a superior science, and with philosophy, seen as both destructive force and foundational principle.<sup>18</sup>

Novalis’s interest in mathematics focuses particularly on the combinatorial school, which traces its lineage to Leibniz and Bernoulli. Through the works of Carl Friedrich Hindenburg and Johann Friedrich Lempe, and the equations of Georg Simon Klügel and the calculus of Nicolas de Condorcet, Novalis seeks to “find the unknown from the given data” as part of his epistemological method. His ultimate aim is to discover a universal language

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<sup>16</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 129.

<sup>17</sup> Concepts such as “nth power of the binomial of the series of data and facts” (entry 198) remain unclear. Nonetheless, following Novalis’s exposition of ideas, we can conjecture that by “nth power,” an exponential growth level is suggested (a repetition multiplied by itself),  $x^{\text{nth}}$ . “Of the binomial” refers to an algebraic expression with two terms ( $a+b$ ), symbolizing a relationship between two elements. Finally, “of the series of data and facts” can be understood as an ordered set of objective information. However, these relationships seem to operate only metaphorically or by analogy, since the “data” and “facts” (as components of a binomial) would be amplified through some process (nth power). This could refer to the way in which simple or dual information is transformed into something more complex or meaningful.

<sup>18</sup> The same concern can be seen in no. 44 of Novalis’ *Last Fragments*: “Philosophy is *arbitrary*, like all synthetic science such as mathematics. It is an ideal, self-invented method of observing and ordering etc. the inner world. Can philosophy even be the unattainable science *kat exochen*—the scientific ideal?” Novalis, *Philosophical Writings* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 164.

for all sciences. These mathematical applications are transformed by Novalis into gnoseological metaphors, underpinning his project. Related to this, among the many definitions of philosophy found in his notes we can mention: “Philosophy is universal—or higher mathematics” and “poetical mathematics” (entry 719).<sup>19</sup>

Philosophy is related to the definition of encyclopedistics as “critical experience of knowledge,” reinforcing its project as the science of sciences.<sup>20</sup> “Philosophy is the substance of science as it were—that is sought everywhere—present everywhere, and yet never appears to the seeker,” he writes in entry 343.<sup>21</sup> Philosophy becomes an infinite problem: unlike science, it produces nothing concrete but “relativizes the universe.”<sup>22</sup> The strength of philosophy lies in its ability to expose the incompleteness of knowledge and to destroy what is established. This Romantic conception of philosophy’s and poetry’s purpose emphasizes the impossibility of synthesizing or achieving absolute unity in knowledge.

If philosophy does not create, it destroys—tearing down foundations and burying assumptions. Yet this is a critical destruction from which something new, such as science, can emerge. Encyclopedistics thus provides a method for disintegrating knowledge and then reuniting it—not by mixing or fusing, but by creating a new synthesis. Philosophy, in its destructive role, is also a starting point, for something must always be the beginning.

To avoid remaining trapped in philosophy’s merely destructive character, praxis becomes essential. Experience contributes to achieving a synthesis between realism and idealism, but philosophy remains the driving force that inspires one to experience the world and create meaning. The critical path of knowledge leads to systematization, just as the instructed human being leads to the systematic thinker.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Novalis’s project also carries a regulatory function, mediated by philosophy in an idealist sense.

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<sup>19</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> “Saber de saberes” (knowledge of knowledges) is the term that Napoli uses, however, the literal translation into English would sound ambiguous.

<sup>21</sup> Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Entry 622. Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 110.

<sup>23</sup> A similar idea can be found in Novalis’ *Logological Fragments II*: “The scholar attains the maximum in his field through the highest simplification—of the rules and therefore also of the subject matter. If he can derive all determinate rules from one *determinate* rule—reduce all determinate ends to one end etc., then he has brought his field to the highest degree of its perfection. The encyclopedic scholar, who does this within the compass of all determinate sciences—and so transforms all determinate sciences into one determinate science, is the maximum of a scholar.” No. 28 of the “Logological Fragments II.” Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 77.

Novalis found inspiration for his synthesis in Plotinus, whose ideas he encountered through Tiedemann's *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*. This discovery led him to embrace experimentation as a poetic path to truth, uniting matter and spirit, nature and idea. For Novalis, Plotinus offered a model of idealist realism that complemented his encyclopedic vision, embodying the tension between the pursuit of absolute knowledge and its unattainability. This impossibility, rather than a limitation, fueled his thought, keeping the synthesis open, dynamic, and reflective of the infinite totality he sought to grasp.

**Chapter 6** delves into the influences of critical philosophy, idealism, empiricism, and skepticism on the encyclopedic project of Novalis. To achieve greater systematization, the poet draws on Fichte's philosophy, starting with the concept of the "I" (*das Ich*) as an ontological principle. Fichte's ideas deeply influenced the thinkers of the Jena Circle, and Novalis was no exception, engaging with Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, a revised version of his lectures. Inspired by this critical analysis, Novalis wrote his *Fichte-Studien*, where he explores the regulative function of philosophy and the role of productive imagination.<sup>24</sup> Among the many problems he considers, one stands out: how individuals can access the "absolute foundation of knowledge." For Fichte, absolute philosophy is a *Wissenschaftslehre* (*Doctrine of Science*), which Novalis envisioned as a "genuine, independent, autonomous encyclopaedics.—Science of the sciences."<sup>25</sup>

Novalis is concerned with the study of totalities. He employs the Fichtean concept of unity to support the metaphor of totality, aiming to integrate different sciences, for instance, psychology and physiology, which, from this perspective, are regarded as essentially the same. Building on the *Fichte-Studien*, Novalis conceives the *Wissenschaftslehre* more broadly than Fichte, encompassing both the general and the particular and serving as the foundational principle for all sciences.

Despite his admiration for Fichte, Novalis criticizes the non-philosophical nature of Fichte's attempt to establish a first principle or absolute foundation of knowledge. For the poet, such a principle is inevitably arbitrary, leading to dogmatism. This critique highlights the incompleteness of Fichte's project, which Novalis sought to complement. His master's failure

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<sup>24</sup> Fichte proposed that the free activity of self-consciousness is the foundation of all philosophy. He argued that knowledge arises not from passive sensory input but through the self's dynamic effort to overcome its limitations. Central to this process is the "productive imagination," which mediates between the finite and the infinite, enabling the self to shape the world according to its moral ideal.

<sup>25</sup> Entry 56. Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 9.

to address particular or concrete aspects motivates Novalis to, drawing on Plotinus and Spinoza, “express the empirical nature of cognitive experience.”<sup>26</sup>

**The final chapter** considers Novalis’s project as a potential book. In his philosophical work *Dialogen*, the German thinker presents a dialogue on two opposing views regarding the proliferation of books: one fearing a glut of worthless publications and the other seeing this trend as a positive development for the dissemination and creation of knowledge. This debate is significant for speculating about what Novalis’s encyclopedistics project might have looked like had it not been permanently interrupted.

What form would this gnoseological Bible take? Napoli views the *Brouillon* as “a grand draft of a systematic book,”<sup>27</sup> a textual unity intended for publication and encompassing multiple genres simultaneously. This vision underscores the ambitious and interdisciplinary nature of Novalis’s unfinished encyclopedistics endeavor.

Napoli interprets Novalis’s potential universal book from two perspectives. First, as the encyclopedistics itself and its method, with the *Brouillon* serving as the draft of a work that would never see the light. Second, he entertains the possibility that the German thinker envisioned the book as an introduction to encyclopedistics—a prelude or prologue to the “book of books.” With this speculation about what Novalis’s new Bible might have been, Napoli concludes his analysis.

Santiago Napoli’s contribution lies not only in delving into this ambitious work of Novalis—analyzing and deciphering its suggestions and unrealized potential—but also in providing tools for its future critique and exploration within the Spanish-speaking world and the broader academic community. In doing so, Napoli transcends the traditional view of Novalis as merely a poet, highlighting his profound interest in the dynamics and foundations of knowledge production.

Unfortunately, Novalis gradually abandoned his project, turning instead to personal reflections and concerns about his professional life. In his letters, he expresses dismay at the lack of time to dedicate to his most ambitious endeavors. Despite all progress and effort in the pursuit of knowledge, the unfathomable remains beyond containment. The end of Novalis’s encyclopedistics is imbued with a quintessentially Romantic sensibility: every comprehensive, absolute attempt at understanding ultimately collapses into fragments and melancholy.

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<sup>26</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 228.

<sup>27</sup> Napoli, *La enciclopedia de Novalis*, 236.

**Book Reviews**

**Rezensionen**

**Recensions**

**Recensioni**



# Symphilosophie

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**Lara Ostaric, *The Critique of Judgment and the Unity of Kant's Critical System*. Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2024, 280 pp. ISBN 9781009336857**

In recent years, many readers and commentators have attempted to reconstruct Kant's critical system in architectonic or systematic ways. To this end, many have incorporated pre-Critical works while others have argued that any published or unpublished work written after 1781 belongs to the critical system. Lara Ostaric, however, asserts that the third *Critique* represents the end—in all senses of that word—of the critical project, for “it does not culminate in empirical cognition of the natural world but, rather, in reason's ‘highest’ or ‘final end’ (KrV, A840/B8868) . . . namely, morality” (2). She offers a bold and ambitious claim and one that I think she achieves. The whole problem that she sets off to resolve, for Kant, is the alleged “gulf” between nature and freedom. She contests the view established by previous commentators that the gulf between the autonomy of rational (moral) principles and our sensible inclinations is closed by the free and disinterested aesthetic pleasure that judgments of taste find in beauty. She refers to these interpretations as psychological and while these claims are substantiated by the third *Critique*, Ostaric argues instead that there is an issue more central to the problem at hand: the unity of reason's principles established by the argument regarding the objective reality of freedom, as well as the objective reality of the Ideas of God and the soul (4–5).

We can take it that she is most interested in highlighting the third *Critique* as being primarily concerned with continuing the claim given in the first and second *Critiques* regarding the postulates and moral belief with the goal in the third *Critique* to be that of demonstrating how reflective judgment achieves a representation of nature *as if* it were rational and, hence, suitable for our rational ends (6). This argument hangs on Kant's notion of the imagination's schematism that serves to create analogues of reason's ideas insofar as the imagination operates on sensible representations of beauty, thus offering reason an indirect presentation for it to think the highest good. I am quite sympathetic to the latter argument, as I think it more convincingly demonstrates the cooperation of the faculties, and especially makes it clear that the intellectual powers of the mind require the imagination to determine

or think an object. As he says in the *Anthropology*, “the mental powers . . . must move harmoniously with the help of the imagination, because otherwise they would not animate but would disturb one another” (Anth, 7: 225).

Ostarcic claims that, according to Kant, “reflective judgments do not merely satisfy reason’s minimal ends . . . but they also serve reason’s final ends” (8–9). Interwoven throughout the book is the concept of the highest good, which I believe plays the role of threading together the stated aims of each chapter, beginning with the effort to establish Kant’s theory concerning the objective reality of freedom in Chapter 1. However, this argument of hers does pose a daunting challenge because the very demonstration of freedom, she claims, requires recourse to the idea of reason’s purely practical “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*), a term Kant in the first *Critique* reserves for representations of objects given in sensible intuition and brought under rules of the understanding via the imagination’s schemata. She claims that, by practical cognition, Kant intends to clarify practical reason’s legislation of the morally good in relation to oneself as a moral agent (23). Perhaps *judgment* or simply *thought* would fulfill that argument better than the specific use of cognition, but Ostarcic does cite quite a bit of literature to justify her usage of that term, thus it is not as if it is a careless placement of cognition in view of practical reason. She points to the second *Critique* as making evident Kant’s claims that practical cognition refers to the consciousness of a moral principle, its objects (good and evil) and ends, and the feeling *and* respect for the moral law (28–29).

Ostarcic claims in Chapters 2 and 3 that the exposition of the highest good in the second and third *Critiques*, respectively, obliges us to consider its objective reality strictly from the perspective of a “subjective practical reality” of reason, which is found in the ideas of God and the soul (11 and 47). She poses both realist and anti-realist approaches to this argument, coming down ultimately on the side of the former, for moral belief, on her view, aims at a real and not theoretical object (59–68, 72). This requires some bit of charity on our part, for we must assume that reflective judgment does all the work of actually applying or at least presenting nature in such a way that moral belief is fulfilled by practical reason’s desire to posit nature as exhibiting laws analogical to reason’s laws. This is to say that the aims of the highest good must be achieved by reflective judgment, thus bridging the theoretical and practical sides of reason. Ostarcic refers to this act not as a “representation of the world as it is in itself,” but as the “product of the reflective judgment and the power of imagination relative to the needs of reason” (73). This makes real sense to me, as Kant consistently argues that the imagination assists in delivering the ends that the powers pursue. One can also think of reflective



judgment bearing witness to the highest good represented in the imagination's free play with beauty. As Schiller would argue in his *Kallias Briefe*, what we love about the beautiful in nature is that it shows off an appearance of freedom that we desperately desire for ourselves.

To make good on her claim about the connection between the moral ends of reason and reflective judgment, Ostaric argues in Chapters 4 and 5 that aesthetic objects conform to reason's idea of the highest good by exhibiting the "supersensible from without," while the aesthetic experiences of subjects (that is, all of us) exhibit the "supersensible from within" made possible by the free harmony of the powers, imagination in its freedom to schematize and the understanding in its lawfulness (even sometimes without a law). Chapter 4 particularly draws attention to the Kantian argument concerning beauty, wherein she points to §59 of the third *Critique* where Kant famously claims that "beauty is a symbol of morality." However, Ostaric somewhat controversially adds that the beauty of art, no less than nature, operates as a symbol for moral teleology (102, 113–18). There are textual reasons to be suspicious of the latter argument, as Kant specifies in the third *Critique* as follows: "This superiority of natural beauty over that of art, namely, that—even if art were to excel nature in form—it is the only beauty that arouses a direct interest, agrees with the refined and solid [*gründlich*] way of thinking of all people who have cultivated their moral feeling" (§42, AA 5: 299). In other words, nature must seemingly be considered superior not just because it represents a higher aesthetic quality, but because nature evokes the Idea of God, thereby setting into motion the realization of the final end of nature, humanity itself. Kant describes the lover of beautiful nature, in contrast to the mere "connoisseur and lover of art," as possessing a "beautiful soul."

Ostaric defends her claim that "*all* beauty, whether natural or artistic, symbolizes morality" by arguing that the work of genius threatens a strict distinction between nature and art (113–14). She challenges contemporary commentators who give privilege to either natural or artistic beauty, maintaining that the works of the genius artist, who is nature's gift, exhibit an idea of the supersensible basis of nature. One can think of poetry as especially illuminating the free harmony of the faculties, setting into motion what Ostaric views as the realization of the supersensible within and without.

However, one problem that nags at me is the question concerning the relativity of art or at least what might be considered the kind of art conducive for promoting our moral ends. This question will no doubt appear too conservative for some readers, but I cannot help but to think that what some might call art is nothing but hideous, drivel, or simply an immature work of

a talentless hack. Arthur Danto once claimed and made a career out of the idea that anything visual can be called art, but that does not signify the kind of conditions needed for moral teleology. No doubt art as it was created in the late eighteenth century would be able to forestall this issue, thus we have to assume that this claim refers to the work of genius in fine art alone.

I had expected Ostaric's attention to ugliness in Chapter 6 to serve as a defense of her claim that art no less than nature exhibits the idea of the supersensible. However, that discussion indicates not so much a failure of the universal harmony of the powers of imagination and understanding but simply the outcome of an object failing to meet the demands of taste.

The previous chapter (5), I think, promotes the aims of the book more significantly by pointing to the imagination as the faculty that prepares the supersensible power of freedom. She begins by rejecting a somewhat popular trend in the scholarship that pairs schematization and logical acts of reflection, as if the aesthetic act of reflection merely acts in service of the logical demands of the understanding (127). I think her claim here is quite correct and I appreciate the push that she makes in Chapter 5, wherein she claims that to view the free play of imagination as still acting at the behest of a "concept in general," even without a noticeable concept guiding the play, undermines Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment (130–31). On this basis, she contends that aesthetic reflection "should be sharply divorced" from logical reflection (132). I also appreciate her efforts to indicate how Kant in the A-Deduction had already made the case that the imagination operates freely in its synthetic apprehension of intuitions, even though it must conform to the demands of inner sense and apperception. However, I would support her argument further by noting how Kant in the B-Deduction describes the "synthetic influence" that the imagination plays on inner sense through its production of "time-relations" (cf. B153–55).

As Ostaric points out, Kant's argument for the free harmony of the faculties in the third *Critique* does represent a shift in his argument given in the first *Critique*. A close reading, though, notices that those rules provided by the understanding are merely abstract and logical without the schemata that apply the categories to the conditions of space and time. In the third *Critique*, we find Kant arguing that the purposiveness of judgment can be secured by the imagination alone or at least with the imagination taking the lead in its play with nature's forms insofar as imagination enables judgment to find pleasure in the beauty of nature. This is all to say that Ostaric provides a much welcome argument by claiming that, even in instances of determinative judgment, the understanding cannot do the work of synthesis nor of subsumption without the freedom of imagination. However, she also claims

that the two dominant strands of interpretation (“pre-cognitivist” and “proto-Hegelian”) place too much emphasis on the independence of imagination, as she claims that the freedom of imagination should be thought of as cultivating judgment. But she also claims that the so-called “multi-cognitivist” prioritizes understanding and thereby ignores the imagination at the expense of the argument as a whole.

The remaining chapters of the book turn to Kant’s accounts of history and culture and their rootedness in the power of reason. Thus, in Chapter 7, Ostaric claims that previous commentators misconstrue Kant’s account of reason’s search for the unity of nature by separating theoretical and practical interests as if they belong to two separate faculties. She claims that understanding Kant’s transcendental idealism requires a metaphysical, not merely epistemological, approach that views reason’s aims as being slightly modified from the rationalist tradition (189–90). This, she claims, anticipates Kant’s argument regarding nature’s systematic unity in the third *Critique* in which he claims that such unity is represented through the reflective power of judgment, namely, by way of its principle of purposiveness.

Chapters 8 and 9 develop this argument by turning to Kant’s notion of organisms indicating natural ends in themselves, thus demonstrating the viability of theoretical and practical interests coalescing in a regulative ideal concerning nature; specifically, the real possibility of freedom for us in this world. According to Ostaric, Kant views the idea of a natural end through which reflective judgment generates the possibility of freedom in nature in a way that balances mechanical and teleological perspectives as harmonizing the theoretical and practical functions of reason. I think that she is correct in her assessment of the idea of the intuitive understanding resolving that antinomy of mechanism and teleology. In Chapter 9, she focuses on Kant’s argument regarding human history as tending toward progress in a way that reveals nature’s suitability for our moral aims. What strikes me as interesting about her argument is that “Kant’s philosophy of history should be narrowed to a political history and the history of culture” of all human beings as such (236). Criticisms of Kant being Eurocentric thus fail to take note of the many passages in which he argues that all human beings have a right to inherit the bounty of nature and shall not be limited to trade with others because of national borders (cf. *Metaphysics of Morals*, The World Community, §62). Ostaric claims that the need for a philosophical account of history, for Kant, satisfies reason’s desire to posit a (regulative) teleological aim of humanity as a whole in such a way that is also in relation to the aims of nature (239–42). This does not mean that the abundance of morally just agents will increase, but only that, according to Ostaric’s interpretation, history will demonstrate

that humans will improve the sensibilities to accommodate rational (moral) demands (254). That being said, no actual proof in history of the highest good in the world will be possible.

This book contributes a valuable piece of scholarship that incorporates elements of Kant's critical philosophy as a whole. I think Ostaric offers enthusiasts of classical German philosophy much to consider and comment upon in the coming years. Through detailed and sustained analyses of Kant's texts, sharp and incisive critical reflections on existing expert commentators, she provides the community with a solid basis from which we may continue to discuss the seemingly endless possibilities that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* poses, including the relationship between aesthetics, ethics, metaphysics, ultimately creating pathways toward the kind of social-political philosophy built upon Kantian ethics.

*Cody Staton*  
Kennesaw State University

**Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2022, pp. 294, ISBN 978-1-3995-0982-4**

La monografia in lingua inglese di Daniel Whistler, dal titolo *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*, uscita per la casa editrice Edinburgh University Press, è avvincente per il modo con cui l'Autore sollecita il lettore allo studio del filosofo olandese di fine Settecento François Hemsterhuis (1721-1790). Whistler dimostra di conoscere bene sia gli scritti di Hemsterhuis sia il vasto carteggio che egli ha intrattenuto con la corrispondente privilegiata Amalia von Gallitzin. Altresì, Whistler documenta una conoscenza approfondita della ricezione del suo pensiero in Germania e del dibattito su Hemsterhuis sia tra i filosofi a lui coevi, come per esempio Jacobi, sia all'interno della letteratura critica internazionale odierna. Whistler colma una lacuna nella bibliografia su Hemsterhuis in lingua inglese proponendo un testo con un approccio interpretativo singolare e libero da desuete interpretazioni. Indubbiamente, il vasto materiale inedito, pubblicato dopo la morte di Hemsterhuis, ha permesso agli interpreti soprattutto degli ultimi venticinque anni di avere un quadro più vasto sulla sua filosofia e di presentare, così, letture con una prospettiva più ampia e articolata.

Whistler ha avuto il merito di saper decifrare i due diversi periodi della speculazione filosofica di Hemsterhuis. Ha potuto, pertanto, individuare alcune chiavi di lettura per comprendere i temi espressi nelle differenti opere

del filosofo olandese e ha potuto cogliere come le due diverse forme stilistiche (la lettera e il dialogo) utilizzate da Hemsterhuis in due diverse fasi della sua produzione non potevano essere una mera esigenza formale esterna ma attinente al suo modo di fare filosofia. Pertanto, Whistler non è caduto in una divulgazione legata esclusivamente alla biografia di Hemsterhuis così come, per lungo tempo, molti interpreti avevano sinora fatto. Si è interrogato, piuttosto, su come Hemsterhuis muti il suo modo di scrivere di filosofia da un periodo a un altro, quale sia il metodo sotteso al suo ragionamento e quali siano i filosofi con i quali entra in dialogo nel contesto olandese e, soprattutto, europeo. Come Hemsterhuis espone la propria filosofia nel corso degli anni e quali mutevoli strategie stilistiche utilizza riguarda, per Whistler, non la forma ma la sostanza intrinseca del suo pensiero. L'interrogativo fondante dell'intera monografia riguarda le ragioni per le quali Hemsterhuis utilizza alcune forme stilistiche per scrivere la sua filosofia.

Per necessità di sintesi si farà una scelta nell'esposizione delle quattro parti di tale monografia. Il libro di Whistler esordisce con una prefazione dal titolo invitante *Reasons to Read Hemsterhuis* per proporre Hemsterhuis anche come «uno dei più grandi stilisti della modernità» (p. XII). Nella prefazione sono condensati alcuni punti che saranno sviluppati nel corso della monografia. La tesi centrale del testo di Whistler è che Hemsterhuis a partire dal 1775 avrebbe mutato il modo di esporre la sua filosofia e ci sarebbe stato un cambiamento qualitativo nella scrittura e nello stile che Whistler chiama «svolta poetica». Hemsterhuis si allontanerebbe, perciò, da una forma epistolare con la quale aveva composto le prime cinque opere per volgersi ad uno stile dialogico nelle quattro opere edite della maturità. Secondo Whistler, le ragioni di tale mutamento non sarebbero puramente estrinseche ma interne al suo progetto filosofico. Che vi sia stato tale cambiamento formale e stilistico nel modo di esporre la sua filosofia in tale esatto anno tutti gli interpreti concordano. Tuttavia, Whistler differisce dalle interpretazioni fornite sinora su tale svolta nel 1775 in Hemsterhuis non attribuendo, per esempio, tale cambiamento della struttura testuale delle opere a ragioni esterne esclusivamente di carattere biografico legate all'incontro con la sua musa ispiratrice e corrispondente Amalia von Gallitzin. Whistler, quindi, propone di individuare ulteriori motivazioni speculative interne al pensiero di Hemsterhuis per avvicinare il lettore a comprendere tale mutamento da un modello epistolare a uno dialogico e suggerisce di intenderlo come qualcosa di intrinseco allo sviluppo intellettuale di Hemsterhuis. Nella parte prima, alla quale Whistler dona il titolo *Preliminaries* (pp. 3-29), il secondo paragrafo è dedicato ad investigare in sintesi le ragioni di tale «rottura» da un modo di esprimersi

tramite l'epistola ad uno dialogico individuando nella sostanziale trasformazione della sua epistemologia morale la chiave interpretativa per comprendere tale frattura. Altresì, l'interprete mette in guardia il lettore da possibili generalizzazioni sul metodo filosofico di Hemsterhuis intendendo le opere della maturità in forma di dialogo (come *Sophyle*, *Aristée*, *Simon* e *Alexis*) come un unico blocco monolitico senza indagare le sottili differenze entro di esse.

Nel capitolo primo della seconda parte (pp. 31-57) Whistler si volge a ricercare i fondamenti del duplice riferimento in Hemsterhuis sia a Socrate sia a Newton, vale a dire sia all'antichità classica sia alla modernità, e come si possa dare una sintesi tra i due. Egli si interroga su un tema, già fatto oggetto da molteplici interpreti, su quali siano le ragioni che spingono Hemsterhuis a tenere insieme nella sua filosofia due orientamenti che sembrano di primo acchito divergenti ovvero l'ideale socratico e l'ammirazione per il metodo geometrico. Ne emerge, perciò, nell'analisi di Whistler come il cosiddetto "filo ellenismo" di Hemsterhuis non sia da attribuire ad un mero interesse filologico per i dialoghi platonici. Essere "nato greco", come Hemsterhuis esplicitamente dichiarava nelle sue opere e corrispondenza, palesava, invece, un debito nei confronti della tradizione platonica che più di ogni altro aveva riconosciuto il profondo legame con il maestro Socrate ed era stata una fonte inesauribile per accedere al pensiero socratico. Il modo di scrivere di Hemsterhuis è, dunque, affine a quello socratico secondo quelle modalità tra-mandate da Platone stesso (cfr. p. 35) e conferisce una sorta di "tono greco" e, persino, un accento prettamente "ateniese" ai suoi testi. Ciò che è com-plesso, come rileva Whistler, è mettere in atto l'ideale di Hemsterhuis per "diventare greco" nella modernità senza risultare anacronistico.

Inoltre, per Hemsterhuis "essere" o "parlare greco", come Whistler mette in evidenza in una nota a piè pagina (p. 33, nota 5), significava attribuire valore alla satira dello scrittore greco Luciano di Samosata (II sec. d. C.) più volte nominato da Hemsterhuis nell'epistolario.

Tuttavia, come ben dimostrano alcuni passi del dialogo *Sophyle* citato da Whistler (cfr. p. 38), Hemsterhuis aspira a restare fedele anche all'epoca moderna riferendosi al metodo geometrico di Newton creando, così, secondo l'interprete, solo un apparente corto circuito oppositivo. Un "metodo geometrico", secondo Whistler (cfr. p. 41), applicabile in maniera universale euristico a tutte le sfere della conoscenza. Un chiaro esempio del modo di Hemsterhuis di impiegare concetti newtoniani per "analogia" alla sfera etico-morale è la coppia di concetti di "attrazione" e di "inerzia" utilizzati in alcune sue opere e, in particolare, nella *Lettre sur les désirs* (1770). Whistler precisa, però, che «per Hemsterhuis filosofare bene è filosofare geometricamente ma questo non è direttamente trasferire i metodi della geometria nella filosofia»

(p. 45). Il “metodo geometrico” è, piuttosto, una sorta di “meta-metodo” che riguarda, in quanto “pensare interdisciplinare”, – come aveva già dimostrato Michael John Petry qui richiamato da Whistler (p. 47) – la precisione dell’osservazione, l’analisi puntuale delle idee e, infine, una visione globale dell’insieme. Inoltre, Whistler fa notare come anche altri siano stati i modelli scientifici utilizzati da Hemsterhuis fuori dal proprio contesto e applicati, per esempio, alla filosofia della storia. Si pensi solo ad alcune tesi astronomiche di Keplero relative alle orbite dei pianeti nel loro rapporto con il sole e alla capacità di Hemsterhuis di utilizzare specie nell’opera *Alexis*, con un procedimento analogico-euristico, certi concetti astronomici nella storia. In realtà, come dimostra Whistler, il fine di Hemsterhuis è, piuttosto, quello di superare un’epoca passata e, nel contempo, fare riferimento ad un’epoca presente, per poter accedere ad un’epoca senza tempo e, in qualche modo, eterna.

Il capitolo secondo della prima parte (pp. 59-104) investe più propriamente il tema della metodologia filosofica e dello stile utilizzato da Hemsterhuis sia nella sua variante Socratico-Newtoniana ovvero analitico-geometrica sia in quella più ampia estetico-narrativa includente in sé la forma del dialogo, il mito, e la metafora. In tale contesto, uno dei concetti emblematici della “svolta poetica” dal 1775 in Hemsterhuis, è l’accento donato, nel dialogo *Aristée*, alla questione della “certezza del sentimento” riferibile ad un’intima e perfetta convinzione che non ha nulla a che vedere con il ragionamento sillogistico. Tale “certezza del sentimento” è superiore a quella intellettuale relativa alla conoscenza discorsiva poiché si tratta di un atto intuitivo conducente ad un’evidenza morale. Per tale motivo, Whistler si interroga su quale sia il procedimento filosofico in Hemsterhuis capace di tenere insieme sia la certezza proveniente dal sentimento sia quella scaturita dal metodo logico-geometrico. La risposta dell’interprete è che per mantenere in sé tale duplicità in una sintesi il riferimento allo stile platonico resta quello privilegiato (cfr. p. 73).

La parte, forse, più originale dell’intera monografia di Whistler è la terza (pp. 101-202) dove egli tratteggia un’ampia storia delle parti del corpo dette “organi” confrontandosi sia con le teorie di Hemsterhuis sia con quelle a lui coeve o del secolo precedente. Lo scopo di tale ricerca su Hemsterhuis da parte di Whistler è dimostrare come egli sia stato una figura centrale nel dibattito del Settecento, soprattutto in corso all’epoca a Parigi e a Ginevra, su tali temi di “organologia” (cfr. p. 101). L’argomentazione di Whistler è che, sebbene Hemsterhuis non citi esplicitamente Charles Bonnet e Denis Diderot come suoi maestri, è proprio in risposta alle loro asserzioni sul con-

cetto di “organo” che va individuata l’ossatura del suo progetto filosofico (cfr. p. 102). Hemsterhuis si inserirebbe, così, in una tradizione immaterialista, in contrasto con Diderot, in quanto le sue dissertazioni sul concetto di “organo”, capace di mediare tra il soggetto e l’oggetto, sono volte ad affermare la plasticità e malleabilità del pensiero. In tale contesto, per esempio, un modo di dimostrare le proprie tesi attraverso l’uso della “analogia” sta ad indicare la messa in atto, secondo Whistler, di strategie vere proprie che fanno riferimento all’ambito filosofico-scientifico dell’organologia. A tale proposito, l’accento posto da Whistler sulle teorie di Hemsterhuis espresse nell’opera postuma *Lettre sur l’optique* (composta nel 1788), concernenti lo studio dell’organo raffinato della vista degli insetti (capace di donare al soggetto più immagini dell’oggetto esterno) amplia la prospettiva in relazione alla visione enfatizzando la possibilità di perfezionamento anche dell’organo umano. La passione per lo studio al microscopio dell’anatomia dell’occhio degli insetti con potenzialità maggiori rispetto quello umano, a parere di Whistler, non sarebbe dovuta allo studio delle tesi contenute nella *Dissertatio optica de visu* (1746) di Petrus Camper (come molti interpreti di Hemsterhuis e soprattutto M. J. Petry avevano sostenuto). Tale interesse va, piuttosto, per Whistler, ricondotto al testo *Micrographia* (1665) dello scienziato inglese del Seicento Robert Hooke. Sia Hooke sia Hemsterhuis avrebbero tentato di mettere in atto, all’interno di un contesto storico in continua mutazione, un modello «innovativo nell’ottica in modo da donare all’organo della vista *un futuro*» (p. 111). Il tema del “perfezionamento” dei diversi “organi” non va solo ascritto in Hemsterhuis all’epoca matura ma, secondo Whistler, è già presente nelle sue pubblicazioni del periodo giovanile. La concezione filosofica che Hemsterhuis esprime già dalle prime opere riguarda la possibilità di amplificare la conoscenza umana. Così come il telescopio come strumento aveva dilatato la possibilità di vedere oggetti estremamente lontani, allora, anche tramite un perfezionamento di diversi tipi di organi esistenti – sia fisici (dei cinque sensi) sia fisiologici (veicoli d’azione) e sia psicologici relativi alla mente – e la ricerca di nuovi organi e, probabilmente, anche la scoperta di nuovi sensi (oltre ai cinque già conosciuti) si può estendere la capacità percettivo-cognitiva umana. In tale ambito storico-filosofico, merita attenzione il modo in cui Hemsterhuis interviene contro la concezione materialista che riduce la realtà solo al presente percepibile (cfr. pp. 119-120). Il parere di Whistler è che il materialismo, per Hemsterhuis, si limiterebbe al presente escludendo ogni altra sfera possibile. Inoltre, la critica di Hemsterhuis si rivolgerebbe «non a denigrare un concetto di materia in sé» dei filosofi del Settecento quanto, piuttosto, a criticare una «limitazione della materia» all’aspetto legato puramente ai sensi (p. 120). È probabile che la materia sia



stata concepita come molto più di quello che si credeva dato che egli ha proposto un arricchimento della materia e una «potenziale estensione del concetto» (p. 122). Quindi, la posizione di Hemsterhuis sembra essere stata, rispetto ai materialisti, molto più “radicale” (cfr. p. 121). A tali concezioni si affianca la tesi della “perfettibilità” dell’essere umano in Hemsterhuis attraverso una costante messa a punto degli organi fisiologici e, altresì, psicologici. I riferimenti di Whistler al dibattito storico-filosofico dell’epoca sulla capacità di “perfezionamento” sono molto ampi e spaziano, solo per citarne alcuni, dalla concezione sulla peculiarità dell’essere umano di J.-J. Rousseau a quella teleologica di Charles Bonnet. Per comprendere anche il complesso progetto pedagogico di Hemsterhuis il concetto di “perfettibilità” è un termine chiave per capire la sua proposta educativa di un essere umano con facoltà in armonia tra loro e con organi altamente perfezionati (cfr. p. 132). Per tale motivo, la formulazione di un “organo morale” – espresso inizialmente nella *Lettre sur l’homme* (1772) e successivamente ripreso in altre opere anche se con accenti e termini diversi – messa in atto da Hemsterhuis tramite una “analogia” con gli organi esistenti, è iscritta, secondo Whistler, nel suo progetto più ampio sulla storia degli organi (cfr. p. 135). Tuttavia, tale possibile “organo morale” (che, in alcuni casi Hemsterhuis chiama “cuore” o “coscienza” e oggi chiameremo, forse, “cervello sociale”), per Whistler, non deve essere contrapposto agli altri organi fisici o fisiologici pena sarebbe giudicare tale filosofo olandese come rigidamente dualista cosa che l’interprete desidera evitare (cfr. p. 137) collocando, piuttosto, tale “organo morale” accanto agli altri organi tutti passibili di un continuo perfezionamento. Solo in tal modo si può comprendere come Hemsterhuis «cerca di elaborare l’etica (così come l’estetica, la politica e la religione) in stretta analogia con la fisica» (p. 139) auspicando di pervenire ad un ideale in cui diversi organi possano espandersi contemporaneamente anche in un rapporto plastico tra loro. Il modo filosofico di scrivere di Hemsterhuis, infatti, rispecchia nello stile, per “analogia”, quello con il quale egli argomenta intorno agli “organi” e si riferisce anche alla sfera morale del sentimento (cfr. 153). Hemsterhuis sente come un bisogno urgente della sua epoca quello di perfezionare l’organo morale al fine, secondo Whistler, di pervenire a quell’ideale di armonia tra le facoltà (cfr. p. 154).

In tale contesto è importante andare a studiare non solo come Diderot commenta Hemsterhuis sin dalla lettura nel 1773 della *Lettre sur l’homme*, ma anche come Hemsterhuis tenti di replicare ad alcune accuse mossegli dal filosofo francese. Altresì, ancora più apprezzabile è il fatto che Hemsterhuis avesse potuto conoscere il pensiero espresso da Diderot nel suo *Rêve de*

*D'Alembert* tramite il manoscritto donatogli dall'ambasciatore russo all'Aia Dmitrij von Gallitzin. Un confronto tra il modo di esporre le proprie tesi sul concetto di “organo” in Diderot rispetto alla concezione di Bonnet (sebbene egli si rivelerà molto critico rispetto ai discepoli di Bonnet incontrati a L'Aia) è necessario per comprendere la tesi di Hemsterhuis volta ad una sovversione del materialismo (cfr. p. 180).

Nella parte quarta (pp. 197-264) Whistler affronta il tema della scrittura filosofica analizzando i diversi modi da parte di Hemsterhuis di intendere la temporalità. L'interrogativo è quale disegno concettuale egli utilizza per proporre altri tipi di temporalità diversi dal presente. Whistler constata come negli scritti di Hemsterhuis del periodo giovanile egli prediliga una dimensione del tempo legata al presente e, in particolare, all'istantaneità. Si tratta, per esempio, di un “*optimum*” estetico esplicitato inizialmente nella teoria, formulata nella *Lettre sur la sculpture* (1769), in cui si afferma un ideale epistemico del soggetto volto ad apprendere un maggior numero di idee in rapporto tra loro nel minor tempo possibile. Con la maturità, invece, la sua cifra stilistica, che adotta il dialogo come forma espressiva, la dimensione temporale prescelta è la successione storica (cfr. p. 203). L'*optimum* da perseguire si manifesta in forme differenti in altre opere assumendo nella *Lettre sur les désirs* (1770) la forma dell'empatia e nella *Lettre sur l'homme* indicando il modo ideale per strutturare la conoscenza umana (cfr. p. 210). Ne consegue, perciò, che la scelta stilistica di utilizzare la forma epistolare durante il periodo giovanile non sia estrinseca al pensiero di Hemsterhuis ma sia anche legata ad un «ideale cartesiano» connesso alla «simultaneità intuitiva» (p. 212). Nelle opere della maturità Hemsterhuis, invece, criticerebbe, secondo Whistler, il presente creando, tramite artifici letterari, una sorta di presente storico fittizio e, in realtà, riferentesi al passato greco, alludendo a curatori immaginari e facendo precedere alcuni dei suoi dialoghi da prefazioni sapientemente inventate da Hemsterhuis con lo scopo di attribuire l'opera ad altri Autori. Lo scopo sarebbe, secondo Whistler, sollecitare il lettore verso una sorta di prospettiva eterna senza un luogo ben definito (cfr. 264).

Infine, nelle conclusioni, dal titolo evocativo *Four Characters in Search of a Philosophy*, Whistler delinea in modo estremamente sintetico e chiaro i risultati della sua ricerca sulle variazioni stilistiche di Hemsterhuis e, soprattutto, sulla sua “svolta poetica”. L'intento di Whistler è stato, in primo luogo, quello di dimostrare che a partire dal 1775 l'uso della forma dialogica per esporre il proprio pensiero sia frutto non solo da un'emulazione di Platone ma di una più pervasiva maniera di tenere insieme “analisi” e “poesia”. In secondo luogo, lo scopo dell'interprete è stato quello di mettere in luce l'ampio progetto morale e conoscitivo di Hemsterhuis sulla plasticità

degli “organi” che, tenendo conto del dibattito sulla possibilità di “perfezionamento” delle capacità degli “organi” dell’essere umano, si fonda su un modo di argomentare che fa uso della “analogia”. Infine, in terzo luogo, il tentativo di Whistler è stato quello di leggere Hemsterhuis attraverso diverse lenti della temporalità per dare spazio anche al futuro e alla speranza. Certamente, l’interprete si rende conto che altre classificazioni sono possibili per decifrare le diverse strategie di scrittura di Hemsterhuis e il suo modo di filosofare socraticamente. Quello che risulta, infine, dal modo peculiare di Hemsterhuis di fare filosofia è quello di abitare quegli spazi intermedi tra «la Grecia classica e la modernità geometrica, tra Socrate e Newton, tra analisi e poesia» e tra «lo scientifico e il mitico» per dare luogo ad un pensiero che non si esprime attraverso dualismi divisivi ma sempre in una relazione critica tra i diversi ambiti che va, di volta in volta, specificata e analizzata. Il volume si completa con una bibliografia della letteratura secondaria utilizzata e da un prezioso indice dei nomi e dei concetti.

Tale monografia di Whistler, così ben scritta in un inglese letterariamente molto ricco e assai piacevole alla lettura, rappresenta un punto di vista finora poco frequentato dalla letteratura critica e soprattutto inglese. Sebbene sia, in qualche modo, sminuito l’aspetto scientifico del pensiero Hemsterhuis e sia stato dato maggior valore a quelle opere della maturità che assumono la forma del dialogo, Whistler ha saputo leggere tra le righe dei diversi testi del filosofo olandese dimostrando di possedere quelle capacità e quel talento che lo stesso Hemsterhuis aveva esortato ad avere per comprendere un ragionamento filosofico.

*Claudia Melica*  
Dipartimento di Filosofia  
Università Roma “Sapienza”

**Katerina Mihaylova, Anna Ezekiel (eds.), *Hope and the Kantian Legacy: New Contributions to the History of Optimism, with a Foreword by George di Giovanni*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, 312pp. ISBN: 978-1-3502-3808-4**

This volume on *Hope and the Kantian Legacy* is an excellent addition to the series, Bloomsbury Studies in Modern German Philosophy. The editors Katerina Mihaylova and Anna Ezekiel have done a wonderful job in curating this collection of seventeen papers in English by some of the world’s leading specialists of German classical philosophy. The book admirably succeeds in its announced aim (pp. 1-2) to philosophically conceptualize and contextualize Kant’s own views on hope and then trace the impact and engagement

with this topic in the succeeding history of German philosophy. Especially noteworthy, and in line with the mission of this Bloomsbury Series, is the space given to figures that are often omitted in similar treatments of the period, with new pieces on Jacob Sigismund Beck (by Fiacha D. Heneghan), J.H. Tieftrunk (Ingomar Kloos) Friedrich Karl Forberg (Kevin Harrelson), J.C. Hoffbauer (Katerina Mihaylova), C.A. Eschenmayer (Cristiana Senigaglia), Karoline von Günderrode (Anna Ezekiel), and Jakob Friedrich Fries (Paul G. Ziche). This fact alone makes the volume a milestone in research on German idealism and romanticism, particularly in the Anglo-phone world.

Moreover, compared with the two other celebrated questions in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* of "what can I know?" and "what should I do?", the third question "what may I hope?" (A803 / B833), has surprisingly been rather neglected by scholars, despite its normative and existential dimensions, as George di Giovanni recalls in his Foreword (x-xiii). In their Introduction, the editors outline some of the central issues of the book. These include: distinctions between hope, expectation, and desire; the rational hope for results rooted in one's own ethical principles and actions; hope for societal, familial, and political improvement, or even hope for divine intervention; and the connections between hope and the faculties of the human mind, such as the imagination and understanding (15). The timespan covered by the volume ranges roughly from 1780 to 1850, with the first few essays devoted to Immanuel Kant (including a chapter by Andrew Chignell, former president of the North American Kant Society), and the volume finishes with papers on thinkers like Schleiermacher (Jörg Noller), Friedrich Creuzer (Allen Speight), and Kierkegaard (Esther Oluffa Pedersen).

This short review in *Symphilosophie* cannot discuss all seventeen papers but will try to delineate certain readings and themes relating to German romantic philosophy.

Günter Zöllner's text, "Between Need and Permission: The Role of Hope in Kant's Critical Foundation of Moral Faith" (25-34), investigates the connection between rational cognition and the limiting of moral faith in the first *Critique*, followed by an analysis of how the theoretical and practical are intertwined when a person harbours certain hopes for particular outcomes of their actions. Zöllner helpfully reminds us that Kant's third question concerning hope is explicitly characterized as "simultaneously practical and theoretical", and subsequently argues that the third question is not so much a new type of question, but directly combines the theoretical and practical elements of the first two (27). Via a close textual examination, he then draws a number of epistemological consequences from this: "Thus in Kant's

analysis of the third type of question of interested human reason, hope functions in relation to an object that can be determined neither theoretically nor practically by the will. In such cases, the permission to hope concerns an object for which neither human knowledge nor human action is sufficient” (27-28); and proposes that the third question should be transcendently and systematically read as “What do I need to hope?” (30).

As the title intimates, “*Circulus Volitionis: The Hope for Divine Aid in Kant’s Religion*”, the essay by the late Lawrence Pasternack seeks to further solidify the Kantian metaphysical basis of the volume by uncovering the rational location of hope within Kant’s philosophy of religion and doctrine of the highest good. Pasternack above all presents the primary functions of religious hope in the text *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, particularly the theological background of hope in calls for divine aid in parts one and three, and shows how they respectively involve commitments to moral development and ethical community (53-69). The Latin *Circulus Volitionis* in the title relates to the Kantian riddle of how it is possible for an evil human being to become a good person through their own force of will, and whether it eventually requires a hope for divine assistance: “The change of heart is aptly described by Kant as a moral ‘revolution’, a spontaneous transformation that is not gradual or emergent out of a pre-existing commitment to the good. ... with our ability to discern the how, we are left instead with the hope that should our powers be inadequate, there will be some ‘cooperation from above’” (58).

Rory Phillips, in his paper “Fichte on Optimism and Pessimism” (109-123), adopts a novel approach to the question of hope in the work of J.G. Fichte, setting up a thought experiment in which he asks how the author of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, who died in 1814, might have responded to the later *Pessimismustreit*. Eduard von Hartmann was one of the protagonists in this latter controversy concerning the value of human life, and had contended Fichte was a pessimist at base. Phillips rejects *inter alia* on ethical grounds Hartmann’s appropriation of Fichte for the pessimist cause, arguing instead that Fichte is more optimistic, underscoring that our “faith and hope in the moral world order is that the world becomes better, that we contribute in some way towards doing so by fulfilling our vocations, and that we can achieve justification and sanctification thereby.” (119). While these relations between hope, pessimism, and optimism, are continued in Kevin Harrelson’s welcome paper on the moral theory of F.K. Forberg (125-140), an almost forgotten thinker, who certainly deserves to be more known than simply for his role in sparking the Atheism Controversy, which embroiled Fichte and led to his dismissal from the University of Jena in 1798/99. Harrelson tackles

the presuppositions and findings of the question in Forberg: “Does moral action require optimism about morality?” (125).

Susan-Judith Hoffmann’s study, “Humboldt, *Bildung*, Language, and Hope” (203-221), discusses the educational reformer, linguist, philosopher, and diplomat, Wilhelm von Humboldt, brother of the romantic scientist Alexander von Humboldt, and presents a passionate defence of the continuing actuality, relevance, and hopefulness of the ideals of Humboldtian *Bildung* (education / development / cultivation), exploring their relation to linguistic pluralism, freedom, diversity, decolonization, and the role of the state in education. For Hoffmann, Humboldt’s texts on “*Bildung* and language articulate an idea of self-development through respectful interaction with others that presents hope for the flourishing of humanity ... It is in this positive sense that Humboldt’s own writings disclose hope for his own times and a hopeful vantage point from which we might think through our own social, cultural, and educational challenges.” (203, 206).

The stimulating piece by the Schelling expert Daniel Whistler, “In the Hope of a Philosopher of Nature” (223-238), embeds the problem of hope in German idealism within a broader religious and eschatological framework. Taking his start from Jacobi’s inspired remark that Fichte was the “true Messiah of speculative reason” (223), Whistler argues that Schelling’s repeated proclamations in 1797 of a coming *Naturphilosophie* should be understood precisely within this same messianic transcendental tradition and structure. Somewhat intriguingly, however, he finishes by characterizing Schelling as a forerunner rather than the expected saviour, a Baptist-like figure “crying in the wilderness” (234), whereas the hope itself of the true philosopher of nature becomes fulfilled in another person: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. “Here – perhaps – we can glimpse Schelling’s earlier messianic hope for a philosophy of nature realized under a Goethean (rather than Fichtean) conception of *Philosophie überhaupt*.” (235).

It is indeed a striking case of parallel lives – the similar destinies of Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) and Karoline von Günderrode. Both highly gifted poets and thinkers, both longing for the life beyond, both dying young and mythologized after their deaths by their friends. In her chapter, “Knowledge, Faith, and Ambiguity: Hope in the Work of Novalis and Karoline von Günderrode” (239-254), Anna Ezekiel discusses many of these parallels, furnishing an innovative piece of scholarship on the philosophies of these two major romantic figures by revealing the underlying strands of hope and optimism in their oeuvres. Specifically, she looks at five key manifestations of hope, with a focus more on the lesser-known Günderrode. First, the form of hope most associated with these romantics: “hope for union with

loved ones after death”, in which the two poets express in “oceanic imagery” a longing for the divine in the after world where an eternal merger with our loved ones is to occur (241). Second, a form of hope embodied in knowing the rational limits of cognition and yet seeking to overcome its discursivity by deploying expanded types of comprehension, similar to Hemsterhuis’s idea of a “moral organ”, a mode of knowledge that Ezekiel appropriately designates as grounded in “epistemological hope” (242-244). Third, the idea of “moral hope” in Günderrode’s concern with “spiritual communities” compared to Kant’s moral system (245-246). Fourth, the hopes we harbour for our natural and cultural environment and world, i.e. the “ontological hope” present in Novalis’s declared mission to cultivate the earth. Here we find the reason for the word “ambiguity” in the title of Ezekiel’s chapter, because although Novalis thought it possible to improve the world by *romanticizing* it, Günderrode believed this goal to be largely outside of our human powers despite it being obviously desirable (240). Therefore, Günderrode “differs from Novalis both in decentering human activity from this process and in her emphasis on the uncertainty of the achievability of this outcome” (247). Lastly, the “political hope” expressed in Novalis’s essay *Christianity or Europe* versus Günderrode’s *Letters* (248-250), where Ezekiel again underlines a contrast between the two thinkers: “Unlike Novalis, however, Günderrode does not advocate a revitalization of Christianity that can spread across and unify the world; ... Instead she emphasizes the value of expanding one’s creative and spiritual life by absorbing or assimilating ideas from outside one’s own culture.” (249).

These thoughts on the role of hope in writings preoccupied with questions of death and the afterlife find a natural continuation in the theories of one particular German philosopher, who completely upends, however, the traditional Kantian conception of hope in relation to optimism. This philosopher is Arthur Schopenhauer, who held the radical view that hope is essentially a worthless distortion of the mind that needs to be eradicated. In a highly engaging piece entitled “‘When my Heart Says So ...’ Hope as Delusion in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy”, Marie-Michèle Blondin explains the origin of the human phenomenon of hope according to Schopenhauer: “For the most part, hope is an illusion that results from an unconscious but embodied will that causes the intellectual faculties to deviate from their usual function of cognition and representation. Therefore, having hope means being fooled by our deep and unconscious inclinations and desires.” (269). Thus, our intellect is deceived by hope and we should obey the advice to employ our will in rooting out this delusion. This might initially sound paradoxical, since we are now to hope for an outcome that is bound up with

hope: “our only hope is to no longer give into the illusion of hope, to free ourselves from the will by negation of the will.” (274) Nevertheless, though Schopenhauer calls for the abandonment of all hope, like the terrifying words above the gates to Dante’s hell (which the romantic August Wilhelm Schlegel had connected with the famous inscription at the temple of Isis<sup>1</sup>), this view ultimately remains tempered in his metaphysics. For hope may alleviate certain sorrows of the human heart, it can play the role of a “consoler”, and it “calms the will” (276). In terms of religious hope, Schopenhauer’s philosophy rejects the position of a person who clings to hope of a belief in some kind of life after death. Yet the later system of Schopenhauer still makes room for the doctrine of palingenesis or the rebirth of our eternal inner core, a doctrine also present in Lessing, Novalis, Fichte, and Goethe. Hope for an afterlife is replaced in Schopenhauer by the ceaseless will to live, in which the “concept of metempsychosis only reinforces the argument that our essence is imperishable” (271). A Schopenhauerian philosophical life demands that we become conscious of all these aspects of hope and not fall prey to its illusions. In short: we should continue to remain hopeful at least about the astonishingly transformative power of our will.

This rich and comprehensive collection of papers has now radically changed the landscape of the metaphysical discussion of hope in studies of German philosophy. It is a stated wish of the editors in their Introduction that this book help to generate more scholarship in the future on Kantian and post-Kantian conceptions of hope and optimism (15). May this prove to be true, for the topic of hope clearly remains a fertile philosophical field.

*David W. Wood*

**Oliver Simons, *Literary Conclusions. The Poetics of Ending in Lessing, Goethe, and Kleist*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 2022, 230 pp., ISBN 978081044898**

«Chi compie un’analisi dovrebbe indagare o meglio chiedersi se ha a che fare con una sintesi misteriosa (*geheimnisvoll*), oppure se ciò di cui si occupa è soltanto un aggregato (*Aggregation*), una contiguità (*Nebeneinander*), [...], o come tutto ciò potrebbe essere modificato» (Goethe, *Analyse und Synthese*, in *Werke*, Weimar, 1887-1914, sez. II, vol. 11, p. 72). Queste parole dal saggio di Goethe *Analisi e sintesi* vengono poste da Walter Benjamin in esergo alla

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<sup>1</sup> See A. W. Schlegel’s translation of Dante’s *Inferno* 3: “Dantes Hölle”, *Die Horen* 1, 3 (1795): 27-28.



sua dissertazione per la *Promotion* del 1919: *Il concetto di critica d'arte nel romanticismo tedesco*. Benjamin contrappone dunque un'autoriflessione – Goethe lo chiama sospetto (*Argwohn*) – di chi fa scienza sulle condizioni del proprio comprendere, e sulla centralità del meccanismo esperienziale all'intreccio di ogni epistemologia – un meccanismo che si può, che si potrebbe, modificare strada facendo.

Un anno dopo la conclusione della dissertazione, in una nota lettera del 1 dicembre 1920 a Gershom Scholem, Benjamin, che del tema si sarebbe occupato per i restanti venti anni della sua vita, si premurò di definire il suo progetto di un'opera chiamata *Politica* come «teleologia senza scopo finale» (*Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. II, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1996, pp. 109-113). Se sappiamo, come risulta da una lettera del 22 ottobre 1917, che inizialmente Benjamin aveva pensato a una dissertazione su “Kant e la storia”, non stupisce come uno dei protagonisti occulti di *Literary Conclusions*, il nuovo libro di Oliver Simons – ma ampiamente dichiarati e discussi nell'*Introduzione* – sia proprio Walter Benjamin. E Benjamin, che fu profondo conoscitore della morfologia goethiana, da cui ricavò la sua teoria dell'ideale e del “fenomeno originario”, definisce un ulteriore tassello del quadro teorico della ricostruzione di Simons proprio nel problematico reperimento della qualità precipua della politica nel concetto decisivo dell'ultima stagione kantiana: la “teleologia”, ma privata di uno scopo finale (*Endzweck*).

È dunque in questo peculiare intreccio, sotto gli auspici benjaminiani, tra letteratura ed epistemologia, estetica e politica, nella cornice del secondo Settecento e del primo romanticismo, che si avventura il libro di Simons, germanista della Columbia University, che vanta un ampio spettro di pubblicazioni non limitate al campo letterario, appunto, ma aperte alle contaminazioni con le discipline politiche (è stato, con Jens Meierhenrich, curatore dell'*Oxford Handbook on Carl Schmitt*). Prendendo le mosse dall'infinita semantica della fine, *The Poetics of Ending* ne esplora i vari lati dal punto di vista letterario per svelare come la questione sia assai più che letteraria – o piuttosto, che la letteratura dica molto di più anche attraverso tattiche e strategie semiotiche tra le convenzioni e i generi. La letteratura, intende Simons, è parte in causa di un'evoluzione della conoscenza, che potrebbe non svilupparsi verso forme di rassicurazione, o di “messa in sicurezza”: «le forme della letteratura così come i generi letterari sono forme di conoscenza e possono quindi essere studiate come aspetti di una storia letteraria della ragione» (p. 7). Una storia letteraria che mette in questione – qui Simons chiama in causa il giovane Benjamin che riflette su Hölderlin – e modifica la soggettività

dello stesso autore, o poeta, che figura come «essere trascendentale atto a determinare la forma interna del ragionamento del poema» (p. 10).

In virtù di questa premessa necessaria finire, andare verso, giudicare a partire dalla causa finale di un processo, di un fenomeno, è tanto una strategia interna al moto quanto, nello stesso tempo, un modo di raccontarlo – e modificarlo. Per questo si fa letteratura anche partendo dalla fine. La sfida di questo libro ambizioso, rigoroso, esatto, è quella di esibire la crisi e la riformulazione della teleologia all'interno della storia attraverso tre diverse – e grandiose – poetiche della “fine” a cavallo tra Settecento e Ottocento: le opere di Lessing, di Goethe e di Kleist, intrecciate – l'uno era lettore, a volte regista, dell'altro – e disparate, portano Simons a dipanare un filo niente affatto continuo. Attraverso un *close reading* di lavori assai noti, non rifuggendo da incursioni in testi altrimenti considerati minori, Simons mette chi legge in grado di ricavare le progressive oscillazioni e trasformazioni del quadro epistemologico che fonda la poetica dei tre grandi autori che occupano ciascuno un capitolo. Al brusco smottamento delle faglie della teoria della conoscenza si affianca, intersecandovisi, una messa in questione dei generi letterari. Se Lessing presenta nell'*Emilia Galotti* e *Nathan il saggio* una prima, nascosta ma radicale discussione della ragione dogmatica del primo Settecento tedesco, se Goethe nel *Werther* e nelle *Affinità elettive* trae le sue conclusioni da una forza inizialmente ingestibile poi sempre più metamorfica, in Kleist si apre una possibilità ulteriore che si distacca dall'epoca e prende una nuova strada.

Simons indaga con dovizia di dettagli (forse esagerando con i conteggi *à la* Leo Strauss di occorrenze e ricorsi di termini e formule) le strutture proposizionali e sintattiche delle opere dei tre. Se in Lessing svela la quantità (e l'opacità) delle proposizioni “se-allora”, se in Goethe vede la duplicità del profilo metaforico-metonimico, in Kleist indaga il valore delle inferenze per leggere la moltiplicazione di piani.

Decisivo, nell'affrontare l'autore dell'*Educazione del genere umano*, appare il ruolo della favola: lì le proposizioni ipotetiche e inferenziali lavorano per modellare e costruire una generalità attraverso uno «scrutinio empirico» (p. 41). La favola ha il valore della presentazione dell'esempio – aiuta a formulare un giudizio generale, una massima. Il suo metodo è quello dell'*invenire* giurisprudenziale, una *Rechtsfindung* che si confronta con l'empiria, dove il lettore è come quel giudice che decide della pertinenza di una determinata realtà a una fattispecie, ma che deve passare, *necessariamente*, per il particolare – e che lo scopre “simile”, non identico all'universale, e per questo consegna una figurazione storica della ragione (p. 47).

Il tema fondamentale si affaccia giusto a metà del testo, quando Simons sta discutendo *La metamorfosi delle piante* di Goethe. In quell'epoca Kant, nei §§ 76-77 della terza Critica, aveva fissato la possibilità – solo di ragione – di un “universale sintetico” come contraccollo, effetto a sua volta contingente, del nostro modo di giudicare secondo cause finali: «questo particolare, nella molteplicità della natura, deve armonizzarsi con l'universale (mediante concetti e leggi) per poter essere sussunto sotto di esso, un'armonia che, sotto queste condizioni, deve essere assai contingente, e, per la facoltà di giudizio, senza un principio determinato», *Critica della facoltà di giudizio*, Einaudi, Torino 1999, § 77, p. 239). Diversamente da Kant Goethe stabilisce come nell'osservazione dello sviluppo e della crescita di un vegetale sia possibile per l'osservatore un comportamento che, con Simons, definiremmo “metonimico”: che una parte stia per il tutto vuol dire che lo sguardo può scivolare facilmente dal dettaglio a una “totalità maggiore”. Si tratta, per Simons, dell'abbandono da parte di Goethe di una visione che era emersa nel suo *Werther*, con l'individuo sottoposto a «forze antagonistiche» che non sa gestire (p. 88). Ora Goethe guarda alla genesi e alla trasformazione come processi del divenire, senza ricorrere a tassonomie statiche. Ma per procedere è necessaria l'immaginazione, che si concretizza nella gestione della metamorfosi attraverso la modifica degli stilemi letterari. Il concetto stesso di affinità elettiva, *Wahlverwandtschaft*, viene interpretato come sintesi di necessità e volontà. È in gioco dunque un'interpretazione del discorso scientifico stesso come ‘metaforico’ – «potrebbe essere questa una delle ragioni per cui i suoi risultati non sono mai eterni e coerenti come sembrano». Quella di Goethe, specie nelle *Affinità elettive*, è una strategia di amministrazione della forza poetica (la *ganz neue Kraft* di cui parla Schiller nelle sue *Lettere sull'educazione estetica* a proposito del romanzo): il romanzo gestisce la *Handlung*, l'azione, il plot – l'evoluzione e le interazioni e le sparizioni dei protagonisti.

E Kleist? Per Simons «andando oltre la trasformazione di teorie del ragionamento logico o di forza vitale in letteratura, Kleist riflette sui generi letterari nel loro statuto indipendente» (p. 104). Kleist rimescola i generi, contestandone la tenuta a partire dal linguaggio di cui i suoi personaggi non sembrano in controllo (p. 109). Come ha detto Christoph Menke in un libro recente, un *Lustspiel* come *La brocca rotta* (un «insuccesso colossale», ricorda Simons, p. 115) «suggerisce la rottura con la tragedia del testo originale, ossia l'*Edipo Re* di Sofocle, dirigendosi verso il lieto fine di una “commedia”» (C. Menke, *Diritto e violenza*, a cura di F. Mancuso e G. Andreozzi, Castelvecchi, Roma 2022, p. 62).

Kleist mescola dunque la tragedia della vendetta col dramma del perdono, lascia continuamente che frammenti dell'uno e dell'altro genere emergano come atti discorsivi – l'uno attraverso “sentenze identificative”, l'altro mediante «l'ambiguità semantica, le frasi se-allora, e i paragoni» (p. 111). Kleist gioca con la stessa formula argomentativa dei drammi di Lessing, ma dove Lessing offriva spazio e agio a una ragione critica, Kleist pochi decenni dopo la mostra già bloccata in un gioco di autoriflessioni fin troppo afoso, dove anche la dinamica dei riconoscimenti (l'*anagnorisis* aristotelica), finisce in farsa, nonostante contenuti tragici. «Invece di risvegliare la ragione critica, Agnes si addormenta» (p. 113). Troppe – e tutte in scena – le possibilità evase nel riconoscere l'errore tragico (la *hamartia*). I frammenti della brocca rotta non si ricompongono – la rottura dei vasi è irreversibile, lo scivolamento metonimico inevitabile: Kleist mette in scena «la condizione generale del linguaggio dopo la caduta» (p. 119). La *hamartia* è un errore generico – una qualità del genere umano: per questo un dramma come *La brocca rotta* non arriva alla fine: è la definizione di un fallimento teleologico.

Anche *Il terremoto in Cile* di Kleist testimonia di una «epistemologia di metafore e metonimie»: la narrazione procede per sdruciolamenti nella semiotica della caduta (*Fall, Zufall, Vorfall*), attraverso connettori sintattici – congiunzioni – come *als* e *weil*, tutto frammentando, tutto ipotizzando e metaforizzando (l'*als ob* onnipresente): nessun narratore onnisciente si fa largo. Ogni dato resta sospetto, disconnesso da quella *Universalgeschichte* o *Weltgeschichte* di cui il tardo Settecento – Schiller in testa, secondo Simons (p. 129) – prende a raccontare l'efficacia causativa. Nel *Trovatello* e nel *Michael Kohlhaas*, Kleist rifiuta ogni chiusura simbolica, rompendo anche la prassi del *Werther* goethiano. «Ogni forma di teleologia viene smantellata», commenta Simons (p. 132). Resta, come nel caso del *Kohlhaas*, la possibilità di una prospettiva narrativa “inconclusiva”, attraverso il «legame metonimico» (p. 140).

Il saggio di Kleist *Sul teatro delle marionette* spiega per Simons come sia proprio il modello di inferenza a diventare, da strumento che era per Lessing, protagonista. I generi letterari stessi diventano luoghi di riflessione – «forme distinte di ragionamento», conclude Simons. Sono modi di sperimentare una «nuova comprensione della letteratura» (p. 153). Della scrittura stessa. Ma, come dimostrano le suggestioni che derivano dalla conclusione-apertura di Simons, tratte dalle *Note all'Edipo* di Hölderlin, la scrittura è tanto più “sintetica” quanto più è metamorfica, quanto più cerca di trasformarsi – e con lei chi scrive – dopo la cesura. Come afferma Hölderlin nel frammento «*Una volta che il poeta sia padrone dello spirito*» (anticamente noto come *Sul modo di procedere dell'agire poetico*), che Simons richiama, il poeta deve farsi “veicolo”

per lo spirito, deve accettare la sua «ricettività» (in *Prose, teatro e lettere*, a cura di Luigi Reitani, Mondadori, Milano 2019, p. 736), a costo di diventare un congruo distruttore di catene significanti e metaforiche. Il punto di Hölderlin viene raccolto da Hegel nella sua lettura del pensiero (e del “pensiero vivente” della sua epoca) come processo di epifania storica dello spirito. La *Fenomenologia* si rivela scienza della manifestazione della forza del pensiero, della sua *Schlusskraft* – la sua forza conclusiva (sillogistica, nel caso hegeliano) riflessa in se stessa. E forse, nella sua conclusione, la ricca monografia di Simons sulle conclusioni si rivela come una possente, proliferante difesa del principio-cardine della *Frühromantik*, la riflessione, ma rivisitato sotto l'imperativa lente speculativa hegel-hölderliniana, che si focalizza tanto più sulla forma della *Darstellung* (nella ricerca di una modifica sempre possibile del genere), quanto più affonda in se stessa.

Ma ci si può chiedere, forse partendo proprio dall'apologo kafkiano – *Desiderio di diventare un indiano* – citato in ultimo da Simons, se l'esito di una forma di auto-riflessione così impetuosa non sia per contraccolpo quello che indica Roland Barthes a proposito di Bataille. Nella *Metafora dell'occhio*, del 1963, Barthes affronta *Histoire de l'œil*, primo e fortunato scritto a tema pornografico dell'autore appena scomparso. Il saggio di Barthes, breve ma decisivo (non menzionato nel libro di Simons, benché – curiosamente – pertinente, stante anche il futuro e peculiare hegelismo di Bataille), affronta il procedimento compositivo di Bataille attraverso la distinzione e successiva congiunzione nell'arco del romanzo della metafora con la metonimia, figure come visto molto presenti nello studio di Simons: «la tecnica poetica consiste qui nel disfare le contiguità usuali di oggetti per sostituirvi nuovi incontri, tuttavia limitati dalla persistenza di un solo tema all'interno di ogni metafora, ne deriva una sorta di contagio generale delle qualità e degli atti» (R. Barthes, *La metafora dell'occhio*, trad. it. di L. Lonzi, SE, 2008, pp. 162-163). Ne deriva una conseguenza, però: «l'*Histoire de l'oeil* non è un'opera profonda: tutto in essa è dato in superficie e senza gerarchia, la metafora è dispiegata nella sua interezza; circolare ed esplicita, non rimanda a nessun segreto; ci imbattiamo qui in una significazione senza significato (o in cui tutto è significato); e non ultima tra le bellezze e le novità di questo testo è di costituire, grazie alla tecnica che si è tentato di descrivere, una letteratura a cielo aperto» (ivi, p. 160).

Di questa letteratura di superficie, a cielo aperto, occorre rendere conto *anche* come contraccolpo, forse tardivo ma profondissimo, di una riflessione infinita, tutta verticale, come quella che le variazioni interne ai generi, infine

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soffocanti, fanno esplodere, e che Simons così bene descrive a proposito di una scrittura primo-romantica.

*Massimo Palma*  
Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa (Napoli)

**Bulletin**  
**Mitteilungen**  
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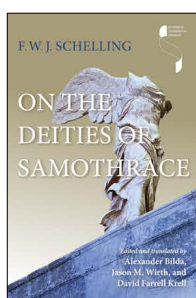


# Symphilosophie

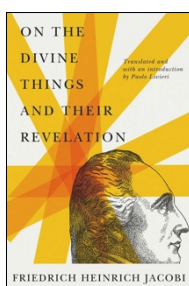
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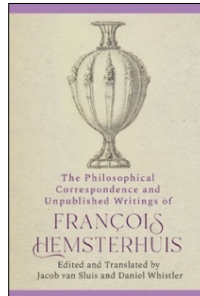
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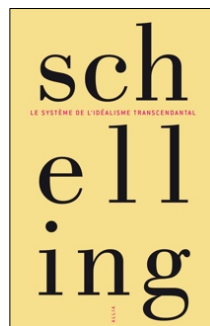
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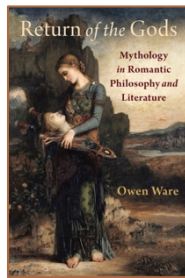
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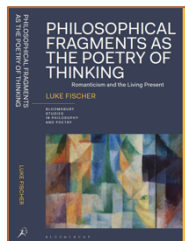
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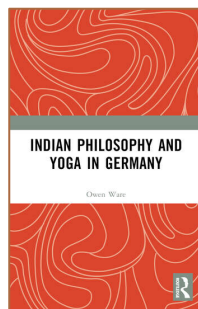
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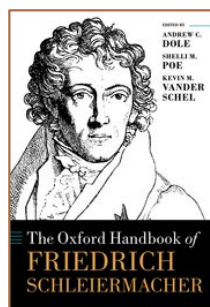
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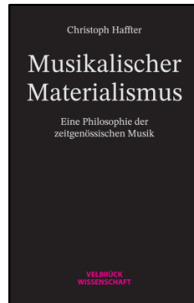
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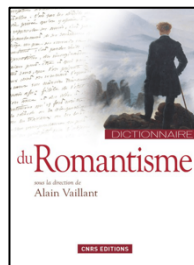
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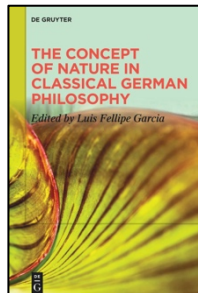
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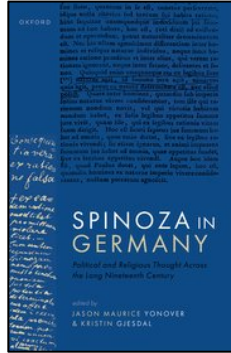
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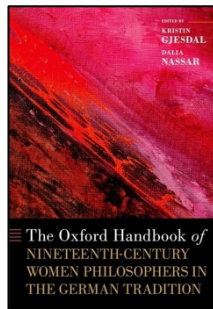
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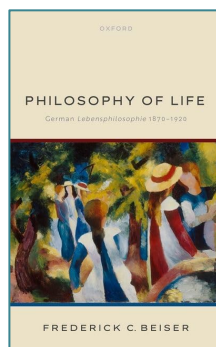
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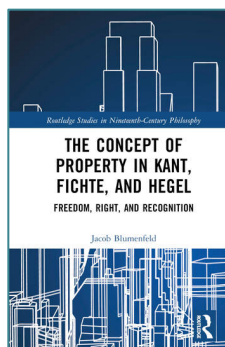
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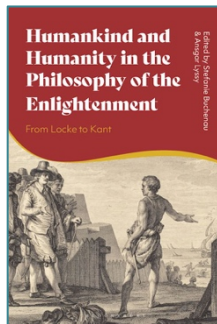




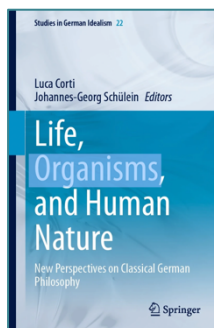
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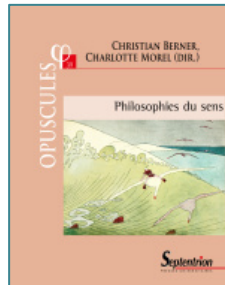
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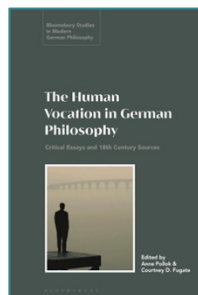
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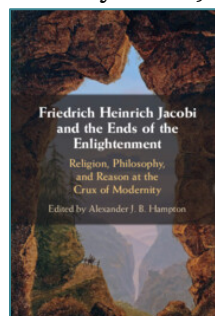
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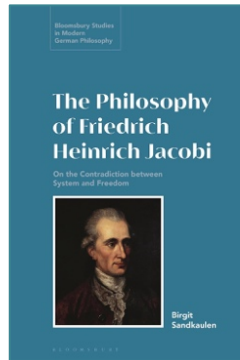
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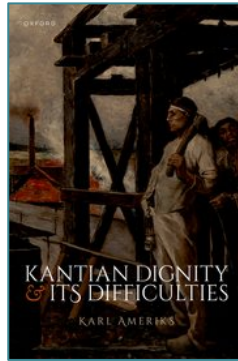


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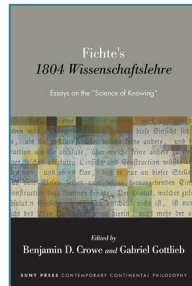
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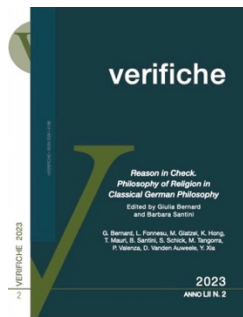
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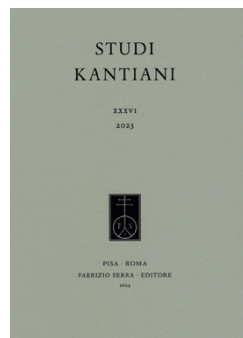
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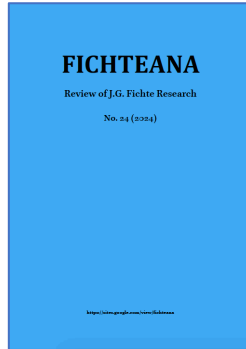
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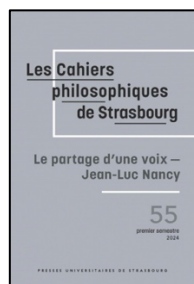


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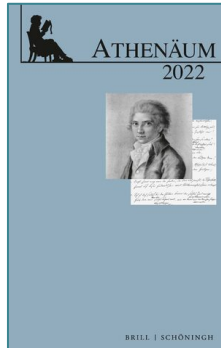


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**Conference: *Symphilosophizing in German Romanticism: Relationships, Methods, and Ideas***

19-21 March 2025, Internationales Zentrum für Philosophie NRW, Universität Bonn, Germany.

Organisation: Michael N. Forster, Laure Cahen-Maurel

**CFP. Conference: *Fichte and Social Thought: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives***

11-13 June 2026. Seventeenth Biennial Meeting of the North American Fichte Society, University of California, Santa Cruz, U.S.A.,

Submission deadline: 15 November 2025.

Contact: Silvestre Gristina, Gabe Gottlieb, [fichtesociety@gmail.com](mailto:fichtesociety@gmail.com)

Further Information: <https://www.fichtesociety.org>

**CFP: Special Issue on “Elective Affinities: The Chemistries of Natural and Social Relations”, *SGIR Review***

Submission deadline: 29 February 2025

Further information: <https://www.sgirreview.com/call-for-papers>

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